

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A (July 24, 2011)

The world of Harry Potter begins with the ability to see what is hidden underneath the surface of life, at a train station where Harry is told to go to Gate 9-3/4, not Gate 9 and not Gate 10. There was no Gate 9-3/4 ...until a person from behind, another person who could see what most couldn't see, told Harry "Just walk with purpose...don't be afraid and walk right through." He did and ended up past the wall, standing before a huge steam locomotive. The story begins. What was hidden is revealed.

Jesus tells parables so that they will do to us what Gate 9-3/4 did for Harry...the parable in today's Gospel opens up a new world, a new way of seeing life, where the Kingdom of Heaven bursts alive in our hearts.

A good friend of mine has a niece who has been diagnosed with **amyotrophic lateral sclerosis**, or ALS, a disease of the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord that control voluntary muscle movement. ALS is a horrific disease that gradually makes one completely unable to move, swallow, eat and eventually, breathe. Cruel...this is a woman in her 30s, is married and has three children. How she has chosen to live in and through this disease allows the kingdom to come alive.

She has learned to communicate with a breathing apparatus hooked up to the computer; her family communicates each day through this method; she has created a blog and writes daily on it. Her husband, a man known for his humor and making other people feel good, continues to do so.

When I heard this story it was like finding a beautiful gem or treasure, buried in the routine of everyday life. How can this young woman be so positive; how does her family accept this reality...the love they share, knowing that there will be no cure?

As I accept this treasure I need to let its message sink more deeply in my heart...I have to *bury* it. Like in the two parables today, burying it means that I must allow it to take root in my heart ...that means I must *sell* my own understanding of what brings happiness. I have to let go of my questions to God; I have to let go of the answer I want to hear. Every treasure that is unearthed brings the kingdom to light and simultaneously demands a change in how we see our God...our lives and loved ones...even our very selves.

Everything begins to change...we begin to see. For some frustrating reason, our God comes to us hidden. The Word Made Flesh, the Incarnation, showed us God hidden in a cave and in a baby soon to become an ordinary man. He continues to be hidden, but He wants us to do the exploring, to find His presence in the ordinary experiences of life. Every day God is waiting for us to uncover the buried treasure of His Life...His Kingdom...

And then it happens. The more we search, the more we experience God revealing himself in the powerful story of a struggling woman and in a beautiful story of a boy named Harry Potter; the more we come to realize that we are the *pearl of great price*, we are the *treasure* in the eyes of Christ. He is searching for us and we are ones hiding from him. He waits patiently for let him uncover our hidden dignity.