

“Like treasure hidden in a field.”

Mt 13:44

Today we have the second in our series of occasional sermons on the Blessed Sacrament this summer in preparation for the Eucharistic Congress in September. A couple of weeks ago we saw that the aim of our Eucharistic Congress, namely to deepen our belief in, and our devotion to, the real presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and through this deeper devotion to foster a renewed spirit of faith and fervour across the parishes of our deanery. With the help of today's Gospel passage, we take our thoughts one step further and consider the *value* of the Blessed Sacrament.

With oil prices still rising, and the cost-of-living crisis still in full flow, it is perhaps not surprising that more lottery tickets are being sold than ever before. Everyone who buys a ticket hopes against hope that he might be the lucky winner and so be set up for life and have no more financial worries. It's a tempting prospect. And when someone does win a multi-million payout there is, presumably, great cheering and celebration, and the popping of champagne corks. Funnily enough, his worries might not end there as he now has to spend a great deal of his time managing his new-found wealth, employing accountants and lawyers, attending endless meetings about how the funds should be preserved or invested or spent, and making difficult decisions, perhaps, about who is to share in this good fortune, and who is not. A huge lottery win may bring financial security, but it might not necessarily bring peace of mind.

The truth is that whatever our state of life there are always things to be attended to, housework to be undertaken, laundry to be washed and dried, bills to be paid, repairs to be made to property, gardens to be weeded, cars to be taxed and insured. The list of real-life

tasks is endless, and even those who dream of running away from it all and living on a remote island find that these practical chores still have to be done. We cannot escape life!

But what is offered in today's Gospel passage is an altogether different type of treasure. A treasure that doesn't involve accumulating yet more material possessions, or adding to the anxieties of modern-day living; a treasure that doesn't involve running away from the chores of daily life; a treasure that does not even promise to take away difficulties and suffering! What on earth is the use of such a treasure?

And that's the point: its use is not of this world. The treasure which makes it worthwhile for the man in the Gospel to sell all that he has is worth far more than even the millions of a European lottery jackpot! It is the treasure which can bring him peace of soul in this life, and everlasting happiness in the next. It is the treasure of faith in the beauty and the holiness of God; it is the treasure of hope in His promise.

And in the context of our Catholic Faith, that beauty and holiness, and that hope, is summed up not in some vague expectation for the future, but in the Person of Our Lord who is actually and truly with us in the Most Holy Eucharist in our tabernacle.

Our Lord's presence here is not merely notional or symbolic. The Sacred Hosts we receive in Holy Communion do not *represent* Christ: they *are* Christ. And it is He, and He alone, who can offer us the peace that so many long for, both in this world and in the next. He offers us peace through the forgiveness of our sins when we go to Him penitent. He offers us peace through the cleansing of our souls. He offers us peace through our giving of ourselves to Him, whole and entire. He offers us peace through the submission of our will to His will. He offers us peace by raising up our lives from the drudgery of this world to a participation in the holiness of the next. He offers us peace by opening up to us the supernatural reality of heaven.

And all of this is to be found in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar in the tabernacles of our Catholic churches.

Our Eucharistic Congress in September is an opportunity for the Catholics of Ipswich and beyond to gather together in the presence of our Beloved Saviour and to pay homage to the Lord of heaven and earth truly present in the Holy Eucharist. *This* is the treasure that is made available to us if we would but unburden ourselves of the material worries and cares of this world. *This* is the treasure which should give us untold cause for celebration and good cheer. *This* is the treasure that embodies all that we truly yearn for in this life. For as the founder of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, St Peter Julian Eymard, said, ‘The holy Eucharist contains the whole spiritual treasure of the Church, that is, Christ [Himself].’

Because we have access via the internet to every material possession we need and almost every material possession we want, we have lost sight of what it means to come across a *real* treasure. Our Eucharistic Congress will give us the chance to be refreshed once more with the only gift that is *truly* to be treasured.