

Treasure in Clay – Even Song Homily

In 1947 a Bedouin shepherd boy called Muhammed was shepherding his goats on the Western Shore of the Dead Sea. One of the boy's goats had strayed and to follow it he had to climb a steep cliff. Passing a cave in a rock face, he threw a stone inside; and when he heard the sound of breakage of clay, he was frightened and came back with his friend and entered the cave and found several large clay Jars; inside the jars, wrapped in a length of linen, was one of the greatest of modern archaeological discoveries: the Dead Sea Scrolls!

The two young shepherds had stumbled on a marvellous treasure in clay jars, but they did not realise it. They tried to sell the scrolls in Bethlehem to a merchant, but he refused to give them the twenty pounds they were asking for. It wasn't until the four scrolls came into the hands of the Syrian Patriarch in Jerusalem and three scrolls were smuggled out of the county to the USA, that the treasure trove came into light. Among the ancient manuscripts was the rule of the Qumran Community and fragments of Scripture, copies of the Book of Isaiah, copies of Deuteronomy and copies of the Psalms and other books of the Hebrew bible written in biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. A Carbon 44 test on the linen wrapping of the scrolls gave them the median date of 33 AD.

The Isaiah Scroll, found relatively intact, is 1000 years older than any previously known copy of Isaiah. In fact, the scrolls are the oldest group of Old Testament manuscripts ever found, and thus is an invaluable treasure! The irony was that the shepherd boys who found these had no idea what they held in their hands, they would have made a fortune had they known what they discovered or if someone was willing to explain to them what it was.

By the virtue of our Baptism and incorporation into the Life of Christ we have all stumbled on true treasure that we have not fully appreciated or

understood. Like the two Bedouin shepherd boys we struggle to appreciate our find wrapped in the ordinary things of our lives. This is what St. Paul refers to in our Second Lesson, in 2 Corinthians 4:7 – *“But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies”*

The treasure we carry is the grace of Christ, the new life made available through the dying and rising of Jesus, and the jars are deeply flawed, fragile, weak and morally suspect people who have received that grace but who are endeavoring to live that new life. Sounds Familiar? It’s our story... It is not just our individual story but also the story of the church. *John Henry Newman observed that “The whole course of Christianity... is but one series of troubles and disorders. Every century is like every other, and to those who live in it seems worse than all times before it. The church is ever ailing... Religion seems ever expiring, schisms dominant, the light of truth dim, its adherents scattered. The cause of Christ is ever in its last agony.”*

Treasure of Christ found in the Sacraments and the Word is given to us in the Spirit of God and we carry within us in clay jars made of ourselves – the Grace of Christ. We are invited and commissioned to carry Christ into the world. The good news is that the Treasure is still available for each of us, through the mercy of God. Thus, the apostle Paul says *“So we do not lose heart. Even through our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal”*