

Today's Readings – the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The themes of today's readings are wisdom and true treasure. The first reading is from the first Book of Kings. The first and second Books of Kings recount the history of the Israelite monarchy from the reign of Solomon (961 BC) to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Captivity in 587 BC. It was probably written sometime after 561 BC. In this reading, God "appeared to Solomon in a dream at night". This is a common scenario in the Old Testament whenever the Lord wants to communicate with an individual. It also extends into the New Testament. The warnings given to Joseph and to the Magi occurred in dreams. In this instance, God asks Solomon what he would like. Solomon could have asked for anything - power, riches, or a long life. Instead he asked for the most precious gift and a true treasure, wisdom. God was very pleased with Solomon and granted him his request. The prayer of Solomon should be the prayer of all those in positions of authority – "Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong".

The Gospel reading is a continuation of last week's Gospel reading from Matthew. This reading is divided into three sections. In the first section, there are two parables comparing the Kingdom of Heaven to valuable treasures. In the second section, there is a third parable about the last judgment. In the third section, we have the story of the scribe. In the first parable, the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a treasure buried in a field. In Palestine in the time of Jesus, it was not uncommon for people to bury their valuables as a way of protecting them. Sometimes they died before they recovered their valuables or just forgot where they buried them. In this parable, a person stumbles upon one of these treasures and goes to great lengths to secure it. Note that he makes no effort to find the rightful owner.

In the second parable, a merchant searches for that perfect pearl, a treasure of great value. When he finds it, he "sells all that he has and buys it". What Jesus was telling His disciple was simply this – they, as we Christians today, at time will have to take drastic measures to attain the Kingdom of Heaven. The third parable is again about the Kingdom of Heaven but this time it is compared not to a treasure but to a net cast into the sea. All different types of fish are caught. They are then separated into the good and the bad with the bad being thrown away. This is similar to last week's parable about the wheat and the weeds, which are separated at the harvest. Again this is a reference to the Last Judgment. The last section is the story of the scribe. The scribe, in Matthew's time, was a teacher, who knew both the teachings of Jesus (the new) and the teachings of the law and the prophets (the old) and how the "old" was fulfilled by the "new".

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