

The Greatest Treasure

If you had one wish, what would you wish for? The choice you make will reveal your own heart and determine who you are.

What Jesus taught is that each of us has only one wish and if we try to make more than one, we lose the whole deal. If we have enough understanding to realize that there is only one choice to make—God—then everything else we need for happiness will be given to us as well. If we fail to make relationship with God our one wish in life, then nothing else we wish for can give us what we desire (see Matthew 6:33).

God taught this in three different ways. To begin with, God gave us the First Commandment: “I am the LORD your God...you shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2-3). This commandment made it an offense to have a divided heart; God alone must be the focus of all our desires, our hopes, our choices. To seek any other good, any other fulfillment besides God, is idolatry.

God said the same thing in giving the Hebrew people words to live by, which Jesus later called the “first and greatest commandment”: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). This commandment explicitly turns law into love.

Jesus taught this from a different angle when he told the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price. Here he presents the command to love God unreservedly as a means to life and fulfillment, to coming into possession of all that is best and most beautiful. Jesus appears here as the Master of the Way, the Teacher of Life, the one who instructs us in the art of living and by example shows us what life is all about. He is

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17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

I Kings 3:5, 7-12; Romans 8:28-30;
Matthew 13:44-52

the Good Shepherd who guides us to the high places where we can experience life most deeply and enjoy it most purely. He is Wisdom incarnate.

“Wisdom” in the Scriptures means the gift of knowing how to live, how to distinguish right from wrong, true from false, helpful from destructive, authentic from fake. It was the gift Solomon chose when he asked for an “understanding heart.” Saint Thomas Aquinas gives the key to wisdom when he describes it as the habit of seeing everything in the light of our last end, our ultimate goal: God. In practical terms, what makes us wise is appreciation of God and spiritual

things. When we appreciate the true value of the “treasure hidden in the field,” we will sell everything we have to possess it. This is what Scripture calls “wisdom” and our culture calls just “being smart.”

Those who are wise take the long view. They avoid judging either people or things by what they appear to be here and now. Wise people know that the true value of everything and of everyone is measured by what this person—or this experience, even this joy or suffering—will mean to us at the end of the world. The world we see is like the surface of a lake: what is underneath is what really counts.

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and yet be cheap.*

On the surface, a lake may appear clean, yet the bottom could be full of trash; or it can look scummy on top and yet be clear and cool underneath. People are the same; that is why we should not judge others.

Values are like this too: They can look good and yet be cheap; they can look life-enhancing and yet be destructive. When at Baptism we “renounce Satan and all his empty promises,” we are committing ourselves to wisdom in contradiction to the slogans and fads of our culture.

The wisdom of the Church comes from its fidelity to the past and its openness to the future. We measure the present by the past and validate the past by expanding it into the present. The rule of Christian wisdom is to be “like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

REFLECTING ON THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

Seventeenth Week of the Year

***Pray daily:** God our Father and protector, without you nothing is holy, nothing has value. Guide us to everlasting life by helping us to use wisely the blessings you have given to the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Monday: Matthew 13:31-35. “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.” How are the teachings of Jesus transforming your heart?

Tuesday: Matthew 13:35-43. “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one.” What words, images, actions around you plant “weeds” in your heart?

Wednesday: Matthew 13:44-46. “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all...and buys that field.” What have you traded off for the sake of knowing God better?

Thursday: Matthew 13:47-53. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind.” In the Church, are you more conscious of the “good” fish or the “bad” fish? What effect does your particular bias have on you?

Friday: Matthew 13:54-58. Jesus returned to Nazareth and taught the people in the synagogue. They were astonished and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power?” Do you admire Christ’s wisdom? Why?

Saturday: Matthew 14:1-12. “The king was grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests...he sent and had John beheaded in the prison.” When do you feel conflict between your desire to please others and your desire to please God?

LIVING THIS WEEK'S GOSPELS

As Christian: Identify one area of your life which seems to have no relation to God. Ask how you can make Jesus an active part of it.

As Disciple: Look at your daily schedule and ask how everything you do is—or can be—directed toward your final goal, God.

As Prophet: Pick one action of your daily life and make it a visible expression of your life’s true goal.

As Priest: Ask what keeps you from participating in the “spiritual” things offered in your parish (Scripture study, adult religious education, prayer). Is it lack of appreciation for the spiritual? Is there something you need to “sell” in order to buy “the treasure in the field”?

As King: Ask yourself how the Church in its changing rules and policies is bringing out of its treasure both the new and the old? Does anything seem to you to be inconsistent, incompatible with the real values of the past? Does anything seem to you to be an enslavement to the past, a fear of what is new? How can you peacefully, without anger or aggressiveness, work to improve the situation?