

Last Sunday evening, for the first time I watched part of the TV show Ninja Warriors, just to get a taste of what all the hype was about. What struck me is the variety of physical skills as well as endurance the participants needed to develop in order to participate effectively, and therefore the amount of time and cost they had to invest in order to reach that level of skill and stamina.

That came to mind as I started reading today's Gospel in preparation for today's homily. There is a similarity with the sacrifice which both the ploughman and the merchant had to make, in order to gain the hidden treasure found in the field, or the pearl that exceeded all expectations of beauty and value. They were able to gain these at the cost of all they possessed, and for them that was worth it.

Since Jesus spoke those parables in the context of what it is worth to gain the Kingdom of heaven, it draws us to ask, what might the cost be for me?

Before I get into that, I'd like to use another comparison. We live in a very fashion-conscious part of Melbourne, and every day we see people going into fashion shops to look at the clothing that is on offer there. They go in and find a dress or a coat they like. It's the right colour, the right style and the right size. So the next step is to look at the price tag, and what they see there plays a major part in whether or not they buy. How much does it cost? It is one of life's major questions.

Hardly a day goes by that we don't ask that question about something, and two concerns are at stake: one is whether we can afford the purchase price, the other is whether the purchase is worth the price.

With the Kingdom of heaven it is a question of how well and how deeply we believe, understand and appreciate what our expectation of heaven really is. Is it just pie in the sky, - an all-day sucker to keep us quiet, while the whole world is in turmoil all around us, or, is it the never-ending experience of an infinite love, as shown us in Jesus, - some of which we experience here already, through the forgiveness of the wrongs we do, and through the

self-gift which Jesus continually brings us, especially in the Eucharist, - the proof of which is his freely-accepted passion and death on the Cross.

A difficulty we can have with this insight of faith is, that our first experience of love is the experience of human love, and that can be a roller-coaster, from the unconditional love of parents for their new-born baby, through to the tough love parents may need to exercise with a wayward teenager, the betrayal of a hesitant love between early companions, to the mature self-giving love that develops in a good marriage. Only when we come to know love as a self-gift which is ever reciprocated can we begin to appreciate what is being offered us in the Kingdom of heaven.

In a sense, the Kingdom of heaven is a misnomer, for it is not **a place** that is offered us, but a relationship and, as we all know, a relationship can only work where both parties enter fully into it. When it's mainly focused on the benefits we might gain from it, it is on the wrong track, - for real love considers, but does not count the cost.

Not that anyone has to go looking for suffering. Sooner or later it knocks on everybody's door. A difficulty arises when too much emphasis is placed on suffering as the will of God. God does not want us to suffer, any more than parents want their children to suffer

And, that is where many people in our world today have difficulty. Without faith in God, and without the example of Christ's love to support them when hardship or suffering makes itself felt, they look for escape, and the only true way of escape is to accept suffering as part of life, part of our human condition, and to face it, work through it with Christ as our companion.

Those of you who have read, not the current, but the previous issue of our Parish Newsletter, the Chronicle, will perhaps remember an item I wrote about the Stations of the Cross. In that I shared a reflection coming from the pen of an Irish priest, Fr. Flor McCarthy, and that's worth repeating here.