

Ordinary Time 17: Wednesday I

Sydney

1 August 2007

Dear Friends in Christ

Introduction

As this Fourth International Conference on Catholic Leadership comes to a close, the Readings of today's Liturgy highlight two truths at the heart of our faith: the joy of speaking to the Lord face to face, like Moses, who was radiant after his encounter; and the demands of proclaiming the Kingdom of heaven. As educational leaders we have committed ourselves to both joyful friendship with God and one another, and the proclamation of the Gospel.

These have been blessed days, and it is more than fitting to celebrate together the intellectual stimulation, encouragement and challenge that we have received from the presentations, lively discussions, and informal conversations. The Lord has been good to us – indeed, he is good to us – and we owe him thanks and praise for allowing us to be co-workers in his vineyard, in that special corner which forms the mind and the heart, where we are privileged to toil.

Now I would like to take a look at the Gospel we have just heard.

Gospel

As we know and as Padraig reminded us earlier this morning, Jesus liked to speak in parables; and today's reading is from a long series of different ones in which he spoke about the kingdom of God: that kingdom which has come near and stands on the threshold. Early

in this chapter, Matthew cited the prophet to justify this way of addressing his disciples: “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world” (Mt 13:35). The crucial characteristic of Jesus’ parables is that they take off from the most mundane and thoroughly familiar points imaginable; they are far from something mysterious to be mastered. Indeed, they are the opening of a window on reality. Jesus’ parables invite us to uncover, or to discover, the hidden wonder of existence: to move, indeed, from wonderment to its Cause, the Wonder of it all.¹

Today, he draws from both the agricultural and commercial realms to reveal the Kingdom. We have a farmer and a merchant, each of whom finds something unexpectedly and with great joy: a treasure buried in a field and a fine pearl in the marketplace. At first glance this seems to be a lesson in earthly prudence, if not shrewdness: keep at it, persevere. What appears to be their good luck requires each of them to sell everything they own to acquire something much more valuable.

Friendship with Jesus: Being with Him

Yet, much more is at stake in the teaching than the need to sacrifice to make a profit. The hidden treasure is the kingdom of God; it is Jesus himself, the kingdom in person. Whoever chooses Jesus finds the greatest treasure, the pearl of great price (cf. Mt 13: 44-46) that gives value to everything else.

¹ Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *You Have the Words of Eternal Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 137.

The disciples are instructed that if they understand the true worth of what Jesus offers in his call to friendship, they will not hesitate to get rid of everything they own, to become poor in spirit, to obtain it. Entry into the sphere of the kingdom requires renunciation.²

However, the true treasure that we have found as companions of Jesus is living in the Lord's love and never losing this love: being his friend. We have found, indeed, through our baptism, we have *been found* by the love of the Lord. In the introduction to his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict affirms: "*We have come to believe in God's love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his [or her] life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.*"³

I have found the hidden treasure or the pearl of great price if I remain in God's love. Since I have been found, my response is to let myself be guided, to allow Providence to do with me as he wills.⁴ At least in part, God has already decided what he wants of us. He wants us to fulfil our vocation as leaders in the demanding world of Catholic education.

² Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Light of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 112.

³ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1.

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address at the Roman Major Seminary (17 February 2007).

To be educational leaders after the Lord's own heart, we must "have in ourselves the mind of Christ Jesus" (cf. Phil 2:5). His mind was such that, faced with the destiny of humanity, he could hardly bear to remain in glory, but had to stoop down and do the incredible, taking upon himself the utter poverty of a human life even to the point of suffering on the Cross. This is the mind of Jesus Christ: he helps us by forming the kingdom of God *with* us and *in* us. He inaugurated the kingdom among us so that, through us, that kingdom can transform the world.⁵

Having the mind of Christ Jesus requires two things of educational leaders. On the one hand, we must know God from within, know Christ as a friend, and be with him as his friend. Only in this way will we discover the full value of the "treasure" he has allowed us to find. This requires that, like Moses – and like Jesus – we go up to the mountain to pray, to pray silently and alone, to enter the presence of the Lord and converse with him (cf. Ex 34:34).

Sent Out on Mission for the Kingdom

On the other hand, as leaders we must also go out towards others. We cannot simply keep the found "treasure" or valuable "pearl" to ourselves. We must hand it on, just as Moses conveyed to the people of Israel all that the Lord had commanded (cf. Ex 34:34). In this regard, I believe, Pope John Paul II had something specific to say to Australians, perhaps especially to those entrusted with the

⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address at the Meeting with Priests and Permanent Deacons of Bavaria (14 September 2006).

noble ministry of educational leadership:

At times the Catholic Church is seen as presenting a message which is irrelevant, unattractive or unconvincing; but we can never allow such claims to undermine our confidence, for we have found the pearl of great price (cf. Mt 13:46). Yet there is no room for complacency. The Church [especially educational leaders] is challenged to interpret the Good News for the peoples of Oceania according to their present needs and circumstances. We must present Christ to our world in a way that brings hope.⁶

For us educational leaders to share the joy of the treasure we have found or the pearl we have purchased, we need to combine zeal with humility. Certainly we need to be enthusiastic. If we truly encounter Christ in our lives – recognizing that he has found us long before we have discovered him – we cannot keep him to ourselves. We will feel impelled to be “heralds” of Christ in the vast world of education, among colleagues, parents, community leaders and students.

However, this zeal, lest it begin to wear us down, must be combined with humility, that is, and with an acceptance of our limits. So many demands are made upon administrators and teachers, and so many things should be

⁶ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 14.

done, yet we see that we cannot do all of them. Trying too hard to do everything leads to spiritual and psychological burnout. We all need to learn to do what we can and then leave the rest to God and to others, to “co-workers.” On this point, the Holy Father gives us a wise lesson on the need to recognize our own limits: “Ultimately you must do this work, Lord, because the Church is yours. You give me only the energy I have. I give it to you, since it comes from you; everything else I place in your hands.” I believe that the humility which prompts us to say: “my energy goes no further, I leave you, Lord, to do the rest” is crucial. And then trust is needed: he will give me the assistants I need, and they will do what I am unable to do.⁷

This combination of zeal and humility is a salutary reminder for hardworking and dedicated educators. It recalls that they must find ways to combine service with an inner life. We can serve others and give them the hidden treasure and pearl of great price only if we ourselves are not depleted. Like Moses, we must go up again and again to the mountain to be with the Lord, so that our faces might be radiant with the joy of friendship (cf. Ex 34:29, 35) and we will be able to proclaim the kingdom in the routine of educational labours.

Conclusion

As we continue our Liturgy, let us remember that the Eucharist

⁷ Benedict XVI, Address at the Meeting with Priests and Permanent Deacons of Bavaria (14 September 2006).

is the greatest “treasure” of the Church, the precious heritage that our Lord has left us.⁸ Moreover, this treasure that we are now celebrating does not exhaust its radius of action in this place but strengthens us for our future apostolic endeavours of leadership in the field of education. Let us pray that the Lord Jesus who gave himself “for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51) will enable us to be ever more convinced that in him we have “a pearl of great price” (cf. Mt 13:46), a hidden “treasure: (cf. Mt 13:44), whom we give to the world so that it might have the fullness of life (cf. Jn 10:10). May our voices never fall silent in the joyful proclamation of the Kingdom for which every human heart yearns.

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⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (18 June 2006).