

To be a collector is to value things that most people couldn't care less about and would even throw out without a second thought.

And I know whereof I speak- I was a record collector, specializing in the Beatles and the Stones and Bob Dylan, and I had a pretty large collection in my day- albums, singles, bootlegs, foreign pressings- everything I could get my hands on and I could afford. For those youngsters out there who don't know what a record is- a record is a piece of plastic with the sounds etched into the grooves, and they came in 12-inch albums and 7-inch singles, which were called 45's. And you had to actually go out and buy them- you didn't just stream songs and that's why you appreciated- that's why you loved- these records so much.

And in my teens and in my 20's, I would haunt all the record stores in the city, especially in Greenwich Village, and one day I heard that one of those stores, Second Coming Records on Sullivan St., had thrown out all these records that they purchased for pennies on a dollar and just couldn't sell. And in this dumpster outside this record store, amidst the usual trash you find in dumpsters- use your imagination- they had boxes of records from the Apple label- which was the record label the Beatles had founded and therefore that I collected - and so I had to have them.

And there was me, going through this dumpster with these other guys who had the same motive- and it's usually men who collect records for some reason- and what joy I experienced to grab these Yoko Ono albums and these singles from these British musicians you never heard of and that most people could not care less about. And I gloated on them on my way back home- me smelling like the dumpster of course- and I proudly held on to them until I was entering the Capuchins at the age of 40 and I had to give up all of my worldly possessions. But I still love records, and my heart still skips a beat when I see a box of old vinyl albums- it would do nothing for you, but you have your own pearl of great price.

When I gave up all my beloved records- and my beloved books and my beloved cat and my beloved apartment- when I entered religious life, it was because I found a pearl of even greater price, a pearl that nothing in the world can compare to and that I was willing to give all that I had to acquire. My heart expanded to love so much more than just these things I gave up- which were good in themselves- but which on their own could never completely satisfy me.

The pearl of great price that Jesus talked about in the parable we heard today is the Kingdom of God, which is just eternal life, which is life with God, which is both in heaven and here and now, where heaven begins, or can begin if we want it to. And this offer of eternal life requires that we make a leap of faith- that we trust in God; that we have trust in other persons; that we trust in ourselves as well. It means that we will turn away from what is keeping us away from God and from one another; and the flip side of that is that we allow the good things in our lives to help us to experience God and His beauty and His creativity and His goodness.

You don't have to literally sell all that you have to experience that. I am a consecrated religious brother and so I took a vow of poverty, meaning that I am trying my best to live simply and not get too caught up in possessions. You did not take a vow of poverty, but you are still called to be poor in spirit, which you do by:

- ❖ trying to give up control of everything in your life
- ❖ letting go of needless worry and anxiety
- ❖ acknowledging that the Lord is the master of your life, whether you like that or not
- ❖ not getting in His way and presuming that you always know what is best for you

❖ humbly thanking God for all the many gifts He has given to you throughout your life and will always give you

In other words, letting God be God and loving Him with all your heart, mind and soul, and then everything will fall into place.

Our Capuchin brother Blessed Solanus Casey, who we remember today in a special way, famously used to say, “*Thank God ahead of time*”, which is not an assurance that everything we pray for and ask God for will be granted to us- of course not. Anyone who has ever prayed for something can tell you that- it meant that we can thank God always and in all ways because we know from experience that He cares for us and loves us and will provide for us. Giving us things that make us uniquely happy and which other persons may never want, but which He knows is exactly what we need, and which is why we thank Him no matter what we actually receive.

Solanus knew that you have to acknowledge God’s presence in your life if you were to allow Him to work in and through you and get you through this life in one piece. And that acknowledgement leads to thanksgiving and that thanksgiving leads to paying forward the blessings you have received. And that pearl of great price- which is the best bargain in the world, by the way- will be shared by all and that makes it even better.