

Homily: 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday: Cycle A: 2023: 1 Kings 3:5; 7-12; Psalm 119; Rom 8:28-30; Mt. 13: 44-52

***“The Pearl of Great Price”***

1. The greatest gift God has bestowed on us is not our health, our physical beauty, our family, our livelihood, or our friends. Those are all special gifts - but **the greatest gift that God has given us is our Catholic Faith**: Do we realize this? The gift of the Catholic Faith is meant to feed both our **mind**: e.g., see *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*: on the Creed, Sacraments, Moral Life, and Prayer Life - the coherent whole - each part of the Catechism reveals the Face of God to us in a slightly different but unifying way (which we all should have a copy of in our homes); and our **heart**: by an ever deepening union with God in our heart and soul, a real personal relationship with Jesus leading us into ever deeper union with the Blessed Trinity.
2. Do we pray like Solomon for a wise and understanding heart? What a beautiful prayer and request on Solomon’s part. God will always grant that prayer. And then we will be able to say like the psalmist “*Lord, I love your commands.*” However, here is **the caution** - it is not a one-shot deal (accept Jesus as Lord once)! Unfortunately, Solomon eventually went astray from the Lord - power and riches and lust for women eventually corrupted his heart: *see the books of Kings*. This is **such a temptation** in our modern world: to similarly live for the lure of riches and sensual pleasure. The lesson here is **everyday** we must pray in humility for the grace of a wise and understanding heart to see our life in this world with the mind and heart of Jesus, and to be on guard against any dangers to our Faith. **We should have an intuitive sense of spiritual danger if we are living in union with God.** It’s kind of like on the natural level when we encounter a danger - be it a dog trying to bite us, we back away or defend ourselves; or walking on the road, when we see a car coming, we step aside to not get hit – just by intuition without thinking. Yes, to remember that **nothing in the world can ultimately make us happy - only living in union with God, in ultimate love and truth** As St. Augustine once stated so profoundly, “*Our hearts were made by you, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*” (See his *Confessions* book).

3. If we pray for this gift of a wise and understanding heart, then we will know what is right in God's eyes and will see the gift of our Catholic faith as "the pearl of great price," for which we are willing to sacrifice everything. God will give us this **grace** if we humbly ask him, and then we need to respond with generosity and love to His invitation to live our Faith in integrity - **the only path to holiness.** No longer will we pick and choose among the teachings of Jesus and the Catholic Church as a "cafeteria Catholic", but we will want to live them all - with His help of course, and in all likelihood with many trips to the Sacrament of Confession and pleading prayers - it's not always easy, of course - but it is worth it! We will trust God is showing us the narrow path to Heaven through the gift of the Catholic Church He founded on St. Peter and the other apostles; through the gift of the Mass and frequently seeking out the sacrament of Confession; through the gift of being sensitive to the needs of others and helping them in concrete ways, especially the poor and distressed; through living our life daily as a Catholic and being **excited** about of our faith; by giving a **positive** witness and sharing our Faith at home, at work, at school, with our neighbors and friends, in a spirit of joy, love and confidence; yes, we will then win others to Christ and save our own soul too. No need to worry a lot about the fiery furnace if we are friends with God in this life. But if we have been doing our own thing for a long time, well..... maybe we should worry some. **Again, ask yourself: is our Catholic Faith the pearl of great in our life or have we substituted something or someone else?** A question we need to ponder today and always. **Without overstating it, our eternal salvation will depend on the answer we give and how we live the rest of our life here on earth.** To reiterate what I said last week: prayer is the key to embracing "this pearl of great price", our Faith - the more we grow in union with Our Lord the more we have the strength to follow Him wherever He leads, in good times and bad. St. Paul says today ***"all things work together for the good of those who love God."*** How consoling! *We have all been called according to His degree* - What is our response to such generous self-giving love on the part of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? What is our pearl of great price? God bless you.