

HOMILY for 17th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel talks about searching for treasures, especially spiritual treasures. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story I'd like to share with you.

A country church had a small congregation of faithful people – all but one farmer, who had to quit coming to church altogether. The pastor decided to visit the farmer & ask him why he wasn't attending anymore.

"Well, Pastor," the farmer said, "I have only these shabby overalls and worn-out boots. I don't think it's right for me to enter the Lord's house looking this way."

The pastor replied, "Well, I've got an extra suit & shoes that might fit you. I'll give them both to you if you'll come back to church!"

The farmer agreed, so the pastor returned that afternoon with the clothes. The next Sunday the pastor expected to see the farmer but he never showed up. So, the minister went out to the farm again & said, "We missed you at church this weekend. I gave you all of those clothes & I thought you said you would be there. What happened?"

"Well, I got cleaned up & put on all those fancy clothes of yours," the man replied. "When I passed the mirror, I looked so doggone good; I just decided to go to the big city church instead!"

At least he found a new spiritual treasure there! Anyway, most of us do not realize that our whole life is about discovery. We spend lots of time searching for the right relationships & best education or jobs for ourselves & our loved ones. We also use a big portion of our time every day to look for best deals & great promises for our future. Indeed, we spend most of our life searching for a secure & bright future. That seems to be the topic that this Sunday's Gospel & First Reading want to talk to us about.

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a lucky find of a treasure buried in a field. Here's what He says, "...The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds & hides again, & out of joy goes & sells all that he has & buys that field." Apparently this person has found a huge treasure buried in a field by accident. He did not know what was hidden in that special field & all the great promises that it would bring him. But, once he learned that the field holds a huge treasure & can produce great potentials in the future, he'd do anything to have an ownership of it. For that would give him lots of benefits & a bright future. So, he sold everything he had to buy that special field & have a bright future.

This first parable, I think, speaks for all the early disciples as they tried to figure out who Jesus was & what a huge treasure he was hiding in himself. After checking Him out a little bit, they sensed that Jesus would hold great potentials & make their future bright. They decided to leave everything behind in exchange for Jesus & follow Him. Jesus sure became the best source of treasure for them & gave their lives a great purpose. They in turn shared His Good News with the world & changed many lives for the better. The early disciples accidentally found Jesus & gave Him a chance to make a big difference in their lives. That's exactly what Jesus did. He made them the richest people in the eyes of God & gave them a purposeful life. He was their lucky find & a huge treasure that has benefited them not only in this life but also the next one.

Meanwhile, the second parable continues the topic of treasure & is shared as the following, "...Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant's search for fine pearls. When he

found one really valuable pearl, he went back & put up for sale all that he had & bought it. “Like the first parable, this one talks about treasure & the desire to have ownership of it at all costs. But, unlike the first parable, the second one shares with us how someone goes out to actively search for the best pearl in the world. He spends night & day to look all over the world for this special jewel. Why? Because this merchant knows that he would have the most coveted piece of treasure in the whole world. Everyone would want to own this rarest pearl. In the long run, it will not lose its value. Instead, its value will multiply; & he’ll be filthy rich in the end.

I believe this second parable aims at believers like Nicodemus or Zacchaeus. They actively spent their whole life searching for the right prophets or holy figures to connect them to God. Those prophets & figures are truly the finest pearls/rarest diamonds that has the unique ability to let them have a glimpse of God & experience the world of Heaven. Both Nicodemus & Zacchaeus had heard a lot of wonderful things about Jesus & His ability to do miracles. They actively looked for opportunities to meet & talk with Jesus. Nicodemus often came out at night to meet Jesus because he did not want other Pharisees to mock & ridicule him for those meetings. Zacchaeus, who was a sinful tax collector, climbed up a tree where Jesus was supposed to pass by & called out to Him. Jesus saw him & signaled him to come down & agreed to meet him at his home. They both searched high & low for the finest pearls/the rarest diamonds & finally found it in Jesus. They were finally rewarded & exchanged everything they owned to have Jesus in their lives.

What have you been searching for in your life? Do you still feel a bit empty or missing something in your life? Let me suggest Jesus & a good spiritual life to fill up that emptiness. If you can not welcome that change of a new life yet, let me propose a bite-size spiritual nourishment by asking you to begin focusing on a life of virtues for now. That way of life will help you live in a close relationship with the Holy Trinity. Let me next ask you to consider these 3 theological virtues to live by: Faith, Hope, & Love. If you want to focus on some virtues that are a little more practical in your daily life, you can try out the fruits of the Holy Spirit, namely, charity/love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, & chastity. Or, if you’d like to follow King David in today’s First Reading & fill your life with something a little more lofty like wisdom, why don’t you spend your life searching for the gifts of the Holy Spirit such as wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, & fear of the Lord? When we can see Jesus & a good spiritual life to be the field with a buried treasure or the finest pearl/the rarest diamond, our life would surely be much more meaningful & satisfied. We would always feel God’s love & peace in our lives in spite of all the turmoil & uncertainty in the world around us.

My dear brothers & sisters, some of us have found a relationship with God or a faith connection with Jesus by accident. Others have actively spent a long time searching for that relationship or faith connection & finally found it in Jesus & His Church. I hope you’ll find that special treasure or that finest pearl/that rarest diamond that will make you feel complete & happy for the rest of your life. Otherwise, why don’t you give Jesus & a life of virtues a trial & see if that might work out for you?