

**Homily - Sunday, November 12, 2023**  
**32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**



As is the case with so many of our Sunday Scripture readings, there is a common theme, an overlap, between the first reading and the Gospel passage. Both deal with “wisdom.” In the first reading, from the Book of Wisdom itself, the author presents wisdom as a strikingly attractive *woman*. Wisdom in the gospel, however, is *preparedness* and not alertness. All 10 bridesmaids fall

asleep. None of them remain alert, but five were considered wise because they were prepared.

Is anyone here willing to share some words of wisdom that were passed on to you? (Something that was said to you a long time ago and still serves you well). Here are a few words of wisdom that come from my own Irish tradition. **1) *You’ll never plough a field by turning it over in your mind.*** **2) *A new broom sweeps clean, but the old broom knows the dirty corners best.*** **3) *Always remember to forget the things that made you sad, but never forget to remember the things that made you glad. Always remember to forget the friends who proved untrue, but never forget to remember the friends who stood by you.***

For the most part we have traded in wisdom for intelligence. We no longer live in a wisdom culture. And it’s sad because it’s the thing we need most. Alexa and search engines like Google can teach you many things about making a living, but only wisdom can teach you how to make a life.

When you are introduced to a piece of wisdom, you get the feeling that you’ve been transported to a world of truth that existed 1000 years ago and that will still be true 1000 years from now. Wisdom, unlike pure intelligence, has passed the test of time. Wisdom isn’t about knowing something more; it’s about knowing something deeper. Wisdom, if you let her, will take you places intelligence doesn’t dare to go and has no access to.

Wise people do not really give you something. Instead, they model how life should be. They apprentice you into seeking what is true, what is lasting, what to pay attention to, and what will serve you well, long into the future. That's exemplified in today's gospel of the wise and foolish bridesmaids. I always thought that Jesus would want us to share with others. Isn't that what we were taught as children, to share? And isn't sharing particularly commendable when you encounter someone in need? Yet, Jesus' parable is about five women who have oil but are not willing to share it with five others who are in need. So much for sharing.

One interpretation is that there are some things you simply can't give to someone else. The oil, in the parable, is like wisdom. You can't give someone wisdom, even if you wanted to. You can only model it. In that sense, it's like water that you put out for the thirsty, but you can't control whether they will drink it. On his deathbed, the great artist, Rembrandt, couldn't give his talent for painting to another painter. But, while he was alive, he could model good habits, creativity, and dedication to the trade. The gift of art was something he could not pass on. Similarly, a mechanic cannot hand over, in a handbook, how to fix cars. But hang around him, day in and day out, and you will learn through osmosis things a manual could never teach you. In the same vein the wise bridesmaids could not give their oil away, but they could model for the foolish ones what preparedness looks like. Expect the unexpected is another way of saying, "be prepared."

We are always mentored into the world of wisdom; we never get there alone. A true wisdom figure is someone who can overcome duality in their own life. The dualistic mind has a preference for knowing things by comparison. The price we pay for our dualistic mind is that one side of the comparison is always idealized and the other side demonized. A wise person, however, says, "There is some truth on this side, and there is some truth on the other side. Nobody is totally right all the time, and nobody is totally wrong all the time." The more you are able to hold opposites, contradictions, and paradoxes together, the greater is the capacity of your soul.

About 15 years ago, I returned to N.Y.C. to see some plays and musicals. After buying my ticket for a particular show, I had quite a few hours to kill before showtime. So, I went into McDonald's, in Times Square, for lunch. I was in no rush,

so I did a little people watching while I ate. A few tables over, I saw a grandfather and his grandson, who was probably 10 years old, having lunch together. I was too far away to pick up their conversation, but I couldn't help but see how much they were enjoying each other's company. I don't know which of the two was making the other laugh more. It was a sheer delight to see a grandparent and a grandchild, both with mischief written all over their faces, savoring each other's presence. Talk about the real presence, and there wasn't a tabernacle anywhere around. I walked out of McDonald's and headed north on Broadway in the direction of Central Park leaving these two behind. I got two blocks away, whistling a happy tune, minding my own business, when all of a sudden swoosh, something brushed up against me from behind, startled me, and it kept going. My heart was in my throat, and I quickly reached to see if my wallet was still on me. When I looked up, I recognized what had happened. It was the 10-year-old boy from the restaurant on roller blades. He goosed me. He got to the top of the street, pivoted, and stared back at me with the biggest grin as if to say, "I got you, and I got you really good!" He really did get me. Looking down from his devilish grin, I noticed he only had one leg. Inwardly, I was cheering him on. I wanted to yell at him, "Good for you. Go forth and goose as many people as you can in Central Park. You made my day." Off he went, with a smile from ear to ear, searching for his next victim.

In the world of wisdom, you are always formed by a mentor through osmosis. This kid got his joy by hanging out with his joyful grandfather. I should have known these two were up to no good in McDonald's. His grandfather was probably a veteran New York City gooser.

Wisdom figures have large souls, because they are able to overcome duality and hold even contradictions and paradoxes within themselves. As a 10-year-old boy, he held the disappointment of having one leg in the same soul with the joy of a 10-year-old boy who loved goosing people and bringing joy to anyone he could. Is your soul large enough, like this boy's was, to carry both disappointment and joy at the same time? Can you be like John the Baptist, who ate both wild locusts and honey, the tragedy of life and the sweetness of life? Can you trust that the good times and the struggles of life both have something valuable to teach you? If so, you have more than enough oil in your lamp, and you are a wisdom figure.

My encounter with this boy reminds me that wisdom will always emerge from an encounter with Jesus. But wisdom will never be the substitute for the actual encounter. It's not the wisdom itself that's important, but the wisdom as it shapes the raw material of your life. If wisdom doesn't shape the raw material of our lives, then it's just platitudes.

Platitudes are just plain burgers. True wisdom is a Happy Meal supersized with joy you never saw coming. ***Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.***

*Fr. Phil*