

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “The Pearl of Great Price”  
Fr. Frank Schuster

The readings this Sunday challenge us, in no uncertain terms, to point a finger at what we hold to be the most important in life. God shows up in Solomon’s bedroom, and tells him, “Ask something of me and I will give it to you”. Now, just imagine that. Solomon could have asked for anything. He could have chosen a long life. Solomon could have chosen riches. Solomon could have chosen to have all his enemies put under his heel. Think of all the things Solomon could have asked for!

You see, God says to Solomon, “Ask something of me and I will give it to you.” Solomon could have asked for literally anything. And the interesting thing is, as Solomon discerned what that “one thing” would be, he discovered who he was in the process. Solomon discovered that he was less interested in self-gratification and more interested in understanding the hearts of others. Solomon was someone who valued knowing the difference between right and wrong as being more valuable than all the gold or pleasures this world had to offer. In short, Solomon valued wisdom more than anything else. God is so impressed with Solomon’s answer that he grants Solomon this very gift. God says to Solomon, “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 equal to you.”

My friends, a good question to ask while we try to enjoy this strange summer we are going through: if God were to show up in your bedroom tonight and ask you what he asked Solomon, “Ask something of me and I will give it to you.” What would be your response? What would it be? Would it be to win the lotto, to live a long life, to rid us of Covid-19 and have every face mask in the planet turn to dust? How do we go about answering that question? Of all the things we can ask God for right now in our life, what would it be? What should it be? The Gospel today gives us interesting advice.

Jesus says, “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 had and buys that field.” Let’s take a magnified glass to that. Jesus is suggesting that a worthy disciple is someone who, after finding the one thing he values most, sells everything he has so that he could purchase the field so to possess the treasure. Jesus continues, “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 had and buys it.” What is Jesus saying here? He is saying, the one thing we value the most in life will be whatever treasure we are willing to sacrifice everything for.

The trouble with all of this, which Jesus is also putting finger on, people have a way of sacrificing everything in this life for really, really stupid things. I can’t tell you how many people I have known who chose being the best at their work, in their field or in their trade, who ended up losing their families and friends in the process, through divorce, lawsuits, addictions and such. I have also known a number of people whose health got permanently or even fatally compromised because of all the stress they were under at work producing or selling whatever widget. They wake up in the hospital after

their quadruple bypass, with no one there to hold their hand, asking themselves, “I sacrificed my life for what?” My friends, there are so many people in our world that finally arrive to their golden retirement age with all this money, with very limited time to spend it, and absolutely no one to spend it with. And they end up dying lonely and disillusioned, asking their priest why they wasted their lives that way? My friends, I think our readings this weekend are offering us the sincerest recommendation, that when it comes to identifying our “pearl of great price”, to be very, very careful about what we wish for.

God shows up in Solomon’s bedroom telling him, “Ask something of me and I will give it to you.” Following our Gospel reading, what is our “pearl of great price” that we are willing to sacrifice everything for? If we answer this question honestly, I believe this might shed some light on who we are, how healthy our souls are and how close we are to the Kingdom of Heaven. Is our ultimate concern for riches, pleasure, ego glorification, or is it for faith, family and friends? Are we living our lives for things of this earth that turn to dust or are we investing our lives for the things of heaven that are eternal? Are we sacrificing our lives for love of mammon or are we spending our lives for love of God and neighbor?

Jesus reminds us at the end of the Gospel reading that we do not have unlimited time to address what we need to be taking care of in our lives today. At the end of time there will be an accounting. However, if we ponder on what our answer would be if God were to invite us, “Ask something of me and I will give it to you”, we might be surprised that the answer to anything we could ever request of God has already been given to us when God gave us his only son Jesus. This is because when our Father in heaven gave us his son Jesus, he gave us his everything and thereby answered every one of our prayers. And so, when we answer the question for ourselves what our “pearl of great price” is for us. If our answer to that question is Jesus, how much happier would we be? However, if my answer to that question is in fact Jesus, what does that answer now demand of me?