When I was about ten years old, I received from my Uncle Doc, who was a tropical fish breeder, the gift of a 10 gallon aquarium and all the necessary equipment to go with it – including a school of about a dozen guppies. I was thrilled to receive it and I dutifully followed his instructions setting up the habitat, and then spent hours being fascinated by those tiny bodies gliding through the transparent nothingness of the waters.

Then one day, to my horror – a female guppy began giving birth – and promptly turned to gobble up each newborn! I instinctually labeled her a “Bad Fish”! And pulled her out of the tank and sent her to – what I hope would be her demise – flushing her down the toilet! I tearfully called my Uncle Doc asking “Why would a mother guppy eat her young?!” In a clear and sympathetic tone, Uncle Doc assured me that, “The fish likely just didn’t know better.” Indeed – “As scientists tell us, when kept in the wild, female guppies have a wild gene that triggers a chemical response in her body as she is giving birth, and that quenches her hunger – and she will not normally eat her young! But with human intervention in breeding guppies commercially, that gene is weakened and its effect lost. Now, according to Uncle Doc’s wise council, “We need to isolate expectant female guppies in a breeding tank, a box that is inserted into the aquarium, separating the female from the lower portion of the box by a narrow silted plate, just wide enough for the newborns to swim to safety. Thus, the female is prevented from attacking newborns. Domestic birthing of guppies requires human intervention. But what in the world does birthing guppies have to do with today’s lectionary readings?!”

Like guppies – and all of God’s creatures – humans have been gifted with life and the invitation to participate in the birthing of the Kingdom of God here on earth and toward its final fulfillment at the end of time (Rom 8: 28-30). However, God does not force us into this action. Along the course of our lives, we all have a variety of choices and opportunities that come our way. But are we open to the Spirit of God who enables us to see the “Treasure” and the “Pearl of Great Price” when they appear before us? Have we allowed the gifts given us at Baptism to become domesticated – our senses dulled to the Treasures of love, justice, mutual relations that empower us in Christian living? Are we blinded by all of those other “spirits” that domesticate us?

I invite you to do an experiment. For the next week, at the end of each day, make two lists. First, make a list of everything you did all day, and the amount of time (minutes or hours) spent on each action. Second, list all of your purchases during the day, and the price you paid for each item. At the end of the week, review your two lists. What percentage of your time and money was devoted to each item? How do those percentages reflect your lived priorities? What amount of time and money went toward
quietly communing with God or in prayer and worship with other Catholics or persons of faith? How would your priorities stack up against those of Solomon (I Kgs 3:5, 7-12)? Would God be as “pleased” with you as with Solomon? In light of your lists and priorities, how well do your actions align with the proclamation of the Responsorial Psalm, “Lord, I love your commands?”

Certainly – for all of us – often our “actions speak louder than words.” Like the domesticated female guppy, we can easily evolve into a “Bad Fish” (Mt 13:48) gradually turning away from attending to our call to an intimate, empowered, loving relationship with God (Rom 8:29-30). As “Bad Fish” we can cannibalize our own life-giving treasures of faith, love, justice, and mutual relationships that are ours through Baptism. But unlike the domesticated female guppy, we do have a choice! When will you and I become willing to “sell all” those things and ways of living that keep us from the Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price?

**PS:**

By the way – I think God considers us “Good Fish” worth saving from ourselves! Like humans come to the aid of the female guppy with the breeding tank, so too God has come to our aid in the birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed, God sees in each of us “a Treasure or a Pearl of Great Price.” As a wise preacher proclaimed:

> We often do not recognize the beauty hidden in the fields of our lives. But God does. Jesus came into our world and discovered a beauty in Mary of Magdala and in Peter and in the leper and in the thief on the cross which they and those around them never suspected. He found it and gave all he had to embrace it and unite it to God (Galatians 2:20). We are meant to live a life of intimacy with God. Let us continue our search for truth and for love and for prayer. But let us not forget that God is the one searching for us. Let us stop rushing and hiding and allow God to find us, for our longing for God is only a shadow of his longing for us.\(^1\)

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1 Source: [http://mbfallon.com/homilies.html](http://mbfallon.com/homilies.html)

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