

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Before I could begin my doctoral studies in the 1980s, I had to write a 50-page qualifying paper. Many students in my situation wrote even longer papers to show off their abilities, but I believed I could say a lot in fewer words. I conducted my research, wrote my paper and gave it to the professor. It was 51 pages long, including footnotes; 55 if you count the bibliography. My paper qualified, but my professor thought it was a mediocre attempt. Before we set to work on the doctorate, he told me what was bothering him about my approach to academic life. He said, "I don't know if you are curious enough to become a doctor." I was offended by that remark, but he was probably right. I could have done more.

Lack of curiosity is one obstacle to gaining wisdom. Sometimes it is the flip side of having curiosity for the wrong things. Some people pass their time with the curiosities of pornography, gambling or drugs. The same time can be spent pursuing better forms of wisdom.

Another obstacle to gaining wisdom is the fear of understanding another point of view. We are often so comfortable with our own opinions that we don't want to consider someone else's. We build our lives on certain tenets; compromising them would shake our foundations. Politics makes a clear example: Whether you are blue or red, you probably think that people of the other party have it all wrong. We often won't even listen to another argument, much less try to understand it. These are two separate steps: letting someone explain their views, and then trying to appreciate their logic. Sometimes we do that while maintaining our own views, and sometimes new understanding leads us to change our opinions. That possibility is scary, and it may prevent us from obtaining wisdom, even when it is within reach.

Wisdom is all around us. You don't have to be a student to pursue it. Today's first reading from the Book of Wisdom puts it this way: Wisdom "is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of their desire." Goodness, she is like a lover anxious to reveal herself, anticipating one's desire, and happy to fulfill it. The passage goes on: "Whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed, for he shall find her sitting by his gate." Wisdom is like a web site; if you search, you will find her. She's been waiting for you.

But often we are like the foolish virgins in the gospel: preoccupied with play, not careful preparations; focused on the present, not on the future; not taking advantage of wisdom even when she is right there waiting for us.

Wisdom is one of the last books written for the Old Testament. It foreshadows Jesus Christ, the Son of God who is anxious to come, enter our lives, and guide our days. We are thirsty for a relationship with him; he wants it even more. The simplest access to the wisdom of Christ is through the bible and prayer. He is as close to us as a book, a cel phone, or a stroll on the street. Christ just asks for time. Everyone is busy. No one has time for new relationships. But we usually make time once we have a priority. There are obstacles to wisdom: fear of change, lack of curiosity, misplaced curiosity. Jesus Christ is God's wisdom. if you watch for him, you will find him sitting at your gate.