July 30, 2017
Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – “Do You Understand All These Things”
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Reading 1 1 Kings 3:5, 7-12
The LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night. God said, “Ask something of me and I will give it to you.” Solomon answered: “O LORD, my God, you have made me, your servant, king to succeed my father David; but I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act. I serve you in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a people so vast that it cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong. For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?”

The LORD was pleased that Solomon made this request. So God said to him: “Because you have asked for this – not for a long life for yourself, nor for riches, nor for the life of your enemies, but for understanding so that you may know what is right – I do as you requested. I give you a heart so wise and understanding that there has never been anyone like you up to now, and after you there will come no one to equal you.”

Reading 2 Romans 8:28-30
Brothers and sisters: We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified.

Gospel Matthew 13:44-52 or (44-46)
(Jesus said to his disciples: “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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.) Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. “Do you understand all these things?” They answered, “Yes.” And he replied, “Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old.”

HOMILY
“DO you understand all these things?”

That question which Jesus asked His disciples has the potential to change your life, the potential to change the world around you and how you perceive it, the potential to affect and maybe even change the lives of those around you. Bear in mind that it’s not the question that can do that, but how you respond and how seriously you take your response by how you follow-up on it. How would YOU answer that question from Jesus?
You probably know by now that I like to have a little audience participation when I’m preaching – I can hear some groans already – so … in our 1st reading today, we hear of God appearing to Solomon in a dream, and asking him what he would like, and Solomon asks for wisdom … and understanding. Who remembers their dreams after they wake-up? [hands up] Sorry to any students, teachers and bus drivers, but believe it or not, in a few short weeks, it’s back to reality, back-to-school time again. Who can remember dreams about being in school, or taking an exam? [hands up] Now, I know that includes most of you, because psychologists say that is one of the more common dreams that we have, although there are differing opinions as to what they mean. I don’t remember many dreams when I awaken, but I do remember this one recurring dream: I’m in college or graduate school, and I need to take an exam – it’s an exam in a course where I had missed a number of classes, maybe many of them, and here I am, anticipating or even walking into the class to take the exam and wondering if the professor even knows who I am. Just a few nights ago, I had the dream again, but this time it was quite different – it was the day before an important exam, probably the final, and I knew I had to study for it. I worried even more if the professor would know who I was, as I had missed every class, never attended even one class. I went looking for the book to study the material and realized I didn’t have it, I needed to go buy the book. I then realized I couldn’t buy the book, because I didn’t know the name of the book, and worse, I didn’t even remember the name of the course! As I look back on the dream, I wonder why I didn’t understand that I needed to be better prepared.

Do YOU understand all these things?

Today, as in the past two weeks, we hear Jesus teaching the people about the kingdom of heaven through parables – 7 parables in all, including the three we heard today. To quickly recap, for those who may not remember, two weeks ago, there was the seed falling on the path where birds got it, on rocky ground where it couldn’t take root, among thorns where it got choked out as it grew, and then on rich soil where it produced a hundred, or sixty, or thirtyfold. Last week, we heard about good seed growing with the weeds and only being separated at harvest time, about the mustard seed growing into the largest of plants, and about yeast mixed with the flour until the batch was leavened. Then today, we heard about selling all to purchase that pearl of great value, about selling everything for that field containing a found treasure, and about fishermen taking their whole catch and only saving what is good, tossing away what is bad. Taken together, Jesus is summarizing the response of each person to hearing the Word of God from Him – whether to be His disciple or not; Jesus is summarizing the growth of the kingdom of God within the world from those who are accepting His Word and His teachings; and Jesus is portraying in stories the separation of the good, the righteous from the bad, the wicked at the end of the age.

Do you understand all these things?

Despite what Wall Street, or Main Street, or Miracle Mile, or whatever marketing pitch tries to tell us, we all know that life is not perfect, but life is not only about me, myself and I. Remember that Solomon asked for wisdom and understanding because he wanted to distinguish right from wrong. Think about it, the world around us, under guise of false happiness and the blurring of right from wrong, is slowly trying to replace the Ten Commandments with pride, greed, lust and the other deadly sins. Not only is the term “family entertainment” being slowly
shattered, but so is each of those 2 words – family and entertainment. **But, all is not lost – all is certainly not lost by any means!** The Good News of Christ, as proclaimed by Jesus, as carried on by His Apostles and disciples, and as taught by His Church today, is there to help us in life, and it’s there to help us help others get through the tough times in life, to see the face of Jesus in others, especially as they struggle. Jesus wants His disciples to see the value of His message as a shiny pearl, considered more valuable than gold during the time of Jesus, or as a treasure with its many gifts; He wants His disciples to leave behind those parts of life that are contrary to His teachings. The disciples of Jesus who follow His teachings are intended to be the seed in rich soil, the wheat among the weeds, the mustard seed, spreading the Good News to others. Faith-filled Catholic Christians spreading the Good News ... by expressing their faith and showing it proudly – visibly blessing themselves at meals, even when eating out – stopping others when they take God’s name in vain – writing their Congress-people to demand, not ask, that legislation be passed which respects the life and dignity of all humans, from conception to natural death, and that funding be taken from abortion-focused agencies like Planned Parenthood and given instead to other more legitimate health centers as well as those families truly struggling to raise their children ... lead to more faith-filled Catholic Christians who can spread the Good News.

Do you understand **ALL** these things?

One day, each of us **will** be walking into that classroom for that final exam, and that Great Professor **will** recognize us. God may well ask us how we responded to that invitation to be a disciple of Jesus, how we loved God and our neighbor, how we helped to grow the kingdom of heaven, how well we studied the Word of God and acted on it, how we treated others with love ... and justice ... and mercy, how we were **peacemakers** when one was needed, how we showed others how to live as a disciple of Christ by our example, how we were joyful and joy-filled in our faith. ... **Hey, I may have just given you some of the questions on that final exam!** ... How can we be better prepared for that final exam? Are there questions that we are not prepared to answer yet? How might we go about getting answers to those questions? What do we need to do to study, to be prepared, to know what is expected of us? Solomon asked God for wisdom and understanding from the heart – knowing our own personal life circumstances, what would we ask for?

Do you understand all **THese Things**? As faith-filled disciples of our Lord, Jesus Christ, we hope and pray that our answer is, “Yes!”