

Commitment. It's a foundation of our faith and a theme that runs through all of today's readings. God is famous for the commitments between Himself and his people. We see this throughout the Old Testament in the various covenants. For example, in Jeremiah a new covenant is proclaimed, "I will be their God and they shall be my people." God wants a solid relationship with his Church AND with us individually and this is only possible through the commitments we make.

Our nature is to be wary of commitments, and for good reason, since accepting too many commitments can lead us to be "overcommitted" and fail to deliver, hurting others and ourselves. Yet, when managed properly, meeting our commitments can give us a deep sense of satisfaction. For example, you commit to babysitting. This could be grandkids, nieces, nephews, or friends, while the parents go and spend much needed time alone. In the process you get to play with children, they look up to you, and at the end of the night, one of them looks into your eyes and says, "When are you coming back?" This is a small commitment with potentially great rewards. Now let's look at larger commitments.

In the first reading, Solomon is crowned King of Israel at the ripe old age of 20! This is a MAJOR commitment. His father is the great King David, and he has BIG shoes to fill. However, God is there and aware of this challenge. He talks to Solomon in a dream and offers him support saying, "Ask something of me and I will give it to you." Solomon asks for "an understanding heart" by which to rule His vast kingdom. God grants Solomon's wish and makes him SO wise and understanding that there will NEVER be anyone equal to him. This speaks to God's willingness to support us in our commitments. He combines the LOVE of a Father with the POWER of God to help us meet our commitments.

In the gospel, Jesus talks about big commitments in two parables. First, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again." Then we hear the key words, "and OUT OF JOY goes and sells ALL that he has and buys that field." It's important to recognize the joy that leads to this commitment. It's not a simple financial transaction, it's a joyful sense of "reckless abandon" in hopes of a new life based on the treasure. Jesus is offering us THIS joy as we commit to Him and secure OUR treasure in heaven.

The next parable is very similar, it involves a merchant searching for fine pearls. Unlike the unexpected discovery of treasure in the first parable, the merchant finds the pearl after a long time of seeking. Part of our commitment as Christians is to seek the Lord and his will for us.

You might be familiar with the poker game called "Texas Hold 'em." There's a point in this game when a player that's running out of chips has the opportunity to go "all in." They wager everything they have. If they win the hand, they stay in the game, but if they lose they're done. When it comes to our heavenly journey, God wants us to be "All in," without

contingencies, only complete faith in Him. But unlike the poker game, if we go "all in" for God, we are guaranteed to win!

So, what does a modern-day life of commitment look like? My spiritual Director, Deacon Stephen, recently passed away and at his funeral last week, a large flower arrangement was wrapped in a ribbon that said, "Husband, Father, Deacon." This symbol recognized the major commitments in his life. He was devoted in all these roles and as a deacon he volunteered at the diocese to help train deacons in formation. On Saturdays, our class met in an empty church to practice mock baptisms, weddings, and other liturgies.

I approached the ambo to read the gospel and instead of saying, "the Lord be with you," I said, "Peace be with you." There were a few chuckles from my classmates, but Deacon Stephen, just made a note on his clipboard and let me continue. Like Solomon, he was gifted with an "Understanding heart."

6 weeks before ordination, I attended a 5-day, silent retreat. The pressure of becoming a deacon was getting the best of me and I brought my troubles to Deacon Stephen who was assigned as my spiritual Director. The retreat was silent, except for spiritual direction meetings, and immediately I began to rattle off all my questions about difficult scenarios I would face as a deacon. Deacon Stephen, in his wise and calm voice, always gave me the same answer. "Just be humble and kind and everything will work out for the best." This has been the best advice I received in my training. Deacon Stephen also taught me meditative prayer and by the end of the retreat I was a changed man, ready to take on the challenges of deacon-hood. In hind site, I can see how God was present, as he was with Solomon, giving me an "understanding heart" in the form of Deacon Stephen.

He continued as my spiritual director after ordination, and we had our last session a few days before he passed. Though he was weak, he insisted on having our call, THIS was the kind of committed person he was.

I knew his body was in decline, so I asked him, "How is your soul?" He said, "I've been preparing for this for 25 years." I knew this included many years of early morning meditative prayer. He told me, "I have 100% faith in God," but he also admitted to having doubts about what to do if the afterlife wasn't what he expected." Then, in that cheerful voice he said, "If it was different, it could only be better than I ever imagined!" This is where I want to be when my time has come, at peace with God's plan. I see how my friend's longtime commitment to the Lord and "All in" attitude landed him in this place.

Let's take time during mass to think about our spiritual commitments. Do we approach this journey with reckless abandon as Deacon Stephen and the characters in Jesus' parables do? Are we asking for support from our Father in heaven as Solomon does? This week let's find ways to seek the joy of Christ and be an understanding heart to the world around us.