

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – July 30, 2017
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I am presently living in my mother's home until the diocese completes some renovations to the Cathedral apartment. Our home is pretty much as it has always been with stuff in every closet and a completely full attic. My father always said that we would not have to clean out the attic – someday it would just come crashing down into the living room. With that in mind, some years ago I stumbled upon a British television series called "Cash in the Attic." Each week, a family would invite in an expert in antiques to rummage through their home to find unwanted collectibles and other items that they could sell to pay for a family vacation. Invariably, the expert would quietly explain to the family members that the rubbish they had collected would bring a fortune if sold at auction. So they loaded up the truck, took it all to auction and came back with their trip to EuroDisney all paid for. Oh, there was some drama. Some things sold for much less than they expected while others went for much more. But all was well in the end.

Seeing the expert rummaging around in this English home, I couldn't help but imagine what he might find in my family's attic. Oh, he'd have plenty of boxes to rummage through – but I somehow suspect that in the Marshall attic he would not find that rare 18th century porcelain dinner service or the fifteen silver trays that apparently every person in Great Britain has lying around. No, if we put everything in our attic into an auction I doubt we'd have enough money to take us to Disney World – maybe to the matinee of a Disney movie instead.

When we hear Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven to buried treasure or to a pearl of great price, we are tempted to look upon it with the skepticism or the amusement with which we watch "Cash in the Attic." If we had that kind of treasure in our grasp, we tell ourselves, there is no way we would lose track of it. If I had a treasure chest full of gold and silver pieces, I doubt that burying it in a field would be my first choice as a method of security. Yet if I did bury the treasure, I would certainly remember what field I put it in – and how I would go about retrieving it. And pearls of great price don't just turn up – at least I've never been lucky enough to find one. In New Orleans, I saw plenty of people get sick from oysters, but I never saw anybody get rich from one. Treasures just don't come along every day, and it is fair to say that most of us will never actually see one.

Of course, that depends upon what we mean by treasure. If all we are searching for are diamonds, emeralds, rubies and pearls, if we only hope to find suitcases of cash or rooms of gold bullion, then we are likely to be disappointed.

Jesus doesn't promise us that. Instead, he tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, a pearl of great price. The gift of the kingdom is meant to bring us the same level of joy as we would experience if we found a monetary treasure. Even though we will never find that treasure buried in a field, we can imagine how we would feel if we did. We'd be excited and jubilant and relieved. We'd imagine all that we could do with the money – how we'd pay off our bills and help our family and friends and live more securely and maybe even splurge a bit. We'd be so filled with joy that the smile would never leave our faces. If we would be so excited to be rich, to find treasure, then how joyous and excited must we be that we have found the kingdom of God. Truly, the smile never leaves our faces. Well, maybe not.

Yes, we have found the treasure of the kingdom of God. True, we are not yet in heaven, but Jesus tells us that the kingdom is in our midst because he is in our midst. We have faith in the kingdom, in the promises made to us by Christ, but somehow the pressures and allures of this world hold us back from experiencing the same joy that we imagine if we struck it rich. Why is that? Do we not believe that heaven and earth are united in the person of Jesus Christ? Do we not believe that Christ offers us an everlasting inheritance in heaven? Do we not believe that even now we are invited to share in the banquet feast of heaven, to dine on the Bread of Angels, to be refreshed by the Cup of Salvation? Oh, yes, we believe, but we do not always experience. We have joy, but we have worries and concerns as well. In short, it is difficult for us – on this side of heaven – to see things with the clarity that we long for in the fullness of the kingdom. That's where we can learn from the experience of Solomon in our first reading.

God gave young Solomon carte blanche. He could ask for anything and his wish would be granted. What would you have asked for? Health or wealth, security or peace, a home, perhaps, or children or happiness? The choices seem endless. But Solomon – knowing that it was his destiny to rule Israel – asked for wisdom and understanding. He asked for a heart that could discern and the wisdom to lead his people in their covenant relationship with God. Solomon was granted wisdom that is renowned to this day – and it was only with the wisdom and understanding that are the gifts of the Holy Spirit that Solomon saw, that we can see that the treasures of this world are nothing in comparison to the treasure of the kingdom. It is only the gifts of the Spirit that can bring us joy in the face of hardship, peace in the midst of chaos. Only God can bring joy from sorrow, hope from pain, life from death. Only God can satisfy all of our longings – and in Christ Jesus he has. The kingdom of heaven, the pearl of great price, the treasure is in our midst. May God give us the understanding to see the kingdom and the wisdom to rejoice in it.