

“The Kingdom of Heaven is ...”

WE HAVE TODAY the third and final set of readings centred on the parables of the Kingdom from Matthew chapter 13.

The kingdom is fundamentally about salvation. The kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God’s plan of salvation in all its fullness.

- The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field,
- Like a mustard seed,
- is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with measures of flour,
- Like a treasure hidden in a field,
- Like a merchant looking for fine pearls,
- Like a dragnet cast into the sea.

The first and second parables are in effect saying that to know God and to live according to the Gospel are the most precious things in life. Through Jesus and the Gospel we come to know and understand what’s the real meaning of life, what are the most important things in life.

It is in this context that we can take a look at the First Reading from the First Book of Kings. The young King Solomon is told by God, “Ask what you would like me to give you.” It is a question that Jesus sometimes asks in the Gospel and he is asking it of me in today’s Mass. How am I going to answer? What do I most want to have or to be right now? ***What you would like me to give you?*** We can make a good guess at what a lot of people, including ourselves, would be likely to ask. For many it would be likely to have some connection with money or material security. What did Solomon ask for? “Give your servant a heart to understand how to discern between God and evil, for who could govern this people of yours that is so great?”

In other words, he asked ***for wisdom and discernment***. Wisdom is much more than knowing a lot of things or having prestigious university degrees. Being endowed with wisdom is much more than being just a morally very good person. Wisdom gives an in-sight into what’s truly important in life, an awareness of the meaning and purpose of living, of what really matters. It is an understanding of where our real wellbeing and

happiness lies. **That is indeed a pearl of great price, price-less in every sense of the word.**

Solomon asked to be able to see. A constant theme running through the Gospel is the healing of blind people and of the incurable blindness of those who thought they could see. The true disciple is the one who begs Jesus, “Lord, that I may see.” The one who sees is the one who has wisdom. The one who has wisdom knows how to cope with the situations of life whether they bring ease or difficulty, pain or joy.

For much of the time, we are chasing false treasures, mainly money, status and pleasure. For much of the time we are locked into the past – full of nostalgia or regrets, or focused on the future – not yet achieved longings and desires, or depressing fears and anxieties. Meanwhile the enriching present passes us by and the treasure is never discovered and the really valuable pearl is never found.

The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea, reminds us that the Church and even the Kingdom in the process of its evolution is full of all kinds of people. Our Church is a Church of both saints and sinners. And we might say it is primarily for

sinners. “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). The role of the Church is to accept into its bosom “the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame” (Luke 14:21) and lead them to the treasure and the pearl of great price.

When Jesus had finished speaking about his parables, he turned to his disciples and asked them, "Have you understood all this?" Jesus asks us the same question. If we want to understand the meaning and significance of the parables for our daily lives, then we must reflect and think through what the Lord is saying to us through his instruction. The Holy Spirit is our guide and teacher who helps us to grow in understanding of God's word in the Scriptures.

Judgment is for later. Right now, it is for us to use the time given to us to go in search of the treasure and the pearl of great price, of the gift to be able to identify, with Jesus, the really true, the good and the beautiful, and to help others too in the same search.