

The parables Jesus tells us today remind us of the treasure that is the Kingdom of God and how precious is our faith. It is worth all that we have in order to hold fast to it. But the third parable, referred to as the Parable of the Dragnet, tells us something further.

In the parable a net is cast into the sea and pulled in with a large number of fish, good and bad. The net symbolizes the Church, the fish are the members of the church, you and me. The Church is made up of good fish as well as bad fish.

The sea symbolizes the turbulent world in which we live. It is a world in which the Church exists and interacts. And while it is in the world, the Church is not of the world.

When the time of this world has come to an end, there will be a judgement. Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead. We profess this Truth every time we pray the Creed. At this judgment some of the fish will be saved and others will be thrown back, “into the fiery furnace where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Both kinds of fish, the righteous and the wicked, were inside the net, inside the Church.

It is not enough for us for us to just say we are Catholic and go through the motions of being a Catholic on the outside. This is what we might refer to as culturally Catholic. Many of our leaders and politicians are like this, they say they are Catholic, they may even go to Church every week and appear to be models of the faith. But their actions are not in line with the teachings God has passed on to us through His Church.

We need to do more than just show up and go through the motions. It is not enough to just be in the net, we also want to end up in the good bucket.

To accomplish this we need to let God's grace penetrate our lives. We need grace to soak into our hearts and minds so that we follow Christ all week long, not just on Sunday. We must be willing to give up all we have in order to possess the treasure of the field and the pearl of great price. We have to fight against our own sinful tendencies and selfish desires in order to be fully united with Christ, the only treasure that will bring us everlasting joy.

And while we work toward our own salvation we must help our brothers and sisters who are struggling with their faith. The judgment will come only at the end, which means we can always hope, until the very last moment of life, for a soul to be redeemed. Nothing is predetermined, and nothing is impossible for God's grace. There are good fish and bad fish in the net, but as long as the net is in the water there is always hope for the victory of grace.

We often talk about the spiritual war that is happening all around us. Make no mistake, the war is very real and we are all caught up in it. Surveys and reports consistently describe Christians as the most persecuted religious group in the world.

Our churches are being set on fire. In Florida this happened with parishioners still inside. The cathedral in Nantes, France, was set ablaze in the last couple of weeks. Here in California the San Gabriel mission, founded by Saint Junipero Serra, was all but destroyed by an early morning blaze. Only a few miles from here a statue honoring Fr. Serra was destroyed by a mob incited by hatred. Fr. Serra is accused of racism and genocide. Of course nothing could be further from the truth. But the mob

that destroyed the statue does not respond to the truth, it responds only to hatred.

Just last weekend churches and statues of Our Lord, and our Blessed Mother were vandalized in New York, Indiana, Montana, and Illinois. Adding to a list that already included Tennessee, Colorado, and Missouri, as well as Florida and California.

We should not be surprised that world hates us. Our Lord told us that the world loves only what is its own. And like the net, we are in the world, but we are not of the world. And it is becoming increasingly difficult to tell the good fish from the bad. After all, the seductive voice of evil sounds so reasonable. We don't want to upset or offend anyone, we should just be nice to everyone. It is so much easier.

But still we are attacked. Even if we attempt to mollify the mob, we are attacked for what they mistakenly believe it means to be Catholic.

We are not free to pick and choose what we believe in order to be more acceptable to the world. We are here to serve each other and save as many souls as possible. If we choose to accept some doctrines of the Church and reject others, such as the teachings on abortion, marriage, or sexuality, then we put ourselves and those we come into contact with, in danger.

We are all soldiers in this war, and the enemy is getting bolder. The first article of faith for a soldier is to ensure their own fitness, the second is to help their fellow soldiers.

General William Tecumseh Sherman was the Union commander of the Western Theater during the American Civil War. In 1865 he wrote a letter

to General Ulysses S. Grant, the Commander General of the army. The letter in part reads, "I knew wherever I was that you thought of me, and if I got in a tight place you would come--if you were alive."

We must always be willing to come to the aid of those whose faith is weak. We must be there to lend an ear to hear, a shoulder to cry on, and an arm to support them.

The Parable of the Dragnet reminds us of the importance to check on our own spiritual health. We must avoid simply going through the motions of being Catholic. God will only accept those who truly desire to be with Him, and who show that desire by honestly striving to follow Christ.

But the parable also reminds us that the people around us need our help.

Just because our friends and family appear to have a good relationship with God, doesn't mean that they don't need our help, prayers, words of encouragement, and a good example.

Judging by appearances, all the fish in the net were safe. But in the end what appeared to be, did not tell the whole story. None of us is immune to temptation. The devil is constantly prowling about the world, like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

The fish in the net next to you may be experiencing a time of severe crisis. They may be undergoing terrible temptations or the stress of an assault upon their spirit, all while seemingly fine and normal on the outside.

And so we should never stop praying for each other. We should never stop looking for new ways to encourage each other to stay faithful to Christ. And

we should never think that our own example of faithfully following Christ doesn't matter. It always matters.

Jesus wants to bring everyone into the bright light of eternal life and He wants us to help each other get there.

And if talk of soldiers and generals and warfare does not connect with you, then think of it this way.

There was once a father with a daughter. One evening, when the daughter was about three years old, she was upstairs getting ready to go to bed and dad was downstairs reading. The daughter called out to her father asking for his help in getting undressed.

Dad gave a little sigh, and because he was involved in his reading and wanted to encourage some measure of independence in his daughter, he called back up, "you know how to get undressed."

"Yes," came the response from the three year old, "but sometimes people need people anyway, even if they do know how to do things by themselves."

Sometimes our brothers and sisters need our help, even if they know what they should do.