

It is a sad truth that our world is becoming increasingly polarized in almost every single possible way to the point that it is almost impossible to dialogue with anyone who has opposing views. This is a problem for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that we are created to exist in relationship with others, and this increasing polarization divides us from each other and ultimately even from ourselves. This division is even felt within the Church as we divide ourselves into separate camps, saying on the one side that we stand for truth and orthodoxy or conversely on the other side for compassion and tolerance, never recognizing that our faith calls for both of these groups to meet in the middle.

Today in our Gospel, we hear Jesus describe the Kingdom of Heaven like a treasure buried in a field or a pearl of great price that a person finds and sells all that they have so that they can buy it. I was privileged to witness this parable in a very real and tangible way earlier this week when I watched several women give away everything that the world holds dear as they vowed to live their lives in poverty, chastity, and obedience as Dominican Sisters. You would think that giving away everything to follow Christ would be difficult and painful, and yet all of their faces reflected deep and transcendent joy.

But what is this pearl of great price that they found and sold everything that they owned to purchase? To put it simply, this pearl of great price is the “good news”, that ancient kerygma which proclaims that in Jesus Christ salvation is offered to all people as a gift of God’s grace and mercy. If we were to expand out on this simple statement, we would say that the “good news” is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary so that He might teach us about His Father’s great love before He was crucified, died and buried so that He might be raised from the dead for the forgiveness of sins. After He was raised from the dead, He sent His Spirit upon us so that we might become one body in Him before He comes again in

judgement of the living and the dead. This good news asks us to repent from our sins and dedicate our lives to God. All of this should sound familiar since it is the core of the Creed which we profess together every Sunday.

What we often forget when we pray the Creed is that these are not some abstract principles, but they are instead deep truths about our living God, our God who loves us deeply and wants a relationship with each and every single one of us. Our faith is not some negative set of rules that are there to take the fun out of life. Instead, our faith is truly “good news” because it is a message of love, a message which proclaims that despite our brokenness we are loved deeply and passionately by our God. And if we choose to embrace this love, we will be purified and brought to everlasting joy. Yes, this will require us to give up everything that the world holds dear, but in doing this we will gain back everything that we gave up.

It is so easy to say this but so much harder to understand it and live it out in our lives. In this, we find ourselves in the same place as Solomon in our first reading. He was overwhelmed with the path that he saw before him, and said “I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act.” So, he asked God to give him an “understanding heart.” I truly love this phrase. I often try to reduce Solomon’s words to a simple request for human wisdom, but Solomon is asking for so much more than this. He is asking for more than mere intellectual knowledge and is instead asking for a knowledge of right and wrong that is integrated with the compassion in his heart. This wedding of the head and heart... this knowledge of truth which is rooted in love... is a gift that can only come from God.

I think that this gift is just as important for us today as it was for Solomon back then. We too are living in a time when the path ahead of us seems overwhelming and the world increasingly tries to separate our heads from our hearts. We desperately need to beg the Lord to give us understanding hearts as well; hearts

which are rooted in the truth... intellects which are rooted in love. It is only with these “understanding hearts” that we will finally realize that the truth and morality that has been given to us by God are not merely rules and regulations but are instead a true message of love and path to joy. Only “understanding hearts” can allow us to discover that pearl of great price and the joy that we gain when we possess it should naturally overflow into a desire to share this great treasure with everyone that we meet.

When we go to share this good news, however, we must share it correctly... sharing the truth with compassion. We cannot share our faith as an empty set of rules that must be followed, and we must not go out and use the truth as a bludgeon to beat those who think differently than us. At the same time, we must not live out a false compassion that is divorced from the truth because it is only the truth that sets us free from the chains of sin which bind us. A compassion which does not include Christ’s call to conversion is ultimately empty... an empty love that does not well up into eternal life.

If you remember, Jesus was ridiculed by some for speaking about sin while others condemned Him for eating and drinking with sinners. We are called to follow His example and do the same, to go forth with compassionate hearts speaking the truth in love while never shying away from loving those around us with compassion. Like Jesus, we too will be condemned and misunderstood... some will call us too conservative while others will condemn us for being too liberal, but it is only when we joyfully live out this compassionate love that we will be able to become bridge builders in this world which is increasingly divided by hatred. While some will turn away from us, others will find in our understanding hearts that pearl of great price for which they will also one day be willing to lay down their lives.