

Homily for Sunday, July 26, 2020.

Our Lord gives us three more parables today. All Three of the parables offer a challenging teaching on discipleship. And as one bishop said, each of them "...is meant to encourage our total irrevocable commitment to the Lord, as well as govern and focus our missionary outreach to others."

These parables are not totally alike. As in the last of the parables in today's passage compared to the first two, sometimes given radically different messages. But taken as a whole, the parables teach us a lot about what it means to let God into our lives.

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I am going to talk about the second parable today. The second parable concerns that of a man who is specifically looking for, and finds, a really valuable pearl. At first glance, it has the same lesson that was just given. Like the previous parable, the finding of the pearl requires that the man sell all he has in order to purchase this one, really valuable pearl. **[But]** Unlike the man in the previous parable,... he does not stumble upon the pearl by accident. Instead, he is specifically searching for something and knows it when he sees it. That, too, is like the Kingdom of God. It is helpful to know what we are looking for in order to recognize it and respond to it.

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In that sense, it might be good to compare Solomon on our first reading today to this story of the merchant.

There are many reasons to hold Solomon in high esteem. The reading today presents one of the great examples of his character – at least while he was younger.

But we know what happens in time. Solomon in time has a harem of wives, and he brings in worship of their gods to Israel.

Solomon was given much – primarily he has been given the blessings of being close to God. And he relinquished much of that grace for something less lasting, and less valuable.

Solomon's life is not unlike the lives of so many who have been given many blessings through the centuries. We can certainly look back four hundred years ago to King Henry the Eighth of England. He inherited a nation at peace, with a strong military, and a rich Church life. It was gone by the time he died. Henry began as a strong Catholic. But because he could not get an annulment so that he could marry another woman – he began a journey that created the Church of England with all its present off-shoots, destroyed all the monasteries that served the poor, and went through several wives.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia ends its article on him by saying, “Few kings have had it in their power to do greater good than Henry, and few have done less. Henry was not really interested in education, or social justice, or the spiritual well-being of his subjects and the Church over which he ruled...”

So much is given to so many. There is so much potential. And so many of these blessings are set aside, for something less valuable.

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Compare that to the Merchant in Christ's parable. He is schooled in what is truly valuable. He comes across something so perfect, so beautiful, so valuable, that he is willing to give up EVERYTHING ELSE in order to possess it.

There is no object on earth that we would say is worth even our job and our home and our money for food.

But there is something beyond earth – available while we are on earth. It is a deep relationship with God. That is what we have in Christ. That is what we are invited today to remember. We are invited to be grateful. We are invited to follow our earlier selves, or others who have entered the Church, and renew our first love.

We are invited to be like the Merchant – to give up all we have (no matter how much it is) and give it up for something priceless.

We are invited to be more like the Merchant, and less like Solomon (let alone Henry the Eighth).

When we realize the priceless nature of the Kingdom – we recommit ourselves to hold onto it. We don't give it up for passing values. We instead are grateful when we even have to give up all we have to hold onto Christ and His Kingdom.

