

Homily of Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B 2021

Wisdom 7:7-11; Psalm 90:12-17; Hebrews 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30

The first reading explains to us the importance of wisdom. In order to understand the importance of wisdom, we need to know what wisdom is. The author of the Book of Job describes wisdom as the fear of the Lord and avoiding evil (Job 28:28). The fear of the Lord does not mean to be afraid of God who punishes sinners. It means to have a profound love for God by knowing his word and obeying it. It means to have a holy fear of the dangers one exposes himself or herself to by turning away from God. We are lost when we depart from the presence of God. Away from God's presence, we fall into the hands of the Evil One. These dangerous situations should make any one tremble with fear.

Wisdom, the first reading says, is greater than scepter and throne. One can have scepter and throne, that is power, but have no wisdom. Such situation is disastrous.

Wisdom is greater than silver and gold. One can have silver and gold, that is material possession, but have no wisdom. Such situation brings about wastage and uselessness.

Wisdom is greater than health and comeliness. One can be healthy and handsome, or healthy and beautiful, but foolish.

Today, we are advised, "Get wisdom, get understanding! ... Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will safeguard you" (Proverbs 4:5-6). For by [wisdom] your days will be multiplied and the years of your life increased (Proverbs 9:10-11).

Despite his wealth, the young king, Solomon, prayed for wisdom: "Give your servant, therefore, a listening heart to judge your people and to distinguish between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9).

The second reading says, "Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12-13). This means that if we rely on the word of God, we will gain the wisdom that will always guide us to discern properly and to judge wisely. We must always refer to the word of God for our decisions and actions.

In the gospel, the man did nothing extra-ordinary by keeping the commandments. "You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother" (Mark 10:19) were also civil laws. He would have faced the wrath of the law if he killed, or committed adultery, or bore false witness, or defrauded, or dishonored his parents. He would not be punished for failing to do works of charity.

Therefore, Jesus challenged him to step out of his comfort zone and begin to live a more radical life of self-giving and self-sacrifice that are beyond keeping to the letter of the law. "'You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor ..., then come and follow me.' At the statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions" (Mark 10:21-22). His major problem is not that he had many possessions, but he lacked the spirit of self-giving and self-sacrifice.

"Peter began to say to him, 'We have given up everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come'" (Mark 10:28-30).

Some persons have the special calling which makes them able to, practically, give up their material possessions. Some persons are able to give up family and property in order to serve God and humanity. Many people are not called that way. But in one way or another, everyone is invited to a life of self-giving and self-sacrifice. We can respond positively to Jesus' invitation. Or, we can have excuses and go away sad. Our unwillingness to live life of self-giving and self-sacrifice are the "many possessions." Therefore, to think that Jesus' words refer only to those having material possessions is to misunderstand the message.

Therefore, let us pray that we will be able to reject the wisdom of this world which St. Paul calls foolishness before God (1 Corinthian 3:19). Let us pray that we will embrace God's wisdom that helps us to distinguish between good and evil; to do good and to avoid evil. And let us pray that we may reject the attitude of self-interest and embrace the spirit of self-giving and self-sacrifice to serve God and humanity.

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