

Homily – Sunday 10th November 2019 – 6 pm

“Ask what I should give you.” It’s quite an invitation, isn’t it? Especially when it comes from God. And I wonder how you and I might answer? I wonder, too, whether we can recognise different ways that we might have answered at different times in our lives.

How often in our youth we think we know exactly what we want. We can picture our future lives – the career; the family; the house, car, holidays. And as life happens, perhaps we might respond differently. Watching a child struggling with bullying, we might feel we would give anything to see them happy. And in the face of ill health – our own, or that of a loved one – probably very few of us would not ask for good health to be restored.

What is extraordinary about our Old Testament reading is that Solomon is just a boy. A boy who comes face to face with God in a dream. And who, when asked what God should give him requests wisdom. Well, specifically he requests: “an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”

It’s quite extraordinary insight, isn’t it? I don’t mean to be unreasonably disrespectful, but I do wonder how many of those people campaigning prior to our current General Election could be trusted to make a similar request if they were asked what God should give them? And I wonder, too, how much better our political landscape might be if they could be trusted to give a similar response?

Solomon’s response to God speaks of so many things. Above all, a great humility. He genuinely sees governing God’s people as an awesome task. As something that he simply cannot undertake by his own strength. As something that requires him to be connected to and guided by God. It speaks too of an already developing wisdom – because he realises that in order to govern well he must seek to understand. And that understanding will not be easy. Solomon already sees that people are complex and complicated – that they are capable of good and evil and that it will not always be easy to know the difference. And there is probably a degree of self-awareness as well. How easy it can be to assume that we are the ones who can tell right from wrong; good from bad. Yet to recognise that we are capable of being deceived, that sometimes our judgement goes awry takes great self-awareness. And the hope and belief that, by God’s grace, we can make better judgements, demonstrates great faith.

There are some weeks when I wonder what connection there can possibly be between the two readings, but this is not one of those weeks. Those words in St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, so familiar to those of us who have attended funerals and prayer with people towards the end of their lives, are a reminder of the strength of God’s love from which we cannot be separated. And Solomon’s dream shows us what it looks like to really believe in the strength of that love, and to realise that the more we draw on that love, the greater our wisdom.

Imagine a world governed by those as faithful and wise as Solomon. Now we really are talking about something very close indeed to the Kingdom of God. That is what we are called to work towards. And of course as we cast our votes next month, we are called to seek to identify those whose motives really are selfless and true.

Amen