

Strait Is The Gate

As soon as you look at the Scripture for today, something powerful takes hold of your mind; a point as sharp as a blade, as dense as a diamond: the truth of God, which is the key to man. The Jewish name for this theme is *Wisdom*, which deserves a capital letter because the Bible so often personifies it.

Precious Stone

There's a lot of old basalt and granite in the globe; but in amongst this bleak rock there are tiny crystal forms of precious stone, which have the power to capture both the light, and our eyes. The rarity of a beautiful jewel, its sheer miraculous power to strike wonder, make it a perfect image of what Wisdom does to a human soul. How does Wisdom enter our life? By our yearning and desire; by our firm refusal of rubbish; by our restlessness until we find the truth and make our home in it. These awkward and mysterious qualities are the condition for our finding Wisdom. They can especially be seen in the young, who can't be screwed down to the exigencies of the world; they take possession of poets, and explorers, and people who think new thoughts and make room for the yet unknown. Searchers of every sort are filled with the longing for what is truly precious, real treasure. All who would make the world shine instead of mouldering have to be servants of the Maker, whose eternal joy is our destination.

Keeping Desire Alive

Desire is dulled by disappointment, by the drip of routine, by the level, sensible voices that erode hope and the idea of exultation. I think we are each of us a city, with its Temple and its treasure-house. The city has a soul, fed by hope and vision, by trust in God. We have all got an embassy within us from the one Jesus calls *The Prince Of This World*, who will every day send fresh messages telling us to abandon our longing, to make a deal with drab facts, to settle for slavery and make the best of its sad stability. And part of us will give in, and surrender the hope that life can be infinitely precious, packed with its own mysterious worth. The erosion of honour and dignity follows on as everything is swamped by the same asphalt of utility and squalor. Suddenly our purses are invaded by false coin, and we are trading in deception, with courage subverted to self-interest,

harmony surrendered to the cacophony of divided lives, love traduced into fakery and dishonour. Wisdom is still calling across this waste land, summoning all who will listen to reawaken hope and the active desire for a true humanity.

A Man Ran Up And Knelt

We presume that he was young, because he ran, because he knelt, because he still held his life in his hands, because he was still looking for a new depth to his existence. Mark says something powerful and unique about this encounter: *Jesus looked steadily at him, and loved him*. Then he issued an entirely personal apostolic call: *There is something you lack. Go and sell everything, give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me*. How could this encounter fail? For so many, the calling of Jesus had been dramatically authoritative. But this one is not going to end happily. *His face fell at these words, and he went away sad, for he was very rich*. Then comes Jesus' lament for the paralysing power of riches. We take very little notice of this; our society treats wealth as the valid ticket to a full and civilised life; it is the index by which people test their own value, and to all intents and purposes it is the unquestioned ultimate reward for wise and careful planning. Yet here is Jesus of Nazareth, treating it as a most dangerous disqualification for anyone who wants to "inherit life". We think of financial power as the ability to buy life, comfort, fulfilment, satisfaction, dignity, security, grace, and style. For Jesus all of this is utter delusion.

Give All You Have Away

For Jesus, the only thing wealth can do is to put into your hands the means of giving away, in other words, more ways in which you can "lay down your life" - which is the *real* price of admission to the Kingdom of Heaven. The power of money is one more thing to lay aside in the name of the Kingdom. The fact is that God's eternal life is lived in a constant state of pouring away - the Father to the Son, the Son to the Father. Anyone who wants to share this life must have the full power to do the same: to pour out the whole of life selflessly. This power to give is the mysterious pearl of great price - the Wisdom of God.

Fr Philip