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At the time of our Lord, the well-to-do often buried treasure in fields to prevent it from being stolen and with time often forget where they'd buried it. Years later, walkers would often stumble across it. Some might actively go in search of it. Pearls were also highly prized in antiquity and the rich would go to great lengths to purchase them. Jesus used these examples from everyday life to tell us something about the Kingdom of God.

In ancient Jewish Law the person who owns the field also owns the treasure, no matter who buried it. In the parable the man who stumbled on the treasure was prepared to sell 'everything he owned', to buy the field. To an outsider this may seem a rash decision but not to this man who knew the true value of his find.

Jesus tells us to 'lay up for ourselves treasure in Heaven'. In order to do that, however, we have first to discover it here on Earth.

When we enter a deeper relationship with our Lord, who is the pearl beyond price, other attractions in life seem less appealing. Like the man in the gospel we're prepared to give up things which we once thought we couldn't live without. I once asked a newly ordained young man if he missed the high life in London where he lived and worked prior to entering the priesthood. He answered 'not one little bit'. He had found his 'pearl of great price'.

Our closeness to Our Lord is the priority, taking precedence over everything else. We may even lose friends along the way. We can say with St Paul; 'I consider everything in life as so much rubbish compared to the true joy of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of everything'.

The finding of the precious 'pearl ' seems to be the fulfilment of a personal quest by the merchant in the story. Unless my closeness to Jesus is a treasure to me personally then it could easily fizzle out. Or if my faith is more cultural than personal, then it will struggle to bring me the inner joy and excitement the merchant experienced in today's gospel.

Someone once said: 'if I was arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me'. To what lengths am I prepared to go to hold on to the treasure of my faith in Jesus. Like the original owners of the field, have I buried the treasure of my faith and forgotten how precious it once was to me.

If our relationship with God is something we treasure, then we'll want to share something of it? In their secular lives parents, for instance, would be loath to cut out from their will any family members and leave them with nothing. But what nuggets of spiritual gold are we likely to bequeath to our children or grandchildren in the realm of personal faith in Jesus Christ? Are they going to end up disappointed or, like the merchant in today's gospel, overjoyed?

If we have found the pearl of great price everyone will benefit. We will also be laying up treasure for ourselves in Heaven.