

FEBRUARY 1, 2026 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

Just the other day while I was watching a video of Fr. Mike Schmidt interviewing Bishop Robert Barron, there was one question Bishop Robert Barron asked that really caught my attention. I had to pause the video to think about it. I'm paraphrasing it but it goes something like this: "Have you ever asked yourself this question? Do you love the benefits or do you love your spouse? Do you love for what's good in it or do you love your spouse for her own sake? Do you love the benefits or do you love the person? Abraham didn't say, "I love God because he's given me family, children and lands, and God has blessed me." Because what if God took away everything he had like the Book of Job. So we are left with a question: Do you love God or do you love the benefits of God? Because what if you were stripped of everything? Would you still love God if He took away every earthly comfort and blessing?" So Can you love God not because of what He can give you, but just for the sake of loving Him? Can you love God with no strings attached? Unconditionally and sacrificially?

Today's first reading was written before the people of God were sent to exile in Babylon. During the time of Prophet Zephaniah, the Israelites were prosperous. They regarded material wealth as a sign of God's blessing. They began to love the benefits of God more than God. As a result they became spiritually blind and became content with their material wealth and worldly comfort, and felt that they had no need for God. This led to their ultimate demise and while in exile they would learn to turn to God and trust Him.

One of the things I've observed in my Dad while growing up was that he was a very hard working man. He worked many hours, and there was no such thing as a holiday or a day off for him. But the reason why he worked so hard was to chase after his idea of worldly success. He worked hard to make money then buy property. And then he leveraged that building and bought another building. Then another building. I think at one point he owned 6 properties. Having money made my Dad feel important and that became his addiction. More money and more properties. In the end, no amount of money and properties he owned was enough for him. It didn't make him happy. My dad was trying to find happiness in material wealth but that didn't fill the emptiness he felt inside. Unfortunately the 2008 financial crisis affected my dad. People couldn't pay the rent and without the rent income my Dad couldn't afford to keep the buildings. He declared bankruptcy and lost everything he had. But there is a happy ending here. Because it was precisely through losing his material wealth, he found God. Or to put it the other way around, because he lost everything that he turned to God. I met many people who have climbed the mountain of success and still left them unsatisfied, unhappy and even feeling empty inside of themselves. After many years of wandering when St. Augustine found God, he said "Our hearts are restless until they rest in you." There is an inherent longing for God that can only be found in our relationship with God.

One of the biggest mistakes we make in our society today is putting our own happiness above everything else in life. And we all have our own ideas of happiness. But the irony is that when we think of being happy we immediately think of what we're missing in life: "I will be happy when I can move out and be on my own. I will be happy when I get promoted and be able to afford a bigger house with an extra bedroom or

a second car. I will be happy when I can retire and start living for myself, doing what I've always wanted to do, like travelling or gardening, etc. I'm sure we can think of many examples and the list can go on and on. But what if we couldn't have any of the things we want? Can we still be happy then?

In today's gospel, we find Jesus teaching the crowd about how to be truly happy or blessed in this world. To be poor and meek, to be despised, hated or even persecuted, all things people in their right mind wouldn't choose. If I can have my own way, I would choose to be successful, respected by others, and strong enough not to fall victim to injustice. But in teaching the beatitudes, Jesus is teaching us about the cost of discipleship. Sometimes we have to forego our own pursuit of wealth, power and instant justice in order to follow God. Being on the right side of history and following God will cost us. Even though we may not be able to comprehend it today, one day we will. We will come to understand it was the price worth paying for, a worthy sacrifice that will bear fruit in God's Kingdom.

Let us not forget that we live in a world that is not aligned with God's Kingdom. It's because our values are not the same as God. And it is due to our fallen nature. We are all vulnerable to corruption and sin. There is injustice, inequality and corruption in every society and government. We live in a world where it's easy to accumulate wealth and to climb the ladder of power and status through dishonest means. But the price we have to pay is our ethics and moral integrity. I remember many years ago, talking to a priest friend who had been a successful financial adviser before he became a priest. He admitted that he made a lot of money, but he had to leave his conscience at the door. He wasn't trying to make money for his clients. He was trying to make money for himself. That's why he would make more money for himself than he did

for his clients. One day he couldn't do it anymore. It eventually caught up to him. He could no longer suppress his conscience and moral integrity. So he left that scene for good and became a priest.

The world isn't perfect. There's no perfect happiness in this life. All we have here are moments of happiness and joy, that are temporary and fleeting. We are not made for this life. We are made for heaven. I think that's why we feel unhappiness and problems in life. I think God is trying to get our attention. God is trying to cultivate our hunger for heaven. God's goal isn't to make us happy in this life, but to make you and me His own! It would be a tragedy if we were satisfied with our life on earth and settled for our earthly life. This isn't our permanent home. The house you live in, the car you drive, the clothes you wear, the money you have in your account, it's all temporary. We're on a journey towards our permanent home. All the longings of our hearts will be met in heaven!