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SELLS ALL THAT HE HAD AND BUYS THAT FIELD Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 13,44-52

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

In chapter 13 of Matthew's gospel, Jesus, with three parables, warned the community against three risks, against the three temptations: with the parable of the weeds he has warned the community the temptation to be a community of elect; with the parable of the mustard seed the temptation of greatness and, finally, with the parable of the yeast of discouragement. Now as an antidote to these three temptations, Jesus invites us to be faithful to the first beatitude and does it again with parables.

Let's read chapter 13 verse 44 of Matthew's gospel: *“The kingdom of heaven..”* remember that the Kingdom of Heaven does not mean a kingdom of the afterlife but the Kingdom of God, that is, the alternative society that Jesus came to realize on this earth, *“.. is like treasure..”* the word treasure opens and closes this paragraph, therefore it is a sign of beauty and splendour *“..hidden in a field, which someone found..”* this man was not looking for a treasure, he found it, it was an opportunity that he has been able to capture in his life and, without hesitation, writes the evangelist *“..and hid; then in his joy he goes...”* literally for the joy of finding this treasure *“..sells all that he has and buys that field.”* There is Saint Paul in the letter to the Philippians 3.7-10, who wrote: *“Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, ...”* When we meet Jesus and his message, this is the answer to that desire for fullness of life, which each person carries within himself, and everything else loses value.

Jesus continues, that always *“..the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls;”* while the first man found it by chance, he knew how to seize the opportunity, the opportunity of his life, the second one is someone who seeks this opportunity, *“.. on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”* What the evangelist means is that following Jesus

is not at the cost of sacrifices, the term sacrifices appears only twice and in negative sense in this gospel, but for joy, the term joy appears in Matthew's gospel for six times.

But Jesus continues “.. *the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea..*” Jesus had asked his disciples to become fisher’s of men and now tells how to fish “..*and caught fish of every kind;*” God's offering, the offering of his love, is for all humanity, it is up to men then to respond or not, “..*when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad.*” unfortunately the translation here is “*bad*”, which indicates a moral judgment on the part of the fisherman. No it isn’t this, “..*threw out the bad.*”, the term used by the evangelist is rotten, it is not a judgment, good and bad, it is a finding: those who can bring life and those who are rotten, therefore it is not a moral judgment, but an observation. Those who choose life are full of life, those who choose death are full of death, therefore they are useless.

Again Jesus continues “*So it will be at the end of the age.*” Not the world but “..*the age.*” “*The angels will come out and separate the evil..*” literally the evil ones, they are like the sowers of the weeds, they are the children of the devil “..*from..*”, not the good “.. *the righteous..*” the faithful, faithful to Jesus’ message “.. *and throw them into the furnace of fire..*” This is a quote from the prophet Daniel, chapter 3 verse 6, where the fiery furnace was worthwhile for those who did not worship the power expressed by the statue of Nebuchadnezzar. Here, now for Jesus, the fiery furnace - what does the fiery furnace mean? complete destruction - it is the end of those who worship power. So those who choose love, sharing, generosity, forgiveness, this is the kingdom of heaven, it is the kingdom of God that Jesus came to inaugurate, they are full of life and they communicate it; those who instead choose selfishness, greed, power, are full of death. Then there is no judgment from God, but simply a finding between those who are full of life and those who are already in the putrefaction of death; “..*where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” a biblical image indicating failure in life.

At the end of the seven parables of the Kingdom, Jesus says “*Have you understood all this?*” They answered, “*Yes.*” And he said to them, “*Therefore every scribe..*” the scribe was an important person he was the master par excellence of Israel, he represented the infallible teachings, “..*who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven ..*” faced with the newness of Jesus, one must go back to school and must become a disciple, perhaps this is a bit of a portrait of the evangelist. The Kingdom of Heaven “..*is like the master of the household who brings out of his treasure..*” Here is the word treasure that opened the reading and now it closes it “..*what is new..*” literally better, the evangelist uses the same term that, in the gospel of John, will indicate the new commandment, the best commandment, “..*and what is old.*” what does the evangelist mean? That the message of Jesus always takes precedence over that of Moses: the new covenant comes before the last covenant of the old testament.

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