

Homily for Trinity VII – 2020

Today, Our Lord tells us three short parables that each begins with the same introductory remark... ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is like’.. a treasure hidden in a field.. a pearl of great price and a net of full of fish being sorted in to the good and the bad. I’d love to speak in some depth about all three just as I’d love to speak in depth about the term, ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’. However the constraints of time make doing all of that quite impossible. That being the case, let us consider very briefly the term ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’ and then have a look into the parable of the Pearl of Great Value.

A study of the phrases in the Lord’s Prayer clearly shows that the Kingdom of Heaven comes on earth when people earnestly and sincerely seek to conform their lives to the revealed will of God. The axiomatic phrase being, ‘Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’ To enter the kingdom of heaven is to accept and do God’s will.

For every single man and woman of faith, accepting and doing God’s will, for all of us, will entail giving up certain aims and ambitions which may be very dear; abandoning certain habits and ways of life which are, almost always, very difficult to lay down; and actively taking up discipline and self-denial (something that is never easy for any of us).

The very heart of learning to do God’s will is to learn to grasp our ‘crosses’; we must take up our cross and follow Jesus. There is absolutely no other way to find peace of mind and heart in this life and the hope of glory in the next. No other way at all.

Let this thought stay in your minds, dear people: the Kingdom of heaven will be born in you and in me when we take up our crosses, lay aside whatever it is that we cling to that keeps us apart from God, and sincerely do all we can to conform our lives to the will of God as revealed in Scripture and especially in the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Turning our thoughts, now, to the Pearl of Great Value, in the ancient world pearls were considered to be one of the most beautiful and mysterious things of nature. In our Lord’s time the pearls would have come from the shores of the Red Sea and from far-off Britain itself. Merchants did indeed scour markets seeking pearls of surpassing beauty.

This brief parable is, once again, a story that people of our Lord’s time could relate to, even if the meaning was lost on many. There are three important points to be made here.

First. The kingdom of Heaven is something of great beauty. The loveliest thing there is in this life is to conform ourselves to Jesus Christ and sincerely follow him by humbly obeying the revealed will of God. To know and do the will of God is never some grey, grim, agonising thing. It is a beautiful thing. Doing the will of God will indeed set us apart from the world in certain respects. Nevertheless, beyond the discipline, beyond the sacrifice, beyond the self-denial, beyond the cross there lies the supreme joy of true peace of heart, true beauty of life. The only way to those true and lasting joys – that perfect beauty – is to accept and do the will of God.

Second. There are many pearls, they are all beautiful, but there is only one of truly great value. The world is full of lovely and worthwhile things. The human heart can find ennoblement in music, art and literature. The triumphs of the human spirit are indeed many and great. We certainly can, and do, find great beauty in human relationships and in the humanitarian service of others. Thanks be to God that we do, but all these things and a myriad of other joys, beautiful though they

most certainly are, are secondary to the supreme beauty that lies in the acceptance of the will of God. Our willing obedience that makes us friends of God is the Pearl of Great Value.

Third. The merchant spent his life searching for the Pearl of Great Value. In the daily activity of his life's business he conducted his ongoing search. When he came upon the object of his search he unhesitatingly did what was necessary to secure to precious object. When God reveals His will to us, whether it be in an unexpected flash or as the result of an ongoing, diligent and even protracted search, one must seize the moment and unhesitatingly grasp the revelation.

Finally, I'd like to humbly suggest to you that since the last Supper itself and right to this very day, the Pearl of Great Value is well within the grasp of faithful Christians of every age. We are so like the merchant in just about every respect. On our journeys through life we are looking for God, seeking His will, desiring a sign of His love, needing His closeness, craving His acceptance, yearning for His forgiveness. That looking, seeking, desiring, needing, craving and yearning finds its satisfaction in the great and beautiful pearl of the church – the Holy Mass.

You are looking for God.... In the Holy Mass, Jesus Christ Himself is here.

You are seeking to know His will for you.... The Holy Mass opens and expounds the scriptures especially the words of Jesus, every single day of the year.

You desire a sign of His love.... the Holy Mass is the cross of Christ which is the greatest expression of love there ever has been and ever will be.

You need to feel His closeness to you.... In the holy Mass we eat Him in the sacrament of His Body and Blood.

You crave His acceptance..... In the Holy Mass we unite ourselves with the one, true, pure offering that is acceptable to the Father - the offering of Jesus on the Cross - He is our peace, our hope and our salvation.

You yearn for His forgiveness..... In the Holy Mass it is given. It is Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Above all else, the Holy Mass proclaims forgiveness of sins by Christ's efficacious offering of himself as an expiation for the sins of the whole world.

Everything we need, to help us come close to God, to know His will and to have the grace and strength do it – everything, is present in the Holy Mass, the pinnacle and summit of the life of the church. Let nothing come between you and this deep and profound truth. Let your eyes of faith and the ears of your hearts appreciate anew today that Jesus bestowed upon His church the Pearl of Great Value when He said to the Apostles at the Last Supper.... 'do this in remembrance of me'.