



In the Irish tradition one of the most important people in the community was the *seanachie*, which is the Irish word for storyteller. So, in training to be a good *seanachie*, I will begin with three stories that all have the same message.

The first one goes like this.: a man hears about a great diamond, perhaps the largest diamond known to humanity. Being a rich man who has had everything he ever wanted, he begins a world-wide search to find this great treasure, this diamond beyond compare. After visiting several continents and crossing the oceans of the world, he comes to learn that the diamond is in a very poor mountain village in Africa. After an arduous trip through the jungle, avoiding lions and tiger, and after a canoe trip of the 300 miles in crocodile infested waters, he, at long, arrives at the village where the man who holds the great diamond lives. He rushes to the straw hut of the man and says, *I will pay any price to you for your great diamond.* The elderly man says, *you want the great diamond. Here it is. You can have it. I do not need it.* The rich man is both shocked and delighted. He dances in delight and rushes off with his great new possession. He is thrilled. As he begins to board the canoe for his return journey, he stops suddenly and begins to run back to the hut where the man who gave him the diamond lives. He dashes into the hut with one question: *Tell me the secret that enable you to let go of the diamond so easily.*

The second story is about a school teacher, a priest, who taught religion. At Christmas time, many of the students, with the encouragement of their parents, would give him Christmas presents. The gifts all looked very similar, long shaped thin boxes with Christmas wrapping. The priest would graciously thank each student and carry his thirty

of so boxes home and put them in his closet. Without opening them, he knew what they were: handkerchiefs. He got them every year. He wondered if the students thought he had a permanent allergy. Well, what else do you give a priest as a gift, unless you a parishioner at St. Martin's where a bottle of Jameson is the preferred gift. The priest would put the boxes in his closet and open them throughout the year, whenever he wanted a fresh handkerchief. So, one September, he opened the box to get out a new handkerchief, but there was an envelope in it rather than the usual gift. He opened the envelope and found two orchestra seats to the Broadway show *Hamilton*. The seats were for a performance in July, a month that had already passed. He had a great pearl and never knew it.

The last story is about a woman who went to the nursing home every day to visit her husband who had had Alzheimer's disease for many years. They had been married for more than sixty years. The disease had progressed to the point that the husband no longer recognized his wife. Yet, she came to visit him faithfully every day. When asked why she did this, she responded in this way: *Because I love him and he would do the same for me. And as much as I love him, I know that after he is gone, only my faith will support me and keep me connected until we are both in heaven and he will know me again.* This was a woman who had had found the pearl of great price.

In our scripture today, we find divinely inspired stories about knowing what is truly important in life. In our first reading from the Old Testament's *First Book of Kings*, God asked King Solomon this question: *Ask something of me and I will give it to you.*" Solomon answered: *Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong.* God has great praise for the wisdom of the young King who did not wish for riches or armies. The Lord responds to him: *I give you a heart so wise and understanding that there has never been anyone like you up to now, and after you there will come no one to equal you."*

What is the deepest desire and yearning of your heart? What would be your response to the question, *ask for anything and I will give it to you?* My first response would be to ask for the Jets to win the Super Bowl, but I do want to ask God to do the impossible. Some might ask to win the Powerball lottery. On a more serious note, I am sure many would ask for good health, a happy marriage, a long life, success and happiness for their children and grandchildren, peace in their families and friendships. All wise answers about wishing for good things. I would probably be quick to name similar wishes.

Would any of us wish for a deeper faith, to know Jesus Christ more deeply, for the grace to serve him more faithfully, for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and on our families? Would any of these make our wish list?

In our Gospel today, Jesus tells parable about searching for the pearl of great price. When one discovers the pearl of great price, he or she is willing do everything to obtain the pearl. I believe we all know what the pearl of great price is: it having a living relationship with God. It is believing that Jesus is the Lord of my life and that only he will

ultimately satisfy the long of our hearts. For some of us, it takes a lifetime to come to learn that truth. I have heard it said that when we are dying, we will not wish we had spent more time working, or watching television, or on the internet. I believe we will be thinking about our relationships with our spouses, our children, our friends, our neighbors. We might think about those whom we could not forgive in life. We might think about our relationship, with God and did we truly make the effort to know him, love him and serve.

I think central to the parable of the pearl of great price is that one does not find it too easily. God seeks to be in a loving relationship with each one of us, but we so easily seek happiness elsewhere. The pearl does not come without a price. A loving marriage takes great effort. A college degree is not easily achieved. A great skill in music, sports, dance cooking, learning a language all take great effort.

Jesus knew well the pearl of great price. As St. Paul says, *Jesus, who in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to cling to but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.* For God, we are the pearl of great price and he pays the great price, his death his coming to earth and dying on the cross for us to have a relationship with each of us. The Gospels leaves you and me with the question: *what is our pearl of great price which moves us act to seek it with all our hearts.*