

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017

The readings of this Sunday talk about the priority to give to the Kingdom of God. They show that the most important and durable values are those which connect people to God. They invite us to choose the values that make our life conform to the will of God.

The first reading describes the reign of the young king Solomon. It shows how, confronted with the harsh reality of power, he asked for God's help. It shows also that instead of requesting material benefits, he asked for an understanding heart in order to judge rightly and to distinguish right from wrong. It equally accounts for God's positive answer to his request, as he granted him a heart so wise and an understanding such that no one had had before him.

What is behind this text is the idea that wisdom is more valuable than material benefits. Another idea is the truth that a successful leadership is that which puts the common good over personal ambitions and privileges. The last idea is that any renunciation accepted for the sake of God's kingdom always has a reward.

This text helps us understand the stakes of today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the reality of the kingdom of God. First of all, the Gospel gives three pictures through which Jesus presents the Kingdom of God, namely the buried treasure, the fine pearl and the net thrown into the sea.

In the first parable, the Gospel describes the cleverness of a man who discovered a buried treasure in a field, but hid it again and sold all his possessions in order to buy the field itself. After that, the Gospel speaks of the second parable in which Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a merchant searching for fine pearls and, when he found a pearl of great price, he sold everything he possessed in order to acquire it.

In the last parable, the Gospel highlights the comparison Jesus makes between the kingdom of heaven and a net thrown into the sea that collects all kinds of fish that the fishers sort out at the end of their work by keeping the good ones and throwing away the bad ones.

The Gospel ends with Jesus saying that it would be like that at the end of time when the angels of God will separate the wicked from the righteous. Finally, the Gospel recalls Jesus' warning, namely that anyone instructed in the kingdom of God is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the necessity of making the kingdom of God a priority for our life. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. In fact, there are a lot of things we do in order to make our life easy and enjoyable. There are also a lot of activities in which we are involved with the goal of improving our health, our physical conditions or the quality of our life.

However, for Jesus, though those things are important, in comparison to the kingdom of God, they are less valuable. Why is it so? First, because the kingdom of God is not something alongside others we possess in the world. It cannot be put at the same level with the things of the world. On the contrary, it is the supreme good that gives meaning to everything else we do in this world. Second, it is God who gives life and meaning to all our desires and needs. In that sense, his kingdom is the supreme value that any human being should be preoccupied for and the things of this world should be submitted to.

It is for that reason that we have to give priority to the kingdom of God. That is what the parables of the hidden treasure and that of the pearl mean. In other words, the man who found the treasure buried in the field did not hesitate to sell everything he possessed in order to acquire it. The merchant who found the pearl of great price did not hesitate to sell everything he had in order to buy it.

We have to behave in the same way by holding the things of the world as less valuable with regard to the kingdom of God. In other words, the things we possess in this world should not become an obstacle in our relationship with God. They should not prevent us to arise to God and to search for the eternal values of God's kingdom.

However, by considering the things of the world as less valuable, in comparison to the kingdom of God, it does not mean that we have to despise them. On the contrary, we have to see them as means that God has put at our disposal in order to make our life easy and to help us by using them to ascend to him.

Because, as human experience has instructed us, the things of the world can become an impediment in our relationship with God, there is urgency that we make the right decision now in favor of God. We should not delay the decision we have to make.

In fact, the man who found the treasure buried or the merchant, who found the pearls, did not delay their decision to act and acquire those valuable objects they needed. In the same way, the kingdom of God compels us to act now, to change our life and to convert from our sins.

This is very important and requires a prompt decision. In fact, there is a tendency to think that opportunities are countless in life and we still have time to decide. But who knows how tomorrow will be? Who knows if the opportunity we miss today will come again our way again? Who knows whether this is the last chance of our life?

The mentality of complacency cannot help us at all, because the time will come where it will be impossible to start again and go back. The wheel of history goes forward and not backward. As a Latin proverb says, "The wine is already in the glass". There is nothing else to do than to drink it. When that moment will come, it will be late. That moment will be a time of judgment and separation of the just from the wicked. That is the warning we have in the last parable.

Even if the church is the mixture of the bad and the good alike, like fish in the net, we have always to remember that God's intention is not that we stay as we are, but rather that we change and renounce our sins in order to conform our life to his. May God help each of us to understand that his kingdom is a great treasure for which we have to sacrifice everything in order to have 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: 28-30; Matthew 13: 44-52

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