

Eighth Sunday Per Annum (A)

March 2, 2014.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil (Mt. 6: 33-34).

Our Lord is exhorting us today to seek the one thing necessary – the Kingdom of God. It is an invitation to live with purpose; with a goal. The Gospel of St. Matthew which we are reading this year, contains two collections of parables: eight parables depicting the present character of the Kingdom of God (13:1-52), and an equal number of end-time Kingdom parables (24:32-25:46), the last of which is the parable of the last judgment. *“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.... Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren you did it to me”* (Mt. 25:34-40). These familiar words were and still are revolutionary, inasmuch as they express the foundational principles of a culture of life. Through the ages these words have inspired Christians to foster, cherish and defend life; for from the foundation of the world God has intended to share His life with humanity. This truth determines our worldview; or so it should.

Though our collective history includes lights and shadows, we can safely assert that through the ages the Church has been at the service of humanity. The parable of the last judgment inspires the works of mercy, both corporal and spiritual: *to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to visit the sick, to visit the imprisoned, to bury the dead, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to admonish the sinner, to comfort the afflicted, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive injuries, to pray for the living and the dead.* This is also our work; and to be engaged in this work is to seek first the Kingdom of God. We call these the works of mercy because through them we endeavour to alleviate the misfortune of others. The proper motive for the practice of these works is supernatural and not merely humanitarian. This is a very important distinction for a merely humanitarian or philanthropic approach can easily become utilitarian. When this happens, principles are compromised and ultimately people are sacrificed for the sake of a worldview based on false assumptions. This is the danger with all ideologies, worldviews and political movements which distract us from our fidelity to God’s manifest will. *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil (Mt. 6: 33-34).*

The works of mercy present us with tangible, immediate needs that we endeavour to alleviate; at times for no other reason than the fact that God commands us to do so. It is His logic that is at work, even when it is difficult for us to serve this truth. The works of mercy, at least in our part of the world, have now to a great extent become the purview of secular government agencies. Institutions such as schools, hospitals and nursing homes, once guided by a Catholic worldview, are now governed and directed by a worldview based on false assumptions or an incomplete or partial understanding of the human person. As a result, for example, for budgetary reasons more than a few corners are cut here and there; and immutable principles are sacrificed on the altar of expediency.

No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear....All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil (Mt. 6: 24-25, 33-34). Our Lord's *therefore* invites us to abandon ourselves to Divine Providence. The service of mammon or the god Money is unmasked at a deeper level as the cult of anxiety as the normal state of our soul. This condition is, in turn, inseparable from the unquestioned assumption that I alone will provide for my needs, that I am dreadfully alone on the bleak landscape of my life (Erasmio Meira-Levikakis, *Heart of Mercy, Heart of the World*, p. 281). The truth however, is altogether different because I am not alone; we are not alone. Listen again to the words of the Prophet: *Can a mother forget her infant? ...Even should she forget, I will never forget you (Is. 49:14-15).* Our Lord further says to us, *Look at the birds in the sky; Learn from the way the wild flowers grow.* In other words, *turn your eyes away from yourselves and look at the things around you. Place your trust in my love, my mercy.*

This invitation will be issued to the whole Church and indeed the whole world on Wednesday of this coming week, Ash Wednesday: *Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. Remember man that you are dust and unto dust you shall return.* As we begin the holy season of Lent, individually and corporately we will respond to the invitation to *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.* The traditional Lenten practices of prayer, penance, fasting and almsgiving enable us to better practise both the corporal and the spiritual works of mercy. We will undertake the discipline of Lent together but each one of us has to decide what to do in order to make a good Lent. Please consult our Lenten calendar posted at the Church doors and in the next few days give some thought to your Lenten discipline. Perhaps as a parish we can all resolve to come at least once to make the Stations of the Cross on Friday evening. This beautiful Lenten devotion recalls the sorrows of our Lord and our Lady. St. Francis of Assisi lamented, *I weep over the sorrows and disgraces of my Lord; and what causes me the greatest sorrow is that men, for whom He suffered so much, live in forgetfulness of Him.* This devotion enables us to be mindful of His Passion and Death and to seek first the Kingdom of God. Our Lord suffered His Death and Resurrection that we might inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. If we respond generously to this invitation we will no doubt succeed a little more this year to further rid ourselves of the self-concern that binds us to the kingdom of this world and which prevents us from experiencing and delighting in the joy of conversion. When we allow the word of God truly to penetrate our hearts we then become wise and learn to see all things in light of our ultimate purpose and destiny. As the Psalmist declares: *What else have I in heaven but you Apart from you I want nothing on earth. My body and my heart faint for joy; God is my possession for ever (Ps. 73).*

Let us be generous in making our Lenten resolutions. All of us, young and old, can do something to ensure that our lives are more authentically Christian, more authentically Eucharistic. God is not stingy. He is generous. He gave us everything. May the Blessed Eucharist which we reverently receive, as a pledge of our future glory and already now a partaking of eternal life, teach us to judge and to use wisely the things of this earth and to love the things of Heaven. *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given you besides.*