32nd Sunday of the Year/A

Growing in Wisdom

One of the values that the Gospels present is that of sharing our goods with others. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says: "if someone asks for your tunic, give them your cloak as well" (Mt 5:40), and in another place he says, "give, and there will be gifts for you, a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap" (Lk 6:38). And in the description of the early Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles, we read that : "The faithful … owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed" (Acts 2:44).

But in today's Gospel parable, the five wise bridesmaids refuse to share their oil to the other bridesmaids, and Jesus seems to applaud them for their action. So, what is going on here? Has Jesus had a change of heart about sharing?

I think the answer is simple: There are certain things in life that we cannot give to others no matter how much we may want to. They must acquire them for ourselves. To give a simple example: I've had a driver's license for 50 years. But if you have never driven a car, I cannot give you my driving ability. You must develop that skill yourself.

At a deeper level, I cannot give you my relationship with God. You must develop your own relationship with God. Even if I could give it to you, it would not be authentic for you, because you are not me. You must develop your own relationship with God, you must cultivate your own spiritual life.

One of the most important things we need to acquire and deepen is wisdom, which one dictionary describes as "a deep understanding of human nature, things, events, situations, resulting in the ability to make good judgements and act on them. Today's first reading has a beautiful three-word description of wisdom – "understanding fully grown".

Wisdom is not something that can be taught like mathematics; it cannot be given to us gift-wrapped in a box at Christmas. It is something that we can acquire only through slow and sometimes painful reflection on experience.

The first reading says that wisdom: “is bright and does not grow dim.” I think this means that wisdom is like a light bulb that lights our way. It helps us to see. And we retain wisdom. It doesn’t dim with the passing of years, as long as our mind stays alert. It is important to appreciate that we can grow in wisdom until the day we die.

The first reading also says that wisdom “is found by those who seek her, easily discerned by those who love her.” First and foremost, we must desire wisdom, and if we truly seek wisdom, we will find her.

In summary, today’s readings are talking about personal responsibility. Each of us must take responsibility for our human life, for our spiritual life, for our relationship with God. We must seek wisdom in our lives. No one else can give us these things, no matter how greatly they love us.

We must get our own oil for our own lamps.

The biblical promise is clear: if we seek wisdom, we will find wisdom. She will manifest herself to us not only in the triumphs of our lives but also in the moments of lowliness, of failure and of error. Everything that happens in our lives can be an occasion for growing in wisdom.

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