Prayer and the Decisions of Life

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Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday Readings for July 27, 2014 for Cycle A:
1 Kgs 3:5-12; Rom 8:28-30; Mt 13:44-52

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Many cultures have stories of a person who is told that any request will be fulfilled in a marvelous way. Often the person must bear the consequence of a poor choice. In our daily life we frequently feel the need of divine assistance, so it is important to review the place of petition in Christian prayer.

Early in his reign Solomon, the son of David, heard a divine promise: "Ask what you would like me to give you". First, before making any request, he acknowledged the great gifts that God had bestowed on David. Gratitude for blessings already received shows the awareness that one belongs to the covenant community of faith. Just as the Hebrews offered thanks and praise to God for past signs of love, so Christians frame all prayer with the commemoration of the Paschal Mystery of Christ's Death-and-Resurrection. The Eucharist celebrates the New Covenant in Christ's love, reminding us of the fundamental vocation of being Christian.

What particular mission in the service of God and his people flows from this call to follow Christ? Solomon reflected upon the heavy responsibilities of royalty. He admitted that he was unskilled in leadership; he asked only for the gift of wisdom. "Give your servant a heart to understand how to discern between good and evil" in order to govern properly. Using the title "servant", Solomon recognized that royal functions are to be exercised as a service or ministry to God and neighbor. Would that all who bear the title "prime minister" in the modern world bear witness to the meaning of their role!

In his youth Solomon learned another principle repeated in the Gospel. Because he asked for wisdom, he was assured of many other blessings as well. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things (the necessities of life) will be given to you besides" (Mt 6:33). Jesus makes this same point again in the parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price.

As people search for happiness they sometimes make a choice or decision that involves a total commitment. There are times when this decision cannot be avoided. The key to true happiness lies in the question: "Should this involve a permanent commitment on my part?" If not, does it turn me from my vocation in life? To live our human and Christian vocation in a manner worthy of our spiritual heritage and destiny, we must be certain that such choices are made prudently. Prayerful reflection is essential as we prepare for the major steps of life -- and we continually ask for what we truly need to fulfill God's will in our lives.