

## Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of spiritual discernment and the way of recognizing the supreme values that make our lives conform to the will of God.

The first reading describes the case of King Solomon who was asked by God to make a request that would make his life enjoyable and his kingship delightful. Instead of asking for a long life, for riches or for the defeat of his enemies, Solomon rather preferred an understanding heart to judge people and a perceptiveness to distinguish right from wrong. Because of the righteousness of that request, God granted him more than the favors he asked for.

What is behind this text is the idea that God's wisdom is more important than anything someone can have in this world. Its value is beyond price, because whoever has it can discern the good from the bad and make good decisions in difficult matters for the wellbeing of his fellow humans and of himself.

Another idea is that any choice we make for God's sake or any renunciation we accept because of our belonging to God will always be rewarded by him who knows what is good for us and what can contribute to our spiritual growth.

All that helps us understand what is at stake in the parables Jesus gives in today's Gospel. First of all, we have the case of a man who found a treasure buried in a field. Because he wanted at any cost to appropriate that treasure, he sold everything he had and bought the field. The same parable is repeated, but in a different way, in the case of a merchant of pearls who sold all his belongings in order to buy the pearls of great price he found in his business.

What is Jesus' intention in giving these parables? First of all, Jesus wants to tell us that the kingdom of God is so important that it is worth sacrificing everything we possess in order to enter it. Therefore, the value of the things we enjoy in this world has to be always submitted to the supreme value of the kingdom of heaven.

It is not a question of despising the things we have in this world as though they are bad in themselves. Rather, the question is about seeing them as less valuable in comparison to the kingdom of heaven and as means that can help us acquire the kingdom of heaven. Of course, this world gives us a lot of satisfaction in many things we enjoy like knowledge, riches, music, politics, glory, career, family life, but all these things will never equal the beauty of the kingdom of heaven. Without rejecting these wonderful gifts the Lord has given us, we have always to give priority to his word and his kingdom.

The second point Jesus wants to remind us is about the urgency of making a decision right now for the kingdom of heaven. In fact, the man who found the treasure buried, or the merchant who found the precious pearls, did not delay his decision to act and acquire these valuable things. In the same way, the kingdom of heaven requires a prompt reaction of change of life and conversion of heart so that we may not miss it.

One of the dramas of human life is to think that opportunities are countless. Experience has taught us, however, that if you miss an opportunity today, it is not certain that it will come your way again tomorrow. What someone misses today might be his only chance that was left for him or her to shine and get over his or her troubles.

Whatever might be the priority people give to the kingdom of God or the promptitude with which they decide in favor of the values of God's kingdom, the question remains of knowing how we relate to those people, whether they are wise in their choice or not.

According to Jesus, we have to be always open to all the people, whether they are good or bad, useless or useful. That is the point of the parable of the net that brings in it every kind of fish.

When we apply this parable to the Church, it means that the Church should not be discriminative, but open to all the people beyond their different backgrounds, be they linguistic, intellectual, cultural or racial. In that perspective, any exclusive view that considers the Church as the gathering of only good people or of only those who are committed to the cause of God's kingdom at the exclusion of others is not in the line of Jesus' inclusive vision.

This, however, should never lead to complacency or presumption, because the time of judgment is always before us. That is why the parable finishes with a warning about the separation of the fish in the net, so that the good ones are kept and the bad ones thrown away. That separation means the judgment that will fall upon those who are inside the Church, so that the good are rewarded and the bad are punished.

All that brings us to the question of conversion and change of life needed in order to conform ourselves to the words of Jesus. To convert and to change our life does not mean it is necessary to deny who we are or to reject our background. In fact, our past and background can even serve as a base for the teaching of Jesus. That is why Jesus does not ask that we give up our gifts or our human knowledge. Instead, what he wants is that we use them in a new way that is enlightened by his teaching and his law.

In order to succeed in such a way, we need courage, the acceptance of sacrifice and renunciation so that we respond correctly to the kingdom of heaven. As painful might be our sacrifice or our effort to change, we should never forget, however, that they are worthwhile. We should never forget that God is able to turn everything, even when it is painful to us, for our good. *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! May God bless you all!

**1 Kings 3, 5, 7-12; Romans 8, 9, 28-30; Matthew 13, 44-52**



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