

The First reading today speaks of the gift of the wisdom as the most important gift a person can ask for. How then do the parables of Jesus give us wisdom as his disciples, as people seeking to follow him and live the kind of life he showed us?

Let us begin by remembering what a parable is – it is an image or picture or story or proverb – which engages our imagination and causes us to think about something important which the parable is drawing to our attention. So parables require engagement and response; they are not just statements of some fact or truth. Because they require a response, parables are a lot like jokes! When someone tells a joke, there is often a pause as people stop to “get the joke”. Sometimes, some people do not get the joke, they can’t see what is funny in it. Someone else has to explain it to them. But of course, if I need to have the joke explained to me, then I have really missed out on the joke. I feel excluded from the group of those who do get the joke; I feel left out.

This is what happened when Jesus told parables – a few people got it, and many did not. They were left out! That’s why the disciples sometimes asked Jesus to explain the parable to them; that’s why they asked him, “why do you speak always in parables?” The answer seems to be that Jesus was inviting them to engage with the story or image he was proposing, and so inviting them *to respond on their own behalf*, to join him in seeing the world as he did, and see God as Jesus experienced him. Everything Jesus said was “a parable” in the sense that it asked for a response from people, inviting them to join the new community he was forming. But many people did not “have the heart” for appreciating the point Jesus was making; their minds and expectations were elsewhere, they could not “hear” what was really being said.

Over the past few Sundays we have listened to parables about the seed – referring to the word of God, and about how we are to respond to that word. Today we have three final images – of treasure in a field, of pearls of great price, and of a fishing net which brings in all sorts of things, good and bad.

These images or stories are meant to help us think about “the kingdom of heaven”, that is, the kingdom of God – which is not a place, but *God’s reign* in our hearts and minds, and throughout creation.

Thinking again of Solomon’s prayer for wisdom – the point is that the truly wise person is one who realises the value of God’s kingdom or reign in their lives. If we truly understand what God is offering us (treasure, fine pearls), then we would give up, or let go of, all sorts of other distractions in order to put God first in our lives. True wisdom is fundamentally a matter of knowing what matters most, of having the true order of priorities in our lives. As God says to Solomon, this is the foundational gift, because if we have our priorities right then everything else, and all the good things we have and are, will find their proper place. We will be able to enjoy the gifts we have received in the proper way.

But as much as we pray for this wisdom to have the right priorities, we are all still a mixture of good and evil; we are sinners, still on the journey. Our lives are the like mixture of good and bad things dragged up by the fishing net. If we fish with a dragnet, there will always be this mixture in what we collect. It is like the parable last

week of the mixture of good wheat and bad weeds in what is growing in the field. Jesus says not to try to get rid of the weeds too soon; we have to be patient with our mixed up lives, and allow God to sort us out in due time. Likewise, we have to keep “dragging our fishing nets”, engaging in our daily lives with our families, in business and our communities, knowing this will involve both good and bad experiences and actions, successes and failures. In other words, we have to be patient and to live with our shortcomings, with the sins we fall into each day, but also with the noble goals and good deeds by which we try to shape our lives.

As St Paul tells us in the second reading, God “co-operates” with us to bring our actions into line with his good purposes. He turns even our failures and sin into something good in his greater plan. He wants us to become true brothers and sisters of Jesus his Son, so that we will share his Son’s Glory.

So our prayer today is for wisdom and for patience – two very practical gifts that will sustain us in our Christian lives.