

Lord, direct our thoughts and teach us to pray.  
Lift up our hearts to worship you in spirit and in truth.  
As God's people we have gathered.  
**Let us worship him together.**

What God has prepared for those who love him,  
he has revealed to us through the Spirit;  
for the Spirit searches everything.  
Therefore let us in penitence open our hearts to the Lord,  
who has prepared good things for those who love him.

**Penitence:** God of mercy,  
we acknowledge that we are all sinners.  
We turn from the wrong that we have thought and said and done,  
and are mindful of all that we have failed to do.  
For the sake of Jesus who died for us,  
forgive us for all that is past,  
and help us to live each day  
in the light of Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

**Absolution:** O King enthroned on high,  
filling the earth with your glory:  
holy is your name,  
Lord God almighty.  
In our sinfulness we cry to you  
to take our guilt away,  
and to cleanse our lips to speak your word,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **1Kings 3:5-12**

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant

therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?’

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

This is the word of the Lord;

**Thanks be to God.**

### **Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

Jesus put before the crowd another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’

He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.’

‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

‘Have you understood all this?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’ And he said to them,

‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’

This is the gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

### **Sermon**

We began with a reading from the start of Solomon’s rise to kingship. I always take from that what Solomon asked God for: “an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil”. Would that any of us, especially the powerful leaders of this world, might ask for that ...

Juxtaposed against that however, we are asked to sit back and to philosophise.

To reflect on another aspect of our existence, as believers:

“The kingdom of Heaven is like ...”

Do you know what the kingdom of heaven is like? Do you know what the phrase means? Can you get your head round the notion?

When I talk about the kingdom of heaven, there isn't one definition I can come up with which will fully explain God's kingdom; for the kingdom of heaven has many different faces.

We are given some fascinating descriptions of the Kingdom of Heaven – five of them in a row. Matthew collected these images from various sources and he presents them all to us together:

- as an aid to understand the enormity of **the kingdom of heaven**.
- something beyond our grasp
- beyond our imagination and experience
- beyond our ability to conceive of.

Which is why I find these images so useful.

Listen to them again ...

We are invited to compare a tiny mustard seed with what it can grow into – from the tiniest seed we know of, into a great shrub. And, indeed - the little seed of Jesus' short ministry on earth has grown to cover the whole world. I find this parable of the mustard seed to be a very satisfying analogy, both intellectually and emotionally. It is a little philosophy of life, and it compares very well with the world's major philosophies, religions and ideologies.

And this –ism, this Christianity - has lasted better than most ideologies and –isms. Look next at how a small portion of yeast can cause flour to rise – to make it so much larger. The amount of bread produced from a very small measure of flour in this parable is ridiculously large: About 39 litres! Enough to feed about forty people three meals a day for several days. Again, it tries to show that the kingdom of heaven is bigger than anything we can imagine.

Then, a different image – the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, whose finder puts all his money into buying that field, and the treasure along with it. And he was moved to do this out of joy! Out of delight! The same goes for the merchant who puts all his money into buying the finest pearl he has ever seen.

Both images describe the kingdom as something so precious that nothing of this world's goods matters in comparison. "He sold all that he had and bought it". Everything else became of no importance. There is no joy until after all this world's goods are disposed of. A hard decision, a difficult decision, isn't it ... for all of us. It's difficult to let go of the love of the things of this world. But the parables are saying that they become of no consequence.

Sometimes it takes a cataclysm, a crisis, in our own lives, to prompt us to think of the larger concepts of our human existence. It happened to me – I had a life-

threatening illness. In facing possible death, the important things immediately came to the surface; the priorities of my little life became clear to me.

Some people do this as an annual Lenten exercise – they write their own obituary – their own account of their life. Just for themselves. Just to help them step back from the hurly-burly of their daily lives, and think out what is important to them, to their existence. It's a good exercise for us Christians, because through our baptism, we have been changed into followers of Christ, and of his message.

And the most important message is that there is a life after our deaths. That there is Heaven. And that is why I like this set of parables in today's Lectionary.

And then, just as we are perhaps getting comfortable with the idea of "the Kingdom of Heaven", the last parable extends the teaching of Jesus. It's known as "The Warning Parable". Jesus compares the kingdom to a net which catches fish of every kind from the sea. When it was full, they hauled in the catch, sorted out the good into baskets, and threw out the bad.

It reminds me of last Sunday's Gospel parable of the wheat and the weeds. Because it tells us that there will be a "sorting", a throwing-out. A parable elsewhere in the gospels uses the imagery of sorting the sheep from the goats. Here it is different fishes – all of whom live together in the sea.

"And so it will be at the end of the age". At Judgement Day. Sometime in the future.

In God's own time, "The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire". We do well to heed these parables, to seek as Christians, to change our lives; to do good. To follow Jesus' teaching. Start, if you like, with the Beatitudes - Jesus' teaching about what is important in the Kingdom of Heaven. Because those Beatitudes are totally at odds with the ways of our human world.

I would also recommend developing what I would call "a wise fear" – a seriousness about our Christianity. We will be judged by God. It's not a very fashionable concept, but as you can see, it is part of Jesus' teaching. So, hang on to three images of what Jesus teaches us about the kingdom of heaven.

The immensity of it. The joy of experiencing it. The Judgement that will occur. Paul simplifies the whole subject of belief and trust in God. He makes it really quite serene; quite straightforward; that we don't need to tie ourselves up in knots of complicated theology, as he reminds us that love is the key:

"Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God." Remember that, if you are ever in a bind about, well, anything. God is there for us; his Spirit is near to us at all times.

And now to the one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power and glory. Amen.

### **The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

**Amen.**

### **Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the Seventh Sunday after Trinity**

Lord of all power and might  
the author and giver of all good things:  
Craft in our hearts the love of your name,  
increase in us true religion,  
nourish us with all goodness,  
and of your great mercy keep us in the same;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Guide your church to cherish and cultivate the precious seed of the Kingdom, that all your people may be gathered into one in holiness. Teach us to recognise the old and the new treasures that have been revealed and entrusted to us, to maintain past integrity and explore new opportunities.

May all that tends to goodness in the world be recognised and developed. Give to the rulers of the nations and to all in authority the understanding that there is a greater kingdom than their own, and a richer treasure than their wealth, so that life for all may be more abundant.

Help us to value more fully the gifts that we have received; and to help our families, our friends and neighbours to the certainty that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God. Have mercy on those suffering from despair and

depression because they have not known the true values that lead to contentment. We pray that all people throughout this world whose lives have been challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, those who are in distress or illness, those who are losing agility or mobility saving power, may know your love and your power to heal.

Lord God, we thank you for calling us into the company of those who trust in Christ and seek to obey his will. And when our span of life is over, we pray that we will join with all your saints in the joys of your eternal kingdom.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever, Amen.

### **Dismissal:**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.  
The love of God enfold you,  
the power of Christ protect you,  
the leading of the Spirit guide you;  
and the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always. Amen