

## THE TREASURE



Mark 10:21 "Jesus, looking at (the rich young man), loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When (the rich young man) heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."

The cheerful little girl with bouncy golden curls was about five years old, standing with her mother at the checkout stand one afternoon at the Five and Dime Store, when she first saw them: a circle of glistening white plastic pearls on a string in a pretty pink foil box. They were the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. "Oh please, Mommy. Can we get them?" she cried, "Please, Mommy, please!" her little heart almost breaking with a sudden

longing for this thing of beauty. Quickly the mother checked the back of the small foil box and then looked down into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's upturned face. "They cost six dollars and ninety-five cents," she said, "That's almost seven dollars. That's a lot of money, but if you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you to do and in no time, you can save enough to buy them yourself. For the family, you see, was not wealthy and could not easily afford such luxuries.

As soon as the little girl got home, she emptied her piggy bank and counted out her coins. She had 37 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores and she went to the neighbor and asked Mrs. Gordon if she could pick the dandelions in her yard for a quarter. Little by little she increased her purse. And then on her birthday, Grandma gave her a new five-dollar bill and at last she had enough money to buy the plastic necklace.

The little girl loved her pearls. They made her feel so dressed up, and so grown up too. They were her special treasure. And she wore them everywhere --- to her kindergarten classes, to Sunday School, and even to bed with her. The only time she took them off was when she had a bubble bath because her mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.

The little girl also had a very loving father, and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a bedtime story. One night when he finished the story, he asked her, "Sweetheart, do you love me?" "Oh yes, Daddy. You know that I love you," she said. "Then give me your pearls," he said. "Oh, Daddy, please not my pearls. Do not ask me for them. But you can have Princess --- the white horse from my collection, the one with the pink tail. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favorite. You can have her." "That's okay, Honey," he said, "Daddy loves you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.

About a week later, after story time, the little girl's daddy asked her again, "Do you love me?" "Daddy, you know I love you," she said. "Then give me your pearls," he said. "Oh Daddy, please not my pearls," clutching them at her chest. "Do not ask for that. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful, and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper too." "That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one," he said, "Daddy loves you." And as always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her daddy came in to read her a story, the little girl with bouncy golden curls was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed Indian style. As he came close, he noticed that her chin was trembling and that her cheeks were wet with tears. "What is it, Sweetheart? What's the matter?" he asked. The little girl didn't say anything; she just lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little plastic necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, "Here, Daddy. They're for you. So that you will know for sure that I love you." With tears gathering in his own eyes, the little girl's kindhearted father reached out with one hand to take the dime-store necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of real pearls and gave them to his daughter. He had had them all the time. They were an old family heirloom, for her. He was just waiting for his daughter to give up the dime-store stuff so he could give her a genuine treasure, so that she would know for sure that he loved her.

Sadly, I fear that we are much too like the little girl in this story clinging to our plastic trinkets, and thus forsaking the real treasure and true pearls that God

is offering us. Like the rich young man in today's Gospel, we are often afraid of letting go of the things we have, for we have many possessions. For most people, especially in the so-called "First World," accumulation of things seems to be our primary goal in life, and not something we can easily think about give up. Wealth is what makes our life safe, we think. Wealth establishes our value as persons, we imagine. For some, wealth is proof of God's favor. Jesus, however, saw that our riches are more likely to be an obstacle to goodness for us, an obstacle to holiness, an obstacle to having compassion and pity for our neighbors and the strangers in our midst. Thus, wealth can sometimes cause us to forsake the things in life that bring real safety, true value as individuals, and authentic proof of God's favor, things like mercy and forgiveness.

So, what are we clinging to then? It is not so much about what we possess, but instead about what possesses us. What are we unable to imagine letting go of? How tightly we sometimes hold onto our jobs, our homes, our families, our riches, thinking they will fulfill us. We as Christians, as followers of Jesus, need to look carefully at the baggage we carry, the baggage we refuse to let go of, and thus at the ultimate values that our lives bear witness to. "Jesus, looking at (the rich young man) in today's Gospel, loved

him and said, 'Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and (then) you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When (the rich young man) heard this, he was shocked, and went away grieving, for he had many possessions," but he lacked one thing, Jesus saw, and that made all the difference. AMEN.