

## Fr James' homily for the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading: First Book of the Kings 3:5-12  
Second Reading: Romans 8:28-30  
Gospel: Matthew 13: 44-52



### What do you want?

When I had the great fortune to live in the city of Rome, almost every day I would walk past the church that marked the traditional site of where St Paul lived during his years of house arrest, before his martyrdom. It always made me reflect on his experience of anxiety, perhaps of failure, in which he lived and preached the risen Christ. St Paul had written his letter to the Romans, from which we read today and over recent Sundays, to this little community in Rome before he got there. It was dictated, and so a bit rambling in places and difficult to follow. In it he described the human problem, the problem of the effects of sin, that he is struggling with. Famously he says “The good I want to do, I don’t do. What I would not do, I end up doing...”

St Paul knows that we cannot solve this problem ourselves, we need a saviour, and despite the ongoing struggle and the apparent failures and frightening future he knows that we have that Saviour. Paul’s confidence in all circumstances comes from the fact of Jesus risen from the dead. In Jesus God has made himself present to the worst of all circumstances and brought redemption. We can see something new, even in the darkest place. So he writes today: “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him” (in a better translation than the one we use in church.)

This process is about choosing Christ in all things, making ourselves more his shape, if you like. Becoming, as St Paul emotively describes himself at the beginning of his letter, the “slave of Jesus Christ”.

God constantly asks the question “What do you want?” We could think of many examples in the Gospels of how Jesus uses this question, just as God asks it of Solomon in our first reading today. When Solomon asks for a wise heart, he is asking for the grace to choose aright, to see all of life from the perspective of God, which is always to want what is best and right for us. To be able to turn all things to good.

How would we answer the question “what do you want?” straight off the top of our heads. Perhaps as in the myth of Midas, we would ask for some apparent solution to problems or deep-seated obsession. A good thing in itself for Midas became his destruction, for it was not in the service of the ultimate good. So it will be for us unless we choose the yoke of Christ. St Paul knew too well how misusing his own great gifts had brought him to near destruction before he met the risen Jesus.

So to the Gospel today and more images of the Kingdom of heaven. More pictures for the wise to read aright. The image of the dragnet is just like that of the wheat and darnel from last Sunday. The others are illustrations of how to answer the question "What do you want?" When we know the treasure of preferring Jesus to all things, what we need to do and how we should answer the question becomes clear - get rid of everything else. Can we see an opportunity, a chance for good, for wisdom and for the Kingdom of God in us, even in the worst problems of a world in pandemic? Let us ask for grace at Mass today always to do so, and ask the prayers of St Paul to do so.

Amen

*Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.*