

Homily for the Final Vows of Geoff te Braake SJ
25th July 2026
Farm Street Church
Matthew 13.44-46

What is the treasure hidden in the field? Might the treasure be the field itself or the right way of looking at and thinking about the field. God has created a beautiful world and many rich fields. We give thanks for them. We resolve to care for them, not to destroy or misuse them and to hand them to coming generations intact or enhanced. We want to allow ourselves to be prepared for heaven in the fields into which our Creator now sends us.

What is the treasure hidden in the field? Might the treasure be God himself who makes everything and is to be found everywhere? God is available to us, abundantly so, but he must be sought out. We look for him in the field in which we find ourselves. He is not hiding from us, but he enables us to approach him by a search, by digging deep, by looking, by desiring, by waiting, by acknowledging our limits and lack of understanding and by letting ourselves be guided by the knowledge which God reveals.

What is the treasure hidden in the field? Is the treasure our connection to Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Son reveals the Father to us through the Holy Spirit. Our finding the treasure that is God is a search and a discovery which takes place alongside Jesus who guides us and directs our search. His commands reassure us and speak to us of his love. In a vast field the Lord shows us where to find the treasure. He rejoices with us in the finding. He helps us to keep the treasure, to guard it, to make good use of it, to share it. Buying the field costs everything the finder owned. Handing over everything enables the getting not of another possession, having sacrificed all the rest, but is an initiation into a different kind of owning, or possessing or having. The great sacrifice, made in imitation of Christ, is a complete gift of the self not a haggling or the making of a deal.

The Lord is the one who gives up everything in order to secure the hidden treasure that is us in our capacity to live happily forever in the kingdom of heaven? He treats us as if we were something to be acquired at all costs. He pays for us with his passion, death and resurrection. Christ values us, perhaps much more highly than we do ourselves. He sacrifices his life for us, judging us worth it. Are we the hidden treasure? Our goodness is buried very deeply sometimes, but Jesus knows it is there and searches it out and gives everything to protect it.

What is the treasure hidden in the field? Is the treasure the spiritual life? The searching and the keeping are the fruit of prayer. The deepening of our connection to God takes place all the time and in many different ways, but prayer is the engine which drives this precious link and relationship. Spiritual exercises, varied and diverse, familiar and new, routine and special, are a channel through which God speaks to us, enlightens us and shows us the way. The field is everything we do and beneath the surface is a treasure trove of connectedness and interiority. God is everywhere but we learn to see him and pay attention to him in an underpinning of prayer, by a foundation of attention to what is really necessary and by allowing our heart to be focused on him. The treasure, understood contemplatively, is the deep-down goodness of all that God has made, buried as it may be beneath all sorts of wrongs and mistakes.

What is the treasure hidden in the field? Is the treasure the religious life? In a few minutes, Brother Geoff te Braake will pronounce his final vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the Society of Jesus. Geoff's field of endeavour is the spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius. Another domain of his is his leadership of efforts made by the Jesuits to be accountable and responsible in the use of our resources. Geoff's furrow is also a deep understanding, long acquired, of ecology and its implications for religion and spirituality. Geoff labours in several fields. The work is hard and unrelenting. He serenely gives thanks for the treasure which sustains the great field of his commitment, and the various and interconnected domains within that in which he lives and toils. The energy for his unstinting service is in a very generous nature and in the grace of God which comes to him not only in the discipleship which he shares with us all but also with the call to the religious life. Geoff has been faithfully answering that call for many years. He has chosen and committed himself to what the Lord has asked him to do and helps him to do, living this call well day and after day. Grace builds on nature. Flourishing and happiness are found amid the dedication and reliability. Contentment and joy are in a Jesuit life in which there is so much to do. There is attention to detail and to the bigger picture. A glimpse of eternity and God's providential plan is occasioned by spread sheets and budgets and also by scientific and theological reflection on the environment and the threats to it.

What is the treasure hidden in the field? Is the treasure the particular and very pure form of Jesuit religious life to which Geoff has been called as a temporal coadjutor? The treasure is concealed by a self-effacing nature and by modesty and humility. The Jesuit brother's unselfish giving of himself to God could be overlooked because of his efficiency. He has a kind, unpretentious, practical wisdom which solves problems without anyone noticing and which simply attends to what needs to be done. In the field, tasks are performed which are indispensable and very productive but are sometimes unnoticed. The treasure hidden in the field, is Geoff's effectiveness, his kindness and his many achievements. Respecting his reticence, this is a day for the rest of us to express gratitude. At his Final Vows, may Brother Geoff te Braake hear from the Society of Jesus, a profound thanks, an acceptance and a definitive incorporation. This religious body is his home. In it he is treasured by his brethren and our partners in mission. All who know him and work with him and us share the Society's esteem and affection for him. His closeness to God helps all of us to allow ourselves also to accept the same proximity to the One who has made us and who has summoned us to the tasks which we have.

A few words to Geoff's family. We are grateful for their presence at the Final Vows. His parents have made the long journey from South Africa to be present. Thanks are offered to them for the gift of Geoff to the Jesuits and to the Church. The family has conferred qualities on him. The question arose earlier if the finding the treasure in the field is really a looking at the field in the right way – a spiritual way, an ecological way, a responsible way. The Christian faith invites us sometimes to see things again with the eyes of a child. What is the treasure hidden the field? God has made the field and us who contemplate it. He helps us to look in the right way. To find the treasure, to contemplate him is to know that we are God's children. We contemplate the field not childishly but with child-like trust in the goodness of what we have been given. In the te Braake family Geoff learned how to see with the eyes of faith. *We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.* (Romans 8. 28-29). Long ago, Marilyn and Jos te Braake placed the foundations in their son, Geoff, for the Final Vows which he freely pronounces. He is making a gift of himself to God: this is an act of love. A mature, autonomous and caring

son learned the essentials of such loving generosity in his parents' household along with his siblings. Let us all of us remember how the field seemed to us when we were very young. That view was limited because of our years and inexperience, but it went to the heart of the matter. *The corn was orient and immortal wheat..... I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world.* (Thomas Traherne *Centuries of Meditations*)

A final time of asking: what is the treasure hidden in the field? Or, another version of the question: Is discipleship of Jesus Christ acquisitive or un-acquisitive? Solomon did not ask God for riches but for wisdom (1 Kings 3.5-12), which many might agree was a more valuable possession whatever age we are. However, the recipient of so worthwhile gift has not acquired something but rather been given it for the service of others. The Lord himself gives everything away to save us. He teaches us self-sacrifice and generosity. Jesus shows us how to do without. *You, O LORD, are my portion; I have promised to obey your words. The law from your mouth means more to me than..., silver and gold.* (Psalm 118) Having given away everything, even life itself, Jesus rose again and draws us in his wake towards eternal life in God. The One who himself has nothing showers us with gifts. He who sacrifices everything promises us heaven. The treasure hidden in the field, discovered and then hidden again, helps us to understand the way in which our faith enables us both to give away everything we possess – for example, by perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, AND to open ourselves joyfully to all that God seeks to give us, above all himself. The field is already magnificent. Yet the Gospel teach us to look at it closely, to search, to dig, to contemplate until it gives up to us its treasure. We delight in what we find. Yet the joy is not of acquisition but of love. Not of getting for ourselves but of lovingly handing ourselves over to God. The treasure found in the field must be buried again. Not to hide it, but to integrate the good of it into this amazing possession which belongs to all of us, if only we could accept it. The treasure hidden in the field is a gift to be shared. The ownership of the field entrusted to us is a responsibility. The work we do in the field, the life we lead in this world, are a revelation to each of us of God's call and grace. Let us accept what he gives us. Let us use his gifts and share them and hand them on. We give the gifts away out of love for the Giver. True gratitude to God for the treasure discovered prompts not acquisitiveness but service.

All of this is beautifully expressed by R. S. Thomas in his poem 'The Bright Field'

*I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the
pearl of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth*