

Sunday Thought

12th September 2021 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Proverbs 1: 20 - 33

Psalm 19

James 3: 1 - 12

Mark 8: 27 - 38

Pray for Wisdom

We have more from James today. His letter may not be regarded as an important theological exposition, but James' life-pictures ring as true for us now as when he first wrote them. The tongue, he says is not a big part of the human body, yet its use can be like a spark which starts a forest fire. One word can spread evil everywhere. James knew nothing of social media when he said we can control most creatures but not the tongue! Nor did he have recourse to the news bulletins we can listen to every hour of the day and night when many tongues speak of many things, from the environment - earthquake, fire and flood - to international conflicts such as in Afghanistan in recent days and the



covid pandemic still raging across much of the world. I will not continue with the list or there will be no space to write of other things. Every news item is discussed and commented on with intention to decide right action – *Did the government get it right or were our expectations misguided?* The words from our Proverbs reading ring true – *'Wisdom is calling and people never pay attention, never listen to the Lord, or obey him. So, when times of trouble come, wise thinking fails them.'*

Psalm 19 also makes a plea for wisdom. The writer sings of recurring sunrise and sunset. Together with all creation they show how God is faithful to his laws. Knowing those laws is to have wisdom. Like the rising and setting of the sun so all our human life depends on our keeping God's commandments – living by his laws. Disregard the rules of creation and the world's life becomes distorted and dangerous. So too, a life not lived by Jesus' Kingdom rules. If only all our life-questions were asked in the light of the Kingdom of God as Jesus explained it. That is wisdom! In the scriptures wisdom is always associated with the Holy Spirit and the apostle Paul lists it as one of the Spirit's gifts, which is why we learn wisdom from the words of Jesus. I recall a conversation with a really earnest lady at a church fete. She was a professed atheist who confided how she had been reading Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. *'I'm sure,'* she said to me, *'that if we could get everyone to live that way, all our social and international problems would be answered.'* I felt humbled. This was the spirit of wisdom speaking.

That same truth emerges through today's challenging Gospel reading. Jesus and his disciples were working in the villages around Caesarea Philippi, thirty miles from the coast and in the shadow of Mount Hermon – a special place of retreat for the Lord. It was time for him to make clear to his disciples all that his mission would involve from now on, and what was to happen to him. He began by asking them what people were saying about him and then, more to the point he asked, *'and what about you? Who do you say I am?'* Peter, with characteristic enthusiasm replied for them all, *'You're the Christ!'* He was of different mind however, when Jesus went on to explain how he would soon be rejected, suffer, be put to death... and then rise again. Peter took him aside, appalled by these pronouncements. *'This can never happen to you, Lord.'* he said, *'you are Christ, God's Son!'* Peter was further surprised when Jesus rebuked him, accusing him of taking the devil's part in being a discourager. Then came the vital words for us to notice. *'Peter, you're thinking man's thoughts, not God's thoughts.'* You are lacking wisdom! They were all to discover before the year was out that wisdom is the gift of God's Spirit. Imparting the wisdom of God is surely the continuing work of Christ's people today.

Now, that is a challenge, like the one given to those disciples at Caesarea Philippi that day. But read on in the story. It is costly to speak and live in the wisdom of God. It means taking up a cross – sharing Jesus' suffering, forgetting self and the wisdom of the world. Rather, it is to follow all the way to Calvary if necessary. Being unashamedly a follower of Jesus and his wisdom means being 'different'. To carry a cross is to stand out in the crowd where, by God's grace, others may see, take note, seek, and live the way of wisdom. Today we have a vital and awesome calling to *'All-the-way-discipleship'*.

A Prayer [with Psalm 19 in mind]

Lord, with people all over the world
I watch the sunrise,
knowing I shall see it set
and rise again day after day.
I feel secure
in the knowledge that all creation
follows your ordained rules and patterns.

I regret
not always following the rules you have given
for happiness in personal and social life.

Lord, your sun sets on confessed and forgiven sins
Keep us living faithfully under the sign of your rising and setting sun
to be reminded of your cross and resurrection,
of eternal life that is to come.

