

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time: July 26, 2020

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

A Reflection on the Gospel: Matthew 13: 44-52

A treasure buried in a field . . . a pearl of great price . . . a net thrown into the sea.

My favorite part of these 3 parables about the kingdom is when Jesus asks the apostles, "Have you understood all this?", and they answer, "Yes."

HA! I say, "FAT CHANCE!"

The apostles, like me, were just regular Joes, not theologians. And some parts of these parables are truly confusing. In the "kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field" parable, as well as in the "kingdom of heaven is like a pearl of great value" parable, the "man" and the "merchant" sell all that they possess in order to buy the treasure or the pearl. Jesus is indicating to his disciples that heaven is more valuable than any worldly good. But you don't have to BUY it, like the man and the merchant. You just have to believe. It's free for the taking. Right?

However, as they say on the Veg-o-matic commercial—BUT WAIT! Jesus goes on to say that 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." So am I supposed to live righteously out of fear?

How about if I DO believe, but I live a totally unrighteous life? Will I still be sorted like the good fish in the third parable who were "sorted into vessels?"

OR can I choose NOT to believe until I take my dying breath and THEN say that I believe?

Questions and more questions. No wonder the disciples just said, "Yes."

They were probably as confused as I.

But I take solace in what Father Dick used to preach to us about the concept of "raising the bar." He would always say that you can't call yourself a good Christian just because you haven't murdered anyone. Maybe I can't be the person who gives up all her worldly goods to follow Jesus. Most of us have mortgages and bills and debts. But, because the kingdom of heaven is worth everything that I own and more, that's where the bar is set. All I can do is strive toward that goal, everyday, in all of the myriad interactions I have with everybody from my neighbors to the grocery clerk to the letter carrier to the homeless woman on the street. And my motivation should not be the fear of the "furnace of fire," but the joy felt by the man who "goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Mary Ann Dunevant