

FAROL

Origen (c.185-253, priest and theologian)
Commentary on St Matthew's Gospel, 10, 9-10; GCS 10, 10-11 (©Friends of Henry Ashworth)

The pearl of great price

To the seeker after fine pearls may be applied the words: «Seek and you will find,» and, «Everyone who seeks will find» (Mt 7,7-8). If you ask what is to be sought, and what will be found by everyone who seeks for it, I say with all confidence: pearls - especially that pearl which will be acquired by those who give their all, who sacrifice everything for it, the pearl Paul meant when he said: «I have accepted the loss of everything in order to gain Christ,» (Phil 3,8). «Everything» means beautiful pearls; «to gain Christ» refers to the one pearl of great price.

Admittedly, a lamp is precious to people in darkness, and they need it until sunrise. Precious too was the radiance on the face of Moses (2Cor 3,7) - and I believe on the faces of the other prophets also. It was a sight of beauty leading us to the point of being able to see the glory of Christ, to whom the Father bore witness in the words: «This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,» (Mt 3,17). But «compared with this surpassing glory, what formerly was glorious now seems to have no glory at all,» (2Cor 3,10). We need at first a glory destined to be outshone by an «all-surpassing glory», just as we need the partial knowledge which «will be superseded when that which is perfect has come,» (1Cor 13,9f.).

Thus everyone beginning to live a spiritual life and «growing toward maturity,» (Heb 6,1) needs tutors, guardians, and trustees until the «fullness of time» (Gal 4,4) arrives for him, so that after all this, he... may on his emancipation receive his patrimony. This patrimony is the pearl of great price, and «the coming of what is perfect to supersede what is imperfect» (1Cor 13,10) when, after acquiring the forms of knowledge, if we may call them so, which are inferior to knowledge of Christ, one becomes able to understand «the supreme value of knowing Christ,» (Phil 3,8). Yet many do not understand the beauty of the many pearls of the Law and of «the partial knowledge» scattered through all the prophets; they wrongly think that, without having fully understood the Law and the prophets, they can find the one pearl of great price...: the full comprehension of the gospel and the complete understanding of the acts and words of Christ Jesus.