

17th (SJ&QA) Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

“*Do you understand all these things?*” Jesus asks in today’s gospel. We are very foolish to think that we must have an answer to every question in order to keep our integrity with others. *If you’re old and wise today you must have been young and stupid once!* In our first reading we heard a conversation between God and the young King Solomon. In his dream Solomon was asked to make a wish and was promised it will come true. *Did he ask for a long life, a winning lotto ticket, good health, money, power, revenge?* No! Solomon’s prayerful wish is to have the precious gift of wisdom that he may know what is right and wrong and may judge people fairly. The Lord gave Solomon a blank check, yet nothing he asked but wisdom. *If the Lord were to appear and ask you that same question how would you answer?* The wisdom that Solomon seeks was what Jesus urges on his disciples. This is what St. Paul also invites us to see - all things from a new perspective, from God’s viewpoint ‘who only wills what is good.’

Today Jesus teaches us that there are precious things worth keeping and precious things worth the price of sacrifice. *Have you ever given up something so precious in favor of something better?* Two phrases in our Gospel demonstrate that action: ‘*He goes and sells all that he has*’ and ‘*he buys it.*’ Both stories use treasure as a metaphor for the kingdom. Jesus likens the kingdom to a treasure buried in a field, and to a beautiful and expensive pearl. He who finds a buried treasure and he who finds a

pearl of great price will not let such a rare chance pass by. They did not wait for a perfect opportunity. Instead, seized the chance without delay and found a way to obtain it. They sell all they have so that they could acquire the precious items. If you discover the kingdom of heaven *will you let such an opportunity pass by?* A wise man will not waste this rarest opportunity—sparing no effort in order to obtain it. Yes, God’s kingdom is more valuable than any earthly treasure. Jesus is himself the kingdom, he who finds it without hesitation would joyfully abandon everything.

What are the values and priorities we ‘treasure’ in life? Some treasure more the *object* rather than the *person*. Ask people who have lost everything in a flood, a fire, or a calamity. They will tell you that after losing everything they have kept and collected through the years, in the end their loved ones and their lives are what matter. The search for a treasure buried in the field and for a pearl of great price has led many souls astray. *How many homes, families & relationships have been shattered because of money and greed? Are the Kingdom of God and the salvation of your soul on your list at all?* A wise philosopher said, “*A life well lived today makes every yesterday a dream and every tomorrow a vision of hope.*” Foresight is the beginning of true wisdom. Living wisely is looking ahead. It means having an eye on our ultimate end and preparing for it every day.

The word of God is announced to all kinds of people—not only to the upright and the just. Everyone is invited to the banquet. His kingdom is open to all: Good or bad, pious or irreligious, devoted or uncommitted. *“Thus at the end, the wicked will be thrown into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.”* Indeed this is a frightening scenario. Some may be very worried because their lives are moving towards the incinerator. But the kingdom of heaven is about the net, not the selection. We are part of that net that collects all kinds. The church is indeed a communion of saints, but is also a church of sinners. If every sinner will be excluded from the Church, where will we be? We simply have to take everything sometimes. We are not to judge, to be selective, or to be selfish. Our nets should catch everyone and everything. It is the Lord who will pick up all the good we have collected and throw away the bad we may have embraced. That is the good news. Just as Jesus challenged his disciples - the requirement is to understand these things first. Their positive answer implies humility and acceptance. Then they have truly become a net for God’s kingdom.

Jesus explains the importance of his preaching and the coming of God’s reign. Many are attracted to his message and teachings. Those who accepted Him witnessed His marvelous deeds. We need to balance between our search for the spiritual and the material. If we neglect the spiritual in our search for the material we end up with what Gandhi calls *‘sins of the world’*: wealth without work; pleasure without conscience,

knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principles. We are given the opportunity and the grace to reform our life and live the values of the kingdom. *Appearance and behavior can sometimes deceive.* Do not judge someone by what you see nor by others' opinions. Judging a person does not define who they are. It defines who you are. Meanwhile, there is need for patience, tolerance, avoidance of social labels, and profound faith in God who is always present and faithful to us. *'Pray for wisdom,'* just as Solomon did. As God is patient with us we have to be patient with others and with ourselves. We should never overlook our greatest treasure—Friendship with God. Whoever finds HIM has found everlasting treasure. Amen!