

A few days ago, we had the gospel reading from Matthew where Jesus gave us three parables. We have continued to hear about these throughout the week. Clearly, it must be important for us to consider. Jesus says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it." As we think of this, I suspect most of us see ourselves as the merchant. We are working on obtaining the price of our admission into heaven. The pearl is the price for our admission. If we love Jesus and keep his commands, we get in. If we don't, then instead of entrance we get sent to hell. We get this from the story our Lord told of the sheep and the goats. Also we get it from the third story where Jesus says, "Again the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full, they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." Much like the sheep and the goats, in this story we want to be the righteous that are "put into buckets" and not the wicked that are "thrown into the fiery furnace." True, but is there not more there?

In Why God Loves Us...No Matter What, Fr. Ken Sedlak sees the story differently. God, not us, is the merchant, the central character in the story. This also means we are the pearl! Can we be the pearl? A valuable pearl that God sells all that He has to obtain it? The answer of course is YES. Jesus is the price paid by God. "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish, but might have eternal life." We know from the writer John that God is love. It is foundational to who He is. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us...We love God because He first loved us." God's nature is to give and withhold nothing. It is by his love that we exist.

As children, we may have felt that God's love is conditional, that we limit his love by what we say and do. It may have seemed that God rewards and punishes us to secure our obedience. However, a strong and consistent theme in scripture is God's constant love for us. God is to reality what fire is to flame, or the ocean to a drop of water, or a singer to a song. God is both the vastness of the universe and the intimacy of our person. God can't be limited and neither can his nature. God is unconditional and unmediated love. God loves us into existence unconditionally. God knows us for who we are because God chose to create us. God knows you for who you are and is choosing to love you into existence right now at this very moment.

Even when we die, God's love goes on. We will go on living. Either with God or without him, we will live. The choice is ours. Live with him in heaven.

May God bless you!

Fr. Tom