17th Sunday: July 30th, 2023.

What do you want?
Choosing things that truly matter in life.

"At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." 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 toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 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. Give your servant therefore an understanding heart to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" "It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 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, I now do according to your word. Indeed, I give you a wise and discerning heart; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you" (1 Kings 3:5, 7-12).

Solomon was the third king of Israel, David's chosen heir. He was the wisest man who ever lived and the author of Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs, as well as some proverbs and Psalms in the Bible. He also made mistakes in his life.

In our first reading, God appears to the young King Solomon with a generous offer: "Ask something of Me and I will give it to you." And what did Solomon ask for? "***An understanding heart"*** to govern, and one that can help him to ***discern between good and evil***.

Seriously! Are you kidding me? This young man was given a chance to have anything in the world, a blank check to write on! It seems he just blew it. Solomon could have asked God for wealth, honor, more political power, victory over his political rivalries, long life, pleasure, bigger mansions, Porch cars, etc. Please don't get me wrong these are beautiful desires, and helpful in life, trust me. They are good. He did not ask for any of these. Rather, Solomon asked God for an ***understanding heart*** so that he would be able to govern well, act with compassion, and have the capacity to distinguish between right from wrong.

Solomon prays to see the world from God's perspective. One may acquire all the powers, wealth, glory, pleasures, and fantoms of this life, but unless one has the mind of God, unless one sees life from God's own perspective, one may not really know what to do with those things. Sometimes those material possessions, without God's wisdom as guidance, will eventually turn on the person, and probably destroy the one. This passage is very important for anyone who wants to deepen his/her spiritual life. At home, please take this passage into deep prayer. It will be worth reflecting upon during your holy hour, retreat, or before going to bed at night. Pray upon this passage folks, especially our young people. What do you want out of life?

February 2023, Kansas City Chiefs kicker Harrison Butker, after the Super Bowl LVII-winning field goal, the team celebrated the Chief's third Championship title with a big parade through the streets of Kansas City in front of hundreds of thousands of screaming fans.

"The offensive line did a great job blocking. Great break, good catch, and luckily that ball went through. All the glory to God," said the 27-year-old player. Right after that event, the Chiefs kicker – Butker went to spend some quiet time in prayer, and reflection at St. Michael's Abbey southeast of Los Angeles. According to him: "Some devils are only cast out by prayer and fasting. We need to embrace this penance to bring order into all the chaos amongst us". Butker is a devout Catholic. It's something he doesn't shy away from during the NFL season or the offseason. In an interview with EWTN, the Catholic news network (with Colm Flynn), Harrison Butker said about himself, "Obviously I was nervous, but one thing that has helped me throughout my career is taking a deep breath, praying is something I always do on the sideline to remember that, yes, football is so important, but it's not the most important thing,".

We need the ***wisdom of heart***, the ability to properly discern, and distinguish good from evil, in other to manage and make good use of the other gifts of life. Like Solomon, pray and ask God for the right things. God will not refuse any good and purposeful prayer. He grants the Holy Spirit to anyone who asks for him, Jesus told us in the Bible.

There is an inspirational quote from St Theresa of Avila. It says, "Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing make you afraid. All things are passing. God alone never changes. ***Patience gains all things. If you have God you will want for nothing. God alone suffices***. ~St Teresa of Avila.

Wisdom gives us insight into what is truly important in life, an awareness of the meaning and purpose of living, of what really matters. Wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It gives us an understanding of where our real well-being and happiness lie. We

all go through life looking for meaning and happiness. Like the young Solomon, let us search and pray for the 'wisdom of heart', 'treasure buried in the field', the 'pearl of great price', as Christ talks about in the parables (Matthew 13: 44-52) today. And what is that – the wisdom of heart, that is, Christ dwelling in us, the Holy Spirit, an awareness of God's presence in us, the kingdom of God here among us.

Nothing in this life is more precious, or more valuable than the kingdom of God, and yet God gives it to us as a gift. Our lives become more joyful as we commit to God. While Solomon discerns and follows the right way, he is a model and a challenge for us all today, and I mean all of us - myself included. His request here invites us to cultivate his prayer for a heart and mind attuned to God and docile to His desires.

Our lives are largely defined by the quality of the choices we make every day and the decisions we take at critical moments. We pray today that we learn to identify and choose those things that truly matter, those things that will give us eternal happiness. Amen.

Fr Martin Ezeihuaku, MSP.