

Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
July 30, 2023
Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ark of the New Covenant

“This preaching and this faith the Church, although scattered over the whole world, diligently observes, as if it occupied but one house, and believes as if it had but one mind, and preaches and teaches as if it had but one mouth. And although there are many dialects in the world, the meaning of the tradition is one and the same.”

(Saint Irenaeus, Against Heresies, circa AD 130-200)

How often have we sat in a church listening to the parables of Jesus, as they were recounted by the writers of the Gospels, and found ourselves completing, by our memory, the parable before it is finished being read? Others have often told stories of how their priest, concerning a particular passage of Scripture, would dust off the yellowed pages of a long-ago written homily, and begin the yearly explanation of the passage. Today’s parable, taken from Saint Matthew’s Gospel (13:44-52), is one which lends itself to something of this sort. I would be willing to assume that many present need only hear two words, “Treasure” and “Field,” and would be able to recall the rest. It is my desire to reflect upon this parable in such a fashion as to shake us out of this scriptural malaise.

I begin by first posing this question: “If the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, then how did this individual come into the knowledge of its location?” If I were to say that he heard of its existence from another, then, would not the other have already exhausted all of their own resources to attain the field and thus secure the hidden treasure? Our attitude toward this passage has been clouded by the current situation in which we live. There is a treasure buried in a field valued at \$10,000,000 and the field costs \$50,000. We will go to the bank, borrow the money, purchase the field, get the money, pay back the loan, and we only suffer the necessary paperwork to secure the loan and purchase the field. As the YouTuber Ryan George of Pitch Meeting fame would say: “Super Easy, Barely an Inconvenience.”

Rather than seeing the parable in this fashion, I offer this “revised” version for your consideration. You are walking along, minding your own business and a torrential rainstorm arises. As you run for cover, choosing to wait till the storm passes, you notice the rain washing away a bit of dirt in a field across the way. Something catches your eye, only a glimpse, a sparkle, a flash. You wait for the rain to slacken; your eyes hawkishly fixed on the spot. With the rain now ended, you walk toward the area of interest. The rain has eroded a section of soil revealing the edge of a battered wooden crate. Its side damaged, you see littered about gold coins and jewels. You realize this is only a fraction of the chest and commit to purchase the land, securing the chest and its contents. Once these tasks are completed, then I ask this question: “Are you content with only those items which are found on the outside of the chest or are you so committed to this quest that you will dig further to find and excavate the whole chest?”

I present the story and the question to you to reference your own faith life. Revisiting the story, the Kingdom of Heaven is the fullness of the Christian Faith found within the crate. One may propose that this Fullness of Faith has been buried. Although not under the soil of the earth waiting to be discovered, it has been buried, nevertheless, under man's constant need for "Innovations." I ask you to consider all of the changes people have made and continue to make to our Christian worship and belief solely to attract and appease others. As situations occur, you and I might find this treasure uncovered in a moment of inspiration and enlightenment. A thought catches the eye of our mind and we rush towards it trying to grasp its fleeting form. And there we notice the outer gifts of the treasure. What is part of the fullness of the treasure of Christian faith that all can easily procure without much effort? My answer would be the Bible. The Bible is easy to get on our phones, tablets, computer screens or even leather-bound with gold leaf pages. Each one here can find a multitude of books, commentaries, and classes taught on the Bible. Yet, I still inquire of each of us, is that all of the treasure? Is there more that God wants us to have which can enrich our lives, but we are required to work to claim it?

My dear family, this is the question I would like for you to reflect upon this week. Is there more to our, your, my Christian faith than just the Bible? Even as great as the Bible is, mind you, it is the Word of God, again I ask, is there more to the treasure, the fullness of our Christian Faith? Some here may say "No, all we need is found in the written pages of Bible." However true their statement is for them, I offer the following thoughts. If the written word contains all, then why did Jesus not stress the "written word?" God is extremely specific, consult His instructions on building the ark. If Jesus wanted to offer everything via the written word, then why did He not write those words He wanted us to know? Other than the unknown words written on the ground, why did He not stress writing and why did He not command His Apostles and Disciples to write down everything? How could Jesus have spent three years with His Apostles before His Passion, another 40 days with them after His Resurrection and not write for them what would be called the New Testament? How would Saint Paul ever learn about Jesus without a Bible for him to read and study? How could Saint Paul write this line, in his first letter to Timothy, before either had access to a written Bible? *"If I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth."* (1 Timothy 3:15). My family, I tell you the Bible is the introduction to more. There is a deeper treasure, the fullness of the Christian faith, which God wants you to possess. But, are you satisfied with just part of the treasure, the Bible, or, are you willing to join me in digging for the more; that treasure which can only answer those questions we all longingly seek to find.