

## **February 16, 2020**

Sir 15:15-20; 1 Cor 2:6-8; Mt 5:17-37

There was once a man who was trying to find out what the best way was in life - what to believe - what to do to live a good and successful life. He went to school and learned a lot of things, he traveled around here and there, he even read a lot of “self-help” books - yet, he was even more confused than ever. There was this whole bunch of things that he was exposed to yet he was having trouble getting the answer. Every time he thought he had found the best way - he would see its flaws. He’d find the one that felt right, then it would stop feeling right after a while. In desperation ... he went to church. He had avoided this because he was sure that the Catholic Church was full of small-minded people who were just holding on to some outdated belief system. I mean, they haven't even caught up with the wisdom of today. Then he heard the words of today’s second reading: *We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. Rather, we speak God's wisdom.* He began to wonder if there wasn’t a greater wisdom behind it all - one that was beyond all the changing “wisdoms” of the day. All of these “wisdoms” claim to be the final right answer, but after a while pass away to leave room for newer ones to take their place. He was going from the wisdom of one group to another, from the wisdom of one intellectual expert to another. Maybe there was something coming down from God through the Church that more lasting.

The wisdom of God is something that touches every time. If all the knowledge we hear from all these human sources was right, it wouldn’t contradict itself and need to be updated - but it does. So we can pick the one that “feels” best (which does not guarantee it is actually correct - oftentimes the truth does not “feel” good), or we can look for something less subjective and more real. Where are we to turn to find what is truly the good and best way to live, how are we to have the answers to the tough questions, how are we to know how to have true and real success in life (not just success as defined by cultural wars) - as a matter of fact, how do we know what true success actually is?

God has been revealing to us the way through history. Giving us as much as we could take in each age of time. Early on God gave the 10 commandments as guides, and presented principles of a moral code. In later ages, these were distorted a bit. God had to return in the person of Jesus Christ to set us straight. Not to say “ok, throw out the old! Here is the latest, here is the newest” - but instead to clarify and expand the ageless law of God. Jesus came not to say here is the thing to do until you figure

out something better. Jesus took and went back to the oldest of the teachings of God and without replacing them, gave us a better understanding of what God meant all along. Jesus says in the Gospel: *Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill ... whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.* It was not that God's laws needed updating, it was that in our trying to figure them out and make God law match what made us comfortable, we went off course.

The great answers are to be found in the ageless wisdom of God. The Church works to help to pass down and interpret this wisdom for each age - helping us to keep looking at it without going too far astray - helping us to understand it without changing it to fit the tastes of every group and time period. The man I told you about earlier began to wonder if there was not a deeper wisdom he had missed. In the Gospel today, Jesus shows that there is a depth of wisdom and direction that was buried deep in God's law from the beginning. For example the fifth commandment "Thou Shalt not Kill" is deep. It's not just a matter of saying "if I didn't commit a murder today then I'm ok" - Jesus tells us that anger, vengeance, hatred, slander, gossip, and other forms of hurt to others violates this commandment. The people of his day, like the people of our time, had made so many exceptions and excuses. In Jesus' time some had essentially said it's ok to beat a person to within an inch of their life, as long as they are still alive then you didn't do anything wrong. But there is more to what God meant than that.

The commandments are good starting places in trying to figure how to live, but there is more to it. God's wisdom is deep, any one person, and any one time - that's why Jesus left behind the Church to unfold it over the centuries with the influence of the Holy Spirit. The first reading today calls us to start with the commandments and to reach out into God's wisdom for even more: *If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live; he has set before you fire and water ... stretch forth your hand.* The man I told you about earlier eventually figured that his own understanding was not deep enough, he saw that many groups simply define God's law to their own tastes, or to make themselves feel comfortable and justified, or to make converts. He wanted something firmer, more sure, less "mushy" - and so he stretched fourth his hand to be led by the Church to the depths of the wisdom of God. A wisdom that does not just tell you what you want to hear, but that gives the plain and sometimes uncomfortable truth as God intended - a Church that does not put you on your own way, but the supports you with the Eucharist, and builds a community to live this life out together.