

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading from 1 Kings offers us a most edifying and uplifting response of Solomon to God who appears to him in a night's dream. God appeals to Solomon to ask something of him and it will be granted. Typically, when one is asked one's desire, they naturally and reflexively think of themselves. They consider whatever might fulfill or satisfy them. This has a selfish, self-interested quality about it. Understandably, there are times when the responsible and mature response would demand looking out for one's own interest. What is so profound and counter-intuitive about Solomon's response is that it is utterly out of character for a person of his stature and leadership. Imagine the shoes he had to fill as the Son of David!

Yet, as one comes to learn more about the kingship of Solomon, there are parallels that prefigure the kingship of Jesus Christ as Messiah. Authors John Bergsma and Brant Pitre, in their book *A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: The Old Testament* [Ignatius Press], clearly and succinctly draw such parallels. The response of Solomon in asking for divine wisdom, these authors assert, is likened to Jesus speaking in parables, as he does in today's Gospel from Matthew, about the kingdom of heaven. The authors offer this insight: "Along similar lines, the early Christian tradition, beginning with the New Testament, was also quick to pick up on other parallels between King Solomon (in his early years) and Jesus.

For example, both Solomon and Jesus are noted as blessed ones with divine wisdom who speak in 'parables' about trees, beasts, birds, fish, and other aspects of nature. As they sit in Jerusalem, their wisdom is tested by those who bring hard questions. Yet for all their similarities, it is clear that with Jesus of Nazareth, 'something greater than Solomon is here.'" I would invite you to take the opportunity to read 1 and 2 Kings and the Gospel of Matthew and draw out the similarities between the ministries of Solomon and Jesus. This can be a very helpful exercise in recognizing not only the connections between the Old and New Testament but also the unfolding of salvation history through time.

In another instance, when God grant's Solomon's desire for an understanding heart to judge as ruler, this is likened to the Doctors of the Church. They, like Solomon, sought only divine assistance in their mission of service to God, not self-service. An important subtext here is that humility and profound attentiveness to fulfilling God's will is essential in the kingship of Solomon and the use of great gifts for the service of the Kingdom.

In his utter poverty and self-awareness, Solomon recognizes his own limitations and thus seeks divine help in exercising his kingship. He identifies lack of knowledge due to his youth. "Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong." This is the true essence of servant leadership; that is, a leader who is disposed to modesty and openness to an unknown truth and seeking justice and righteousness out of that stance. In response to the magnanimous request of Solomon, God says 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 that you may know what is right - I do as you requested." Solomon's detachment from the things of this world yielded a rich harvest indeed. The experience of Solomon foreshadows the litany of parables Jesus describes in today's Gospel.

Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to treasure buried in the field; a merchant searching and finds fine pearls; and a net thrown into the sea and which yields a bountiful of fish of every kind, and the good fish is kept and the bad discarded. These words of Jesus bespeak renewal and conversion, the spiritual graces given elicit a response of great joy. Jesus poignantly asks his disciples, "Do you understand all these things?" This is a question which poses to each of us as well. What is the treasure buried in the field that is so great that we would be willing to give it all away in order to attain? What is the pearl of great price in our lives that is so transformative that we would be willing to let go of everything or order to hold on to that singular gift?

I pray that each of us takes the time to ponder the mystery of the kingdom of heaven as it unfolds in our midst. May we reflect upon the treasure hidden in the field, that pearl of great price...seek it out, find it, and discard all that gets in the way of living the depths of these gifts in our personal and collective lives!

Fr. Tom