

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 30, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. God said, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you." Solomon answered: "O LORD, my God, you have made me, your servant, king to succeed my father David; but I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act. I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong. For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?"

The LORD was pleased that Solomon made this request. So God said to him: "Because you have asked for this-not for a long life for yourself, nor for riches, nor for the life of your enemies, but for understanding so that you may know what is right-I do as you requested. 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."

Psalm: Ps 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130

R. (97a) Lord, I love your commands.

I have said, O Lord, that my part
is to keep your words.
The law of your mouth is to me more precious
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Let your kindness comfort me
according to your promise to your servants.
Let your compassion come to me that I may live,
for your law is my delight.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

For I love your commands
more than gold, however fine.
For in all your precepts I go forward;
every false way I hate.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Wonderful are your decrees;
therefore I observe them.
The revelation of your words sheds light,
giving understanding to the simple.

R. Lord, I love your commands.

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:28-30

Brothers and sisters: We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified.

Gospel: Matthew 13:44-52

Jesus said to his disciples: "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

"Do you understand all these things?" They answered, "Yes." And he replied, "Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old."



Loving Father, you overshadow us with your
kindness as a tree provides shade in the heat of the
day. With the direction of your Son
and the grace of the Holy Spirit, may our hearts
produce only the good that will benefit
our brothers and sisters.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

A terribly decrepit old man is sitting on the front porch. A very beautiful woman walks by on the sidewalk and his mouth is hanging open. Of course there was an old flea-bitten dog at the man's feet, since George Booth was the cartoonist. The man's equally haggard wife is at the door with the screen pushed open just far enough to take in the scene. "Well whistle, you damn fool!" she says. Actually these are words of everyday common sense. In the Gospel, Jesus also uses common sense wisdom. If you went out into a field, he says, and saw a suspicious mound of earth and you happened to dig it up and you found there a hidden treasure, as much gold as you could ever want, would you immediately run out and tell everyone where to find it? No, no, no. This is just the opposite of "Well whistle, you damn fool!" You would keep the treasure a complete, deep, dark, fail-safe secret, you would re-bury the treasure disguising it so no one could know that anything was there. You would go sell your goods and buy the field. Now the treasure is yours and you can tell everybody "Look what I happened to find on my new property!" It makes sense.

If you agree, then there is a question for you. Wouldn't you do as much for the kingdom of heaven? Jesus asks you this. Well, hmmm. Maybe that is worth some consideration. Where else can you look for such wisdom? As we might remember, King Solomon was noted far and wide for his wise decisions. It is said that the Queen of Sheba traveled to him to get advice. How did he get so wise? Did he just inherit it from his father, David? No, he prayed to God for a beautiful kind of wisdom (First Reading). He did not ask how to increase his fortune or to be well-known or to have power. He asked God for an understanding heart. He would use it to rule God's people well. God is moved by this request and gives Solomon great practical wisdom so he can be on the side of the regular folks. How many leaders today even listen to the people, let alone listen with understanding? Perhaps the deepest wisdom this Sunday is in the Second Reading. You or I have undoubtedly quoted the words, not remembering where they came from, "All things work for good for those who love God." The older I get, the more true this seems. Even when darkness and loss become our daily bread, still the love of God labors incessantly to bring out larger love, greater forgiveness, more acceptance of life and love, even within pain. This is food we all need every day. Sunday at Mass we can pay attention to these varieties of wisdom. The important thing is not to just sit there and gape. Do what every other human being in the world would do if they were given a glimpse into the kingdom. What? "Whistle, you damn fool"? No. Listen with an understanding heart.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. "Understanding" or "*shōmē'a*" in Hebrew means listening or obedient. How would the world be different if those in leadership positions (parent, teacher, boss, political leaders, religious leaders) earnestly prayed Solomon's prayer: "Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart"? What impact might "listening" have on good leadership?
2. The New American Bible translation is "All things work together for those who love God." Suffering is inevitable in human life. Even so, can all things work together for those who love God?
3. Did the pearlfinder and the merchant have to be shrewd about obtaining their treasures? What about you? Are you shrewd about recognizing the "treasure" or the kingdom of God in your life? Do you find God, or at least look for God, in all things in your life? Do you notice when God is "whispering," or just when God is "shouting" in your life?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy, bestow in abundance your mercy upon us and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may use the good things that pass in such a way as to hold fast even now to those that ever endure. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen