

39 Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A July 30, 2017
1 Kings 3:5-12 Psalm 119 Romans 8:28-30 Matthew 13:44-52

There was a farmer who was not content with the golden grain he harvested year after year. He could think of almost nothing other than leaving his farm and family and going off in search of gold. One night in a dream he saw himself in a room filled with gold. After gleefully running the golden nuggets through his hands, he realized he was hungry. When he looked around for something to eat, he could only find the gold.

He called out for his wife, hoping to be comforted by the warmth of her love, but there was only the coldness of the yellow metal. He longed to look into the sparkling eyes of his children, but the only sparkle he could see was that of his lifeless riches. He woke up with a start. It only took him but a moment to realize what his true values in life were. Through a dream he had become a wise man for he knew now that his greatest riches were not in gold.

Jesus concludes His teaching with three more short parables on the *hidden nature* of the kingdom of God. Jesus is not teaching us that the kingdom of God is a treasure or a pearl or a fishing net. That would be to miss the point by identifying the kingdom of heaven with the riches of the world. Nothing in this world matches the richness of the kingdom of God. Jesus uses the expression, “the Kingdom of God is *like...*”, not the expression, “the kingdom of God is the *same* as. . .”

In the first of the three parables, the kingdom of God is *like* a man who is searching in a field and finds a hidden treasure. In his joy, the man “sells all that he has and buys that field.” Our Catholic Church is like this field. Yes, God’s Church is the greatest treasure on earth, and with great joy we are able to recognize the great value of the Church and sell everything we have to become a member of it.

In the second parable the kingdom is *like* a very valuable pearl. It takes a trained jeweler to tell the difference between a real or fake pearl, a valuable or a worthless pearl. Likewise, where do we find the kingdom of God of great value in our life today? One of the encouraging parts of this Gospel story is that such a kingdom can be found in ordinary places.

What we are invited to do is to open our hearts and eyes to God’s presence and search for Him in the small things of our everyday happenings. God is constantly

speaking to us in the simplicity of our lives. We can find the kingdom of God through our prayers, and trying to discover what God is saying to us at any given moment.

We can find the kingdom of God in times of our suffering, or in serious illness, or in times of crisis when it seems everything is falling apart. We can find the kingdom of God right in our own family, in our interactions with our brothers and sisters in Christ and those in our community. The kingdom of God means to know that one is a child of God, with a divine dignity and an eternal destiny. It means to know the meaning of life, how to live it and follow God's plans that He has set out for us for living our lives.

We get a glimpse of the kingdom of God in the Mass. When we gather to celebrate the Mass, we have found the greatest treasure of our faith on earth. When we look around for something to eat, we receive the real presence of Christ's Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist. When we long to be comforted by the warmth of love, God and our parish community embrace us with their kindness and love. When we long to look into the sparkling eyes of children, we see God's children in the eyes of our brothers and sisters in Christ all around us.

And when we discover God's Kingdom in the Mass, we need to act and feel its great joy. We need to hold it close to our centre, cherishing it, pondering it, loving it, and contemplating it. We need to tuck it deep in our heart. The Mass is a sure sign that we know what the true values in life are, that we are acting in accord with the great gift of God's wisdom.

Finally, the kingdom is *like* a fishing net that gathers fish of many kinds, which are not sorted out until the fishermen bring their nets back to the shore. The Church Fathers understood the sea as the world and the nets as the Church. The fishermen are the Apostles and their successors, the Bishops and Priests. The good and bad fish are the saints and sinners living together in our world, living together in our Church.

This parable is particularly important because it proves that the kingdom of heaven is *present in this age*. The kingdom of God is a net gathering fish, and the fish are not sorted out until the angels come for the final judgment. That means the kingdom of God exists *now*, in that it is gathering fish *now*. It is a purely future reality, not simply a perfect age that Jesus will bring at the end of time.

The point of the parables is to taste the joy of the kingdom of God. It means letting go of our dependence on worldly values, not making them the be-all and the end-all of our lives. If we really want happiness, there is no point in turning to the passing riches of life and hoping that they will fill our emptiness and loneliness, just as the man who dreamt of finding gold and found that gold wasn't his true happiness in life. Even if we were able to satisfy all of our material desires, emptiness would remain because we are more than just our bodies. God created us with also our souls.

Christ offers us the one treasure worthy of the human heart, the one treasure that will not betray us, the only one that can escort us beyond the grave and across the threshold to eternal life. And what is that treasure? It is the person of Christ Himself and all the good actions we do for His sake.

Living for Christ alone, loving Him above all else, offering Him our lives, our very selves for Him, constitute the only treasure rich enough to satisfy the human heart. God is the only One capable of fulfilling our deepest aspirations. Only this treasure will remain for all eternity, immersing us in a joy that is ever beginning, ever new.

Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." Here are some questions to think about now: What is your life in Christ worth to you? Do you love Jesus more than gold and silver and all the worldly possessions in the world? Would you sell all that you have and only keep what you have need of in life in order to possess the kingdom Jesus promises you? If we want to know where our treasure is, all we have to do is ask ourselves where our hearts are. What is it that we love the most, that we pursue the most with our hearts?

Ask yourself if you're making the right choices in your life? Do you have the right values? *We have to trust* that Jesus is speaking to each one of us through today's parables. As you listen, remember how much Jesus *deeply loves you*, and be very confident that He will help you find the greatest treasure of all, the kingdom of heaven.