

## I. Homily – 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Parables

### II. The treasure hidden in the field. The pearl of great price. The fish caught in the net.

A. What do they have in common?

B. Something hidden reveals God.

1. The treasure is hidden in the earth.
2. The pearl is hidden and grows in the dark recesses of the oyster.
3. The fish are not seen until they are brought up from the depths of the sea by a net.

C. It is indeed strange that something hidden helps us understand. Even the people of Jesus time protested: “Lord, why do you speak with parables and not speak plainly.”

### III. We have been hearing a great many parables of late.

A. Not only these three but also the parable of the sower and the parable of the Wheat and the weeds.

B. What is a parable and why doesn't our Lord just speak plainly?

1. It seems defeating the purpose of teaching to make the concepts hard to find.
2. Isn't it easier to speak plainly?
  - a)  $2+2 = 4$ .
  - b) *The grass is green.*
  - c) *The rain is wet.*
  - d) *These are clear and no one can deny it.*
3. So why doesn't he just say that we must put the treasure of the Kingdom of God first in our life? Why does he make us figure it out?

#### **IV. Solomon can help us understand.**

##### **A. Solomon could have asked for some very clear and concrete things.**

1. He could have asked for riches or the defeat of his enemies or a long life.
2. But, he didn't. Our Lord rejoiced because he asked for Wisdom.
3. Wisdom in the Old Testament is not a trait or even a virtue. Wisdom is something far more profound and deep.
4. Wisdom is in fact a person.
5. When we encounter a person, we are not just encountering a list of traits or tasks or commands.
6. We encounter something that goes far beyond the facts saved on a hard drive.
7. A person has an intellect and a free will. A person is infinite while a piece of paper is finite.

##### **B. Further, the person whom Wisdom is, is God. Solomon is asking for the Grace of God.**

1. While he is faithful to God, he is wise.
2. When he is unfaithful to God, everything in his kingdom goes awry.

#### **V. Same thing with a parable.**

##### **A. A parable does not simply communicate a fact or lesson to be figured out by our cleverness.**

##### **B. It is an encounter with a person that goes far beyond that which could be communicated by any one statement of fact.**

##### **C. Understanding the parable does not require cleverness as much as it requires faith.**

1. When I was in philosophy, we had a professor who had been a marine and had converted after having been injured. He encountered a Catholic priest who was chaplain in the hospital and through the ministry of that priest he would later convert.

2. As we struggled with the rigors of Natural Philosophy, he would regularly counsel us: "You need to let it soak!"

3. The understanding came from allowing the material to sit with us over time and we slowly began to recognize the truth of what we saw in the world and soon it became a part of us.

4. The parable takes this idea a step further.

D. Our Lord told us that he teaches in parables in the hope that the hardhearted will see the truth, embrace it and begin the process of conversion.

**VI. How does this happen? Well...as we "let it soak" we begin to see that there is more than meets the eye.**

A. The parable is not simply about a man finding a treasure in a field.

1. Just as the treasure is hidden in the field and it requires that the man not be in his room sleeping to find it, so in the parable does it require that we seek the truth in order that it be found.

2. A parable does not hand us the truth. Christ knew that in his parables the hiddenness itself would entice the hearer to search for its meaning.

3. Ultimately, the hiddenness of the parable reflects the reality that Christ knew that essential in faith is believing that which is not seen. In order to find that which is not seen, one must be looking for it.

B. So, let's take an example: Perhaps, the first parable in today's gospel is not simply about the treasure but about the treasure and the field.

1. The field is exactly that field in the parable of the sower which produced much fruit or the field in the parable of the wheat and the weeds after harvest.

2. It not only brought about life in abundance, but the field now hides a treasure in the depth of the earth.

a) *One commentator points out that the chief agent in the parables is always God Himself who from the very beginning of time hid great mysteries that Jesus Christ would later reveal.*

b) *He sees in the hidden treasure in the field, the reality of the Incarnation that Christ who is God came hidden as man and it was his humanity that revealed his divinity.*

c) *Indeed the greatest treasure of the Father, Immanuel, God with us, was hidden by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin.*

d) *The commentator states clearly: "...the treasure in question is the mystery of God giving himself to us in Christ."*

**C. Perhaps the parable of the treasure and the field is not simply about the treasure and the field... but also the one finding the treasure.**

1. Before the man who finds the treasure can reveal it, he must go, sell all that he owns, give up his very self and buy that field.

a) *You might say that he must pay the price for redeeming the field before the identity of the treasure is revealed.*

b) *There is a time and place for the revelation.*

2. Further, we do not know how the person first went about finding this treasure, whether he stepped on it and heard it under his feet or whether he was plowing the field...

3. But what we do not know is that he was not just sitting in his room waiting for the treasure to be revealed to him. He was out searching...

**D. So, the field, the treasure and the man are inseparable.**

1. The man could not simply remove the treasure from the field and run off with it.

2. Once, he found the treasure, he could not abandon it.

3. He would change his whole life to spend it near and even a part of the treasure he had found in the field.

**VII. When we invest ourselves in the parable not only as an intellectual exercise but an exercise of our whole being, then the parable makes a change in us and opens the heart a little more to the work of God's grace.**

**A. One commentator explained this about parables: “Understanding his parables is one way of ‘seeing God’, of penetrating God’s thoughts, God’s ways—a blessed vision he has promised in the Beatitudes.” “But parables are the beginning and not the end of a revelation. Parables, says Jesus, are a means used by God’s mercy to reach the obtuse and hard-hearted, to give them something they can grasp that will perhaps initiate in them a process of conversion.”**

**B. Jesus is more a physician than a philosopher and so he is communicating not just a concept but Himself.**

**C. He did not just teach. He gave his life.**

**D. He did not just convey a concept, he gives us his body, blood, soul and divinity.**

**E. He makes us not just members of his congregation but members of His Mystical Body.**

## **VIII. Conclusion**

**A. God did not hide Christ, His only Son, in our midst so that we would not find Him.**

**B. He uses His hiddenness so that we might search for Him and come to believe that which is not seen.**

**C. He wants us with our whole being to embrace that which is unseen so that we might be united in the one being who is beyond our sight: not a thing, but Three persons in one God.**

**1. So that, in the Eucharist, we will see not a piece of bread but Christ...**

**2. So that, in our fellow human beings, we will see not a human being...but an immortal soul created in God’s image.**

**3. So that, in His Church, we see not an institution, but His Mystical Body.**