



Bringing Home the Word

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | July 30, 2017

Finding Wisdom and God

By Mary Katharine Deeley

If you could ask for anything, what would it be? In the classic story *The Monkey's Paw*, a couple's first wish is granted but at a terrible price, and the owners realize what the old adage tells us: "Be careful what you wish for—you just might get it."

In the first reading today, Solomon

is given the opportunity to ask God for anything, and after praying, he finally asks for wisdom that he might discern what is right. God affirms the goodness of the wish and, noting that Solomon did not ask for riches or victory in war, grants it gladly.

In spite of some of his more questionable choices later in his life, Solomon will always be remembered for this request. Wisdom, as we find out in another part of Scripture, is God's "unfailing treasure; those who gain this treasure win the friendship of God" (Wisdom 7:14).

In today's Gospel, Jesus compares the kingdom of God both to a treasure and to someone who searches for one.

I think the desire for the kingdom of God and the desire for wisdom come out of the same longing in our hearts. We might find God's wisdom in surprising places, but once we find her, we must be willing to give all we have to acquire her, for she will help us know what is of God.

At the same time, the kingdom of God goes in search of us. Maybe we are God's pearls and, with wisdom as a guide, each one of us can become children and friends of God, knowing what is right.

Find wisdom, then, and do what you must to get her. When you do this, you shall also find God. †

Sunday Readings

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

[Solomon said,] "Give your servant, therefore, a listening heart to judge your people and to distinguish between good and evil. For who is able to give judgment for this vast people of yours?"

Romans 8:28-30

We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose

Matthew 13:44-52 or 13:44-46

[Jesus said,] "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 has and buys that field."

A Word From Pope Francis

The Apostle Thomas, at the conclusion of his impassioned quest, not only came to believe in the resurrection but found in Jesus his life's greatest treasure, his Lord. He says to Jesus: "My Lord and my God!" [John 20:28]. We would do well, today, and every day, to pray these magnificent words, and to say to the Lord: You are my one treasure, the path I must follow, the core of my life, my all.

—Mass with priests, men and women religious, consecrated people and Polish seminarians at St. John Paul II Shrine, Kraków, July 30, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What are you searching for? What are you willing to give up for it?
- Are there riches or treasures that have a stronger hold on your heart than the kingdom of God?



Behind Jesus' Rich Man/Poor Man Parable

By Alice Camille

What's so bad about being rich? Is it a sin, after all, to work hard and reap the rewards of your labor?

The Bible tells us that God hears the cry of the poor, and the Church teaches that God has a preferential option for the poor. This implies we ought to be looking out for the poor as well. So does this mean that God doesn't hear the cry of the well-to-do and God has it in for the SUV-driving crowd?

Lots of ancient morality stories deal with the disparity between rich and poor, and some of these tales fall into the category of "next-life reversals." We can see the basic outline of these stories in the parable Jesus tells of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar (Luke 16:19-31). Remember this one?

The rich man, called Dives by tradition (*dives* is Latin for "rich"), dines sumptuously every day, while Lazarus desires but does not get even the crumbs that fall from the rich guy's table. Instead, he sits outside, his running sores licked by dogs. But it gets better for our hero Lazarus. In the next life, he gets to lie in the bosom of Abraham in heaven, while the rich fellow groans in the torments of the netherworld. Not quite the end of the story, but that's enough for now.

Why does the rich man get the netherworld, while Lazarus gets paradise? There is no hint in the story

that Dives is a bad man or, for that matter, that Lazarus is a good one. So we are nearly led to believe that being rich is the sin of the first man and being poor is the virtue of the second. But that's not right, either. So what are we to understand from this story?

Seeking the Full Story

Perhaps we want more details to fill in the blanks about these characters. Was the rich man aware of Lazarus at his door? Did he know about his hunger, the sores, the dog situation, and did he choose to do nothing about it? And how about Lazarus? How did he get to be in this awful predicament, and did he do anything to contribute to his striking lack of success?

We begin to imagine that Dives must have made a big mistake (something we might avoid with a little forethought); say, he forgot to give to the Bishop's Annual Appeal or the United Way. And seeing Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham at the end, we presume that he ended up on skid row, not because he was lazy, did poorly on his SATs, or had a drinking problem, but because he got laid off in a failing economy. What we want, in short, is evidence that the rich guy was a bad guy, and the poor man a victim of injustice.

But the parable tells us none of that. What we do know is that the rich man had a great life and Lazarus had a lousy time of it, and that after they died, their fortunes were reversed.

Final Lessons

Unlike many afterlife reversal stories from antiquity, however, Lazarus does not jeer at the rich man's fate from where he now sits in heaven, a sign perhaps of his good-heartedness. He never wanted to break into the rich man's house and take his stuff, either; he just wanted the crumbs.

And we catch a glimpse of the rich man's soul when he does not protest his final state but asks only to warn his brothers, still guilty of the same choices he made. This in itself may be an admission of his negligence. Dives acknowledges that his brothers remain blissfully unrepentant in their self-serving lifestyle.

The bottom line would seem to be that those whose needs are well-met (and then some) must have great compassion. No excuses. Suffering is all around us. So, pick a cause, any cause: But be compassionate! It's no sin to be rich, but it's a fatal error not to share. †

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Lord, your death on the cross reveals the kingdom of heaven on earth. Help me be more aware of God's presence.

From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*
Rev. Warren J. Savage and
Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

July 31–August 5

Mon.	St. Ignatius of Loyola: Ex 32:15–24, 30–34 / Mt 13:31–35
Tue.	St. Alphonsus Liguori: Ex 33:7–11; 34:5b–9, 28 / Mt 13:36–43
Wed.	Weekday: Ex 34:29–35 / Mt 13:44–46

Thu.	Weekday: Ex 40:16–21, 34–38 / Mt 13:47–53
Fri.	St. John Vianney: Lv 23:1, 4–11, 15–16, 27, 34b–37 / Mt 13:54–58
Sat.	Weekday: Lv 25:1, 8–17 / Mt 14:1–12