

Lesson 12

Proper 12

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:44–52

Matthew 13 provides us with eight of Jesus' parables about the kingdom of heaven—emphasizing its acceptance by some and its rejection by others. This little pericope includes four of them. Since they all begin with “the kingdom of heaven is like,” their applications are similar, but they show various facets of the Kingdom.

174. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value have the same point of comparison. What do both parables say about the kingdom of heaven? Is it necessary to sell all you have to gain the hidden treasure or the valuable pearl—the kingdom of heaven? What difference is there between a man finding a hidden treasure in a field and an importer of fine pearls finding the one pearl of great value that he has been looking for? What does this tell us about the kingdom of heaven?

175. What is the point of comparison in the parable of the net between the kingdom of heaven and the fisherman's net filled with good fish and scrap fish? (See vv. 37–43.)

Scribes were professional students of the Law and the Prophets. But in telling His little parable, Jesus appears to have been speaking more generally about anyone versed in the Word of God. “Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven” more literally is “every scribe who has been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven.” More than just information is involved in this.

176. What would be the case of a teacher of the law who has *not* been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven? What point was Jesus making with this little parable or simile?

The Old Testament Lesson: Deuteronomy 7:6–9

Deuteronomy means “second law.” The Israelites were at the point of entry into the Promised Land. Moses was told he would not enter the land with them, but he was concerned about preparing them for what lay ahead, encouraging their faithfulness to the Lord. His “second law” was more than just a review of the first. In his “farewell address,” Moses added theological application and amplification of the Law, encouraging Israel to remember it and apply it to daily life—and he promised blessings as a result. Moses recounted the history of the faithless generation who had died in the wilderness wanderings and then said, “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?” (Deuteronomy 10:12–13).

In today's lesson, we hear Moses reminding the people that they were who they were only as a result of God's gracious choosing.

177. What is the significance of Moses' calling them "a people holy to the LORD your God"? Why was their being chosen to be the Lord's treasured possession not to be a source of pride and boasting for them?

178. What was the reason the Lord chose Israel out of all the peoples on the face of the earth? What was the Lord demonstrating about Himself by rescuing the Israelites—after their being slaves in Egypt for more than four centuries? What was the Lord's faithfulness to His covenant to encourage in them?

179. What does this lesson encourage us to see about ourselves in our life in the Church?

180. How does this lesson relate to the emphasis of today's Holy Gospel?

The Epistle for the Day: Romans 8:28–39

"For those who love God all things work together for good" is often said to comfort those in suffering or to reassure those in circumstances that have surprised or puzzled them. But Paul did more than offer a cliché. He told *who* it is for whom the promise is abundantly true, and he unfolded the mystery of God's eternal purpose and will so we may know in faith *why* it is true that God works for good in everything. *Prothesis*, "purpose," indicates a "plan" or an "intention."

"All things." Really? A young Christian husband and father is killed in a collision with a drunk driver; the life of a Christian wife and mother ends after a painful battle with cancer; drowning claims a Christian child, age four—is God at work in all of these? Yes! It is He who permits them to happen, and He is at work in them to assert His good purpose for all the individuals affected.

181. Who are the recipients of the assurance that God's purpose is that all things work together for good? What good is evidently foremost in God's heart as He works out His purpose in all things?

Paul listed the gracious actions in the process by which God has drawn us into new life in Christ.

Foreknew. God's foreknowledge is more than just "knowing in advance." God has an active choice in the matter.

Predestined states the fact that God is the gracious agent of our being called according to His purpose. While God has predestined us to salvation, the corollary is not true: He predestines *none* to damnation.

182. On what is God's foreknowledge of those He predestined to be His own based? (See 1 Peter 1:1–2.)

Called brings the eternal into the present to make God's foreknowledge and predestination effective.

183. How is God's gracious, life-enabling call extended? (See Romans 10:14–17.)

Justified is a forensic term, meaning "declared right with God."

184. What is it that allows God to say that sinners whom He foreknew and predestined and called were also justified? (See Romans 3:21–28.)

Glorified adds the eternal dimension of God's love and its ultimate purpose for us. (See Philippians 3:20–21.)

185. How is it significant that this verb also is in the past tense?

186. What does it mean to you that God's knowing you from eternity in Christ, His predestining you to be His son or daughter, and His calling and justifying and glorifying you are all part of His eternal purpose for you? How has God worked in surprising ways for your good in "all things" in your life?

With irrefutable logic, Paul asked, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" With additional oratorical questions, he then showed just how much God *has been* and *is* for us in Christ. Then he asked, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" and specified seven things that might seem to threaten our confidence in His love for us: ____, ____, ____, ____, ____, ____, ____. These had been realities in Paul's own life and were being experienced by many Christians during times of official persecution. The list ends with *machaira*, the short sword worn by Roman soldiers—included by Paul as a symbol of the possibility of their arrest and martyrdom.

Quoting Psalm 44, Paul used the experience of Israel as a case in point. The psalm was a cry for help when they were suffering at the hand of enemies—not because of unfaithfulness, but even "though we have not forgotten You, and we have not been false to Your covenant" (Psalm 44:17).

187. What makes us "more than conquerors" even in such experiences?

The questions lead finally to Paul's answer. Let's end today's study by joining Paul in his exultant expression of confident faith: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."