

July 26, 2026—17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

King Solomon brought the Kingdom of his father David to the peak of its military and economic power. Throughout the world it was known as a great nation. The Temple of Jerusalem was an architectural wonder of the world. The First Reading told us of Solomon's prayer for his kingship. **"Give your servant . . . an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong."** He could have chosen wealth and power over his enemies, but he told God that he wanted to be able to judge wisely for the good of his people. God was pleased with his request, and Solomon became not only a powerful king, but a wise one, as well. He is accredited with many of the proverbs in the Old Testament.

The sad thing is that King Solomon did not persevere in the wisdom that God gave him at the beginning of his reign. As time went on, he became like the despots of other nations. He organized the kingdom as they did and married numerous times and allowed his foreign wives to bring worship of pagan gods into Israel. He even built shrines to their horrible gods. If you look through the kings of the Old Testament and Christian history there are a few good kings, like our own St. Louis, King of France, but for the most part they were not. The praise and adulation and power made them think they deserved it.

The sin of vanity is related to the sin of pride. Vanity is inflated pride in oneself or one's appearance. Vanity is not only the sin of kings. It is particularly a vice of our times. The internet breeds it. Social Media is filled with people who want to be noticed. They must post outrageous things to get "Likes" and an ever-increasing number of followers.

"Main Character Syndrome" is the term that internet influencers use to say that you must focus everything on yourself. You should make yourself the most important person in your life and your way of acting, the main character of the story. Everyone else plays secondary parts. We used to say people wanted to "Get their 15 minutes of fame"; with this attitude you never get enough attention. As a Christian, I would say that everything is not about me, I am not the main character of my life, Jesus Christ is! Vanity will never bring about the happiness that it promises because in the end it is simply an exaggerated selfishness.

Vanity is also excessive concern about one's appearance. There is nothing wrong with trying to look one's best. But vanity is an exaggerated concern. You may have heard the term, looksmaxxing. They go to extremes, even hitting their jaws with a hammer to get the perfect jaw line. I heard one of the leading advocates of

looksmaxxing in an interview. He judged the worthiness of politicians by how they looked and his responses to the interviewer were so shallow that I wondered if he was joking. But he wasn't.

The three parables in the Gospel this Sunday use images to guide us to seek true wisdom and true wealth; the kind King Solomon gained and lost. The first speaks about buried treasure. Many stories have been based on this premise. Who wouldn't want to find a buried treasure! It was worth it to sell all he owned to buy the field in which it was buried so that he could legally own it. The treasure that God offers us is the grace of faith that is lived out in love. I couldn't live without faith in Jesus. It is a treasure that gets us through trials and gives us joy.

With a similar theme Jesus told us of the pearl of great price. A merchant found a fine pearl. He knew which pearls were really valuable and which were not. He went and sold all that he had to buy it. We are called to see that mercy, grace and faith are the most valuable possessions we can have.

The Church has also seen consecrated virginity or celibacy as the pearl of great price. The priests and religious strive to give Jesus everything, even the good of having a spouse and children. In a sex-saturated world, celibacy is needed more than ever to point to the love of Jesus who gave Himself totally, even to His death upon the Cross. The pornography industry is vast and cruel and addictive, leading many people to think sexual pleasure is indispensable to happiness. They do not know there is a greater love and greater happiness that is available than the pleasures of this world—a pearl of great price.

The third parable is about fishing. It was the kind of fishing that involved throwing a net out into the sea and pulling in everything, even those fish which were not wanted. Like the parable of the weeds growing in the midst of the wheat and must be separated, the good fish must be separated from the inedible things pulled in by the net. The good and evil, faithful and faithless live together in this world. Life is a time of testing for us. We are called to live our lives in accordance with Christian morality and remain faithful to Jesus. Also, we cannot give up hope on anyone's conversion. Although worthless fish cannot be changed into good fish, we can change through grace and repentance and the mercy of God.

Reflecting on the state of our country at the 250th anniversary, Archbishop Charles Chaput wrote: **"We need to remember some simple facts. We're not powerless. Our time here matters. What we do matters; it has consequences for our own eternity and all those around us. Our lives, gathered together as a people, will**

shape the future of America's experiment in human dignity for better or for worse."

The words of St. Paul in the Second Reading are so important. He wrote to the Romans: **"We know that all things work for the good for those who love God"**. Even when everything seems to be going wrong, God has not abandoned you. Even when we look at our lives and regret actions from the past, God has not abandoned you. If we turn to Him in love, He will work all things for the good.