

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

When I am preparing a homily for children, I pray that I might find an image or a story to begin my homily that the children can connect with. When I find such a story or image then there is a good chance that the children will hear the gospel message that I am trying to share. Jesus uses parables to connect with us and to invite us to ponder something that he wants us to understand.

Chapter thirteen of Matthew's Gospel has seven different parables about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a difficult concept for us to understand. We need to approach it from many different angles. "The kingdom of God is like treasure in a field which someone has found;" In the time of Jesus digging a hole in the ground and burying our treasure was the equivalent of opening a bank account. But sometimes death or war intervened, and the deposit was not able to be redeemed. When someone else finds that treasure then it could become theirs if they owned the land in which it was buried. In our parable we are told that "the man goes away happy; sells everything he owns and buys the field."

What do we learn when we ponder that image? We might notice that there is a gap between finding the treasure and possessing it. Perhaps it is reminding us that God's reign in the world will always be something in the

future. But once we have a glimpse of it, it is something that we yearn for. It is something that we work for. The man in the parable sold everything to buy the field. Possessing the Kingdom of God will only come at a cost. When we see what it can be like for God to reign in our hearts and in our world we are happy, and we are ready to pay the price of letting God rule our lives.

The second parable is like first one. This time the pearl of great price is not something that that is stumbled upon but something that was sort after for a lifetime. Again, there is a great cost, but the happiness and the joy that comes from finding what we are looking for gives us the freedom to sell everything else so that we can have what is of great value.

In the third parable for today Jesus describes the kingdom of God as being like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds. The point of this parable is very much like the one that we read last Sunday about the weeds and the wheat. But it can also remind us of how wide are the arms of a God who draws all people to himself. Like the net that hauls in all kinds of fish, our God invites into his kingdom people of all kinds. How they respond to that invitation will only be known in time. It is only when the net is drawn in that the fishermen sort out the good fish from those that cannot be eaten. You and I live in a world where the just

and the unjust live side by side. It is not our job to sort out the just from the unjust. We need to leave that to the angels of God.

The last part of the gospel has some special wisdom for us. Jesus asks his disciples if they have understood all that he had taught them. They say that they have but how they act would indicate that they still had much to learn. We too have much to learn. It takes a lifetime to become a disciple of Jesus. Understanding what Jesus teaches is hard enough. Taking on the mind of Jesus, as St. Paul, urges us to do today, is even harder. But Paul gives us hope. He tells us that Jesus is the one who forms us into his image. We cannot do it by ourselves.

Today Jesus describes someone who becomes his disciple as being “like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old.” What does that mean for us? Perhaps we could think of the old as being the rich tradition of our Church, those things that have sustained communities of faithful disciples of Jesus for centuries. One of the graces of the Second Vatican Council has been to rediscover the Wisdom of the ages. We can now tap into the riches of our monastic traditions. We can read with fresh eyes the writings of the men and women who founded the great religious orders of the Church. The Church that we knew as children is only a brief part of our Church History. We

can be grateful for what we learnt as children. What we learnt has shaped us and given us the foundations to live our lives well and generously for others. But longing for the Church of our youth is not healthy. It is no more than nostalgia

We need to bring out of our storehouse things that are new. We need new insights to live well in a world that has changed much since we were young. We are challenged to keep refreshing and deepening what we believe as disciples of Jesus. We are called to listen to the younger members of our community and to be humble enough to learn from them about how God may be at work in our world today.

None of us is called to be Church for our own sake. We are a community of faith for the sake of others. We will only grow and be nourished in as much as we are ready to give our ourselves to others. Our first reading today reminds us that Solomon only became a great king because as a young man he asked God to give him the wisdom that he needed to be a good leader. He asked God to give him what others needed from him. May we have something of Solomon’s wisdom as we ask God for all that we need to be a community of faith for others.