

## **Reflection: 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time (year A), July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

All the readings today highlight the incomparable value of the gifts of God. In the First Reading Solomon asks for Wisdom before riches, long-life or victory over his enemies, while the psalm sings that the joy of being faithful to the law is worth more than fine gold or a thousand silver pieces. The Second reading speaks of discipleship and being conformed to the image of God's son and the joy of being justified – which means being declared innocent before God or forgiven.

But the Gospel particularly demands a response: what is the Kingdom of Heaven worth in our lives, and for those that have found it, what are we willing to do to keep this treasure?

What is the Kingdom of God? Biblical scholars aren't sure and really it can refer to anything the person interpreting it wants it to be, and usually this interpretation centers around their agenda or interest – and I'm not saying that to accuse anyone of being seedy or conspiratorial. But we can boil it down to three levels. The social, individual and communal.

So first, the social level, which brings us to Catholic Social Teaching and this is my background. The Kingdom of Heaven is the vision that keeps those of us committed to social justice going. We want a different world, a better world,

where the vision in the Magnificat is fulfilled – the hungry are filled and the mighty are humbled - in terms of fair government, just economics and empowered local communities. Writing in 1990, Fr. John Coleman (one of the major thinkers in the field of Catholic Social Thought) stated that Catholic Social Teaching has become a tradition of the Democratic Welfare State. Others maintain a different vision or come to a different understanding.

But I really do not think that's what these parables, or Jesus's ministry itself, is focused on. In many ways it's the opposite. The Kingdom of Heaven is within, and that no matter what the economic or political order of the day, we all have access to the love and grace of God in our hearts. Whether we are poor and struggling, or living life luxuriously, we can all find this treasure. More often than not, this treasure comes easiest to those who suffer and are poor. This has been a major transformative challenge for me: forcing me to reign in my politics and desire and to begin cultivating that personal relationship with God and searching for "that peace which the world cannot give."

Now, I say that to say this, there is always a balance that needs to be found, and you will certainly never hear from me this kind of individualistic understanding of

our faith, or what is often called solipsism – that the only thing that is important is ourselves as individual or the only important question is your personal salvation.

Therefore, the third level of understanding the Kingdom of God or Heaven: the communal, or our lives lived in community with others. Yes, its about our inner selves and a new freedom; but, again returning to Catholic Social Teaching, it is a **bonded freedom**. The Lord liberated our spiritual ancestors out of slavery in Egypt and given them a land and made of them a great nation, but they now have a responsibility as the people of God, they must care for the widowed and orphaned among them and welcome the stranger in their midst. I have found a great treasure, but I can only keep it if I insist on cultivating it my whole life with the goal of giving away the entire product. Every day in my morning prayers I ask “Lord, free me of my fears and my shortcomings in order that I may live happily in your service and in the service of others.” That’s what this is about, rearranging our desire away from the things of this world (consumerism or fantasy utopias) and towards a reality of fulfillment here and now with each other.

There was one other thing that I thought was interesting about the first parable today, the parable of the lost treasure. In the commentaries I consulted they suggested that something underhanded or illicit was happening in the farmers

actions. This obviously wasn't his farm, he was only a laborer, and yet when finding the treasure he hides it again and keeps knowledge of it from the land owner. This hints at an attitude that the Kingdom is worth any action to achieve it and it made me think that how we get to the Kingdom of God within doesn't really matter.

Many of us have found or rediscovered our faith after periods of great suffering, often through the process of grief and loss, or recovery from illness (physical and mental) and addiction. We come back to God kicking and screaming, begging to make the pain stop, the grief end, the obsession, or whatever, stop. We might **trudge** through the initial steps of this journey, but eventually we find something greater. Oftentimes this a peaceful acceptance of life on life's terms, fortified with a joy and a new determination. A new vision comes to us - a life pregnant with meaning. Life infused with meaning is what living in the Kingdom comes to mean to us. And word **trudge** means to walk with purpose.

Returning to the Second Reading, this life of purpose continues to call us to greater conformity to the image of Jesus, and this is a communal call. As Paul says, "**We know** that all things work together for good for **those who love God**". "Those who love God", is a designation for the People of God in the Old

Testament. We journey together as the Church, the people of God, with the Kingdom of God in our midst, in our hearts, in the Church - our community.

I will end with a little reading. To some of you this might be a familiar passage:

“Abandon yourself to God, as you understand God. Admit your faults to him and your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We will be with you in the fellowship of the Spirit, and you will meet us as you trudge the road of happy destiny. May God bless and keep you – until then.

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