

July 26, 2020

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 13:44-52

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."

### **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 make up almost the entire 13th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. All of these parables were addressed to the crowds that came to hear Jesus' teaching. However, the explanation of the meaning of the parables was 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--a farmer, a merchant, and a fisherman. The first two parables present the kingdom of God as a great treasure that is present, but hidden to the non-observant. This theme 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 net is similar to the parable of the farmer who let the weeds grow along with the wheat. In both parables, Jesus says that angels will separate the wicked from the righteous in the final judgment.

From another perspective, the three parables of the Gospel for today present three different ways that people discover the kingdom of God. In the first parable, the farmer finds a treasure in a field, which seems to suggest an unexpected discovery. The farmer responds with joyful enthusiasm that would be considered reckless by his fellow farmers. If the farmer sells everything to buy this field 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 seeking the great pearl. The response to the discovery is equally enthusiastic as that of the farmer. The last parable is about fishermen who are about the ordinary task of the day--separating the fish from the other objects that the net picked up as it was dragged through the sea. The kingdom is 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 seems to echo the theme of the over-generous action of God as was described in the parable of the sower at the start of this chapter. (Matthew 13:1-9) These parables present a picture of God who is at work establishing the kingdom, and bringing people to an awareness of the kingdom through various efforts on their part. The theme that runs through the three parables in today's text is that God has placed the Kingdom within the reach of common people, those who find the Kingdom realize that it is to be valued above all else, and discovery of the Kingdom brings great joy to those who discover it.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. When you reflect on your life journey, what are some of the things you have desired?
2. What are some of the things that have brought you a sense of joy?
3. Are the things that have brought you joy the same things that you have desired?

4. Have you desired the wrong things?
5. Have your mistakes at desiring the wrong things led you to a better understanding of what it is you truly desire?
6. How would you complete the line: "The kingdom of God is like...?"
7. Does your image of God's Kingdom leave you with a sense of being overjoyed?
8. What are the things in the last week that have left you with a sense of joy?
9. Which of the three parables in this text most attracts your attention? How would you like to respond to that fascination?
10. Can you take some time now to talk with God about your desires and how those desires have impacted your life, or about the things that bring joy to your life, or about anything else that this text is saying to you at this time of your life?

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 [annemarie.lom@gmail.com](mailto:annemarie.lom@gmail.com)

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### **Excerpts from the readings for July 26, 2020, 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**