**8TH SUNDAY after PENTECOST SERMON**

 For the past few Sundays, Jesus talked about the Kingdom of heaven in parables. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus continues his teaching by giving us not one parable but five parables: ”The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed; it’s like a woman who puts yeast in bread; it’s like a treasure hidden in a field; and it’s like a pearl of great value, and like a net that **gathered fish of every kind,** both good and bad.

 The first two parables of the mustard seed and the yeast or leaven are pairs that present a contrast between the small beginnings and the large endings.

 The next two parables of the buried treasure and the pearl of great price are also paired and stress the need for searching, then finding, then celebrating, and finally selling all in order to possess something of great value. God's Kingdom is so valuable it is worth giving up everything for.

 The final parable echoes the theme of last Sunday about the field of wheat mixed with the weeds which were kept together until harvest time and the wheat stored and the weeds thrown away and burned. In today’s gospel. it is the fishing net full of both good and bad fish which are kept together until the boat reaches the shore and the good fish are kept and the bad thrown away.

 Unlike the parables of the previous Sundays, these parables have no interpretation and application. That is why, today, we will look briefly at the meaning of these parables and relate them to our situation.

 Let us start with the second group of two parables: the hidden treasure in the field and the pearl of great price. The hidden treasure in the field is a parable that illustrates how a man having found a treasure in the field was so possessed by the treasure that his only concern was to get that treasure no matter what it might cost him. .... He sells all that he has and buys that field. The message of the next parable of the pearl of great price is essentially the same. The merchant “sold all” to buy the pearl.

 Note how these discoveries disrupted daily life and priorities. The treasure and pearl possessed the finders and shaped their lives. These discoveries demanded total commitment and dedication, risk and sacrifice. And as the saying in Spanish goes: *vale la pena*. It is worth the pain.

These two parables really teach us, that once we discover the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, which really mean the Kingdom of God, everything else becomes secondary, everything else will be given to us besides.

 Applied to our situation during this corona virus pandemic, these two parables should remind us about the great need to discover “the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price” in the disruptions and sufferings of our daily life, the anxiety and the boredom of staying at home, the discomfort of wearing a mask in public, of washing our hands, of social distancing, not to mention the loss of jobs, the closure of small businesses, the closure of churches and of schools for our children. What is God telling us about all these? What are the hidden and precious lessons we can uncover and learn from all these?

 This then brings us to the other set of parables: the mustard seed and the yeast or leaven. These parables offer hope and encouragement. The tiny mustard seed and the small yeast promise great outcomes from small beginnings. Our situation seems so overwhelming, and our resources so few. We have so little in the face of daunting odds. But Jesus encourages us through these parables, he promises us that the kingdom of God in our midst, the kingdom of God that we proclaim – the mustard seed will become a tree; the tiny quantity of yeast has power to affect a large quantity of flour. So it is with the kingdom of God. We who live under the rule of Christ seem unimportant and insignificant –– but watch out! By Christ's power, we will make a huge difference!

 We cannot underestimate our small gestures of compassion and generosity: a short phone call, a few words in a card. During the pandemic, every little gesture or word counts.

 What could be so small and so less significant than a baby in a manger ––or a Jew from Nazareth or a handful of not-very-promising fishermen-disciples?

The final parable of the good and the bad fish, and of the good being kept and the bad being thrown away – reminds us that in the end the Kingdom of God will put everything right. We are therefore called to be patient and faithful. The Lord will set all things right. Amen