

SUNDAY 17 OT YEAR A.

This week's readings lead us to reflect on the priceless treasures of wisdom, faith, and the kingdom of Heaven itself.

In the first reading Solomon is not interested in earthly benefits of great honours or luxury goods, instead he simply asks for a discerning heart so that he can govern his people effectively and wisely. It's this type of request that appeals to the nature of God.

How then would we respond in similar circumstances, not that we are likely to have an encounter with God, as Solomon did, but God does connect with us in various ways and our conscience can influence our decisions and requests. Are we then to be satisfied with the gifts that God has bestowed on us and only ask for the same again.

Something to reflect on.

Over the past weeks Jesus has had a great time in posing situations within the framework of His parables. Today is the conclusion of the current cycle of these parables designed to make us ponder upon the reign of God and the kingdom of Heaven. So the message today is intended as praise for those who have listened carefully, understood and responded to His message.

In previous weeks the parables about, seeds, wheat, weeds, and so on, have been about how we respond to the word of God planted in our lives. Do we let it grow and develop in us or is it choked out by other influences in our lives.

In the first and second parables today Jesus goes further in explaining the attractions of the Kingdom of Heaven, by likening it to things of great value and particularly the ends people go to, in order to attain them. He is emphasising not so much the material aspects of acquiring earthly wealth but the importance of doing everything we can to attain entry into the Kingdom of Heaven, especially by sacrificing everything we have in order to achieve this goal.

When one discovers Jesus, or rediscovers Him, everything else become secondary. That is what Paul meant when in Philippians 3 he said “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ”

His message, to have a personal experience of Christ and a personal relationship with Him- in other words to have made Christ’s view of life, one’s own- is the most precious thing in the world.

The 3rd parable has a different approach. Still concerning the Kingdom of God but in a different context.

It's about the final judgement that will come, the time of separation, when the good and the bad are separated and sent to their respective destinies, a similarity to the parable of the weeds and the wheat last week.

To illustrate this point Jesus used the symbolism of the drag net, one of the fishing methods used in Jesus's time, Galilean seine-nets were tied between two boats and dragged through the water. The catch was sorted afterwards when the fish were sorted with edible or kosher fish were sent to market and the remainder thrown away.

Just as the drag net catches both good and bad fish, so the church is a mixture of all kinds of people, good & bad, saints and sinners. Just like the parable of the wheat & weeds there is no immediate or premature weeding out, but judgement will take place eventually when the sorting out will occur.

The three parables highlight the opportunities as well as the challenges of discipleship and the final message is that as Christians we should understand the value of understanding the message of both the old and new teaching that comes to us through the Hebrew Scriptures and teaching of the New Testament.

There are many messages for us in today's lections. Rather than spending out time chasing false treasures such as money, unnecessary possessions, status, or power, we must

establish the right goals, and seek the really valuable pearl of sharing in God's life through Jesus. Let us remember that whenever we fight against discrimination, whenever we trust completely in God, whenever we conquer selfishness, whenever our love overcomes sin and our faith overcomes suffering, and whenever we render humble service to others, we are doing the will of God. In fact we are already living in the Kingdom of Heaven, right here on earth.