

Matthew 13: 44-52

44 The world of God is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man, after discovering it and driven by his joy, hides again, the time to sell everything he owns to acquire that field.

45 In the same way, the world of God is like what a merchant looks for in search of rare pearls. 46 When he finds a pearl of great quality, he sells everything he owns to acquire it.

47 Or, God's world is like a mixture of various kinds of sea fish caught in a trawler's net. 48. Once the net is filled and pulled ashore, people sit down and keep in a bin what is valuable and throw away what is inedible. 49 So it will be at the end of time when God's messengers will sort out the wicked from the righteous. 50 They will throw away the wicked who will kick themselves hard about their lives.

51 Did you understand all this, Jesus said to them? Yes, was the answer. 52 From then on, a Bible scholar who has put himself in the school of God's world is like a householder who knows how to sort out valuable things, both new and old.

Gospel commentary - Homily

What can really change a whole life?

This is the story of Peter's mother, a child with Morquio syndrome, a rare degenerative disease. One day, when he was eight years old, she brought him to the Montreal Children's Hospital because of a severe cold. But the child's condition became more complicated, he had to undergo a tracheotomy and became paraplegic. He could no longer leave the hospital. Cynthia, the mother, who lives in Buckingham, a town a hundred twenty-five miles away, decides with her spouse to quit her job as a teacher's aide and move to Montreal, near her son. Despite his disability, Peter wanted to study. A studious and diligent student, he obtained his high school diploma thanks to the courses given at the children's hospital. Now 19 years old, Peter must leave the children's hospital for a residential and long-term care center. However, he wants to continue his studies and obtain his diploma in computer technology, so he must attend a specialized college. So mom Cynthia will accompany her son to class. When a class is at 8 a.m., she has to get up at 5 a.m. because she needs a good hour to prepare Peter. And since adapted transportation is not reliable, she will be driving the adapted vehicle acquired through a fundraising campaign. Moreover, for the exercises in class, given Peter's paraplegia, it is mom who must use the screwdriver on the computers following her son's instructions. And of course, she has to accompany him everywhere: to national competitions on space technologies, because Peter is a member of PolyOrbite, a technical society of Polytechnic School of Montreal, or to student parties. Fortunately, her job at the Provincial Liquor Store offers her some flexibility, but her life has a name: her son.

I thought I would relate this situation to today's gospel, because it talks about the discovery of a treasure that leads someone to sell everything they have to acquire the field where it is hidden. It also speaks of the discovery of a precious pearl that leads someone to sell everything he has to acquire this pearl. Peter's mother will easily understand these two parables. But before going into their meanings, let's recognize that the whole of Matthew's account leaves us perplexed.

First of all, how can one associate the kingdom of God with either a treasure or a rare pearl that is discovered? For Jesus seems to normally associate the kingdom or reign of God with the very action of God who, through his ministry, intervenes to heal people, and thus associates it with a form of visitation of God to this world. It is never associated with a precious object that can be acquired. Sometimes, in Jesus, this kingdom refers to the world to come with God, where those who meet a certain number of criteria will enter. Only the third parable, the one about the fishing net catching all kinds of fish and then having to be sorted out, respects this notion of the kingdom of God at the end of time. And for Matthew, who, like any good Jew, emphasizes action, the idea of God's judgment on humans at the end of time is very important and runs through his entire gospel. But then what message did he want to convey with this gospel passage and where is the good news?

In my opinion, the key to understanding this gospel passage is to consider the very vocation of the evangelist Matthew. Even if he remains unknown to us, his work betrays his Jewish origins. One can imagine that Christian preaching, the proclamation that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish messiah, was a shock and a discovery for him, and that his decision to believe and join the Christian community was the most important of his life; all of this put him at odds with his fellow Jews, but for him Jesus and his message was that treasure discovered, that pearl found, for which it was worth losing his old world to be now part of the dynamic of the kingdom of God at work. The gospel he would write was an echo of that dynamic. The third parable is an extension of all this, for the image of the net with all kinds of fish and the need to sort them out, even though it may arouse the anxiety of judgment and the fear of ending up with those who will be kicking themselves hard for having done evil, is a proclamation of faith: evil has no place in God's world; it is also a proclamation of hope: evil will be defeated, evil will one day disappear. We are therefore in a way faced with an autobiographical account of Matthew. Moreover, isn't this specific gospel passage his own, i.e. totally absent from the other gospels? The autobiographical account becomes even clearer with its ending: "Every scribe or Biblical scholar who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who has sorted out the valuable things, both new and old." Which scribe are we talking about? It is clearly Matthew, who had to sort out his Jewish past, and choose only what was valuable and consistent with his new faith.

All this leaves us with a question: Cynthia has made Peter her treasure, a treasure that she wants to be great and play a role in society, Matthew has made his new faith in Jesus the Messiah his treasure, seeing in it the possibility of transforming the whole world; but where is our treasure? Let us recall the criteria given by Matthew: this treasure is so important that one is ready to leave everything for it, this treasure becomes the final criterion, as shown in the scene of the fishing net, for determining what one keeps in one's life and what one rejects, and for judging whether a life is successful or not. For native Christians, who have been bathed all their lives in the perception that Jesus is Lord, it may be difficult to shed light on their true treasure. But, as in the case of an old couple who realize how much their love has transformed them, it is worthwhile for them to take a break and discover how much their faith has allowed them to experience.