

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Our first reading this week is from the first Book of Kings and it has to do with Solomon, the Son of David and Bathsheba. He is the Israelite king who built the great temple in Jerusalem. Our passage takes us right back to the very beginning of Solomon's reign when he was just a young man, untried, inexperienced and most likely beset with all sorts of self-doubts.

I would imagine that if anyone of us found ourselves to be a young monarch having just succeeded our great father, David, we would wonder if we have what it takes to be a good ruler. We would wonder if we were up to the challenge of filling our father's shoes.

Our reading today, tells us that Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream and said: **Ask something of me and I will give it you.** I submit to you that this is an extraordinary moment: God offering, like a genie, anything you want.

Your answer, if you are honest, will tell you great deal about you. Notice how often this kind of situation comes up in the Scriptures and Tradition:

Just before departing for heaven, Elijah tells his successor Elisha that he will give him anything he asks.

Jesus turns to the disciples of John the Baptist, who are following him, and says: **what do you seek?**

Our Lord asked the blind Bartimaeus: **what do you want me to do for you?**

Thomas Aquinas toward the end of his life placed his treatise on the Eucharist at the foot of the cross asking for judgment and he received this locution: **You have written well of me, Thomas, what would have as a reward?**

This kind of question is of enormous moment because it forces a clarification of self. In answering this question honestly we will find out who we are at a very fundamental level; we find out what our particular pearl of great price truly is.

So let us attend with care and attention to Solomon's answer. He said: **Give your servant an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong.**

An understanding heart—God is so pleased with his answer that He determines to make Solomon the wisest man who ever lived. We hear the words of Yahweh: **Because you have asked for this—not for long life, nor riches, nor for power over your enemies—but for understanding so that you may know what is right—I do as you requested.**

Why did Solomon's answer please God so? Since God needs nothing, God is always pleased by what brings us to deeper life. It is not as though Solomon's answer gives

God something that God needs...no! When God is pleased in the Scriptures, it means we are coming to deeper understanding and living according to His ways. The pleasure of God is always a clue to human flourishing. In asking for wisdom, Solomon was seeking to order his life according to God. Since wisdom is one of God's principal attributes.

Thomas Aquinas said that wisdom is seeing from the height; it's seeing from the perspective of God.

Solomon will be able to see all of life's situations, good or bad, from the Divine vantage point.

When Elijah turned to Elisha and offered him anything he might ask, Elisha's response was: *Give me a double portion of your spirit.* That's a good answer! Elisha didn't say give me fame, success, power, or wealth, but rather, a double portion of Elijah's spirit. In other words, he wanted a share in Elijah's deeply rooted connection to the Lord. He asks to be doubled rooted. He seeks that divine perspective and vantage point.

John the Baptist's disciples respond to Jesus' question with the words: *Where do you stay?* They want to know where Jesus stays...where he abides. If you know that, if you know where to stay with the Lord Jesus, then you too will have the divine advantage to all of life's situations.

Similarly, Jesus asked Bartimaeus: ***What do you want me to do for you?*** Bartimaeus says: *I want to see.* This is not merely physical vision, it is spiritual vision. Lord I want to see as you see.

Origen said: To be holy is to see with the eyes of Christ, to see the world through His eyes.

Bartimaeus wants the vision that will help him to see the world and what it offers with God's eyes and perspective.

Lastly we return to Thomas Aquinas, when he heard the voice from the cross say: What would you have as a reward? He responded: ***Nil nisi Te***—nothing except you. That's the answer! Thomas wants to possess Christ completely and entirely. If you have Christ, the rest of it takes care of itself. If you have Christ, you can handle wealth or poverty. If you have Christ, you can handle success or failure. If you have Christ, you can handle victory or defeat. If you have Christ, you have the pearl of great price.

That is why we take time this week to reflect on this all important question and our all important answer. What would you say if the Lord Himself stood before you and said: I will give you anything you want? How would you answer?

- Fr. David M. Chiantella

