I. Introduction

Over 100 years ago there was an elderly widow in Scotland whose only son had gone to America to seek his fortune. He became very successful and prosperous. This didn’t help the widow, however; she was so poor the entire community had to support her. In fact, some of the people grumbled about this, saying, “Why doesn’t John help his mother?” One of the neighbors visited the widow and tactfully suggested that maybe if her son knew how badly off she was, he’d try to assist, but the woman defended her son, saying, “My Johnny is a good boy; he’d help if he could. Anyway, he writes me every week, and in every letter he sends pictures. I’ll admit, though, the pictures are kind of strange—old men on narrow green strips of paper. But he still thinks of his mother like a good son.” The visitor asked to see these strange pictures—and discovered, of course, that the widow’s son had been sending her hundreds of U.S. banknotes—more than enough money to care for her needs. The widow had a fortune in her possession, but hadn’t realized it (Msgr. Arthur Tonne, Five-Minute Homilies, p. 39).

In the same way, God offers all of us the gift of faith, but many people ignore it or take it for granted. Faith is a treasure because it alone can give lasting meaning to life, and prepare us for eternity—but this great gift means nothing unless we accept it and use it.

II. Development

The readings we’ve just heard tell us something about the treasure God offers us. St. Paul states that “all things work for the good of those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.” We have indeed been called by God, and so we are invited to share in His riches. For this to happen, however, we must have proper values, and make good decisions. This idea is illustrated in the 1st Reading. Young Solomon had just become king following the death of his father David, and God offered to bless him in whatever way he chose. Instead of seeking something for his own personal benefit—riches, power, or victory over his enemies—Solomon asked for something that would help him fulfill his responsibility to God and the people. He asked for wisdom, that he might be a good and just ruler. Wisdom means understanding and accepting the ways of God, and because it’s the principle of order from which all blessings flow, Solomon received many other gifts as well. Though a mere youth, Solomon recognized what was truly important, and in the Gospel Jesus states that this must also be true of His followers.

Our Lord gives two symbolic examples of someone discovering an item of great value—both of which apply to us today. In some ways we discover God’s Kingdom by chance, like the man who uncovered a buried treasure, but in other ways we discover the Kingdom by dedicated searching, like the merchant looking for a valuable pearl. God’s grace is a free gift on His part, but at the same time we must do our part to find Him. To discover God’s Kingdom, we have to be willing to sacrifice or subordinate everything to it—in other words, we must follow Jesus wholeheartedly.
III. Conclusion

The Lord offers us many treasures. The question is: Do we recognize them and make good use of them? Some of our blessings are very obvious—but still it’s good to review our use of them. First of all, we are very fortunate to be Americans. Do we try to be good, informed citizens, and by our influence and example, to make this a better country? Compared to most people in the world, we are rich in material things. Are we grateful, and do we try to be generous with those less fortunate than ourselves?

All of us have talents and abilities. Do we try to develop them, and to use them for God’s glory? The Lord also gives us freedom and the opportunity to continue growing as persons. Do we try to overcome our faults and to grow in virtue? Are we making good use of our freedom by trying to come closer to God each day? Another treasure God gives us consists of the people in our lives—our families and relatives, friends and neighbors, and fellow parisioners. Our Heavenly Father doesn’t want us to take one another for granted. We must appreciate each other and be a source of mutual inspiration and support as we journey together in faith.

There’s one other treasure I’d like to mention, one which we often overlook: our Catholic heritage. As Catholics, we belong to the only Church directly founded by Jesus Christ; no one else can say this. As Catholics, we are able to receive the Body and Blood of Christ—a privilege denied to most people. As Catholics, we can receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation—a powerful remedy against sin and guilt unavailable to the majority of the human race. As Catholics, we more than anyone else have a devotion to Our Lady and the saints, seeing in them our spiritual family and friends, always ready to help and guide us. As Catholics, we have access to a wealth of spiritual and religious materials: books, magazines, videos, parish programs, retreats, conferences, and other such resources. All these treasures are offered to us so that we might be spiritually and morally prepared for the day of judgment, and that we might help others be prepared, too.

We should be proud and delighted to be Catholics—though, of course, without looking down on others. After all, God somehow welcomes to His Kingdom everyone who sincerely tries to be good and loving and to do His will. As Catholics, however, we have special opportunities and resources: the sacraments, religious devotions, and the teachings of the Church. Along with these goes a special responsibility: we, even more than other Christians, must value and practice our faith, making the Lord’s will our highest priority. God’s Kingdom is a priceless and everlasting treasure. Rather than wasting or setting aside our religious heritage, as did the elderly widow who didn’t recognize the money her son was sending her, we must cherish the invitation God offers us, and do our best to respond with all our hearts.