



Module 3 – Week 5 – We have a treasure – 18 October 2022

Archbishop Julian started the evening by asking everyone how they felt about last week's session which was praying with someone. He acknowledged that for some people it might have been an awkward experience if it was their first time, but some people said that they found it wonderful and didn't realise that they could actually do it. Archbishop Julian hoped that everyone would feel that it was something that they could do and for those whose first time it was to pray with someone, he hoped that it was a breakthrough moment for them. He mentioned again that the important aspect of when someone asks for prayers, that that is the moment of grace and openness. It is an opportunity for oneself to be an instrument of God's grace and love for the person asking for prayers.

In St Matthew's gospel chapter 13: 44, *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."* This is what happens to people when they have an encounter with Christ or a spiritual experience or discovering the reality of God, they realise that they have a treasure. In the parable, the man covers up the treasure so that he can arrange his life to be able to buy the field and have the treasure.

Archbishop Julian believes that Catholics have a treasure – the treasure being one's faith, one's relationship with God and one's knowledge of Christ. Archbishop Julian urges all to take a moment to consider what a great treasure one's faith is. The treasure of faith can be seen in many ways. It might be that one's faith can give a person a great sense of security about one's life, its purpose and meaning where one is going. It might be a sense of consolation during dark times and difficulty.

To quote Archbishop Julian he says "it might be as simple as knowing that someone loves me unconditionally and is always with me. God's love is always there, and I can always turn and draw on that love. I know that when I am burdened by my own sinfulness I can go to God and receive forgiveness and mercy and that heals me, that sets me free and gives me new hope and purpose. When we reflect upon living a life of faith, it is a great treasure that we have. The more we appreciate it as a treasure, the more we realise that we would like to share this with others. Especially for those people whose lives are in darkness, in a fog, in uncertainty and they are struggling as they don't know God and they don't know God's love or the mercy they can receive and the healing that is available for them. This gives us an incentive that faith is in fact a treasure and is something that we would like to share with others."

Archbishop Julian touched back on an idea a few weeks back that he hoped that people would not feel as though no one needs this treasure or that no one is interested in sharing one's faith with others. These days there is a lot of antagonism towards Christians and Catholics and one can feel that the whole world is against Christianity. There is a tendency to feel withdrawn and defensive because of this. Archbishop Julian acknowledges that yes, there will be various forms of persecution and in the current times, this is likely to get worse before it gets better. But at the same time, he deeply believes that there are many ordinary folk who are searching, who don't know God in their life and have a need for God.

For those that say that they are spiritual but not religious, means that they are saying they believe in a higher power, a supreme being and a spiritual dimension, this should be taken as a positive for evangelisation and for mission. As believers, one can help bring this fullness of understanding of that missing dimension is in that person's life. "We should not allow the antagonism, criticism, negativity, attacks and persecution that we experience, and we will experience them but to not allow them to become the determining factor in terms of how we relate to other people. Because I believe the bulk of people who don't have a faith know that there is something lacking that they would like in their life as they have a sense of it themselves. We should not feel as though that we do not have something to offer. Let us not withdraw and live our life privately but instead try to reach out and engage other people. When we look at people around us that don't have faith, let's have a sense that maybe that person is searching and when those opportunities come to witness to our faith, like praying with them, be willing to pray with them." Archbishop Julian said.

The first mass that Pope Benedict celebrated when he was first elected in April 2005, he said these words at the end of his homily. *"If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful, and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide... Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ and you will find true life."*

This is saying that Christ is not going to constrict or limit one's life, but instead one is released into the fullness of life, and one is set free and can find the beauty of human life. Faith in Christ enables one to blossom and flourish fully in this human life and also in eternity life in union with God.

Archbishop Julian then recounted a story of a lady who had had a stroke and had slipped into a coma. The doctors were not hopeful and had told the family that this was possibly the end. The lady is not Catholic and had no particular faith, but her husband is Catholic. Surprisingly, the lady came out of her coma, and she experienced a priest coming to her telling her to wake up. However, there was no priest that came to her during this time. She then wanted to see Archbishop Julian who did come to visit her, and she asked him for a blessing which he gave her. This goes to show that even though she was not Catholic, there was a deep need in her for God. "Never underestimate what may be in people's hearts, the desires people have in them, or what may be moments of grace whereby something touches them to see God." Archbishop Julian simply said.

To conclude this series and his teaching Archbishop Julian encouraged, "let's be missionary disciples! Let's live this! We live our faith in the normal and simple ways that we do, and let's be missionary disciples and be available for when the moment may come. That we are there in the conversation when the opportunity comes up to share our faith or invoke the blessing of God, the grace of God or the peace of God on somebody."