

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Robert Cutshaw was a collector of precious stones. He owned a little roadside shop outside Andrews in North Carolina. He hunted for precious stones everywhere and sold them to jewelry makers. But he did not make enough to live on. One day during his search, he found a shining blue rock. He tried to sell it many times but was not successful. Finally he sold it for \$500 to pay his power bill. It is now known as “The Star of David Sapphire,” which weighs nearly a pound and is worth three million dollars. The gospel of today contains a number of parables concerning the Kingdom of Heaven—the hidden treasure, the pearl of great value and the great net thrown into the sea. The net thrown into the sea is the image of the Church, which holds both sinners and saints. Sinners belong to the Church, despite their sins. No matter what sins we commit, we still form part of the Church because there is still good in us—the grace that we received at baptism. Just as a sick or paralyzed part of the body receives assistance from the rest of the body, so it is with the Mystical Body of Christ. We do not cut off right away the part of the body that is sick or paralyzed. Instead, we give it medical treatment. We care for it, hoping it will become well again. That is what the Church does as well. As sinners, we still need the Church for our sustenance and well-being. The Church continues to live in her children who are not in the state of grace. If the Church is the net that Jesus is talking about, then make sure you are in the net. If you are outside the net, you may not find your way to the kingdom of heaven.

The pearl of great value in the parable of Christ is the gospel. This gospel is entrusted to the Church. Therefore, the Church becomes the hidden treasure. Christ and his Church are one and the same today. Those who find this treasure will give up everything else to possess this. When we understand the gospel, we understand ourselves in the scheme of God’s eternal plan for the world. When we read the gospel, we tend to understand ourselves better. As we come to a deeper knowledge of who we are, we come to a deeper knowledge of what God wants us to be. Wisdom is understanding God’s plan for each of us. When you have found yourself you have found God.

In the first reading, Solomon did not ask for health and wealth. Instead he asked for wisdom—an understanding heart with the ability to distinguish right from wrong. God was very pleased to grant that. To be wise has little to do with being intelligent or being smart. It is knowing what is right. It is looking at things as God would look at them. Wisdom is to know the true value of things in relation to our soul. Think of the silly, purposeless, futile and fleeting things that we

long for and spend hours and hours working for them. Today, the lives of many people are purposeless and empty. Without those talk shows, soap operas, American idols or dancing with the stars on television, they would not know what to do with themselves. Yet, these things have almost nothing to do in the grand scheme of things that God has in His plan for us. A great way to find what you want from life is to write your own epitaph. Then examine it to see if what you want is God's plan for you.

How many of us ask for spiritual gifts from God? Ask for spiritual gifts. If you examine the things you ask for from God, you will find that they are very often for some material help. God grants us not only material things. He also grants us Spiritual gifts. In fact, He would grant us those gifts much quicker than others.

Once, God sent two of His angels to earth to gather all the requests and prayers of the people—one to gather all the material requests and the other to gather spiritual requests. The angels came back a few days later, and one angel had his huge basket full and overflowing with prayers for material things. The other angel came back with an almost empty basket. Ask God for the virtues of kindness, love, compassion, charity, generosity, purity, patience and the grace to forgive. It is these spiritual gifts that make us more and more to resemble the image and likeness of God. These spiritual gifts will strengthen the good in us to fight against and transform the elements of evil in us.