

Opening the Word: Call to wisdom

✘ Wisdom is costly. It requires the gift of our whole self.

In the Book of Wisdom, the term “wisdom” does not simply refer to “wise” decision-making. Wisdom is instead connected to the Law, to giving one’s will entirely over to God’s will.

The Book of Wisdom describes wisdom as a woman who is “the reflection of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness” (Wis 7:26). To prefer wisdom to all the riches of the world is to prefer God above all else.

It is to prefer God as a child prefers to be in the presence of his or her beloved mother or father. It is to delight entirely and absolutely in the beloved: “Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it” (Mk 10:15).

The rich young man in the Gospel of Mark possesses partial wisdom. He has kept the Law with all his heart. He longs to inherit eternal life.

So, wisdom itself, the Word made flesh, invites him to take the next step. Jesus loves the young man, wanting him to experience the fullness of life in the kingdom of God: “‘You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me’” (Mk 10:21).

[28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Oct. 14, 2018](#)

WIS 7:7-11
PS 90:12-13, 14-15, 16-17
HEB 4:12-13
MK 10:17-30

We tend to read this text in light of a clash between the rich and the poor, a conflict between classes that are part of modern life. But Jesus is saying something more. He is inviting this man to pursue ultimate wisdom, dispossessing himself of everything except the desire to follow Christ unto the end. Seek wisdom with all one's heart. Seek the wisdom that is Jesus Christ and follow him.

The young man goes away sad because he cannot dispossess himself of everything to follow Christ. He places a limitation on what he can give, unwilling to offer his full self.

But let us not too quickly judge this rich young man. For Jesus, addressing the disciples as children, says that it is exceedingly difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mk 10:25).

Addressing the disciples as children is the key to unlocking the text. Jesus has already pointed to the child earlier in the Gospel of Mark as the icon of discipleship, of total dispossession between God's gracious love.

The book of Proverbs also frequently addresses the reader as "child," as the one who is learning to seek wisdom with all one's heart.

And the wisdom that Jesus teaches is radical dispossession. Salvation is not achieved through giving up one's riches, seeking to control God through an economy of exchange. Rather, the wisdom of Christian salvation is radical dependence on God.

There is something about the human heart that does not seek to give everything to God. Whether it's riches or grudges, we want to hang on. We create idols.

And the God of wisdom enters into recalcitrant hearts to soften them, making possible what for us is impossible: "For human beings it is impossible, but not for God" (Mk 10:27).

The task of the Christian, therefore, is to make room for God's possibility. We do this through becoming a little child, dispossessing ourselves of all self-sufficiency. Only then, through God's merciful love, will we inherit eternal life.

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