

Homily - Year 28B - October 10, 2021

You're not the brightest bulb in the Christmas tree. Sounds like you're missing a few fries in your McDonald's meal deal. His golf bag doesn't contain a full set of irons. (Robin Williams) His ignorance is encyclopedic. (Abba Eban)

Those expressions do not praise someone's intelligence. In fact, they are downright insulting. On the other hand, we just heard in the first reading: "I prayed and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me." Those insults that I read at the beginning do not indicate how much knowledge someone has, but rather they indicate what people do with the knowledge. The person with the 3.9 average can sometimes not be too bright. Wisdom and prudence give direction to our lives so that we know what to do with what we know.

Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas define prudence as right reason in the matters of action. Prudence tells us what must be done, when it must be done, and how it must be done. Prudence is practical wisdom.

Wisdom defines itself as the ability to determine truth. The greatest expression of wisdom is the recognition that God is the supreme good.

I know that these definitions and distinctions are probably somewhat yawn (not awe) inspiring. However, they give us a clue to the depth of today's gospel in which Jesus invites someone to go spiritually beyond where he is to the next level.

The young man had observed all the rules, but then asks the question what he must do to inherit everlasting life. What an interesting question! Don't we presume that if we observe all the rules, then the reward, the payback, the benefits should kick in, and we are all set to breeze into heaven.

Remember Jesus first told him that the ten commandments are the starting point. Hearing his admission that he has already observed all these commandments, Jesus points out what is missing by saying to the man: "You have done well, but you are still clinging to this world rather than to my world." Jesus makes it clear that to inherit eternal life we must execute the do's and the don'ts to which we must also add freeing ourselves from our worldly attachments. Besides being very spiritual advice, Jesus' words are also very practical: you never see a Uhaul carry-all attached to a hearse.

So, this is where prudence and wisdom must kick in. We need wisdom to know what should and should not be done. We need prudence to know how to act on our wisdom.

Sounds simple doesn't it? Well, if it is so simple, why are there so many lapsed, ex, former and/or non-practicing Catholics? Which has disappeared, their wisdom or their prudence? My guess is that both are lacking, but I hope it's not too late.

So, that's where you come in. Pope Francis seems to have a wide appeal to the general population. His message is the traditional Catholic message. That is his wisdom. He expresses prudence by the manner in which he presents the truth. He aims at enlivening and enriching the faith of all Catholic, both practicing and non-practicing. He calls all of us to exercise the gifts of wisdom and prudence in our daily lives. Wisdom that will help us understand the teachings of Jesus as handed down over the centuries through the church and prudence to apply those teachings in our daily lives. There is a brief item in this week's bulletin about the Holy Father convening a synod, basically a process in which all of us are in some way called upon to exercise prudence and our wisdom in giving direction to the future of the Church. We will hear more about the synod in the days and weeks to come. Our bottom line: we must always speak our Catholic wisdom and speak it prudently.

As Catholics, we need to stop being cafeteria Catholics where we pick and choose what we believe and what we will do or not do. That lack of prudence replaces divine wisdom with human wisdom.

The man in the gospel experienced sadness at the answer Jesus gave him. Let's hope and pray that none of us experience that sadness. Jesus is the source of all joy as he shares his wisdom with us so that we can prudently share that wisdom with others. As did Jesus and as did Pope Francis let us prudently share our wisdom.