

Homily of 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A

Solomon was in his 20s when he became the king of Israel. When in his dream God said to him, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you." Solomon replied, "...I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act...Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong." God was pleased that Solomon made this request, and said to Solomon, "Because you have asked this – not for 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..." Various English translations of Solomon's prayer bring out the power of the prayer. Some of the translations are:

- Give your servant **an understanding heart**... to distinguish right from wrong (The New American Bible).
- Give your servant **a discerning heart**... to distinguish between right and wrong (New International Version).
- Give your servant **a discerning mind** ... to distinguish right from wrong (NET Bible)
- Give your servant **an obedient heart**... to discern between good and evil (Holman Christian Bible).
- Give me **a heart that listens** so that I can tell the difference between good and evil (God's Word Translation).
- Give thy slave **a hearing heart**... that I may discern between good and evil (Jubilee Bible).
- Give me **the wisdom** to know the difference between good and evil (Good News Bible).

Solomon prayed for an understanding heart, a discerning heart and mind, an obedient heart that hears and listens, and wisdom; able to distinguish between right and wrong, able to discern between good and evil, able to know and tell the difference, and able to judge wisely. What a rich prayer! Solomon's prayer challenges our style of prayer. The prayer teaches us to seek wisdom from the Lord more than we seek other things. The Book of Proverbs says, "Get wisdom, get understanding!... Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will safeguard you. The beginning of wisdom is: get wisdom; whatever else you get, get understanding. Extol her, and she will exalt you; she will bring honors if you embrace her. She will put on your head a graceful diadem; a glorious crown she will bestow on you" (Proverbs 4:5-9). Isaiah the prophet names wisdom as the first of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:3).

It is with this wisdom described above that we can find a treasure buried in a field and locate fine pearls of great price. It is with this type of wisdom we are able to select the good fish and throw away the bad ones. Jesus uses today's Gospel parables to let us know that we need the wisdom from the Lord for our earthly and heavenly race. Almost every moment, we are faced with discerning and distinguishing between right and wrong, and good and evil, and making judgments and choices. Human wisdom alone is not enough. With human wisdom alone, we are in the danger of mistakes, errors, bad choices, and even choosing evil. St. Paul says, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight" (1 Corinthians 3:19). We act sinfully and foolishly without God's wisdom.

Therefore, we are encouraged today to be close to God and to pray as Solomon did. We need to constantly ask God to grant us his wisdom to guide us at every moment. St. James writes, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and he will be given" (James 1:5). Jesus' words, "Ask and you will be given; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7); applies mostly in the prayer for wisdom.

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