

## Make Your Life a Pilgrimage

Sunday, July 26, 2020

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12, Romans 8:28-30, Matthew 13: 44-52

Joseph Campbell, an American author and scholar of comparative religions once said, "*The greatest tragedy in life is not failure, but rather climbing the ladder of success and finding out it is up against the wrong wall.*" Now let's take that ladder and turn it into a ladder to heaven - the ultimate success. As Catholics, we believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. But what if we find out we were on the wrong wall or the wrong ladder.

In the Gospel, we hear two parables that sound very similar and indeed they are. A man finds a buried treasure and sells everything he has to buy the field so he can obtain the treasure. The other has a merchant searching for a pearl of great price. He too sells everything to obtain the treasure. The first man may not know what he is looking for but recognizes a treasure when he finds it. The merchant was actively seeking that special pearl and finds it.

They both sell all that they have to obtain it. It doesn't say whether the field or the pearl were \$10 or \$10 million - it just cost all that they had.

If the treasure or the pearl is like the kingdom of God, are you willing to sell all that you have to obtain it? Does that mean you can buy your way into heaven? Are we to sell everything, leave our families, and go live in a monastery for the rest of our lives? Of course not! It cannot be bought and it cannot be earned. It will only be given to us if we are willing to surrender all that WE are. Are we willing to surrender everything to God? Is God even #1 on your list?

Let's face it, for many of us - our lives are filled with clutter - things we do that have no meaning for our eternal well-being. Especially in these times, we need to separate the essential from the expendable. We spend a lot of time in a rat-race chasing things that won't help us find our treasure. We need to turn our rat-race into a pilgrimage. We need to prioritize our actions. We need to make God #1. Are we willing to surrender everything to God - our thoughts, will, affections, dreams, fears, and even our sins

But how can we judge our actions? How do we decide the priorities? All good treasure hunters need tools. I would like to suggest dusting off three of our fundamental principles of Catholicism - the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Faith allows us to believe even when the world tells us not too or we can't make sense of the miracles around us. Hope allows us to aspire to something better even when our situation seems dire or impossible.

But the greatest of these is love. It allows us to go beyond ourselves - to show compassion and kindness to others who are on their own treasure hunts. Love is eternal. Love endures. When we reach the kingdom - faith will give way to sight, hope will give way to joy but love is forever.

Imagine the old shuttle being launched into space. It had two giant boosters that helped it reach its altitude and then they dropped away - leaving just the shuttle. So when we enter the kingdom, faith and hope will drop away and we will carry our relationships with God and with our loved ones into the Kingdom with us.

We won't be judged on our bank accounts, how famous we were, or the power we obtained. We get no credit for the number of hours spent at work or the number of likes we have on Facebook. Rather, how much love did we give away, how much of ourselves did we surrender.

Look at your actions - each rung of the ladder you are on. Judge each one by whether it increases your faith in God, hope for the kingdom, or the love of God and your neighbor. If it doesn't, reach for a different rung or consider climbing a different ladder. Focus on those things that matter for your eternity.

Like Solomon, ask for wisdom to help you discern which rung will bring you closer to God. Perhaps even ask for clarity when you wake up in the morning - before your feet even hit the ground. Lord, make it clear to me what matters today.

I can't tell you what is essential and what is expendable. Your ladder will look different than mine. For some, it may mean less time at work and more time with family. For others, they may find time to help the poor instead of spending their time on their cell phones or watching TV.

Whatever it is, weigh your actions with faith, hope, and love. And when you find it, do like pirates did when they found their treasure and put an X on the map - or better yet - a cross.

Oh, and one more thing. The parable tells us that the man "out of joy" sold all that he had. The kingdom of God will always be out of our reach if we do it because we are told to or as a sense of obligation. Joy is the fuel for our rocket ship that makes our faith, hope, and love propel us to where we can reach the kingdom. When we can do things with joy - especially for our neighbors - that's when we are closest to the kingdom of God.

It's OK to reach for the stars - just make sure you are climbing the right ladder. Get out of the rat race that is getting you nowhere, surrender everything to God, and make your life a pilgrimage.

With that in mind - I'd like to close with the end of a prayer that is often said for those attending services for the recently departed

*Lord God,  
Let your Spirit guide our days on earth  
in the ways of holiness and justice,  
that we may serve you  
in union with the whole Church,  
sure in faith, strong in hope, perfected in love.  
And when our earthly journey is ended,  
lead us rejoicing into your Kingdom,  
where you live for ever and ever.*