

The 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time November 8, 2020

What does it mean when we call someone a “fool”? Usually those we call “fools” are ones who have no common sense. They make poor judgments because they don’t think before they act. Fools usually act out of their feelings rather than their reason. They cannot control their emotions and so they are always flying off the handle. There is nothing a fool likes to do better than to show how ignorant they are by making rude comments. They are quick to offend others but can’t take criticism themselves. A fool is someone you want to stay far away from because not only do they get themselves into trouble, but they find a way to get everyone around them into trouble as well.

The Old Testament, has a different definition for who the fool is. In the Hebrew Scriptures, fools are the ones who live their lives without taking God and His word into account. In Psalm 14 we read, “The fool says in his heart ‘there is no God’” (Ps 14:1). They might believe in God but they act as if He doesn’t exist. They make their decisions without any consideration for God’s word. Fools actually believe that they know better than God what is good for them. They think they have a better plan than God. What could be more foolish than that?

So, what happens to the fool, according to the Old Testament? The Bible tells us that they are headed for ruin. Because they take no heed of God, none of their plans will come to completion. They may have some success, and for a time it might seem as though they know what they’re doing, but, eventually, they will fail. Whatever they try to build with their lives ultimately falls apart because it is not built on the foundation of God’s lasting truth.

The wise person is very different from the fool. In the Old Testament, the wise are those who put God and His word at the center of their lives. The Book of Proverbs teaches us that, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10). The wise person has a healthy respect - a fear - of God. The wise person realizes that God’s plan is better than theirs, that God’s ways are better than their ways, and that the path God has marked out for them is more secure than any plan they could have marked out for themselves. People who are wise realize that God is God and that they are not God. To them, God is not someone to struggle with and fight against. They do not see Him as an enemy or competitor but as a father and a friend.

Because of this, the Bible tells us that the wise prosper in everything they do. Psalm 1 compares the wise person to a tree that is planted near a running stream with full, green leaves that bear abundant fruit. Because God is at the center of everything they do, they will have a full and happy life. Like the fool, they will face challenges and difficulties in their life. But, unlike the fool, they will rely on God to get them through it and they will grow stronger because of it.

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The beautiful thing is that wisdom is a virtue that God wants to give everyone. We don't have to be geniuses to receive God's wisdom. We don't need college degrees or advanced education. All we need to do is to desire it. Today's first reading assures us, "she [wisdom] is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her."

We grow in wisdom through prayer. When we sit quietly in God's presence, He moves our hearts and minds to desire Him even more, and we gain wisdom as a result. Also, God's word is a treasury of wisdom. By reading the Bible, we absorb the wisdom of God and it shapes our thinking and our decisions. Wisdom is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we receive at Confirmation. By following the Holy Spirit's lead, we become wiser as a result. So wisdom is not elusive, but something that is within the reach of all those who love God and seek to know Him.

Jesus adds another wrinkle to this in today's gospel. The wise person not only seeks God but waits for Him. They are prepared for the long haul and ready to do whatever it takes to be there when God finally arrives. They hope in the Lord with all their heart and has no doubt that He will come again. No matter how long it takes, they will be there ready to welcome God.

We are all here today like the wise and foolish virgins in today's gospel. Some of us are prepared for what God is offering us in this Mass and some of us are not so prepared.

So, who are the wise ones who are prepared? They are the ones who have read through the readings for Mass before coming to church. They have spent time filling their lamps with the oil of God's word so that, when it is proclaimed at Mass, they would be able to hear it in all its richness. Because they prepared themselves ahead of time, God's word in all its wisdom can enter them, form their hearts and change their lives.

The wise among us also prepared themselves by making an examination of conscience. They have looked back over the past week and have recognized when they did not live up to the demands of God's word. They see when they failed to love their neighbor or help someone in need. They realize how their words may have hurt others. If their sins were especially grave, they made sure they went to confession before Mass. Because of that, they can offer up to God the places in their lives where they need healing. God's wisdom can enter them more fully as a result.

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Unlike the foolish virgins in today's gospel, we have another opportunity to fill up our lamps before God's return in glory. We can turn aside from our foolish ways and put God at the center of our lives. We can give up the delusion that we know better than God and turn to Him for the guidance and direction we need in life. We can also take time right now to focus on Jesus - the One who gives Himself to us in the Eucharist. Are we prepared to welcome Him into our hearts? Do we desire Him enough to do whatever it takes to make sure we are prepared? If we are, then we are truly wise and will know the joy of being part of the Supper of the Lamb which God prepares for all those who seek Him.