

Cycle A 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I, 1 Kgs 3:5, 7-12

The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. God said, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you." Solomon answered: "O LORD, my God, you have made me, your servant, king to succeed my father David; but I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act. I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong. For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?"

The LORD was pleased that Solomon made this request. So God said to him: "Because you have asked for this-- not for a long life for yourself, nor for riches, nor for the life of your enemies, but for understanding so that you may know what is right-- I do as you requested. I give you a heart so wise and understanding that there has never been anyone like you up to now, and after you there will come no one to equal you."

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130

R. (97a) Lord, I love your commands.

I have said, O LORD, that my part is to keep your words. The law of your mouth is to me more precious than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Let your kindness comfort me according to your promise to your servants. Let your compassion come to me that I may live, for your law is my delight.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

For I love your command more than gold, however fine. For in all your precepts I go forward; every false way I hate.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Wonderful are your decrees; therefore I observe them. The revelation of your words sheds light, giving understanding to the simple.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Reading II, Rom 8:28-30

Brothers and sisters: We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified.

Gospel, Mt 13:44-52 or 13:44-46

Jesus said to his disciples: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

"Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." And he replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old."

A few years ago you may have read about Randy Pausch who died at age 47. Dr Pausch became famous for his “last lecture” at Carnegie Mellon University, while living with and dying of pancreatic cancer. He gave his last lecture “Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams” on September 18, 2007. It celebrated his life, the one he had dreamed of since childhood, instead of concentrating on the impending death that he didn’t know was just 10 months away. The moving and often humorous talk recounted his efforts to achieve his childhood dreams, such as becoming a professional football player, experiencing zero gravity, and becoming a Disney Imagineer, those people who create the Disney World attractions. He shared his insights on helping others enable their dreams, finding the good in other people, working hard to overcome the “brick wall” obstacles in our lives and living generously. Dr. Pausch said that he could look back and say, “pretty much any time I got the chance to do anything cool, I tried to grab for it. And that’s where my solace came from. We don’t beat the reaper by living longer; we beat the reaper by living well and living fully.”

Today’s Scriptures tell us that God loves us so much that he gives us a very special, priceless gift, the Kingdom of Heaven, not because we earned it or deserve it, but purely because he loves us. All we have to do is accept it. We could take it’s benefits and run, but as Christians what we have been given, we must now give to others.

In today’s short Gospel, Jesus tells us parables about the buried treasure and the pearl of great price, something or someone in life we find that is of such value that we are willing to “sell all we have” to obtain it. Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a very human experience of finding something so valuable that it shapes the rest of our life. Nothing is of any value in comparison to what we have found. But as always there is a “catch” in the parables....and, it is not obvious. If we think it is obvious and clear, then we are probably missing the point. Jesus’ parables are meant to challenge our way of thinking about the world and God’s desire for this world.

In today's parables it's easy to focus on the treasure and the pearl of great price in a way that is about our personal desires. "What is it in my life that I consider so valuable that I would be willing to reorient my life for this, sell all that I have for this one thing or someone?" Even the most unselfish response: "The things I want are an end to war, a cure for cancer, health and happiness for my family"; these wishes would be missing the point of the parables. What Jesus says is that the Kingdom of Heaven is God's desire, that is what is more precious, more valuable than anything else, and it is worth selling all we have to receive it. This is certainly what Jesus did. For Jesus the pearl of great price was his relationship with his "abba" and his passion for God's dream for the world. Nothing else was of any value to Jesus. He was so alive in God that everything had to be in alignment with God's Will, God's desire for mercy, compassion, and justice.

Nothing in the world can compare to the joy brought by the Kingdom of Heaven. It is a priceless gift given to us by God, all we have to do is accept the Good News that the Risen Christ is alive in His Word, in the Eucharist and in us. As followers of Christ when we realize that the treasure is ours, like Solomon in the 1st reading, we change, and then respond to God's blessings by serving others. God gives the precious Kingdom of Heaven to everyone, to the saints and the sinners, and then He watches to see how it affects our lives and what we do with it.

We may never know what impact God's love has when we serve others. Dr. Pausch said, "like Moses, I have seen the Promised Land but never will live in it, but that's okay." After his death, his wife Jai said her husband was proud that that his last lecture and book "inspired people to revisit their priorities, particularly their relationships with their children." I highly recommend you view the last lecture at the Carnegie Mellon or TED Talk web sites....

https://www.ted.com/talks/randy_pausch_really_achieving_your_childhood_dreams

you will want to hear him explain the real reason for his last lecture. It wasn't the obvious legacy of the influence of his body of work that may impact how our children learn computer programming in future years. It was a special roadmap for some special people in his life....his 3 children.

I was intending to finish my homily at this point. But with all this talk about the Kingdom of Heaven and enabling dreams, I remembered that in a few weeks a special friend will be visiting us here at St. Brendan's. Father Meres the pastor of Our Lady of Fatima is coming to update us on the progress in Bassin-Zim, Haiti. We won't be disappointed with the impact our support has made, in fact it's such a miracle that I sense they are finally being nudged beyond survival mode. Not many of us realize that Fr. Meres' vision, his dream, his legacy, has always been to build a school. I am sure we will hear more about the over 100 students in the 4 grades that are now being taught in the Parish Hall we financed. And now we are taking the next steps to enable his dream...the land has been purchased, and this weekend Dave and Sandi Smith along with Deacon Bill Monahan are in Maryland attending a Rotary International meeting...we are praying they return with a \$50,000 grant to begin building the school. It will be up to us to finish the job...God's Will be done.