

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 KGS 3:5,7-12

ROM 8:28-30

MT 13:44-52

For the past three weeks we've heard parables from the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel—the parable of the sower, the yeast, the mustard seed, the wheat and the weeds and now the buried treasure in a field, the pearl of great price and the net thrown into the sea.

All of them tell us something about the kingdom of heaven. For some the meanings are more obvious than others, some are more poignant, but all of them are mysterious. Because that is the nature of a parable (or a metaphor). Even the Lord says, “the kingdom of heaven is *like*...” Which means that the kingdom of heaven is not the *same* as a seed or a pearl or a buried treasure, it is *like* these things. So, there is room for interpretation.

It's interesting that Jesus only provides an interpretation of the parable of the sower. All the other parables he leaves open-ended. Perhaps the redactors left them out. Perhaps to the people of that time the meaning was clear and an interpretation was therefore unnecessary. As in the passage we just heard when Jesus asked them, “Do you understand all these things?” and they replied, “Yes.” Or perhaps, they didn't really understand and Jesus knew that but trusted that they would figure it out on their own.

Either way, without a canonical interpretation, we are left to do just that, of course, with the help of the Church. It would have been much easier if Jesus had taught like a true Rabbi and gave direct and explicit explanations of the law with clear and precise directives instead of telling ambiguous stories. Then we would have no doubt what he was trying to say and everything would be clearly defined and there would be no need for debate or argument or confusion.

We wouldn't be in the mess we are in today where everyone believes whatever he or she wants to believe. Each can create his or her own reality and arrive at his or her own conclusions based on whatever criteria he or she wishes to devise or follow. And if there is one particular issue that he or she is particularly passionate about then he or she can shift everything through the lens of that one particular issue and create a whole set of expectations and demands centered on just that one issue. Hopefully, you realize now that I am being sarcastic and mocking of our relativistic culture that rejects divine Truth. By no means am I condoning or affirming this way of thinking. In fact, I am very much opposed to it.

I have preached many times about divine Truth and that it is our responsibility as disciples to conform to the Truth that God reveals to us through sacred scripture, through the Tradition of the Church and, most importantly, through his only begotten Son, our

Lord, Jesus Christ instead of creating our own truth. We have an obligation to do the work of knowing the mind of God (even though there is no way we could ever know Him completely). But I also believe that we must meet people where they are and that just because we say something once (or a thousand times) doesn't always mean that they will believe what we tell them.

And perhaps this is why Jesus spoke in parables. Stories which use the ordinary material of life carry more weight (for some) than definitions and detailed explanations. Mostly because they employ familiar images and ideas, and when it comes to theology, they link the mystery of God with the reality of this world. And isn't that what the Incarnation is all about? God becoming man. Divinity and humanity joined together in the person of Jesus Christ. And isn't that what our life as Christians is all about too? Making sense of the world around us in light of the Paschal Mystery. Our human flesh united with God's grace in the Sacraments. Isn't that what we mean when we say that the Holy Spirit dwells in us and empowers us with gifts of knowledge, wisdom, understanding, counsel, fear of the Lord, piety and fortitude? Isn't that why we never want to do anything to separate ourselves from the Body of Christ, the Church, and the Eucharist, so we can receive Him, body, blood, soul and divinity, into our own bodies?

Learning to live with mystery and a lack of complete understanding in all things is an essential part of faith. None of us has full certainty. That's why we have faith. That is why we trust in God who is greater than we are in every way while we still try to comprehend his mystery without having all the answers.

There are too many people (and the number is growing) who think they know what is right and have decided how the world ought to be leaving little room for interpretation or Christ or the Church. They are like the Pharisees who teach clearly and explicitly and live by the "letter of their own law" but cannot not see the presence of God in their midst. God became man and dwelled among us in order to redeem us from our sins and he told stories about the kingdom of heaven with images like a mustard seed and yeast mixed into dough and a net thrown into the sea to reveal the deeper Truth that his love is far bigger than anything we can imagine, more valuable than anything we can possess on this earth and available to everyone—if we listen, if we truly listen to him as if what he says is like a buried treasure we find in a field and we sell everything and buy that field.

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