

Commentary and Study Notes: Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

OCIA Study Guide: The Heart and the Covenant

The Word Today

- **First Reading:** 1 Kings 11:4-13 (The fall of Solomon)
 - **Second Reading:** 1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1 (Doing all for the glory of God)
 - **Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 106 (The danger of idolatry)
 - **Gospel:** Mark 7:24-30 (The faith of the Syrophenician woman)
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Connecting the Word: The Integrated Life

The First Reading: The Divided Heart

Solomon began his reign with a request for wisdom, yet he ends it with a heart that is "not entirely with the Lord." His fall was not sudden but gradual, influenced by his desire to please his surroundings and maintain worldly alliances. By building "high places" for foreign idols, he allowed his heart to become compartmentalized—attempting to serve the Lord while simultaneously entertaining "strange gods."

The Second Reading: The Unified Heart

St. Paul provides the spiritual antidote to Solomon's failure. He instructs us to live a life of total integration where even the most mundane acts—eating and drinking—are done for the "glory of God."

- **Avoiding Scandal:** While Solomon's actions became a snare for an entire nation, Paul urges us to avoid being a "stumbling block."
- **Imitation:** Paul's call to "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" reminds us that the goal of the OCIA process is a total transformation of our character to mirror Jesus.

The Gospel: The Undaunted Heart

In a striking reversal, we move from the King of Israel (an "insider" who turned away) to a Syrophenician woman (an "outsider" turning toward Jesus).

- **Humble Persistence:** Though she is a Gentile, she recognizes Jesus' authority. She does not claim a right to the "bread" of the Covenant; she is humble enough to seek the "scraps."
 - **The Contrast:** While Solomon had the full wisdom of God and rejected it, this woman recognized that even a fragment of Jesus' power was enough to save her daughter.
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Key Themes

- **The Danger of "Strange Gods":** Idolatry today is rarely about statues. It is anything that turns our hearts away from God—career, ego, or comfort. This is a time to examine what might be competing with God for our primary attention.
 - **Internal vs. External Faith:** Solomon had the Temple and the Law (the externals), but his heart (the internal) wandered. True discipleship requires that our interior spiritual state matches our exterior actions.
 - **The Universal Call to Mercy:** These readings show that holiness is not a matter of status or birthright, but of the heart's orientation toward Christ. God's mercy is available to all who seek it with persistent humility.
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Discussion & Reflection Questions

1. St. Paul says, "Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." How does this change our perspective on our daily work, chores, or social interactions?
 2. Solomon's heart was turned "when he was old," suggesting that spiritual drifting can happen at any stage of life. How do we ensure that our faith remains "unreserved" over the long haul?
 3. The Syrophenician woman "fell at his feet" in a house where Jesus wanted to remain hidden. When have you felt like an "outsider" seeking God, and how did you experience His response?
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Looking Ahead: Preparation for Next Week

- **The Healing of the Senses:** As we move toward the next week, we will encounter the healing of the deaf man (Mark 7:31-37). Reflect on the "Ephphatha" ("Be

opened") rite used in the Church. How is God opening your ears to hear the Gospel differently this year?

- **The Law of Love:** In the upcoming Sunday readings, contrast the "exclusion" found in the Old Testament Law regarding lepers with the "inclusion" and "touch" of Jesus.
 - **Action Step:** Choose one routine task this week and consciously offer it "for the glory of God." Additionally, identify one "high place" or distraction in your life and ask for the grace to set it aside.
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