

The Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 26th July 2020 – St. Matthew 13 v 44 – 52

In today's Gospel, Jesus continues to teach the crowd by means of parables, and He continues to instruct the crowd about the nature of the Kingdom of God and the signs by which we are to recognise an authentic work of the Holy Spirit (the Kingdom of God) within us. In other parables, Jesus has spoken of the beginning of the life of grace within us as a "seed" sown widely by Divine Providence which successfully takes root in the furrowed and fertile soil/heart of the believer. In today's parables, Jesus draws attention to the appropriate and authentic **response** to the seed planted within us. The authentic response (a sign that the Word of God/the life of grace is alive and active – Hebrews 4 v 12 - within us) is the value we put on the interior life and what we do to protect, promote, nourish and encourage the life of grace within us. **Is Jesus precious to us?** Do we value Him so that we are willing to make sacrifices to ensure that the life of grace remains a living presence and active principle within us? St. Peter writes, " to you therefore who believe, Jesus is **precious**" (1 Peter 2 v 7); that we are saved by "the **precious** Blood of Jesus" (1 v 19), and that our faith is "more **precious** than gold" (1 v 7), recalling today's parables that the life of grace/the Kingdom of God is "treasure" (v44) and a pearl of "great value" (v 46).

If we find that our faith and the life of grace is flickering and in danger of being snuffed out, how precious to us is that flame of faith? How important is it in our daily lives? What value do we put on it? Will we fan the flame and feed it or are we content for it to expire? Our parables today suggest that the appropriate and authentic response to the life of grace is a willingness to make the necessary sacrifices to promote and protect, to nourish and encourage it. To fan the flame by prayer, obedience and faith; to feed the interior life by attending to Word and sacrament – the "precious" means which God has provided to promote, quicken and enliven the life of grace within us.

The Sacraments are fountains of grace and the more we absent ourselves from those fountains, the further we fall back in the life of grace. For those who have no access to the sacraments, there are other "means of grace" but for those who deliberately (or through apathy/weakness of will) separate themselves from the life of the church (from those fountains of grace), like a coal plucked from the fire, faith will slowly dim and all the light and warmth of the life of grace slowly expires.

Over the last few months there has been a "famine" in the life of the Church. The sacramental fountains of grace have been closed to the faithful and the Church has been drawing upon those other (and equally necessary) means of grace, those of prayer, of fasting and of almsgiving/charitable service.

I wish particularly to give thanks to those who have faithfully and generously continued to support the church through the weekly envelopes, donations and standing-orders during these last few months. Also to give thanks, on behalf of us all, for the work (their ministry to the Body of Christ) of our parish S.V.P.Group, the Legion of Mary and St. Joseph's Support Group (and others) for the outstanding contribution to the welfare and healthy community life of the parish during these difficult days of lockdown. I know also that others have taken the opportunity to develop a deeper and more regular prayer life and a return to the reading of Scripture. These "means of grace" (serving Christ in others, a deeper prayer life, the reading of Scripture) prepare us for our return to the sacramental fountains of grace and our meeting together (observing social distancing!) when our two churches of St. Joseph's and St. John Kemble re-open for Mass next weekend 1st/2nd August. (See the Parish Newsletter for further details).

From today's Gospel, let us return to the celebration of Holy Mass with excitement and joy, as to a "treasure" that has been "hidden" (withheld) from us. May God grant that our love of the Mass (of Word and Sacrament), and our longing to be together with God's Holy People, has deepened and become more fervent during these "days of famine" as we look forward with great joy to the celebration of Holy Mass next weekend.

" Lord, we thank you for accompanying us through these "days in the wilderness", and for keeping alive within us our faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ and our hope in the Gospel. Continue to protect us all, we pray, and in Your great mercy, pour out rich blessings upon us and the abundance of grace, as we gather once again as Your Holy People around Your Holy Altar, to worship and adore the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13 v 18), and to praise the Precious Blood of Jesus. Come Holy Spirit! Come, Lord Jesus!"