Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
2026—A Cycle



What do I see?

"God's kingdom is like a fishnet cast into the sea, catching all kinds of fish."
Matthew 13

Aren't we the lucky ones! Individually, with all our virtues and despite our flaws, God's wide net will catch each and every one of us. Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM (Franciscan), champions an inclusive, cosmic view of salvation rooted in his groundbreaking book, *The Universal Christ*. Rohr argues that God's grace is unconditional, all-encompassing, and eternal. He concludes that a loving God will not permanently exclude or condemn anyone or any part of creation.

— *What do I think will happen to me in the instant following my death? On what do I base that expectation?*

Image source: Pexels

Opening Prayer

A Fisher's Prayer (edited)
God, grant me a little more time... to pick up my rod and cast my line.
Work and worry disappear... soon as I pick up my gear.
With the boat on my trailer... I can go wherever.
The fishing seems fine... when I see what's on my line.

When I'm old and feeble and gray... don't take my pole away.
When the pearly gates open wide... find this fisherman one good lake inside.
Amen.

Original source: Jeannette Hoppes, Tellout.com

Scripture Readings

I Kings 3: 5, 7-12 'That night, there in Gibeon, God appeared to Solomon in a dream. God said, 'What can I give you? Ask.'"
Psalm 119: 57, 72, 76-77, 127-30 "Because you have satisfied me, God, I promise to do everything you say."
Romans 8: 28-30 "God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son."
Matthew 13: 44-52 "God's kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field for years and then accidentally found by a trespasser."

Introduction to the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This week's readings are full of beauty and wisdom for the soul. In the antiphon for Psalm 119, we hear this message, "Lord, I *love* your commands." At one hundred and seventy-six verses, this psalm stands as the longest in the entire psalter (see Bible Gateway). It has 22 stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza contains eight verses, and every verse in a stanza begins with the same Hebrew letter.

In I Kings 3: 5, 7-12, we read that "God appeared to Solomon in a dream. God said, 'What can I give you? Ask.'" This wonderful line offers an open-ended invitation to ask our God for *anything at all!* Most of us ask too little. Yahweh, however, invites King Solomon, "Go head. Ask for the moon. Leave it up to me to deliver it in the way I know is best for you and for the world. So, come on. Give it a try."

Biblical scholars differ about the author of the two Books of Kings. First and Second Kings are drawn from several sources. The timing seems fairly certain—around the year 600 BC/BCE, several centuries after King Solomon's lifetime. Some scholars hold that the "left behind" Jeremiah wrote these books during the period of the Babylonian exile (500s). No one knows for sure—yet.

In Romans 8: 28-30, we read, "God knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God..." Nice words from St. Paul, but sometimes they don't seem to match our own real-life stories. Yet, the liturgy calls us to believe exactly that. No matter what happens, God wants me to believe that life really is "good."

Matthew 13: 44-52—"God's kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field for years, and then accidentally found by a trespasser. The finder is ecstatic—*what a find!*—and proceeds to sell everything he owns to raise money and buy that field." Parables. *Always* parables! They sound nice, even poetic, *but*... we don't always get their full meaning.

How might we sum up in one or two words the spiritual theme of this week's readings? How about... *Divine generosity*? Or _____*(after reflecting, add your own)*____.

Reading from the First Book of Kings (3: 5, 7-12)

"There in Gibeon, God appeared to Solomon in a dream. God said, 'What can I give you? Ask.'"....

"'And now here I am. God, my God, you have made me, your servant, ruler of the kingdom in place of David my father. I'm too young for this, a mere child! I don't know the ropes, hardly know the ins and outs of this job. And here I am, set down in the middle of the people you've chosen, a great people—far too many to ever count.

"'Here's what I want. Give me a God-listening heart, so I can lead your people well, discerning the difference between good and evil. For, who on their own is capable of leading your glorious people?'

"God, the Master, was delighted with Solomon's response. And God said to him, 'Because you have asked for this and haven't grasped after a long life, or riches, or the doom of your enemies, but you have asked for the ability to lead and govern well, I'll give you what you've asked for—I'm giving you a wise and mature heart. There's never been anyone like you before; and there'll be no one after.'"

Personal Reflection

When God appeared to the young King Solomon in a dream, God offered him everyone's "dream" opportunity... just *ask* and *I'll give you whatever you want*! In her commentary on this reading in the *Bible Diary 2023*, Mary Elizabeth Sperry wrote, "The way you spend your time, energy, and money shows what really matters to you."

— *As I look back over my life, what has <u>really mattered</u> to me? It's best to reflect on what mattered most to me <u>at various stages</u> of my life—teenage, early adulthood, middle age, senior years....*

Antiphon: Psalm 119 (57, 72, 76-77)

Love of God's law: an alphabetical psalm (in the *original Hebrew*).

Lord, I love your commands.

Because you have satisfied me, God,
I promise to do everything you say.
I beg you from the bottom of my heart:
smile, be gracious to me just as you promised.
Lord, I love your commands.

My troubles all turned out for the best—
they forced me to learn from your textbook.
Truth from your mouth means more to me

than striking it rich in a gold mine.
Lord, I love your commands.

Oh, love me—and right now!—hold me tight!
just the way you promised.
Now comfort me so I can live, really live;
your revelation is the tune I dance to.
Lord, I love your commands.

Let the fast-talking tricksters be exposed as frauds;
they tried to sell me a bill of goods,
but I kept my mind fixed on your counsel.
Lord, I love your commands.

Personal Reflection

No one knows the exact author of this psalm. Most scholars agree it's one of the following giants of Old Testament faith—David, Ezra, Daniel, or Jeremiah. Each of them suffered serious difficulties in his life. The persecution and affliction of the man or woman of God is a major theme of this psalm. The psalmist makes this daring promise, "Because you have satisfied me, God, I promise to do *everything* you say." Wow!

— *Would I dare to make that promise to God today? If not... why not?*

From St. Paul's Letter to the Romans (8: 28-30)

"God knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

"God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. In him, we see the original and intended shape of our lives.

"After God decided what his children should be like, he followed it up by calling people by name. After he called them by name, he set them on a solid basis with himself. And then, after getting them established, he stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what he had begun."

Personal Reflection

In this passage, Paul outlines God's comprehensive redemptive process for the salvation of believers. This involves several interconnected divine actions. Each separate concept in this passage carries profound theological weight and reveals the depth of God's purpose in the lives of those who trust in Christ. The driving force behind God's ultimate eternal purpose is his desire to have many sons and daughters made in the likeness of his beloved Son.

"Every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good."
— *How convinced am I that everything that has ever happened to me—in the past, now in the present, or will happen in the future—was/is/will be "good for me"? On what do I base that conviction?*

The Gospel According to Matthew (13: 44-52)

[Jesus said,] "God's kingdom is *<u>like</u> a treasure* hidden in a field for years, and then accidentally found by a trespasser. The finder is ecstatic—'What a find!'—and proceeds to sell everything he owns to raise money and buy that field.

"Or God's kingdom is *<u>like</u> a jewel merchant* on the hunt for exquisite pearls. Finding one that is flawless, he immediately sells everything and buys it.



"Or God's kingdom is *<u>like</u> a fishnet* cast into the sea, catching all kinds of fish. When it is full, it is hauled onto the beach. The good fish are picked out and put in a tub; those unfit to eat are thrown away. That's how it will be when the curtain comes down on history. The angels will come and cull the bad fish and throw them in the garbage. There will be a lot of desperate complaining, but it won't do any good."

"Jesus then [asked his listeners,] 'Are you starting to get a handle on all this?'

"They answered, 'Yes.'

"He said, 'Then you see how every student well trained in God's kingdom is like the owner of a general store who can put his hands on anything you need, old or new, exactly when you need it.'"
(Image source: Shutterstock)

<u>Personal Reflection</u>

"The kingdom is *like....*" Jesus must have wished he could do better than use weak, earthbound examples to describe the divine realities he cherished in his heart of hearts. The fact is... we're stuck with building the steppingstones of our faith on imperfect words and concepts.

— *When have I wished, like Jesus' apostles, that I had a better understanding of his teachings and parables (and they had the advantage of hearing them straight from his own mouth)? On whom do I rely as my teacher(s) in learning about the life and truth of Jesus?*

For Inspirational Watching, Listening and Reading

<u>Watch</u>

Maybe it's time to revisit an old standby that never lets us down. Click on "*A Grateful Day*" and enjoy this quiet, but ever timely, 5-minute meditation, led by Brother David Steindl-Rast, OSB (Order of St. Benedict). — Visit also Gratefulness.org

Listen
We are indeed God's earthen vessels, which calls us to sing and pray along with composer/vocalist Fr. John Foley, S.J. (Jesuit), as we listen to his beautiful hymn, "Earthen Vessels."

Read
The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB (Order of St. Benedict). A "must-read" on discernment for "senior citizens" (92% 4-and-5-star reviews on Amazon).
Note: I've read this book and found it enormously helpful and inspiring for wrapping my head around the possibilities awaiting those of us who deal with our own aging process on a day-to-day basis. — AJG

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 55: 1-3 "All who are thirsty, come to the water!"
Psalm 145: 15-18 "Generous to a fault, you lavish your favor on all creatures."
Romans 8: 35, 37-39 "Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way!"
Matthew 14: 13-21 "When Jesus got the news [of John the Baptist's death], he slipped away by boat to an out-of-the-way place by himself."

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

A Fisherman's Prayer (Based on Psalm 23)
The Lord is my pilot... I shall not drift.
He lights the way across dark waters.
He guides me by the star of holiness for his name's sake.
Though I sail 'mid the thunders and tempests of life...
I shall dread no danger... for he is near me.
His love and care shelter me.
He prepares a harbor for me... in the homeland of eternity.
He anoints the waves with oil... so my ship rides calmly.
Surely, sunlight and starlight shall favor me on the voyage I take...
until I will rest in the port of my God... forever.
Amen

Source: National Fishing Remembrance Day, 2024

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from *The Message* Bible translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)

Peterson's translation of the Bible is a highly interpretive paraphrase, celebrated for its readability.

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