

Homily for the Seventeenth Sunday Year A

One day, a wealthy nobleman came to **St. Philip Neri** to get his spiritual guidance. The man proudly told him that *he attended Mass every day, fasted regularly, gave generously to the poor, and faithfully observed all the commandments.* After listening quietly, St. Philip did not praise him. Instead, *he simply asked him to do one unusual thing.*

He said, *"Tomorrow morning, take this basket filled with food and give it to the poor widow who is living on the other side of the city. But with one condition that on your way you need to stop and speak kindly to every person who greets you."*

The man agreed and did what was requested by St. Philip Neri. However, when he returned, he was irritated and exhausted and he complained, *"Father, I completed your task, but those people along the road kept delaying me. Beggars asked for help. Children wanted to talk. An old woman walked so slowly in front of me that I became impatient. It was impossible to reach the widow quickly."*

St. Philip looked at him gently and asked, *"My son, did you notice the widow's tears when she received the food?"* The man lowered his head and answered, *"No, Father. I was very much concerned about finishing the task."*

St. Philip smiled and said, **"That is the problem. You completed the work, but you never saw the people. You were so focused on the task that you missed the hearts God placed in your path."** The nobleman understood. He had been trying to serve God with his hands, but not yet with an understanding heart.

In today's first reading, When God invited him to ask for anything, Solomon did not ask for riches or power. He prayed, ***"Give your servant an understanding heart."*** *He knew that ruling God's people was not simply about making laws or giving orders. It was about seeing people as God sees them, understanding their joys and sorrows, and leading them with wisdom and compassion. Let me share a beautiful example from the Book of 1 Kings 3:16–28, which illustrates the gift of wisdom and good judgment.*

Two women came before King Solomon. They were both mothers, and each had given birth to a baby. One night, one woman's baby died. While the other mother was sleeping, the woman whose child had died secretly exchanged the babies. In the morning, both women claimed that the living baby belonged to them. There were no witnesses. There was no evidence. No one knew who was telling the truth.

How could Solomon decide? Instead of becoming confused, Solomon calmly said, **"Bring me a sword."** When the sword was brought, he said, **"Cut the living child into two, and give half to one and half to the other."** Of course, Solomon never intended to harm the child. He was testing the hearts of the two women. The true mother immediately cried out, **"Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Do not kill him!"** The other woman replied, **"Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two."** At that moment Solomon knew who the real mother was.

He declared, **"Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother."** The people were amazed. The Bible says, **"When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered, they stood in awe of the king, because they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice."**

This story reminds us that true wisdom is a gift from God. When Solomon became king, he did not ask God for riches, power, or a long life. Instead, he prayed for "an understanding heart" , a heart that could listen to God, discern right from wrong, and judge His people with justice and compassion. God was pleased with Solomon's request and granted him extraordinary wisdom.

As followers of Christ, we too are called to pray for an understanding heart not merely an intelligent mind, but a heart that listens to God. **An understanding heart is very different from a clever mind. Intelligence helps us solve problems, but an understanding heart helps us understand people. It listens before speaking. It seeks the truth before judging. It forgives before condemning. It looks beyond appearance and tries to understand another person's struggles, fears, and hopes.** That is why God was so pleased with Solomon's prayer. God knew that a person with an understanding heart would use every other blessing wisely.

We need that same gift of **understanding heart** today. In our families, misunderstandings often arise because we are quick to speak and slow to listen. In our workplaces and communities, we sometimes judge people without knowing the burdens they carry.

The renowned psychologist **Carl Rogers (1902–1987)** said that *one of the greatest gifts we can offer another person is to truly understand them without judging them.* He believed that when people feel genuinely understood, they become more open, hopeful, and capable of change. *That is exactly the kind of heart Solomon prayed for a heart that listens before it judges."*

Another psychologist **Daniel Goleman**, *who popularized the concept of emotional intelligence*, explains that **wisdom is not only about having a high IQ, but ability to understand understanding the feelings of others, and responding with empathy and self-control.** *Solomon asked God for precisely that kind of wisdom."*

Today let us make Solomon's prayer our own: **"Lord, give me a heart of understanding."** May God give us hearts that listen before judging, love before condemning, and seek His will above our own. If we pray for this gift each day, God will guide our decisions and make us instruments of His wisdom and peace. **Amen.**