

Bishop's Reflection – 32nd Sunday

We would all like to consider ourselves among the wise. Even when many of us have experienced what it means to be foolish. For wisdom can never be possessed or presumed. Day after day, it needs to be sought and welcomed.

That's what our first Reading is about. It speaks of Wisdom as something that is available to all who seek her. "She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her;" "She will be found sitting at the gate." The fool may think himself wise; their own foolishness is hidden from them.

What is said about Wisdom can also be said about God. The fool may think they have Him all figured out, that there is nothing left to do. Surely, God will smile on them, heaven's gates opened wide. The wise, by contrast, seek him at every moment, knowing that there is always more. They do not fear, should He delay; their perseverance is a gift from Him.

The fool presumes, and so have I. I once believed that I would be ordained by merely putting in my time in seminary formation. It wasn't as if I wasn't trying my best, or that I wasn't diligent in doing my work and spending time in prayer, but I never thought there would be more to it than that.

It may not come as a big surprise that I wasn't ordained at first. When it was time to apply for ordination in 1990, my application was denied. In many ways, I had to re-examine my life and my naïve perspective on things. I had presumed so much and failed to respond to the signs that had been there.

Only later was I able to see the wisdom of the seminary. I wasn't ready for what lay ahead; I lacked the strength and the resiliency for priestly ministry. Many of my decisions were geared more to "safety" (i.e. a safe life) than to a missionary calling. I needed an extra period of testing, lest my life as a priest would be marked by lukewarmness and mediocrity. I thank them now, where once I cursed. I see God's hand at work in it.

I suspect some of you may have had parallel experiences, be they in professional pursuits or human relations. We can blame it on a spouse, a flawed workplace, an imperfect parish or an unappreciative boss – and there may well be truth in anyone of these. But what about ourselves, how were we involved? How foolish or how wise were we? What have we learned and how have we grown through all of it?

In the parable of the ten bridesmaids, we are reminded that the spiritual life is no different, that our relationship with the Lord is a daily pursuit. Trimming our lamps and replenishing our oil, these are part of our life in Christ. Gathering together, for support and for mission, Christ invites us to move beyond our comfortable notion of "me and God" to the love born out through service, self-sacrifice, generosity and forgiveness.

The fool is ill prepared for suffering. They cannot tolerate obstacles or delays. When faced with a community that is less than ideal or a slight or setback against their person, they cannot tolerate it. Challenged by the insult of the cross, that Jesus willingly bore for us, they lose heart and drop away. The oil they had is soon burned up; who will replenish it? Only in God do we find the proper strength; only in Him, who died for us, do we find the path forward in all our undertakings.