

*“If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all.”* St Paul reminds us that God has given us this life as a time to choose between the way of life and the way of death. The ancients understood that these two ways led to very different places and very different destinies. In our daily experience of the world we come to know that there really are only two ways of life: the way of giving and the way of taking, the way of love and the way death. When we put our trust in ourselves and focus only on the things of this world we are like those scraggly bushes that Jeremiah described as living in a wasteland – we have no root, no depth and no capacity to survive the hard times which will come upon us. The person who relies solely on the riches of this world will inevitably fail because his horizons are too small. The person who looks to God for his support will have the strength and the stamina to endure the misfortunes of life. Christ calls us to prepare ourselves for the inevitable hard times of life by putting our trust in God and the riches of the spirit.

In the gospel Jesus takes this understanding of the two ways of life to a new level, a new plain of understanding. Before he came, the understanding of the faithful was superficial, looking only at external obedience to God’s commandments as the source of their well being, seeing worldly success as a sign of God’s approval: follow the rules, and you will be rewarded; break the rules and God will punish you forever. This is an immature view of God because the emphasis is on doing good, rather than being good. But when Jesus came he taught us that we must not only do good, we must also be good. Jesus teaches us that the observance of God’s commandments should be an external sign to the world of the interior transformation of our own hearts and souls. Seen this way, obedience to the commandments is the natural result of an interior purification of spirit, a purification that comes about only through uniting our selves to God and submitting our worldly wills and limited horizons to his divine will and infinite vision.

When Jesus says “Blessed are you poor, yours is the kingdom of God, but woe to you rich your consolation is now” he is not exalting poverty or condemning wealth. Rather, he is saying that the person who seeks from the world only what he needs and keeps his eyes focused on the riches of heaven is blessed because he will possess the riches of heaven, but the person who focuses his desire on the good things of this life is blinded by those very things to the eternal good that comes only from God. Such a person will never have anything more than that which he has here and now, and even that will be taken away by death. Jesus reminds us that what we do here and now on earth is building our future for eternity because we are investing in what we can take to heaven, our soul. If we spend our life solely in the pursuit of worldly riches, we will have nothing we can take with us. But if we store up riches by molding ourselves into the likeness and image of Christ, then when we leave this world, those riches cannot be taken from us because our heart has been transformed by God, where our heart is there also will be our treasure.

We were created to come to know God’s love and to choose that love. Our lives are necessarily filled with the passing things of this world but our hearts must eagerly seek the things of heaven if we are to be truly happy. Let us therefore imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary and seek first the heart of Christ so that all things might be ours in their proper order. Let us choose the way of life and reject the way of death.