

Homily For Wednesday of the 17th Week of in Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - July 27, 2022

Jer. 15:10-21 "I will take you back ... if you utter what is precious and not what is worthless."

Psalm 59:1-17 "I will sing of your steadfast love in the morning."

Matt 13:44-46 "On finding one pearl of great value, he sold all that he had and bought it."

A Certain Treasure

Introduction

In all the major professional sports, the teams draft young players before they can really know what their true potential will be. There is a lot of guess work in determining which players will continue to develop so that they can be effective players. There are no sure things in this process. That is why a lot of resources go into making those selections. In the first round of the draft, there is the expectation that the players chosen will be able to play in the big leagues, certainly within a couple of years. If that doesn't happen, it is considered a huge failure. However, in every round after the first, there is no certainty at all. Any player chosen in the many rounds after the first, who have an impact at the professional level, is considered a bonus. All the teams are looking for that 'diamond in the rough', a rough looking stone that turns out to be a polished gem.

Many of the choices we make in our lives, and the things we make into priorities, will either pay off later, or will turn out to be mistakes. Which career choice, which relationship choice, which investment, which friends, which opportunities to pursue. Some will pay off in worldly success and others not so much.

In the spiritual life, it is different. The Good News is good because it always pays off. That doesn't mean it will be easy. It just means that there is a way we can be sure of ultimate success. In the life given to us by the God who created us for one purpose, to share his Blessed life with us, no matter what happens to us in the world, we can make a choice which will lead us to the greatest reward possible. That reward is always life with God.

Lamentation of Jeremiah

The prophet Jeremiah seems unsure of that success. First of all, he resisted God's call for him to be a prophet. He is unwilling, but eventually bends his will to God's. Jeremiah is a very emotional dude. We see in him how failure and loss is experienced at a deeply emotional level. Apparently he is sometimes referred to as 'the weeping prophet'. Loss can do that to us in the world. Sometimes it seems that we are simply overwhelmed by it all.

This weeping isn't necessarily a bad thing. I remember one of the first funerals I presided at as a deacon. It was for a very elderly woman. At the reception after the funeral, I noticed her great grandson, a boy of about 12, standing by himself. Right there, in the middle of the gathered family and friends, he began to weep uncontrollably. At the time, I thought it was one of the most beautiful of sights, a boy just letting himself feel the full weight of the loss of his great grandmother.

So Jeremiah weeps over Israel's plight. He laments his own personal feelings of loss. He cries out to God that he can't understand how this is happening when he has tried so hard to do God's will. "Why have you struck us down so that there is no healing for us?" It kind of reminds us of Job, who was a good man but who lost everything and is trying to figure it out.

Then he remembers the reality of their situation: We know that our ancestors have sinned and turned away from you. We know that we have sinned. But you have made a covenant with us. For this sake and for the sake of your name, don't forget about us. Then there is this very beautiful section, where Jeremiah remembers the most important way he has turned to God: "When I found your words, I devoured them. They became the joy and the happiness of my heart, because I bore your name, O Lord, God of hosts." He recognizes the treasure that is God, through his holy word.

Now God speaks. This will be our transition to the parables of Jesus today. God says to Jeremiah: Turn back. You have heard my word? Now let your word be a precious jewel. I will take you back, but you must say and do only things of great value. You must let all other thoughts and sins and desires go.

Matthew

Today, once again, we have that Word of God, in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God, telling us how to make our draft selections so that we will have no doubt. We will be certain of success. How will we know if we have succeeded? It is nothing short of the kingdom of heaven. Even the wildest earthly success is nothing in comparison to this choice that is before us.

To the world, the greatest treasure is hidden. That's the theme of this chapter in Matthew. Not everyone will be looking for the kingdom, so they are not going to find it. Only those who are searching for it, or who will recognize it when they come across it, will know what to do. And what is that? Let go of everything else you thought was going to be a hit. Trade it. Sell it. Then buy what you have found. A hidden treasure. A pearl of great price, more valuable than any gold.

Hope in Jesus

Martha's sister, Mary, got this. Remember how she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him? That's the treasure. Jesus himself. He is the jackpot. He is the Kingdom of Heaven. The kingdom is a treasure that alters one's priorities. It doesn't mean life will be easy. We will sometimes cry our hearts out with the feelings of what we have lost. But that will be the very moment when we can recognize the great treasure, the pearl, that is right in front of us.

There is only one pearl. It is THE pearl of great price. All that we have is really not enough to buy it. Yet, when we let go of those things as our top priorities and turn back to God, He gives us everything. He gives us the pearl. He gives us the deepest desire of our hearts, that we didn't even realize was there at first, the salvation of our souls.

The treasure is out of sight for those immersed in this world. We have to seek it to discover it and be willing to give up even our comfort for it. Can I think of anything I need to up for this greatest of pearls? That is what I must reflect on today. If I can do this thing, my choice will guarantee success. It's a sure thing.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand? But with you is found forgiveness.*

Collect: *May your grace, O Lord, make us determined to carry out good works.*

Jeremiah: *Jeremiah cried out to the Lord: Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me, a man of strife. When I found your words, I devoured them. They became to me a joy and the delight of my heart. For I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Therefore thus says the Lord: If you turn back, I will take you back and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth. They shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you says the Lord, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.*

Psalm: *O my God, protect me from those who rise up against me. For no transgression or sin of mine. I will watch for you, O God, my fortress. I will sing of your might. I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been a fortress for me and a refuge in the day of my distress.*

Matthew: *Jesus said to the crowds: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. On finding one pearl of great value, he sold all that he had and bought it.*