

Homily. 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. C. 3/4 September 2022.

Knowledge about things, valuable as that may be, isn't wisdom. I'm sure we've all met very knowledgeable people who come across as having the wisdom of a dodo. Differently, as the readings indicate, wisdom is about the ability to weigh up consequences and foresee outcomes. It's about having insight into ourselves and others and measuring what we are and aren't capable of achieving. It's about what we call right judgement and discernment, confirming gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In the gospel Jesus urges us to be wise since the gift of His call and good-news means the gift of ourselves to His cause and to the living of it. The leader contemplating going to war against a stronger enemy rightly considers if their forces and resources are up to the task. If not, then they wisely seek a peace treaty. Likewise, the builder works out the cost lest they rashly start to erect a tower, and being unable to complete it, leave only an eyesore and public testament to their foolishness. In the same way, Jesus says, the gift of Himself to us means the gift of ourselves to him. Best then to discern if we can faithfully carry our cross of loving self giving for others and make a whole hearted response to God's goodness.

Fathers and Mothers, spouses and families, communities, Churches and Parishes, congregations and their leaders are, or at least ought be, schools in wisdom because all of them they are places of self giving. Yet, as we know, this hasn't been and still isn't always the case. In all of these places and situations self interest and human weakness inserts itself, sometimes gaining the upper hand.

When this happens wisdom, discernment and caring service succumbs to the forces of egotism, personal neediness and power over others. Where wisdom saves us from ourselves, straightening out our paths as the 1st reading taught, these enemies of our true selves distort us, bending us out of shape, making fools of us in dangerous, even deadly ways. For us who aim to be discerning and wise, only the way of Christ is able to guide us, the way of truth and respect, of forgiveness and self giving.

St. Paul teaches us this by his own example. In prison, getting old and frail, he had a helper who became a Christian through his witness. St. Paul sacrificed his own needs to return Onesimus to Philemon, begging him to receive him back not as a slave any more, but as something much better, a dear brother in the Lord, treating him as if he were Paul himself.

This is a model of wisdom and discernment at work, creating us anew in the image of the Lord who keeps on giving Himself for us so that we can be a people living the good-news in ways that are truly pleasing to God. Lots of things can bring us and those around us crashing down. Lacking the wisdom born of self knowledge and discerning judgement don't have to be among them unless we blindly choose to simply blunder ahead.