

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Knights of Columbus Board et al.*

*St. Louis, Missouri*

*July 30, 2017*

Those of you who are moving along in years might remember an old movie entitled "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World." Filmed in 1963, this mad-cap comedy starred Spencer Tracy & featured an all-star cast that included the likes of Edie Adams, Ethel Merman, Sid Caesar, and Milton Berle. The plot hinges on rumors of buried treasure, some \$350,000, in the Santa Rosita State Park, near the Mexican Border. This treasure was to be found under a big "W"... which turned out to be three tall, interlocking palm trees swaying in the wind.

News of this buried treasure totally upended the lives of a police chief, a dentist, a salesman, a truck driver, and a lot of other people as well. Indeed, the prospect of getting all or most of this money unearthed the worst instincts in most all these characters and prompted them to do the most outlandish and dangerous things to get it. If you recall, this tale of greed didn't really end well for anyone most especially the police chief who, until then, had been seen as a pillar of the community.

This movie forms a fairly sacrilegious backdrop for trying to understand today's Gospel which, among other things, also pertains to a buried treasure. What could a screwball movie about greedy people have to do with the buried treasure of which Jesus speaks?

Perhaps it's the contrast that puts today's Gospel message in sharp relief. The buried treasure in the film only served to reveal the greedy instincts of human nature that are just below the surface . . . whereas priceless treasure of which Jesus speaks not only changes one's behavior but indeed completely alters one's priorities in life. When one truly discovers the hidden treasure of God's Kingdom — the glory of God shining on the face of Christ, the beauty of his self-giving love poured into

our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the incomparable experience of being loved by God – then all the many things we seek to possess and grasp at seem worthless.

Paul's words come to mind when he said, "...I... consider everything a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have accepted the loss of all things and consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). So too, shining in our mind's eye is the example of the Apostles who left everything to follow Jesus.

There is a second contrast between the characters in "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World" and those who spend their lives in pursuit of the Kingdom of God, and it's this: The characters in the movie were foolish to the point of exaggeration – but it is their exaggerated foolishness that highlights the folly of our daily behavior. For example, I work for the Church and my life is devoted to the ministry yet how many times do I find myself all wrapped up in short-term goals, imagining that if I hit this target or maneuver around that dilemma – well, then – all will be well, my life will be happy, and the People of God better off ... silly me! Yes, our pursuit of short term goals can often be a lot like the reckless car chase scenes in that movie, as we careen from one goal to the next in an elusive search for happiness. By contrast, those who seek first the Kingdom of God are wiser even than Solomon (whom we met in our reading from the First Book of Kings). When the Lord invited Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted, Solomon did not ask for power or riches but wisdom – he asked for "an understanding heart", a discerning heart, if you will.

Wisdom and understanding are gifts of the Holy Spirit given at Baptism, gifts that are increased and deepened in us through the Sacrament of Confirmation. Among other things, these gifts help us sort through our priorities as expressed in our daily work, our family relationships, and so much more – to see if we are seeking a private treasure of self-enhancement or if we are seeking first to know Christ, to love Christ, to follow Christ and indeed to become like Christ in all things. Those who have acquired true wisdom know that everything in their lives can be marshalled in pursuit of the Kingdom of God. As St. Paul puts it in today's reading from Romans, "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Yet, if there is one *similarity* between the zany characters in the movie and those who seek first the Kingdom of God, it should

be this: a sense of urgency. The people in, “It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad World”, were in a hurry and they were single-minded in their pursuit of the a few hundred thousand dollars. The saints – men and women on the path to genuine holiness – are like that. Their lives are marked by a sense of urgency. Filled with God’s wisdom, they understand the shortness of life and seek to use every moment of their lives in pursuit of holiness – as they pray, do penance, and spend themselves in service of others. Would that all of us, as children of the light, would have the same sense of urgency in the pursuit of holiness as the children of darkness have in their pursuit of wealth.

And one more thing. In the movie, cited throughout this homily, the characters were looking for tips and shortcuts to the hidden treasure. They wanted to know anything and everything that would get them to the “Big W”. I think Father McGivney, the Founder of the Knights of Columbus, understood that side of our human nature very well. He knew that we need help if we are really to know, love, and live our faith, to be true practicing Catholics, who follow the Lord and live our vocations to the hilt.

So it was that he left to the Knights of Columbus tips, shortcuts, that took the form of the foundational principles of our beloved Order – namely, charity, unity, and fraternity. He probably understood that most of us would not learn about the spiritual life by reading St. Bonaventure or St. Theresa of Avila, nor would most of us learn how discern at the feet of St. Ignatius of Loyola. So he left us these three simple principles to help us know, love, and follow Christ – charity by which we open our hearts to God’s love poured in our hearts by the Holy Spirit – a charity we in turn are to share with others – sometimes on a small scale, many times on a grand scale; unity by which we dwell together in the oneness of Jesus and the Father, a oneness we reflect in professing our faith and in serving the needs of others; fraternity in which we experience Jesus’ amazing solidarity with us and in turn manifest a like solidarity to brother Knights and their families, most especially in time of need.

These three principles are something like a treasure map, guiding the family of the Knights of Columbus with greatest reliability to the hidden treasure of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. As we prepare to head into the hectic days of our Supreme Convention, so well prepared for by our gracious hosts here in Missouri,

let us keep our eyes fixed on this treasure map – praying that we, our brother knights and their families, everyone here tonight will, with the help of God's grace, unearth the treasure of God's love in our lives, a love worth more than anything we could ever imagine or hope for.

May God bless us and keep us in his love! *Vivat Jesus!*