

30 July 2017 (17th Sunday of Ordinary Time)

1Kings 3:5,7-12; Psalm 118(119):57,72,76-77,127-130; Romans 8:28-30; Matthew 13:44-52.

Pearl of great price.

In today's gospel we are invited to consider another three parables that speak about the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is compared to treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great price and a dragnet. It is not easy to define the kingdom of heaven, so Matthew puts together a set of eight parables each of which demonstrates a different aspect of this kingdom.

The first two parables, the treasure in a field and the pearl of great price, are parallel parables and can be read together. In each case we are faced with a person who finds something of great value, goes sells all his possessions and acquires the thing found.

People come to the kingdom in different ways; some have been actively looking for something while others just stumble across it almost by accident. What is more important is that we recognise the great value of this kingdom in our own life. The man who stumbles on the treasure was certainly not looking for it, yet once he unearthed the treasure he recognised that he had found something extremely valuable. The pearl merchant was used to the trade: he had spent his life looking at pearls and learning how to evaluate them, so he could easily appreciate the pearl of great price.

The kingdom of heaven is not something we can own and possess, but rather something we discover and grow into. In both parables there is a time lapse between the moment when the object was found and the time when it became the person's possession. The kingdom of heaven requires a great commitment. The person who found the treasure and the merchant who found the pearl of great price both were prepared to go and sell all they possessed. The kingdom of heaven does not permit half measures but requires total commitment. Its value for those who understand it is such that the person needs to go and sell everything they possessed and only then could they go and take possession of their find.

In order to be disciples we need to encounter the kingdom of heaven especially in the person of Jesus and in the words of the gospel. Do we recognise the great value that lies in God's word for us? Once I recognise this great value then nothing can stop me from selling everything I own in order to be able to live this kingdom. Selling all possessions is in itself a metaphor for letting go of everything that stands between the kingdom and us. This in itself is a lifelong journey. At some stage in our life we discover the value of the kingdom and then we are invited to repent and convert our life in a way that suits this kingdom. This involves our personal life of prayer, the way we see Jesus in the poor and the lonely, our participation in the body of Christ, the Church. The fact that we understand the great value of the treasure we have found in Jesus keeps us focused until we reach the moment when we can claim what we have been working for. In a way the kingdom of heaven is here and yet not in our hands.

The third parable speaks of the dragnet that is thrown out at sea and catches all types of fish. The dragnet is another metaphor for the kingdom. Everyone is invited to be part of and participate in the kingdom of heaven. In his great generosity God does not differentiate between good and bad but calls all to live in this kingdom. It is only at the end of the day, when the fish is pulled up, that the fish that are not the right size are thrown back into the sea.

Our job is to participate in this kingdom!

Fr Mario