

GIVE YOUR SERVANT



AN UNDERSTANDING
HEART

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY (A) JULY 27, 2008

KINGS 3:5, 7-11

ROMANS 8:28-30

MATTHEW 13:44-51

FR. VINCE ALAGIA, S.J.

A LIFELONG CHALLENGE

The Kingdom of heaven is like... an elderly woman, very poor, and her neighbors supported her. They were happy to do this. Some wondered, however, why her son who had left home and become rich but did not care better for her.

She defended her son saying, "He writes me every week and always sends me a little picture. See," she said, "I keep them here in my Bible." Between the pages of her Bible were hundreds of US bank notes. She had a treasure in her Bible; yet she did not realize it. We might ask ourselves: *To what extent do I need to rediscover the treasures in my life? – even the treasure of the phase of life I'm in?*

The Kingdom of heaven is like... Mother Moon, stolen from her place in the sky, and how the towns people frantically searched to find her. The villagers risked their lives to find her. Their pursuit was wholehearted and courageous. Released from her lightless prison, Mother Moon rejoiced once more by gladly dispelling the darkness. We might ask ourselves: *To what extent am I willing to go in my searches for what I believe in?*

"I'd give anything only if..." – how often we have said this. How many dreams, hopes, aspirations, desires have been introduced with these words? How many regrets have been expressed as well with that sentiment? *I'd give anything if I could take back those angry words.* And let's not leave out such

expressions as: *I'd give anything to be thinner, more beautiful, more handsome, thinner, and to tell the future.* How sublime and how ridiculous we can be.

If Jesus were here today, I think he would be telling stories like the parables in the Gospel, stories pointing out *what really matters in life.* His subject was always God's loving and powerful dominion over not just the hearts and minds of his people but of all of us.

One big difference between the Gospel parables and the ones I chose to share is that Jesus was no dreamer. He was the supreme realist! His parables were intended to make a point, each of them, describing the way people did live. While each parable I told at the beginning had a valid point, the story itself was drawn from a world of fantasy, a child's world; his stories were drawn from the very lives of people he knew.

And no parable of Jesus comes with a simple point. He wants people to think, to use their heads and hearts, hands and feet. I often wonder if he didn't prefer to not give answers but directions, roads for discovering him and his love for us. His parables for the most part were like that.

There was the person who discovered a treasure, and rather than report it to the owner, scrapes and saves for years to buy the field for himself. Or did he report it? What would I do? He seems often to leave us with more questions than answers, respecting our consciences, our freedom. Jesus liked to leave the answer, or direction towards an answer, up to the listener. Again, with regard to the precious pearl, the man who found it, did he do everything possible to be able to buy it? What if the owner did not realize the treasure he had and sold it for less than it was worth? Jesus doesn't give answers here. He simply states that the person did everything possible to obtain what was so worthwhile for him. I thoroughly enjoy reading parables – and good stories –

because they leave me thinking and wondering about what's worthwhile in life? – about life? – my life? – sometimes yours? – sometimes ours together as a faith community? – etc?

For a moment, let us look at the third of these parables today: fish caught in a dragnet, anything without scales and fins discarded, shell fish as well (there was no market for them among the people trying to observe the kosher laws of the Bible). The edible had value; the inedible no value. Is there a lesson there for me, for you, for us? The story's point was easily grasped by Jesus' audience. As a teacher, Jesus pointed out to them a lesson in the last judgment. We may see something different that touches our own sense of values, and/or we may also take the lesson to heart which Jesus was most likely trying to have his listener think about.

To be a seeker is a major challenge. To live, to simply live, is a major challenge. It does not have to be a burden but there is no escaping the "yoke" of the Lord, or the cross. It is difficult at times to believe this, or even want to believe it. How many dispossessed in our world, in our communities, in our own homes, have lost everything meaningful or worthwhile to them? The tragedies that abound: in nature, in man's inhumanity to man, in the sense of helplessness among us. How hard it is to hear and believe God telling us, as in the first reading, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you (Kings 3:5). In the second reading, God through Paul is saying to us "that all things work together for good for those who love God" (Rom 8:28).

Solomon asked the Lord for an understanding heart instead of a long life or riches, and Paul asks us to trust in the Lord and to believe him when he promises to work with us until we are with him forever in heaven.

The Psalms are a beautiful way to pray. I'd like today to end with one which challenges and yet full of promises as we strive to live the parables of the Kingdom of God in our hearts:

Oh, the joys of those
who walk not after the advice of the wicked.
nor sit in the seat of scoffers
but delight in the law of Yahweh
and ponder it day and night.
They are like trees planted by streams of water
that yield fruit in due season,
whose leaves do not wither,
and everything they do prospers.
Therefore, they cannot stand firm
when judgment comes,
nor shall sinners find a place in the assembly of the righteous.
For God knows the ways of the just,
but the way of the ungodly ends in ruin.*

*Psalms Anew. N. Schreck & M. Leach. St. Mary's Press. Winona, MN 1986. p.17. [While no longer printed, it can be obtained through old/used book publishers].