

## Year B, Trinity 15, Proper 21, HC

Wisdom 1.16-2.1; 2:12-22  
James 3:13-4:3,7,8a  
Mark 9:30-37.

Jesus announces his imminent departure from the face of the planet and the disciples are – without even a decent pause – arguing about succession and hierarchy. Not even a ‘gosh we’ll be sad to see you go’ or ‘what about a farewell party.’

Remind you of anything?

This is curiously like what’s going on in the party that masquerades under the title of the Labour Party. Mr Blair announces his imminent departure and the latter-day saints that surround him are bickering about the succession.

In one of the messages of today’s gospel, Jesus tells us to just get on with the job – JUST DO IT – and stop fretting about consequences, rewards, hierarchies, promotions. And have no regard to whom you serve: the divine, Jesus, is in everybody – if we serve the least amongst us, we serve God.

This is difficult advice to take in a world where rank and promotion prospects affect incomes, pensions, our ability to provide for dependants and so on.

And it’s difficult when competitiveness is hardwired into us animals, this hardwiring a result of divine creation. And let me tell you that I am in position to talk sanctimoniously about getting rid of ambition. When I was a junior lecturer, I made a list of UK Professors of Anatomy with their ages and likely dates of death or retirement. I can’t imagine that clergy would be thing thus about dead man’s shoes when a bishop kicks the bucket.

But to live in this imperfect and complex world as it is, we can not ignore these practical and biological things. We must think twice about rushing headlong into self-denying service to others that would mean that we could not clothe and feed our children. There is truth in what Margaret Thatcher said that you can not give to the poor unless you yourself have some wealth to give.

So we must employ the right use of reason, of logic. Pope Benedict said recently in a lecture in Regensburg that not to use reason is to go against God, building on what you might call natural law expounded by Aquinas. This was the talk that got him into trouble. But the Pope is right: God gave us the ability to reason and so we must use it. The question is how.

We need to use reason so that we do not trample on the needs of others, or fail to consider the weak and poor. And this means that we must not become too self-obsessed, too ego driven.

James in the epistle is absolutely right when he says that conflicts come from our egos. In fact, with a few words changed here and there, this could have been written by Freud – the battle between ego, superego and id.

**We need divine wisdom from above**, rather than ego-driven wisdom from below: to reason the right course of action. And divine wisdom from above is implanted in each and every one of us at creation.

In Proverbs 8 you read that wisdom was there at creation, the material out of which the world was made perhaps.

And Later wisdom σοφία was personified as Jesus Christ. So wisdom is within all creation, within us all. The trouble is that as imperfect humans we seem unable to stop the light of wisdom within being obscured by ego and error.

We have descriptions of wisdom – some descriptions in Proverbs about what it is, and some in today’s Wisdom reading about what it is not.

It is kind, without envy or show, not vain, not self-seeking, yields, without hypocrisy??  
Haven’t I heard those words somewhere before. Yes, the wisdom that comes from above is love.

And one of the things about wisdom from above, according to the Wisdom literature, esp Proverbs, is that it’s practical. Wisdom from above is that which leads to a well-run ship. It maximises good, if you like, given the circumstances. It is reason.

Tell that to the politicians in a world where the gap between rich and poor is widening. Where so often those in power serve the needs of the powerful. Where favours are granted to financial contributors and those whose yachts or palaces are borrowed for the summer.

Wisdom is love. Not sappy love Mills and Boon love but practical down to earth necessary love. If you serve the powerless you serve me.

Jesus sounds harsh in the Gospels, especially Mark, and love can be harsh. Love is by not 'nice'. Love may say no, it may hate wrongdoing, it may demand repentance, but it is always careful and considerate and without hypocrisy ... 1 Corinthians 13 again.

- Wisdom from below, ego driven, eats us up, destroys us, embitters us.
- Wisdom from above enlightens and enlivens us, it lights us up.
- Wisdom from above is love, light and knowledge. Important because the three things **together** are necessary. Not love alone – that's useless without action, and love and action are useless without practical know-how.

Bulgakov

Wisdom from above is love of love. And wisdom is practical – it demands action.

A question each one of us must ask ourselves, then, is what are we going to **do** - do, not sit and think fine thoughts about, but **do** – to help those in whom the divine spark is dimmed by circumstance, but present just as in you and me?