

Homily for Sunday, July 26, 2026



For the Jewish people, David, the shepherd boy who slew the giant Goliath, became the most honoured and beloved king in their history. Even down to this day, many Jewish parents will name their firstborn son, David. But it was his son, King Solomon, who was considered the wisest. The first reading recalls a young Solomon, probably 20 years old, ascending the throne as the king of Israel after his father's passing. He's overwhelmed by the responsibility and admits that he doesn't know the "ins" and "outs" of the job ("I don't know how to go out or come in"). Adding to his anxiety, on Day 1 of his new job, is that he realizes he's not just the leader of *any* nation, but that he's the leader of

God's chosen people. It's one thing to work under a regional manager, but when your immediate supervisor is God, that's a lot of added pressure.

Young King Solomon hears God say to him, in a dream, "Solomon, ask what I should give you." Solomon impresses God by not asking for riches nor a long life but for wisdom. When he awoke from the dream, he was sure that God had, indeed, granted him a wise and discerning mind. The discerning mind God gave the king didn't just help Solomon govern better but it also gave Solomon insights into God's mind.

Discernment isn't just about choosing a good path in life; it's more about coming to know the path that God is revealing to us. Without discernment, life is about me; with discernment, I am about life. We should always pray for the gift of wisdom and discernment in our personal lives as well as in the lives of leaders, both Church leaders and political leaders. Discernment helps us to see what is important to keep as well as what needs to be thrown away as baggage that's just dragging us down.

One of the good things that happened in the 4th century is that the Church stopped being persecuted by the Romans and people were free to worship publicly. However, on the down side of becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Church moved from being a mystical Church into being a juridical Church. Laws and obeying them took precedence over spiritual union with God—something we've been stuck with since the 4th

century. A group of people saw this danger and decided to move out of Jerusalem into the desert. We call them the Desert Fathers although I'm sure there were also Desert Mothers. This discerning group was more concerned about growing into a deeper relationship with Christ rather than putting their energy into building shrines, monuments, and dressing up the clergy in albs, chasubles, and miters—the garb of the Roman officials, the very people who persecuted the Early Church.

The Desert Fathers practiced something called *apatheia*, from which we get the English word “apathy.” *Apatheia* is a Greek word that means “a fierce indifference to unimportant things.” *Apatheia* is about choosing not to give your precious time or energy to trivial things or lies. As a way of arriving at their True Selves, the Desert Fathers would ask each other two questions each day: What do you love? And, what do you need to ignore?

There is a story of one of these Desert Fathers named Makarios the Great (c. 300-391 A.D.) of Egypt, and it goes like this. ***A young man approached Makarios with the desire to become holy (and he only had a weekend to do it). Makarios told the young man that if he wants to become holy, he should go to the cemetery and rail against the dead with every insult he could throw at them. So off went the young man and he did just that. He went to the cemetery and told the dead how useless they were, how insignificant were their lives, and how easily they are forgotten by the living. When he was done insulting the dead, the young man returns to the monk. Makarios, the monk, asked him how he made out. The young man responded that his insults were met only with silence. The monk suggested the young man return to the cemetery but, this time, he was to heap praise and compliments upon the dead. The young man returns to the cemetery speaking to the dead in such terms: “You are the most wonderful people ever to have lived. You are missed by everyone who knew you. You were the most generous, forgiving, and wonderful people in all the world.” When he was done, he reported back to Makarios that the results were the same---more silence from the dead. Makarios then told the young man that if he wanted to become a holy man, he must become like the dead taking no notice of peoples’ insults nor of peoples’ praises.***

Discernment helps us to know what we should take notice of. Discernment also help us to practice *apatheia*, the fierce indifference to unimportant things. The three parables in today’s gospel might be summarized as “seek first the Kingdom of God and everything else will be given to you.” I have a hunch that if I was to stumble upon the Kingdom and realize

what a treasure it is, I would have no more interest in everything else that could possibly be given to me. Once you've found the treasure in the field or the pearl of great value, everything else is relativized. I think it's what Paul is getting at when he said that he considers everything a loss compared to the treasure of knowing and serving Jesus. "Apart from knowing Jesus", Paul say, "everything is garbage" (Phil. 3:8). ("Dung" is the correct translation).

It's interesting that there is no one way of accessing the kingdom of heaven. Sometimes it's just like the first parable where you're not looking for it, but you stumble upon it by accident just walking through a field. Other times, it's more like the second parable, where the merchant is deliberately looking for fine pearls and is rewarded for his or her diligence. Then there's the third parable which describe the kingdom of heaven as a net thrown into the sea and gathers fish of every kind. When you draw in the net, through a process of discernment, you decide to keep what is in your net because it is helpful for your life. You also practice a fierce indifference to what is not helpful for your spiritual development and throw those things back into the sea.

Parables, being what they are, seem to reveal new layers with every reading. Perhaps the ending is the twist I never considered. While I was looking for the treasure in the field, the pearl of great price, the net full of good fish, I realize now that I was subconsciously searching for God. The question, "What is my pearl?" could easily be the question, "Who is my pearl?" What I'm looking for has never stopped looking for me. It is God's grace that is thrown like a net over every human being whether we consider ourself a good fish or a bad fish. God is looking to gather us all.

It is God who is like the owner of a general store just waiting for us to come through the door. He says, "Come, you that have no money, come anyway. Buy and eat; come, buy wine and milk without any money at all. Why spend your money on what cannot nourish, and your hard-earned wages on things that fail to satisfy? Ask anything of me, and like a store owner, I'll find it for you. It might be what is new or it might be what is old. But whatever it will be, it will be a treasure and it will be just for you, just for the asking. I gave Solomon a discerning heart, and I'll give you your heart's desire as well."

Fr. Phil