

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 30, 2017 Cycle A

Opening prayer: *All-wise and loving God, you bless us with a share of your divine wisdom and life. May we always have the wisdom to choose you above all things. Grace us now with the wisdom and heart to hear and respond to the Word you place before us today. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Sharing life: What are you most and least grateful for this week?

Facilitator reads focus statement: This Sunday's Scriptures are like a chest filled with buried treasures for those willing to hunt them down. The first reading shows Solomon asking God for wisdom, a treasure beyond price and truly rare. The psalmist treasures the law of the Lord far above silver or gold. Paul extols the treasure of God's grace. Matthew speaks of the greatest treasure, the Kingdom of heaven. All these treasures are worth more than risking everything to seek them and make them our own.

After proclaiming each of the readings, pause for a moment and then consider reading the commentary.

FIRST READING: 1Kings 3:5, 7-12

Solomon consolidates the power he inherited from his father, David. God asks Solomon what gift (what pearl of great price) he desires most of all? He answers, "Wisdom and understanding heart." God gives Solomon wisdom and a discerning heart. In Israelite tradition, wisdom has to do with having the ability to achieve success in any field of endeavor. Solomon illustrates this very well, being successful in governing, construction, foreign trade and diplomacy, and writing proverbs. Solomon is an example of the "wise scribe" spoken about in the Gospel. Unfortunately, his service as king does not conclude as well as it began, which clearly shows that God's gifts are not bestowed automatically and permanently, but require continual tending and cooperation on the part of the recipient.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 119

This psalm glorifies the wonder, beauty and wisdom of God's law.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:28-30

God has a plan for our lives and he is in control of everything. It is his desire that we be refashioned in the image of Christ in a progressive process which he himself directs.

When Paul speaks about those whom God has predestined, he does not mean that God whimsically chooses some to be saved and others to be lost. God's plan is for *all* to be saved. This means it is God's *active* will that all be saved, but God's

passive will permits individuals to accept or reject God's salvation.

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:14-52

This Gospel offers three more parables intended to give us some insight into the *Kingdom of God*. Jesus does not give us a definition of the reign of God. Instead, he offers *some* images of what the Kingdom of God is like.

In the first two parables, Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a *buried treasure* or a *set of fine pearls*. When one finds the treasure of pearls, he realizes that he has found the "real thing," and he thinks: "This is what I have been looking for all my life." Discovering the buried treasure of pearls brings great joy. Discovering a "pearl of great price" calls for great *commitment*, symbolized by a willingness to sell everything to purchase the treasure. In the story, both men are willing to joyfully sacrifice all to purchase their newfound treasure. No one is pushing them to do it—they want to do it. Message: we must be willing to risk everything in order to join the fellowship of Jesus' disciples.

The *third parable* about the dragnet hauling all kinds of things—good and bad—is similar to the *wheat and weeds* parable. Judgment will happen at the end. Only then will the good be separated from the bad. Like the *wheat and weeds* parable, this one cautions us against premature judgment, and warns us that judgment will take place.

Matthew says: "*Every scribe who is learned in the Kingdom of God is like the head of a household*

who can bring from his store both the new and the old.” Jesus has been speaking to the Pharisees and his disciples. The Pharisees, who have become fixated on the Old Law, are unable to appreciate the new Word of God spoken through Jesus.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. What verse spoke to you most?
2. If God said to you what he said to Solomon, “Ask something of me and I will give it to you,” what gift would you ask for? What is the deepest desire of your heart?
3. In the second reading, Paul says, “All things work for the good for those who love the Lord.” Is this your experience? Can you recall a bad experience out of which God brought some good?
4. What are the priorities in your life? What do you value the most? What is most important to you? Does the way you spend your time, treasure and talent reflect these priorities?
5. What is the “pearl of great price” in your life?

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Name one way you can act on these readings.
Suggestion: If your “pearl of great price” is someone or something other than God, do something to make God your pearl of great price.
St. Augustine says: *“Christ is not valued at all if he is not valued above all.”*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Pray especially for the gift of wisdom so that you can choose wisely and have “the smarts” to follow the ways of God. ©