

Homily 28th Sunday Ordinary Time 2024

'My ways are not your ways and my thoughts not your thoughts.' (Isaiah 55:8-9)

"In the final analysis we have one of two choices: obediently accept our innate poverty (and abandon ourselves to God's holy will) or to become the slave of anxiety," (Johannes Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit*, 1968, p.28)

The story goes that a man was walking along a cliff top when he slipped and as he fell, he managed to grasp a branch protruding from the rocks. As he hung precariously, with nothing but the abyss below, he called out in desperation for help, 'Is anyone up there?'. A second time he yelled, 'Is anyone up there?'. Then a voice from above was heard saying, 'My son, I am The Lord your God. Trust in me and let go!' Gripped by even greater despair the man shouted, 'Is there anyone else up there?'

God's wisdom is to be desired more than health and gold according to today's First Reading from The Book of Wisdom. However, accepting the wise counsel of God is never easy: 'Forgive seventy times seven..'; 'Do not worry about tomorrow today is enough for you..'; 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...'; 'If someone strikes you on the left cheek, offer your right cheek as well.' 'If someone steals your cloak, offer your tunic as well.' Yes, God's wisdom is radically different from the world's and in many instances defies the logic of the world.

St James in today's Second Reading speaks of God's Word, or God's Wisdom, as a two-edged sword which cuts, 'where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts.' In other words, God's wisdom sets extremely challenging standards and very different from human 'wisdom' which is often comfortable and neatly packaged.

Jesus in today's Gospel challenges a young man who has accumulated great wealth, probably at the expense of his poor neighbours. He asks Jesus what more he must do to have eternal life? He claims to have already kept The Commandments but in the words of the evangelist, 'Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, 'There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But his face fell at these words, and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.' Jesus' wisdom was too challenging for this young man.

So, in our daily lives, when a family member or friend hurts us do we follow the 'wisdom' of the world and nurse a grudge for years or are we ready to always forgive no matter the cost to us and our pride? Are we consumed by the guilt of past failings and the fear of future disasters, or do we accept living in the NOW, just for today? If someone disrespects or offends us, do we return it with anger or do we instead love in return? If a poor person steals from us, do we seek human justice or try to help that person in his/her need?

The rich young man in The Gospel, chose to opt for the 'wisdom' of the world leading to unhappiness and frustration. Will we also reject Jesus' wisdom, namely to trust absolutely in him or will we too, in the words of Johannes Metz in his classic *Poverty of Spirit* prefer to lead lives of anxiety and worry?