

4. “You will have treasure in heaven”

The gospel of the rich young man is important for showing that joy is essential to vocation.

But when is it that we are truly happy? When is it, for example, that joy springs up in a child? Fundamentally when one finds a treasure, something more precious than everything else, something that the heart perceives as preferable to everything else. For St. Benedict, let us say it right away, but we will go into it more deeply afterward, the treasure is the love of Christ, Christ who loves us and Christ who is to be loved. It's enough to read the essential phrase of chapter 4 of the Rule: “Put nothing before the love of Christ” (RB 4:21).

This phrase helps us interpret also what happens with the rich young man. Indeed, Jesus looks on him with love and proposes to him to no longer prefer anything to this love, that is, that this love become the one and only treasure of his life: “Looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me!’” (Mk 10:21).

In just a few words, Jesus offers the young man his love as an eternal, infinite treasure, in heaven, and this offer is the rich young man's vocation, the path he is to follow, the way on which he is to follow Jesus.

I was saying that joy springs up in us when we find a treasure. When Jesus offers the young man a treasure in heaven, he offers him the greatest joy, an infinite joy. The only condition for having this treasure is following Jesus, saying yes to his call and being with Him, because He is the treasure of life in person. Meeting Jesus, listening to his voice, we discover that vocation, treasure, and joy are indissolubly linked.

On this topic, we will never meditate enough on the parable of the treasure hidden in the field in Matthew 13:44: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field”.

Normally I also like to cite the parable immediately connected to this one, the parable of the pearl (Mt 13:45–46), saying that there is something more radical in the parable of the pearl, since the man who buys it finds himself not possessing anything anymore and living like a beggar who holds close to his heart the pearl that is worth all that he had and that he left behind. But I realize that to meditate on the charism of our consecrated, monastic life, as on every vocation, it is perhaps more useful to meditate on the treasure in the field, precisely because the man who sells all and buys the field finds himself owning a field in which the treasure is hidden, and this image is very useful for us in meditating on the life we live when we consent to follow Christ.

Indeed, each of our vocations happens a bit like this. We discover that in this community, in this way of life, a treasure is hidden, a treasure that is a deeper and

more living relationship with Jesus Christ. Basically we discover right away that this treasure is the pearl of Christ's love that our heart wants to grasp to itself and keep always in itself. It is the discovery of a loving gaze that is truly for us, that seizes our whole heart, that promises us eternal life and endless joy. Indeed, when a vocation is born, normally the joy is very great, a joy that at the beginning will be stronger than every other feeling; a joy that frees us from the highs and lows of our feelings. We will no longer be able to deny this joy, even if as a sentiment it will grow weaker, and we will often fall back into sadness, perhaps into the "dark night." Even so, that experience of Christ who looks upon us, loves us, calls us, grants us his whole self and asks for our whole heart, that experience of the pearl, of the treasure that is worth more than life, will remain hidden but really present in the field that, if we choose to say yes to following Christ in that form of vocation, we will have acquired. We acquire the field because the treasure is hidden in it. When we enter the postulancy, the novitiate, especially when we make profession of our vows, we act, or should act, like that man in the parable who "in his joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." The joy for the treasure is the energy that allows his freedom to sell, to separate from himself "all that he has" to buy the field. Also the lay faithful who feel called to marriage, buy, so to speak, the field of family life because they perceive that in that place is hidden for them the treasure of Christ who calls them to follow him in spousal love and the welcoming of children.

Thus, the real beginning of every vocational journey, after the initial renunciation of everything, consists in finding oneself in possession of a new field on which to live, but a field that has the unique and exclusive characteristic of hiding the treasure of our life. There is no other field in the world that hides for us the treasure of Christ's love, the treasure of the Kingdom of God.

But at this point often, all too often, it happens that either individual people, but even entire communities, coming to find themselves living on the field that they sold everything to buy because the treasure is in it, well, on this field, instead of starting to dig their whole life to find the hidden treasure, what do they do? They pass their lives... raising salad! Or maybe carrots, or strawberries, or fruit trees. Some manage to build a nice house on that field, or a nice church, or maybe an amusement park, or even a very high skyscraper. Whatever you want. The problem is that whether you're raising lettuce or building a skyscraper, all of your attention and effort is pointed in the direction opposite to where the treasure is hidden. It is the problem of the tower of Babel. One builds high to conquer the world and have divine powers, but one forgets that all of this is sterile if one forgets the treasure that we have found because an Other granted it to us.

Jesus explains to us in other passages of the Gospel that this treasure in the heavens, deep down, is our soul, the divine life that we receive when the Lord creates us and breathes into us, as into Adam, the breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7).