

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS 17<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY (A)

1 Kings 3: 5, 7-12 Psalm 119 Romans 8: 28-30 Matthew 13: 44-52

Dear Preachers:

### PRENOTES

This week we begin a new feature----**FAITH BOOK**---mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. Based on the current "First Impressions," these focused meditations offer suggestions for applying the scriptures to daily life. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the **parish bulletins** people take home with them from Sunday worship.

Go to the movies much? Even if you are only a casual moviegoer, why not check our fr. Tom Condon, OP's movie reviews ("Faith and Films") on our webpage. Go to:

<http://www.judeop.org/resources.htm> and click on the link ("Faith and Films").

July seems to be the month for Jesus' parables. This is the third week we are given an opportunity to reflect on these simple, yet profound stories Jesus tells which begin, "The kingdom of heaven is like...."

A friend rented a video and he recommended that I see it. I think the title was "Everest" and it is based on a true story. It's about a mountain climbing expedition that went very bad. The climbers were making their way to Everest's summit when a storm came up and stranded them on the mountain. The storm was so severe that rescuers couldn't get to them and some of the climbers died. One man, whom they thought was dead, survived. He had some of his toes and fingers amputated because of frost bite.

In an interview the climber was asked, "Will you climb again?" And without hesitation he said, "Absolutely!". "But why?" he was asked, "You almost died on the mountain!" His reply, "You just have to be there. Climbing makes this minute of life so alive, so precious. It's not just about your time on the mountain. Once you have been on the mountain you become more aware of everything. Nothing is ever the same in your life. If you have been there, all of your life is affected by your experience. Climbing alters the way you see your family, job...everything."

I have no idea what that man is talking about! To me mountain climbing sounds

like a crazy thing to do – I am afraid of heights. I am an outsider to the world that climber is describing. I don't get it. But I am sure, if other climbers heard what he said, they would sagely nod their heads in agreement. They get it...they are insiders, they know his world.

I think it is something like that with Jesus' parables. Jesus has an experience of God and life that he wants to share with his disciples. His parables are one way he does that. He tells them to his disciples, as we hear him do in today's gospel. When he finished telling them the parables – about the man who found the treasure in the field, the merchant searching for fine pearls and catching "fish of every kind" in the net – Jesus asked the disciples, "Do you understand all these things?" Their reply, "Yes."

Well, they probably didn't understand all that Jesus was sharing with them about God and God's ways, but they were beginning to understand. They were "insiders"; being with Jesus, watching him perform miracles and listening to his teachings, introduced them into the ways and life of the kingdom of heaven – the world he depicted in parables. When Jesus tells his parables to people who are not as docile or open as his disciples are becoming – they don't get it. The stories are mysterious, crazy and don't make sense—like that mountain climber who would go back to climbing after his near-death experience, appears to me. This outsider doesn't get it.

We believers have accepted the invitation to enter into the world of the parables. We trust that Jesus is sharing the truth with us; we trust the wisdom we discover in his parables. It is a wisdom we wouldn't have or deduce on our own. It is our story Jesus tells in today's parables. It is as if we have stumbled on something very special – like that simple man who happened to find the treasure and it changed his life forever. Through the parables we have discovered a treasure that can change our lives. It is truly the most valuable possession we could ever have. Like the people in today's parables, we have made personal sacrifices for what we have found. We want to buy the whole field, not live according to the prevalent world view and standards that confront us each day.

As a result of our "buying the whole field": we practice honesty, even when it means not making extra profits on the job; we treat people, not just fairly, but in a loving way, even if others don't think these people are worth the effort; we are faithful in a marriage and friendships, even though the world treats promises casually; we help people who need us, even if we don't owe them anything; we

have hope as we look into our future with God, even though there is a lot that discourages us; we forgive those who harm us, even though many in our world have long memories of wrongs done against them.

None of this makes much sense to outsiders; the way climbing Everest after nearly dying in the attempt doesn't make sense to me. But when Jesus tells stories about finding treasures and a pearl of great price – I think I get it. I sense what he is speaking of; I sense I have stumbled on something very valuable. I come to realize it is what I have searched for all my life, even though I hadn't realized it and didn't always know where to look. Surrendering to the world the parables describes and trying to live according to their vision, is a risky business.

Maybe even riskier than mountain climbing, because I have to risk and take a chance on Jesus each day of my life. I can't say, "Been there, done that." Sometimes the sacrifices I must make are large; but for the most part they are there everyday – frequent opportunities to say another "Yes" to the world Jesus paints in his parables. In fact, while there are things the world considers valuable, like personal gain, time, pleasures, and possessions, the parables invite me to let all those pearls go whenever I sense they keep me from having the pearl more valuable than all the rest.

In the bible, the pearl is a symbol of wisdom. In our first reading, when Solomon was given a choice to ask for anything and God was willing to give it, he prayed for wisdom. It is a practical, everyday gift and that's what we pray for today. Why are we gathered at Eucharist? Because we too are searchers who need wisdom, to help us make decisions each day for God and God's ways: to know what we have to detach ourselves from to live God's way of life; to know what choices we must make in favor of the treasure that is God's life in us; to know what changes, even little ones, we must make to experience more of God; to know what to do to build up the relationships we have that are good, and to know what relationships are destructive and we need to let go; to know where to invest our precious time and energies in ways that serve God, our treasure.

Why are we gathered here? We are here because we don't want to be tempted by fake pearls and fool's gold. It is just not worth it. We want the real thing in our lives. We sense what it is----- who it is---and we want more of it. We have stumbled on a treasure and know that everything else is of much lesser value.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCE**

For an additional reflection of the parables, see the July edition of "Stories Seldom

Heard,” on the “Preachers’ Exchange” webpage. <http://www.judeop.org/>

## **FAITH BOOK**

### **From today’s Gospel reading:**

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again and out of sheer joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, 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.

### **Reflection:**

Why are we gathered at church today? We are here because we want wisdom; we don’t want to be tempted by fake pearls and fool’s gold. It is just not worth it. We want the real thing in our lives. We sense what it is----- WHO it is---and we want more.

We have stumbled on a treasure and know that everything else is of much lesser value. We have found a valuable pearl and we are willing to put aside whatever stands in the way of having that pearl.

### **So we ask ourselves:**

What keeps us from having a closer relationship with Jesus in our daily lives?

Do we realize our faith is a treasure we have found, rather than a reward we have been given?

## **QUOTABLE**

The homily is not simply an explanation of the scriptures, the fruit of research into the best scholarship. Nor is it the drawing of a moral from the scriptures, nor using the scriptures to back up the latest need for school support or abortion law reform. Nor is the homily a great literary creation “from nothing”: The scriptures and eucharist are its beginning and its ending. The homilist helps the assembly appreciate the wonderful web that links word and sacrament and daily living.

—Gabe Huck and Gerald T. Chinchar, *LITURGY WITH STYLE AND GRACE* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998), page 50.

## **JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD**

**“Give your servant an understanding heart to ...distinguish right from**

**wrong. For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?”**

*(1 Kings 3:)*

In these months of forums and debates leading up to the November Elections how wonderful it would be to know that the prayer of Solomon from today's first reading was being prayed fervently by each local and national candidate. It would be even more wonderful to know that the candidates then listened for the answer of our God who cares for each of us and surrounds us all, but especially those most in need with his ever present love.

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, “it is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life” (*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship, No. 13*)

Maryknoll missionaries who witness daily the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions encourage voters to “scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the United States and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.” Maryknoll offers the following questions on the global economy. How do our local and national candidates respond to these questions? How would **you** answer them?

1. “What would you do to make our economy both fairer and more sustainable?”
2. How would you address the disparity between the median household wealth of white families in the US and that of families of color?
3. How do you propose to reduce the excessive influence of powerful corporations on public policies?
4. Would you support canceling unjust debts impoverished countries owe to the U.S., the World Bank and the IMF?
5. How would you change U.S. trade policy to strengthen local economies and adapt to a future without cheap oil?

These questions are taken from a 12 page guide prepared by Maryknoll's Office for Global Concerns titled *Loving Our Neighbor in a Shrinking World*. You can download a PDF version at: [www.maryknollogc.org/2008/elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008/elections/index.htm)

It is another way to become more aware and educated about issues facing our world and those whom we will elect.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, NC)

### **POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES**

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." *If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.*

Please write to:.....

Jerry Cummings    #0095361    (On death row since 11/11/97)

Elrico Fowler                    #0134151    (11/14/97)

Erroll Moses                    #0552017    (11/18/97)

---Central Prison    1300 Western Blvd.    Raleigh, NC    27606

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### ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Two new CDs Available: **"FIRST IMPRESSIONS PREACHING REFLECTIONS"**

**"Liturgical year A,"** which begins in Advent and contains **three** reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts for the year. It also has book reviews and additional essays related to preaching.

**"Liturgical years, A, B and C,"** reflections on the three-year cycle.

If you are a preacher, lead a Lectionary-based scripture group, or are a member of a liturgical team, these CDs will be helpful in your preparation process. Individual worshipers report they also use these reflections as they prepare for Sunday liturgy.

You can order the CDs by going to our webpage: [www.preacherexchange.com](http://www.preacherexchange.com) and clicking on the "First Impressions" CDs link on the left.

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections,



make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)

3. Our webpage: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>

Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilias Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.

4. "Homilias Dominicales"-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Jose David Padilla, OP, Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP. Like "First Impressions", "Homilias Dominicales" are a preacher's early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive "Homilias Dominicales" drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: [Jboll@opsouth.org](mailto:Jboll@opsouth.org) or [jboll@preacherexchange.org](mailto:jboll@preacherexchange.org)

5. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

### **DONATIONS**

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>

Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA

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