

Homily – Sunday 10th February 2019 – 6 pm

Is it obvious? Is it obvious to you what it looks like to be a follower of Christ? Is it obvious what it requires of you – and of others? Is it obvious which path to take at any given time?

When I read the scriptures, I often find myself ping-ponging between two extremes. Sometimes I will be reading something that makes it seem so obvious. In some ways I would put this evening's readings into that category. There are parts of the book of Wisdom that speak so much sense. I wonder if you have heard that phrase "with great power comes great responsibility." This chapter seems to be speaking into that idea. Those in positions of authority need to seek out wisdom. And the starting point to attaining wisdom is indeed to look for it. To want to learn. To be prepared to be instructed in the ways of wisdom. Somehow whoever wrote this book makes it sound, if not easy, at least possible.

And then there's St. Paul's letter to the Colossians. There is something down-to-earth here. Some clear ideas about what it looks like to be a follower of Christ. The things that need to be abandoned - fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry); anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. And those that need to be taken up - compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience; not to mention forgiveness and love.

The question I often find myself asking is if it's so obvious, why do we seem to find it so difficult? Why is it that the writer of the book of Wisdom and indeed St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians even needed to say these things if it's just common sense, perfectly clear to us all?

I will always remember when I was teaching the time early in the New Year when people began applying for – and getting – jobs. Because of the nature of teaching, it is particularly pronounced – new jobs usually begin in September, whereas in other sectors people leave and arrive throughout the year. And because of that, it can be unsettling to others as their colleagues announce one by one that they will be leaving. I wonder if you have had that experience – of thinking you were content in your role, but then being unsettled as the people around you announce that they will be moving on.

I think this phenomenon is part of what can make what at first glance is quite obvious be quite hard to live out.

The book of Wisdom offers sound advice about seeking wisdom and St. Paul is equally clear about the path of the follower of Christ. But in our daily lives we find ourselves buffeted by reality. We thought we were building on a foundation of wisdom, but suddenly we find ourselves questioning why other people are getting promoted around us; or are taking different career paths when ours seemed to make sense; or are choosing to go on regular holidays – and can afford to do so; or seem to have closer relationships with their children and grandchildren than we do.

Sometimes our best intentions get thrown out of kilter by the stuff of life. And it is perfectly natural for us to ask questions. Was the foundation we had really that firm? Were we really following Christ, or is the evidence of life showing us that we had got it wrong? But just as important, is it possible that the stuff of life is distracting us from God's path?

And in the end, of course, this evening's readings can be of great help to us in the middle of our lives. Just because something seems obvious, doesn't necessarily mean that it's easy. There can be a simplicity in truth. But there is also depth.

What the book of Wisdom points us towards is practice and learning. Wisdom is there, but we grow in wisdom if we seek it and if we are prepared to make ourselves learners. Wisdom doesn't really fit with the language of quick wins – it is deeper than that. And growing in wisdom lasts a lifetime – no doubt with twists and turns along the way.

And St. Paul is looking at what it means to be "in Christ". Again, it's not really about following a set of rules, but rather about an ongoing commitment to seek the Christlike path. It doesn't mean we won't go astray, but the commitment is to keep returning, to make it our practice to keep Christ at the centre of our lives.

Is it obvious? Sometimes it might feel gloriously so, and at other times not at all. But that's the nature of journeying. And the path we seek to walk is one that we never walk alone.

Amen