

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 30th, 2017

In Korea, many Catholics are not Catholics by birth, they are converts to the faith. My family falls into this category. When I was baptized as an infant, my parents were baptized with me, so historically, my family didn't have a strong faith tradition. I myself had never actually believed in God. When I was in middle school and high school, I stopped going to church. I was a solid atheist for those six years. I thought that I did not need God and that I could do anything without Him. My goal was to be a movie director and become rich and famous. I thought it was the way to a happy life.

One day, when I was going to my friend's house, I met a priest who was a parochial vicar in my home parish. This priest invited me to the parish youth retreat. I said to him, "Thank you for inviting me, Father. However, I don't go to Mass and I don't actually believe in God." Then he said to me, "Peter, this retreat will be fun. I will cover the cost for you and you can leave if you feel uncomfortable during the retreat." I eventually went to the retreat, and there, for the first time in six years, I went to

Confession, and it was through the power of this sacrament, that I had an encounter with God that completely transformed my heart and changed my life. It was then that I realized that my soul had constantly desired God. I had avoided God, but my life had a place and purpose in His plan all along. And so it was during Confession on my parish retreat, that I decided to become a priest. The rest is history. Ten years later, I am standing here before you and talking about God's amazing works in my life. I can say that I couldn't be happier with my life as a priest.

In today's gospel, Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven as a treasure buried in a field. A treasure is obviously a precious and valuable object, but where does the value come from? The value of a treasure is closely related to our happiness. In many cases when we think about a treasure, we imagine fancy and expensive things—whatever they may be—that will make us rich. Many people tend to equate this wealth with happiness. However, in this parable, Jesus tells us that we can find genuine happiness in the treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven. The person who finds this treasure sells all that he has to obtain it. The Kingdom of Heaven is, therefore, a priceless treasure that leads us to incomparable happiness.

Then, where can we find this treasure? The treasure of the Kingdom of God is not in deep under the sea or on an isolated island. Jesus said it can be found in a field. The Kingdom of Heaven is not a reality that is completely separated from our earthly lives. Jesus said that, "The Kingdom of God is among you." When Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, He is not talking simply about life with God after death. Indeed, the kingdom of God encompasses earth as well as heaven. The Kingdom of God first touches our hearts then impacts our actions, thoughts, relationships, families, institutions, and governments. In the end, it will touch everything on earth, when God's will is fully done on earth "as it is in heaven."

On the other hand, be aware that this treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven is hidden. It is buried in a field. We need a treasure map it, and as we all know, Jesus Christ is the way and the truth. He is our "treasure map." In Him, we find this priceless treasure of the Kingdom of God, and it is most fully in Holy Communion that we have an intimate encounter with Jesus Christ here on Earth. Finding Christ *is* finding the Kingdom of God in

our lives. Christ will transform our hearts and help us to find the way of genuine happiness in our lives.

Finally, The Kingdom of God requires our total commitment. This goes beyond our ritual celebrations and exterior practices (The Mass, celebrating the Sacraments, etc.). The person who finds a treasure buried in a field sells all that he has. This doesn't mean that we have to sell everything we have, but we do need to let God touch and transform every aspect of our lives. Letting God do this is a only a shadow and a foretaste of how we will be in heaven. Purified and totally conformed to God's will in every way, we will be who we were always meant to be. Here are some practical things we can do now to connect more with God and prepare ourselves to enter into His kingdom; we can download a prayer app on our smart phone to pray and reflect on the gospel every day. We can save a couple dollars every time when we go out to eat then donate it to the poor during the holidays. We can say a short prayer before and after we play any sports or games. And most of all, we can and should treat every person we encounter with love and mercy as Jesus did.

“We know that all things work for good for those who love God,
who are called according to His purpose.”

