

July 30, 2017

A junior manager, a senior manager, and their boss were in a cab on the way to lunch. They discovered a little brass lamp in the cab, so guess what, they rubbed it. Out popped a genie, and the genie said, "I'll give each one of you one wish." The senior manager, of course spoke up first, "I want to be on a fast boat in the Bahamas with no worries." Poof, he was gone. The junior manager said, "I want to be in Miami with beautiful girls, food and cocktails." Poof, he was gone. Their boss finally got his wish and he said, "I want those idiots back in the office after lunch."

In our first reading today, we see Solomon. Solomon was feeling inadequate. Solomon is the son of David. David unified the kingdom of Israel. South to the North, he unified them. He went out and defeated all their enemies. He had wars, he had military victories, he had all of these things going for him, and Solomon comes along and thinks, "What am I going to be able to do?" So, God says, "Ask whatever you want." How many of us would love that? How many of us would ask for a dumb thing right away, something crazy? But he doesn't. He asks for a wise heart, so that he can judge right from wrong. Why does he ask for a wise heart? Why doesn't he ask for a wise mind? Because up until the 19th Century up into the 20th Century, people didn't know what the brain was for. The ancient Egyptians, when they embalmed their dead and wrapped them in the linen cloths and made mummies out of them, they just sucked the brain out and put it in a jar and said maybe they'll know what to do with it after life. But it wasn't until much later we said, "Oh, we do thinking in the brain." Well now there's been research, I just read, and they found out, our brain isn't for thinking, our brain is a memory. It's a total memory dump. We think elsewhere as well. And that's what they believed in the time of Solomon. The heart was for thinking, the kidneys were for loving. How about that for St. Valentine's day? I kidney you. But that's what they thought, because when you are feeling stress, or great emotion, where do you feel it? Down here, in the abdomen. So, they weren't far off. Scientists have researched and believe that we feel emotions all over, head to toe. We also store memories head to toe, muscle memory, nerve memory. That's how athletes become so great, they train their muscles and never have to worry about thinking, their muscles do it for them. Solomon was asking for wisdom to know right from wrong. They always leave out the greatest story about Solomon ever. These two women had children at the same time and one of the babies died in the night and the other woman stole the baby. It was brought before Solomon, who was the judge as well as king. They argued back and forth and finally he said, "Bring me a sword, I'm going to cut the baby in half and give each of you a half." And the moment the sword was coming down, this woman said, "Give it to her!" Solomon said, "Stop, give the baby over to her, that's his mother, she wanted him to live." So, he truly was given wisdom. The best thing we can ask of God, is for wisdom. Wisdom is another word for grace, wisdom is another word for God's grace. We see that time and time again, in the scriptures. We think of God's grace: masculine. But, whenever we see the term wisdom: feminine. Wisdom is a woman in the scriptures. God's wisdom, God's grace, it's a total kind of thing.

The second reading we have Saint Paul. If you ever read, "the Power of Positive Thinking," by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, you'll recognize the first line. "We all know that things work for good for those who love God." If you don't love God, it's not going to work out good. If you love God, then whatever you do is going to try and please Him. It's going to try and glorify Him. And, He is going to raise you up as well. These positive sayings got me through a difficult time in my life and this is one of the great ones. The other one is, "He who walks shall run on eagle's wings..." or something like that, I forgot, I had it memorized and I forgot it already. Just like I used to be fluent in French and I have no idea now. Wee

wee in the reservoir, I don't know. So that's a good power of positive thinking line right there, to be able to do that.

In our gospel, I chose the first two parables because the third one is like last week's parable about the weeds and the wheat. Evil co-exists with good in the church and in the world and that God puts up with evil to give it a chance to convert. Same kind of reasoning there.

We see that we have two people, two different people, we have a person who works for a landowner and he's out plowing with an ox. Now, the thing is, when you plow with an ox, or a horse, you have to look straight to the horizon, to the edge of the field. If you look down you're going to go like this~~~~all curvy. But, if you want a straight line, you look straight ahead. Well, this guy actually looked down at the right moment, to see this treasure. Is that so unique in the time of Jesus? No, Israel existed in a place in the world at the time when armies crossed back and forth and through to get somewhere else and also to conquer this area. So, the only safe place for your money and treasures and valuables, was in the ground. People would bury their treasure; their retirement was in the ground. If you died without telling anybody, guess what? That money was lost. But this guy actually happens to look down, a coincidence. No, according to NCIS Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs, there is no coincidence. And he's right. Because coincidences are God's grace peeking through our lives. Giving us a chance to grab hold of something God wants us to have. That way it's not a coincidence. God is giving us a chance to be rewarded in one way or another. If we are open to it, if our senses are going, we see it and we grab on to it. This guy sees it, and what does he do? He buries it. Why? Because unlike us; ownership is nine tenths of the law... not back then. He would have the treasure taken from him, given to the landowner, and he would have been punished, probably executed. So, he buried it. Then when he got enough money together, he went to his boss and said, "I'd like to buy that little plot over there." He bought it and he had the treasure. Jesus is saying, this is like the kingdom of heaven. You do everything you can to get the treasure. You do everything that you can to make sure that it's legally yours. The treasure is the Kingdom of Heaven. Otherwise known as grace of God, in your life. A personal relationship with Jesus. So, we have a guy that by accident, by God's grace, finds the kingdom of heaven. That's how people do that, some people are brought to God's heaven, God's church by, sorry, "coincidence." They weren't looking, but they found it.

The second example is businessmen, and in the days of Jesus you worked, if you weren't Jewish, you worked seven days a week, 80-hour workweek. And if you were Jewish you worked six days a week and put your 80 hours in then. He is working all his life but he's got his eye open. He's looking for a treasure that will set him up for life. He won't have to work, he'll just kick back and have whatever he wants; slaves, servants, whatever. So, he finds this pearl of great price. Why did Jesus use a pearl? Because, in the time of Jesus, and even later, pearls were the most valuable treasure on earth. People didn't know how to swim, they didn't know how to dive down into the ocean. So, to have a pearl that was actually dredged up was amazing. Cleopatra, supposedly the most beautiful woman at the time (and if you ever see a picture you're like, ack), paid 4 million dollars, two thousand years ago, for a pearl. That's four hundred million dollars today, for a pearl. We think, oh what are pearls, because people dive for them. Now we make our own. Here little oyster, let me put a little piece of sand in there to irritate you, so you'll make a pearl. We do that, so for us it's not that valuable but for them it was the most valuable thing you could ever find. And this guy bets his whole life, everything he has, he gets rid of so he can buy that one treasure, and that's what the kingdom of heaven is like. People give everything they have, to belong to Jesus. Even their lives, to belong to Jesus. They're actively seeking it, actively looking for it and when they find it, they give their whole lives. When I was in the seminary in Philadelphia, one of my

classmates, was born and raised a Protestant. He converted to Catholicism and went in the seminary; his whole family on both sides disowned him. He gave up family, everything that he had, to be a priest. This happens all the time. He knew what the treasure was, he knew what the appropriate price was and he gave it all, so that he could have it. This is what we don't understand in our world today. Our society teaches us not to sacrifice, not to suffer, to take the easy way. That's not how you find the kingdom of heaven. You sacrifice, you do some suffering, all for the kingdom of heaven, all for God's grace, all for a personal relationship with Jesus. Whatever it takes, that's what we do. That's because Jesus said if you don't, where's salvation. Saint Peter Balsam, I like his story because it's so horrible. He was apprehended in Palestine in the three-hundreds, for refusing to compromise his relationship with Jesus, by offering sacrifices to pagan Gods. The governor tried to convince him that he was being unreasonable. He had Peter hung, stretched over a rack, the torturers came with metal hooks and tore his body. Once in a while the governor would invite him to renounce Jesus, but Peter, from the depths of his pain would say, "No, I'm staying true to Jesus." The tortures lasted so long, were so horrific, that the bystanders who were Christians, although secret ones, were telling him, "Just do it, offer sacrifice, you can go to confession later." That's a mortal sin, by the way, presumption of going to confession so you can commit a sin. But, he knew where his true treasure was, he found it. And so, he refused to give it up. After wearing out two separate shifts of torturers, this guy lasted two shifts of torturers and they still couldn't kill him, so they finally crucified him. He knew what the treasure was. Our elder brothers and sisters who died for the faith, who died for the name of Jesus, knew the treasure they had. They knew what they had and they weren't going to give it up. They were going to keep it. This is the story for us. People are so easily swayed today. Oh, "I want to go this direction, I want to go that direction, why can't I do that, why can't I do this." And yet, to have a personal relationship with Jesus, we're supposed to make our relationship with Jesus number one. Nothing else gets in the way. "Oh Father, I was on vacation last week so I didn't go to church." Wait a minute, where does it say, "Honor God on the sabbath except when you are on vacation." There's no exceptions in the ten commandments. They have done studies that people under 45 think that going to church on Sunday is equivalent to going hiking in the mountains, it's equivalent. So, if they decide to wake up on Sunday and go to the mountains, that's okay, because it's equivalent. They don't understand the relationship with Jesus because society doesn't allow it. We have to make that decision ourselves. We have to find what we are looking for and then keep it, and do whatever we can to not get rid of it, or we don't have anything at all. Jesus said, "Follow me, or else there is no salvation."

God bless you