

**Reflection on the Gospel-17th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A
(Matthew 13:44-52)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The three parables and the summary statement in today's gospel conclude Matthew's parable chapter. In the first parable, the Matthean Jesus likens the kin-dom of the heavens, not just to "treasure", but rather to treasure hidden in a field that someone, possibly a slave or day labourer, finds and hides before going joyfully to sell everything in order to buy the field and acquire the treasure. The parabolic image here comprises the whole complex of actor, objects and actions (the finder; the finding, selling and buying; the joy; the treasure and the field). The details pose endless questions. Who had right to ownership of the treasure? Is this a case of theft? Whatever the answer to these questions, this parable invites us to pause and consider what constitutes the real "treasure" in our lives and ask to what lengths we would go in order to secure that treasure.

The second parable tells of a merchant who seeks fine pearls, finds one of great value, then goes and sells all his possessions in order to acquire that one pearl. Again, that is what the kin-dom of the heavens is about. What is of such value to us that we would give up everything else in order to have that one thing, that one relationship? That is the question.

Jesus proceeds to liken the kin-dom of the heavens, not just to a dragnet, but to a dragnet thrown into the sea that catches fish of every kind and is drawn to shore by fisher-folk who sit down and sort it, putting the good into baskets and throwing away the bad. To what might this parable invite us? As we confine ourselves to essential shopping during the pandemic, many are asking what is good and what is not so good, what sort of future do we really want. Do we want to perpetuate a consumerist life-style that appropriates far more than our share of the world's resources and leaves little time or energy for considering either the plight of our endangered planet or the needs and aspirations of those on the edge? There is a new realisation that standard of living and quality of life are far from synonymous.

The summary statement tells us that, like Matthew's community, we need to be "scribes" educated in the ways of God. We need to bring out of the treasury of our traditions "what is new and what is old", wisely discerning what to keep and what to relinquish. Parables help to subvert our presuppositions. They disturb our complacency if we allow them to do so. The parables of the buried treasure, the priceless pearl and the dragnet remind us that gospel discipleship demands an all-embracing investment of heart and spirit. We search our hearts to know where our treasure lies and join with others who show us how we might claim it for the common good of the entire Earth community.