

## 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

### GOSPEL

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Jesus said to the crowds, 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in a basket and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the just to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

'Have you understood all this?' They said, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old.'

(Matthew 13:44–52)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In ancient times, people often buried their treasures as they fled from enemies or invaders. Sometimes their owners may return to recover the treasure, but often it remained buried for many years. Among priceless discoveries of treasure buried as the owners fled invaders are the Dead Sea Scrolls, hidden from the Roman army in the late first century.
- A scribe in the ancient world was someone who could read and write and who often held government positions. At the time of Jesus, the scribes were influential teachers of the Jewish faith, well versed in Scripture and the Law.
- The householder who brings out things both old and new may be a reference to people like Matthew himself, who as well as receiving the teachings of Jesus and believing in him, retain a profound respect for the Law and traditions of Judaism.
- The blazing furnace referred to here is the place of eternal punishment for the wicked, known by the Hebrew terms *Sheol* or *Gehenna*. *Hell* is the English word used to translate these terms.

### EXPLORING THE WORD

Jesus continues to convey his teaching about the kingdom using the imagery of everyday life. Pearls were highly valued in the Near East and were regarded as a symbol of wisdom—hence the saying 'pearls of wisdom'. In the first two of these parables, the protagonists commit everything they own to acquiring what is beyond price. According to Jesus, gaining a place in the kingdom is worth the sacrifice of everything we value most.

The parable of the dragnet tells us something more of the kingdom. There will be those who have not recognised its value and are unworthy of the kingdom. However, it is not for people to judge who is worthy and who is not. That task belongs to God.

Jesus is very concerned that his followers clearly understand his message, and he questions them directly: 'Do you understand all this?' There must be no confusion over the meaning of the gospel!

Matthew stresses that believing in Christ does not mean a total rejection of Judaism. Indeed, both the old and the new have value. Jesus did not come to overturn the Law but to fulfil it, and those who recognise this truth will honour both the old and the new.

- What are the new understandings you have gained on your journey so far?
- Recall a moment of delight or discovery in your life: falling in love, mastering a skill, coming to understanding. Are these experiences pointers to the kingdom?

### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Share a story of a goal you had and the striving that was needed to achieve it. How did you feel when the goal was reached? How did you feel if the goal was not achieved?
- What have you given up in order to follow Christ?
- What are you prepared to give up?
- How do you understand being a disciple of the kingdom of heaven?
- What are the things that are most precious to you? Does this gospel challenge your attitude to them?
- This week, treasure those things and people who are precious to you in special ways.
- Jesus asks the disciples, 'Have you understood all these things?' Ponder your own understanding of the mystery of faith and how you are coming closer to it. Pray for the strength and understanding you need to continue the journey towards the treasure.

