

Fr. Curtis Miller July 25-26, 2020 Homily for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

If God promised to give you anything you requested, what would you ask for?

This is the very opportunity that God presented to the young King Solomon in today's first reading. He could have asked for power and wealth, or for military might like his father, King David. Instead, Solomon asks for wisdom. God is pleased with this request and fulfills his promise by making Solomon the wisest of all men.

Why was God so pleased with this request? Because Solomon did not ask for something that only benefited himself or harmed his enemies, but rather he asked for something that would help him to better serve the people of Israel and fulfill the task that God had entrusted to him. Solomon knew that he could not rule well without wisdom and that he could not be wise enough on his own; he needed God's help to be truly wise. Solomon humbly recognized his own limitations and turned to God with trust. He demonstrated the truth that if you think you're already wise, you're not, but that if you acknowledge that you are not wise, you are on the path to gaining true wisdom.

The Bible contains many examples of Solomon's great wisdom. Several books in the Old Testament are attributed to him, including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Wisdom of Solomon. The most famous story about Solomon's wisdom is the story of two women who came before him with a baby, each claiming to be the child's mother. Astonishingly, the king asked for a sword, saying that he would divide the child between them. Solomon cleverly exposed the false mother, who agreed to this cruel act, and revealed the true mother, who cried out that the other woman could have her baby, just so long as no harm be done to the child.

We also read about the Queen of Sheba, who traveled many miles across a desert to hear the wisdom of Solomon. In the Gospels, Jesus reminds His listeners of this story, then tells them that there is something greater than Solomon in their midst, namely Himself, and the wisdom of His teachings. If that queen was willing to travel so far to hear Solomon, how much more should we pay attention to Jesus now that He has come to us. We get to hear Jesus' words week after week at Mass, or read them whenever we open the Bible, and to be in His presence here. Let's not take this for granted!

So we know that Solomon asked for wisdom, but what would you ask God to give you? At first, don't try to think of the "right answer." Answer honestly for yourself. What would you ask from God? Then compare it to the "right answers:" wisdom, faithfulness, greater love of God and neighbor, God's blessing on your loved ones, or peace in our world. These are all good things to ask for, but how closely do our first answers compare to them? Was our first answer for something more selfish? Wealth, power, or fame? If not, and our first answer was something good and holy, that's great.

But it's important that we honestly weigh this question, so that we can purify our deepest desires and refocus them on God.

If you're having trouble thinking of an answer to this question, consider how you are answering it by your life and actions. What do you spend the most time working on, thinking about, longing for, or making sacrifices for? What would you be willing to give up everything for? The answer to these questions will help you identify your deepest desires, what you would ask God to give you.

We see this in Jesus' parables from today's Gospel reading. In the first, someone finds a treasure in a field, then sells everything he has to buy that field and possess that treasure. In the second, a merchant finds a pearl of great price, then sells all he has so that he can buy that pearl. What would you be willing to give everything for? What are you already spending your life working for? That is our treasure. And as Jesus teaches: Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

If we are valuing something worldly, like wealth, above all else, we know that we've made a bad bargain because worldly wealth is fleeting and ultimately unsatisfying. Instead, Jesus encourages us to recognize eternal life in the kingdom of heaven as the true pearl of great price, to give all that we have, and to spend all of our lives to find and possess that treasure.

Ultimately, the true treasure is Jesus Himself. If we're working toward heaven as if it were just some worldly paradise, then we've missed the point. Jesus Himself is the greatest treasure, and we should want to be in heaven precisely so that we can be with Jesus. If we possess Jesus, then we possess all things. But we actually cannot possess Him. Instead, the best we can do is to give ourselves completely to Jesus, to follow His commandments, to live holy lives, and to allow ourselves to be possessed by Him. Only when we have surrendered ourselves entirely to Jesus will we receive that pearl of great price.