

Sermon: Living wisely
1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14; Psalm 111; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58
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If you need wise advise for your life, where do you go? We often need wisdom, wise advise, an idea of how to live and what to do, but where to find it?

Would you go to Justin Bieber? Would you go to movie-star Denzel Washington or to Bill Gates of Microsoft? Would you ask former president of the USA, Bill Clinton? For wise advise, would you go to the rich and famous?

People seem to *give up* on wisdom in order to get power, pleasure, fame, and wealth. If you doubt this, watch almost any reality television show. Watch politics.

We have a sort of natural feeling that wisdom and being rich and famous and powerful is not a logical match. We rather believe that a person like Mother Teresa or, if you know him, Father Henri Nouen are the sort people who can make us wise. Poor and powerless people.

That this is not always true we see in the Biblical story of Solomon. He was very rich and powerful, and wise at the same time. Because he had his priorities right, at least at a certain time in his life.

1. Wisdom is desirable

Solomon was actually already rich and powerful, 'his rule was firmly established' and then God asked him what he wanted. Solomon said,

O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.

Life has so many challenges, what to do! What to choose! How to behave. Go left or right? Take action? Do nothing? Speak or keep your mouth shut? What job to take,

what spouse to pursue, when to retire? Live where? Each day we are bombarded with choices and with our lack of wisdom. What to do.

It may be difficult to define wisdom, but you generally recognize it when you encounter it in someone. Psychologists pretty much agree it involves an integration of knowledge, experience, and a deep understanding with a tolerance for the uncertainties of life as well as its ups and downs.

Wise people usually share an optimism that life's problems can be solved and they experience a certain amount of calm in facing difficult decisions. Intelligence may be necessary for wisdom, but it definitely isn't sufficient; an ability to see the big picture, a sense of proportion, and considerable introspection also contribute to its development.

Is that not what we need, this sort of wisdom? Is that not the person we want to be?

A lack of wisdom is the most devastating kind of deficit a person can face, for wisdom has the answers, the solutions, and the principles needed for life. A person is at a great disadvantage when he is void of wisdom about how to pay his bills and conquer debt; how to reverse a decline in his business; how to resolve challenges with his children, his spouse, his boss, or his coworkers; or how to make key decisions that will affect his future.

When a person lacks this kind of wisdom, it can paralyze her, because she doesn't know what to do!

James writes in his biblical letter:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Ask God for wisdom. Solomon did it, James advises it. It works.

In the time of James, the Greeks were well-known for their wisdom, and especially the Stoics were a popular wisdom-movement. They saw much suffering in the world and, following their leader Epictetus they believed that we must learn to live a life that does not allow itself to be influenced by external circumstances.

The Stoics believed that suffering is optional. And so is happiness. What you choose to think determines how you feel. It may seem "normal" and to be common to go through a lot of mind-made suffering after the initial pain that ignited the suffering. But

you don't have to, was their teaching. You can learn to gain more control over your happiness and suffering - with your mind.

This sort of 'wisdom' we also hear much of today. And this type of positive thinking, these mind-games, can sometimes help us, but this type of mental escapism from the actual problems of this world, is certainly not what I would call wisdom. It does not pay the bills, it does not solve problems with your children, it does not solve issues at work. It does not heal our diseases.

2. Wisdom is behavioral

In the bible, wisdom is not detaching you from the actual troubles of life, and it is not only a matter of opinion, or viewpoints. In the Christian life, wisdom is not only a good insight, but it is also applying that insight in daily life. It is lifestyle. There is no wisdom in an ivory tower. A wise person faces the show and knows how to deal with it.

In the case of Solomon, wisdom was directly linked with how he ruled the nation of Israel. After Solomon prayed for wisdom, God told him,

Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. [...] If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.

So, wisdom is directly linked to living a lifestyle that honors God. That is where the rubber hits the road. I can write a thousand very wise sounding statements and publish them on Facebook - but that does not make me a wise person.

In the letter of Paul to the Ephesians we learn this same lesson. He said,

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Wisdom has to do with knowing the will of God, and then doing what we know God wants. When we lack wisdom we pray for it, but this prayer must be embedded in a lifestyle of knowing God and his will, and in doing that.

It is important to see that wisdom is not based on having PhD's or being able to write interesting and intelligent books. Very simple, unlearned people can be very wise and have wisdom for living, if they know our Lord and apply the little knowledge they have, in daily life.

This general wisdom for living is usually the basis for knowing how to deal with all sorts of unexpected and tough situations. If we obey our Lord in daily life, if we love God and our neighbor, if we take Jesus Christ as our example, than we have the right ingredients for dealing with the hardships of life. Then we have the instrument to make the right practical and moral choices.

What does God want me to do in this or that situation? What is his will for me now, today? He wants us to make up our own mind as mature people; if we know him, and we walk with him, then we have a bucketful of wisdom that we can use in all circumstances we face.

3. Wisdom is relational

And we can read about this wisdom in books; we can read wise statements; we can learn from books of wise leaders. But in the end, wisdom does not become part of us by reading much. That basically gives us knowledge, information.

But it is really in daily life, in relating to people and problems, that we increase in wisdom. It is in daily life that we learn to apply what we know - and this learning process is usually quite slow - certainly in my case.

By facing problems, by dealing with people, we learn to be wise, and we often learn most from the mistakes we make.

It may even feel that we are so dumb, saying clumsy things, doing unhelpful things, but while we may feel stupid every now and then, we actually increase in wisdom. Because of our prayers, because of knowing how God wants us to live, and because we practice this behavior in the community.

Wisdom is not informational in the first place, it is relational. And the main source, is God himself. In Psalm 111 we have read:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; those who act accordingly have a good understanding; his praise endures for ever.

True wisdom is what we need for living; this wisdom is only truly received by being in relationship with God. Reverence for God is the beginning of wisdom, because it makes us submit to him as our God and Father.

He is the source of all wisdom, so ultimately, being a normal Christian and persevering in learning from God, this increases our wisdom; we grow in the ability to cope with life, with problems, with family, with work, we even grow in the ability to live in accordance with the will of God.

For God it does not matter whether you wear a red or a blue dress, or whether you wear brown shoes or black shoes. He does not care whether you do your banking with this or with that bank.

He does not care much about where you work, or what car you drive in.

Ultimately, what he cares about is that you love him and your neighbors. He cares that in wherever you work or live, love is the theme of your life.

And when we need wisdom to make this or that choice, or for solving hard issues, then that criterion of love is the ultimate one. And such love we only learn by being very close to God.

In the Gospel reading - which refers directly to our Holy Eucharist - Jesus said,

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

He in us, and we in Him - closer it cannot get. That is what he invites us to. That is where we become wise to live our life well.

Conclusion

If you choose to be intimately linked to Jesus in prayer, by faith, in accepting him in Holy Communion, in listening to his word, in being a loving person, if that is you, then you will surely increase in wisdom.

Then you will surprise yourself that throughout time, you become wiser, better able to deal with life. And God will use you to be a blessing for other people, with love and wise advice.

And that was also why God gave Solomon wisdom. Because he needed wisdom for being a blessing for the people of God. The choice to live God and his people is the wisest choice we can make, and it increases our wisdom, because that is where we learn the art of living, and the wisdom that we need.

Amen