

## "Kate's Treasure"

Homily of September 24, 2006

by Fr. Brian Joyce

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You know, today's Gospel passage is absolutely remarkable. We heard the first part of it last week, where Jesus was saying that he was going to have to suffer. And when Peter says, "No, no. You're not going to suffer, Lord," he calls him, "Satan" and rebukes him. Today, he is telling the disciples again that he is going to be arrested and he is going to be executed. And they are not even listening. They go off discussing which of them is the greatest. They obviously didn't even hear what he was saying.

If I heard that, I would have said, "I'm getting off this train right now. I'm getting out of town. I'm not going anywhere with this guy." But, because of their own self-interest, which James talks about in the first reading, they can't hear what he has to say to them. And Jesus turns their thinking upside down by taking a little child and putting the child in the midst of them and saying, "This is the most important, the greatest among you, this child." Now, remember, this is done in a culture and in a time before Dr. Spock, a time before our bookshelves and bookstores and libraries were filled with books on child-rearing and child development. This is in a time and a culture when a child counted for nothing. The status of a child was zero. The importance of a child was zero. In fact, if a parent wanted to sell their child into slavery, that was perfectly legal. If they wanted to abuse or beat their child, it was perfectly legal. If they wanted to kill their child there was no law against it. Children did not count. And, in the midst of this, Jesus says, "Here is the one who counts the most. Receive this child and you will be receiving me and our God. This is the most important one in the kingdom."

Children are wonderful. They are a gift to us and, hopefully, we realize that. First of all, they are direct and honest, even in talking to God. That prayer one of the children wrote, "Thank you, God, for my baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy....." Direct to God! Or, they reveal ourselves and what we put up with and what we are like when we don't want to say it. One child wrote, "Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it!" And children tell us about God and what God is all about and what we're expected. If a mother says to her child struggling with her own problems, "I wonder why God is so hidden. Why is God always hidden?" and the little ten-year-old says, "I think it is because God wants us to be looking for him." We are called to be people who look for God. Children are a gift, whether they are newborn and cute or whether they are in the terrible twos and hard to catch up with or whether they are the terrific teenagers who, before our very eyes, are becoming adults. They are wonderful and they are a gift. And my hope is that, for the young people of our parish, that together we really be family and share a vision and

values so we can get a little better at living in this world, so we can find a better balance together between service and self-interest, that we might deal with global warming together, that we might deal with terrorism and war together because the children are our future. They are our treasure. They are our hope.

Earlier this month, we had a new person join our staff, a new youth minister, Kate Doherty. Kate grew up and has lived all her life, up 'til now, in the Boston area. For the last six years, she was youth minister, first at one parish and then at two at the same time, and also pursued graduate studies at Boston College. I want you to meet Kate. I want you to welcome her. (Applause!)

Kate Doherty:

Good Morning! So, the gospel this morning was about children. We had been talking a little bit together about where we grew up. So, I thought I would tell you a little bit about my childhood and where I grew up. But before I do anything else, I wanted to say “Thank you” because I feel very blessed to have landed in a community like Christ the King. I got here about a month ago, knowing nobody, having nowhere to go, having very little to my name, and, immediately, before I could even worry about any of that, someone had offered me a place to stay until I found an apartment. I was overwhelmed with dinner invitations and donations of furniture and just received so much good company and warm welcome. It was very gracious of everyone and I just wanted to say that, in my life, Christ the King’s community is one of the most welcoming and wonderful places that I think I have been. And I just wanted to say “Thank you” for that.

Since I got here, the question that most people have asked me is “Why? What made you move three thousand miles away from your family, friends and home?” Apparently, you all haven’t met my friends and family or you might not think three thousand miles was so far. But, in all seriousness, I have a wonderful family. I have a younger brother whom I adore, a mother who is just so sweet and has done so much for me I could never thank her for everything she has done, and I have friends who are more like family to me, who already have started making plans to come out and see me. So, I have been very, very lucky in that way and very blessed in that way.

But the person I wanted to talk to you about this morning is my father. My father was a funeral director in the town of Redding where I grew up, a little New England town and he was great at what he did because, for him, his job was never a job. It was never about money. It was never a “business.” It was about people. He loved the people of Redding. That’s the town where I grew up. And he just wanted to do everything he could to make sure that they knew how much he loved them. And he walked with them through the hardest times in their lives when they had lost someone that they had loved. And he did it with such care. It didn’t matter what your reputation was or how much money you had or what other people thought of you. He felt that every life deserved respect and dignity and he wanted to pay tribute to everyone’s life in that way. So, if you didn’t have enough money for a funeral, he would do it for free. And if someone who passed away didn’t have a lot of friends and family, he would make me and my brother come and sit and be with that family of the person who had died because he wanted those people to realize that other people cared that this person was passing on. And that always stuck with me

because a year ago, a little over a year ago now, he passed away with liver cancer. And, at his funeral, it was such a tribute to him when, at his wake (There were two days of it.) and, for five hours, there was a steady stream, all the way down the street, of people coming in just to tell us how much he had meant to them, and what a wonderful person he was. I think it was just a great tribute to him and how to serve people, and how to be with people. Everyone in that town loved him because he loved them. And I knew, as I was growing up, that I wanted a job like that. I wanted to serve people like my father served people, and be with people like he had been with people.

But, besides being a great funeral director, he was a great dad. His friends used to joke that my father only had kids because he needed playmates. And it was true. In the summer, he would make tepees for us and dig out these giant sand swimming holes in our backyard. In the winter, he would make these incredible snow sculptures in front of our yard, and he would build igloos for us to play in. And we would have snowball fights and go sledding. I think one of his favorite things to do was go on a treasure hunt. What he would do is, when my brother and I were out at school or visiting our grandparents or out of the house, he would take a piece of parchment paper and he'd dye it in tea and he would burn the edges so it looked really old and he would draw a map. Then when my brother and I came home he would say, "Oh, you know, I saw some pirates out in the backyard over by the tree back there." And so my brother and I would "Ooh!" and we would run back to the tree and in the hollow, there would be the map and it would take us hours to go through all the little rhymes and places he would put on the map, until we got to the end where X marks the spot and there would be gold coins and toys for us waiting. I don't know if he liked it more because it kept us busy for four hours or he liked to see us do it!

But, he really had a great imagination and he was an amazing storyteller, whether it was ghost stories during the summer or, in the winter, he used to always read the classics to us by the fire. I remember particularly when he read "The Last of the Mohicans" to us because, every night, I could not wait for dinner to be over because I wanted to hear the next chapter. And he never read straight from the book. He always glanced at a page and then he told the story to us. I had an "Aha!" moment when I was in college and, with my freshman roommates, was in a bookstore to buy our semester books and there, on a rack, were all these yellow books, and it was all the books my father had read, you know "Moby Dick" and "Last of the Mohicans" and it suddenly occurred to me that my father had been reading us Cliff Notes! So, I never felt gypped, though, because he was very good at storytelling and he made the stories his own.

Later in life, when I was thinking about what I wanted to do, that all came together for me in Church Ministry because I wanted to serve people and I wanted to tell story. And I think my father's sense of imagination in storytelling that he passed on so generously to me and to my brother helped me engage the Scripture and gospels in a way that I don't think I would have been able to without him. My relationship with the gospels is very deep now because of that and because of that ability to engage a story. And I understand the power of a story. My father, I think he was always up for adventure. He was always up for going for rides, seeing what was out there. So, when I thought about (coming back to that question that initially I was talking about,

“Why come here? Why come out?”)... I think I can answer it for you now, now that you know a little bit of where I am from. I came out here because there is adventure to seek. There is treasure to find here in California, and there are legends to read and stories to tell. And, most of all, I came out because I think my father would have wanted me to. So, I am excited to be here. I hope many of you will join us as the Youth Ministry hosts an evening Mass, once a month. It will be at 6:00 p.m. on Oct. 22nd. So, I hope to see a lot of you coming. I hope to get to know a lot of you. The first Youth Group, actually, is tonight at 7:00 in the Parish Hall. So, if you have teenagers or if you are a teenager, we would love to see you. Thank you very much! (Applause!)

Father Joyce:

Well, if she came out here to find a treasure, I think we found a treasure in our new Youth Minister! That's great! Let's stand together.....