

‘USING OUR GREATEST TREASURES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE’ – HOMILY 7 AUGUST 2016

The Gospel passage today from Luke begins,

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions, and give alms.

Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out,

An unfailing treasure in heaven,

Where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit.”

‘Little flock’ - not an exclusive club, not a top 500 company, not an elitist company, not a college of excellence. The Greek word ‘mikron’ from which we get the word micro. Small enough to be humble.

A flock, a community that follows The Shepherd, Jesus.

Because of its total trust in the shepherd, it need not fear.

Not a thing that wears away, or rots away, or spoils, or can be stolen.

Instead it is given much more. So much more.

Given the kingdom, the reign of God.

Given God’s continued deep and intimate love.

A love that does not drive us, but invites us to grow in love, to make a difference by actively loving.

We are not called to be a driven community, but a loving community.

Our Saviour, Our Shepherd, Jesus showing us the [WAY](#).

But this treasure?

How do we describe it?

It is not something that we hoard.

Dressed for action?

Not overcome by fear and paralysis?

It is alive, active, now.

Let us turn on a recent discourse from Pope Francis to understand this more fully.

For ease of reading, paragraphs and longer lines are spaced out.

With the [2016 WORLD YOUTH DAY](#) concluded and now with our focus on the Rio Olympics, we could easily miss a wonderful opportunity to remember the reflection of Pope Francis on July 31st at a prayer Vigil on the outskirts of Krakow.

The prayer vigil’s theme was ‘[Jesus, Source of Mercy](#)’.

It responded to how Jesus offers -

[FAITH](#) to those who doubt, [HOPE](#) for the disillusioned, [LOVE](#) to the indifferent,

[FORGIVENESS](#) to those who have done harm, and [JOY](#) to the sorrowful.

Pope Francis reached out to the youth at this World Youth Event, saying,

“... For us, here, today, coming from different parts of the world, the suffering and the wars that many young people experience are no longer anonymous, something we read about in the papers.

They have a name, they have a face, they have a story, they are close at hand.”

Pope Francis reflected on three testimonies that young people had shared:

“We have heard three testimonies.

Our hearts were touched by their stories, their lives.

We have seen how, like the disciples, they experienced similar moments, living through times of great fear, when it seemed like everything was falling apart.

The fear and anguish born of knowing that leaving home might mean never again seeing their loved ones, the fear of not feeling appreciated or loved, the fear of having no choices. They shared with us the same experience the disciples had; they felt the kind of fear that only leads to one thing.

Where does fear lead us?

The feeling of being closed in on oneself, trapped.

Once we feel that way, our fear starts to fester and is inevitably joined by its ‘twin sister’, paralysis: the feeling of being paralysed.

Thinking that in this world, in our cities and our communities, there is no longer any room to grow, to dream, to create, to gaze at new horizons – in a word to live – is one of the worst things that can happen to us in life, and especially at a younger age. When we are paralysed, we miss the magic of encountering others, making friends, sharing dreams, walking at the side of others. This paralysis distances us from others, it prevents us from taking each other’s hand... “

Pope Francis spoke of another type of paralysis:

“... It is not easy to put our finger on it.

I like to describe it as the paralysis that comes from confusing happiness with a sofa.

In other words, to think that in order to be happy, all we need is a good sofa.

A sofa that makes us feel comfortable, calm, safe.

A sofa like one of those we have nowadays with a built-in massage unit to put us to sleep.

A sofa that promises us hours of comfort so we can escape to the world of videogames and spend all kinds of time in front of a computer screen.

A sofa that keeps us safe from any kind of pain and fear.

A sofa that allows us to stay home without needing to work at, or worry about, anything. ‘Sofa-happiness’!

That is probably the most harmful and insidious form of paralysis, which can cause the greatest harm to young people.

And why does this happen, Father?

Because, little by little, without even realising it, we start to nod off, to grow drowsy and dull.

The other day, I spoke about young people who go into retirement at the age of 20; today I speak about young persons who nod off, grow drowsy and dull, while others – perhaps more alert than we are, but not necessarily better – decide our future for us. For many people in fact, it is much easier and better to have drowsy and dull kids who confuse happiness with a sofa.

For many people, that is more convenient than having young people who are alert and searching, trying to respond to God’s dream and to all the restlessness present in the human heart”.

Today we say that we are called to make a difference.

Pope Francis explains it also as leaving a mark.

He identifies our greatest treasure: our freedom.

"... Dear young people, we didn't come into this world to 'vegetate', to take it easy, to make our lives a comfortable sofa to fall asleep on.

No, we came for another reason: to leave a mark. It is very sad to pass through life without leaving a mark.

But when we opt for ease and convenience, for confusing happiness with consumption, then we end up paying a high price indeed: we lose our freedom.

We are not free to leave a mark. We lose our freedom. This is the high price we pay.

There are so many people who do not want the young to be free;

there are so many people who do not wish you well, who want you to be drowsy and dull, and never free!

No, this must not be so! We must defend our freedom".

"This is itself a great form of paralysis, whenever we start thinking that happiness is the same as comfort and convenience that being happy means going through life asleep or on tranquillisers, that the only way to be happy is to live in a haze.

Certainly, drugs are bad, but there are plenty of other socially acceptable drugs, that can end up enslaving us just the same.

One way or the other, they rob us of our greatest treasure: our freedom. They strip us of our freedom".

Pope Francis stirs the heart and mind as he says,

"... My friends, Jesus is the Lord of risk, He is the Lord of the eternal 'more'.

Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security and ease.

Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes and to set out on new and uncharted paths.

To blaze trails that open up new horizons capable of spreading joy, the joy that is born of God's love and wells up in your hearts with every act of mercy.

To take the path of the 'craziness' of our God, Who teaches us to encounter Him in the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the friend in trouble, the prisoner, the refugee and the migrant, and our neighbours who feel abandoned.

To take the path of our God, Who encourages us to be politicians, thinkers, social activists.

The God who encourages us to devise an economy marked by greater solidarity than our own.

In all the settings in which you find yourselves, God's love invites you bring the Good News, making of your own lives a gift to Him and to others.

This means being courageous, this means being free".

"... That is the secret, dear friends, and all of us are called to share in it. God expects something from you. Have you understood this?

God expects something from you, God wants something from you. God hopes in you.

God comes to break down all our fences. He comes to open the doors of our lives, our dreams, our ways of seeing things.

*God comes to break open everything that keeps you closed in. He is encouraging you to dream.
He wants to make you see that, with you, the world can be different.
For the fact is, unless you offer the best of yourselves, the world will never be different. This is the challenge”.*

What do we choose? What do we decide?

Pope Francis continues,

*“... Today’s world demands that you be a protagonist of history because life is always beautiful when we choose to live it fully,
when we choose to leave a mark. History today calls us to defend our dignity and not to let others decide our future.
No! We must decide our future, you must decide your future!
As He did on Pentecost, the Lord wants to work one of the greatest miracles we can experience;
He wants to turn your hands, my hands, our hands, into signs of reconciliation, of communion, of creation.
He wants your hands to continue building the world of today. And He wants to build that world with you. And what is your response?”*

I invite all to read the full discourse of Pope Francis at <http://tinyurl.com/gS8ay9b>

God expects us to use our freedom, to live our gift of freedom, to open our greatest treasure to make a difference.

Let us humbly pray to God who has created us, loves us, inspires us, challenges us, heals us,
Calls us to light our lamps,
Calls us as a little flock, not to be afraid but to share the “Good News’.
God “wants to build that world with you”.

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – ‘Using Our Greatest Treasure to Make A Difference’ – 7 August 2016]
[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/080716.cfm>]