

28th SUNDAY OF YEAR B

It was the 18th century biologist Carl Linnaeus who gave us human beings the binomial taxonomic name *Homo sapiens*. In so far as what we know today we are the only currently existing sub-species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Neanderthals and others are extinct. *Sapiens* comes from a Latin root meaning taste, savor. *Sapientia* from the same root is usually translated as wisdom, a word with Anglo-Saxon roots, and is understood as a deep understanding of created reality, especially the ways and motives of God and man.

In most civilized cultures, wisdom is highly praised, passed on from generation to generation, something to treasure. Seeing someone with shrewdness and insightful know-how, we may describe them as street-wise, money-wise, or health-wise. I think we can rightly call the saints God-wise. Wisdom is often associated with age, with gray hair. There are exceptions as St. Benedict teaches in chapter 3 of the Rule on summoning brothers for counsel. He wrote: "The reason why we have said all should be called for counsel is that the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger." In Chapter 63 on Community Rank he makes it clear that age does not automatically determine rank. "Remember that Samuel and Daniel were still boys when they judged their elders."

There are seven books of the Old Testament classified as Wisdom Literature, the main ones being the Psalms, Proverbs, the Books of Wisdom and Sirach. In them not a few times we read: "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." That is not servile fear, but open-mouthed awe and dutiful reverence for the majesty and sovereignty of the all holy Creator-God. From the book of Isaiah we are told the first of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is wisdom. When Solomon ascended to the throne of his father King David, the Lord God told him to ask for anything he wanted. As we heard in the first reading the king asked for wisdom. God was pleased that he did not ask for the destruction of his enemies and the like; so he gave him the gift of wisdom along with fame and riches that became proverbial. But the reality is that in his old age he became foolish. He began to offer sacrifices to the gods of his foreign wives.

It is the sad thing that we *Homines sapiens sapiens* are not always wise in dealing with the reality of our human situation, our mortality and accountability to our neighbor and our Maker in the world we find ourselves in. We heard Jesus telling his disciples, and any who will listen to him, that it is hard for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. Why? Because love of riches can give a false sense of security and control over immediate needs and comforts, and nest egg for the future. How easily that castle of cards is blown away by market crashes, losses from natural disasters, wars, sicknesses and random accidents.

Human experience and handed-down knowledge can help make us human-wise. God's revelation, especially its fullness through the works and teachings of Jesus help us to be God-wise. For we have a greater than Solomon here. We heard in the reading from the letter to the Hebrews: "the word of God [is] able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart." Jesus is that Word of God incarnate and he knows of what we are made.

St. Paul has a lot to say about human so-called wisdom and divine folly. Writing to the Corinthians, he questions: “Where is the wise man to be found? ... Where is the master of worldly argument? Has not God turned the wisdom of this world into folly? Since in God’s wisdom the world did not come to know him through “wisdom”, it pleased God to save those who believe through the absurdity of the preaching of the gospel. Yes, Jews demand signs and Greeks look for “wisdom,” but we preach Christ crucified – a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles; but to those who are called...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s folly is wiser than men, and his weakness more powerful than men.” (I Cor 1:20 ff)

Jesus’ teaching turns the world’s values upside down. Lose your life, if you want to get a real life. Don’t seek revenge; forgive your enemies. Take up your cross. Be my witnesses even to the point of shedding your blood. The one who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me. If you marry, do not divorce. Give up marriage with its companionship and possibilities of co-creating new life. Be eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom.

Just like the disciples who were amazed and challenged by his words, so are all of us. If earthly life requires all of these things contrary to our natural instincts in order to enter the narrow door to eternal life to the kingdom of God, then who can be saved? By mere human effort it is impossible. However, we are not left to our own devices. God has given us his Son as our Redeemer and our Savior. When he accomplished his mission on earth, he and the Father poured their Spirit into our hearts so that we are guided into all truth and even address the awesome, all-knowing, all-powerful God as “Abba, Father”, Our Father.

What is impossible for man is made possible by God gracious gifts and favor. Let us be deeply grateful, untiringly thankful for such present blessings and future promises. As we return to the altar, Jesus invites us to join him in rendering perfect praise and sacrifice to our loving God. Then by receiving him in communion we begin already to share in eternal life. Let me close with last Sunday’s post communion prayer which says precisely what we are doing in faith here and now.

Let us pray: “Grant us Almighty God that we may be refreshed and nourished by the sacrament which we... receive; so as to be transformed into what we consume.” Put on the mind of Christ, who with the Father and the Spirit, deserves our adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and obedience now and in the world to come. Amen