



Bringing Home the Word



17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 27, 2014

Is It Trash or Is It Treasure?

By Diane M. Houdek

We watch shows like A&E's *Hoarders* with a sort of sick fascination, wondering how people can accumulate so many possessions that they can no longer walk through their homes. Spinoffs and copycat shows have included stories of relapsed hoarders and the extreme version, *Hoarding: Buried Alive*. But then at the other end of the spectrum are the ever-popular shows such as the venerable *Antiques Roadshow* on PBS that hold out the enticing promise that the junk in your attic or garage might make you fabulously wealthy. We have apparently developed a complex and conflicted relationship with our possessions.

Recently I read an article about the adult children of hoarders. One effect

that their parent(s) problem had for them was an inability to distinguish the intrinsic value of things. They found themselves throwing away things that were actually valuable or useful because they were afraid *not* to keep useless containers or other trash.

Distinguishing what is of true value in our spiritual lives can often be a similar challenge. Over time we can find ourselves hanging on to childish superstitions and missing the opportunity to grow into a more adult faith in God's providence. We harbor a secret desire for magic prayers instead of the difficult task of discernment.

Today's Gospel contains several parables about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus finds numerous ways to help his followers understand the lure that attaining the kingdom should have for them.

He talks about a farmer plowing his field and coming across a buried treasure. The man buries the treasure again and then buys the whole field to secure his ownership of the treasure chest. Then he tells them about the pearl merchant who finds one fine pearl and sells everything else he owns in order to possess it. Finally he tells them about the fishing net that contained both good and bad fish.

One man stumbles upon his treasure accidentally; the other one finds it in the regular course of his daily business; the third needs to sort the good from the

bad. In all three instances, the central characters must be able to recognize the great value of what they have found.

When we hear this Gospel, we can find ourselves getting lost in the details.

We start dreaming about what we'd do if we won the lottery or if we had a chance for an ideal promotion at work. We can fail to make the leap to understand what Jesus is saying about the kingdom of heaven.

For many of us, especially those born and baptized into the faith at an early age, our religious life is simply part of who we are, more like the field than the treasure. We don't recognize the wonder of it and so we don't value it as highly as we might. Those who come to the Church later in life can have a deeper appreciation for it, and seeing their enthusiasm can spark our own. This is one of the great benefits of the more visible RCIA process in today's Church.

Today's Gospel prompts us to take a step back and recognize the treasures before us. Take some time to think about your own faith, the rituals of the Church, the Eucharist, the Scriptures. Ask what you'd be missing without those things in your life. Ask, too, whether you're holding on to things that you've outgrown or no longer need, things that might be getting in the way of a more mature relationship with God. The treasures of our spiritual lives are too precious to get lost among the clutter. †

SUNDAY READINGS

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

A king wishes for a lasting kingdom. He finds it in true service to God.

Romans 8:28-30

Paul reminds us that God is on the side of those who respond in love to God's love for them. From all eternity God has planned their salvation.

Matthew 13:44-52

Jesus teaches that the kingdom of heaven is like a valuable treasure. The finder does whatever is necessary to obtain it.

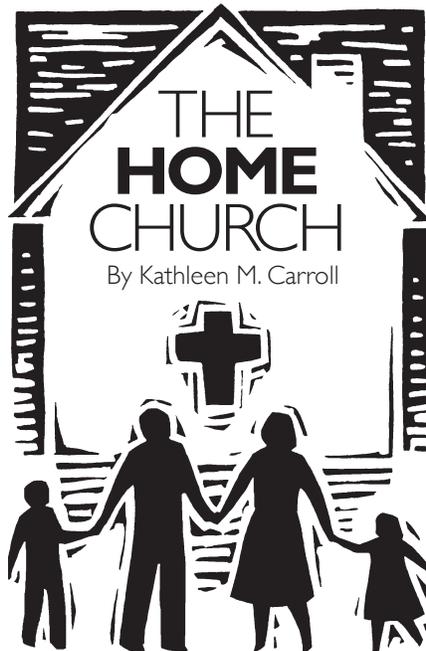
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- What does the parable of the net teach us about God's kingdom?
- How valuable is the kingdom of God to you? Why?
- What is your most precious treasure? How do your feelings about this relate to the pearl in today's parable?

PRAYER

Lord,
our lives are filled
with good things and bad,
joy and sorrow.
Help us to know
all things work
together for good
for those who love you.
Give us understanding hearts
that we might see our lives
as you do,
and so make
right judgments.
Amen.



I had my children while I was still in college, working multiple jobs to make ends meet. When a colleague asked how I managed to balance work, school, and children, the question confused me. "Balance? There is no balance. The children come first and everything else comes, well, if it does."

I'm not sure if this single-minded focus came as a result of my own upbringing or if it was a biological switch that flipped when I first heard, "It's a boy!" I do know all the dreams I'd once held dear evaporated and were not missed. My calling turned out to be more of a high-pitched, early-morning wail.

Jesus tells us that our devotion to the Gospel should be as all-encompassing. It is the pearl of great price for which we sell all our possessions. Trying to balance our faith with other items on our to-do lists results in a scurrying disorder in which everything is of equal importance—going to Mass, feeding the children, watering the plants, getting that worrisome lump looked at. Some things are simply more important than others. As Christians, nothing should be more precious to us than our faith.



The gift of discernment offers us a way to examine our spiritual lives and God's activity in our world. As a gift of the Spirit, it provides an inner certitude of God's presence or absence.

St. Ignatius Loyola includes discernment of spirits as an essential part of his Spiritual Exercises. This involves learning to recognize the presence of good or evil in situations, circumstances and, at times, people.

Like all spiritual gifts, it can be strengthened through study, prayer, and guidance from others. Many good books are available on this topic. A careful search of the Internet can turn up helpful resources as well.

Honesty and humility go hand in hand with the gift of discernment. We need to beware of crossing the line from discernment to judgment of others. And we need to be willing to admit that we might be wrong. Constant prayer will keep us aware of God's hand moving in our life.

Questions of faith can be difficult to sort out by ourselves. Consider looking for a spiritual director, someone to help you wrestle with these questions and grow in your prayer life. Ask your pastor or a member of the parish staff for recommendations.

WEEKDAY READINGS

Monday	Jer 13:1-11/Mt 13:31-35	Friday	Jer 26:1-9/Mt 13:54-58
Tuesday	Jer 14:17-22 /Mt 13:36-43 <i>Martha</i>		<i>Alphonsus Liguori</i>
Wednesday	Jer 15:10, 16-21/Mt 13:44-46	Saturday	Jer 26:11-16, 24/Mt 14:1-12
Thursday	Jer 18:1-6/Mt 13:47-53 <i>Ignatius of Loyola</i>		