

OPENING COLLECT

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: 1 Kings 3.5-12

⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you' ⁶ And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷ And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, though I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted.

⁹ Give your servant therefore an understanding mind

to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.

¹¹ God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you

and no one like you shall arise after you.'

The early chapters of Kings conclude the story of David, the great king. David was not the oldest of the sons of Jesse, nor was he the tallest or the strongest, for 'God looks on the heart' (1Sam.16.7), and David was the one he wanted. He proved, in spite of his escapades, 'faithful, righteous and upright in heart' (v.6). Now, there is a new king. Solomon is, again, not the oldest, nor the strongest, of David's many sons; in fact he is the son of Bathsheba, one of David's escapades! He comes to the throne and he asks for wisdom. The mention of being able to "discern between good and evil", may remind us of the Adam and Eve story (Genesis 2.9) Seizing god-like knowledge is one thing. However, being given it by God, is quite another! The king asks for the most important thing and God responds. Kings also records that he was immensely successful and very rich as well! Solomon demonstrates his God-given wisdom in stories like the one about the two women fighting over the baby, and Chronicles records that the Queen of Sheba came a long way to see him, so impressed was she by his wisdom, and his success.

SECOND READING: Romans 8.26-39

²⁶ The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints

according to the will of God. ²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God,

who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be

As we continue our reading of Romans, Paul concludes these crucial chapters (5-8), before he moves on to look at the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles, in the new 'Kingdom situation'. We shall make no attempt to integrate this passage with the Gospel and the story about Solomon. Just read it through again, slowly, and sense Paul's utter conviction that we are a new creation, as we share by grace, through faith, the new life in Christ. Being a Christian is not a 'part-time occupation', nor a 'fair weather option'!

conformed to the image of his Son,

Epistle continued: in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. ³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, ³⁹ nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is of central import for our lives, and, therefore, if we do the work of God, for the lives of all.

Gospel: Matthew 13.31-33, 44-52

³¹ Jesus put before the crowd another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.' ³³ He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened. ⁴⁴ The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. ⁴⁷ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁵¹ Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' ⁵² And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe, who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven, is like the master of a household, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

Two weeks ago, we read the parable of the Sower, exploring the response people make to the Word of God. Last week's parable, of the wheat and the darnels, put that mixed response into a 'judgement' context. Both elements, response and judgement, feature in this week's Gospel reading. Faith in God is all important, like God-given wisdom is for Solomon. It is the greatest treasure, the finest pearl, but notice, also, that this treasure, once found, has a purpose in our lives. It is to be shared; it must become a great tree, fully leavened flour, a net full of fish. 'Good' and 'bad' may live side by side, but we cannot rest content with this. The concluding verse is all important. We are to be the 'trained scribes' of the Kingdom, for we are the bearers of a great treasure!

Post-Communion Collect:

Lord God, whose Son is the true vine and the source of life, ever giving himself that the world may live: may we so receive within ourselves the power of his death and passion that, in his saving cup, we may share his glory and be made perfect in his love; for he is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen.**