

17 OT Year A Readings and Commentary

Celebration Summary by Dave Pitt: If, in a dream, we were to find a magical lamp, and be given any number of wishes, the odds seem good that we would likely ask our genie for long life, wealth, and, perhaps, some come-uppance over our enemies. In today's first reading, Solomon is asked such a question by God. Instead, Solomon asks for wisdom, so that he may govern the people well and help them honor the covenant they had made with God. In effect, Solomon forgoes earthly success for spiritual gain. Solomon's wish is paralleled in the first two parables in today's Gospel reading. Here we are instructed that, having found the kingdom of God, our proper response should be to pursue the kingdom of God relentlessly – selling all that we have. In all of these three episodes, God is readily available (God comes to Solomon, and the treasures have been found) and the individual proper response is to embrace God's presence.

How, then, can we come to recognize the kingdom, in order that we might seek it? Today's responsorial psalm provides the key to unlocking this challenge: "Lord, I love your commands." It is God's law, made known in the scriptures, and in the liturgy, that we find what is "more precious than thousands of gold and silver pieces." "In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims... We eagerly await the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, until he, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with him in glory" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8).

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Lectionary Summary: Glenn CJ Byer

If one is prone to thinking about the final judgement, it can be tempting, after hearing the today's first two readings and psalm, to emit a thankful sigh. Who can help but be relieved by hearing that their judge is "lenient to all," "judge[s] with clemency," and is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity." How much more grateful should we be, then, to discover that our judge is also our defense; God, the Spirit, is our advocate, bolstering our prayers. It appears that the odds are in our favor. The parable of the harvest, however, complicates things. Despite the mercy of our judge, there are still those "weeds" that will be punished. The point of this parable is, at least, twofold. First, we must trust in God, believing that God seeks our salvation. We must repent and seek

reconciliation, and accept that we are, ultimately, incapable of saving ourselves. We need the assistance that God readily provides. Second, however, we must also accept that it is God, and not ourselves, who is the final judge. It is frequently tempting to assume this role in our communities. But the parable of the harvest promotes tolerance: we are not equipped to distinguish between the weeds and the wheat, nor would we be able to remove the weeds without damage. We are, instead, to trust in God's justice, lenient as it is. After all, it is solely on God's merciful judgment that we rely for our own salvation. Debate often swirls around the miracle in today's Gospel: was it miraculous that Jesus was able to multiply five loaves and two fish, or that Jesus was able to convince a crowd of strangers to share their food. To become embroiled in this debate, however, is to miss the real point of the parables. Jesus' teaching and miracles point towards the coming of the Reign of God. Through description and action Jesus articulates what God's kingdom will look like. Jesus' instruction, "bring them here to me," echoes the invitation in Isaiah: "All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk." Everyone, regardless of status, is called to the feeding. Since the miracles foreshadow the Kingdom of God we can also say, echoing Romans 8, that since nothing can.

First Reading 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

You have asked for wisdom.

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."

The word of the Lord

Commentary Psalm 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130 by Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB: Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the entire psalter. The whole composition revolves around the central theme of Torah. God's Torah is a multifaceted concept expressing in all its forms the rich and varied teaching God communicates to humans. Even the brief selected verses chosen for the response in this liturgy is packed with Torah vocabulary: words, teaching, promise, commands, precepts, decrees, revelation. This vocabulary and the theology behind it comes from the book of Deuteronomy (see Dt 6:1-9). Therefore the overall message of this psalm is that everything the Lord is and has done is present in and through Torah.

Torah instruction is significant because it is God's and thus contains no meaning whatsoever apart from God. It is always relational and if that relationship is broken this instruction disintegrates into idolatry. The response that God's word evokes from the hearer is two-fold: obedience and faith. Obedience is radical listening which leads to faith in what has been heard. Ultimately this leads to trust and to hope. God's word is communicated to humans for their instruction. However, it can never be possessed by humans because it is always God's. This means that humans must always seek this divine instruction and the best and most effective way to do that is in prayer. While God's Torah can never become a possession of humans', it still must become a part of who they are. It must transform the human heart converting it from division and fragmentation into unity and wholeness. The bible refers to this as "shalom."

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Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 119:57, 72, 76-77, 127-128, 129-130

℟(97a) 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.

Psalm 86:5-6, 9-10, 15-16

The response in this psalm tells us what is of such great importance about God: "Lord, you are good and forgiving." The psalm picks up this theme with its various synonyms: kindness (twice), merciful, gracious, slow to anger, fidelity. This is the God whose loving initiative makes us be, and whose loving communion draws us into the Divine Communion. The psalmist asks this God to respond to his prayer for help, but in a context marked by utter confidence that he will be heard, and graciously. Mitchell Dahood, S.J. thinks this was originally a prayer of the Israelite king, the lord, addressing the Lord, "a royal letter addressed to God." In Hebrew theology the king was God's vicegerent or representative on earth, praying on behalf of all his people. In Catholic theology the Church is God's premier sacrament on earth, praying on behalf of all God's people, that is, everyone. In the liturgy, a psalm of Israel becomes universal in scope. Perhaps this is anticipated in the lines, "All the nations you have made... glorify your name." The face of the Church --- in a word all of us --- praying this psalm, is invited and expected to show God's face as good, forgiving, kind, merciful, gracious, faithful. Do we?

Second Reading Romans 8:28-30

God predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son.

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.

The word of the Lord

Commentary: Romans 8:28-30 by John Paul Heil: Main Theme:
Loving God gives us the sure hope of being glorified through God's
Son.

Paul obliges us to admit that we Christians will definitely arrive at the future goal of our hope because it is God himself who has absolutely assured it: First, as Paul and we realize, God makes everything in his creation work together for "the good," that is for final salvation or glory, for the benefit of us who love God and are called in accord with God's purpose. And so God guarantees our participation in the final fulfillment of his salvific purpose.

Second, from the very beginning of his plan of salvation, God has predestined us "to be conformed to the image of his Son," that is, to share in the future, final glory of the risen, heavenly Christ, and so to be among all the many brothers and sisters of his first-born Son. And third, God will definitely bring to final glorification all of us Christians, whom he has already "predestined," "called," and "justified." It has already been definitively decided within God's eternal plan of salvation, a divine process which has already commenced and so will relentlessly reach its culmination. That God, in effect, "has glorified" us already serves as the emphatic climax to this rhetorically powerful, chain-like series of verbs which epitomizes God's on-going activity from the beginning to the end of his total plan of salvation.

Gospel Acclamation cf. Matthew 11:25

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth;
for you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom.

Gospel: Matthew 13:44-52

He sells all that he has and buys the field

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."

The Gospel of the Lord

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Commentary Matthew 13:44-52 by Deacon Owen Cummings: The first two parables in this gospel passage from St. Matthew relate well to the first reading about King Solomon in 1 Kings 3. In his dream conversation, Solomon is invited by God to ask for something. He asks for wisdom, and is commended by God. Wisdom, or as the text has it "an understanding heart," is really a pseudonym for God. Asking for wisdom is asking for God. That is precisely what the "reign of God" is. The reign is God himself, with reality as God desires it to be. That's what makes the reign of God a "buried treasure," or a "really valuable pearl." It is God's own self, and so priceless, beyond compare. The great Origen of Alexandria calls Jesus the *autobasileia*, "the reign itself." Jesus is God's own self, and Jesus is human reality as God would have it be. He is God and man. He is the understanding heart of God, and the understanding heart every human seeks to be.

The next parable of the dragnet that draws in what is worthwhile and what is worthless is used by Matthew as a message to his own community and to the Church today. The reign of God, with the Church as its harbinger and servant, is mixed, made up of both sinners and saints. Final judgment belongs with God alone, and as Benedict Viviano, OP, says in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, "In the meantime patient tolerance must guide the practice of those in it."

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