

First, an example of good Catholic wisdom:

An Irish-born nun and superior of her religious community, was close to death. Several of the sisters, hoping to comfort her in the waning moments of her life, brought to her a warm glass of milk. Mother refused to drink from the glass. Dejected, one of the sisters returned to the kitchen with the milk. Remembering a recent Christmas gift to her community, a bottle of Irish whisky, she poured a generous amount in the glass, and then returned with it to the dying nun. The elderly woman drank freely from the glass, first a sip, than a swig, and finally two gulps, and emptied the glass. As they were preparing to leave the room, one of the sisters asked her superior for some wisdom before she died. She raised herself up in bed, and said, "Don't sell that cow!"

Perhaps some of you are of an age to remember a popular game show on television, dating back to the late fifties and sixties: "I've got a Secret". The show featured a host, Gary Moore, four celebrity panelists and a couple of guest contestants, each of whom was in possession of a closely guarded secret. After whispering the secret in the host's ear, the panelists then questioned the guest, hoping to uncover the secret. The show ran for many years, and, to this day, is considered one of the most successful in the history of television.

In all honesty, do we not usually treasure hearing a secret?

In today's second reading (1 Cor. 2:6-10), St. Paul reveals a secret to the Christians at Corinth, one which he had received through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10). In answer to the question, Where is true wisdom to be found?, Paul's answer is unequivocal: "In Christ Jesus and Him crucified" Unlike in Athens where his missionary efforts largely met with failure, Paul zeroed in on the mystery of the cross, a mystery beyond all human comprehension, in his letter to the fledgling Christian community of Corinth. To Paul, the cross is the source of power and leads the way to true wisdom. All pagan forms of human wisdom pale in comparison to the Divine Wisdom. The wisdom of any age passes away and is soon forgotten. Not so the cross. St Paul writes, "We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age". (1 Cor. 2:6) God's wisdom is hidden, mysterious (1 Cor. 2:7).

In a pagan culture, Christians are exposed to danger. The city of Corinth, the largest city of Greece, was a cosmopolitan city of 100,000 inhabitants. Over one half of the population were slaves. The city had a notorious reputation for immorality. In one of the pagan temples of the city, there were over a thousand priestesses, who practiced "sacred prostitution". St. Paul founded the church at Corinth. Amazingly, he made many converts. And why was he successful? He preached Christ crucified!

In his reflections on Paul's first letter to the Church at Corinth, the late biblical scholar, Stanley Morrow, S.J., "The wisdom the gospel preaches is clearly not of this age, not of this world. It is a common enough sight to see Christian communities demanding to have the gospel preached in conformity to the present age." Too many of us want a Christian faith that makes few demands on us. We insist on a religion that is up-to-date and progressive. In other words, we want Christianity without the cross. "Christianity lite" will simply not suffice!

Today, we celebrate the fifth anniversary of the martyrdom twenty-one Coptic Christians who were brutally executed by the agents of Isis in Egypt. The condemned men showed little emotion before they were each beheaded in an act of unspeakable cruelty. Their gruesome murders were filmed for the entire world to see. The world, however, learned a lesson: true wisdom lies hidden in the foolishness of the cross.

To those among us who clamor for a watered down faith, I quote the great apostle to the Gentiles: “The message of the cross is foolishness for those who are perishing but to those who are being saved, it is the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:18) We cannot be truly wise unless we accept the mystery of the cross! The wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God! (1 Cor. 3:19)