

Beloved in Christ: Christ is in our midst!

What do we seek in our lives? What motivates us? Even, what makes us set the alarm to come to church on Sundays? There are many things that can motivate us: the desire to succeed, the wish to provide for our families, the potential of receiving a reward. We can ask what motivates us in the church today. What makes us want to increase the number of people in our parish? Our intentions are important. We may seek the right thing but have the wrong intention behind it. We may seek the right thing for the wrong reason. Maybe we do good but we do it because we want to be rewarded or recognized. Maybe we do good because we don't want to be punished. Or maybe we do good because it is what has been revealed to us by Christ Jesus and our heart's desire is to live in Him and have Him live in us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks about intentions and desires often. Earlier in Matthew's gospel He tells us to lay up treasure in heaven. Maybe we need that carrot of a reward to get us started on the way. That's a start but there is so much more that is so much better. Today Jesus reveals to us that our motivation, our intention, is to be centered not on gaining reward but on seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness and then everything else will be given to us. That God's kingdom should be first for us. Then everything else will be added. The "everything else" is good but it is not the highest good. The highest good is the kingdom of God. If we seek God's kingdom in our hearts and lives then we will lay up treasure for ourselves in heaven. That is where we should begin, seeking God's kingdom.

We should not begin by seeking reward and then figuring out how to obtain that reward. That line of thinking is self-centered. It is focused on us. The intention behind it is our own self-fulfillment. Jesus tells us our intention and focus is God. If God is our focus, then ultimately everything else will fall into place even though at times it may seem that it is not. It is a question of whether we trust our Lord Jesus and His words. If we trust Him, then we need to let go of our anxieties and the needless stresses that we put upon ourselves. Trusting in God does not remove suffering rather our trust in God liberates us from our always trying to have everything our way. It opens us to a deeper faith and continuing communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It opens to us His kingdom.

And God's kingdom has come into the world in the person of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Jesus says in Luke's gospel that "the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21) St. Paul says that "The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17) God's kingdom is made manifest in the world by a life of compassion, a life of love, a life of forgiveness, a life of patience, a life of standing with others who suffer, a life that does not judge the sinner but looks with compassion upon him or her. These virtues and together with them all the others open up the kingdom of God inside of us. And it makes the kingdom of God present in this world, on this earth, here and now, even if only in a partial way until it comes in its fullness with the coming of the Lord. The kingdom of God is our communion, our participation, insofar as we are able in this life, in the life of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Son of God came to bring us from earth to heaven. That we may become by grace what our Lord Jesus is by nature, a child of God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the ultimate fulfillment of our human lives, where our lives are directed to go. What God's intention for us is. Let us bend our hearts to God and His good will for us first of all that we may have life in Him and share that life with others by His light that shines within us.