

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HOLY MASS FOR THE 28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
HOLY ROSARY CATHOLIC CHURCH – WASHINGTON, D.C.
OCTOBER 13, 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Happy feast day!

Allow me to convey to you the spiritual closeness of the Holy Father as you celebrate your patroness Our Lady of the Rosary, while you also commemorate the second anniversary of the canonization of St. John Baptist Scalabrini, and in addition, mark Columbus Day.

The stories of Christopher Columbus and of St. John Baptist Scalabrini both help us to receive the message that is delivered to us in today's readings from Scripture – the message that there is something in life worth pursuing at the expense of other things.

Christopher Columbus was an explorer. For him, the prospect of discovering new lands was worth many sacrifices. In setting out on his voyage, he and those with him knew that the journey would be long and arduous. They knew that provisions were likely to wear thin. And while they prepared as well as they could, they knew that they would face unknown challenges. Most sobering of all was the likelihood of sickness, injury, and even the possibility of death along the way. Would they succeed in finding the lands they sought? And if so, at what cost? For Columbus and those who shared his vision, the risk and the cost of their mission was worth the prospect of discovery. And so they went forth.

Saint John Baptist Scalabrini was also an explorer. But his mission was explicitly the same mission as that of Christ. When giving up house and brothers and sisters and mother and father and children and lands, he was doing so for the sake of the gospel. To Scalabrini, as to every saint, the spread of the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection was everything. Christ was the fulfillment of that "spirit of wisdom" which the author of our first reading preferred to power, riches, health, beauty, and light. For the one who has had a life-changing encounter with Christ knows that if we possess

Christ, then we need nothing else in this world, and that if we have the whole world but we lack Christ, then we have nothing. This is why the truly converted missionary disciple is able to sacrifice so much, and to do so joyfully, in order to give others the opportunity to have an encounter with Christ. Such a disciple does not fear entering into the lives of people in this world who are suffering, who are poor, who are on the various peripheries of society or of the Church; because the missionary disciple knows that the treasure he is bringing to people is the only true treasure: Jesus Christ. As Pope Francis said regarding the joy of the Gospel:

“We have a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive, and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint. It penetrates to the depths of our hearts, sustaining and ennobling us. It is a truth which is never out of date because it reaches that part of us which nothing else can reach. Our infinite sadness can only be cured by an infinite love.”¹

Why, then, did the man in today’s Gospel go away from Jesus sad? This man showed, apparently, great devotion. He had been observing God’s commandments from his youth. Seeing an opportunity to encounter Jesus, the “good teacher”, he ran to catch up to him. He knelt before him, and asked the question which would give him the key to happiness: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” But at the answer of Jesus, instead of being filled with joy, the man’s face fell and he went away sad. He was not expecting the “one thing” that he would need to do in order to find treasure in heaven: in order to follow Jesus, he had to sell his possessions and give to the poor.

Jesus loved this man. This man was dutiful. He seemed righteous. He had a genuine desire to learn from Jesus. But apparently, he had not yet wrapped his heart completely around the Gospel. Following Jesus was not yet, for him, the one thing necessary, the pearl of great price, the treasure worth selling everything else to possess.

Do we see ourselves in this man? Do we follow the commandments, practice our Catholic faith, and listen to Jesus, yet still have something in our lives that we are unwilling to surrender in order to follow him completely as his missionary disciples? Or, to put it another way: are we comfortable being his disciples, but afraid to be his missionaries?

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 265.

Dear brothers and sisters, we know in our minds that we have in Christ a great treasure. But as the Pope says,

“this conviction has to be sustained by our own constantly renewed experience of savoring Christ’s friendship and his message. It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly, not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights.”²

The man who went away from Jesus sad still had the idea that his possessions were necessary for his life to be fulfilled. He couldn’t yet trust that Christ *is* the life which he sought, and that an encounter with him could give his life a new horizon and a decisive direction.

Who knows this better than Our Lady of the Rosary? In the first two Joyful Mysteries, we see how Mary becomes a missionary disciple. At the Annunciation, she welcomes her encounter with the Word of God so completely that this Word becomes flesh within her. And then, she is willing to abandon everything for the sake of the mission. She leaves her home in Nazareth, betrothed and mysteriously pregnant, in order to bring the incarnate Word to her relative Elizabeth and to assist her in her need.

Mary is the missionary disciple for whom the Word of God, Christ Jesus, is everything. Throughout her whole life, she attunes to him and to the mystery that unfolds in his life. Even now, when we turn to her for help, she says to us: “Do whatever he tells you.” Through the intercession of Our Lady of the Rosary and St. John Baptist Scalabrini, may we follow Jesus as missionary disciples, letting go of anything that keeps us from embracing the one true treasure, which is his own life.

² *Ibid.*, 266.