

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time A
27 July 2008

LESSON: Friendship w/ Christ Is More Valuable Than Anything Else

Today Jesus is showing us not only what his Kingdom is like **in itself**, but what it means for us **personally**.

He gives us a snapshot of two men whose lives are suddenly lifted to an **entirely different level**.

- ✍ A **farmer** is plowing a field that is not his own.
- ✍ He is a hired laborer, a farmhand, someone who has to spend his days **worrying** about making ends meet.
- ✍ As he plows he uncovers a buried treasure.
- ✍ Suddenly, he is **set free** from the **chains** of poverty and uncertainty; now he can live life to the full.
- ✍ A **businessman** spends his career working long hours, travelling, suffering, looking all the while for the deal that will liberate him from 80-hour work weeks and give him **security**.
- ✍ Finally he finds the pearl of great price.
- ✍ He too can now enjoy the peace of **stable prosperity**, free from the rat race and the worry of living hand-to-mouth.

This is what **happens to us** when we enter fully into Christ's Kingdom.

- ✍ When we decide to **follow Jesus**, to **obey his teachings** and make his **friendship** our highest priority, we put ourselves under his protection and his guidance, becoming full **citizens** of his Kingdom.
- ✍ And as soon as we do that, suddenly our lives take on a **whole new purpose**.
- ✍ Suddenly our relationships, actions, and decisions take on **transcendent meaning**; they are connected to **eternal life**.
- ✍ Suddenly, we are free from the **frustration** and **meaninglessness** that comes from living only for the passing, superficial pleasures and successes of this life, because we have found something **infinitely more valuable**: a **personal relationship with Jesus Christ**, King and Lord of heaven and earth.

That **relationship** is our treasure and pearl; it **alone** can give us the **joy and satisfaction** we yearn for in the depths of our hearts.

ILLUSTRATION: Sandbox Blues (linked to Second Reading)

One reason we often give into **frustration and discouragement** is because we forget how **wonderful** this treasure really is.

In Christ, we have become **children of God**, members of God's own family.

All of God's omnipotence is now **at our service**.

As St Paul puts it in today's Second Reading, "We know that **all things work for good** for those who love God."

- ✍ A little boy was playing in his **sandbox** one Saturday morning.
- ✍ He had with him his box of **cars and trucks**, his **plastic pail**, and a shiny, red plastic **shovel**.
- ✍ While digging roads and tunnels in the **soft sand**, he ran into a **large rock** in the middle of the sandbox.
- ✍ He dug around the rock, finally **dislodging** it from the dirt.
- ✍ Struggling, the little boy used his feet to **push and nudge** the large rock across the sandbox.
- ✍ But when he finally got it to the **edge** of the sandbox, he was simply **unable** to roll it up and over the little wall.
- ✍ Determined, the little boy **grunted, shoved, pushed, and pried**, but every single time the rock just **fell back** into the sandbox, scraping and smashing his little fingers.
- ✍ Finally he burst into **tears of frustration**.
- ✍ Moments later, a **large shadow** fell across the boy and the sandbox.
- ✍ It was his father, who had been watching from the **living room window**.
- ✍ Gently but firmly he said, "Son, why didn't you use **all the strength that you had available**?"
- ✍ Defeated, the boy sobbed back, "But I **did**, Daddy, I did! I used **all the strength** that I had!"
- ✍ "No, son," corrected the father kindly. "You didn't use **all** the strength you had. **You didn't ask me**."
- ✍ With that the father reached down, **picked up the rock**, and removed it from the sandbox.

The **treasure** Christ offers his followers is **access to the Father** and a share in the **grace** that makes us God's children.

APPLICATION: Finding More Treasures

In a sense, each one of us has **already found** the treasure of friendship with Christ, and the **benefits** it brings.

And yet, here he is, telling us this parable **again**.

Why? Because friendships are **unique** treasures.

- ✍ Not only can it be **lost**, like normal treasures and pearls of great price, but it can also **grow**.
- ✍ We can always get to know our friends **better**, experience **more things** together, and **enjoy** each other's company more as the years go by.
- ✍ If that's the case with merely **human** friendships, how much **more** is it the case of our friendship with **God** himself, who is infinite wisdom, sheer goodness, and eternal beauty!
- ✍ St Paul wrote about the **inexhaustibly abundant riches** of Christ's grace (Ephesians 2:7).
- ✍ It's as if he were saying that Jesus is not **just one** buried treasure, but a whole **series** of them, each one **more marvelous** than the one before.
- ✍ Jesus has **more** he wants to give us, **more** he wants to show us, **more** he wants to teach us.

And he is reminding today us that nothing is more **valuable** than **discovering and laying claim** to that "more."

- ✍ The farmer sold **all** he had to buy his treasure.
- ✍ The merchant sold **all** he had to buy the pearl.
- ✍ We too have to step **out of our comfort zone** to lay claim to the treasures Christ has in store for us.
- ✍ We have to **give something up** - maybe a sinful habit, a secret grudge, a self-centered ambition, or a hidden sorrow - in order to **lay firmer hold** on Christ.

Today, Jesus is hoping with **all his heart** that will we **trust** him enough to do just that, to **give up** whatever it is he has **put on our conscience**, in order to **experience his grace more fully**.

Let's not disappoint him.