

23rd Sunday, Year C, St. Xavier's Church, Wisdom 9:13-18b; Psalm 90:3-6, 12-14, 17; Philippians 9b-10:12-17; Luke 14:25-33.

Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, in our daily lives we can sometimes be overwhelmed, taken over by our work or the pleasures that life offers us. But are we free to do what God asks of us? Do we have time and space in our minds and hearts to meet God? At the beginning of this celebration, let us lay before God everything that stands between Him and us, so that there may be room for Him in our hearts again.

Dear brothers and sisters, today we hear about doubt and wisdom. One does not necessarily exclude the other. It is human to doubt sometimes. 'The thoughts of mortals are unsure,' says the Book of Wisdom. Often, uncertainty arises from everyday concerns about our health, our children, our relationships, or our possessions. The Book of Wisdom puts it this way: 'our earthly bondage hinders the agile mind.' Yet these worries can be very real. But we hear in that same reading that we do not have to remain stuck in worry and uncertainty. It is God himself who gives us insight, says the Book of Wisdom. We can understand this better by first looking at small examples. When you are working on a particular problem, for example, looking for a word in a crossword puzzle, it may suddenly occur to you. Or, when you look at a work of art, you may suddenly understand what the painter or sculptor probably wanted to express with it. With such insight, it quickly becomes clear that this is being given to you.

The same applies to bigger things. When a writer is inspired to write a book, we also say: when he has the spirit, he is capable of great things. And inventors can often remember the moment when they first had their idea.

The first reading makes it clear to us that God sends us his Holy Spirit, through whom we can gradually come to know the will of God. This is not easy, discernment is needed, in order to walk in the right paths and be saved.

How can we acquire this wisdom? First of all, through prayer. 'I prayed, and insight was given to me; I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me,' says the author of the Book of Wisdom. In prayer, we can also bring very personal matters before the Lord, trusting that He knows who we are and what we need.

As you probably know, I am a Jesuit, this weekend exactly 25 years. Every Jesuit who begins religious life does a 30-day retreat in the first year. Such a retreat means a quiet time, with a spiritual director with whom you have a conversation every day. A

wonderful time! As Jesuits, we are accustomed to going on retreat for eight days every year.

The founder of the Jesuit order, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, strongly emphasises that in our silent prayers we should ask the Lord for what we desire. We can even present our desires to Jesus as we would to a friend. The best attitude to have in this regard could be described as one of spiritual poverty. This means that we do not seek wealth or honour, because these things can actually keep us away from God. In the Gospel, we also heard that a disciple of Jesus detaches himself from what he possesses. This does not always have to mean poverty in a material sense, but above all an attitude of humility towards God.

It is therefore also important, as we heard from the man who wanted to build a tower, that our desires are realistic, and even holy. This means that we dare to look honestly at ourselves to see what is possible and what is not. Another aspect of this is that we are not stubborn, thinking that we can do it all ourselves. This also applies to our prayer life. When we take our prayer seriously, it can sometimes be very helpful to discuss with someone else how that actually works. That other person could be your partner, a good friend, or a spiritual guide. They can help you to objectify your own desires.

An indispensable aid to our prayer is, of course, Holy Scripture, the source par excellence. We can continue to read it throughout our lives and never tire of it.

When we are given insight, and when we pray for the Holy Spirit, this does not mean that our difficulties will disappear. We may also encounter misunderstanding or even great resistance. This is why Jesus says that unless someone takes up his cross and follows Him, they cannot be his disciple. Taking up your cross can mean accepting that there are certain things you cannot do or can no longer do because of old age or illness. But it can also mean that you are willing to take on the burdens of others. Jesus did the same by carrying his cross to Golgotha, taking upon himself the sins of the people and offering them a way to forgiveness and liberation. The love He showed us was not calculating, unlike the man who wanted to build the tower. Jesus' love is boundless, without conditions. Let us therefore be willing to accept that love by accepting his offer. Amen.

Intercessions

Pr.: Let us pray, trusting in our union with the Lord and present to Him everything that is in our hearts:

R.: For the leaders of the Church and for all believers: that they may dare to follow Jesus by taking up their cross, letting go of secondary matters and placing their trust in Him alone. (Let us pray)

R.: For all those in positions of power throughout the world: that they may not be blinded by the pursuit of money and power; that they may commit themselves to the welfare of all those entrusted to their care. (Let us pray)

R.: For those who are in need, for all those who are struggling financially: that they may have the courage to talk to others about their problems and ask for help; that they may meet people who can truly support them. (Let us pray)

R.: For ourselves: that we may remain close to Jesus through prayer, through receiving the sacraments and through the support of each other as a community, so that our hearts may be open to God and to our neighbours. (Let us pray)

R.: For the intentions of this eucharist:

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And a moment in silence for what we keep in our hearts:

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Pr.: Gracious God, we owe everything we have and are to You. You are the giver of all that exists. Grant that we may live with grateful hearts and remain connected to You and to one another through mutual love. Hear our prayer, Lord, and give us what we need to be sincere disciples of your Son. We ask this through Christ our Lord.