

## Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2005

We live in a troubled period where Christian values learned through catechism and baptism are challenged by the new and contradictory values conveyed by the media, the television, the movies and the transformations happening in society. There is a real crash between them to such an extent that sometimes we are confused and we do not know what to choose. In this confusion a question comes up: how to discern what is good from what is bad, what is right from what is wrong? Moreover, what is the most valuable for us? How shall we account for it?

Today's readings try to display the way through which one might discern the bad from the good and how to deal with it. In the first reading, Solomon, the young king of Israel, confronted with the hard reality of governance asks for God's help. Instead of asking for wealth, health or victories over his enemies, he prefers wisdom. He knew that whoever was in power could easily be misled and corrupted by sympathies, emotions, whims, or unchecked passions that could lead him into making serious mistakes and injustice against his people. So, he asked God for an understanding heart to judge his people according to his will and to distinguish right from wrong.

In this troubled period of our time, we too need God's help to come to discern the good from the bad, but also the most important values for our lives and that of our children. Such help can only come but from prayer. The example of Solomon teaches that when one prays with detachment and without seeking first of all his own interest, God gives beyond all expectations. This confirms the words of Jesus when saying: "*Whoever seeks will find and whoever asks - according to God's will - will receive*". It is here we see the importance of today's Gospel as inviting us to choose God's kingdom as our ultimate treasure. As a matter of fact, although God's kingdom is on the one side a gratuitous gift from God, on the other side, it is a fruit of human search and diligence. It requires some decision-making and skills: we have to opt willingly for it.

This is the point of today's parables. The one who discovered a treasure buried in the field did not hesitate to sell anything he owned to buy that field. The same is true for the merchant who sold all his belongings to buy the pearl of immense value. In other words, anyone really convinced of having found something extremely precious should be ready to go to any length and do all he can in order to get it. It should be like that with God's kingdom. We should put forth all our effort in order to come to its possession. This is the first message we draw from today's Gospel.

The second message is about the urgency of making certain decisions. Life sometimes offers certain chances that should not be lost, since they will never come our way again. To choose the kingdom is not something that can be delayed. When God calls, one has to respond immediately. There are people who, although aware that God is calling them to some progress and change in

their life, or to a certain service in the church, are not willing to say yes. Will it not be too late when they decide? Will they not by then have lost precious time?

The third message of today is about the joy of being Christian. Do you know anybody who has just discovered a treasure and goes about all sad? Or somebody who has made a good bargain who goes about all sad? Instead he will be smiling and joking because that is his good luck. Jesus today is telling us that we were already offered this chance when we came across the message of the Gospel, the greatest of the treasures, the most beautiful of the pearls. The Gospel is a great treasure for one who believes in it and puts his trust in Jesus Christ. The thing is that many people have heard about the Gospel, they know it, but have never taken it as a treasure to be bought at any cost; they have never realized how precious it was, and thus keep on being sad and gloomy as though their life has never changed.

As I began this homily by mentioning the difficulty we encounter in our modern culture with regard to Christian values, let me finish by referring to it again. My point here is about how we deal with the past and the present. I refer myself to the last words in today's Gospel: *"Every one 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"*. There are many people who idealize the past and want to return to life as it was, for example, in the fifties. There are many others who want to reject the past and to concentrate only on the advancement of modern life. In the domain of faith, the first group wants to return to the pre-Vatican church and the second group wants a church tied up with the evolution of the modern society. In my view, any radicalized position that does not take into account the good that comes from both sides would be a mistake. To handle with wisdom both the past and the present is to know what should be brought with us and what should be left behind. Every value that enhances life, gives peace of heart and mind, supports growth in faith, and so forth, is worthwhile keeping; all other things which bring us but troubles have to be abandoned.

However, we have to know that any sacrifice we do or any suffering we endure for the sake of God's kingdom is worthwhile. This statement is based on the conviction that God is able to turn everything even when it is painful to us for the good of those who belong to him. As St Paul says, *"We know that all things work for good for those who love God"*. May God help each of us to understand that his kingdom is a great treasure for which we have to sell everything in order to win it. May he fill us with his Holy Spirit so that we may be able to choose his kingdom as our ultimate value.



Homily Date: July 24, 2005

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Document Name: 20050724homily.pdf