

WHAT MATTERS MOST: 17TH SUNDAY A

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An elderly lady in Scotland was so poor her that her neighbours had to support her. They were happy to do this. But what bothered some of them was that her son had gone to America, and had become rich. The mother defended her son, saying: *'He writes to me every week and always sends me a little picture.'* *'See,'* she said, *'I always keep them in my Bible.'* Between the pages of her Bible were hundreds of U.S. bank notes, cash galore. The woman had a money treasure in her Bible, but didn't realise it.

That story, and the stories Jesus told to make his point about belonging to the kingdom of God and doing what God wants, offer us a challenge that we need to take seriously. Let me tell you of one group of people who have responded to that challenge. Over the entrance to a Catholic School in Fiji, there is a large sign which reads: *'Enter to learn. Leave to serve.'* That sign proclaims loudly and clearly the values of that school and how it understands its role. That sign is in harmony with the teaching of Jesus today about what matters most. In his message to us today, Jesus uses a new set of images and comparisons to highlight these.

Jesus teaches us that the most important and the most urgent thing in life is to find out just what God wants of us, and to do it. This is what he means when he urges us to be as single-minded, as focussed, and as dedicated, as someone who digs up a treasure in a field, re-buries it, and hurries off to buy that field, so that he can have that treasure all to himself. Jesus makes the same point about priorities when he urges us to be as single-minded, as focussed, and as dedicated, as a collector of jewellery, who comes across the finest pearl in the world, and sells all personal possessions in order to acquire it.

King Solomon was one of the most successful kings in Jewish history. He was famous as both a brilliant builder and a wise ruler. Like Jesus, he also strove to know and do God's will. Unlike Jesus, however, his life-style was not completely faithful to God. It was not totally consistent with his ideals. All too often, like too many other human beings, he gave in to lust and was unfaithful in marriage and that more than once.

Yet he got the theory right as we learn from the prayer he prays in our First Reading today. He reminds God that he is a young man, unskilled in leadership. So he prays: *'Give your servant a heart to understand how to discern between good and evil, for who could govern this people of yours that is so great?'* God heard his prayer by giving him greater wisdom than any ruler before or since. God heard his prayer precisely because the king did not ask for personal gain in any form. He did not, e.g. ask for long life, money, riches, power, or victory over enemies. In asking for wisdom only, it was for the service of others that Solomon prayed, and this unselfish prayer pleased the Lord immensely.

Against this background of the Word of God today, let's return to the aptness of that sign at the entrance to a Catholic school in Fiji: *'Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve'*. There's no mention there to the graduating students of leaving to get the job that will get them the most money to spend on themselves. There's no mention there of leaving to join the ever-bigger numbers of human beings, for whom a career path is not about loving and serving others, but about financial rewards, personal satisfaction, comfort and pleasure. The message of that school motto, on the contrary, is to go out from school to make a difference, to serve the well-being of others, to make our world a better place to live in. In other words, to go out and work with God for the coming of God's kingdom on earth - a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of goodness and love, a kingdom of justice, joy and peace. That's exactly what God wants.

The motto from that school, *'Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve'* is an invitation from Jesus Christ not only to those students in Fiji but to you and me as well. How will we hear it? How will we heed it? Will our corner of the world be any better for our being here? Will we make a difference by the quality and the quantity of our unselfishness, our loving, our caring, our helping, and our serving? Will we, in fact, want to live with the same sense of purpose as that expressed many years ago by a young man called Stephen Grellet. These are his inspirational words: *'I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.'*

In response to the message addressed to us by Jesus our Teacher in our Readings today, will we, in fact, be more determined than ever, to live as true images, true mirrors, true reflections of Christ to others? Will we, as two of today's colloquial sayings express it, *'just go for it'*, and *'just do it'*?