

Homily 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (30.7.17)

'Rummaging in our personal haversacks' - What's really important?'

So we continue with our parables of the Kingdom, which we've heard from Matthew over the last few weeks. And, as I've said, I think you have to make these parables your own to fully understand them. We often think of the Kingdom, as 'out there' and yet we need to look at what is within us.

I remember years ago, when I was on a marriage preparation course not because I was getting married but because I was a priest at the church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We used to have over twenty weddings a year, and we had to prepare couples. We used the counsellors from Catholic Marriage Advisory Council. I remember one image I really liked from the course – that of the 'haversack' on our back. The people were talking about when you really know someone well, either as husband or wife, or spouse, or through courtship – long courtship, or maybe just a very good friend who you've known for years, with whom you've shared your personal details. Before this deeper relationship, you've lived as a single individual, with your own likes and preferences, and you come to a new relationship carrying this 'haversack' of the single you. In that haversack is all the 'equipment' we get from our parents and the wider family, together with our own innate prejudices, as well as our strengths.

When we become intimate with someone, or close to someone in friendship, we give them permission to rummage in our haversack. They lift up the flap and look inside and they go –

 'that's a bit rusty isn't it?' and, 'it's about time that went!'
or more positively,

 'oh this is good, I can learn from that.'

We actually enrich one another, and tidy up each other in a relationship.

To me, that image of the haversack suits this last parable of a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds of things, and we see the fishermen

sort out the good and bad fish. That's so true of us too. When we try to assimilate the Kingdom, the sovereign rule of God in our own lives, there's an awful lot of 'rummaging' to do – our reactions to things – positive as well as negative. We need to sort out those reactions if we are to find the Kingdom within us.

The other two parables are superb too, because it's about investment isn't it? Like the merchant who is a collector, a connoisseur of pearls. When he or she discovers the most perfect pearl, then they'll do anything in their power to own that pearl. And the other parable which gives us a sense of searching – rather like a treasure hunter today with his metal detector. In the parable he stumbles upon a great treasure, and buys the field so he can claim ownership of the treasure. (He obviously didn't have the modern British law of 'Treasure Trove' to deal with!)

And the point of all this is – Jesus gives us these images of worldly wealth – the pearl collector, the treasure, and says to us - you'll bend over backwards for these physical things – things that will not last – but what about the Kingdom of God?! What about the value of God in your life, the Sovereign Rule of God? How much do you invest in that? Because YOU need to be a real searcher, and a genuine connoisseur.

And if you look at the gospels, the teaching of Jesus Christ, with all its divine wisdom, I challenge you to bring me any religious text from any other religion that is as profound as the teaching of Jesus Christ. The teachings of Buddha, and the Hindu scriptures, are superb I'm sure – but do we really appreciate and value the outstanding wisdom of Jesus Christ to be found in the Christian gospels – such a wisdom that Solomon would LOVE to have heard!