

Every graduation season I think back to my last day in school. I had finished my final exams and was taking a walk on the seminary campus. For years I had studied hard in order to become a priest. Now I was done. I was done with school. I thought to myself, "This is what it feels like to know everything you have to know to become a priest." It was not a comforting feeling. I knew enough to get started, but I sure didn't know everything, and I still don't. Today, whenever people ask me how long I have been a priest, I give the same reply, just changing the number: "Thirty-one years. I'm starting to get the hang of it."

Wisdom is something we gain with time. Getting educated is one thing; getting wise is something else. You can finish your formal education, but you never finish getting wise. Graduates don't have one thing many employers want: experience. Employers want your degree, but they want something more. They want wisdom.

The Old Testament has a number of books often called the wisdom literature. One is the book from which we hear today's first reading, Proverbs. As you would expect, most of the Book of Proverbs collects famous sayings, such as "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." It dips into the well of wisdom and hands it to the next generation. Today's first reading says that wisdom was there before God made the world – before there were depths and springs, before the mountains and clods of earth, before the oceans and the stars. Before God created anything, wisdom was there, at God's side.

We hear this passage on Trinity Sunday because of traditions that equate this wisdom either with the Holy Spirit or with Jesus Christ, whom Saint Paul called the Wisdom of God. The beginning of John's gospel puts it this way: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Then John says, "the Word became flesh and dwelled among us." One way of thinking about the Holy Spirit or about Christ is that he is God's wisdom, present from before the beginning, the one who helped order the world the way it is. When we follow Christ or receive the Holy Spirit, we partake in God's wisdom from its very source.

Everybody would like to be wise – to have just the right thing to say when we are put on the spot, to pass exams and impress teachers, to know how to advise the people we love who come to us with problems, and to handle global issues like world peace, the end of hunger, and stopping the flow of oil from the Gulf of Mexico. World events and personal events remind us time and again that we may be well educated, but we are not yet fully wise. Still, we are getting there. In Christ we come to know how and why God made us. We get the hang of it – we do not know it all. Incomplete knowledge is the very place where faith lives. Even people who say they have no faith face the mysteries of life and death, trust and love, right and wrong. Some of them confuse lack of wisdom with lack of faith. It's not that they don't believe things; they just dwell in a deeper mystery. In faith we draw closer to the source of wisdom. We are never fully wise, but we are getting there by faith.