

Homily of Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year A, 2023

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12, Psalm 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-130; Roman 8:28-30; Matthew 13:44-52

Solomon was a young man when he became the king of Israel. 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... In addition, ... I give you such riches and glory that among kings there will be no one like you all your days.” Solomon’s encounter with God reminds us Solomon’s prayer reminds us Matthew 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.”

Different versions of Solomon’s prayer in various Bible translations bring out the depth and power of the prayer:

- 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 **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).

As seen above, Solomon prayed for an understanding heart, a discerning heart, an obedient heart, a hearing heart, a listening heart, and for wisdom; to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, able to discern between good and evil, able to know and tell the difference between good and evil. What a rich prayer! Solomon’s prayer challenges our prayers, which most times are for material things that satisfy the flesh.

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. Exalt 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). Prophet Isaiah names wisdom as the first of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:3).

Jesus uses today’s gospel to remind us that our entire life is a journey to the kingdom of heaven. It is a journey where there are constant challenges of distinguishing right from wrong, of discerning between good and evil, of knowing the difference between good and evil, and of making wise judgements and good choices. If we depend solely on human wisdom for the journey, we will follow the wrong way and miss the kingdom. St. Paul says, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight” (1 Corinthians 3:19). Human wisdom alone is not enough. When and where we remove God, who is the origin and source of all things, and operate only on human wisdom, we put ourselves in danger of mistakes, errors, bad choices, and sin.

With God's wisdom, we will discover hidden treasure and pearls of great price, and we will be able to put what is good into the bucket and throw away what is bad. Therefore, we are encouraged to pray for God's wisdom to guide us at every moment. St. James advises us, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and [the person] will be given" (James 1:5). God's wisdom is mysterious and hidden (1 Corinthians 2:7), given to those who desire and seek it.

It is equally important to know that we, also, receive God's wisdom from fellow human beings. Thus, Tobit advised his son Tobiah, "Seek counsel (wisdom) from every wise person, and do not think lightly of any useful advice" (Tobit 4:18). Unfortunately, some people seek counsel from unwise persons and from evil minded persons who lead them astray.

St. Paul states in the second reading, "Brothers and sisters: We know that all things work for the good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Our relationship with God determines the fulfilment of this statement of faith. We are to love God by obeying his commands, trust him, and surrender ourselves to him, then, all things will work together for our good according to God's plan. God's plan is for our welfare and not for woe (Jeremiah 29:11). Amen.

Fr Martin Eke, MSP