

As I sat to write this sermon for today, I prayed I had words of wisdom to share about all those passages of the Scriptures about wisdom...and it made me smile because, as I was doing so, asking for words of wisdom, I realized that maybe, what Solomon is asking God is not that extraordinary. Don't get me wrong, it is always good to have leaders of the people willing to realize their shortcomings and how challenging it is to govern and how they need to pray to be given the ability to discern what they need to do! Yet, what I realized is that, although this passage of the Bible is well-known, asking for wisdom is not only a king's prayer. I think Solomon's request is something we can all relate to, because most of us, no matter our age or our life style, we also look for wisdom in many ways.

Have you ever prayed that God could tell you exactly the right thing to do? I certainly did that, many times. It can happen when you go through a major change of life. I recently had a conversation with a young man who was wondering if he should start working or continue his studies. A few days after, I had another conversation with an elder lady who was wondering if it was time for her to move to assisted living. Both of them wished God could guide them to know what to do. Yet, our quest for guidance can happen in very little things as well. Maybe it happened to you this past week and you didn't even realize it. You were sitting with a friend who was feeling sad, and you looked into your heart to find something comforting to say. Or a child asked you a question about faith, and you wished you knew how to answer. Or maybe somebody was rude to you or said hurtful things, and you wondered how to respond to that. You were looking for wisdom.

We often hear religious people talk about "control" and how in our society we have become controlling people – "control freaks" – and they say that because of that, because we so much want to be in charge, it has become very hard for us to surrender to God, "To let Jesus takes the wheel" or to "Let go and to let God". But my experience is that actually we would often be happy with letting God make decisions for us. Most of the time, we turn to God in prayer so God would tell us what to do because, yes of course we are preoccupied with our own will and our own whims, but mostly, we are just afraid to make mistakes, to hurt ourselves or to hurt others, and we think that if God were in charge none of this would happen!

Yet today the readings give us a different perspective on the question than just “surrendering” to God’s will. Solomon does not ask God to take over because he is such a terrible person, but realizing his weakness, what he does is to ask God to guide him, to walk with him. And God accepts the offer. God is even pleased with it. God does not seem so preoccupied with sovereignty than he enjoys partnership. Solomon does not forgo of his responsibilities, he will still lead the people – he just does not want to do it on his own. With God, Solomon wants to get the ability to listen and to discern, and this is what I think make his prayer really remarkable.

In faith, we can be tempted to look for ready made answers. To believe that good and evil are two entities that we can easily separate and identify. We can be tempted to convince ourselves that the law of God is a set of rules we can find in the Bible. We can be tempted to imagine that God has a plan for us written in the sky that we only need to figure out somehow, and once we’ve done all that then well, we will be wise and know God’s ways and life won’t have many surprises in store for us anymore.

Yet it’s often more complicated and it can be scary to realize that. I think this is what happens to Solomon. In our lectionary, a good chunk of the first reading has been cut off, which is a shame, because if we had read it, we would have learned that one of the first actions of Solomon as a king was to get rid of his father David’s enemies, and I don’t know but I have a sense that Solomon woke up from this bloodbath a little afraid, realizing perhaps that indeed, he did not know the difference between good and evil. At first, Solomon was probably convinced he was doing good by obeying to his father’s last instructions to get rid of his enemies. But once he had killed all the men, he probably did not feel so good about himself and started to question what he took for granted. It’s a step we all take in life (hopefully in less dramatic ways!) when we realize that our parents aren’t that perfect, and we cannot follow blindly what they instructed us to do. In the same way later, there are always moments when we also realize that our own lives are full of detours and our hearts full of contradictions. We cannot apply a ready made set of rules to our lives, because each one of us is unique, and so we need to be guided each step along the way.

And I think this is really what the Bible is about. It is not meant to be a collection of righteous instructions that would just replace wrong instructions. It's about growing into wisdom through freedom and partnership with God. The Bible first tells us the stories of unique men and women who, like Solomon, in spite of their moral ambiguities, chose to walk with God. And those stories are meant to mirror our own stories to make us think deeply about our lives and help us to learn how to listen and to discern by receiving the Holy Spirit Paul mentions when he invites the Ephesians to become wise.

So how do we become wise?

Well, I don't think it means we need to become very smart. Actually, I am not sure wisdom has a lot to do with being clever. Because there are a lot of smart people in the world who, although they are bright, when it comes to their own lives, have no idea what's happening to them. They think fast and logical, but they are not aware of what they feel, they don't question why they believe what they believe. On the other end, I think that what the Bible teaches us is that wisdom is more like a quality of presence and attentiveness to our own lives, to the lives of others and, of course, to the life of God. It's sort of a spiritual sensitivity and it requires to slow down. I was raised in city but my father grew up on a farm and he used to tell me that on the farm, maybe people were not that educated, but they had wisdom because their survival depended on their attentiveness, to the cattle, to the crops, to the weather. They always had to be fully aware of their surroundings.

In the same way, our spiritual survival depends on our attentiveness to God. And what Jesus tells us in the Gospel, by reminding us that his flesh and blood is our food and drink, is that God is not an abstract God we can find by searching our minds or by reading books or by sitting at church, but God is present by what God does in our lives. To me, I even hear Jesus saying that in fact, God is our own lives or, if you prefer that God is as close as our own lives, as real as bread in our stomachs and blood in our veins. Actually, Jesus literally invites us to "chew" on his flesh and blood. In the original Greek, Jesus does not use the regular word to say "eat" although it's the common translation.

This passage seems very hard to understand until we realize that Jesus uses the words of the Ecclesiasticus, where “Wisdom” invites people to her banquet. As we walk with God, as we learn to see God present in our humanity, we may not have life figured out but we become wiser as our mortal lives open up to the dimension of eternal life, which is not necessarily life after death, it’s about learning how God “abides in us and we abide in God” here and now. We see our lives through the lens of eternity. This is what we are called to do as individuals but also as a church. We listen together, and we discern with one another the Spirit of God. It’s more about trust than it is about surrender. It’s not about control, but it’s about responsibility. And so, if it’s scary at the beginning to have all this freedom, in the end I think it’s much more reassuring to think of God as a God who participates in our lives and is creative with us instead of thinking of a God who just wants our submission.

So today, may we pray for the gift of attentiveness. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” says the psalm. Wisdom comes with the awareness of God, when we come to know God, not as a theoretical God but as a God present and active through our lives, the lives of our neighbors, the life of our communities. May we turn to God for wisdom not just once, but again and again, because God is our wisdom incarnated in Jesus, with us in every meal, every Eucharist, each step on the way. Amen.