**Sunday 17 A**

I'm increasingly sceptical about Catholic guilt, (though that depends what we mean by the term) especially when it's claimed alongside the accusation that the Church is too demanding: sometimes we should feel guilty, but we Catholics call it *repentance;* and actually Jesus *is* quite demanding – *Repent!* *Be perfect; enter by the narrow door;love me more than you love your closest relationships; take up your cross; love your enemies; they will persecute and kill you.* And in today's Gospel Jesus' poetic language is equally challenging, that seeking His kingdom requires a diligent search, like a merchant seeking fine pearls or people looking for buried treasure. And what about that unsettling image of the dragnet?

The BBC series *'Detectorists'* was about two friends' addictive hobby searching for treasure. They were prepared to give up everything for that search, despite mostly finding Pepsi ring-pulls and rusty M&S buttons. In one episode they unearthed a wooden bowl that they didn't recognise was actually the Holy Grail.

As the Gospel suggests, we often chance upon God's kingdom; in situations so prosaic that we don't recognise the shock of grace in them. It's only by faithful prayer that we discover God in the utterly ordinary. Prayer becomes our spiritual detector, tuning us to hear God, the poet-lover knocking through moments of beauty, or simply buried deep in the daily goodness and faithfulness of others.

But Jesus suggests we also have to look for the kingdom. The trouble is that the field of our hearts is broken and so we don't always prioritise spiritual treasures as Solomon did when he asked for wisdom. *Unwisely,* we chase the consolations of *this world*. It's the basis of all addiction, and sin is our shared addiction; addictions fill the emptiness that only God can fill - with the quick fix of life's passing goods and pleasures. Not that these are bad, but all the goods and pleasures of life - sorry to tell you – we're going to lose them all. But the hardest thing of all to give up is the ego's unwillingness to repent.

The saint's repentance seeks the spiritual riches that satisfy our heart's deepest desire - of faithful prayer, the mass, the sacraments and spiritual reading; even when the spiritual life seems to turn up only the rusty ring pulls of distracted prayer in a life as banal as an earthenware bowl. But we have Jesus' promise that if we truly seek God we will discover the treasures of his kingdom, and find the holy grail of eternal life.

God's demands are actually a mode of his thirsting for us, not of some hard religious moralism; because, as Pope Benedict XVI taught, *we're not made for comfort, we're made for greatness*. But how earnestly do we really want *to be found*? Or is our *Catholic guilt*, or some false image of God, our way of playing hard-to-get with God who is a persistent lover? The shock of grace is that all the while our seeking God is itself a grace from Him who was prepared to give up Heaven itself to seek and find our hearts, his most beloved treasure, his own pearls of great price.

If he's demanding of us, how much more demanding was He of Himself?

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