

Dedication

I could not have written this book without the presence of Mary, the mother of God, in my life. She is the way Jesus has first come to us in history, and she continues to be the way in which Jesus comes to me each moment.

Every day in prayer I ask Mary to be with me, pray with me, and reveal her son to me more deeply. In every homily I preach or talk that I give, in every spiritual direction appointment or apostolic endeavor I am involved in, I ask Mary to guide my thoughts, words, and actions so that they can reveal and glorify her Son. And as I sat down each day to write this book and reflected on the words of Jesus, I begged her to help me speak of him in a way that is true and beautiful, and most importantly, will lead people to want to seek Jesus more intensely in their own lives.

I simply could not have written this book were not the presence of this beautiful and Immaculate mother guiding me each day. Therefore, I give it back to her, since she knows Jesus best and since she was given to us by Jesus to be our mother in the order of grace (John 19:25–27). I ask her to do with this book what she deems best, knowing that everything she does is purely for the glory of God.

Contents

Foreword by Fr. Innocent Montgomery, CFR	8
Introduction	10
1 The World Is Never Enough	13
2 What Matters Most	18
3 The One Thing Necessary	23
4 Hating Our Life	27
5 Community as Healing	32
6 The Self I Must Deny	37
7 A Love Story	42
8 The One Thing Certain in Life	47
9 Can I Trust God?	53
10 A Spiritual Examination	58
11 Fear Is a Liar	63
12 The Authority of Jesus	69
13 Love Is a Journey, Not an Experience	75
14 God and Us	81
15 Is Happiness Important?	87
16 The Necessity of Solitary Prayer	92
17 Our Point of Reference	98
18 Responding to Hypocrisy	103
19 God Is Now	109
20 Following Jesus to Eternity	114
21 The Cost of Discipleship	119
22 The Simplicity of Prayer	124
23 Our Purpose in Life	130
24 Zeal for Worship	136
25 Am I Resisting or Receptive?	142
26 Who Is God?	147
27 Be Who You Are in God	152
Notes	157

The World Is Never Enough

“Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me.”

—Luke 12:13



The world's human population today consists of eight billion people. Among them are thousands of cultures and ethnicities, each providing a unique beauty to the richness of humanity. The seven continents on this planet comprise more than 57 million square miles of land, with wonders of nature that include enormous mountain ranges, tropical rain forests, deserts, and so much more. The five oceans that exist comprise 139 million square miles, most of which have not been explored yet, and contain 230,000 different species living in those oceans. This earth that we inhabit is truly a marvelous place.

Considering then the vastness and immensity of this world, one would think that this world would be enough for us, that here among so much beauty and diversity we could find what we are looking for and experience the peace that all of us so desperately desire. One would think that among all the remarkable features of life on this planet, the human heart could find rest and satisfaction. Yet humanity remains restless; people are continually searching not only in this world, but now, even beyond it. Why then does humanity keep searching in this world for its ultimate meaning and is seemingly never able to find one? Why is this world not enough for us? Many people have proposed various answers to these questions, but none provide an answer as fascinating as those found in the Bible. According to the Bible, the reason the world is never enough for us is, ironically, that it is too small.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, we read these famous words: “*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity*” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). The book of Ecclesiastes is probably the least popular book in the entire Bible. I have heard many of my own brother priests lament this book when it appears in the lectionary either for Mass or in the Divine Office, because, according to them, the ramblings of Qoheleth, the author, appear to have no coherent theme or structure. I have heard some people admit that they cannot read this book because the author, they believe, is depressed, and they cannot understand or even tolerate his dark and negative outlook on life.

On the surface these complaints about the Book of Ecclesiastes can appear valid and sensible. However, if we listen more deeply to these words, the author is not intending to communicate to us a dark and negative view of human existence. Nor does he want us to believe that life in this world is miserable and that there is never anything to look forward to. Rather, he is telling us that life, just by itself, even amidst so much beauty and wonder, is not enough. It's not enough for the human heart, because the human heart can only find its completion and rest in the Infinite, in the One whose vastness and immensity knows no limits, and who has no beginning or end.

Several years ago, I was sitting in an airport awaiting a connecting flight when a middle-aged man approached me and asked if he could speak with me. I smiled at him, put away the book I was reading, and invited him to sit down next to me. Immediately he began telling me about his life. He was a travel writer who spent most of the year traveling all over the world and writing about his many experiences with all the people and places he was privileged to visit. Towards the end of our conversation, he looked at me with a tear in his eye and said to me, “Father, I have been almost everywhere in this world and seen almost everything, and I am not happy. I am always restless.” A deep sadness filled my own heart when he said this as we both looked out the window of the airport. A few seconds later I asked him, “Have you ever thought about the One who created all this beauty and wonder that you are blessed to see.” His response to me was shocking. He

looked at me, both annoyed and frustrated, and said to me, “I just want this to be enough. I just want this world, my travels, and my career to be enough.” I smiled at him and said as compassionately as I could, “This world is never enough, and it never will be.”

In the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21) a man from the crowd approaches Jesus and says to him: “*Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me*” (Luke 12:13). After Jesus refuses to heed this man’s request, he then proceeds to tell the crowd a parable about a man who acquired a great deal of wealth and who decides that to store the surplus of his crops, he will tear down his barns to build larger ones. Once the larger barns are built and his crops are safely stored, the rich fool says to himself, “*You have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry*” (Luke 12:19). The world, it appears, seems to be enough for this man, and now he can sit back, relax, and enjoy life. However, this man’s peace is short-lived, because as Jesus recounts in the parable, that night he will die. Jesus concludes the parable with a striking condemnation for those who not only believe, but also seek to find their peace in this world alone: “*The things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God*” (Luke 12:20–21).

Are the things of this world important? Yes, they are, and Jesus never refutes that. However, they are not as important as eternity. To live only for this world or to hope that this world will be enough is to set oneself up for frustration and disappointment. Jesus is not denying or being insensitive to this man’s earthly and material needs. However, he does not want him or us to simply remain here on this earth with only our earthly needs and desires. St. Paul, in writing to the Colossians, says, “*Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*” (Colossians 3:1–2). It is only by looking beyond this world that we can live this life correctly, and this, according to Jesus, means being rich in the things of God.

How then practically do we live like this? First, we cannot ignore this world. As mentioned in the beginning, this world is truly a marvelous place. However, this world is not all there is. All the beauty and immensity of this world is meant to point to the immensity and beauty of God. The Psalmist understands this very well when he writes, *“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars which you have established; what is man that you care for him?”* (Psalm 8:3–4). To ignore this world then would be to ignore God. Second, we cannot ignore our life. All of us have material, physical and earthly needs that are simply a part of life in this world. However, we must not think that the purpose in life, or that our peace comes from the fulfillment of those needs. Rather, all these human needs, just like creation itself, are meant to be signs pointing us both beyond this world and even our own life. Whether it be in the beauty of creation or in the mystery of our own life, we can never stop and say, *“This is it, this is what I’ve been looking for, this is what will fulfill me.”* Whatever “this” is can’t be it, for the simple reason that it is too small.

There is nothing in this world then that can be pursued as an end. This includes our relationships, jobs, vocations, talents, friendships, and even our own life. So many of our frustrations and problems occur in life when we seek our fulfillment or end in the things of this world. I have witnessed so many friendships, marriages, and even vocations ending in heartache, anger, and deep emotional and psychological hurt, simply because either one person or several were hoping the other person would be someone they were not. In contrast to this, so much joy occurs and is available to us when we allow ourselves to be taken beyond this world to God, the true end for which we were created. A truly holy person witnesses to this joy in the depths of their being, because they are not attached or grasping at anything in this world. Rather, they are attached to and desire only God.

St. Basil writes, *“What, I ask, is more wonderful than the beauty of God? What is more pleasing and satisfying than God’s mercy?”*

. . . *The radiance of the divine beauty is altogether beyond the power of words to describe.*"²² The answer, of course, is *nothing*: Nothing is more beautiful and satisfying than God. May we truly live then in this world as pilgrims and follow both this world and our own life, in all its immensity and beauty, to the One who is even greater, to the One whose beauty and greatness knows no limits.