

HOMILY SUNDAY 17 - YEAR A

“The Kingdom of God”

(1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119; Romans 8:28-30; Matthew 13:44-52)

Imagine a hockey game without a net; a ball game without a home plate; a bingo game without cards; hunting moose where there are no moose to be found!

Everyone needs a goal, a target in life. Be wise - make the Kingdom of heaven your goal in life.

Paulo Elie, an Oblate priest serving in Brazil for many years, shared a striking comment with me during a visit to the seminary at Battleford when I apologized for not staying in touch with him more over the years. He said “There is a Portugese saying: ‘You find the time and the money for what is important to you.’” It was a polite way of saying that staying in touch with him was not important to me, since I had found neither the time nor the money for that. Ouch! – that bit of truth coming home to roost hurt a bit, and so it should.

In the parable about the treasure in a field, Jesus is saying the same thing about the Kingdom of God. A question - what did Jesus speak and teach about the most? – What was his favourite topic? Right - the Kingdom of God. Obviously that was important to him, and should be to us as well. But is it?

What is your goal in life? What is your target? What is important to you? Is it the Kingdom of God? How much time do you spend, lets say, reading and praying with the Bible? Worshipping in Church with the Christian community? Sitting quietly in prayerful meditation? Serving your community as a volunteer? Sharing your feelings with your spouse and family?

Jesus is very clear. There can be nothing more important. Both the treasure and the pearl are OT symbols for wisdom. The common point is that the disciple responds joyfully to the discovery of the kingdom with total commitment. The treasure of the Kingdom is worth any price. Such is the whole-hearted response of the disciple who is surprised by joy - the joy of finding Jesus Christ, a pearl beyond price, hidden in the subsoil of his ordinary life. We also need to search for that treasure buried within.

According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, a well known Catholic theologian, “whoever understands the value of what Jesus offers will not hesitate to get rid of everything of his own, to become poor in spirit and pure in faith, in order to obtain what has been offered. At stake is the loss or gain of the whole meaning of human existence. Just as the farmer and the merchant are shrewd enough not to hesitate for a moment, so the Christian who has grasped what is at stake will take action immediately.”

King Solomon, in the first reading, is a good example for us. He gives up all the other options he could have prayed for, to ask for wisdom that would help him govern the people. God heard his prayer and gave him the rest besides.

Jesus concludes his teaching with parables with a final point. The Jewish teacher who becomes a disciple has at his disposal the wealth of the O.T. as well as its completion in the new. Matthew does not just repeat the past. Alongside the old he introduces the new, presenting the old in a new light, reclaiming it for the new situation in which he finds himself, seeing all things in the light of the Christ event and the coming of the Kingdom. Even his unexpected word-order of “new and old” may be important. The Gospel is the fullness of the Law. It is the new that provides the key to the appropriation of the old, not vice versa. The ideal is for a scribe, like Matthew, to become a disciple.

I would like to offer a simple guide to pursuing the Kingdom of God. It includes four simple steps: 1) Read, study and pray with the Word of God; 2) Worship with the faith community; 3) Repent of any sin and 4) Love others as Jesus has loved us. Do these things and the Kingdom of Heaven will be yours.

I was especially impressed one day while visiting a certain community to discover that the father of that family took the time to read from the bible to his kids every night, explaining to them what the passage meant to him. He was surprised at how well the kids listened. It became a special intimate time of being with his family they all anticipated.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is worship at its best. It is food for our spiritual journey into discovering the treasure of the Kingdom of God as pilgrims of the heart.

So, be wise. Like Jesus, make the Kingdom of God your target, your goal in life. Make it your number one priority, and you will experience the peace, joy and justice of the Holy Spirit, which is the Kingdom of heaven.