



## Bible Reflection on Vocations

2017 is the PANAM Zone Year for Divine Word Vocations. Each month throughout this year, the biblical reflection will focus on a passage related to vocation awareness, discernment and promotion. In each reflection, the Bible Committee will make use of the five steps of *lectio divina*: read, meditate, pray, contemplate and act.

### July 2017 — Finding a Treasure

#### 1. *Read*

##### **Matthew 13:44-52**

Jesus said to his disciples: “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of 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. 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.

“Do you understand all these things?” They answered, “Yes.” And he replied, “Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.”

(Gospel of the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time,  
Cycle A, July 30, 2017)

## 2. *Meditate*

Finding a treasure is something we might dream about or long for, but we recognize that this doesn't happen in life – except in fairy tales and fiction (such as in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* or J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*).

Only on occasion do we find a coin or a small bill. It was more likely to happen in Jesus' day, however, since there was no reliable banking system and people actually buried their most precious possessions in the ground for safekeeping during times of danger.

This Gospel reading presents us with two parables, each of which tells us something about the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is something precious that is worth working for, looking for and investing in. The Kingdom is like that treasure we all dream about, a treasure that we find accidentally while at work in someone else's field. (It would seem that the owner doesn't even know it is there – otherwise he would never sell that field!)

The Kingdom also is like the search for the finest of pearls. Pearls were especially prized in the ancient Near East because of their rarity and beauty. People were fascinated by them. The merchant in this parable is not looking for just any pearl, but one that is perfect, beautiful and dazzling.

In the first story the worker finds the treasure by accident. In the second story the merchant is actively seeking the best pearl that can be found.

It is interesting to note the reactions and activities of the "finder" in each parable. Surprise and joy are the hallmarks of their discoveries. Each "goes and sells all that he has and buys" the object of his desire (Matthew 13:44, 46).

The prize is worth the investment. Nothing else in comparison has value, and both finders are even willing to depart from the prize momentarily to divest themselves of everything else in order to get the precious prize.

Getting rid of all one's possessions is no big deal if one can substitute for them a real treasure. Half measures will not do. One must give up everything for the prize, everything for the Kingdom of God.

Discovering one's vocation in life has certain parallels to the discovery of God's Kingdom and to the discovery of a treasure or a fine pearl. What is our role in God's Kingdom? What will give our lives joy and meaning? We know that God makes plans for us and following those plans will guarantee our happiness.

All people search for happiness and meaning. We Christians understand that search in terms of God's will for us. Some marriages seem "made in heaven," and such lucky couples seem to meet by accident and to fall in love quickly. Other marriages are the result of a long search for the ideal spouse. The delay may seem worthwhile, however, when one's "soulmate" has finally been found.

For some the discovery of a religious vocation is more or less an accident. It seems to come looking for them. For others that search requires much more time and effort. An understanding of one's particular vocation may come only after serious prayer, reflection and spiritual direction. It may mean spending time in volunteer ministry, in a seminary or in a religious community. One does not necessarily accept the first pearl that comes along. Sometimes that pearl of great price is discovered only after a lengthy search.

In the first reading of the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, King Solomon prays for an understanding heart (1 Kings 3:9). Solomon needs wisdom in order to lead and judge the people of Israel. We could certainly make the same request since an understanding heart will help us to discover the treasure that our vocation truly is.

Today's Gospel has a third parable that might dampen the idealism of the first two. It brings us back to reality. The Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a dragnet that is thrown into the sea (Matthew 13:47). Such dragnets are big enough to capture a large number of fish, some of which are useless or inedible. They can only be thrown away.

The first two parables describe treasures worth investing in. The third parable admits that sometimes aspects of our lives need to be consigned to the garbage can or the rubbish dump. One might think that, after finding a treasure or the perfect pearl, life too will be precious and perfect. We may forget that even in serving God we sometimes fail or disappoint or get caught up in our own imperfections.

The third parable reminds us of our dependence on God even after we have discovered the vocation that will make us happy, even after we have given up everything in order to follow Jesus and work for the Kingdom. Let's not lose our awareness that only imperfect and unworthy human beings discover treasures and search for pearls. Every so often we need to take stock of our vocation and examine our lives to see if they measure up to the ideals that inspired them in the first place.



### *3. Pray*

*“Give your servant, therefore,  
an understanding heart to judge your people and  
to distinguish right from wrong.” (1 Kings 3:9)*

*Grant that I may know your will and  
follow your plans for me.*

*Help me to discover the treasure  
that you have in store for me.*

*May I learn to appreciate my vocation  
as a pearl of great price and  
as a treasure hidden in a field.*

### *4. Contemplate*

Spend some time thanking God for including you in the divine plan. Marvel at how you fit into the infinite God’s plan for the universe. You can do this while looking at the starry sky or while looking at a photo of the starry sky.

### *5. Act*

Remind someone of the treasure that God has made him or her. Acknowledge someone else’s gifts or talents.

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