

## Homily for The Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A)(26/07/20)

Once again this is a Sunday of parables, with three more parables of finding: treasure, a pearl, and a miraculous catch of unexpected fish. I think we could describe them as three parables of a restless heart, a heart that is searching. Each of them is about a slightly different sort of search. In the first parable a man finds treasure in a field. There is nothing to suggest that he is looking for treasure, but he seems to just stumble upon it and, having done so, is bowled over with delight at what he finds. He has found something that he didn't know he wanted, but when he stumbles on it he discovers just how much he really does want it. In the second parable the story is slightly different. The man is looking for pearls; finding a pearl is no surprise, because that is what he is looking for. He knew he wanted something, but until he found it he didn't realize just how much. Now he surely does. The third story is different again. The fishermen know what they are looking for, they know how much they want it, but until they find it they do not realize quite how much they will find. It is not just a big catch of fish; it is a haul of all kinds, a haul that challenges them to decide what they really want and what they do not.

One person is not really looking for anything; one is looking for one thing but finds something even better; the fishermen find what they are looking for, but are challenged by it to decide what they want and what they don't. These are parables of searching, parables of the restless heart, parables of the longing for God and the nostalgia for Heaven that is planted deep within each one of us.

In the first two parables the finder sells everything they own so that they can have the treasure, have the pearl. The possessions that they already own are not of absolute value, they are a tool, a means to an end: they are what allow them to get hold of the treasure and the pearl. As the Collect says, they use the good things that pass so that they can hold fast to the good things that endure. They are the key that opens the door to the treasure house, not the treasure itself. The restless heart of the seeker knows that what he has is good, but also knows that he wants more. What he has is not enough, because in the end it will pass, it will be gone: might there be something more than this, something that will last?

How do we tell the difference between the things that pass and the ones that endure? This is an important question, because if we don't address it we condemn ourselves to a life of searching. The longing for God, longing for the one good that is absolute and cannot ever be worth shedding, that is planted deep within each one of us will make sure that we can never be entirely satisfied with a life based on things that pass.

Celebrating Mass among what seems like the wreckage of the world as it used to be is, for me, moving beyond words. With so much gone or changed beyond recognition, here I can still stand, saying the words and doing the actions that Christ has promised will make him present. This is the pearl of great price: to be able to stand at the unchanging centre of the world where Christ says, and will

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always say, 'My love for you is eternal, and nothing will stand between my heart and yours'. Everything else can be dispensed with, but not that. In the silence of communion as it is today, as the Sacred Host is held up for you, he comes to you exactly as you need him most: The Love of Christ; the Hope of Christ; the Peace of Christ; the Joy of Christ; the Mercy of Christ; the Healing of Christ; the Passion of Christ; the Understanding of Christ; the Gentleness of Christ. When things seem hard, or confusing, or dark, we might remember the words of today's psalm: 'Let your love come and I shall live'. And now the pearl is ours.