



Sunday Reflection

24th Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 8 November 2020

Pentecost 24

St Margaret of Scotland (trans)

Today we give thanks for the gift of faith as shown in the life of St Margaret of Scotland. And we reflect on the joy of seeking the kingdom of heaven in our own lives.

Reflection for this week's Gospel

"then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" *Matthew 13.44*

An Illustration to set the scene



How did an English princess become the "pearl of Scotland", the patroness, not only of our church in Renfrew but of the whole of Scotland? As Pope Innocent IV said when he declared her a saint, she was "torn from her homeland, and embraced another". The windows of St Margaret's Newlands in Glasgow tell her story. As a 10-year-old girl she came back from Hungary in 1057 in the

expectation her father Edward would be the next King of England, but then Edward died, and William the Conqueror won power. On her way back to the continent in 1068 the ship was blown ashore in Scotland. Her heart was set on the religious life, but Malcolm Kings of Scots eventually persuaded her into marriage.

Her faith was the abiding constant of her life. She is said to have influenced the King to charity and piety and she brought up her children, including three future kings of Scotland, in the faith. She used an earthly throne to promote a heavenly one. When she died at the age of 50 on November 16th, 1093, just three days after the death of her husband and eldest son in battle and exhausted by the rigours of her piety, she left a legacy in church reform, in the Benedictines she had brought to Dunfermline and in the example of her life.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches through two short, but closely connected, parables. He is speaking here to his disciples, the followers who are committed to following him, so we'd best pay attention!

His subject is the kingdom of heaven. He compares it to a treasure hidden in a field and to an exceptionally valuable pearl.

In the first story someone finds hidden treasure in a field and hides it away before selling everything he owns to buy the whole field. In the second story a merchant, a specialist by the sound of it, is searching for the best pearls and when he comes upon one that is exceptional, he too goes, sells all that he has and buys it. The selling of all that the person has and the purchase of what they found is common to both stories, indeed it is the punchline. So, Jesus is emphasising just how much value these two characters placed on their discoveries.

Perhaps you're a bit shocked that Jesus uses the image of buying and selling, for attaining the kingdom of heaven. It's one image among several in the parables in this chapter that are essentially down to earth, like yeast or weeds in a field, what the 17th century poet George Herbert expressed in the phrase 'heaven in ordinarie'. And perhaps that's important. For in Jesus the kingdom of heaven has come near. In his person, teaching and ministry Jesus is revealing what the kingdom of God is like, and how it will be for us a completion, rather than a sharp break, for in Jesus we have glimpsed what God's Kingdom is about.

The disciples were on the journey of following Jesus to obtain the gift of the kingdom. And what does Jesus tell them? That the way is costly, it will require of them all that they have. Do you remember the rich young man who asked Jesus 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And who went away, sad, when Jesus told him 'go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven: then come, follow me' (Matt 19: 16-22). It is a hard call, but also perhaps a comfort to the disciples, for they have left everything to follow Jesus and he assures them that their reward will be far greater than anything they could buy.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

We are told that the reaction of the man in the first story when he made his surprising discovery of the treasure was 'joy', and we can presume that the merchant was no less filled with emotion when he found a pearl more precious than any he had handled before.

Does this capture for us something of the feeling when we acknowledged Jesus as our Saviour and realised just how much we had gained? In the words of Charles Wesley's hymn,

'Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, should die for me?'

'Sing joyfully' is the note for that hymn. And it is that God-given realisation of saving love that draws us into the response of discipleship:

'I rose, went forth and followed thee.'

In St Margaret of Scotland, we have an example of someone who prized the gift of faith above all things. She had the power of a royal queen, but she valued faith more highly and used her power to further God's Kingdom in her adoptive land. "Your way, the Royal way of the cross", Pope Innocent declared of her. Not for nothing then, did he describe her as 'a pearl'.

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Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

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