

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Solomon = SOL-uh-muhn

A reading like a fairy tale, in which a request is granted, as instructive as it is full of wonder.

Part of the power of the reading comes from the way that Solomon draws out his request. Allow it to unfold in your proclamation.

Note the rhythm, especially in the repetitions of "not" and "nor."

LECTIONARY #109

READING I 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

A reading from the first Book of Kings

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."

READING I

Our first reading comes from the First Book of Kings. It tells the story about how King Solomon had a powerful nighttime vision of a conversation with God. In the chapter and verses that precede this reading, we learn that Solomon ascended the throne of Israel in Jerusalem after his father David died. Before David died, he instructed Solomon to follow God's ordinances in the law of Moses. David tells his son to settle scores with some of his enemies, which he does. Solomon also had his brother Adonijah killed, because he perceived him to be a

threat to his kingship. Finally, when he had established his kingdom, he began to build his home and the Temple in Jerusalem.

The narrator of the story tells us that Solomon "loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father" (1 Kings 3:3). This is why God said to Solomon, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you." Solomon's response is comprised of three statements. The first, which is not included in today's reading, is about God's past relationship with his father David, who was loved by God for his faithfulness (literally, walking in truth), his righteousness as a

ruler, and the upright nature of his heart. Ancients believed that the heart was associated with emotions but also thought, insight, discernment, and will. The second statement is about Solomon's present relationship with God. He describes himself as God's servant, chosen to be king in his father's place, even though he feels greatly inadequate to the job. The third statement is a request for the future that he be given "an understanding heart" literally, "a listening heart," so that he can govern well and act with proper discernment toward God's people. God responds by praising him for

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 119:57, 72, 76–77, 127–128, 129–130 (97a)

R. 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.

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.

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

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

READING II Romans 8:28–30

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

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.

Paul's teaching in this letter is complex and challenging. Read it with care because its content might easily be misconstrued.

TO KEEP IN MIND

Read the Scripture passage and its commentary in Workbook. Then read it from your Bible, including what comes before and after it, so that you understand the context.

not asking for things that kings typically wanted and by granting Solomon's request for wisdom and discernment, adding that Solomon is unique among the kings of Israel. Sadly, Solomon's reign would end much differently than it began, because he stopped observing God's commandments (see 1 Kings 11:1–13).

READING II Today's second reading follows immediately after last Sunday's reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans, in which Paul explained how the Spirit would come to our aid in our weak-

ness and intercede for us before God when we do not know how to pray. In this reading, Paul goes on to assure his readers that God is in control and everything that we experience is part of God's plan. And what is God's plan for those who love God? Paul is thinking of the community as a whole here, not individuals on their own merit. But notice that Paul does not use the term "predestined" as modern theologians do, suggesting that God has determined beforehand who would be saved and who would not. Rather, it means something like "God decided beforehand" that he wanted

humanity to be formed in a way similar to the image or likeness of Christ. Thus, God called us and justified us—put us in right relationship with God—so that we can also be glorified with Christ. Essentially, Paul is talking about the invitation God has given us to participate in the paschal mystery, dying with Christ so that we can come to fullness of life in Christ.

GOSPEL Today's Gospel provides us with three more parables about the reign of God or what Matthew calls "the kingdom of heaven." The first

This reading consists of a series of vivid comparisons and likenesses to the kingdom of heaven that Jesus provides for his disciples.

After providing the likenesses, Jesus' tone becomes more pointedly apocalyptic.

With this question, Jesus concludes the initiation into the mysteries of heaven he has undertaken with the disciples.

Let the strangeness of this imagery abide with the members of your assembly.

two—the parable of the treasure and the parable of the pearl of great price—have some important similarities, and therefore most likely are intended to have a similar message. In both cases, the values of the treasure and the pearl are noted. Such is the reign of God; it is a treasure of immeasurable value. Nothing can compare to it anywhere on earth. And what about the person who seeks out the treasure or pearl? Having found this object of great price, the person goes off and sells everything he has in order to secure it. Again, such is the reign of God; the wise person

recognizes it in joy and commits to it so fully that he gives up everything he has to participate in it.

The third parable sounds a lot like the parable of the weeds and wheat from the previous Sunday's Gospel reading. The sea is filled with good fish and bad fish. Likewise, the field has wheat and weeds growing together until harvest. Thus, the netting and sorting of fish in this parable serves the same purpose as the gathering of the harvest and burning of the weeds in the previous parable. Both are symbols of God's end time judgment, when the righ-

teous will be separated from the wicked. But to be clear, God is the judge. It is not our place to judge others but to act with patience and charity. God will judge when the time is right. Moreover, there is hope for all of us because God's judgment is best described as justice tempered with mercy. C.C.

GOSPEL Matthew 13:44–52

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

[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.**”

[Shorter: Matthew 13:44–46 (see brackets)]