

## THE PROS AND CONS OF AN UNDERSTANDING HEART

What do you know about King Solomon? He was one of King David's sons. His mother was Bathsheba the wife of the Uriah the Hittite who was on the General's staff of the Israelite army. The army was on campaign and King David was back in Jerusalem with too much time on his hands and he observes Bathsheba bathing one afternoon, sends for her, has relations with her and sends her home. She, however, has conceived. David sends for Uriah and hopes he will go down to his wife while he is back from the campaign but Uriah doesn't. David then conspires with his general to have Uriah killed in combat. But God knows what David has done and so do others and David is discovered. The child dies. David repents and asks God's forgiveness. God does forgive but David is told that now the sword shall never leave his house. Later David takes Bathsheba as one of his wives. Later still they will conceive another child. His name is Solomon, from Shalom, Man of peace.

Solomon succeeds King David as king of the united kingdom of Israel. Solomon is still young when David appoints him king and then dies. David ruled as king for a total of 40 years, 33 over all twelve tribes. Solomon will rule for another 40 years. King David wanted to build a grand Temple for the Lord but was told that he had shed too much blood to be so honored. That responsibility and honor would fall to his son, Solomon. Today's first reading from the First Book of Kings has the young King Solomon praying for the gift of an understanding heart so that he might rule well as king. God is pleased at such a request and bestows an understanding heart and wisdom as well. A very appropriate beginning.

But somewhere along the way things started to go bad and go off track. King David had left a fortune for Solomon to build the Temple—a 100,000 talents of gold, a million talents of silver. How much was that? Well a talent weighs about 60 pounds. 6 million pounds of gold, 60 million pounds of silver, and bronze and iron and stone and timber and all manner of artisans. Even if that was an exaggeration we get the idea. Solomon had everything he needed. And so he set out to build a magnificent Temple. He had all these material blessings and then on top of that spiritual blessings of an understanding heart. He had enough and he had more than enough. And there was peace in the land for many years.

But there was something wrong in Solomon's thinking. If some is good then more must be better and much more must be the best of all. Or not. The great blessing of an understanding heart needs other blessings to accompany it. An understanding heart needs to be surrounded by other virtues—wisdom, courage, and especially a respect for and a love of the truth. I myself have been given the blessing of an understanding heart. What I have learned is that I can be too understanding, too accepting, too accommodating of too many things. King Solomon was a very gifted individual. He had a great personality. He was bright, witty and clever. He was a type A personality. He

loved to build things. His talents knew no limits and it was precisely there that things started to go bad.

Solomon misused his gift of an understanding heart. Not completely. Not all at once. Only a little bit at first. God gave him the wisdom to know what he should do to lead his people in truth. Solomon used the wisdom to identify what he could do as king. There is a difference between what we should do and what we could do. Even then. Even now.

King Solomon began to build—not just a Temple but all manner of cities and buildings. And then temples to other gods. He created a lavish lifestyle in Jerusalem. Good for the rich; not so much for the poor. Later in the first Book of Kings there is a line that says in one year Solomon collected from taxes 666 gold talents—40,000 pounds—and spent it—and more. By the end of his reign he will have overspent so much that kingdom will be close to bankruptcy. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. So, I am thinking about that. I don't know. I'm not exactly sure how to say this but I think he was –distracted. Just trying to remember names. That's a lot of wives in any age!

And yet he left few children which is also very curious. The son who succeeds him is named Rehoboam. King Rehoboam will preside over the split of the kingdom. Rehoboam is described in the Book of Wisdom in this fashion: “Solomon left behind a son to succeed him who was limited in sense and expansive in folly.”

Everything started out so good. What happened? When God blesses us we have to accept the blessing but we have to bring something of ourselves to the moment of blessing. We have to bring our heart and soul to the table. Solomon allowed himself to become enamored by always wanting more. He had many wives. He built temples to many false gods and even worshipped them. He taxed his people into poverty. He squandered his own life and the lives of his people.

Today's reading is a cautionary tale. In effect, Solomon decided that his pearl of great price was to have more. In the end it destroyed him and the kingdom of Israel. Solomon's pearl of great price was: What I can do. That's not where he started out but it is where he finished up. Our pearl can never be: What I can do. Lord what do You want me to do? The question which seeks an answer and guidance. Lord what do You want me to do? And then give your heart there. Nothing else will do. Nothing else will satisfy. There is no other treasure or pearl worth having. Today's reading is a cautionary tale, not about how you start but about how you finish.