

Homily July 30, 2017

Last weekend I was able to attend my 50th year high school reunion, Seattle Prep, class of 1967. The event included a Mass at Prep for all alumni who have been graduated fifty years or more. I concelibrated with a Jesuit classmate who is president of Holy Cross college in Massachusetts. Another classmate who is a permanent deacon from Colorado also assisted. In his remarks the celebrant noted that it was clear we were all older and he hopes wiser. Yes, it is true there is a phrase which speaks of "older and wiser" as seemingly connected. A greater accumulation of experiences that comes with age certainly makes greater wisdom possible, but it is no guarantee, it takes more.

This weekend's scriptures point to wisdom. That is most obvious in a first reading in which in response to the Lord's words to Solomon that he ask for something that the Lord would give him, Solomon chose Wisdom. His request for wisdom is captured in the request for an "understanding heart to judge God's people and to distinguish right from wrong." The Lord commended Solomon for requesting this as opposed to long life or material possessions. And so the Lord promised to give Solomon a heart that is wise and understanding. Indeed Solomon's reputation lead to the creation of the phrase: "the wisdom of Solomon."

As I occasionally do in speaking about a word or concept I like to look it up in the dictionary. I found a bit of variety in the answers. The secular definitions revolve around the ability y to make good choices based on experience, knowledge and good judgement. However, most definitions do not refer to an objective source of the knowledge that would develop wisdom. As with many terms or concepts in our own Christian and Catholic context the meaning becomes refined. The knowledge and experience that is identified is associated with the divine, with God. For Solomon in our first reading the understanding heart, the ability to choose was identified as a gift from God. Further, wisdom is identified as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So in those definitions of wisdom coming from a religious perspective some interaction with the divine is identified.

For the one who believes in the personal, loving, Creator God; the ability to make right choices in ultimately guided by that God. He is the one who created all things and gives them meaning and purpose. He is the one who made us in His image and knows better than anyone what will make us truly happy. He is the one who loves and relates with us so that we will have the means to develop true wisdom. I think all authentic wisdom requires some contact with the divine. That is true even if it is as vague or subtle as someone's recognition that they must go

beyond themselves for greater knowledge that directs wise choices. And God, in His own mysterious ways, somehow responds to that opening to the Other, to the Greater. So even the wise atheist may, without knowing it, be touched by God in their process of choosing. Remember God did create the person who calls themselves atheist and He loves them. Now I am not saying we should be atheists with the confidence that God will give us whatever we need anyway.

As Christians and Catholics, we do not have to settle for the vague and subtle in acquiring and developing our wisdom, our ability to make right choices. That is where the message of today's Gospel comes in, the message of the kingdom of God. The essence of the kingdom of God is living under the rule of God. Living under the rule or reign of God is living in a two fold context of experience of God's reign. First is context of a loving God who reveals the truth to guide our choices. He has instituted a Church, guided by His Holy Spirit, to help know, understand and apply the truths of revelation. Those who believe in this God and His kingdom will seek knowledge of the things of God and how they impact our lives. Such believers will look to His Church for that knowledge. Second there is the domain of care from the one who reigns. Being in God's kingdom disposes us to an array of interior touches, gifts, enriches that are a very share in the divine. It is what we call grace. In God's Kingdom He embraces us in prayer and worship. He feeds us, heals us, gives us special power to act through the sacraments.

The Gospel parables speak of the willingness to make sacrifices in order to enjoy the full benefit of being in God's kingdom. If our relationship with God and fellowship in His Church is valued as a pearl or a treasure, we will give up things in order to attain, or more importantly, sustain it our fellowship in the Body of Christ. That tells us that the blessings are not automatic. They are specifically granted by God and they must be valued, sought, discovered, welcomed and nurtured by us.

The price we pay for the pearl and treasure of our Catholic Faith is the sacrifice of time spent in worship here at Mass, daily prayer, ongoing learning. That is time we could use for other more self-indulgent activities. It is also work we engage in to participate in the ministries of the Church. It is the price we pay literally when we contribute to the Church and other charities as true stewards of God's gifts. It is the sacrifices we make when we make a moral choice consistent with God's revelation that seems to conflict with contemporary preferences.

May the God of wisdom be our God, and may our wisdom be of God.