Written by Chiara Lubich
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"The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price,he goes and sells all that he has and buys it."

Mt. 13:45-46

In this very brief parable, Jesus captures the imagination of his listeners. Everyone knew the value of pearls; along with gold, they were the most precious things one could possess.

The Scriptures also spoke of wisdom, that is, of the knowledge of God, as something that was so valuable that it could not be compared to “any priceless gem” (Wis 7:9).

What emerges in the parable, however, is the description of an unusual and surprising event: the merchant caught sight of a pearl, perhaps in a bazaar. Only his expert eye could see that this pearl had enormous value. From it he could derive considerable profit. This is why, after careful calculation, he decided that it was well worth it to sell everything he had to buy the pearl. Who wouldn’t have done the same thing in his place?

This, then, is the profound meaning of the parable: the encounter with Jesus, with the kingdom of God among us, is the pearl. It is the unique opportunity we must jump at, involving all our energies and all that we possess.

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This is not the first time that the disciples are faced with a radical choice. In order to follow Jesus, they have to leave everything—everything that is most precious to them, such as family affections, financial security, guarantees for the future.

Jesus, however, is not asking something pointless or absurd. For the “everything” that we let go of, there is the “everything” that we find, which is immeasurably more precious. Each time Jesus asks for something, he promises to give much, much more.

With this parable, he assures us of a treasure that will make us rich forever.

And if it seems to be a mistake to leave what is certain for what is uncertain, a possession for just the promise of one, let us remember that merchant; because he knows that that pearl is most precious, he can confidently await the profits it will bring.

Likewise, whoever wants to follow Jesus knows—sees with the eyes of faith—what an immense gain it is to be heirs with him to the kingdom for having left everything, at least spiritually.

God, moreover, offers such an opportunity to all men and women.

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It is a concrete invitation to put aside everything that can take the place of God in our hearts: a career, marriage, studies, a beautiful house, a profession, sports or entertainment.

It is an invitation to give God first place in our hearts, for everything in our life must converge towards him and come to us from him.

If we do this, if we “seek his kingdom,” according to the Gospel promise, the rest will be given to us in addition (see Lk 12:31). If we put aside everything for the kingdom of God, we “receive a hundred times” as much in “houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother” (Mt 19:29), because the Gospel has a real human dimension. Jesus is the God-Man, who along with spiritual food assures us of bread, shelter, clothing, family, and the rest.

Perhaps we should learn from the “little ones” to trust more in the Providence of the Father, for he never fails to give to those who give the little they have out of love.

A few months ago, a group of young people in the Congo started making greeting cards out of banana peels. The cards were then sold in Germany. At first, they kept all the profits since some of them had to support their families. Later on, they decided to share half of their profits in order to help thirty-five young people who were unemployed.

The story of what they did circulated in their area. Some shopkeepers who were looking for workers heard it too and offered eleven of the young people permanent jobs. God does not let himself be outdone in generosity.

-Chiara Lubich

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