

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Proper 12 7/24/2011

Preacher: Thomas Graf

May the Lord be in my heart and on my lips that I might worthily proclaim his holy word. Amen.

We are told that Jesus spoke in parables so that the disciples....so that the people...COULD UNDERSTAND

In our Gospel today, Jesus presents the disciples...presents us....with 5 new parables, two of which only appear in the Gospel of Matthew: THE HIDDEN TREASURE & THE PEARL OF GREAT VALUE. After presenting them, he specifically questions his disciples....questions us....HAVE YOU UNDERSTOOD ALL THIS? We are told that the disciples immediately respond.....YES!!! But did they? Do we?

How many of us have found ourselves in the situation where we have something VERY IMPORTANT to explain to someone else:

- Perhaps teaching our children about crossing the street---Look both ways, etc.
- Perhaps a very important detail for someone to remember about how to do something at work

After PAINSTAKINGLY preparing what you are going to say...and carefully...using precise and appropriate wording, you present this VERY IMPORTANT message...HOPING that the listener will UNDERSTAND this message---which might possibly change their life. You are SO CONCERNED that after presenting your message, you ask (ALMOST IN DESPERATION) HAVE YOU UNDERSTOOD ALL THIS????

I don't know about you, but there have been times when I can tell (FROM FACE REACTIONS, EYES, etc.) if the person did, or did not really understand, sometimes you can tell:

- OH YES! Thank God...they really do seem to understand...I can tell by their reaction.
- Other times...O.K., I can see that you may get somewhat the gist of what I am trying to say...but let me give you this other bit of information...or say it this way instead...and hopefully you will really understand.
- Then there are those times when you look at the listener and you just know (EVEN BEFORE THEY RESPOND) that they either were not listening at all, or they just have no INKLING of what you were trying to say.

Jesus tried over and over again to give the disciples a true understanding of what was THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. He would repeat:

Again....The Kingdom of Heaven is like..... Again...The Kingdom of Heaven is like..... Again....The Kingdom of Heaven is Like.....

Did the disciples understand?????????? Do we understand??????????

For some reason, as I reflected on the parables, I felt led to center on the two that only appear in Matthew; THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT VALUE. Both are Old Testament SYMBOLS of WISDOM-----treasure that Solomon prays for in our first reading today from Kings.

The first depicts a poor farm laborer ploughing on another's field. When all of a sudden he UNEARTHS A TREASURE. During that time period, it was VERY COMMON for the Rich/Wealthy/Landowners, to bury their VALUABLES in fields. This was due to the many invasions/revolts throughout the region. If the person was killed/died the valuables (HIDDEN TREASURES) remained hidden until someone---like the LUCKY LABORER---hit upon them. Overwhelmed with JOY, he does not hesitate for a moment. As he is a poor man, he has to sell everything to buy this small field.

Somewhat different is the well-to-do merchant who is on the look-out for the single most valuable substance in the ancient world---PEARLS---some writers relate that PEARLS were much more valuable than the finest GOLD. So...when he finds this one more valuable than all...he too sells all he has to purchase it.

So.....do we UNDERSTAND what Jesus is trying to say about how these 2 parables represent the KINGDOM of HEAVEN????????????

Most commentators would say that Jesus is trying to tell the disciples, to tell us....that the TREASURE OF THE KINGDOM is worth ANY PRICE!!! That the genuine disciple responds joyfully to the DISCOVERY of the KINGDOM with TOTAL COMMITMENT. The disciple's INVESTMENT/COMMITMENT is, or should be, TOTAL!! Because the PEARL/THE TREASURE is beyond price.

DO WE UNDERSTAND??????

I had a WONDERFUL experience just the other day while bringing Eucharist to several of our church members. We prayed, I read today's GOSPEL and I shared some of the reflections from the commentators. As I concluded my "reflection", I could see that one of the two listeners had a STRANGE look on her face. However, it did not seem to match any of the ones that I explained in the beginning of my homily. This look was more like...."I DON'T BUY WHAT YOU ARE SAYING TO ME!"

All of a sudden she said, "That guy was dishonest....he was a thief...how dare he do what he did...he should have went straight to the Land Owner and told him what he had found."

She clearly didn't buy that saying, "FINDERS KEEPERS....LOSERS WEEPERS." We then got into a discussion about the law that is on the books, and what one should truly do if they are followers of Christ, etc... VERY INTERESTING.....

BUT.....DID SHE UNDERSTAND?????

Clearly she did understand....and she clearly took my understanding to a deeper level. Clearly her response came from a place deep within her being/soul. From a place that perhaps has seen tines of drought....from a place that has carefully cultivated a seed that has grown...that has blossomed into a TREASURE of RICH FRUIT within her heart. Her response for me was better than GOLD....it was a GOLD MINE!!! More precious than a Fine PEARLit was GRACE-FILLED PEARLS OF WISDOM. There was no doubt for me that she held deep within her heart the greatest TREASURE/PEARL of all, the TREASURE of the GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT!!!

Far greater even than the TREASURE/GIFT that Solomon received from the LORD....WISDOM. She had clearly received the gift that Paul speaks of in his letter to the Romans today:

The first fruits of the HOLY SPIRIT....which are a FORETASTE of the GLORY TO COME....THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN!!!

And when this blessed "receiver of Eucharist" shared her UNDERSTANDING/WISDOM that flowed from her SPIRIT FILLED HEART...she perhaps spoke a parable to me.... AGAIN....THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE.....

THE HIDDEN TREASURE

(The Pearl of Great Worth")

There is a hidden Treasure.

Most search for it in vain.

It comes down from heaven,

And it falls like rain.

This treasure is not one of silver.

This treasure is not one of gold.

The source of this hidden treasure,

Lies deep within one's soul.

A treasure more precious than silver

A treasure more precious than gold.

To find this hidden treasure,

You must look within your soul.

By George Rapanos

Amen!