

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski
17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 26, 2020

Solomon was a king who greatly sinned...However, in the first reading today, we heard of how God bestowed the gift of wisdom upon young Solomon. Solomon was known to be a king great in wisdom, wealth and power but also a king who greatly sinned: His sins included marrying foreign women (he had over 700 wives and 300 concubines!) who turned Solomon's heart to follow other gods; ultimately, in spite of his wisdom, Solomon was **unfaithful** to Yahweh, which eventually led to the kingdom being torn in two.

Over the last three Sundays, we've heard gospel readings from St. Matthew in which Jesus teaches with parables, interesting short stories about everyday life used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. Jesus taught with parables because they were interesting and attention-grabbing; people could readily identify with the images in his parables. However, some people understood the imagery Jesus presented while others did not; some responded positively and followed Jesus while others reacted negatively and went away.

In recent weeks, we've heard about:

- Seed sown on rocky ground, among thorns and on rich soil
- The mustard seed
- Buried treasure, AND
- A pearl of great price.

Of all these parables, the one that caught my attention is one we heard today: The parable of the buried treasure. In this parable, Jesus was demonstrating the **immense** value in attaining the "kingdom of heaven" but at **great personal cost**.

The fact that someone would find treasure buried in a field, while unusual, was not unheard of because, in the days before the safety of FDIC-insured bank accounts, there were not many places that a person could secure his valuables, particularly during periods of social and civil unrest, which was quite often in biblical times. As a result, many buried their prized valuables. However, for a variety of reasons, the person could become permanently separated from their valuables which would remain buried until another individual stumbled upon it, as happened in today's parable.

We are not too far removed from the notion of individuals burying their valuables, their treasure. In fact, one such story developed right here on this very property in the days before the Cathedral was built in the 1880s.

Father Bernard Donnelly was pastor of the Church of the Immaculate Conception from 1845-1880 and a very well respected civic and religious leader during the early days following Kansas City's founding. In October of 1864, during the Civil War, with the Battle of Westport looming on the horizon, a panic spread like wildfire throughout Kansas City because the Confederate army of General Sterling Price had recently looted the local banks during the Second Battle of Lexington, Missouri. Afraid that the same would happen in Kansas City, there was a run on the Kansas City banks and hundreds of Kansas Citians, parishioners and non-Catholics alike, brought their money to the universally-respected, but reluctant, Fr. Donnelly for safekeeping.

The short story is that Fr. Donnelly buried the treasure on the church property and then ministered as priest and nurse to both Union and Confederate casualties in the Battle of Westport. It was a month before he could return to the church but when he went to dig-up the treasure for which he was steward, he couldn't find it; the box containing the treasure was never found!

When Fr. Donnelly, ever the faithful servant of the people, had abandoned all hope of recovering the buried money, he went to a friendly banker and took out a loan so he could repay each and every individual!

While the wisdom of Fr. Donnelly to accept such a heavy fiduciary responsibility can be questioned, there can be no doubt about his **faithfulness** to God and the people of Kansas City for whom he was shepherd. Although wise beyond compare, Solomon could have used a little of Fr. Donnelly's faithfulness.

My prayer for each of you is that God grant you the wisdom of Solomon and the faithfulness of Fr. Donnelly.