



FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL GROUP CATECHESIS

17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A

SUNDAY GOSPEL

The Treasure of our Lives

Matthew 13:44-52

Jesus said to the crowds, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in a basket and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be



at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the just to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

“Have you understood all this?” They said, “Yes.” And he said to

them, “Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old.” ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Fr Gerard Moran OCD



All of today’s parables are unique to Matthew. They seem to be a unity. The shorter ones of the treasure and the fine pearl speak clearly about the fact that the disciple must give up everything he owns if he wishes to secure entry to the

Kingdom. The choice is a joyful one for he has found the way, albeit narrow, to eternal life.

When combined with the scene of separating the fish and throwing away the useless ones, the message becomes broader: hearing Jesus’ radical words and not doing them has eternal consequences! The remorse of those who have failed to do so is a chilling note on which to end the parables, a note that was heard in the “Lord, Lord” at the end

of the Sermon on the Mount and will be heard again at the end of the judgment.

The challenging radicality of this final clutch of parables might be accounted for by the fact that they are seemingly addressed specifically to his disciples. The Lucan Jesus strikes the same note when he says, “Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required.” And, “Anyone who has ears let him hear!” ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS

The brief similes proposed in today's liturgy conclude the chapter of the Gospel of Matthew dedicated to the parables of the Kingdom of God. Among these are two small masterpieces: the parables of the treasure hidden in the field and of the pearl of great value. They tell us that the discovery of the Kingdom of God can happen *suddenly* like the farmer, or *after a long search*, like the pearl merchant. Yet, in each case, the point is that the treasure and the pearl are worth more than all other possessions; and therefore when the farmer and the merchant discover them, they give up everything else in order to obtain them. They do not need to rationalise or think about it or reflect: they immediately perceive the incomparable value of what they've found and they are prepared to lose everything in order to have it.

This is how it is with the Kingdom of God: those who find it have no doubts, they sense that this is what they have been seeking and waiting for; and this is what fulfils their most authentic aspirations. And it really is like this: those who know Jesus, encounter him

personally, *are captivated, attracted* by so much goodness, so much truth, so much beauty, and all with great humility and simplicity. To seek Jesus, to find Jesus: this is the great treasure!

Many people, many saints, reading the gospel with an open heart, have been so struck by Jesus that they convert to him. Let us think of St Francis of Assisi: he was already a Christian, though a "rosewater" Christian. When he read the gospel, in that decisive moment of his youth, he encountered Jesus and discovered the Kingdom of God; with this, all his dreams of worldly glory vanished. The gospel allows you to know the real Jesus, it lets you know the living Jesus; it speaks to your heart and changes your life. And then yes, you leave it all. You can effectively change lifestyles, or continue to do what you did before but *you* are someone else, you are reborn: you have found what gives meaning, what gives flavour, what gives light to all things, even to toil, even to suffering, and even to death.

Read the gospel. Read the gospel. To read a passage of the gospel every day; and to carry a little gospel with us, in our pocket, in a purse, in some way, to keep it at hand. And there, reading a passage, we will find Jesus. Everything takes on meaning when you find your treasure there, in the gospel. Jesus calls it "the Kingdom of God", that is to say, God who reigns in your life, in our life; God who is love, peace and joy in every man and in all men. This is what God wants and it is why Jesus gave himself up to death on the cross, to free us from the power of darkness and to move us to the kingdom of life, of beauty, of goodness and of joy. To read the gospel is to find Jesus and to have this Christian joy, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Dear brothers and sisters, the joy of finding the treasure of the Kingdom of God shines through, it's visible. The Christian cannot keep his faith hidden, because it shines through in every word, in every deed, even the most simple and mundane: the love that God has given through Jesus shines through. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. Over the last few weeks, the gospels have challenged us to make radical choices about what and who is our priority. Once again, there is no room for fence-sitting this week. We are presented with "all-or-nothing" choices about the Kingdom of God. Is Jesus and the Kingdom of heaven truly your treasure above all things? Does today's parable excite you or leave you with hard personal questions?
2. Pope Francis this week shows that the Kingdom is about seeking and finding Jesus, "This is the great treasure!" ... "Those who know Jesus, encounter him personally, are captivated, attracted by so much goodness, so much truth, so much beauty, and all with great humility and simplicity." Have you had the sort of personal encounter with Jesus and the Holy Spirit that lets you with certainty and abandon, choose him above all else?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for Each Other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them

Response: *Lord Jesus, overwhelm my heart, so that I may know you as my greatest treasure, my pearl of great price.*

Reflect: Jesus tells us that all who seek him sincerely will find him. How am I seeking Jesus? What can I be doing in prayer, through reading Scripture, in the receipt of Sacraments, in the midst of community, to be setting my heart on finding in Jesus, the greatest and lasting treasure?

Closing Prayer: Lord we set our hearts upon you. Help us through our prayer, our openness to your spirit, through the power of your Word and Sacrament, to be drawn into the truth and fullness of who you are and embrace you above all other things.

