

HOMILY 17th Sunday Ordinary Time

July 26, 2020

If you had three wishes, what would you wish for? We encounter this question in fairy tales and fables. What usually happens is that the person makes a series of bad choices, and in the process they learn what truly matters. What commonly comes to mind is winning the lottery. At first glance, we may think that if we just had a lot of money our problems would all be solved, but we know that most of the things that really matter in life have nothing to do with money or material possessions. Having a lot of money just brings another host of problems. The more money and stuff you have, the more energy you have to expend taking care of it, energy that could be better spent doing what is important. We may wish for fame. Would you really want to be famous, no privacy, you do not know if people care about you or just want a piece of your fame? More problems, not fewer. Maybe you want power and control over others. This comes with a tremendous responsibility. You have to live with the effects of your decisions.

In the first reading today, the Lord asks Solomon what he wants. Solomon responds that he knows his vocation; the Lord has called him to be king. He asks the Lord for the wisdom to be a really good king. The Lord responds, good answer,

and grants him his wish. Knowing our God given vocation, our purpose in life, and developing all of the skills we need to carry it out.

So, how does God act in our lives? How does God grant us this wish? In the second reading we hear, “We know that all things work for the good of those who love God.” Notice it does not say those who believe in God, but those who love God. If we believe in God, we may believe that God is all knowing, all powerful and all loving, and this is true. But if we believe that this is true, we can also ask if these things are all true, why doesn’t God just make our lives perfect and take away all pain and suffering? Well, that would be heaven and we are not there yet. We can also think, if God does not make our lives perfect, he must be making bad things happen to us to test us, to teach us a lesson, or to punish us for things we have done wrong. Or we may think that we have to wear God down with prayer so he will give in and give us what we want. That does not sound like a loving God.

Loving God goes beyond believing in God. When we really share love with someone, it is not based upon what we can get out of the relationship. The relationship itself is important. In the process of sharing love, we do get our needs met, but that is not the basis of the relationship. When we love God, we walk with him, we love and serve him by loving and serving one another. God helps us to get what we need to live out our vocation, the purpose he has given for our lives, so that

we can be fulfilled, so that we can find meaning in our lives, so that we can find joy.

God has been very good to us. He created a world that is governed by natural law and most of the time I take great joy in this. It is this predictability that allows us to function. For example, that is how we can have the whole field of medicine. That is how we can figure out how to cure and prevent diseases. We have learned that if we eat a healthy diet, exercise, watch our weight and so forth, we will be healthy. We know what we need to do to be good stewards of our environment. We do not always do those things, and that is what causes many of our problems.

And now we have this coronavirus. We are not sure where this came from, but it will probably be governed by natural law and we will figure out how to overcome it. I wonder if we will be willing to do what we need to do to defeat the virus. But we cannot overcome it today and until we defeat the virus we must go on living. Today is what we have and we can live well today if we decide to do that. Within the confines of being safe, how can we live out our vocation? How can we be better spouses, parents, sons and daughters, better friends? How do we have the social contacts we desperately need? We have to take some risks, but we do that every time we get into a car and every time we get on a plane. What have we learned so far about natural law? Wear a mask, social distance, stay away from

people that are not being careful, outside is better than inside, stay out of large groups when possible, use technology, think of small acts of kindness. How can you make today the best that it can be? And we are going to have days that we are disoriented or sad. That is normal during this time. We are all grieving the loss of so many things in our lives. When we are grieving, we will have days where we just feel sad. That is normal. Maybe we even need to make a list of all the things that we have lost and feel sad about. But don't get stuck there. We also have to make a list of all of the things that we have to be grateful for. My list is very long and that can frequently pull me out of the sadness. And remember that we know that all things work for good for those who love God.