

HOMILY – Father Jim Carini
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St. Matthew Church, Tolland, CT

“God said, ‘Ask something of me and I will give it to you’”

So, what would you ask God for if you had a chance to wish for anything? It would be interesting to hear some of your responses if we had time during this brief homily. Let me presume to list a few things you might ask for: Peace throughout the world. An end to terrorism. Good health. A secure job. Winning a lottery jackpot. A deeper love of God. Did I get close to any of yours? Did I touch upon your desired treasure? Your pearl of great price?

Now if we tie these thoughts from the first reading into our gospel message, we would have to ask ourselves: *“What would I be willing to do or to let go of to gain this treasure, this pearl of great price? Oh, did you think it would be given to you without any sacrifice? ”*

Every choice we make includes letting go of something else that might have been possible. This truth may explain why we struggle to make clear choices in life. Why we shy away from making commitments. Let me share this story to illustrate what I mean.

There was this woman who married a man she loved a lot, but early on in the marriage she was quite immature in carrying out her part of the relationship. One night, she went to a party with her husband. As the evening wore on she continued to drink too much, and eventually left the party with another man. After she sobered up she found her way home, fully expecting to be greeted with the explosive anger of her husband and the end of their marriage. But, her husband, though very hurt and shaken, was calm and very direct with her. He simply said to her, *“I am going away for a few days so that you can be alone with yourself. You need to decide who you are: Are you a married woman or are you something else?”*

He took a three-day sabbatical away from her. During this time she cried a lot as she sorted out the question he had put to her. Now, years beyond this painful experience, she is inside a very solid marriage and much more aware that the pearl of great price comes at a price.

Every choice we make is a series of renunciations. If I marry one person, I cannot marry anyone else; if I live in one place, I cannot live anywhere else; if I choose a certain career, I have to exclude other careers; if I have this, then I cannot have that. This is the reality of the choices we make in life.

Perhaps most of our choices do not leave us with a painful sting. We pretty much accept this limitation in life. But the area of love is more sensitive. Here we feel more of a sting. Here we find it hard to accept the real limits of life. What are those limits? They are limits that come from being an infinite spirit in a finite world.

In our youth we want to exercise this wide-open spirit. We don't just want something, we want everything, and we want it now! There is a good aspect to this spirit. Call it the idealism of youth, a destiny we dream about, the desire to embrace the world. God has planted this seed within us and we are to learn how to harness its power to do good. How to love as God loves, how to do good in the world as followers of Jesus. Great saints and ordinary good people have matured into life and their choices have changed our world. But sometimes this wide-open spirit exercised in the recklessness of youth can bring tragedy. Such as when youth+speed+alcohol meets the finiteness of a tree or telephone pole head on. Perhaps I shouldn't center just on youth, because we all need to grow up in making good and right choices.

Our yearning is wide, our longing is infinite, but in this life we only get to meet the finite. We have to choose and in our choices we learn how to let go, how to commit ourselves to one particular person, to one particular place, to a very particular life with all the limits that come to us. That is the nature of real life and love.