

WISDOM 101



TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE B

Wisdom 2: 12, 17-20

James 3: 16-4:3

Mark 9: 30-37

GATHERING

(A toy bus, back to school ads, school books, a bell and an unlit candle are arranged on a table in the gathering place. A selection of quiet instrumental music is playing as members arrive.)

If new members are joining the community, some time is taken for people to become acquainted and for newcomers to learn something about the history of the community. All share their hopes and expectations about being a part of a small church community.

Summer is slipping into fall; gardens are ripe with warm fall colors; children have headed back to school. We have many diverse and enriching summer experiences to share. God's grace has flowed abundantly in our lives. We come together this week to explore the nuggets of wisdom God is revealing to us in this good time.

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit and the leader rings the bell. He or she asks the group to take a deep breath, and to slowly release it. The community then prays in two alternating groups.)

Whoever
receives
one child
such as
this
in my
name,
receives
me;
and
whoever
receives
me,
receives
not me
but the
One
who
sent me.

Mark 9: 37



The first image is conveyed by the opening scene from the first reading in the ancient book of Wisdom. We are sort of eavesdropping on the conversation of the evil ones, who are plotting to do damage to the just man. They want to trip him up, set a trap for him, find out just how much bullying and torture they can inflict on the innocent one before God comes to his aid. These are obviously *not* the wise ones. They are wasting their energies in destructive ways, instead of directing their behavior toward being a force for good. In the second reading, James lays out the alternate perspective: “The wisdom from above is first of all pure; then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.” *What simplicity!*

Wickedness and corrupt moral character are all too present around us in the news of the day. Lying, cheating, greediness, wars, abortion and murder are pernicious evidence of our need to focus on the *Just One*, who, in his wisdom cares for us all.

The second scene opens before us as Jesus and his disciples are walking through Galilee. Jesus tells the disciples that his death is close at hand, but that it will not be the end, for “the Son of Man will rise.” There is a heavy sadness conveyed by his words, and there is a mystery about the Son of Man rising that is too deep for these disciples to understand. Wisdom here is so impenetrable that the disciples do “not understand the saying,” and are even afraid to question him. Sometimes, wisdom hides herself in order to encourage us to dig deeper and work harder to find her. We are urged to go beyond our fear of questioning, and challenge what appears to be an impossible mystery. When we do, we are rewarded with new insights and solutions to situations that had previously eluded our grasp.

Our final image from the treasure house of wisdom comes literally from the hands of the master. Taking a child, Jesus placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me.” Just a few moments earlier Jesus had caught the disciples “arguing” among themselves about which one of them was the greatest! With this one simple heartwarming gesture Jesus puts an image of wisdom in front of them. A child. The words of the letter from James, in describing the “wisdom from above,” might well be applied to a child; pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy and good fruits. It is as if Jesus is saying, rather than getting puffed up with ego, let each of you come to the other as a child, trusting and open, because it is in that openness that you will receive me and not only me, but also the One who has sent me. That One will be your wisdom and come to your aid when set upon by the wicked.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

- I: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.
Enkindle in them the fire of your love.
- II: Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created,
and you shall renew the face of the earth.
- I: O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit
instructs the hearts of the faithful,
- II: Grant, that by the same Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever rejoice in his consolation.
- All: Amen.

(Members join in singing, "Here I Am, Lord." The song may be found on the Internet.

Focus Question

What was your favorite teacher in school like?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

Welcome to the class of Wisdom 101. We have some wonderful images in this Sunday's readings that vividly portray what wisdom is and what it is not. On the one hand, we have the wicked conjuring up their evil doings, and on the other, we have a child, full of innocence and gentleness, standing hopeful, waiting for all good things to be bestowed on it by the universe. In between these two pictures the apostles give us a lesson in how easy it is to miss the message of wisdom.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION¹

- ◆ How does the word, phrase or image that struck you from this week's scriptures speak to your life or the life of the community, your family or your world these days?
- ◆ What wisdom has led you to your small community and keeps you coming back?
- ◆ What helps you deal with muddy moral issues?
- ◆ "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me." What does Jesus see in the child that reflects himself? How childlike are you?
- ◆ What gives rise to your inner conflicts between wickedness and wisdom?
- ◆ In the Epistle, James says, "You ask wrongly". What leads you to ask wrongly?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

(The leader poses the question, "What does God ask of you/us in light of our sharing of life and faith this week?" After a few moments of reflection, the leader invites conversation in response to the question.)

- ◆ Mentor a child. Call your local school to find out how to sign up to mentor a child.
- ◆ Take a stand on a moral issue you feel challenged by in your community. Write a letter or send an email to the editor of your local paper stating your position.
- ◆ Be an advocate for a child; volunteer with Department of Children Services in your area.
- ◆ Offer to serve as a cuddler for babies at your local hospital.

¹ Members should feel free to speak to any question(s) they choose. It is not necessary for the questions to be taken in the order they are presented. Not every question needs to be considered in a given session. In addition to the questions suggested, there are always universal questions that may be brought to any scripture: How does this scripture encourage you? How does this scripture challenge you?

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The community pauses in silence while a selection of instrumental music is played. Following the music, members pray in two alternating groups.)

I: The wicked say...let us beset the just one.

II: The wise say...let us ask for purity.

I: The wicked say...let us torture the just one.

II: The wise say...let us be gentle and compliant.

I: The wicked say...let us try the patience of the just one.

II: The wise say...let us be merciful and sincere.

I: The wicked say...let us condemn the just one.

II: The wise say...let us cultivate peace.

(The session concludes with the praying the Lord's Prayer and the exchange of a sign of peace.)