

WISDOM

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I was watching some football over the weekend – one of my favorite activities. During one of the games the announcer said something about a defensive back: “He’s older now and may have lost a step or two but he can still play great because he’s experienced and wiser.”

Now that I’m getting older and may have lost a step, or two....or three, this concept of maybe making up for it with wisdom is intriguing.

Wisdom...now that’s an interesting subject. But what exactly is it anyway?

Dilip Jeste, a very fine psychiatrist at UCSD, has just published an article in the journal “The Gerontologist” in which he focuses on the concept of wisdom. In his article Dr. Jeste writes that intelligence and spirituality share features with wisdom, but they are not the same thing. One can be intelligent, but not wise. Spirituality and wisdom are both associated with age, but are actually different qualities.

He states that wisdom:

- Is uniquely human
- Is a form of advanced development that is experience-driven
- Is a personal quality and tends to be rare.
- It can be learned, increases with age, and can be measured.
- And, unfortunately, it is not enhanced by taking medication.

He concludes that his survey “Cannot fully and completely define wisdom.”

Nuts.

The Jewish Wisdom literature, which includes such books as Job and Proverbs, reflects searching for the meaning and mastery of life as it is known from experience. This literature aims at discovering the right way to live.

In our Catholic tradition, we associate The Father with Creation, the Son with Redemption and The Holy Spirit with Guidance and Wisdom. Our tradition lists Wisdom as one of the 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit who is the Source of Wisdom.

And as we speak of God the Father and God the Son in masculine terms, it may be (gasp) not that crazy to speak of the Holy Spirit, the Source of Wisdom, in soft, feminine terms. Listen to this from The Wisdom of Solomon, chapter 9:

“With you is wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according your commandments. Send her forth from the holy heavens and from the throne of your glory send her that she may labor at my side, pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things and she will guide me wisely in my actions.”

Starting from the 11th. century, one of the devotional titles given to the Blessed Mother pictured with the child Jesus in her lap is “Throne of Wisdom” or “Seat of Wisdom.” We old guys may remember that title from some of our prayers in grammar school. She reflects her status as a vessel of the Incarnation.

But still, what **is** Wisdom?

Perhaps we can get a clue from Matthew chapter 2 and the story of the Magi: “In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, **Wise Men** from the East came to Jerusalem asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.’”

These wise men from the East are thought to possibly be astrologers; or even sorcerers. They looked to the heavens and stars to try to act wisely about what is important on earth.

Sort of like looking into a Giant Crystal Ball for Wisdom.

Hmmm.

Let's return to the Original Not-Wise Act. Let's go back to the Garden of Eden. God had forbidden Adam to eat from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When tempted by the serpent it is OBVIOUS that Adam and Eve knew already what they should do and what they were forbidden to do. Eve even tells the Serpent what God commanded. But, out of the temptation to be-like-a-god they made...or, how shall I put this?...the wrong choice.

Now let's rerun the story. Let's imagine that Adam and Eve had a giant, magical, crystal ball. Before eating the Forbidden Fruit they look into the Crystal Ball and read ahead to the end of Genesis chapter 3 to see themselves being driven out of the Garden of Eden after they ate the Forbidden Fruit.

NOW I ask you, do you think they would have eaten it? I DON'T THINK SO.

Perhaps that gives us a clue to wisdom. We are in the middle of making a choice: to go down the left road or go down the right road. *Wisdom is the ability to look into a crystal ball and see, as clearly as possible, the end of the story of each road.* Hopefully, we have learned from our past experiences and our consultations with Wise Men and, as we grow older, to know which road to take. And as we get older we pray **we** will earn the title of "experienced and wiser."

So, a fellow goes to a fortune teller who says: "For a hundred dollars I'll look into my crystal ball and you can ask me three questions." The man says "Questions about what?" "About anything" she replies. "Well", he says "isn't a hundred dollars a lot of money?"

"No, not really," she says, "Now what is your last question?"