

17th Sunday Ordinary Time
July 24, 2011
Fr. Tom Elliott

Urgent and Generous Response

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12
Psalm 119
Romans 8:28-30
Matthew 13:44-46

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter....

For, though I knew His love Who followed,
Yet was I sore adread
Lest having Him, I must have naught beside....

-“The Hound of Heaven” by Francis Thompson

“The Hound of Heaven” is a famous poem written by Francis Thompson in the nineteenth century. It beautifully describes the fears we inevitably face in light of God’s tremendous love for us, described by Jesus as a treasure and a pearl of great price.

The two parables we heard today are meant to teach us about the overwhelming worth of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, God’s eternal, unconditional love for us, and the proper response to finding something of such great value. Unlike those people who heard Jesus’ message and just got angry at Him and wanted to kill Him, a true disciple gets *excited* about what Jesus says and feels a growing sense of *urgency* and *generosity* in responding to His message! In order to respond in this way, however, we must first address our fears.

We fear that accepting God’s love will mean that we are no longer in control of our lives. We also fear that we will ultimately be rejected for not being worthy and good enough. One of the most common fears we have is the fear that accepting the treasure of God’s love will require *too much* of us. This is the fear I’d like for us to briefly look at today. It’s the fear described by Francis Thompson when he wrote, “I was sore adread, lest having Him, I must have naught beside.” In other words, “I was fearful that to have God would require me to give up everything else.”

We often keep God at a distance because we fear what His love might require of us. If we respond to God’s eternal love for us with urgency and generosity, what sacrifices will He require us to make? What will He ask us to do? Will God think we’re too wealthy and take away our resources? Will our friends think our values have changed too much and drift away? Will our jobs no longer make sense in light of God’s love? Will our spouse think we’ve gone off the deep end? These are all ways of asking, “Will urgently and generously responding to God’s love cause me to lose everything and be miserable?”

These are reasonable questions based on our unreasonable fears. The fear that our urgent and generous response to God's love will ultimately lead us to misery is based on a lie. The truth is that our urgent and generous response to God's love will actually lead us to greater happiness because we will grow in freedom to be who God created us to be, which always brings about greater happiness. Fear, on the other hand, limits freedom and therefore, limits happiness.

Today, we are invited by these parables to accept the radical love of God and to respond to it immediately and generously, letting it reprioritize every aspect of our lives!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read Matthew 13:44-50. Share with God your own judgment of your *urgency* and *generosity* in responding to His love.