

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A TREASURE OF GREAT VALUE

July 27, 2008

17th Ordinary Sunday

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*"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ."* [Phil 3:8]

**A. I KINGS 3:5,7-12-- The Context.** This book covers the period from 961 B.C. to 561 B.C., i.e., from the end of the reign of David to the Babylonian exile. It was written to explain the exile; to tell the people that their infidelity caused the collapse of the nation. [RG 128] **Today's portion** describes **Solomon's request** that God not give him a long life or riches or power, but **an understanding heart in order that he might govern well**. This pleased God. [TCB p. 350]

**B. PSALM 119:57,72, 127-130--The Context.** This psalm, the longest in the Psalter, praises God for **giving such splendid laws and instruction for people to live by** [TCB p.728]

**C. ROMANS 8:28-30—The Context:** Paul wrote this book between 56-58 A.D. from Greece to stress salvation and justification through faith in Christ. [RG 397] **Today's text** outlines the Christian vocation as it was designed by God: **to be conformed to the image of his Son**. God's redemptive action on behalf of believers has been in process before the beginning of the world. Paul uses the term, **predestined**, not to mean that God is arbitrary, but **to emphasize the thought and care that God has taken for the Christian's salvation**. [TCB 241]

**D. MATTHEW 13:44-52--The Context:** Matthew was a Greek speaking Jewish convert living at the end of the first century in Antioch, Syria and writing to a Jewish audience around 70-90 A.D. [RG 314] **Today's pericope** includes 3 parables: **the found treasure, the pearl, the fish net**. The first two parables have the same point. The person who finds a buried treasure or who finds a pearl sell all they have to acquire these finds; similarly **the one who understands the supreme value of the kingdom gives up whatever he must to obtain it**. The parable of the fishnet resembles that of the weeds with stress on the final exclusion of evil persons from the kingdom. [TCB p.31]

### WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO ME PERSONALLY TODAY?

We are again presented today with three parables. The people of Jesus' time would have understood them all very easily. They were drawn from scenes of everyday life with which they were perfectly familiar. The first and second parables are in effect saying that **to know God and to live according to the Gospel are the most important things in life**.

In the first parable Jesus compares entering the Kingdom to a man who finds treasure in a field. We need to remember that in those days, ordinary people did not have banks. If ordinary people did have valuable things, the simplest and safest thing was to hide them under the ground. If for some reason they were not able to retrieve them, then someone else, then, might stumble on their treasure and, according to Jewish law, the finder could regard it as his own.

In this parable, the man comes across the treasure but the field where it is hidden does not belong to him. Perhaps he found it while digging the ground or ploughing the field, that is, in the course of his ordinary working day. He sells everything he has in order to get ownership of the field and hence of its buried treasure. **The idea obviously is that when one really discovers Jesus and his vision of life everything else becomes secondary**. In the service of the Kingdom there are no half measures and in that service there is a special kind of liberating joy. To have a personal relationship with Christ and to have made his view of life one's own is the most beautiful, the most precious thing in the world.

Jesus, and **the real meaning of Jesus, may come to me unexpectedly** through some daily experience. Many people have described their conversion to Christ as happening in such an unexpected way. There is a need, as the Gospel constantly urges, for us to be ready whenever and however Jesus comes into our lives.

In the second parable, however, the man is on the lookout for the "*pearl of great price*". He

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knows it must exist and he uses all his energies to find it. **Although we are baptized Christians, we still need to pursue constantly the true and full meaning of the Gospel which can escape us for many years.** We always need to love more, to serve more.

It is in this context that we can take a look at the First Reading from the First Book of Kings. The young King Solomon is told by God, **"Ask what you would like me to give you."** It is a question that Jesus sometimes asks in the Gospel and **he is asking it of me in today's Mass.** How am I going to answer? What do I most want to have or to be right now? We can make a good guess at what a lot of people, including ourselves, would be likely to ask. **For many it would be likely to have some connection with money or material security.** What did Solomon ask for? **"Give your servant an understanding heart."** He asked for wisdom and discernment. Wisdom is much more than knowing a lot of things. **Wisdom gives an insight into what is truly important in life, an awareness of the meaning and purpose of living, of what really matters.**

Solomon did not ask for wealth, or power, although these things came to him. The true disciple is the one who begs Jesus, **"Lord, that I may see."** One who sees is one who has wisdom. The one who has wisdom knows how to cope with the situations of life in ease, difficulty, pain or joy.

**A wise heart is the treasure hidden in a field** for which a man sells everything to have. It is the fine pearl for which a merchant sells everything he owns in order to get it. **The ability to see is what opens the door to the Kingdom of God,** that world of interlocking relationships between God, human beings and our world which brings to all security, happiness and peace. For much of our time, we are chasing false treasures, mainly money, status and pleasure.

This brings us to the third parable today. This third parable helps to put our two feet firmly back on the ground. While the ideals are valid and still beckon us, **they must not lead us into any form of elitism.** This parable reminds us that the Church and even the Kingdom in the process of its evolution is full of all kinds of people. **Our Church is a Church of both saints and sinners.** And we might say it is primarily for sinners.

The lesson of this parable is that the kingdom is a mixed body of saints and sinners (good and rotten fish). In the meantime, it is for us **to learn to be tolerant, compassionate and understanding of those who seem to fall far below the requirements of the Gospel** and the Kingdom. And, as we said in discussing the parable of the weeds, there are very few of us who are not, in the one person, a mixture of the good and the rotten. Judgment is for later. [Frank Doyle, S.J.]

### WHAT AM I GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

Do I love Jesus enough to reach out to his poor, oppressed, sick and lonely children?

How will I guard against the tendency to set myself up as a judge of others?

What am I doing to foster the well-being and spiritual growth of my community?

How will I use my talents to advance God's kingdom in my home, work or neighborhood?

[Sources: Scripture readings- **The Catholic Bible, NAB translation, Home Study Edition, (TCB), and its Reading Guide (RG); The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, [JSB]** Jewish Publication Society; **The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (JBC)** 1968 edition; **Dictionary of the Bible (DB), J.L.McKenzie, SJ;** **Daily Study Bible Series, John (DSBS), Wm Barclay;** **Sunday Scripture Reflections** by Frank Doyle, SJ at <http://www.sacredspace.ie/livingspace>; 17<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Sunday. [Compiled by Michael Hosemann].