

I turned and looked up, and there he was! Of all places, I didn't think that I'd find him *there*. This past Memorial Day weekend, Valérie and I went to "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing" for the first time: the Indy 500. The day before the race, we were allowed to walk around the paddocks and see the cars being fine-tuned, speak to members of the teams, and touch the different types of racing tires. Suddenly, I heard the high-pitched whine of an Indy car go by. I realized that there were test drivers on the course, so we walked under the famous Pagoda to get a close up look. It was there that I turned and looked up and saw him! Sitting on top of a stand where spotter guides were being sold. It took a moment to recognize him but, once I did, a smile broke out on my face. And here he is. Can you see him? (Hold up the Jesus figure. Walk to a parishioner and ask who it is. Let the person keep "Jesus.")



That's right, it was Jesus, or at least, a mini-plastic representation. Frankly, I was surprised that the woman selling the guides was allowed to give the figure away. I told her that I didn't expect to see Jesus at the Indy 500. She said, "and that's exactly why he is here." She explained to me that people leave this little figure in plain sight and unexpected places. On a gas pump, a park bench, or a table at a restaurant. In that moment, the person who unexpectedly sees Jesus is reminded that Jesus can be found all around us. The one who finds Jesus can choose to leave the toy figure or, as we did, take it with them to leave for others to find. The theology of

the toy is simple: Jesus is all around us, if only we can recognize him. After finding him, we can then go out and bring Jesus to the rest of the world. Quite a big message for a small, smiling toy.

Now, maybe we shouldn't **need** this figure as a reminder. I mean, our Christian faith teaches us that everything was created through Jesus and for Jesus. The entire universe is overflowing with the abundance of God's love, meaning that Jesus is in everything. In reality, the situation should be the opposite. We should be unable to look at anything or anyone "under the sun" and not see Jesus within. Yet, this is **not** the case and we must therefore ask ourselves, "how can this be?" How can Jesus be in everything when, sadly, we know that seeing Jesus in the world is often difficult to do and that seeing Jesus easily is **not** our reality. We must be reminded to look for and to see Jesus. When this is difficult, in our frustrations, we find that the words of Kohelet are too often true. "Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!" All things are worthless "under the sun." This book of wisdom tells us that both the fool and the wise are subject to the same futility. Yet, if all things are vanity, we must ask ourselves, "how can this be" if Jesus is in all?

In our second reading, we hear from Paul's letter to the Colossians, where it **seems** that Paul is agreeing with Kohelet by telling them to seek what is above and not the things of Earth. Paul tells us that we are to find Christ above where he is seated at the right hand of the Father. This Christ, seated above, is our purpose and our goal and, united to him in our baptism, we will also live with him forever. It would seem as if Paul is saying that all things "under the sun" are vain and worthless. If Paul is saying this, we must ask ourselves, "how can this be" if Jesus is in all?

To find the answer, we must turn to our Gospel reading this week where Jesus points us in the right direction. It is interesting to me how many times we read of people encountering God

in the flesh and asking for vain things. We hear another example of it today. A man is upset with the question of earthly inheritance and asks Jesus to adjudicate the matter. He asks this wise teacher to help bring about **earthly** justice. How strange it is to hear Jesus, the one who will judge the living and the dead, ask the man “who appointed me as your judge?” Jesus then implies that the motivations of the man come from greed, not from a sense of justice. To drive the point home, Jesus tells of a man who stored up earthly things in abundance only to lose it all when he died. It is almost as if Jesus is citing Kohelet who wrote “Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill, and yet to another who has not labored over it, he must leave property.” It is as if Jesus is saying “vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!” All things are worthless. And we must ask ourselves, “how can this be” if Jesus is in all?

The answer is this: it is not **creation**, it is not the things of this world, that are worthless, but what we choose to do with them that is worthless. Jesus is all around us and **all** things were created **through** him and **for** him. **This** is not vanity. **This** is not worthless. Despite the negativity that Kohelet has, the preacher speaks of enjoying the simple things in life, simply. Enjoy the good, **for** it being good, and that is all. Do not twist it into something greater, something that you worship, because then it **would be** worthless. Paul tells the Colossians to seek what is above and to put to death earthly things. But the things that Paul mentions as being **worthy** of death are **perversions** and **abuses** of creation such as lying, evil desire, and idolatrous greed. These **perversions** of creation are worthless. And Jesus tells us that, while he is the ultimate judge of all, it is not your possessions that he will judge but what you chose to do with them. In the Gospel, we hear of an obsession with possessions from an inheritance that caused family strife. A person choosing a personal abundance of **earthly** things in the face of need. A person who led a life focused on work and **himself** instead of a life focused on living and **others**.

The taking of the gifts of creation, ignoring Jesus that is in them all, and using them for purposes other than what matters to God. **This** is worthless.

And, if we understand this fact in our spirits, if we catch a glimpse of what the little Jesus figure is meant to remind us, to see the **truth** that St. Paul tells the Colossians and us, that Jesus “*is* all and *in* all,” then, in fact, we are **more** likely than ever to cry out “that is worthless! Vanity of vanities!”

When you post something online meant to destroy rather than to be understood: “Vanity of vanities!”

When a tiny figure on a park bench allows you to see Jesus but not the homeless person sleeping there: “Vanity of vanities!”

When you see the babies actively being starved in Gaza, how many of their ribs must you count before you cry out! “Vanity of vanities!”

When we separate ourselves from loved ones for long forgotten reasons. “Vanity of vanities!”

Whenever we forget how to see Jesus in creation, and not just **all** of creation, but even **some** of the people and things of this world, we run the risk of taking them in vain and treating them as useless, something we can easily discard, denying us the inherent blessing that they are. The creative love of God means that Jesus is in **all** things by their very nature. But, it is in the simple pleasure of bread and wine at this table where we can find Jesus most truly, first in the bread and the wine, and then in us. Recognizing Jesus in the Eucharist will help us to see Jesus around us and in all things. Recognizing this fact will help us to see the obsessive perversions of God’s intentions for all created things. Then, having seen these perversions, we can go about the

work that matters to God: the undoing of the abuses of God's gifts. This is only possible when each of us recognizes that if Jesus is in all things, then Jesus is in us. And with Jesus working through us, we can help to heal the people and things of our world so that Jesus can be clearly seen in all, by all. And every time you turn around and look up, you will see him, even if there *isn't* a Jesus figure there.

Copyright 2025 by Rev. Mr. Kirk Collins. All rights reserved.