HOMILY for 17th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel tells us about buried treasure & fine pearls. Thinking about that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

Mrs. Flinders decided to have her portrait painted. She told the artist, "Paint me with diamond earrings, a diamond necklace, emerald bracelets, and a ruby pendant."

"But you are not wearing any of those things," responded the artist.

"I know," said Mrs. Flinders. "It's in case I should die before my husband. I'm sure he would remarry right away; & I want her to go nuts looking for the jewelry."

Since the beginning of Creation, we humans have realized how rare diamonds & some precious stones are compared to other regular stones & rocks. That is why we have desired those special stones so much & spent days & nights searching for them. Some have gone far & wide to look for the rarest diamonds. Others have dived down to the deepest oceans to find the lost treasures. That is why we have seen movies such as Indiana Jones telling us about the efforts & passions of some people who dared to search for the Holy Grail. They had to do careful research & risk everything they had, including their personal safety to get their hands on the invaluable treasure. For that is their life mission, in fact the purpose of their whole life.

However, there is one best Holy Grail, the most invaluable treasure that we often overlook, namely, the kingdom of heaven or of God. That is why Jesus wants to remind us in this Gospel as the following, "…The kingdom of God is like a buried treasure which a person found in a field. He hid it again, & rejoicing at ones' find went & sold all one had & bought that field. Or again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant's search for fine pearls. When one found one really valuable pearl, one went back & put up for sale all that one had & bought it." Like last Sunday, this Sunday's Gospel is one of the rare occasions that the kingdom of heaven or of God is being revealed to us. Jesus once again used parables to let us have a close look at it. He compared it to a buried treasure in a field or fine pearls. For someone who is interested in treasure or fine pearls, that is music to one's ears. The kingdom of heaven or of God is exactly what the person has been searching for. It is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow for a hardworking treasure hunter. However, if people do not look for the kingdom of heaven or of God, that good news of a buried treasure in a field or fine pearls would not mean much.

Unfortunately, that is problem of our current world. It might be interested in treasures & fine pearls. But, it does not seem to see & want to consider the kingdom of heaven or of God to be the hidden treasure or fine pearls. We know that the whole world keeps going after treasures & fine pearls every day. It has worked hard days & nights to accumulate treasures & wealth. It has used every possible way to advance that life mission. In fact, I have watched many programs about some treasure hunters who have scoured the bottom of the oceans in search for shipwreck treasures. Others have gone after stolen treasures from various wars & conflicts that were secretly buried around the world. Meanwhile, many business entrepreneurs have travelled around the world to look for rarest diamonds & fine pearls. I have learned that a few of them was lucky enough to find a rare, huge, blue diamond in Africa worth several million dollars. If we have put that much effort & resources to search for hidden treasures & fine pearls, why shouldn't we do the same about the kingdom of heaven or of God that is worth more than all the treasures & fine pearls on earth?

King Solomon was given an opportunity to ask God for anything when he became the King of Israel. The whole world was surprised by his prayer request. Here is how this Sunday's First Reading tells us about it, "The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. God said, 'Ask something of me; & I will give it to you.' Solomon answered, '…Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people& distinguish right from wrong.'…God said to him, 'Because you have asked for this – not for a long life for yourself, nor for riches, nor for the life of your enemies, but for understanding so that you may know what is right… I give you a heart so wise & understanding that there have never been anyone like you up to now, & after you there will come no one to equal you.'" As you can see, King Solomon could ask the Lord for anything; but he chose a wise & understanding heart instead. For the king, that is the hidden treasure & fine pearl. A wise & understanding heart is what he was searching for his life & kingship. What is it that you are searching for your life? Which are the hidden treasures & fine pearls that you want for your spiritual life?

My dear brothers & sisters, we often assume that God only communicates to us when we are awake. But, today's First Reading was one of several times in the Bible that the Lord appeared to the people of God in a dream with a special message. So, pay attention to your dreams & see what the Lord might want to talk to you about. More importantly, let us search for the kingdom of heaven or of God in our daily life as is we are looking for hidden treasures & fine pearls. That way we will do everything in our power to possess it.