



*Light and
Love in the
darkness*

CELEBRATING AT HOME LECTIO DIVINA FOR 17TH SUNDAY

Close encounters with the Kingdom of God (Mt 13:44-52)

This resource is presented by the Carmelites of Australia & Timor-Leste at a time when we cannot gather together as we usually do to celebrate the Eucharist. We are conscious that Christ is present not only in the Blessed Sacrament but also in the words of the Gospel and in our own hearts. Even when we are on our own we remain part of the Body of Christ.

In the room you decide to use for Lectio Divina you could have a lighted candle and the Bible. These symbols help keep us mindful of the sacredness of our time of prayer.

Lectio Divina has four main stages. The first stage is *lectio* (reading) where we read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us.

The second stage is *meditatio* (reflection) where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us.

The third stage is *oratio* (response) where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God.

The final stage of Lectio Divina is *contemplatio* (rest) where we let go not only of our own ideas, plans and meditations but also of our holy words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within us. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. This transformation will have a profound effect on the way we actually live our daily lives.

As you use this prayer know that the Carmelites will be remembering in our prayer you and all the members of our family at this time.

CELEBRATING AT HOME

LECTIO DIVINA FOR 17TH SUNDAY

Prayer

Spirit of Truth, sent by Jesus to guide us to the whole truth, enlighten our minds so that we may understand the Scriptures. You who overshadowed Mary and made her fruitful ground where the Word of God could germinate, purify our hearts from all obstacles to the Word. Help us to learn like her to listen with good and pure hearts to the Word that God speaks to us in life and in Scripture, so that we may observe the Word and produce good fruit through our perseverance.

A key to the reading

On this 17th Sunday of Ordinary Time we meditate on the three parables that make up the final section of the Discourse of the Parables: the hidden treasure, the merchant of precious pearls and the dragnet cast into the sea. Jesus' parables help us adjust our sight to better see the presence of the Kingdom of God in the most ordinary things of life. As we read, it would be good to keep in mind the following: "What is for me a hidden treasure, a merchant of precious pearls or a dragnet cast into the sea? How does my experience help me understand the parables of the treasure, of the pearl and of the dragnet?"

Read (Matthew 13:44-52)

Jesus said to the crowds, 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.

Again the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds. When it is full the fishermen haul it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in a basket and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the just to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

Have you understood all this?' They said, 'yes'. And he said to them, 'Well, then, every scribe who becomes a

disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old.'

Reflect

Spend a few moments in quiet reflection

Comment

The context of the parables told by Jesus

The Gospels contain many parables of Jesus. Matthew even says, "All these things Jesus said to the crowd in parables and did not speak to them unless in parables" (Mt 13:34). This was a common method of teaching used in those days. It was in this way that Jesus made Himself understood by the people. In the parables, He starts from very ordinary things of life and uses them as terms of comparison to help people better understand the less known things of the Kingdom of God. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus starts with three well-known things in the lives of people: the treasure hidden in the field, the merchant who seeks pearls, and the dragnet that fishermen cast into the sea.

A commentary on the text

Matthew 13:44: The parable of the hidden treasure Here the term of comparison used to shed light on the things of the Kingdom of God is the treasure hidden in the field. No one knows that there is a treasure in that field. By chance, a man finds it. He did not know he was going to find it. He finds it and rejoices and gratefully welcomes the unexpected. The discovered treasure does not belong to him yet, it will be his if he succeeds in buying the field. Such were the laws in those days. So he goes, sells all he owns and buys that field. By buying the field he also acquires the treasure. Jesus does not explain the parable. The same applies here as was said on previous occasions: "He who has ears to hear let him hear" (Mt 13:9, 43). Or: "The Kingdom of God is this. You have heard. Now try to understand!" If Jesus does not explain the parable, nor will I. This is the task for each one of us. But I would like to offer a suggestion beginning from what I have understood. The field is our life. In our lives there is no hidden treasure, no precious treasure, more precious than all else. Will anyone who comes across such a treasure give away everything that he or she owns in order to buy this treasure?

Matthew 13:45-46: The parable of the merchant of precious pearls In the first parable, the term of comparison is “the treasure hidden in the field”. In this parable, the accent is different. The term of comparison is not the precious pearl, but the activity, the effort of the merchant who seeks precious pearls. We all know that such pearls exist. What is important is not to know that they exist, but to seek them ceaselessly until we come across them. Both parables have some common and some different elements. In both cases, it is about something precious: a treasure and a pearl. In both cases there is a finding of the object desired, and in both cases the person goes and sells all he owns so as to be able to buy the precious thing found. In the first parable, the finding is by chance. In the second, the finding is the result of the effort of seeking. Here we see two basic aspects of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom exists, it is hidden in life, waiting for those who will find it. The Kingdom is the result of a seeking (obtaining). These are the two basic dimensions of human life: gratitude of love that welcomes us and comes to meet us, and the faithful observance that brings us to meet the Other.

Matthew 13:47-50: The parable of the dragnet cast into the sea Here the Kingdom is likened to a dragnet, not any kind of net, but a net cast into the sea and gathers fish of all kinds. It is something typical of the life of those who were listening, most of whom were fishermen who lived by fishing. This is an experience they are familiar with, the casting of the net that gathers all, some good and some less good. The fisherman cannot prevent the less good fish from entering the net, because he cannot control what happens in the deep waters of the sea where he drags his net. He will only know when he pulls up the net and sits with his mates to sort the fish out. Then they will separate what is worthwhile from what is worthless. Again, Jesus does not explain the parable. He just gives a hint: “This is how it will be at the end of time”. Then the good will be separated from the evil.

Matthew 13:51-52: Conclusion of the discourse of parables In Matthew’s Gospel, the discourse of parables ends with a brief dialogue between Jesus and His listeners and that acts as a key to the reading of all the parables. Jesus asks, “Have you understood all these?” The people reply, “Yes!” Then Jesus concludes with these very beautiful words, “Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old”. These closing words are another parable. “The things new as well as old that the householder brings out from his storeroom” are the things of the life that Jesus has just suggested in the parables: seeds cast in the field (Mt 13:4-8), the mustard seed (Mt 13:31-32), the leaven (Mt 13:33), the treasure hidden in the field (Mt 13:44), the merchant of precious pearls (Mt 13: 45-46), the dragnet cast into the sea (Mt 13:47-48). Each person’s experience of these things is his or her treasure. It is in such experiences that each person finds the term of comparison that will permit him or her to understand the things of the Kingdom of God! Sometimes when the parables do not mean much to us and do not yield their message, the cause may not be a lack of study, but a lack of experience in life or a lack of depth in one’s life. Those who live superficially without any depth of the experience of life, have no storeroom from which to bring out things new as well as old.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice what your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practice the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.