

Homily for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

You know – I’ve always liked maps. As a kid in school, I enjoyed looking at geography maps and maps of the Civil War. On my travels throughout the U.S. and around the world, I’ve loved studying maps in advance to get a sneak-peek of the topographical adventures that I’d be visiting. I’ve even enjoyed doodling, and drawing my own maps of fictitious countries I’ve made up. Yep – I’ve always like maps. But for as much as I like maps, I am not very good with directions – at all. I am so thankful for the GPS – otherwise, who knows where I’d end up some times!

Well, today, and for the past couple weeks, Jesus has been speaking about the Kingdom of God, also referred to as the Kingdom of heaven, in our Gospel passages. Now, when I hear the word “kingdom”, I kind of geek out and think of some kind of maps from the Lord of the Rings or the Narnia Chronicles. But as Pope Benedict XVI has written of the Kingdom of God: it “is not to be found on any maps...it is located in man’s inner being” – his heart.

In fact, theologically, there are various ways we can understand what Jesus means when He speaks about the Kingdom of God. First, as Pope Benedict said, and as Scripture teaches, God’s Kingdom is already present mystically in the heart of each believer. As St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans: “the Kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” In other words, it is an invisible reality that is hidden away in the core, the heart, of each of God’s children.

Another way to understand the Kingdom of God is that it is the Church. In one of Jesus' images today, He speaks of the Kingdom of heaven like a net cast into the sea that gathers in all types of fish – big and small, good and bad. In this way, the Church is a mixed reality that will only be realized at the end of history, just like the parable of the weeds and the wheat from last week. And yet, at the same time, the Church in heaven already exists as that perfected Kingdom, which we are journeying towards and aiming for.

Finally, the Kingdom of God can also be understood as referring to Jesus Himself. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, who is the incarnation – the visible face – of His Father's Kingdom. In fact, where the king is, there is the kingdom. Again, take the Gospel images today where Jesus refers to the Kingdom of heaven as a treasure buried in a field or as a pearl of great price. In this way, Jesus Himself is that pearl and that treasure, which, as we hear, one would be willing to give everything he has to possess.

The Kingdom of God is kind of complicated and kind of simple all at the same time – just like the Trinity. I guess that's why Jesus chose to use so many illustrations so that we could understand what it is. To summarize, the Kingdom of God is an invisible reality of the heart, no less real than gravity or love. It's made visible in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the King of that Kingdom, which we desire to possess. And, we are truly members of this Kingdom, as we are members of Christ's Body, the Church, on our pilgrimage to heaven. In other words, the Kingdom of God is present here and now; it's the goal of our journey on this earth; and it's the means of arriving to that goal.

Therefore, since there is nothing more important than God's Kingdom, Jesus can rightly teach that like a person who finds a treasure or a pearl of great price, he would go and sell all that he has to buy it. But, is that just poetic language on the part of Jesus? I mean, does He really mean we have to sell everything to buy it? Well, first of all, the Kingdom of God is not for sale. It can only be discovered for what it is and received from the arms of the King. But, at the same time, the Kingdom is not a matter of externals, as much as it's a matter of the eternal truths that endure – things like grace, virtue, mercy, and forgiveness.

Therefore, for us to sell all that we have means that we each have to look within ourselves and see what so-called "valuables" we need to sell to the Lord to receive His Kingdom. These "valuables" are things we think are really important, but in the estimation of God are not. Look inside and see what you have to sell. Remember, everything must be sold to purchase it. What's there? Attachment to stuff or people? Reliance on yourself to do everything? Unforgiveness? Pride? Anger and resentment? Selfishness? Deceit?

My friends, we cannot have it both ways. We cannot think that we can keep what God wants us to give to Him, and fully receive Him and His Kingdom at the same time – for, as Scripture says: "where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." The choice is ours. God bless you.