

Bishop's Reflection – 17th Sunday

The old man and his wife had died years ago, and their small piece of land had gone to weeds. Though listed for sale, it was more commonly used as a foot path, trampled on by a thousand feet.

A stranger came by one day, who saw the property in a different light. He had studied the habits of past generations, and knew they were more prone to bury their treasures than to entrust them to a banker. He made some inquiries regarding the childless couple. He was even seen with shovel in hand. His suspicions satisfied, he bought the worthless piece of land and walked away with the treasure buried underneath.

The kingdom of heaven is like a field, trampled by many, but valued by few. How many people have simply walked away from what was shared with them, never to dig any deeper? How many times have we not been among them, when we held God in little regard and ignored God's will and great invitation?

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field. There are some people who know all about it. It is not that they are not telling; they are simply not heard. The Apostles who left their fishing nets lying on the shore, the Tax Collector who left his booth and followed Christ, the Saints, both rich and poor, who took the time to dig deeper and found true joy.

The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. Whereas most of us settle for beads and trinkets, there are those who are looking for truth, goodness and wisdom. Take Solomon as an example. In today's First Reading we find him asleep and dreaming. "Ask me anything," The Lord tells him, "and I shall grant it"; the proverbial Genie in the bottle, released.

By-passing both fame and fortune, and not content with having his enemies cower at his feet, Solomon asks for wisdom as the gift he needs most, wisdom to rule in uprightness and truth. And, so impressed with the young man's request, the Lord grants his request and promises all the other things as well.

But that is not the end of Solomon's story, and it is important that even the wise person take heed. King Solomon may well have been the wisest person that ever lived, but he died an old fool. Led astray by his own passions and possessions, his heart grew far away from God and his kingdom was set to be divided.

The kingdom of heaven may well be like a merchant in search of fine pearls, but, for many, the opposite may also be true. As Fr. James Mallon likes to point out, the fine pearl may well have been bought, but it was also sold; woe to the one who sold it so cheaply, never fully realizing the value of what was his. Imagine the horror on realizing the truth; eternity could not contain the full extent of his grief.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea." Jesus continues his teaching by telling us that death does not discriminate between good and bad. No one is spared of its eternal embrace. Some are found favourable, others are not. Some are collected, others are thrown away. Whereas, in the first parables, the discernment and choice is ours to make, the focus shifts to God's discernment and the reward that comes to those who are truly wise.