

Fr. John's Homily for July 23, 2023, the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Delivered at Christ the King Church in Acme, Michigan

You have all heard the phrase, "*Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you.*" Have you ever asked God for something? Well, yes, of course you have. We all have. It's called a prayer of supplication, and sometimes we get pretty specific. Lord, I need this, Lord, I want that. The answered prayer can happen immediately or sometimes we have to wait. Sometimes we receive... and sometimes we don't. For those times when we don't, I like to remind people of two of the greatest prayers ever prayed. One by St. Paul, and one by Jesus, Himself. St. Paul asked three times to have "*a thorn of Satan*" removed from his side. And the answer, three times, was "*No, No, and No. My grace is enough for you.*"

And Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane, deathly afraid, knowing what lies in store for Him, said "*Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me.*" And then, the most important part of the prayer, "*But, not my will, but yours be done.*" And the answer to Jesus' prayer was a definitive, "*No*".

In our first reading today, Solomon, the son of David, the king of Israel, has a vision in the night. A dream. God appears to him like a genie and says, "*Ask what you will, and I will give it to you. Your wish is my command.*" And Solomon gives one of the most important answers of all time. He asked for ... an understanding heart. In a word, he asked for *Wisdom*. Ah, Wisdom; one of my favorite subjects. A major segment of the Old Testament is referred to as the *Wisdom Literature*. The Proverbs, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon.

We have an elementary school at my church down in Brighton and I always like to preach wisdom to our kids. They will learn many things in school that will help them make their way in the world. Some of it will foster intellectual abilities such as reading, writing and arithmetic. And some of it will be particular skills as with art, music, computers or even sports. I wish I could say it would also include some hand skills. In my previous life I was a shop teacher. Metal shop and wood shop were my specialties. But shop classes are pretty much obsolete now. Too bad. We have a lot of kids who don't know how to turn a screwdriver.

But in any case, I always remind them about the words of Jesus. "*What would it profit a man if he gained the whole world, but in the end lost his soul?*" And that, of course, is the reason why we teach religion in our parochial schools. Because, "*The beginning of wisdom.... is the fear of the Lord*". Christ is indeed the reason for our schools.

I once asked at a school Mass if anyone could define wisdom, as we understood it. A young boy gave it a shot. And he did quite well. "Wisdom", he said, "is knowing right from wrong, and good from evil. But also having the common sense to choose the good and reject the evil." So wisdom is not just special knowledge, but also includes an act of the will.

Now when we pray, we ask for many different types of things. But are we wise in our choices? Probably not very. One of my favorite movies was *Bruce Almighty*. Bruce, played by that crazy actor Jim Carrey, for a time is given the powers of God. And a big part of that is answering the prayers of the people. And he takes his new responsibility quite seriously. He tries to be kind and accommodating. He wants to give them what they desire.

All of his attempts at answering prayer are done at his computer. And hundreds of thousands of prayers come to him by way of email. One of the big prayers of the people of the city of Buffalo, New York is : "*Dear Lord, please, let me win the lottery.*" Well, his answer to all of them is, "yes, yes, yes". So everybody wins the lottery. And so when they get their check in the mail, the grand prize, divided by the number of all the answered prayers, comes down to \$1.27 per person. And the people of Buffalo go nuts. Feeling they've been cheated, they riot in the streets. They destroy the city. I would suggest to you that they were not very wise in their prayer and most certainly in their response.

I think there's a lesson there for us. If we ask for anything, the first thing we should ask for is the gift of Solomon. We should be wise like he was in asking for an *understanding* heart. We should ask for Wisdom.

Again, we may gain the whole world, but if we do not have wisdom, we can lose it all. And the wisdom comes through His Church, and the Church receives its wisdom from scripture. As in today's story about Solomon.

In our Gospel today, Jesus is talking to His disciples, and He's differentiating them from the people. "The mysteries of the kingdom have been revealed to you". After sharing all the ways the kingdom of heaven has been described to the people, in parables, He asks the disciples, "*Do you understand?*" "Yes", they say, "*we understand*". They are becoming wise. They have learned, and will continue to learn, at the feet of their master, and later, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, I would like to say that wisdom should be seen as something like a *treasure found in a field*. Or, a *pearl of great price*. We should sell all we have to purchase wisdom. And we should guard it with our life because we can lose it. Ultimately Solomon failed in his wisdom. He was influenced by the world that he lived in. And among those 12 apostles, one of them, Peter, lost his wisdom, but only for a moment. Judas lost for eternity.

We would be wise to learn from their stories. Because, as we've been told, *Those who do not learn from history are condemned to relive it.*

~Fr. John