

Roy F. Baumeister is the Francis Eppes Professor of Psychology at Florida State University in Tallahassee. He is a social psychologist who has authored 500 publications and has written, co-written, or edited almost 30 books.

He coined the term “*ego depletion*” to describe his observation that self-control or willpower draws upon a limited pool of mental energy that can quickly get used up. He compares this as being similar to the tiredness that comes from physical exertion of a muscle. And, similar to our muscles, our self-control can be built up and strengthened over time.

In 2011, he teamed up with *New York Times* science writer John Tierney to write the book *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*.

Self-control, it seems has had its ups and downs in society. According to a statistical analysis of words used in print, “self-control” rose in popularity through the 1800s, peaked around 1920, and apparently bottomed out in the 1960s.

In a famous experiment conducted around that same time, preschoolers were presented with the agonizing choice of two things: (1) either one marshmallow ... right now, (2) or two marshmallows ... in fifteen minutes. Decades later, it turned out that the kids who held out for the two marshmallows were better adjusted adults with fewer problems, higher self-esteem, better relationships, and were overall more successful.

Today is the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. In the First Reading we hear about the young King Solomon who is presented with a choice from God ... Who says to Solomon: “*Ask [anything] of me and I will give it to you.*”

Tough choice ... yet Solomon doesn't ask for riches, long-life, or victory in battle ... but rather he asks for an understanding heart. The word here rendered as “understanding” has many layers of meaning in the original Hebrew. In addition to “understanding,” it also means “to hear” and “to listen,” “to yield,” and “to agree,” as well as “to obey” or “to be obedient.”

Because Solomon, as King of Israel didn't need to figure this all out on his own. Israel already had the Law, and more than just “hearing” or

“understanding” the Law, Solomon wanted “to be obedient” to God’s Law and to follow God’s holy Will.

This is played out in the Psalm where we hear: “*Lord, I love your commands,*” as well as that the Law is “*more precious than ... gold and silver,*” and that God’s Law is a “*delight.*”

In our continuous reading from Romans chapter 8, we hear today “*that all things work for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.*”

With apologies to the *Beatles*, this doesn't mean “*All you need is love.*” Rather, St. Paul goes on to say that we must be “*conformed to the image of*” Jesus Christ.

Finally, the parables in today’s Gospel can be viewed from two different perspectives.

In the first view, we might reflect on the question: “How much are we willing to sacrifice for the great treasure that is our salvation in Christ.”

But perhaps a better direction to view these parables in ... is to consider the great Sacrifice that the Son of God made to rescue our souls ... the treasure that is each one of each of us ... and the price of our redemption ... His saving death on the Cross for the Salvation of the World.

In God’s eyes, each one of us is a “*pearl of great price*” that God is willing to give His Only Begotten Son to win us back for Himself.

The difficulty arises when we choose our own will over God’s Will ... when we demand our way over God’s ways ... when we desire to write our own law instead of follow God’s Law.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us ask for the grace of a (1)listening, (2)understanding and (3)obedient heart ... that we might make the choice to (1)hear, (2)know, and (3)follow the Holy Will of God in our lives. May we be able to love God’s will ... may it be precious to us, and become our heart’s delight ... as we realize how valuable we are to God Who has so generously redeemed us in Christ.