A close up of a sign

Description automatically generated

**August 11, 2019 - Live The Faith**

**By Rev. Mattei**

**Lk. 12:32-40**

Last week, Jesus warned the crowd to watch out and not to be greedy: a greedy person is a selfish fool who thinks only of himself, unaware of the needs of his neighbor and his relationship with God. Indeed, we have seen that a greedy person, acting like a fool, cannot have a relationship with God (Ps. 14). Commenting on a parallel passage from the gospel of Matthew (Mt. 6:25-7:11), Martin Luther explains:

“I am not concerned about anything that my heart does not think about, but I must have a heart for anything about which I am concerned… [The] concern of love, something divine and Christian, [is] not a concern devoted to its own advantage or to Mammon [the god of possession], militating against faith and love, and even interfering with the official concern. The man whose money is dear to him and who is on the lookout for his own advantage will not have much regard for his neighbor or for the office that involves his neighbor...Christ has forbidden this greedy concern and worship of Mammon as an idolatry that makes men enemies of God.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Jesus explains further, in today’s assigned gospel, what it means to trust God and depend only on God’s providence. The only treasures we want to pay attention to, says Jesus, is spiritual in nature (Lk 12:33-34), whereby “spiritual” is intended an integrated life, a life in which one’s material needs are considered through our spiritual dimension. We can’t go wrong when we start paying attention to our spirit: Jesus assures us that God’s delight is to give us all that we need for a life in God (Lk. 12:32).

But how do we get to the point of opening our heart in trust, the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Heb. 11:1)? Abram is proclaimed our father in faith; we can certainly look at him for learning and inspiration. Terah, Abram’s father, had lost one of his sons, Haran. He felt in his heart that the best way to respond to this life trauma was to leave their native land, Ur of the Chaldeans, where undoubtedly so much reminded him of his son, and reach the land of Canaan. He asked his son, Abram to follow him. Out of trust for his father, Abram did. But when his father wanted to settle halfway, God spoke to Abram and commanded him to continue on to Canaan, a land God promised him along with descendants too numerous to count. (Gen. 11:27-12:3 and Gen. 15:1-6). In ancient times, God used angelic visions, dreams, burning bush, and whispering winds to speak. That was a language used to express the nearness of God to the one who is ready to listen. Contemporary euphemisms intend to convey the same message: God is near and speaks to us in our hearts, in our prayers, in music and in the arts, in spiritual readings and in Christian fellowship, in words of encouragement and in acts of compassion. God’s only purpose to seek us out is to have a relationship in which we flourish, and in which we find the strength to face critical moments, and courage during challenges and grief. The Word of God becomes flesh (Jn. 1: 1-5 and v. 14) as we pay attention to it and act on it.

Howard Washington Thurman (1899 – 1981) was an African-American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader. As a prominent religious figure, he played a leading role in the social justice movements of the twentieth century.His theology of radical nonviolence influenced and shaped a generation of civil rights activists, including M.L.King, Jr. Thus did Thurman spoke of faith:

“Not only is faith a way of knowing, a form of knowledge, but it is also one of life’s great teachers. At no point is this fact more clearly demonstrated than in an individual’s growing knowledge of God. It is obvious that, in the last analysis, proof of the existence of God is quite impossible. A simple reason for this is the fact that, if there is that to which God may be finally reduced, then He is not ultimate. But let us not be led astray by this apparent abstraction. Faith teaches a man that God is. The human spirit has two fundamental demands that must be met relative to God. First, [God] must be vast, limitless, transcendent, all-comprehensive, so that there is nothing that is outside the wide reaches of His apprehension. The stars in the universe, the great galaxies of spatial groupings moving in endless rhythmic patterns in the trackless skies, as well as the tiny blade of grass by the roadside, are all within His grasp. The second demand is that [God] be personal and intimate. A man must have a sense of being cared for, of not being alone and stranded in the universe. All of us want the assurance of not being deserted *by* life nor deserted *in* life. Faith teaches us that God is—that [God] is the fact of life from which all other things take their meaning and reality. When Jesus prayed, he was conscious that, in his prayer, he met the Presence, and this consciousness was far more important and significant than the answering of his prayer. It is for this reason primarily that God was for Jesus the answer to all the issues and the problems of life. When I, with all my mind and heart, truly seek God and give myself in prayer, I, too, meet His Presence, and then I know for myself that Jesus was right.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

People of faith, the Bible instructs us, live in the world but are not of the world (Jn. 17); in fact, they live as “strangers and foreigners on the earth,” (Heb. 11:13) keeping the faith from generation to generation even as they do not see God’s promises materialized. People of faith keep God, our homeland, in mind. In that homeland, we have a home not made of human hands (2 Cor. 5:1). “We must fly to our beloved homeland. There the Father is, and there is everything.”[[3]](#footnote-3) When we feel stuck, caught up in the challenges of our day, when it’s difficult to see a way forward, when life seems cruel and we experience the threat of dispair, let us bring everything in prayer to God. Let us be diligent in our faith and appeal to the witness of those who have come before us (Heb. 12:1). Let us keep alive the faith that binds us to a larger reality with saints of all times and places, in a holy communion that knows no boundaries. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom...Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Trust the Word, live the faith. Amen.

1. M. Luther, Do Not Be Anxious About Your Life, in R. J. Foster and E. Griffin, Spiritual Classics, p. 120 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Howard Thurman, *Deep Is the Hunger: Meditations for Apostles of Sensitiveness*, 145-146. See *Howard Thurman: Essential Writings*, ed. Luther E. Smith, Jr. (Orbis: 2006), 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. St. Augustine, The City of God, IX, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)