



# THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

## Father Alan's Blog

For the Twentieth Sunday After Trinity - October 17, 2021

*"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*

St. Matthew 6:21 (NKJV)

Percy Bysshe Shelley (who was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1792) was one of the major English Romantic poets. In fact, Percy Shelley was considered by many of his contemporaries to be among the finest English-language lyric and philosophical poets (and, certainly, one of the most influential). Labelled as a radical in his poetry as well as in his political and social views, Shelley did not garner much celebrity during his lifetime. Yet, appreciation of his accomplishments in poetry grew increasingly following his untimely death - having ironically drowned in a sudden storm while yachting off the Italian coast on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 1822 - less than one month before his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. Even so, over the course of his brief literary career, Shelley succeeded in becoming a central member of a close circle of visionary poets and writers that included:

- ✂ **Lord Byron;**
- ✂ **John Keats;**
- ✂ **Leigh Hunt;**
- ✂ **Thomas Love Peacock; and**
- ✂ **Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (his second wife), author of the 1818 novel "Frankenstein".**

Lastly, in 1817 (the year prior to his wife Mary's noteworthy success), Shelley wrote what many regard to be his greatest work – a political poem entitled, "Ozymandias". Written at a time when Napoleon Bonaparte's domination of Europe had come to a crashing end and yet another empire (namely, that of Great Britain's) was on the verge of preeminence, Shelley's immortal lines encapsulated, metaphorically, the outcome of such tyrannical wielding of power that no:

👑 king;  
👑 ruler;  
👑 leader;  
👑 dictator; or  
👑 despot

can overcome – *time*:

*"I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."*



👉 **"LOOK ON MY WORKS, YE MIGHTY, AND DESPAIR!"**

I am not “mighty” (quite the contrary, in fact) and yet, as I read these lines and looked upon the decrepit works of “Ozymandias” (the Greek name for Egyptian pharaoh, Ramses II), I did – and still do – despair:

- ☞ **for him; and**
- ☞ **for those of us like him.**

Because the simple (but tragic) truth is that too many of us spend our entire lives “building up kingdoms”, these little empires that fade into nothingness shockingly soon after our earthly departure. Instead of spending our lives building up treasures in heaven:

- ☞ **(that is, eternal, everlasting things),**

we look for our treasures on earth:

- ☞ **(that is, temporal, temporary things),**

in direct contravention of what our Lord Jesus exhorts the original hearers of His “Sermon on the Mount” (as found in St. Matthew’s Gospel, chapters 5-7) – **and all of us human beings today** – to do. Specifically, we read in St. Matthew 6:19-21:

*“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*

And again (in verse 33):

*“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”*

Now, the hard truth is, we all run after (or, better still, “worship”) something, like:

- ✓ **money;**
- ✓ **possessions;**
- ✓ **food;**
- ✓ **fame;**
- ✓ **power;**
- ✓ **attractiveness;**
- ✓ **intelligence;**
- ✓ **and so on.**

Nevertheless, these things are all temporary, they fade away:

☞ **And we CAN'T take them with us when we die.**

Moreover, if we are busy worshipping something other than God (and, again, at times we all do), then we are being **idolatrous** (which, by the way, **is the epitome - the height - of SIN**, as we are literally worshipping **created things** instead of **The Creator** Who made them). Also, what we spend our precious time doing reflects what we value; similarly, what we value, in turn, reflects how loving (or unloving) our souls are. So, then, do we spend an inordinate amount of time chasing after:

- 🐮 **money;**
- 🐮 **possessions;**
- 🐮 **food;**
- 🐮 **fame;**
- 🐮 **power;**
- 🐮 **attractiveness;**
- 🐮 **intelligence;**
- 🐮 **and so on**

More revealing still, do we spend hours and days simply worrying about **our ability to acquire such things**? Accordingly (and, perhaps, most tellingly), do our worries relegate us to constantly living in (and for) the future?



Case in point:

In a former life as a consultant, in the never-ending search for new clients and the constant servicing of existing contracts, I was forever living six to eight weeks in the future – **never for “today.”**

(Now, I am not saying that we should not be prudent and plan ahead for things like children’s welfare and education, or for our retirement needs, but for us to never stop and “smell the roses” is NOT what God intended for us – because, the sad reality is, for many people, **tomorrow never comes**. For example, how many people have ever lamented on their deathbeds that they wished they had spent more time at the office? I know of one person who recently shared with me that the sudden death of someone close to him immediately caused him to reevaluate and restructure exactly how he would spend his limited – and precious – time on Earth from then on.)

All of which vividly illustrates why endlessly stressing and worrying about tomorrow’s needs or cares is such a waste (and unproductive use) of one’s time, as it really eats into one’s enjoyment and use of today – the theme for which, being “The 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Trinity”, is:

👍 **cheerful obedience and service to God.**



In today’s Epistle Lesson (Ephesians 5:15-21), St. Paul exhorts us (verses 18b-19) to live lives full of spiritual joy:

*“...be filled with the Spirit singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”*

This unsurpassable joy (which permeates the lives of all true believers in Jesus Christ) is one of the great sources of spiritual strength and progress:

 **For the truly Christian life is not one of downcast eyes, but of cheerfulness.**

The connection between today's Epistle Lesson and Collect, then, is clear, as our petitions closely reiterate St. Paul's focus in his message to the church in Ephesus. First, we pray to be kept from all hurtful things which hinder us from cheerful service:

*"O ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us..."*,

including – as the Epistle Lesson warns us in verses 17-18a – from the:

-  **carelessness;**
-  **laziness; and**
-  **self-indulgence,**

with which we are all so often tempted.

Second, the Collect concludes that, thus guarded and guided, we may cheerfully accomplish the things which God would have us do in the joyful spirit, as described by St. Paul in the Epistle Lesson:

*"... that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that thou wouldest have done..."*

In addition, the Collect also takes its meaning from the Gospel Lesson for today – "The Parable of the Marriage Feast of the King's Son" – as found in St. Matthew 22:1-14. Due to the fact that (according to Holy Scripture) Jesus related this particular parable on the Tuesday of Holy Week – **that is, only three days before His crucifixion** – this most:

⚠ **profound;**  
⚠ **telling; and**  
⚠ *urgent*

story contrasts the Divine privileges to which all humanity is invited with the dangers of being overly absorbed in the cares and anxieties of the world. For as we are told (verses 3 and 5), the invited guests in Jesus' parable not only "refused" the King's generous invitation and "went their separate ways", but "they made light of it", as well.

Moreover (in verse 6), some of the invitees even went so far as to seize the King's servants and "treated them spitefully" (that is to say, **tortured** them) and then "killed them" - clearly depicting what the Jews, particularly the rulers and religious leaders over the course of Israel's 1,900-year sordid history, made of Almighty God's direct commands and inflicted on His many prophets sent to warn the Jews to change their sinful behaviour.

Hence, our earnest request in today's Collect is that we will not be like those who refused and abused the King's gracious invitation, but, rather, that we will accept the generous invitation of Jesus Christ to come to Him to receive his salvation, and, thus cleansed of our sins, will faithfully serve Him all the rest of our earthly days.

Again:

*"... that we, being ready in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that thou wouldest have done..."*

Whereas the first part of Jesus' parable (verses 2-10) speaks of God's rejection of Israel as a "nation of priests" 2,000 years ago, the parable's second part (verses 11-14), in which a man "not having a wedding-garment" is thrown out of the feast, deals with the responsibility of the individual today. Thus, the "wedding-garment" symbolizes the:

- ✚ righteousness;
- ✚ purity; and
- ✚ holiness,

that God Himself, as the gracious Host of the “Feast,” provides for everyone who accept His priceless invitation, as generously bestowed upon all true believers through His Son Jesus Christ’s:

- † broken Body; and
- † shed Blood,

as well as nurtured throughout their lives by His Holy Spirit, that without which:

**⚠ no one shall get to spend eternity with Him, as a welcome guest, at “Heaven’s Wedding Feast”.**

In other words, Almighty God issues an **undeserved invitation** to **undeserving people** and, in addition, provides in Himself the righteousness the invitation demands.

In short, therefore:

- 👉 **God has done ALL the work; we need only to accept His gracious offer.**

Accordingly, each time we attend Holy Communion, we must similarly prepare to approach our Lord’s Table:

✚ (His “*Earthly Wedding Feast*”, if you will),

With:

- ♥ our hearts; and
- 🧠 our minds; and
- 🙏 our entire beings,

clothed with Jesus Christ's:

- ☩ holiness; and
- ☩ love; and
- ☩ joyfulness,

as instructed on page 90 of the 1962 Canadian Book of Common Prayer (BCP), as per the words of the second "Exhortation":

*"...so that ye may come holy and clean to such a heavenly Feast, in the marriage-garment required by God in holy Scripture, and be received as worthy partakers of that holy Table."*

Furthermore, Almighty God invites us to His Holy Table to receive the Body and Blood of His Son Jesus Christ, so that, as we petition in "The Prayer of Humble Access" (BCP, page 84):

*"...our sinful bodies may be made clean by his Body, And our souls washed through his most precious Blood..."*

Thus, let us dare not refuse our Lord's most gracious invitation, but, rather, let us come to His Wedding Feast with cheerful and loving hearts, for the sad reality is:

☞ **many are invited, but few DESIRE to be chosen.**

May today's Collect, then, become our fervent and daily prayer - that we may be:

- ☞ *"ready both in body and soul" to serve Him; and*
- ☞ *that we may "cheerfully accomplish (all) those things that (He) wouldest have done".*



Therefore, this day, this “20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity”:

🕒 **not tomorrow,**  
🕒 **but today,**  
🕒 ***right now, in fact,***

let us each remake our good confession to Almighty God in the presence of “so great a cloud of witnesses” (BCP, page 81), and as St. Paul (in 1 Timothy 6:12) encourages us to:

*“Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”*

Likewise, starting today, let us also heed the clear warning, as sounded by the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, through his timeless – yet sobering – lesson of “Ozymandias, king of kings” (a.k.a. the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II), who foolishly chose to build up his treasures on earth, where “moth and rust”:

🔥 **certainly DID destroy.**

Instead, this day – and every day thereafter – let us always be (as the author of Hebrews 12:2 so wisely counsels):

*“... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

And, finally, from this day forward, let us seek first God’s kingdom in all things – and they shall be added unto us:

† **both now, in our daily lives as true Christians; and**  
† **forevermore, at Almighty God’s “Eternal Wedding Feast”.**

♥ **For where our hearts are, there shall our treasures forever be.**



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