

Sunday 30th July 2017: EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST. YR A.

Gospel: Matthew 13:44-52(58)

“Jesus' meanings of the Parables”.

A woman had just returned to her home from an evening of church services, when she was startled by an intruder. She caught the man in the act of robbing her home of its valuables and yelled: ‘Stop! Acts 2:38!’
(Acts 2:38 (ESV) says “Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins.”)

The burglar stopped in his tracks. The woman calmly called the police and explained what she had done.

As the officer cuffed the man to take him in, he asked the burglar: ‘Why did you just stand there? All the old lady did was yell a scripture to you.’

‘Scripture?’ replied the burglar. **‘She said she had an Axe and Two 38s!’**

In the Name of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's Gospel reading has us reading from Mt 13:44-58, however I have taken my sermon based on 44-52. Parables can for the best and most of us be a mumble jumble if we don't understand them, and sometimes it can be frustrating for even clergy to do a sermon/homily based on the parables and have to explain to their congregations, so here goes.

In these parables, Jesus explains the value of His Kingdom, and the foolishness of chasing after the things of the world. His Kingdom is what life is all about; yet, we tend to wrongly preoccupy ourselves with life in a dysfunctional way. We must come to the point that these teachings from our Lord make a difference. We have to ask the question, and present a real, genuine answer to our Lord and to others around us: Is our faith in Christ authentic; is it making a difference? Or, are we the faker, the pretender, the person who causes strife and dysfunction in His Church instead of glorifying Him.

The answer to the question of whether our faith is real or pretend requires us to be discerning, to see if our heart is receiving His Word, or we are only looking to ourselves. Is life all about "me," or is it all about Him?

The first two parables in today's Gospel – the parables of the buried treasure and the pearl – are lessons in the total attachment to Christ and detachment from the things of the world demanded of the disciple in order to make the reign of God a reality.

The parable of the dragnet is similar in theme to last week's parable of the wheat and weeds. Again, Matthew makes the point that the kingdom of God is neither an instant happening nor a static event, but a dynamic movement toward completion and fulfilment which Jesus set into motion.

The context of any passage is the key to understanding it, and this passage occurs in the midst of the period of time in which the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders has reached a peak. They have falsely accused Him of breaking the Law of Moses and of doing His work by the power of the devil. Jesus has strongly rebuked them, showing He is perfect in keeping with the law and that what He has done could only have been done by the power of God.

Jesus is now teaching the multitudes using parables so that, as it says in Matthew 13:11-17, He could reveal truth to His followers while at the same time concealing that truth from His enemies though both heard the same thing.

Jesus' followers gain understanding through both the ministry of the Holy Spirit who enlightens their minds and the further explanations that Jesus gives to them in private. Jesus' enemies lose even what understanding they did have of the Old Testament prophecies because they are limited to their own wisdom and the devil blinds their minds to the truth.

The difference between the two parables is that in the first, the person stumbles onto the treasure; while in the second, the merchant had been diligently looking for it. This is the way in which salvation comes to individuals. Some have diligently been searching for the truth before they find it in Jesus Christ. Others have just been living their lives without much thought to eternal things when they, from the human point of view, stumble into Christ and find the answer to the question that they had not even been asking – what is life all about?

The "treasures" and "pearls" of lasting value are the things of God: the love of family and friends, the support of community, the sense of fulfilment from serving and giving for the sake of others. In order to attain such treasure, we must take the risk of the speculator and "sell off" our own interests, ambitions and agendas in order to free ourselves to embrace the lasting values of the compassion, love and reconciliation of God.

The Gospel “pearl” of great price transcends logic, efficiency, and self-interest; and the Gospel “treasure” is the joy and wholeness one experiences in imitating the humble compassion and forgiveness of Christ.

In the parable of the dragnet, Jesus calls us to embrace the vision of God that seeks out the good and nurturing, the right and just in all things amid the “junk” of life.

Amen.