

Here's a text if you've only a minute ...

Give your servant a heart to understand how to discern between good and evil.

First Reading

Let your love be ready to console me.

Psalm

'Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life!'

Pope Benedict xvi, Inaugural Address, 2005

God our Father, open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendour of creation, in the beauty of human life.

Touched by your hand our world is holy.

Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us,
to share your blessings with our brothers and sisters,
and to experience the joy of life in your presence.

Old Opening Prayer

This week's texts if you want to reflect further:
1 Kings 3: 5, 7–12; Ps. 118 (119); Romans 8: 28–30; Matthew 13: 44–52



7th-c apse (detail), Basilica di Sant' Apollinare, Ravenna (Creative Commons)

'The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls'

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ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM



Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Year A, 30th July 2023

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field ...'

Today's readings weave around themes of wisdom, treasure and joy. When asked in a dream what he desires from God, Solomon chooses 'a heart to understand how to discern between good and evil.' God is pleased that Solomon does not seek riches or a long life, so gives him the gift of wisdom (**First Reading**).

The **Psalmist** asks the Lord for his consoling love. God's law means more to him than precious metals.

St Paul explains that the plan now unfolding has been there from the beginning (**Second Reading**). God chose, and called us all to become 'true images of his Son'. God wants all who love him and follow his teaching to share in his glory.

In the **Gospel** Jesus offers three images for God's kingdom: a treasure we find unexpectedly; a pearl for which we search diligently; a net that gathers us in. They illustrate the priceless value and importance of the kingdom to which all are invited. Jesus also reminds us to hold on to treasures both old and new as we seek God's kingdom.

This week, we ponder God's gift of wisdom. We pray that it will guide us to the 'treasure': the delight of knowing and loving Jesus, and the riches this brings. We ask God's help to share that with those we encounter, however we can.



Opening Prayer

O God, protector of those who hope in you,
without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy,
bestow in abundance your mercy upon us
and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide,
we may use the good things that pass
in such a way as to hold fast even now
to those that ever endure.

First Reading 1 Kings 3: 5, 7–12

The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, ‘Ask what you would like me to give you.’ Solomon replied, ‘Lord, my God, you have made your servant king in succession to David my father. But I am a very young man, unskilled in leadership. Your servant finds himself in the midst of these people of yours that you have chosen, a people so many its numbers cannot be counted or reckoned. Give your servant a heart to understand how to discern between good and evil, for who could govern this people of yours that is so great?’ It pleased the Lord that Solomon should have asked for this. ‘Since you have asked for this’, the Lord said, ‘and not asked for long life for yourself or riches or the lives of your enemies, but have asked for a discerning judgement for yourself, here and now I do what you asked. I give you a heart wise and shrewd as none before you has had and none will have after you.’

As I begin to settle into my prayer time, I gently place myself before the Lord. Though I may not always be aware of God’s presence, I trust that he is constantly with me, loving me exactly as I am.

I take a couple of deep breaths to help me become more still. I invite the Holy Spirit, the breath of life, to guide my prayer, and to open my heart wider to whatever God may wish to show me.

I turn to the text. What am I noticing? What especially draws me? Perhaps Solomon’s concern for the people rather than for himself ...? his humility and desire to serve ...? Or the Lord’s gift of wisdom?

Maybe I imagine myself in the young Solomon’s place, being told by the Lord, ‘*Ask what you would like me to give you.*’

I ponder what is going on in my life just now. How will I answer? What do I most want to have or to be? What matters most?

I share my hopes and desires, my concerns and needs, openly with the Lord, confident he knows what is best for me.

I listen to what he may be saying.

I bring my prayer slowly to a close, expressing my gratitude for all that I have already received.

Our Father ...

Gospel Matthew 13: 44–52

Jesus said to the crowds, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; they hide it again, go off happy, sell everything they own and buy the field.

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in a basket and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the just to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

‘Have you understood all this?’ They said, ‘Yes.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Well, then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old.’

Making sure I’m comfortable yet attentive, I settle into stillness.

As I read the text, I might imagine myself on the shore, listening to Jesus. What do I notice about the tone of his voice ... the expression on his face?

I ponder any line that particularly stands out for me.

How do I feel as Jesus describes the value of the kingdom ... the joy of recognising the treasure and giving everything for it? I reflect on what knowing and loving Jesus means to me, the riches it brings.

How do I feel at the prospect of the fishermen sorting the contents of their catch? Nervous, fearful, or trusting in the Lord’s absolute love for me?

Perhaps there are attachments, plans or priorities I need to let go of to follow Jesus more closely?

I ponder how I try to make Jesus’s values my own ... in my life, my community, the world. In what way can I share them with others?

How do I respond to Jesus asking ‘have you understood all this’?

Knowing I can be totally honest with Jesus, I ask for whatever I need.

I speak from my heart, listening to what he may be saying to me.

I end by thanking God for this time of prayer, and any insights I have received.