

11. Treasures in heaven

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. (Matthew 13: 44).

The field in this story told by Jesus is the kingdom of heaven. Half of what we own will not buy the field, nor will any amount that is not the total of what we own. Jesus is not talking here about material possessions which he has told us should be used for our needs only. No, he is telling us that we must be singular in our commitment to him. We must not give him part of our love, we must not have a self which is divided between him and the world, because if we do serve two masters, we make ourselves incapable of receiving the gifts of the Kingdom of God as well as the Kingdom itself.

When we receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, he comes to us with the gift of God's Kingdom. He gives our soul a new geography of the Spirit; he gives us the mansion he has prepared for us; and he takes up residence in our soul because we have invited him to stay in an undivided heart.

Perhaps your heart has become overcrowded with many worldly matters, and God's voice, which is always very quiet is being drowned out. Perhaps you want Jesus to live in your soul and to bring you all the wonderful gifts of his kingdom, but when he comes he finds the place crowded and there is no room for him. St. James talks about the divided heart in the following reading:

If there is any one of you who needs wisdom, he must ask God, who gives to all freely and ungrudgingly; it will be given to him. But he must ask with faith, and no trace of doubt, because the person who has doubts is like the waves thrown up in the sea when the wind drives. That sort of person, in two minds, wavering between going two different ways, must not expect that the Lord will give him anything.

Happy the man who stands firm when trials come. He has proved himself, and will win the prize of life, the crown that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

(The Letter of James 1: 3-8, 12)

Sell your possessions and give alms. Get yourself purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven, where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it. For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also. (Luke 12:33-34)

The True Vine.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. ...I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away---he withers; these branches

are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you will get it.....I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask in my name. What I command you is to love one another.
(John 15: 1-17)

When Jesus says that we are the branches of the vine, he is telling us that we need his life in our souls to keep us spiritually alive and healthy. He wants us to produce the fruit of good works and to strengthen our faith. Jesus commands us to love one another, to let the life blood of the vine which is his love flow through us to the next branch and all those branches attached to us.

The Keys of the Kingdom

Jesus asked, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are blessed! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So now I say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.'
(Matthew 16: 15-19)

Jesus makes Peter the head of the Church and by giving him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven all the graces won for us by the suffering, death, and resurrection of Our Lord are put into the Church's keeping for the faithful.

The Food of the Poor.

*Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty;
though you have no money, come!
Buy corn without money, and eat,
and at no cost, wine and milk.
Why spend money on what is not bread,
your wages on what fails to satisfy?
Listen, listen to me and you will have good things to eat
and rich food to enjoy.
Pay attention, come to me;
listen, and your soul will live. (Isaiah 55: 1-3)*

*Seek Yahweh while he is still to be found,
call to him while he is still near.
Let the wicked man abandon his way,
the evil man his thoughts.
Let him turn back to Yahweh who will take pity on him,*

*to our God who is rich in forgiving;
for my thoughts are not your thoughts,
my ways not your ways ---it is Yahweh who speaks.
Yes, the heavens are as high above the earth
as my ways are above your ways,
my thoughts above your thoughts. (Isaiah 55: 6-9)*

In Isaiah 55: 1-3, Jesus invites us to come to him for all our needs. We do not need money to buy the riches of heaven. He asks us to listen to his words and follow him. All the treasures of heaven will be given to us when we follow him. Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity and our Saviour has shown us the way and only through him can we receive eternal life.

*Man does not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4: 4)*

The treasury of heaven is open wide for us at the Sacrifice of the Mass. Jesus gave his Apostle, Peter, the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and to all the Apostles he sent the Holy Spirit with the treasury of heaven's graces. The great gift of God to the baptized faithful is the Eucharist. Jesus, who is the vine, feeds us, the branches, with his body, blood, soul, and divinity, so that by our communion with him we will produce much fruit. God's life flowing to us through the sacraments of the Church is called Sanctifying Grace.

When we unite our good works, penances, prayers and sufferings to Christ's saving action we gain graces which are added to the treasure of heaven. Jesus told us to store up treasures in heaven which would last for eternity he really meant that we must make it our business to do so.

We can ask God to accept our graces for those in our family who have died and may still be in the purification time of Purgatory. Or we can offer all the graces we receive in a day for someone on earth who is alone and suffering. There are many ways to use the treasure of heaven and it is there for us when we ask for it. There is no need for money, this treasure is free, and it is ours through our love for God.

Of all the needs we have as Christians, the forgiveness of our sins is one of the most important. We need the graces that Jesus won for us in order to be forgiven for our sins against God and neighbour. Some of our sins are very serious indeed because they cut us off completely from eternal life with God, which Jesus' death on the cross bought for us, and which he promised to us if we loved him and kept his commandments. To be without God for eternity means that we have, with full knowledge and full consent, seriously broken the laws of God; we have committed a mortal sin.

Mortal sin brings spiritual death and requires the graces of others' prayers to give the person the desire to go to confession. When a person confesses their sins, they are required to be deeply sorry for having offended God, and they are required to make a firm declaration that they will not repeat this sin. They must also try to undo the damage

which they have caused. In the case of theft, for example, they must give back what they have stolen. The Church allows you to do this anonymously, since God is our final judge.

Although confession with absolution brings the sinner back to the Father and all sins are forgiven and forgotten by God, we must also repair the damage which our sins have caused in our souls and those involved with us. We are very much like Eve when we sin, because most often we do not sin alone. Through our prayers and sincere love for God we do good works and penance in order to strengthen our damaged and weakened soul.

Indulgences

Every sin we are told causes harm in the universal order established by God, brings great destruction to the sinner, and to the human family. There are two kinds of punishment due for sin: eternal punishment and temporal punishment. All sin has temporal punishment attached. Prayer, penance and good works can remove the temporal punishment due for sin. The action of grace in our soul is like an ointment which heals all its wounds and repairs the damage done to by sin. The debt of temporal punishment can be erased either in this life or after death in the final purification of purgatory.

The Church as minister of the treasury of heaven, can offer indulgences or graces which will assist the faithful in taking away the temporal punishment due for their sins, as well as the sins of those souls who are in purgatory. By encouraging the faithful to pray for and have Masses said for the repose of the souls in purgatory, the church strengthens the bond of God's love and mercy between the living and the dead.

The Apostolic Constitution of Pope Paul VI in the document Indulgentiarum Doctrina states that:

'It is a divinely revealed truth that sins bring punishments inflicted by God's sanctity and justice. These must be expiated either on this earth through the sorrows, miseries and calamities of this life and above all through death, or else in the life beyond through the fire and torments or "purifying" punishments. Therefore it has always been the conviction of the faithful that the paths of evil are fraught with many stumbling blocks and bring adversities, bitterness and harm to those who follow them.'

If mortal sins are not forgiven they will bring the soul both eternal punishment and temporal punishment. When mortal sins are forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation then all eternal punishment is removed. However temporal punishment can remain even after sins have been forgiven.

Reparation for sin must be carried out so that friendship with God be re-established, all personal and social values be repaired, and the universal order established by God accepted once more. Each person can lessen or end completely the temporal punishment still due for sins through their penance given in confession, prayer, attending Mass, fasting, charitable donations, works of mercy, and patience in times of sufferings.

There are two kinds of indulgences which we can receive for the remission of temporal punishment due for sin. They are called Plenary and Partial Indulgences. In giving special indulgences the Church is fulfilling the command given to St. Peter by Jesus: *'feed my lambs and to feed my sheep'* (John 21: 15-17).

A **partial indulgence** frees us or others that we are praying for from **some** of the temporal punishment that remains even after sins have been forgiven. Partial indulgences can be gained more than once per day unless there is a provision to the contrary. When we have completed the act which has a partial indulgence attached the Church gives an equal indulgence as well.

In order to receive a partial indulgence the person must be free from serious sin and be sorry for sins committed. They must do the work or prayer to which the indulgence is attached and have the intention of gaining an indulgence. There are general grants of partial indulgences to the faithful who, with the intention of gaining an indulgence, do any of the following:

- a. Raise their minds in prayer to God with humble confidence while carrying out their duties and bearing the difficulties of everyday life.
- b. Motivated by love of God give of themselves or their goods for the service of those in need.
- c. In a spirit of penance, spontaneously refrain from the enjoyment of things which are lawful and pleasing to them.
- d. A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful who witness to their faith in a secular environment (this can even be something as simple as saying grace in a restaurant!)
- e. Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the Litany of the Saints.
- f. A visit to a cemetery with prayers for the dead gains a partial indulgence for the dead every day of the year except the days from November 1st to November 8th inclusive, when a plenary indulgence can be obtained for the dead.
- g. The recitation of the prayer Hail Holy Queen, the Apostles Creed, the Sign of the Cross, a prayer for vocations to the priesthood or to religious life can gain a partial indulgence.
- h. Reading the Holy Bible for half an hour gains a partial, for longer than one half hour, a plenary indulgence.
- i. Teaching or learning Christian Doctrine gains a partial indulgence.
- j. Renewal of one's baptismal promises at any time of the year gains a partial indulgence. (see plenary indulgence list for exceptions).

A partial indulgence can be gained at any time that we use a sacramental such as a crucifix, a rosary, scapular or medal when we pray. If the holy object has been blessed by the Pope or any Bishop a Plenary Indulgence can be gained on the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul.

A **plenary indulgence** frees us or others that we are praying for from **all** the temporal

punishment due for sins. The Church directs us to gain graces for those people who have died and are going through a time of purification in purgatory, by uniting our sacrifices, good works and prayers with the offerings of the whole Church. In this way we can gain all the graces needed for salvation and assist both the living and the dead.

A plenary indulgence can be gained once only per day, except for those at the point of death. One of the most encouraging accounts of a plenary indulgence being given to a dying man is told in St. Luke's Gospel in the story of the good thief.

When Jesus was on the cross one of the criminals there abused him. 'Are you not the Christ?' he said, 'Save yourself and us as well.' But the other spoke up and rebuked him. 'Have you no fear of God at all?' he said. 'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.'

'Jesus,' he said, 'remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

'Indeed, I promise you,' Jesus replied, 'today you will be with me in paradise.'

It is of great importance to ask for a priest to administer the Sacrament of Extreme Unction to a dying person. A plenary indulgence can be gained, in fact more than one can be gained by the dying person. There are no words that could bring greater peace to a soul than the words of Jesus, 'Indeed, I promise you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

To acquire a plenary indulgence when we are well and can perform the work to which the indulgence is attached, we must fulfill the following conditions:

1. Make a Sacramental Confession.
2. Receive Communion.
3. Pray for the intentions of the Pope.
4. Perform the action or say the prayer to which the indulgence is attached.

All attachment to sin, even less serious venial sin, must be absent for the person to receive a plenary indulgence. If this is not the case and venial sins are still present the plenary indulgence becomes a partial indulgence. Although venial sins do not cut us off completely from God they must be forgiven and stopped since they are doing spiritual damage to the soul.

Although the three conditions listed above can be fulfilled several days before or after the work or prayer is completed, it is recommended that Eucharistic Communion and prayers for the Pope be said on the day of the indulgence. The faithful may choose any prayers to be said for the Pope's intentions. Usually, one Our Father and one Hail Mary is said. The Holy Father is grateful for our prayers, so be generous!

A plenary indulgence can be gained by one sacramental Confession, but Eucharistic Communion must also be received and prayers for the Pope's intentions said on the same day.

On November 2nd, the feast of the Holy Souls a plenary indulgence can be gained for the dead at all Churches and Oratories.

Twice a year, a plenary indulgence can be gained in Parish Churches on the Feast Day of that Church's Patron Saint and one other day decided by the local Bishop. This plenary indulgence can also be gained on the Sunday preceding or the Sunday following these two dates to make it possible for all the parishioners to gain the indulgences.

Plenary Indulgences are granted for:

1. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for at least one half hour.
2. Devout reading of Scriptures for at least one half hour.
3. Making the Way of the Cross, Nicene Creed.
4. Recitation of the Rosary in a Church, public Oratory, or private Chapel, or in a family group, Religious Community or Prayer Group,(partial indulgence in other circumstances).
5. Spending at least three days in retreat.
6. Participating in Adoration of the Cross during the Good Friday liturgy, and devoutly kissing the cross.
7. Renewal of one's baptismal promises can gain a plenary indulgence if the renewal is made on the Vigil of Easter or on the anniversary of one's baptism.

Only one plenary indulgence can be gained in a day except by a person at the point of death who can receive more than one. For those who are following their faith through television or radio and are fulfilling all conditions necessary, the Bishop can impart a Papal Blessing and Indulgence three times a year.

We are encouraged by the Church to have Masses said for the souls in Purgatory. We are also reminded that Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Whether our prayers are for the living or the dead we can direct the flow of graces we receive by way of indulgences to those who need grace on this earth or in purgatory. We ask those in heaven to pray and intercede for us before the throne of God where they see God and converse with Him.

The Church calls the link between those in heaven, those in the purification of purgatory, and those who are baptized Christians living on earth, **The Communion of Saints**. The infinite merits won for us by Christ, Our Lord, the merits won for us by the life and fiat of Mary the Mother of God, and the sacrifices, prayers and offerings of all the saints make available an endless supply of graces. The Communion of Saints is a spiritual union which is kept alive when we pray for each other and draw on all these graces. The good thief still asks us to remember those like him, and to pray for them. When we gain indulgences we can ask that they be given freely to those in most need so that they will turn to Our Lord before it is too late.

The gaining of indulgences is the gaining of treasure in heaven, and we can become

spiritually rich when we labour for treasure that lasts. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and lend without any hope of return. He tells us that we will have a great reward, and we will be sons of the Most High, for God himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves: do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.' (St. Luke 6: 35-38)

From the diary of Sister Faustina---

*Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless
and the treasury of compassion
inexhaustible, look kindly upon us
and increase your mercy in us, that in
difficult moments we might not
despair nor become despondent,
but with great confidence submit
ourselves to Your Holy Will,
which is love and mercy itself. (950)*

References: all information on indulgences is taken from *The Doctrine and Practice of Indulgences*, an apostolic constitution issued by Pope Paul VI Jan. 1, 1967, and the summary of this document taken from *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Almanac*, 1998.