

July 30, 2023  
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Matthew 13:44-52

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away.

Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

"Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." And he replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old."

**Background:**

This week's Gospel text, along with the text from the two previous weeks, has given the reader the opportunity to reflect on a block of Jesus' parables that take up almost the entire 13th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. These parables are addressed to the crowds that come to hear Jesus' teaching. However, the explanation of the meaning of the parables is reserved for the disciples.

The three short parables that comprise the majority of the text for this week are all taken from familiar experiences of common people of the day - farmers, merchants and fishermen. The first two parables present the kingdom of God as a great treasure that is present but hidden to the non-observant, a theme that was hinted at by Jesus two weeks ago. When the disciples asked Jesus why he taught with parables, he responded: "This is why I speak to them in parables, because 'they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand.'" (Matthew 13:13)

The parable about the kingdom being like a fisherman's drag net is similar to the parable of the farmer who let the weeds grow along with wheat in his field until it was time to harvest. In both parables, Jesus says that angels will separate the wicked from the righteous in the final judgment.

The three parables of the Gospel for today also present three different ways that people discover or obtain the kingdom of God. In the first parable, the farmer finds a treasure in a field, which suggests an unexpected discovery. The farmer responds with joyful enthusiasm that would be considered reckless by most. If the farmer sells everything and the field does not produce a good harvest, the farmer is in danger of losing the field and the treasure. In the second parable, the merchant is diligently looking when the discovery of the great pearl occurs. The response to the discovery is equally as enthusiastic as the farmer in the first parable. The last parable speaks of those who are caught up in the kingdom without any awareness of what is going on. The kingdom is still present but they are unaware of its presence until the very end when they discover what has been caught. Some of the "catch" will be kept and some discarded. This parable echoes the theme of the over-generous action of God that was present in the parable of the sower that was first in this group of parables. (Matthew 13:1-9)

These parables present a picture of God who is at work establishing the kingdom. They include men and women, those who till the soil, merchants, and fishermen. God's kingdom is discovered by those who are diligent in its pursuit, those who seem to stumble upon the kingdom almost by accident, and those who are caught in the kingdom as if by a large net with good and bad in it together. As a group, the parables present an

image of God who is extravagant in God's desire to bring the ordinary people of Jesus' day to the kingdom. His message would be welcomed, greeted with enthusiasm, and stand in contrast to the teachings of the religious leaders of his day.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. When have you had an experience of being overjoyed? When have you witnessed that experience in others?
2. What about your image of the kingdom of God would lead you to feeling **overjoyed**?
3. How would you complete the line: "The kingdom of God is like...?"
4. Do you know people who really seem to be seeking the kingdom of God? What is it about them or their behavior that leads you to that assumption?
5. Have you experienced the awareness that you have been treasuring the wrong things?
6. Having reflected on the parables for the last three weeks, how would you describe Jesus' desire?
7. Can you take some time now to respond to God whose kingdom is revealed in the parables?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to [fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com](mailto:fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com).

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscclalledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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### **Excerpts from the readings for July 30, 2023, the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream. God said, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you." Solomon answered: "My God, you have made me, your servant, king to succeed my father David; but I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act. I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted.

Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong. For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?"

The Lord was pleased that Solomon made this request. So God said to him: "Because you have asked for this—not for a long life for yourself, nor for riches, nor for the life of your enemies, but for understanding so that you may know what is right—I do as you requested.

I give you a heart so wise and understanding that there has never been anyone like you up to now, and after you there will come no one to equal you."

Lord, I love your commands. My part is to keep your words.

The law of your mouth is to me more precious than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

Let your kindness comfort me according to your promise to your servants.

Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.

I love your command more than gold, however fine.  
In all your precepts I go forward; every false way I hate.  
Wonderful are your decrees; therefore I observe them.  
The revelation of your words sheds light, giving understanding to the simple.

Brothers and sisters:

We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified.

Jesus said to his disciples: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. "Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." And he replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old."

### **Excerpts from 1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:57, 72-77, 127-130; Romans 8:28-30; and Matthew 13:44-52**

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for July 30th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. Similar to the Gospel from last week, today's Gospel from Matthew presents three more parables. In the first two short parables, the person who finds a buried treasure and the merchant who finds a pearl of great price both go and sell all that they have, in order to acquire what they have discovered. These both compare to someone who finds understanding of the supreme value of the kingdom, and he gives up whatever he must in order to obtain it. At the end of this Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, "Do you understand all these things?" and they answer, "Yes."

The other readings also have references to what is most precious, and to the understanding given by God. In the first reading from 1 Kings, Solomon asks the Lord for an understanding heart, and the Lord is pleased with this request. "I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen," Solomon says. "Give me an understanding heart to judge your people." The Lord responds, "I give you a heart so wise and understanding that there has never been anyone like you." Psalm 119 proclaims, "I love your command more than gold, however fine. Your words give understanding to the simple." In the second reading, from the letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "All things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

If the long form is used, there is more to the Gospel than just the first two short parables. The longer third parable is similar to the one last week about weeds in the wheat. This one is about fish of all types caught in a net. When the net is hauled in, the good fish are kept and the bad are thrown away. "Thus it will be at the end of the age," Jesus says. "The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!

