

Scripture Study

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

1 Kings 3:5,7-12

(Ps 119:57,72,76-77,127-130)

Romans 8:28-30

Matthew 13:44-52

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel reading is the conclusion of Matthew, chapter 13, which features many of Jesus' most well known parables. We will be looking at three parables and a final instruction by Jesus.
- Verses 44-46 are really two parables that emphasize one important truth: the surpassing riches and beauty of the kingdom of heaven are worth more than anything that would be given up to obtain it, whether one just stumbles upon it (verse 44) or is searching for it (verse 45-46). Some, like the rich young man in Matthew 19:21, will find the cost too high.
- Verses 47-50 concerns a dragnet, a very large net that was tied between two fishing boats. Along with fish, it also tended to pick up trash, seaweed and algae that had to be separated from the catch. Like the parable of the weeds in the field we heard last week, Jesus likens this to the Church at the Last Judgment.
- Finally, Jesus reveals to his Apostles how they will be like the religious teachers who taught the old Law. The difference, however, is that they will find their treasure not only in the Old Testament, but also in the new Law of the Gospel.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, when God offers to give Solomon whatever he asks, what does the young king ask for? What is God's response? Can you see yourself asking for the same thing of God? Why or why not?
- What does the 2nd Reading tell us about placing our trust in God? How does God reward that trust?
- In the Gospel Reading, what do the parables in verses 44-50 teach about the value of the kingdom? With what emotion and energy should it be pursued?
- What does the parable of the net teach about the kingdom of heaven? How does it compare with the parable of the weeds (verses 24-30)?
- Who are the teachers of the old Law who have been instructed in the new Gospel (verse 52)?
- Compared to the man and the merchant, how valuable is the kingdom to you and why: (a) It's worth more than anything else. (b) I think I'd miss too much of the other things. (c) I'm not ready to put all my eggs in one basket.
- Examine how you spend your time, talent and treasure and ask yourself: "What would I sacrifice for the kingdom of heaven?"

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1724, 546, 29

Closing prayer

If the object of love is what is good, then the soul should take its delight in the higher good, the things of heaven. –St. Gregory the Great

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

“On finding one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it...”

Scripture: *Matthew 13:44-52*

Meditation: What do you treasure the most and how secure is that treasure? In a peasant community the best safe was often the earth. The man in the parable "went in his joy" to sell everything. Why? Because he found a treasure worth possessing above all else he had. He did not, however, have enough to buy the treasure. Fortunately, he only needed enough to buy the field. In a similar fashion, God offers his kingdom as incomparable treasure at a price we can afford! We can't pay the full price for the life which God gives us; but when we exchange our life for the life which God offers, we receive a treasure beyond compare.

The pearl of great price also tells us a similar lesson. Pearls in the ancient world came to represent the supremely valuable. Jesus remarked that one should not cast pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6). Why would a merchant sell everything for a peerless pearl? No doubt because he was attracted to what he thought was the greatest treasure he could possess. Discovering God's kingdom is like stumbling across hidden treasure or finding the one pearl of great price. When we discover the kingdom of God we receive the greatest possible treasure – the Lord himself. Selling all that we



have to obtain this incomparable treasure could mean many things – our friends, job, our "style of life", what we do with our free time. Treasure has a special connection to the heart, the place of desire and longing, the place of will and focus. The thing we most set our heart on is our highest treasure. In this parable what does the treasure of the kingdom refer to? It certainly refers to the kingdom of God in all its aspects. But in a special way, the Lord himself is the treasure we seek for. *If the Almighty is your gold and your precious silver, then you will delight yourself in the Almighty* (Job 22:22- 23). Is the Lord the treasure and delight of your heart?

What can a story of a dragnet and a great catch of fish tell us about God's kingdom? The two most common ways of fishing in Jesus' time was with a casting-net (or hand-net) which was thrown from the shore and the drag-net or trawl which was let down or cast into the waters from a boat. As the boat moved through the waters the drag-net was drawn into the shape of a great cone which indiscriminately took in all

kinds of fish and flotsam and jetsam swept in its path. It usually took several men to haul such a net to shore. What is Jesus' point here? Just as a drag-net catches every kind of fish in the sea, so the church acts as God's instrument for gathering in all who will come. Just as the drag-net does not or cannot discriminate, so the church does not discriminate between the good and the bad, the useless and the useful. God's kingdom is open to all who will accept and believe. But there will come a time of separation, at the *close of the age*, when the angels will send the good and the bad to their respective destinations. Our duty is to gather in all who will come. God, in the end, will give the good and the bad the reward they deserve. God offers the treasure of his kingdom to all who believe. Do you hunger for God and his kingdom?

"Lord Jesus, reveal to me the true riches of your kingdom. Help me to set my heart on you alone as the treasure beyond compare with any other. Free my heart of any inordinate desires or attachment to other things that I may freely give to you all that I have in joy and gratitude for all that you have given to me. May I always find joy and delight in your presence."

© 2011 Don Schwager
www.rc.net/wcc/reading