

'One day God decided to launch a treasure hunt on earth. So he called his angels and gave them a priceless treasure to bring to earth, instructing them to hide it so that people would have to search for it and might have the joy of finding it. "Shall we hide it on the highest mountain", the angels asked. "No", answered God, "because only the fittest and healthiest could climb that mountain and the weak would have no chance". Again the angels asked: "Shall we put it on the furthest shores of the ocean". "No", answered God, "because only the rich people could afford to travel so far and the poor would have no chance". "Where then shall we put it?" the angels asked. And God instructed: "Put it within reach of everybody, rich or poor, healthy or weak. Plant it in the centre of their beings. Hide it in their hearts."

We are all treasure hunters. We seek the 'pearl of great value' (Mt 13:46) the one thing that will answer the deepest yearning of our hearts and make us truly happy. The problem is that we spend too much time looking for it in the wrong places – outside ourselves. And we invariably end up frustrated, with troubled and unsettled hearts. The treasure we seek is the presence of God for which our hearts were made.

In his famous autobiography, Confessions, St Augustine wrote, 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless, till they rest in you'. Augustine then goes on to describe his own experience of seeking and finally discovering the divine treasure. After a fruitless search for this treasure outside of himself, he finally discovered it in the depths of his heart. His moving words convey his unbounded joy on discovering the treasure for which he had been searching all his life:

‘Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new; late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my weakness I plunged into the lovely things you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness.... You touched me, and I burned for your peace.’

Today’s gospel invites us to attend to the divine presence within our hearts for it is there we will find the treasure we seek, the priceless pearl for which we must give up all we possess. Yes, there is a price to be paid for the divine treasure. We have to make choices, to let go of the things that distract us from the quest – things we foolishly imagine will make us happy, like success, wealth, and power. Like Solomon in our first reading today we need ‘a discerning heart’ to keep us on the right path, the path that leads us to the treasure hidden by the angels. Sometimes, perhaps, we may have found the treasure and then cast it aside, or forgotten about it in our foolish quest for things we thought might make us feel important.

One of the blessings of ageing, and of having to take our foot off the pedal and slow down, is the opportunity it gives us to notice and attend to, the everyday miracles around us, miracles we may have missed in our busy days of doing great things. We can begin to live more freely in the present moment, to embrace the eternity that awaits us, and appreciate the treasure hidden in our hearts – a treasure beautiful beyond words and well worth whatever it takes to find it.