

Today God asks Solomon in a dream to choose his own divine blessing. The dream is there to protect God from so rash and uncharacteristic a proceeding; but the dream still happens. It invites us into a particular form of meditation on our own aspiration. It is asking us to decide, not only what is most precious in our eyes, but to locate that gift in the unrealised, the future; Solomon is not asked what he most values of what he already has, but what gift he longs for the most.

Zechariah in the Temple (Luke 1) might be expected to pray realistically on the greatest day of his religious life; in fact this old man is spending his unique time in the Holy of Holies bewailing the barrenness of his wife and marriage, his childlessness - which from any realistic point of view is "past praying for". Yet that very day he will hear the response from an archangel: *your prayer has been heard*; because without suspecting it he is caught up in a divine plan which will bring the laws of heaven to earth, and transform every life it touches to a different realism.

So the question comes to us: what would you like God to give you?

Solomon actually replies realistically. He asks for the issues of his real life, the life of a reigning King, to be led by the wisdom of God. Once this prayer is granted, the life of Solomon becomes something more than it was before; instead of the series of stumbling political fudges and pragmatism it might have been, it becomes a time of treasureable points of intersection, where the wisdom of God takes flesh. He is given a heart wise and discerning, instinct with divine understanding; this will bring the Queen of Sheba and her train of spices and gifts to Jerusalem.

Today's picture is fra Angelico, of Dominic, whose wisdom and beauty of life enabled him to attract intelligent and gifted people to the path of holiness in the Dominican order. He is shown here in the grip of powerful emotion, embracing the Cross. God has answered his prayer, and led him to the wisdom of the Cross, which he is following with an open heart. What is written in his face and his tears is the compassion of a saint, compassion for humanity, and for the suffering Christ who has taken possession of his whole heart. Because when we ask God to give us his wisdom, it appears in us as the ability to live the very life God has made for us. Not, therefore, a Cinderella transformation-scene, but the uplifting of the person we really are, into the realms of Passion and Resurrection. Treasures are buried in real fields, and only when we recognise that can we have the grace to dig and find them. Most people leave this work in the land of dreams. Saints take up a spade and start where they are.

God has made us understand these mysteries by the sending of his Son. Jesus does not lead us on strange paths or far from our home. The faith that would change the course of history for all the universe was generated by a man who never travelled more than a hundred miles from his birthplace. If you have eyes to see, the gold is buried in a shallow grave, no distance at all from where you now are. All you need to do is to leave off thinking of anything else, sell all you have, and so buy the right to dig it up.