

SUNDAY PLUS

Worth the effort

Identify the priorities



By Michael George

Recently I led students in an activity reflecting on priorities. "What informs our priorities?" I asked. "Do we ever try to excuse ourselves by saying that we have run out of time, when a more honest self-appraisal would be that we did not give something sufficient priority?" Reflecting on priorities can tell us a lot about ourselves.

In today's Gospel there are dramatic illustrations of priorities in action. A man finds treasure in a field and sells everything to take possession of the field. Another finds the

most precious of pearls and sells everything so that the pearl can be his. Everything they had worked for, saved for and made sacrifices for, they parted with in order to obtain the greater treasure that was in store for them. That treasure was open to them because a lifetime's work had equipped them with the means to obtain it. They were prepared.

It was no accident that these men came across their treasure. They were searching. They were seeking. The Gospel challenges and encourages us to think: are we, today, seeking

the kingdom of heaven? Is working here on earth, so that we are equipped for the kingdom of heaven, our priority?

As with the men in the Gospel who sought and found, God invites us, through our life and work on earth, to seek the greatest treasure of all – the treasure of eternal life in heaven. This is a treasure to prioritise, a treasure worth a lifetime of effort seeking to attain.

Michael George has served Catholic primary schools as a teacher and headteacher for more than twenty years.

"Jesus, what do you think of my choice? What would you do in this situation, with these people?" It will do us good to ask Jesus, who is the way, for the directions to heaven.

Pope Francis

Something very precious

By Natasha Pritchard

Sometimes in life we just can't resist a treat or a thrill. Why shouldn't we find temporary pleasure going skydiving or buying the latest phone? We live in the real world, after all, and we're only human.

A common theme across all religions is to search for something deeper. How many times does Christ tell us that the greatest treasure we could ever seek is the kingdom of heaven? Working to build God's kingdom here on earth

– in whatever small way we can – leads to inner peace, serenity and satisfaction: everything our souls crave.

In today's reading, Solomon pleases God by asking not for something for his own gain, but for wisdom, discernment and understanding. When we focus on how we might serve others, rather than ourselves, we become part of something greater. The temporary thrills do not compare. The kingdom of heaven is our goal and our reward, and once we have found it, we know that we have found something very precious.

Natasha Pritchard has worked in Catholic hospital chaplaincy, youth ministry and is now Area Support Chaplain at Methodist Homes.

Feast of the week
Tuesday 1 August

St Alphonsus Ligouri (1696-1787)

Chronic pain is lonely. Normal daily activities such as washing and dressing, eating and drinking, standing up, sitting down, going to bed and getting up in the mornings are burdensome. That's the story of arthritis.

Arthritis forced St Alphonsus Liguori into a wheelchair. Yet he ran a diocese without today's painkillers, when even holding a pen was agony and Rome waited thirteen years before letting him retire. Perhaps that's how St Alphonsus became the patron saint of people with arthritis.

The founder of the Redemptorists was an Italian bishop, spiritual writer, composer, musician, artist, poet, lawyer, scholastic philosopher and moral theologian. Born in Naples in 1696, Alphonsus was of noble birth, well-educated and talented. He abandoned his legal career to become a priest, serving in Naples' narrow, overcrowded streets, where he experienced the abject poverty of his parishioners. They taught him mercy, understanding, respect for personal dignity and the need to "speak their language". He later declared, "I have never preached a sermon which the poorest old woman in the congregation could not understand".

Sr Janet Fearns FMDM

Today:
1 Kings 3:5, 7-12
Romans 8:28-30
Matthew 13:44-52

Monday:
Exodus 32:15-24,
30-34
Matthew 13:31-35

Tuesday:
Exodus 33:7-11; 34:5-9, 28
Matthew 13:36-43

Wednesday:
Exodus 34:29-35
Matthew 13:44-46

Thursday:
Exodus 40:16-21, 34-38
Matthew 13:47-53

Friday:
Leviticus 23:1, 4-11,
15-16, 27, 34-37
Matthew 13:54-58

Saturday:
Leviticus 25:1, 8-17
Matthew 14:1-12

Next Sunday:
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
2 Peter 1:16-19
Matthew 17:1-9