

17th Sunday A: Choose God First (2020)

Dear family and friends of CCST,

I hope you are well and safe with your family. Let me offer my prayer to all of you. I know this is just one of the many prayers offered to God for the people of Hawaii who are bracing for the Hurricane Douglas:

Merciful Father, we beg you to dissipate and weaken the distractive power of Hurricane Douglas as it passes through our islands. We continue to turn to you for healing, health, and protection against COVID-19 Corona Virus. Forgive our sins and our lack of faith in you. Help us to be steadfast in faith through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Did you know that it has been a constant prayer of our Church for deliverance from all harm? This is the prayer that the priest prays right after praying the Lord's prayer: Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may always be free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope, and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This is the prayer of the Church who entrusts herself to the power of the Kingdom of God. A prayer that invites all her children to "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt 6:33).

But what is the Kingdom of Heaven? It is a state of being when we talk about the reign of God in one's heart. It is a place when we talk about our eternal destiny. These two understandings are complementary. The Kingdom of Heaven is both a journey and final destiny. It is a journey with Jesus, allowing him to rule our life. It is a destiny because it is where we account the way we used the blessings we received and the life we live here and now. It reminds us of the consequences of any ungodly and unrepented acts in this life. There is a judgment for the wicked, and there is a place reserve for them.

The way our Lord Jesus describes the consequence is a severe warning. The angel will separate them and thrown out into a fiery furnace where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth (cf. Matt 13:42). This is a sad state: eternal wailing and grinding of teeth. What a terrible end!

But the good news is we are given a chance to choose for the Kingdom. It is continually offered to us, for we are all predestined to conform to our Lord Jesus (cf. Rom 8:29).

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure buried in a field or a pearl of great price. Both images speak about the treasure of high value: it is the source of incomparable joy when one finds it, and it is an incredibly magnificent treasure that when one gives up everything for it, one will find the fulfillment of all desires. This tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is not about how much or how big you give up owning it but how you value it. There is no amount at stake so that you can own it. It is a gift. It asks us to anchor our life on the values it holds dear, the importance of peace, love, meekness, forgiveness, justice, and solidarity. These values grow in and through our relationship with God. It grows in the soil of our hearts when we make God number one in our life. Hence, it is a constant reminder to seek first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness. I hope we are not tired of hearing this reminder.

The story of Solomon should inspire us all. In a dream, God offered to give him the one thing that he wanted. Being young, Solomon could have asked for wealth or glory or long life. But realizing the enormous task ahead of him, Solomon decided that what he needed was the understanding heart to rule his people well in God's ways. Wisdom from God is what Solomon asked. And God was so pleased with him, for he chose wisdom over wealth. God blessed his choice; he promised him more than the gift of wisdom, including riches, glory, and long life. This is a profound story of seeking God first over anything in life.

But how do I know that I genuinely chose God, and he is number one in my life?

It is...

When I wake up in the morning, I think of you, O Lord. I glorify you and pray.

During the day, I honor your name through faithfulness and dedication to my work and seek the opportunity to exercise charity.

When evening draws near, I thank you for what I accomplish, my success, and my failures.
At night, I entrust myself to your care to pass through the darkness that I may wake up to greet another day and continue to thrive in your love.

How do I know that I take him for granted, and he is not number one?

It is...

When I wake up in the morning, I think of myself and immediately plan the day.
During the day, I worked like a horse to beat the day and seek respect. If I didn't, I would gratify myself through the pleasures the world offers.
When evening draws near, I sighed that it's too short, but I am tired anyway.
At night, I entrust myself to myself. I need to relax to some sort until I fall asleep.
Oh my God, I need to sleep, I have work and deadlines tomorrow.

But deep within, I know that God is my life, because...

I talk to him like a friend.
I walk with him as my teacher.
I trust him as my redeemer and Savior.
I work for him as my Lord and Master.
I offer all to him for I have nothing to bring with me at the end.
After all, what matters, in the end, is the love that I receive from him and share with others.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all good things shall be added unto you." This is the best summary of the way we are called to live our lives. This is the best summary of how we entrust ourselves, our fears, and anxieties to God.

Be safe and healthy!

In Christ,

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor, CCST