

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 17th Sunday Ordinary Year A1

What a great set of parables Jesus teaches today about a treasure hunter, a pearl merchant, and fishermen picking through a net looking for the big one. And we might have thought our current 'trash or treasure' shows like the Pickers, Pawn Stars or Storage Wars were a unique and new in our modern time? Yet Jesus' characters in these gospel parables beat us to the bargain, in fact they come upon the find of lifetime! And Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God is like that – God's grace is hidden right now, among what we might look over and walk by every moment – until our eyes & hearts realize, catch it and hold on to it. There it is! Priceless treasure, that God has set in our path for us to discover!

Have you ever been surprised stumbling upon a treasure? These parables remind me of one time when I was working behind the counter in our family's grocery, when a neighbor came in and said, *"I can't believe what happened just now – I'm so thankful to my father – what a gift!"* I knew that his father had passed away, but before I could ask the question, "What do you mean?" he had proceeded to ask, "Can you break this \$100 dollar bill for me?" I told him, 'Sure, but what's up?' He told me, "Dad and I always hunted together when I was little and he knew I loved his 12-gauge shotgun, so after he passed his gun collection was given to me. The 12-gauge has just sat in the cabinet since then but this morning, I thought I'd break it down and restore it, so as I took the wood stock off to sand it, out of its hollowed end, this straw looking-wad fell out, and it was 10 \$100 bills rolled up in rubber band!" He went on, "The gun was already priceless but dad sweetened the deal stashing that surprise in it for me!" Ofc course, what a find, I thought. Or closer to home for me, when I was a kid I collected stamps. I don't know how much of those kind of hobbies, go on anymore, but it was a wonderfully educational thing to keep me occupied. If you followed all of the annual newly issued commemorative stamps, you could learn a lot (history, current events, personalities, science & nature, too). Some people collected by just buying those new releases (but that took big money, we kids didn't have!) So, my friend and I, were always on the lookout for used stamps – that was our main collection. We loved to visit the science museum's gift store on Saturday mornings because it had this big barrel of loose, cancelled stamps that they sold for a few cents each, and we could comb through the piles and piles of them, finding stamps we didn't have, to add to our collection. Sometimes we came upon

a great find, like a single stamp that might complete a 4 or 8 stamp series we needed to complete the set. But our most surprising find ever, wasn't at the museum. Could this even happen today? But we would walk around the neighborhood, and ask if we look through their old cards and envelopes, maybe in their attics and some allowed us to, or they cut off stamp corners for us). But the great find happened this way. My friend Danny, his mom let us poke through boxes in their attic, and we were going through a stack of cards & letters, and we hit the Jackpot! I was cutting a particularly colorful nature conservancy stamp off an envelope and as I held the envelope, I thought I saw green peek out. and sure enough there was a five dollar bill still inside the card stored away as a keepsake! We did take it to his mom (that was big money then - in the 1970's). Her finder-fee for us, was a quarter each for us to go buy a small lime Slushie at corner store. But what a surprise find on a hunt! I think that is Jesus' point about these parables illustrating the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom brings joy and life to us through the process of seeking and discovery. Jesus tells us, Matthew 7:7 "Seek and you will find" Psalm 105:4 commands us to, "Look to the Lord.....seek His face always" and Amos 5:4 tells us, "Seek me and Live!" Jesus is telling us that if we look, seek & strive to discover, we will find, and things will be opened to us. But we have to be alert, actively searching, and engaged in the seeking. We will find the kingdom, receiving God's grace. And, so much more. Like the parable of the Sower & seed, from two weeks ago, we will harvest, 30, or 60 or even a hundred-fold (Matt 13:8)! It is all here for the finding, if we actively seek it out.

This 'searching' outlook & 'seeking' posture for us, helps us understand what was otherwise a perplexing or shocking statement we heard from Jesus two weeks ago in that Sower/Seed parable. Someone caught me after last weekend's mass and asked how to explain what sounded like a 'cruel' comment from Jesus about who gets and who doesn't get the meaning of his parables. He said it sounded uncharacteristically exclusive of Jesus, that Jesus implied the Kingdom was being intentionally hidden/withheld from people - the exact verse the man was questioning was this one -Matthew 13:12 "To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away." He was asking me, 'Give the poor guy a break, he only has a little and that little is lost from him too'. But keep in mind that Jesus says, 'little can become a lot'-mustard seed (Matthew 13:31) (I note that it is repeated by Matthew in 25:29 *"For to everyone who*

has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." So, if twice repeated what is Jesus saying?) Well, Jesus is saying that we have to look, we have to seek, we have to be on hunt for it, to actually discover it. How many times have we probably had this exchange with other people, when someone asks, "Did you ever find that bolt to the dining room chair back?" No, I quit looking. Or, 'Did you ever find your cross pen? 'No 'I gave up.' Well, like the proverb, 'Use it or lose it'. If we are not actively searching or seeking, then there's no chance of any discovery-even what little we had is gone. I think that is what Jesus is saying about even the guy's little being taken away. He gave up. But Jesus tells us, that if we keep engaged in the pursuit & probe then we will find we will receive and our find will just keep growing. Jesus said as much when he sent out His apostles on mission, in Matthew 10:7 telling them, "As you go, make this proclamation: 'The kingdom of heaven is **at hand**.' Yet, I love how he goes on in Luke 17:21 to say the Kingdom is closer than you'll ever imagine, saying, "Behold, the kingdom of God is among (within) you." That's close! But it can be missed. The Kingdom is here for our discovery. We just have to seek it.