

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

July 26, 2020 Cycle A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

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*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the 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. Finally, Matthew speaks of the greatest treasure: the Kingdom of Heaven. All these treasures are more than worth risking everything to seek them and make them our own.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

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

As this chapter in the Book of Kings opens, Solomon consolidates the power he inherits 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 attain success in any field of endeavor. Solomon illustrates this very well as he flourishes in governance, in construction, in foreign trade and diplomacy, and in writing proverbs. Solomon is an example of the 'wise scribe' spoken about in the Gospel. Unfortunately, Solomon's reign as king does not conclude as well as it began, which shows that God's gifts are not bestowed automatically and permanently, but require continual tending and cooperation on the part of the one to whom they are given.

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 each individual to accept or reject God's salvation.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 13:44-52

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:44-52

This Gospel offers three more parables which are intended to give the listener 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 a treasure of pearls and realizes it is the ‘real thing,’ he/she thinks: “*This is what I have been looking for all my life.*” Stumbling upon the buried treasure of pearls brings great joy. Discovering a “pearl of great price” calls for great *commitment* symbolized by a willingness to sell all of one’s possessions to purchase the treasure. In the story, both men are willing to joyfully sacrifice all to purchase their new found treasure. No one is pushing them to do this. 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 allegory on the *wheat and weeds*, this parable is a warning against premature judgment, but also a warning that judgment will take place. Matthew finishes this section of his Gospel by saying: “*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 in parables to the Pharisees and his disciples. Those who grasp their meaning are like a wise scribe who appreciates not only the old revelation in Moses, but also the new revelation in Jesus. Both shed light on each other, but the new is definite and the fulfillment of the old.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

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?

6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s 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.*”

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, you are our ‘pearl of great price.’ Help us to always remember that and push back against all that seeks to replace you as the top priority in our lives.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Especially pray for the gift of wisdom so that you can choose wisely and have “the smarts” to follow the ways of God.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

Holy Spirit, fill us with heavenly wisdom.

Help us to see what really matters.

Give us the strength to follow where you are.

Amen.