

BIBLICAL RESOURCES

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12; Ps 119 (118); Romans 8:28-30; Matthew 13:44-52

In his joy the merchant goes and sells all that he has and buys that field

Matt 13:44 [Jesus said:] “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Matt 13:45 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46 on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matt 13:47 “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; 48 when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. 49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matt 13:51 “Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” 52 And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Our passage today gives us a great opportunity to become familiar with the mind and interests of Matthew. This is because all four paragraphs—the three parables and the question at the end—are unique to this Gospel and found elsewhere only in the Gospel of Thomas §76, 109 and 8. As usual, this distinctive material lets us into the particular concerns of the writer at the time of writing. Last Sunday’s parable of the weeds and wheat dealing with perfectionists in the community should be born in mind.



OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

(i) The parable of the treasure: My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; if you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding; if you seek it like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures— then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. (Prov 2:1-5) Hidden wisdom and unseen treasure, of what value is either? Better are those who hide their folly than those who hide their wisdom. (Sir 20:30-31)

(ii) The parable of the pearl: Job 28, too long to quote, would be a good OT resource on the search for wisdom, meditating especially on the lengths to which people go to find underground treasure—and yet what is real treasure?

KIND OF WRITING

The selection comes from the second part of Matthew 13.

Inside: teaching the disciples (13:36-43)

Explanation of the weeds (vv. 36-43)

The treasure and the pearl (44-46)

The dragnet (47-50)

Concluding dialogue (51-53)

We have here three parables or comparisons. In their original form, parables are meant to contain something puzzling or disturbing. Whether or not you think these parables go back to Jesus’ own teaching depends on whether you think these are “real” parables or more simply didactic examples with a fairly clear message. The question at the end captures Matthew own description of himself, trying to hold together the novelty of the Gospel and the lasting value of the Old Testament within the Jewish

Thought for the day

Our conviction is that God loves us wholly, in the double sense that he loves us fully and completely and his desire is that grace should touch every dimension of our lives. Anyone who has made the discovery of faith, like the merchant in search of fine pearls, will know what is meant: it is so wonderful that it leads to a discipleship costing not less than everything. It can be daunting, of course, but it leads to life in abundance (Jn 10:10).

Prayer

God of the covenant, faithful and true, you offer us both love and a way of living. As we embrace your love for each of us, help us so to live that we may be fully alive with your Good News.

tradition.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

(i) The parables of the treasure and the pearl: Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” (Matt 19:21) And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life. (Matt 19:29) So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. (Luke 14:33)

(ii) The parable of the net goes back to the fishing metaphor used at the call stories in the Gospels: And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” (Matt 4:19) The particular function of the parable of the net resembles that of two other parables in Matthew, that of the weeds and the wheat (Matt 13) and that of the wedding feast (Matt 19). In all three cases the issue is the tendency of religious groups to exclude the imperfect. This was an issue in the Christian movement once it had “settled down” and become “church”. Matthew’s overall teaching on this is both hopeful and theological:

hopeful in that now is the time of growth and change and no-one can determine what may happen on the faith journey of another; theological in that he says clearly that we are to leave the assessment firmly in the hands of God.

(iii) The difficult expression “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is found only in Matthew with one exception in Luke (Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28).

(iv) On the old and the new: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matt 5:17-20) *“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.”* (Matt 9:16)

(v) Chapter 13 fits into Matthew’s story in an interesting way. In chs. 5-7, Jesus gave powerful teaching to his followers. In chs. 8-9, we see Jesus powerful in deed. Following on that, chs. 11-12 show a variety of responses to Jesus. In ch. 13, Jesus tries to deconstruct an old world and construct a new one.

There are two “audiences”: the crowds (who do not really understand) and the disciples (who begin to understand, albeit falteringly). That is why, in the middle of ch. 13, Jesus turns to his disciples and instructs them directly. This division of response will continue in chs. 14-16, where we witness the widening gap between two communities, no doubt reflecting conditions at the time of writing.

With such a context in mind, we are reminded that we cannot take the parables out of their setting and treat them somehow as generic wisdom. The parables packed a punch in the ministry of Jesus and in the life of the early church. It is our task to allow them to speak today, in our communities and contexts.

ST PAUL

On leaving the judgement to God, two passages in Romans 14 are helpful.

Now receive the one who is weak in the faith, and do not have disputes over differing opinions. One person believes in eating everything, but the weak person eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not despise the one who does not, and the one who abstains must not judge the one who eats everything, for God has accepted him. Who are you to pass judgment on another’s servant? Before his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Rom 14:1-4)

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” So then, each of us will be accountable to God. (Rom 14:10-12)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 44 The finder is like someone who has come across something which is worth everything—to be read in the light of the cost of discipleship. At the same time, a thrilling note of joy is registered.

Verse 45 A metaphor closely related to the previous one. Why especially a *pearl*? *No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal; the price of wisdom is above pearls.* (Job 28:18)

Verse 46 The one, supreme gem is worth simply everything. Both these parables have the same purpose: the supreme value of what is sought and the extraordinary sacrifice in attaining it.

Verse 47 This seventh parable is a different kind of parable with a different purpose: putting up with the imperfect in the community. It is not unlike the parable of the wheat and the weeds, with one difference. Fish have to be sorted immediately!!

Verse 48 “Sorting” is a feature of the allegorical parables in Matthew 13 and 19. The parable of the Great Assize should also be kept in mind (Matthew 25).

Verse 49 Angels (a euphemism for God) do the sifting at the end. It is assumed that the disciples belong to the righteous and that they will escape judgment on account of their faith in Jesus.

Verse 50 This quotes Dan 3:6 and appends Matthew’s favourite dental metaphor. *Whoever does not bow down and*

pay homage will immediately be thrown into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire! (Dan 3:6)

Verse 51 Matthew, in contrast to Mark, shows the disciples coming to some understanding. Cf. Matt 13:11, 16, 23. Elsewhere, their grasp of things is less apparent: 14:17, 28-31; 15:16, 33; 16:5-8, 22-23 etc.

Verse 52 He then describes himself, really, as the perfect scribe, combining old and new (see Matt 5:17-20 and 9:16-17). See the portrait of the ideal scribe in Sirach 39.

He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients, and is concerned with prophecies; he preserves the sayings of the famous and penetrates the subtleties of parables; he seeks out the hidden meanings of proverbs and is at home with the obscurities of parables. (Sir 39:1-3)

In the rabbinic tradition, we read: “Whosoever studies the Torah and does not revise it is likened unto one who sows without reaping.”

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Have you ever found yourself saying “that was worth it” after giving up something (time, pleasure, money, etc.)? What was the treasure that made the sacrifice worthwhile?
2. The “kingdom of heaven” is when God is really the ruler in our life. What treasures have you obtained when you allow God to be at the centre of your life?
3. In life, we gather a lot of things, some good and some bad. The wise person in the kingdom of heaven, knows how to sit down and make decisions on what to keep and what to discard. When have you undertaken that kind of discernment? What have you discarded? What have you retained?

PRAYER

God of eternal wisdom, you alone impart the gift of right judgement. Grant us an understanding ear, that we may value wisely the treasure of your kingdom and gladly forgo all lesser gifts to possess that kingdom’s incomparable joy.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

All things work together for good for those who love God

Rom 8:28 And we know that in all things the Spirit works together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose (*prothesin*), 29 because those whom he foreknew (*proegnō*) he also predestined (*proōrisen*) to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn (*prōtokon*) among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined (*proōrisen*), he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified. (NET adjusted in v. 28)

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The overall topic in Romans 8 is God's final victory, in Christ, over sin and death. God's victory is placed in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. There is tremendous conviction here, conviction which is hard for us today. But, for that very reason, that may be why we need to hear it again in our time.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Romans is quite an experiential document. Right from chapter 2 onwards, Paul want the hearers to pay attention to what is actually happening in their lives. This is true of the negative parts to do with sin and also true of the positive sections such as chapter 8. Unlike some preachers, Paul is not telling the Roman believers how they should feel but rather inviting them to notice what is actually happening in their own experience, especially at this point in their experience of prayer. Do they have the spiritual gifts? Do they call to Abba, father? Do they know the help and intercession of the Holy Spirit? In a word, do they know the love of God and do they love God in response?

KIND OF WRITING

The overall pattern in Romans 8 has been:

8:1-17 The Spirit and life
8:18-30 The Spirit and hope
8:31-39 God's irrevocable love in Jesus

The central section also unfolds in three moments:

8:18-25 Future transformation
8:26-27 The role of the Spirit
8:28-30 *God's plan of salvation*

Verses 28-30 function as a kind of inclu-

sion with Rom 5:1-5. Notice especially the same use of an overt rhetorical figure resembling a staircase. In both Rom 5:1-5 and here in 8:28-30 you have the figure of *gradatio* or *climax*. One word is repeated and leads to another while the overall effect is build-up to a climax. Here's a good illustration from Barack Obama:

"One voice can change a room. And if it can change a room, it can change a city. And if it can change a city, it can change a state. And if it can change a state, it can change a nation. And if it can change a nation, it can change a world." (*Presidential campaign speech in Des Moines, Iowa, Nov. 5, 2012*)

RELATED PASSAGES

Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of God's glory. Not only this, but we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:1-5)

From Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, *called* to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. ...You also are among them, *called* to belong to Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:1, 6)

On the representative role of image (eikōn)

You diminished him a little in comparison with angels; with glory and honour you crowned him. And you set him over the works of your hands; you subjected all under his feet, sheep and cattle, all together, and further the beasts of the plain, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea —the things that pass through paths of seas. (Psalms 8:6-9)

He gave them days in number and a fixed time, and he gave them authority over the things upon it. He clothed them in a strength like himself, and in his image he made them. He placed the fear of him upon all flesh, even to have dominion over beasts and birds. (Sirach 17:2-4)

On creation and resurrection

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him. He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things. (Colossians 1:15-18)

After God spoke long ago in various portions and in various ways to our ancestors through the prophets, in these last days he has spoken to us in a son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he created the world. The Son is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence, and he sustains all things by his powerful word, and so when he had accomplished cleansing for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Thus he became so far better than the angels as he has inherited a name superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my son! Today I have fathered you"? And in another place he says, "I will be his father and he will be my son." But when he again brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all the angels of God worship him!" (Hebrews 1:1-6)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 28 Paul includes his hearers in the convictions about to unfold: hence "and we know." He is appealing here both to a common conviction in the culture and at the same time to the Romans' own experience.

Our mini-section opens with a claim or thesis: all things work for good. Because the Greek is unclear, there are choices to be made here. The less than clear Greek says "all things it cooperates for good." Who is the subject of the verb?

- (1) *God*: We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28 TEV; also NJB)
- (2) *All things*: We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28 NRSV; also NET above)

(3) *The Spirit*: and God who searches our inmost being knows what the Spirit means, because he pleads for God's people as God himself wills; and in everything, as we know, he co-operates for good with those who love God and are called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:27–28 REB)

It is likely that “all” should be read as “in all things” and so it cannot be the subject of the verb. If the subject is God, this leads to a stylistic awkwardness, where God is both the object of our love also the subject of the main verb. It is, therefore, more likely that Paul is still thinking of Spirit as in the preceding verses as the who works together “in all things.” The verb form “with” is generally use of the Spirit in Romans 8, in any case. Thus the Revised English Bible (no. 3 above) may be the closest to what Paul intended.

Paul is teaching here that there is a divine and human co-responsibility, a synergy to use a contemporary word, in which both work together. The “good” to be accomplished is wide—the work of every day, the growth of the faith in Rome, Paul's own further missionary projects.

“Love God”: This love *for* God has already been poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5). Of course, it does not start with us but with God as we read: *But God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Rom 5:8) It spills over into a practical love of the neighbour: *Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet,” (and if there is any other commandment) are summed up in this, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.* (Rom 13:8–10)

“Called” is an important word in Romans and in the Christian project in general. See Rom 1:1, 6 above. For the verb “to call”: Rom 4:17; 8:30; 9:7, 12, 24–26.

“Purpose”: using a different word, we find in the Isaiah: *“and I said, “My whole plan shall stand, and I will do all the things I have planned”* (LXX Isaiah 46:10). Isaiah is alluded to later in Romans, actually combining calling and purpose: *“...even before they were born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose in election would stand, not by works but by his calling) ...”* (Rom 9:11)

Within Romans 8, the overarching pur-

pose of God is nothing less than cosmic: the new creation, through Christ's resurrection and the disclosure of believers as children (lit. sons) of God in the Son. Thus while cosmic in scope, it takes in the transformation of individual lives in Christ. This transformation is reflected upon in detail in Rom 12:1–15:6, beginning with *but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect* (Romans 12:2)

Verse 29 Something of Paul's literary skill is evident here in the number of words beginning with “pro” in Greek. This is not just literary because the verbs pick up the word purpose (prothesis) and explore further its meaning. It is likely that Paul is echoing here some of the vocabulary of Christian initiation. Being conformed to the image of the Son begins in Baptism. Cf. *Instead we speak the wisdom of God, hidden in a mystery, that God determined before the ages for our glory.* (1 Cor 2:7) In other words, while the transformation looks indeed to the future it is also happening *now*. Being conformed is literally in Greek to become *summorphos*, that is, to have the form (*morphē*) with (*syn*) Jesus. We know from Phil 2:6–11 that this includes suffering in this present time—one of the topics under consideration in Romans 8.

For image, see Ps 8:6–9 and Sir 17:2–4 above. Originally, “image” had a representative function, associated with kings as God's “agents.” The Old Testament democratized the concept radically, with the result that every human being is in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27).

The vocabulary used in this verse gave rise in later generations to intense discussion about predestination and free will. This is not Paul's purpose here. (In any case, he affirms elsewhere both grace and free will.) Instead, he is reassuring the Christ believers in Rome, under immense pressure, that their present suffering is part of God's plan to restore all in Christ's image, the firstborn among the dead. By his resurrection, Christ restored the divine image for all humanity. At the same time, this being “first” is related as well, in the Apocalyptic imagination, to creation. For the later evolution of these ideas in the Pauline tradition, see Col 1:15–18 and Heb 1:1–6 above. Thus disconcerting experience of the Romans is part of something much larger.

Many brothers and sisters: Elsewhere in Romans, Paul talks about there being “no distinction” between Christians of

Jewish and Gentile origin, both in sin and in grace. Because they are now part of a much greater cosmic purpose, the barriers they have erected are, it is implied, utterly irrelevant.

Verse 30 Paul returns to the figure of *gradatio*, the “staircase” effect. The literary form, showing all the pieces fitting together purposefully, mirrors the content. All the piece of our lives, even when we can't see it or feel it, fit together purposefully. The topics of call and purpose are picked up form v. 28.

Paul then changes to then language of “justified”, a key term in Romans. As always, the concept is both relational and forensic. It means to be put in “right relationship” through God's forgiveness and grace. The verb “to justify” is used extensively in Romans 1–4 (Rom 2:13; 3:4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4:2, 5) but only sparingly afterwards (Rom 5:1, 9; 6:7; 8:30, 33) and never after Romans 8. Its sudden introduction in Romans 8 at this point may surprise. Paul's understanding of cosmic salvation is grounded in the cross and resurrection, the saving events which made justification / right relationship possible. Thus, he stays focused on Christ and on the work of the Spirit, making Christ present in the hearts of believers. The continued journey of conversion (*metanoia*) of heart and personal transformation is also in view.

The past tenses in v. 30 are notable. “Glorified” in the past tense (aorist) has surprised readers and triggered a good deal of discussion. The past tense is to be retained but in the sense of a process, a continuing transformation. Cf. *And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, which is from the Lord, who is the Spirit.* (2 Cor 3:18) Eventually, our current unclarity or ambiguity will be resolved (Rom 8:18–19).

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. What is my own sense of the Spirit working in all things for good?
2. Perhaps we are not always aware of it, but our limited reality is really part of something much, much greater.

PRAYER

Loving God, our vision is always limited and we find it hard to detect your purpose in the unfolding of our lives. Renew our sense of trust in the working of your Holy Spirit and help us believe that “all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.” Amen.

Give your servant understanding and discernment, O Lord

1 Kgs 3:4 *The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.* 5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.” 6 *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.* 7 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. 8 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. 9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”

1 Kgs 3:10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 11 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, 12 I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. 13 I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. 14 If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.”

1 Kgs 3:15 *Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. He offered up burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.*

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Occasionally, extra verses are included in these notes, usually for the sake of completeness or context. In this case, the extra verses are essential to a proper reading of the text. What was Solomon doing at a high place, the very location so regularly condemned by the prophets, and practicing there idolatry, so often excluded in the book of Deuteronomy.

The reading in the lectionary airbrushes these essential features from the passage, making it seem merely pious. See 1 Kgs 3:1–3!!

ORIGIN OF THE READING

The death of David and the unsteady transition to Solomon are recounted in 1 Kings 1-2. The book offers an account of the reign of Solomon in chapters 3-11, beginning with the legitimization of his rule in 3:1-15. The text as we have it has been considerably edited by a Deuteronomistic redactor, offering a favourable opinion of David but an ambivalent assessment of Solomon, who clearly made mistakes in his marriages and in his worship (probably not unconnected). In any case, the reading honours the traditional reputation of Solomon as the most wise ruler and attributes this gift to the prayer of Solomon at the start of his reign.

KIND OF WRITING

This is a legitimization narrative—actually very necessary after the low-grade actions of Solomon in 1 Kings 1-2. In a very petty way, he acted against soldiers who were brave and a priest who was faithful all in order to prevent a brother taking the throne. The author offers this legitimization legend to lend authority to the kingship of Solomon. The real burden of the story is that he was God's candidate and the gifts he enjoyed were from God.

RELATED READINGS

Solomon said to God, “You have shown great and steadfast love to my father David, and have made me succeed him as king. O LORD God, let your promise to my father David now be fulfilled, for you have made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth. Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can rule this great people of yours?” (2 Chr 1:8–10; See Wisdom 9.)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 4 This is smoothly written, as if it were normal; it is, of course, anything but normal. Gibeon was the natural hub of conflict between Judah and Israel.

Verse 5 The redactor alerts the reader to the fact that a theophany is taking place.

Verse 6 On the lips of Solomon, the redactor recalls the promise to David (2 Samuel 7) and, more significantly, the reasons for God's fidelity to David.

Verse 7 Solomon was not a child; the affirmation of youthfulness explores unpreparedness and his need of God's help.

Verse 8 Contrasting the poverty of the person called and the greatness of the task. That the people are not only many but difficult is part of the redactor's agenda.

Verse 9 Understanding mind is literally a “listening heart” which might appeal today. To govern is literally to “judge” your people in the important matter of distinguishing good and evil.

Verse 10 God's reaction is entirely positive.

Verse 11 The redactor approves in a moralising way of Solomon's choice. There is a hymnic quality to God's speech making is sound like part of a coronation ritual (Pss 2:8; 20:4–6; 21:2).

Verse 12 The opening lines reverse the usual relationship between the creator and the creature. Solomon's unparalleled distinction is a theme of the Deuteronomist.

Verse 13 Solomon was famous for both his wisdom *and his wealth*.

Verse 14 The conditions for a long life show the hand of the redactor once more. A very important conditional if.

Verse 15 The dream is over and the conclusion is brief and unexpected.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Taking up a new role calls for reflection and prayer. What has your experience been?
2. If you were in a position to ask absolutely anything of God for yourself, for what would you ask?

PRAYER

God of our ancestors and Lord of mercy, with you is wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments. Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she may labour at my side, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you.

THE LITURGY

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12; Ps 119 (118); Romans 8:28-30; Matthew 13:44-52

READINGS 1 AND 3

The desire for heavenly wisdom and the hidden treasure of the kingdom unites the two readings. Such desire is marvelously explored in Job 28.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 119 is a justly famous meditation on the Torah and the wisdom to be found therein. It follows well the prayer of Solomon, if not his practice!

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

At the start of his reign, Solomon is in the position to ask anything of God. What would you do in that situation? Solomon—renowned for his wisdom—prays wisely!

Second reading

Romans 8:28-30

A brief few lines from Paul manage to say a great deal. It is not that we always see this to be true immediately, but with time and reflection, we can see the fingerprints of God.

Gospel

Matthew 13:44-52

How would you recognise what you really wanted, in your heart of hearts, out of life? Probably not by listening to your words (the ideal) but by noticing your works, what you actually do (the real). Something similar may be said of these parables.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 31 July

St Ignatius Loyola, priest

Exodus 32:15-24, 30-34

It's a bit of a surprise to find such a frank and sudden collapse into gross idolatry...and yet, with more sophistication perhaps (!), we all do it, moulding God into our own image and likeness!

Matthew 13:31-35

In the time of Jesus, such confidence in growth would have seemed definitely

unwarranted and yet we see 2,000 years of Christian expansion. We may need to hear that confident message again in these difficult days.

Tuesday 1 August

Saint Alphonsus de Liguori, bishop, doctor

Exodus 33:7-11, 34:5-9, 28

What is God like? In our reading today two sides of God are held in tension: 'The Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness; for thousands he maintains his kindness, forgives faults, transgression, sin; yet he lets nothing go unchecked, punishing the father's fault in the sons and in the grandsons of the third and fourth generation.'

Matthew 13:36-43

This explanation of the parable is certainly secondary and a little different to the original meaning of unstoppable growth. However, it gives us a window onto the experience of the early Christians and perhaps onto our experience as well. Matthew has supplied the dental imagery which is typical of him (6-0-1).

Wednesday 2 August

Exodus 34:29-35

Something happened to Moses in his encounter with God and afterwards, he was "different." St Paul reflects on this, contrasting the old and the new, in the second Letter to the Corinthians: *Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside.* (2Corinthians 3:12-13)

Matthew 13:44-46

Two very mini parables with the same teaching: for those who discover it, the king is worthy all that I am, costing not less than everything.

Thursday 3 August

Exodus 40:16-21, 34-38

Often in Bible, God is presented as God-with-us or Immanuel. God's presence is symbolised in today's reading by the cloud.

Matthew 13:47-53

The parable of the dragnet reflects issues in emerging Christianity. Like its companion parable of the weeds and the wheat, the message is to let things be until the final counting. The desire to restrict the community to the perfect seems to have begun early.

Friday 4 August

St John Vianney, priest

Leviticus 23:1, 4-11, 15-16, 27, 34-37

Today, the feasts of the Jewish calendar are enumerated if not all named: Passover and Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, the Day of Atonement, Tabernacles. Our Christian feasts of Easter and Pentecost are rooted in this Jewish calendar.

Matthew 13:54-58

As we say, familiarity breeds contempt. Because they *think* they are utterly familiar with this neighbour of theirs, their minds are blinded. This can happen to us too in our piety—we may think we know this Jesus, but do we really?

Saturday 5 August

Leviticus 25:1, 8-17

The Jubilee year was to take place every fifty years—it symbolised the desire to be free, not to bound by the accumulation of debts. Its not really known if this was ever in reality practiced, but the desire is surely a reality! Who would not like such a year?

Matthew 14:1-12

The death of John the Baptist is a sad, even absurd ending to a fiery career. It is reported Mark and Matthew, both of whom use it a warning about the cost of discipleship. It is omitted in Luke and John, probably to avoid any comparisons with the unique death of Jesus. We know a little more about it from Josephus, who writes: "Accordingly John was sent as a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Machaerus, the castle I already mentioned, and was put to death. Now the Jews thought that the destruction of his army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure with him." (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18).