

The Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Homily ~July 23-24, 2011

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"I'd give anything if...."

How many dreams and hopes have been introduced with these words? How many regrets and pains have been given similar expression?

I'd give anything if... I could tell a deceased parent, relative or friend that I love them just one more time.

I'd give anything if... I could take back those angry words that made you so unhappy.

I'd give anything if... I was wealthy, famous, thinner, taller, intelligent, talented, beautiful.

I'd give anything if... I could foretell the future.

I'd give anything if... I could right the wrongs in this world.

I'd give anything if... I could find the perfect wife or husband.

I'd give anything if... I could be assured that I would live a long, healthy, safe and secure life.

Obviously, this wish list could go on and on because the desires of the human heart are legion.

Today's readings challenge us to surrender our wishes and to redirect our desires away from ourselves and the fleeting things of this world and to redirect them toward God.

In the First Reading, Solomon is presented as being gifted by God with a golden opportunity. In a dream God told him he did not have to give anything, he only had to ask and God would grant him his heart's desire.

According to an ancient legend, Solomon summoned one of every creature that existed to appear before him. When all had gathered, Solomon held up a beautiful goblet that contained the Water of Endless Life. Supposedly, if anyone

were to drink it, he would live forever. All the creatures agreed that the king should imbibe. “Drink, O King! Live forever!”

Then Solomon inquired if all the earth’s creatures were present and was told that the dove had not yet arrived. When she appeared and Solomon asked her opinion, she replies, “Sir, if my mate died, I should die too. What good will immortal youth do if everything and everyone you love perish around you?” Taught by the voice of affection, Solomon poured out the water of endless life, untasted.

To his credit, Solomon didn’t waste his opportunity by wishing for trappings of fame, wealth, power or success. Rather he requested of God “an understanding heart.” A heart that sees as God sees.

Solomon’s exemplary wisdom invites each of us to be careful what we wish for. Wishes, desires, and even prayers must be tempered and toned by a holy wisdom—basically, not what we want, but what God wants. To do that there is a cost.

Sister Jane Schutz, who served us for many years, used to say life is a series of trade-offs. Take the man who discovered a buried treasure and the merchant who found one very valuable pearl. The man sold all he had to purchase the field and the merchant divested himself of everything in order to purchase one really valuable pearl.

Jesus is not talking about a valuable pearl or a buried treasure but the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God. The Reign of God is worth any risk and sacrifice. Both men were willing to readjust their values and priorities in order to attain that buried treasure, that really valuable pearl.

The requests of Solomon and the two men in the Gospel prompt us to ask ourselves what we would ask of God. What would we be willing to give in order to welcome the Reign of God in our lives? Are we willing to risk losing all we have in order to gain God’s gifts?

In the Lord’s Prayer before we pray “Give us this day our daily bread,” we pray, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” In other words, the reign of the Kingdom of God is the place on earth where God’s will is

perfectly done as it is in heaven. To enter the Kingdom or to welcome God's reign is to accept and to do God's will.

Here I am reminded of a poem by an unknown author.

I Asked God


I asked for strength, and God gave me difficulties to
make me strong.
I asked for wisdom, and God gave me problems to
solve.
I asked for prosperity, and God gave me brawn and
brains to work.
I asked for courage, and God gave me dangers to
overcome.
I asked for patience, and God placed me in situations
where I was forced to wait.
I asked for love, and God gave me troubled people to
love.
I received nothing I wanted—I received everything I
needed.
My prayers have all been answered.

Very simply, to find God's reign is to take up our cross and daily follow after Jesus.

In closing, we need to remember what Paul says in today's Second Reading:

*“God makes everything work together
for the good of those who love Him.”*

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