Spirituality
Scripture for Life



Migrants disembark at the port of La Estaca in Valverde at the Canary Island of El Hierro, Spain, Aug. 26, 2024, after a 13-day voyage by boat from the coast of Senegal. (AP/Maria Ximena)



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"If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I am living for, in detail, ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for."

Thus wrote Thomas Merton in his novel *My Argument With the Gestapo*. This sounds simple, but many of us might have a hard time answering the question. Or, we might come up with some beautiful, even pious, response that is hardly reflected in our daily activities.

In *Dilexi Te*, Pope Leo warns that we are ripe to fall prey to "the illusion of happiness derived from a comfortable life [that] pushes many people towards a vision of life centered on the accumulation of wealth and social success at all costs." What are we living for?

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 26, 2026

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12
Psalm 119
Romans 8:28-30
Matthew 13:44-52

Jesus talks about this in today's Gospel. He describes two people who find something that is worth everything to them. They sell what they have and invest it all in that thing — the thing Jesus calls the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus says that they do this "out of joy," the joy we might name as what they were living for.

In June, Pope Leo walked his talk. He addressed migrants, saying, "I want to bow before your dignity. ... You are people who have left behind families and homes. You have dreams that no one has the right to despise."

He went on to say, "Your life does not belong to those who harmed you; your body does not belong to those who took advantage of you; your days do not belong to those who wanted to chain you to fear. Your life belongs to God, who has given you

a dignity that cannot be taken from you. We want to walk with you until that truth feels stronger than the pain."

If we really want to understand today's Gospel, we might ask migrants to explain it. They are the people who risk all they have and are to find a better life. They believe there is a treasure in an unseen field, a pearl worth any sacrifice. Like many of our ancestors, they have a dream that others might despise, but that spurs them on through trials and beyond all odds. As Leo points out in *Dilexi Te*, they are the church's real treasures.

Visiting the Canary Islands, Leo met with migrants and their champions. Tito Villarmea, a rescue captain, told the pope about just two of the 20,000 people he had helped save. He saw a woman and her child, who appeared to be a teenage boy. Once they were on board the rescue vessel, the mother removed the child's outerwear and put gold earrings in the child's ears. "It was a girl," he said.

Villarmea's witness, Leo said, reveals how "the migrant ceases to be 'just one more.' " When we know that, he said, "Only then can we understand that that little girl could be our daughter, and that those [migrants'] faces could be part of our family.

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Many people who wager everything for a better future are models for us. As they suffer hunger, thirst, danger and fear, their stories are hero stories, showing us what it means to have a clear focus in life. Hoping against hope, they believe what Paul says: "All things work for good for those who love God."

Therefore there are no people, circumstances or situations that cannot be redeemed. They somehow know that God always offers the inspiration and grace for redemption, while it's up to us to provide the strategies and the muscle.

Paul tells us that, from the beginning of creation, humanity was predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Predestination is a term that names the innate longing in our heart for God. Being conformed to the Son expresses the call to live our vocation, which is expressed in a thousand different ways and religious traditions.

The glory we are invited to share will be the joy of finding the treasure worth spending our lives on — and it will grow like a mustard seed.

Today's Gospel challenges us to identify ourselves. What do we live for? What is worth giving our lives for? What keeps us from that? Confronting those questions will reveal us to ourselves, and summon us to live with profound integrity in our words and actions.

No one can live without dedicating their life to something, be it wealth, fame, power, vocation or our most precious relationships. Vocation and relationships bring the experience of the kingdom of heaven. Just keep asking yourself: "What, really, is worth your life?"

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.