

17A

At the time of our Lord, those who had treasure often buried it in fields to prevent it from being stolen and with time they would forget where they'd buried it. Years later, walkers would often stumble across it. Some might actively go in search of it like archaeologists do today. Even in antiquity pearls were highly prized and dealers 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 found the treasure was determined to sell 'everything he owned', to buy the field. To an outsider this may have seemed a rash decision but not to this man who knew the true value of his find.

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

When we enter into a deeper relationship with our Lord, who is Himself the pearl beyond price, other attractions in life seem far less appealing. Like the merchant we're prepared to forego things which we once thought we couldn't live without. The present lockdown has taught us a thing or two in this regard. I once asked a newly ordained young priest if he missed the 'bright lights' of London where he lived and worked prior to entering the seminary. He answered 'not one little bit'. Jesus says; "where your treasure is there also is your heart"

Our closeness to Our Lord is the priority, taking precedence over everything else. 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'. Remember the man in the gospel sold everything he owned to buy the field.

The finding of the precious 'pearl ' by the merchant seems to me to be the fulfilment of a lifelong personal ambition. Unless I'm striving for a closer personal relationship with Jesus, then even though the pearl of great value may be 'staring me in the face', I may not have eyes for it. It would equate to 'throwing pearls before swine'. Or if my faith is more cultural than personal, then the treasure of my faith in Jesus may be more apparent than real.

To what lengths am I prepared to go, to never let go of this treasure. Like the original owners of the field, who had forgotten where they'd buried their treasure, 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 bequeath it to the next generation? In ordinary life 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 offspring in the realm of personal faith in Jesus Christ? Will Christ become their pearl of great value?

If we have found this treasure everyone will benefit. We will be at the same time laying up treasure for ourselves in Heaven.