

## Commentary to the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Seventeenth Sunday: Wisdom This Sunday's readings begin Solomon's request for Wisdom and conclude with a summation of the Lord's teaching on the parables.

At the conclusion of the Dissertation on the parables in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus states: Every scribe of the Kingdom is like the head of the household who brings out from his storeroom both the new and the old. Jesus spoke to the Jewish people, well versed in Hebrew scripture. The Gospel of Matthew was pointed towards Jewish Christians. Jesus is not replacing what we call the Old Testament with the New Testament. He is combining the best of the Hebrew Scriptures with the New Way, the Kingdom of God. The wise one, the scribe of the Kingdom, therefore, knows how to use what is old and what is new.

It takes wisdom to understand how to deal with the past and the present. There are many people who idealize the past and want to return to life as it was, for example, in the fifties. There are many others who want to reject the past and concentrate only on the advancements of modern life. So, in the area of family life, the first group wants to re-create the Cleaver Family, and the second group sees a value in the Modern Family. In the area of faith, the first group wants to return to the pre-Vatican Church and the second group wants a Church without a visible structure.

How do we best deal with the past and the present? I believe that it was the Russian poet/philosopher, Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko, who had this insight: He said that the trick to handling the past is to know what should be brought with us and what should be left behind. That is wisdom. For

example, within the Church, we should bring with us from the past devotion to the sacraments, to the Mother of God, the importance of the Catholic Family, firm standards of morality, a determination to practice the faith.

What should be left behind would include the subordination of the laity, the repression of the roles of women in the faith, the glorification of the clergy, and the diminishing of the study of Sacred Scripture. Perhaps a good example would be how we utilize the writings of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, the great teacher of the middle of the last century whose weekly program, *Life is Worth Living*, out drew even the comedian Milton Berle. So many of Bishop Sheen's teachings contain a profound spirituality. Here at St. Ignatius we use his meditations on the Seven Last Words in the Teen presentation of our Good Friday Evening Prayer, the Journey to the Cross. At the same time, Bishop Sheen spoke at a time when the clergy tended to patronize the people and held as suspect anything that did not originate from a bishop or priest.

The laity was seen as too simple to study and learn from scripture. I remember attending a conference given by Bishop Sheen for the laity of Paterson, New Jersey, when the Bishop, God bless him, told the people not to read the Old Testament, it would just confuse them. He was speaking as a person of his time, not our time. My point is that we need to know what to bring with us from the past and what to leave behind. That is wisdom. We should also apply this to our lives.

All of us can look back on our lives and note numerous positive and multiple negative aspects of our lives. We have got to stop persecuting ourselves by dwelling on the negatives of our past. When we do this, we are bringing the past into the present. Leave it in the past. At the same time, it is not pride to recognize the gifts we have shown and to be sure that we utilize our potential, or make our talents real in the present. So, for example, a person went through a period of life when he or she behaved immorally. Then, perhaps due to a religious experience most likely occasioned by love, that person changed his or her lifestyle and became the person he or she is now. He or she said, I am getting married now. I am having a child now.

I need to be a person of integrity. And that person grew up spiritually determined to live a new, dedicated Christian lifestyle. It would be so wrong for that person or any of us to dwell on the mistakes of the past. If sin was involved, well, remember the sacrament of reconciliation is given to us to leave the past in the past and to concentrate on the present. On the positive side, a person can look at his or her past and remember how volunteer work for the poor or sick was so important during high school or college. Perhaps, he or she might remember how others could not deal with a dying person, but how he or she was able to sit down and chat with the sick person and see that person, not the person's sickness.

Reflecting on this, the person says, Hey, I can do this. And it is important for me to use this gift God gave me. I'm going to volunteer as an AIDS buddy or as a hospice companion.? This is looking at the past and bringing the best with us to the present. You married folks really should do this when considering your relationship. If you are human beings, then you have made mistakes. Leave them in the past. You have also been supportive and caring.

Bring this into your present. Sometimes, a couple will see me that is having a crisis in their marriage. Often, I'll mention that the present situation needs to be dealt with, but don' let this situation cause you to overlook all the good you have done for each other and the growth you have achieved as a loving couple. Some people are too quick to give up on marriage and end up realizing what they have lost only after it is too late. Solomon prayed for wisdom. Not a bad idea. It takes wisdom to combat the challenges of life. It takes wisdom to be a good parent, a good husband, a good wife, a good priest, a good person. It takes wisdom to discern what needs to be brought into the present and what needs to be left in the past. Where do we get this wisdom? The same place that Solomon received his.