

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 7th Sunday after Trinity
July 26, 2020

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The 13th chapter of St Matthew's Gospel gives us a whole succession of memorable parables of Our Lord Jesus. We have them as Gospels at Mass on successive Sundays: parables of the sower, of the tares, and today, because these are short, a grouping of parables: of the pearl of great price, the treasure in the field, and the net gathering fish of all kinds.

Up to now, Our Lord's message had been that different mindsets receive the Word of God with varying acceptance, and consequent fruitfulness. God our Heavenly Father is patient, allowing the good and the bad to grow up together, even in His Church, until harvest.

Today's gospel passage takes a different tack. Here God's Son had something different in mind. His teaching was still cast in parables, and directed at the same listeners. But here He is letting us into God's mind and heart, into God's view of things, into the very reasoning for the Incarnation, when God took flesh upon Him and became man.

In both the parables of the pearl and the treasure in the field, note the man in each case sold all that he had in order to obtain what he desired. And we think of the Incarnation of God "emptying Himself." That was St Paul's memorable phrase. Almighty God became His creature and brought Heaven into a cold manger, into an upper room of betrayal, and placed His divine throne and crown on the hard wood of the Cross. We know we were "bought with a price." Someday we will know just how fully involved God was when He "emptied Himself." We will know fully, when we see Him as He is. But that is not now. For now we have the parables to help us understand what God has done for us.

Our Lord compared us to the pearl of great price. Momentarily we are flattered. Who doesn't like pearls? They are a very attractive and appreciated commodity, luxurious and elegant. We make gifts of pearls as an expression of great affection and esteem. But the Lord added the *other* parables to the mix, and perhaps this is so we will not compare ourselves too favorably to pearls. Fish flopping in the bilge of a dingy is not so elegant, and mention that some fish caught were thrown back into the drink is downright distressing!

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Then there is the other parable: the one about the treasure in the field. In it the man still sells all that he had in order to make the purchase. It is still Christ Who gives all that He had and makes the purchase, Who joined us, and redeemed us. But here, the parable describes coming across treasure in a *field*. And there may be many other things in the field besides treasure! There may be rocks making farming difficult. Perhaps there is a broken-down barn that ought to be pulled down and burned. There are always weeds, and maybe the remains of a crop never harvested. The whole field may have been so poorly managed for years, with the farmer not alternating crops, or allowing a part of the field to lie fallow each year. Poor tillage may have led to erosion of the topsoil. In these ways a field that has been badly farmed can be in very poor condition. Is the field Our Lord's gentle reminder of the condition of our souls?

The man in the parable puts up with all this because of the treasure he know lies hidden in the field. Jesus will go to the Cross, paying all that He had, to redeem, to give value again, to us, because of the treasure that lies hidden. That field has got all sorts of things in it we call our life: our projects, often in decay or ruined out of neglect. There may be some things we do which, like an old barn, need to be pulled down. The farmer can practically ruin the soil through bad or hard farming practices, resulting in making it impossible to grow crops. So too we can create a mindset in ourselves that is nearly impervious to the Word of God.

One reason we call the Gospel *good news* is that there is One Who thinks the field still worth the price, despite its sorry condition. That fact is a great comfort to you and me. There are some poor souls in great distress after concluding there wasn't any treasure in the field of their lives at all. *And then comes Jesus.*

So He buys the field, and the date of purchase is called Good Friday. And because He is the good farmer, He has all the remedies, practices, and tools to put the field right, and have it produce for His desired purpose. And the treasure? The treasure is a soul perfectly attuned to its Heavenly Father.

That is how much Jesus wants you. *And you must want Him too.*