

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
JULY 26, 2026
SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

SCRIPTURES:

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12 God is pleased that Solomon asks for wisdom.
Romans 8:28-30 God will not default on plans of salvation.
Matthew 13:44-52 The kingdom of heaven is worth more than all else.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Matthew:

These three parables, found only in Matthew, are addressed to the disciples after Jesus has entered into the privacy of a house. They need to know something special. There will be a cost to discipleship that will not be charged to those who are not disciples! So, the disciples need to be comforted in a particular way.

Matthew himself exemplifies the “scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven.” He knows how to bring forth everything needed for the good of his community. He reaches into the living heritage of the community within which has been preserved the stories of Jesus. That is the *old*. He knows how to apply it to the years of the 80s when he is writing. That is the *new*.

Our translations are very weak: “the kingdom of heaven is *like*” The Aramaic that lies behind the Greek words here says, “*It is the case with the kingdom of heaven as with a buried treasure ..., a pearl of great price*” The focus is with the conclusion of the story rather than with the specific item in the story.

One story has to do with private life: “a buried treasure.” The other has to do with one’s public life or business: “a merchant dealing in pearls.” The kingdom of heaven is about both the private and the public life, what is seen and what is unseen. Politics or public affairs are not exempt from God’s concern.

Parables sometimes contain an element that is not quite ethical, if not downright illegal! The “buried treasure” obviously belonged to someone else. The one who found it goes out and buys the field without disclosing to the owner all that lies in that field. Parables do not have to *work* in all their elements. Some facts may be extraneous to the point that the speaker wants to make (See Luke 16:1-13; 18:1-8).

The “Net Cast into the Sea” resembles the “Wheat and the Weeds” parable. It emphasizes that only at the end of the world should there be a sorting out of the good and the bad. Again, the fate awaiting those who have not repented is a horrible one. Weeds were used as fuel for cooking meals in a place where there were few trees. Here, Matthew goes beyond reporting what Jesus said: that the bad fish would be thrown out. He adds, “The angels will come; they will deal, not with fish but with evil people. They will throw those into the furnace of fire!”

Philosophers tell us that *values* are constructs of the human heart and of the human intelligence. A dog does not know the worth of the expensive shoe that he is chewing to pieces. Only persons can evaluate and appreciate that which is valuable. Made in the image and likeness of God, we have the ability to see and to assign value to things. We make judgments. And we go after what

we value. We spend our time and our energies pursuing what we perceive to be good for us. The ultimate value has to be what God values.

1 Kings:

God sometimes communicates with people in dreams (Genesis 20:3; 28:12; 31:11; Joseph in the Second Testament). Solomon has a dream: God says to him, "Ask for whatever!" But Solomon is already wise. He knows how to be modest and humble before God. So, he asks not for wealth or for power, nothing for himself, only for what he needs to be God's worthy servant as king of God's people. He asks for the kind of knowledge that will make him effective in his service of God. Solomon will forever be known as the one who knew the treasure worth pursuing.

Romans:

Perhaps, some do not yet know for certain that God is in charge of the universe, in control of all the circumstance of our lives. God also protects and guides those who belong to God. The same God is the one who knows all things and who loves supremely. Surely, there can be no more reassuring words in the whole Bible. In the plan of salvation that God has for all persons, we find comfort and consolation. God will make it happen on our behalf. (The verb tense indicates that God has already made it happen!) Ours is not like the lives of the pagans who are at the mercy of the whims and fatalities of the "fates" or blind powers. The fact that God has already planned for our salvation does not mean that we have no part to play, nor that we have no choice now. God always respects the freedom given us in creation.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you have one of those computer programs for personal finances that lets you see at the end of the year exactly what you have spent your money on? Do you keep track of the amount of energy you devote to the various segments of your life? Are we sleeping our lives away? What kinds of persons do we spend most of our time with?

2. What are your parish priorities? Is the whole Church engaged in ministries that really matter? Where would you shift some of the energies of the Church if you were in charge? Do you feel you have a responsibility to say something about where the parish is putting its money? Will your voice be heard?

3. Do you value contemplative prayer? Do you believe that after you retire you should spend the rest of the years allotted to you as a contemplative? Are you now *in training* for the eternal Beatific Vision? Are you exercising your spiritual muscles for a better performance in God's sight? What Olympic record are you trying to set?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

On the day of the Memorial of St. Martha, patron of homemakers and of cooks (July 29), go to your principal homemaker, the one who does the cooking for your household, the one who does most of the laundry, the one who vacuums the floors and cleans the bathroom, and say: "Thank You!"

PRAYER

*I have said, O Lord, that my part
is to keep your words.*

*The law of your mouth is to me more precious
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.*

Lord, I love your commands.

(From Psalm 119)

CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

Sometimes in prayer and meditation, I consider what the greatest treasure is in my own life. What do I value the most? Is there any one thing for which I would give up everything else I possess? It helps me to set things in perspective and to see priorities when I ask myself those questions. I look at the lives of my friends and of other people I know well, and I wonder what their “pearl of great price” happens to be. What is the last thing in this world they would give up if they had to give up everything? We all have a “bottom line” of sorts. Most often, that line has nothing to do with financial statements. There are values and relationships that we treasure far beyond what we can list on the asset side of our personal or family bookkeeping.

A parish too has its own “pearl of great price.” What is your greatest treasure at St. So-and-So? The oldest person in the parish? The youngest person in the parish? Those preparing to be received into the Church? The poor among us? Those who gave an anonymous gift for the repair of the church steeple? The man or woman who started a ministry for alienated Catholics? Perhaps your parish priest or deacon? Perhaps our greatest treasure is not really a person but rather the love that binds us all to one another!

The Word of God that lives on in our Catholic faith, Jesus Christ made flesh in his body which is the Church, the Holy Spirit living in our hearts, our call to mission and to ministry in making known the name of the Savior who is good news for us and for others, the holy Eucharist which is our food and drink for everlasting life, the rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the poor whom we serve at the food pantry, the children whom we initiate as Church. It is good to take a look at the priorities of our parish in its ministries and in its services. Someone has said that we can tell what is important to the parish when we look at the annual pastoral plan: How much of personal and financial resources do we assign to each segment of our responsibilities? Do we value buildings more than we do persons? A spiritual inventory will do us all some good!