

Homily for November 16, 2017

An angel appears at a faculty meeting and tells the dean that in return for his unselfish and exemplary behavior, the Lord will reward him with his choice of infinite wealth, wisdom or beauty. Without hesitating, the dean selects infinite wisdom.

"Done!" says the angel, and disappears in a cloud of smoke and a bolt of lightning. Now, all heads turn toward the dean, who sits surrounded by a faint halo of light. At length, one of his colleagues whispers, "Say something."

The dean looks intently at his colleagues gathered around him and says, "I should have taken the money."

Money is much easier to quantify than the gift of wisdom. And yet the Bible says that to ask for wisdom is far more prudent.

The Book of Wisdom, although written in the 2nd century BC, focuses on the Wisdom of King Solomon, who lived some 800 years earlier. He epitomized for the Jewish people what it meant to desire Wisdom above all else.

Here in chapter 7, from where this morning's Old Testament reading is taken, we hear that like our faculty dean, Solomon also prayed for Wisdom. Listen to these verses, quoted from earlier in chapter 7.

*Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me;
I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.
8 I preferred her to scepters and thrones,
and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her.
9 Neither did I liken to her any priceless gem,
because all gold is but a little sand in her sight,
and silver will be accounted as clay before her.
10 I loved her more than health and beauty,
and I chose to have her rather than light,
because her radiance never ceases.*

Why is wisdom so important? It is because those who desire wisdom will know how to live well. It is a virtue for which we have to seek and is found by the righteous and is a gift from God to those who earnestly desire it.

That wisdom is of premium value is explicitly stated in this morning's reading:

God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.

It is worth noting this verse does not say, the person who has Wisdom, but the person who lives with Wisdom. This is because wisdom is not so much something we possess as a guide who walks with us through this life. That is why repeatedly Wisdom is personified in the Old Testament using the feminine pronoun. In the Book of Proverbs she is called "Lady Wisdom".

Solomon asked for Wisdom above all else because he knew Wisdom's companionship is what he most needed in order to live well in this world.

What are Wisdom's attributes? They are enumerated in verses 22 and 23. Interestingly there are 21 attributes listed in these two verses. Think about that. 21 divided by three equals seven. Seven is the number of perfection in the Bible and 3 is a depiction of the blessed and divine Trinity. 21 is therefore the number of divine perfection and perfect wisdom.

The first seven attributes speak of the transcendent nature of wisdom and depict something of the attributes of God the Father. Wisdom is

1. Intelligent
2. holy,
3. unique
4. manifold
5. subtle,
6. mobile
7. clear

These qualities celebrate how Wisdom accompanies us with an omnipotence and omnipresence that infuses all of creation, like God the Father, the creator of heaven and earth.

The next seven attributes concentrate more on the near presence of God, as celebrated in the Incarnation. Here we are told Wisdom is

1. unpolluted
2. distinct
3. invulnerable
4. loving the good
5. keen
6. irresistible,
7. beneficent

These qualities celebrate that Wisdom is Emmanuel, God with us, and inspire us to meditate on how they are revealed in Jesus.

The final seven anticipate the Holy Spirit, our counselor and advocate and celebrate wisdom is:

1. humane,
2. steadfast
3. sure,
4. free from anxiety,
5. all-powerful
6. overseeing all,
7. penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.

Proceeding from the Father and the Son, these attributes of Wisdom inspire us to live humane, steadfast and confident lives, free from anxiety as we choose to desire to live each day with the indwelling Holy Spirit.

For like Solomon and our faculty dean those who ask for Wisdom above wealth and beauty come to know:

*26 For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of his goodness.*

Like Solomon, let us pray as he did in 1 Kings 3:

9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind that I may discern between good and evil;

May we all pray in such a way that we may increase in Wisdom as we walk through this life with Wisdom at our side remembering:

God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.