

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [A] November 8, 2020

Our key word this Sunday is WISDOM. While it is a word that is not unfamiliar to most of us, wisdom is probably a word we don't use very often in our everyday conversations. It might also be a word we could have some difficulty in explaining to someone just what it means. Sure, we talk about "wisdom teeth" and "wise guys," but we may be unaware that WISDOM is one of the most important concepts in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially those written close to the Christian era. Even today in its Yiddish form, HUTZPAH, wisdom is a very valued quality in the Jewish community.

Wisdom is a kind of practical shrewdness. It is the result of sharp observation -- even over generations -- of the realities of everyday life. It is also guided by the written Law, the Torah, and it helps in applying the Torah to one's life in ways that lead to personal holiness. It combines common sense, sound judgement and fidelity to the Law. It is a most highly prized and sought-after quality by every devout Jew. Seven books of the Old Testament are called "Wisdom Books".

By the century that just preceded the birth of Jesus, wisdom had become so essential a quality in Hebrew spirituality that it even began to be referred to as if it were a person, as we can detect in today's First Reading from the Book of Wisdom. The characteristics of wisdom differed very little from the qualities of the WORD, or in Greek, LOGOS, in New Testament times. With very little difficulty we can substitute the word JESUS for the word WISDOM in our First Reading, and it will make perfect sense.

Our Gospel today refers to "wise virgins." They were wise in the best Old Testament sense, alert, vigilant, active and provident, ready to make the best of the situation they were in. They were recognized as such by the bridegroom, Jesus, and were rewarded by Him.

If this WISDOM is such a wonderful, important, and necessary spiritual quality, how can you and I become "wiser"? By study and by observation, and above all by prayer. Wisdom is not the same as knowledge, but it does require a database. Wisdom is not a multitude of facts, but the right

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ordering and interpreting of facts. This data is enhanced by careful watching of how people feel and act and interact. Data plus sensitivity make one streetwise, but prayer permeating and infusing these two components makes one spiritually wise. In fact, the adjectives “holy” and “wise” are often used interchangeably in everyday conversation. Prayerful persons are often presumed to be wise people -- and they usually are. Many Catholics these days are looking for recommendations on how to pray better. Three of the four Scripture readings today make reference to a time for prayer that was quite common in Old Testament and early New Testament times and then right down through the centuries even to our day, as still practiced in many contemplative monastic communities. It seems that one of the best times for prayer is what is termed “vigils” in the First Reading and “night watches” in the Responsorial Psalm. It means rising from one’s sleep in the very early hours to pray. In the silence and solitude, the dark and the quiet of these hours, many of the greatest Jewish and Christian saints discovered their best time for prayer -- praying that really endowed them with wisdom. For each of us here, this time for praying might be well worth a try, at least now and then. If someone wonders just what is going on, just tell them that you could not sleep or that the golf course tractors woke you up or that there wasn’t anything worth watching on TV, so you decided to get up from bed and pray. Note in St. Paul’s words today to the Thessalonians, in possibly the very first book of the New Testament to be written, that Paul reminds them that after death “we shall always be with the Lord.” As followers of Jesus we do not only believe that there is life after death, but that that life will be spent in the company of Jesus. We will be the wiser -- and probably the holier too even now in this life -- by keeping this promised truth ever in mind. Finally in November the month in which we especially remember our Faithful Departed, heed the words of Jesus: **STAY AWAKE AND BE READY, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW ON WHAT DAY THE LORD WILL COME FOR YOU.**

