

Homily: 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020

Over the last couple of weeks we've heard in the Gospel several parables about the Kingdom of God. We've heard of the sower who went out to sow with mixed success, of the wheat and the darnel that must be allowed to grow side-by-side until the harvest, and today we hear three more images which help us to understand the Kingdom of Heaven. One of the reasons our Lord uses parables is to give us images of a reality which is not visible to our senses. We cannot see the Kingdom of God, but it is already a reality in our midst. These parables help us to appreciate what the Lord is already doing amongst us.

And perhaps today's parables emphasise the *hidden* nature of the Kingdom. Jesus tells us that it is like treasure buried, hidden, in a field. The lucky man who finds it goes away and sacrifices everything he has ever owned in order to raise the money to buy the field. Unlike everyone else, he knows the field contains something greater than the money he already had. This man has a secret: he sees something that is not visible; he understands a deeper truth.

The merchant in the parable also has a knowledge which is not given to everyone. He has a discerning eye – he knows which pearls are valuable, and which are really valuable. He finds one which he knows is worth more than all he owns, and quickly goes and gives up everything for this pearl. How many times in the Gospel does the Lord ask people to give up their possessions, their jobs, their old way of life, and follow Him? When we read about, or even encounter, someone who has done this, we think they have made an amazing sacrifice. Actually, they haven't – it's just that they see clearly the value of what they receive from the Lord, and know that it's worth so much more than the things they already have. He is calling them to give up everything else so that their joy may be complete.

In today's first reading Solomon is offered any gift he would like from the Lord. He asks for wisdom – in a way, this response is a proof of how wise he already was! Reading this passage today alongside the Gospel is an invitation for us to be wise, to be discerning, to see what is of real value. The most important things are often the most hidden. By the light of faith, through our prayer, Jesus teaches us to see what is genuinely important in our lives and to find joy in what is really life-giving.

So let's pray for wisdom. Actually – if we do this – we're a bit like Solomon. We're already wise. You are already wise! Wise enough to know that here there is something precious; wise enough to know that faith is a wonderful gift, not a burden; wise enough to at least catch a glimpse of the reality of God and the life He offers, even though it is hidden from most. You are wise enough to perceive the invisible grace which flows from God in this Mass – the grace of His presence here in the Eucharist, a presence hidden to those who do not have the eyes of faith; the grace of His Word; the grace of the communion which we share as members of His Body. If you weren't wise in this way, you wouldn't want to participate in the Mass.

If I were to go into the street and offer someone a hoard of treasure, as long as they believed me they would snap it up very quickly. If I offered them a field, maybe the reception would be less enthusiastic. To people who don't have faith, they look at the Church and see a field, I suppose. Not very exciting; maybe even a waste of land. But to us who have encountered God, we know what is hidden in this field – a treasure beyond any price. Let us pray for the grace to believe this more and more deeply, to see the hidden realities which God makes known to us, and joyfully to put aside all that prevents us from receiving this treasure in its fulness.

Fr Andrew

