



a Kendall Hunt Company

## Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



### Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

Psalms 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130

Romans 8:28-30

Matthew 13:44-52 [or (short form) 13:44-46]

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

RCL Benziger

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Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

### The Word In Liturgy

Today's gospel text completes the "Discourse in Parables" in which Matthew has collected various teachings about the nature of God's reign proclaimed by Jesus. Each of the three parables we read today contributes some insight into the nature of that kingdom. The man who finds the buried treasure must put up (risk) everything he has in order to attain the treasure. Being part of the reign of God is not for the faint-hearted or fearful. It requires boldness and decisive action, a single-minded commitment of all one's resources. The second parable of the pearl is similar but, in this case, it is not a laborer (a poor man) who discovers

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the treasure but a merchant (a rich man) who seeks it out. God's kingdom is all-inclusive, available to rich and poor alike. Still, the merchant like the laborer must risk everything to succeed. The message is clear: discipleship is open to all but entails sacrifice. Equally clear is the outcome of the disciple's quest: a joy that exceeds imagination when he has found the only truly valuable thing in life. The final parable of the dragnet hearkens back to last week's parables that tried to explain the presence of those who seem unfit for the kingdom. The invitation of Jesus to be part of God's reign is open to rich and poor, good and bad; in fact, many of all sorts are collected into the community of disciples. But at the end there will be a sorting out of those who are worthless and those who have been proven valuable. The image of fishermen hauling in the dragnet would certainly have resonated with the early Christian community that had come to recognize the apostles as "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). They knew this was about their own mission as evangelizers. They must refuse the invitation to no one, regardless of whether or not they seemed "worthy" of the kingdom.

The first reading from 1 Kings was clearly chosen in view of the idea that discipleship requires a person to choose the one thing that is most important of all. The deuteronomic editor responsible for 1 Kings was concerned to trace the history of Israel's kings in a way that would demonstrate the importance of fidelity to Yahweh's covenant. A monarch's infidelity invariably brought ruin on the whole people; his obedience to Yahweh resulted in blessings. Solomon is presented here and elsewhere as the epitome of the wise ruler. God's offer to grant whatever Solomon asks for is exceptional. Solomon's request is equally extraordinary: he eschews wealth, longevity, and power over his enemies and simply asks for what he needs to fulfill the mission entrusted to him by the Lord. In return, the Lord lavishly promises that Solomon will be unsurpassed in wisdom among all the rulers of the earth.

## **Catholic Doctrine** ***The Kingdom of God***

The phrase "kingdom of God," also translated as "reign of God" or "dominion of God," appears 150 times in the New Testament. Two-thirds of these are found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is a rich metaphor that has definite roots in Old Testament scriptures, although the precise phrase "kingdom of God" is not found therein (the closest is "reign of the Lord" in some of the later Hebrew scriptures). However, the Old Testament gives God the title of "king" in numerous references to illustrate the relationship of the Most High to Israel, to history, and to all of creation.

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The metaphor “kingdom of God,” as used by Jesus, not only relies on this Old Testament basis but goes beyond it in a rich, unique way that has no one clear definition or description—precisely because the metaphor is less a concept and more a symbol. Yet this does not mean that the metaphor is void of content. Rather, the significance of the metaphor is layered and multidimensional, and can only be deciphered in relationship to the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ: the One who saves us, the One who is the decisive event in world history, and the One who is the invitation to union with God.

Jesus is the decisive event in world history. He inaugurates his ministry by proclaiming that the kingdom of God is “at hand” (Mark 1:14–15). His disciples are promised that before they die they will witness the coming of God’s kingdom in power (Mark 9:1 and Matthew 10:23). Jesus announces, as he works a healing miracle, that the kingdom of God “has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28 and Luke 11:20). Thus, the Church upholds Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s love that is lavished upon the world; Christ is the decisive event that incarnates God’s activity among men and women—for all time (CCC 541). And yet, if the event of the kingdom has been decisively inaugurated by Jesus and is here now among us, it is nevertheless not fully realized. Jesus’ own transfiguration upon the mountain is a foretaste of the fullness of the kingdom when all those drawn to Christ will be transformed in glory. The scriptural episode of the transfiguration also is a reminder that those who follow Jesus and desire entrance into the kingdom of God must bear hardship and possibly persecution and the cross (CCC 556). Thus, the decisive “kingdom of God” metaphor contains a tension in that Jesus proclaims its advent among us while we yet wait for its fullness to be revealed.

It is important to note that the Church is linked to the idea of the kingdom of God. On earth, the Church is the seedbed for the kingdom, but it is not exactly synonymous with it. Nonetheless, the Second Vatican Council taught that the mystery of the Church is founded on the inauguration of Jesus’ good news of the kingdom (LG 5). Jesus is the head and lifeblood of the Church, and the depths of meaning involved in “kingdom of God” cannot be plumbed without reference to Christ. It follows, then, that Church and the kingdom are twin threads in the salvation story.