

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR “A”

Some call him one of the most amazing persons who ever lived – He was regal, wealthy, powerful and famous.

He had an architectural vision that manifested itself in the building of a temple. He was a king and his reign lasted nearly 40 years.

In his personal life he was fabled to have had 700 wives -- now that's a lot of mother-in-laws -- not to mention a lot of names and anniversary dates to remember.

Who is this great biblical figure? None other than the successor of King David – Solomon.

The Word of God today introduces us to this amazing character. In the first reading from the first Book of Kings, Solomon is in the sanctuary at Gibeon. A sanctuary is a sacred place in which a sacrifice is offered to God. The sanctuary at Gibeon differed somewhat from our present day sanctuary in as much as it was probably a mountain. In fact, the author of Kings calls Gibeon “the most renowned high place”. Our sanctuary is not a mountain but it is the highest level of the Church and it is just as sacred even without the altar rails.

In any event, Solomon enters the sanctuary to offer a sacrifice to the God he loves and as is often the case in this place, God speaks to him. This communication by God unfolds in the context of a dream at night. The Lord asks Solomon one question: “Ask something of me and I will give it to you.” Solomon’s response is striking, for he does not ask for money, health, peace or success. He simply says, “Give your servant, therefore an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong.” Solomon, you see, is young – and new at this “king thing” and he is seemingly bewildered by the large number of people in his midst.

The Lord responds favorably to Solomon’s request and says, “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 be no one to equal you.” Solomon goes on to leave his mark – building, furnishing and dedicating the temple. His name is synonymous with wisdom and yet, later on he becomes such a fool by allowing his many wives and concubines to turn his heart to other gods. Never the less, what is noteworthy about today’s text is that Solomon asks the Lord not for something he wants – but rather for something he needs. And what he needed was an understanding heart to distinguish right from wrong.

My brothers and sisters, if God were to ask us what he asked Solomon, what would we seek? No doubt we all would seek something different, like health, a new home, a world without terrorism and war, a winning lottery ticket. How many of us would ask for an understanding heart? Even more basic, what criteria would we use to determine our answer to that question? It would seem that the key in responding to God’s request is not our wants but our needs. What we need is always primary - although it may not be what we want – it none the less is what we need. And it goes without saying that we all need wisdom and or an understanding heart to help us determine right from wrong.

Everyday as human beings we are faced with an array of choices – some of which are so simple and mundane as what shall I wear, while others are as complex as what should I do with my life. Underneath all of these choices, however, from the simple to the complex, there is a choice to be made, either for what is right or for what is wrong. And wisdom in the ability to choose right over wrong. And this ability, this gift is a need that supercedes any or all of our wants.

So, this week, as we approach the sanctuary of St. Bartholomew’s Church to offer our sacrifice and to serve Him, to receive the revelation of God, the Word made flesh, let us echo the words of Solomon and say, “Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong.”