

Homily for July 30th 2020Thursday 17th week of Ordinary Time

“The Gospel is never changing and always new”

The saying at the end of today’s Gospel is a riddle-like proverb where Jesus asks the Apostles “have you understood the parables?” And they say “yes.” And then he says to them “therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

What does that mean? It is a very cryptic saying. There are a couple things I think we can point out about it.

First, the scribe:

The scribe in Jewish culture was somebody who would not only know how to write because he had been trained, but in particular they studied the Scriptures. They would make copies of the Jewish scriptures and they would also study the Scriptures, ponder the Scriptures, they were kind of the ancient equivalent of a biblical scholar, someone who devotes their life to unpacking the word and the meaning of the word of God as found in the Scriptures. So Jesus here is in essence calling his disciples to be like scribes who were trained for the sake, not of the Law of Moses, but for the kingdom of heaven. So they're supposed to study the Scriptures and through their training, they are to bring out what is new, the good news of the kingdom, the unexpected elements that Jesus is giving to them in the parables, the mysteries, but also what is old, looking at the mystery of the kingdom in light of the Old Testament and how the Old Testament is going to be fulfilled in the New, and then the New is going to be concealed in the Old.

Second, the scripture:

I love this proverb, because this is what I love to do as a teacher of Scripture, is to try to look at that relationship between the old and the new, to see how often, as Augustine said, the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, but then the Old is revealed in the New. And that is what Jesus is doing with the apostles here. He's training them to go out and proclaim the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God, which is a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, but it also goes beyond the Old Testament. There is something new that Jesus is revealing through his parables about this great mystery of the kingdom. There is something unexpected there and that's what the Apostles are being trained to bring out.

As a pastor, associated with this joy of seeing the complementarity of the Old and New Testaments is the gift of seeing people discover in their own lives this ancient story that is ever new when it comes alive for a person in their life. When this happens we come to see with greater clarity what Jeremiah expressed analogically in the first reading. We are the clay in the hand of the master potter who will shape and mold us by grace and our cooperation into those who will reflect the perfect image of His son Jesus, as we are inspired by the life of the saints. We also discover that in this world the Church is this great net that pulls up good fish, bad fish and what are not fish at all.

Almost all the Greek manuscripts and early translations say “All kinds of things”. A dragnet is very long and about two metres wide; when it is extended between two boats it forms double or triple mesh with the result that when it is pulled in it collects all sorts of things in addition to fish—algae, weeds, rubbish etc.¹

In this world the church is kind of a messy fishing boat because of all that has been brought on board. But the Church is also that community that lives in the hope that in the end everything that is old will be made new, and all that diminishes life, because it is evil will be sorted out by Jesus, and the angels so that the righteous will shine like the sun in all its glory.

May we be inspired to a deepening trust in the teaching of Jesus to discover that the treasure of Revelation is so rich that it can provide teaching that applies to all times and situations. It is for the word of God to enlighten all ages and situations—not the other way around. Therefore, the Church and its pastors preach, not new things, but a single unchanging truth contained in the treasure of Revelation: for the past two thousand years the Gospel has always been “good news”.²

¹ [*Saint Matthew's Gospel*](#). (2005). (p. 108). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.

² [*Saint Matthew's Gospel*](#). (2005). (p. 109). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.