

Along the track

The Getting of Wisdom

Every day we are faced with many choices, some great, some trivial but they all make their mark and in their own way, they change us. Good or bad habits start by small decisions. Virtues grow out of daily choices. Every day we rethink old decisions and make new ones. We grapple and struggle, we commit and repent over and over again. Every day of our lives our souls, our spirit within grows a little more into God or a little more into self, more focused on our own priorities or our decisions may lead us to be more open and wiser.

It is interesting to note how science is now 'seeking wisdom'. Wisdom is being researched and deconstructed into its essential elements. Biologists, neuroscientists and psychologists are studying the nature of virtues like forgiveness and awe and how they can be made 'more likely'. Compassion, humour, kindness, patience are also under the microscope as scientific researchers consider them to be essential ingredients of wisdom. There is a concerted effort, it seems, to research and explore not only what makes us happy but wise as well. It seems there is a scientific thirst for understanding what touches hearts as well as minds.

One survey, for example, asked those engaged in the research on the nature of wisdom to rate the importance of 47 components, such as altruism, practical life skills, sense of humour, realism, willingness to forgive others and self-esteem, as well as what were considered to be the essential components of wisdom - intelligence and spirituality.

Is it any wonder that the Apostle James wrote: *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, it is always fair and honest, sincere.* James 3:17

For St James, wisdom comes with an openness to life and to others. It does not allow others to do our thinking for us. A sign that wisdom is alive and growing emerges when we can show compassion and forgiveness, when we are fair and honest towards others, when we are big enough and courageous enough to show mercy, when we have not closed our minds but we are curious and open to reason.

It is not by chance that wisdom heads the list of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom is not something static which, once achieved, becomes an unending moment of illumination. It is, rather, the daily invitation to let the Spirit come alive within us. The gifts of the Spirit will lie unopened if we don't use them. These gifts of the Spirit are like seeds or sparks within us and it is our life calling to fan them into life. It is the Spirit who inspires and animates us, who calls us to be more than we thought we could be, who calls us to love, to be generous, to be curious, to be faithful and compassionate. Spirit-inspired Wisdom is the result of a sustained search for understanding, the courage and a willingness to question with genuine openness, to be willing to examine the uncomfortable as well as the things that have supported us. Wisdom seeks to grow in understanding and compassion and kindness. That takes humility because it admits that we are vulnerable, that we don't know it all, that we are still on a journey of discovery.

St Paul wrote us that we will know when we are 'wise' and that we are living 'in the Spirit' when there is "charity, joy, peace, patience, endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness, and chastity". (Galatians, 5), in other words, when there is an outwardness in our lives, a generosity of spirit, a respect for others. The Spirit is alive in our kindness and generosity, in our faithfulness to commitments, in our love and compassion, joy, creativity, when we are patient and gentle, generous, when awe and wonder still touch us. Wisdom comes alive in our curiosity and enthusiasm, our respect, optimism and loyalty. It is hard to be all those things – it is encouraging to know that they are the signs of the life of the Spirit. We are not alone in our efforts. (CCC 1832)

No wonder it is the first of the gifts of the Spirit.

Regards
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