

**Reflection, July 29-30, 2017, 17th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Saint Joseph's Parish**

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Last weekend, as is the case on most Saturdays, I found myself in the grocery store waiting in the checkout line. As I stood there, I noticed a little girl and her dad examining the frozen treats in the ice cream freezer that had been thoughtfully placed right beside the cash registers. She was very cute, probably about four year's old, with curly hair. She was very intent on choosing just the right and perfect treat for herself. As she would tentatively touch each one or point to it, dad would explain...now this one is chocolate fudge, and this one is made with frozen juice, and this one is an ice cream cone with crushed peanuts on top...and so it went. All so good...so tantalizing... so many delicious and colorful options! What a hard choice! I must say, that as this went on, I was a little tempted to reach in and take one myself...fortunately, my turn came to begin placing my groceries on the cash register belt and so I was able to resist.

In today's reading from 1 Kings, we hear of another young person who is given a choice. In a dream, God invites young Solomon to choose any gift that he would wish God to give him. What to choose? Power? Riches? Long life? It would be so natural to want any of these things. And one could imagine that the security and stability that such gifts would bring to the king and to the kingdom would also be good for the people of Israel over whom Solomon will rule, so why not?

But no, instead of any of these things, Solomon asks for wisdom. Wisdom, not for its own sake, but so that he can rule and guide God's people well. And as we hear, God is pleased with this choice and God grants wisdom to Solomon so that no one before or after him will be as wise as he.

Today's gospel continues the series of parables and stories about the kingdom of heaven that we have been hearing for the past three weeks. Now if Jesus was teaching in Ottawa this weekend, I am sure that he would find a way to work a gigantic mechanical spider and a fire-breathing dragon into his images of heaven. But in another place and another time, 2000 years ago Jesus finds other images that attract his listeners—a buried treasure or a beautiful and magnificent pearl. He easily paints the scene of scheming and strategizing that one might go through in order to acquire such a prized possession.

What is the pearl, what is the treasure, what is the treat or attraction that occupies my attention these days? Am I hungering after wisdom, after

opportunities to be of service to others, after occasions to build the kingdom of heaven here on earth? Or perhaps I really need a new car, a new cell phone, or a bigger apartment, or front row concert tickets to next week's concert. Any of these things could be good, even important or necessary. But sometimes the direction that our choices desires are taking us can be a bit unclear.

Let me tell you another story. For many years, now my wife Donna and I have had a clay statue of Saint Francis of Assisi in our garden. The statue has provided a nice reminder of Francis' love for creation, and to pray and thank the Creator for creation's beauty. The statue was made in Mexico and the clay is somewhat porous so poor Francis has lost a few parts—a hand, the water bowl he was holding—due to water entering a crack and then freezing in the winter. However, in early June of this year, disaster struck when a wind storm blew a potted plant against poor Francis and he lost his head. Well, Francis without a hand is one thing...but Francis without a head just doesn't work very well. So I decided to replace the statue. My quest led me to multiple garden centres, to multiple websites, to making many phone calls... I found many mythical creatures, fairy tale characters, Buddhas, Shivas, owls, snakes, deer...and several Francis statues, but also with pieces missing. Then there was the question of how much I was willing to pay? \$150? \$275? \$400? This was becoming an epic quest. Then one evening I suddenly realized that it was also becoming a bit compulsive. Replacing Francis was beginning to consume me. This project was no longer so much about creating a place of beauty to share with others, but more one of simply satisfying my own desires.

Perhaps it is a silly example, but it seems to me that so many situations in our lives can go either way—leading us outward towards the kingdom of heaven or inward towards building our ego and sense of security. In his last image of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus shows how the kingdom reaches out to all—good and bad alike. And while none of us are likely to deliberately choose evil, it is easy to get distracted or to rationalize a choice that is only second-best.

As we go forward this week, I invite each of us to try to find a few minutes to imagine ourselves in Solomon's place. The Lord is speaking to us, whether in a dream or in the everyday circumstances of our lives. God says, "Ask what I should give you." In his dream, Solomon asked for wisdom so that he could serve the Lord's people. For what gift will we ask, so that we too can serve?

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