



Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 30 2017 A

- ◆ What would you ask for?
- ◆ All things work for the good
- ◆ What is your pearl of great price?
- ◆ Four witnesses

First Reading: Solomon asks for the gift of wisdom

In our first reading today (1Kings 3:5, 7-12), God says to the new young King of Israel: “Ask something of me and I will give it to you.” Realizing that he is young and unwise in the affairs of government, Solomon asks for “an understanding heart” to judge God’s people and for the ability to “distinguish right from wrong.”

Pleased that Solomon has not asked for riches or for long life, God gladly bestows on him a wise and understanding heart.

Reflection question

If God asked you what gift would you want him to bestow on you, what would be your response?

Second Reading

Today’s second reading begins with the words: “We know that all things work for the good for those who love God...” (Romans 8:28).

Paul’s words can be both challenging and comforting.

Challenging. When bad things are happening to us, we can easily wonder how could this bad experience be for our good. An important belief of Christians is that God does not cause bad things. Rather, he permits them and then works with us to draw good out of the bad. For example, in the Bible when Joseph is sold by his brothers into slavery, they intend evil for him whom their father seems to favor. Years later during a big famine, the brothers come to Egypt looking for food. They feel very bad for the evil they had done to their brother. But Joseph tells them: “It was not you who sent me here but God. You meant evil for me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many could be saved” (a reference to how Joseph is able to feed many starving

people in a time of famine). Joseph’s *faith perspective* enables him to see God bringing good out of evil. That same perspective can help us to do the same. Sometimes this is easy enough; sometimes it is very difficult.

Comforting. Paul’s words about all things working for the good can be very comforting as we struggle to see God’s hand in the painful and difficult experiences of life. As we grow in faith, we will be able to embrace the wisdom found in the following poem.

The Weaver

*My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He worketh steadily.
Ofttimes He weaveth sorrow,
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper, and I, the underside.
Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver’s skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.*

(Author Unknown)

“The Weaver” is a poetic way of reading Romans 8:28.

Reflection questions

- 1) To what extent can you agree with Paul that all things work for the good for those who love the Lord?
- 2) Can you look back on some painful event/s in your life from which God brought some good?

The Gospel asks: What is our pearl of great price?

Today’s Gospel offers three parables intended to give the listener some insight into what Jesus calls the *Reign of God*. Jesus does not give us a definition of the *Reign of God*, but instead offers us images of what it is like.

In the first two parables today, Jesus likens the *Reign of God* to a *buried treasure* or a set of *fine pearls*. In stumbling upon the treasure of pearls, one recognizes a *real find*: "This is what I've been looking for all my life!" Discovering buried treasure or pearls brings us great *joy*. And with it comes a great commitment, shown by our willingness to sell all we have in exchange for the treasure. In the story, both men are willing to joyfully *sacrifice* all to purchase their newfound treasure. No one pushes them to do it—they *want* to do it.

The third parable about the dragnet hauling all kinds of things—good and bad—is similar to last Sunday's wheat and weeds parable. Judgment will only happen at the end when the useful will be separated from the useless. Like the wheat and weeds parable, it cautions against premature judgment, but also serves as a warning that judgment will take place.

Matthew ends his section on parables by saying: "*Every scribe who is learned in the Reign of God is like the head of a household who can bring from his store both the new and the old.*" Jesus has been speaking to the Pharisees and his disciples, but the Pharisees have become fixated on the *Old Law* (the Torah) that they are unable to appreciate the *new* Word of God spoken through Jesus.

Today, we live in a Church where there is a mixture of the new and the old. The wise person appreciates and draws from both the new and the old to nurture his/her spiritual life. To be fixated on one or the other is a limiting place to be.

Reflection questions

- 1) What is your pearl of great price?
- 2) What is really important in your life?

One thing that can help us to answer these important questions is to ask ourselves: How do I spend my time, treasure and talent? We may say God and love of God are the most important in my life, but the way I spend my time, energy and money may tell me that there are other things more important to me than God.

Two "fishy" stories with good lessons

The Contented Fisherman

The rich industrialist from the North was horrified to find the Southern fisherman lying lazily beside his boat, smoking a pipe.

"Why aren't you out fishing?" said the industrialist.

"Because I have caught enough fish for the day," said the fisherman.

"Why don't you catch more than you need?" said the industrialist.

"What would I do with them?" asked the fisherman.

"You could earn more money," was the reply. "With that you could have a motor fixed for your boat. Then you could go into deeper waters and catch more fish. Then you would make enough to buy nylon nets. These would bring you more fish and more money. Soon you would have enough money to own two boats. Then you would be a rich man like me."

"What would I do then?" asked the fisherman.

"Then you could sit down and enjoy life," said the industrialist.

"What do you think I am doing right now?" said the contented fisherman.

The Blind Fish

"Excuse me," said one ocean fish to another, "you are older and more experienced than I, and will probably be able to help me. Tell me, where can I find this thing they call the Ocean? I've been searching for it everywhere to no avail."

"The Ocean? But this is the Ocean," said the older fish.

"Oh, this? But this is only water. What I'm searching for is the Ocean," said the young fish, feeling quite disappointed as he swam to search elsewhere.

So often in our search for God, we forget that he is all around us. In him we live, move, and have our being.

Four witnesses whose feast days occur this week

This week, I share with you four more Christian witnesses from Robert Ellsberg's book *Blessed Among Us*.

Venerable Solanus Casey - July 31 (1870-1957) Capuchin Friar

Solanus Casey, the son of Irish immigrants in Wisconsin, felt called to the priesthood after witnessing a drunken sailor stabbing a woman. Somehow, this scene of sin and suffering caused him to dedicate himself to God and to promote God's love as the answer to the world's troubles. After entering the Capuchins, he was ordained a priest. But in light of academic difficulties, his superiors placed restriction on his priestly faculties. He was not permitted to hear confessions or preach on

doctrine. Instead, he spent most of his life as a porter at St. Bonaventure's Monastery in Detroit and worked in the friars' soup kitchen.

Despite his humble office, Solanus' extraordinary spiritual gifts were quickly recognized. A gifted reader of souls, he became particularly renowned for his ministry of healing prayer. Scores of people sought him out each day for spiritual counsel and intercession. Dutifully, he recorded their petitions in his prayer book and promised to ask God's assistance. Even in his lifetime, hundreds of miraculous cures were attributed to his prayers. In his final illness, he remarked, "I'm offering my suffering that all might be one. If only I could see the conversion of the whole world."

Since his death on July 31, 1957, at the age of 86, the reports of healing miracles have continued unabated. His cause for canonization is in process.

"We must be faithful to the present moment or we will frustrate the plan of God for our lives."

-Venerable Solanus Casey

Solanus Casey will become Blessed Solanus this November in Detroit.

Flannery O'Connor - August 3 (1925-1964) **Catholic Writer**

Flannery O'Connor died of lupus on August 3, 1964, at the age of 39. Though her short life—largely confined to her mother's dairy farm in Milledgeville, Georgia—may have been lacking in external drama, she left behind a small output of novels and stories that assured her place among the greatest of American writers. But it was the posthumous publication of her letters, *The Habit of Being*, that made it clear how much the shape of her art owed to her Catholic faith. Her personal circumstances, her sharp intelligence, and her deeply held faith combined to forge a prophetic vision of extraordinary depth.

Unlike other "Catholic writers," O'Connor avoided explicitly Catholic settings for her stories. Nonetheless, her stories were set in a universe defined by the reality of sin, grace, and the drama of salvation. "All my stories," she wrote, "are about the action of grace on a character who is not very willing to support it."

She believed the Church was the only thing likely to make the world endurable. And yet, she added, "The only thing that makes the Church endurable is that it is somehow the Body of Christ and that on this we are fed."

She would have been glad to be remembered for her art. Posthumously, however, she has achieved an unexpected reputation as a Christian witness and spiritual advisor to many.

"I feel that if I were not a Catholic, I would have no reason to write, no reason to see, no reason ever to feel horrified or even to enjoy anything."

-Flannery O'Connor

St. John Vianney - August 4 (1786-1859) **Curé of Ars**

The early life of John Vianney contained no foreshadowing of greatness in any field. Born to a peasant family in Lyons, he desired nothing else than to be a priest. But his humble background and lack of education made it unlikely that he would ever realize such a vocation. With the help of a private tutor he secured a place in seminary but proved to be a miserable student. It was only with grave reservations that he was recommended for ordination. After a brief assignment in his home parish, he was named the parish priest of Ars-en-Dombes, a village of 250 souls, as remote and insignificant a place as his bishop could find.

Vianney's sermons were simple and unsophisticated. His theology was rudimentary. But there was one area in which he acquired a reputation for genius: his extraordinary gifts as a confessor. It was said that he had the ability to read souls. Fixed in his cramped confessional, he would sit ten, twelve, as many as eighteen hours a day. Special trains were provided to accommodate the heavy traffic of pilgrims to the famous confessional in Ars.

By the time of his death in 1859, Vianney was one of the most beloved figures in France. He was canonized in 1925 by Pope Pius XI and at the same time was named the patron saint of all parish priests.

"Prayer is to our soul what rain is to the soil. Fertilize the soil ever so richly, it will remain barren unless fed by frequent rains."

-St. John Vianney

Enrique Angelelli - August 4 (1923-1976) **Bishop and Martyr**

Enrique Angelelli was appointed bishop of La Rioja in Argentina in 1968. Among the largely conservative hierarchy of Argentina, he was among the few to strongly support the prophetic line of the Latin American bishops at Medellin. In his first message as bishop, he said, "With one ear I listen to the gospel and

with the other I listen to the people.” Before long he was on a collision course with the military and other powerful interests, who complained that he was a communist who had “ruined the Church of Pius XII.”

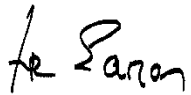
In 1976, a military coup unleashed a vicious period of persecution. By and large, the Church hierarchy stood silent—or worse, offered tacit blessings to the military’s defense of order and “Christian values.” Angelelli denounced the terror, which included the abduction and murder of his priests. He compiled documents proving government responsibility for these murders. These documents were with him on August 4 when two cars ran his truck off the road. He was found 25 yards away with his skull smashed in and his briefcase missing. The police labeled it an accident.

With the return of democracy, a court in 1986 reopened the case and termed it a clear homicide. In 2006 at a Mass commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of his death, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, became the first Argentine prelate to refer to Angelelli as a martyr.

“The thought crosses my mind that the Lord needs a bishop in jail or killed in order to make us wake up to our episcopal collegiality and live it more deeply.”

-Bishop Enrique Angelelli

Have a blessed weekend,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Aaron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.