

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Wisdom 7:7-11

Psalm 90:12-13, 14-15, 16-17

Hebrews 4:12-13

Mark 10:17-30

The Garaventa Center

The University of Portland

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Our first reading today personifies Wisdom and proclaims her precious beyond measure. Compared to her, silver and gold are just muck and sand. Even health, beauty and the very light of day pale in comparison to Wisdom. What is wisdom? Wisdom is freedom from illusion. To be wise is to see clearly, and to know how to cope with what you see. Wisdom is knowing the truth and dealing with it. The alternative is to embrace self-protective, self-promoting fantasies about the world and about ourselves. It's tempting to choose the fantasy – to aspire to a kind of self-hypnosis in which we pretend to believe some plausible narrative that will enable us to acquire more muck and sand than the next person. May we have the wisdom to avoid that alternative.

God *has* no illusions, about the world or about us. “Indeed the word of God is...sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit...and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.” This is one of those occasions on which we are invited to imitate God – to act like God acts. We are called to try to know ourselves like God knows us – to dare to expose ourselves to ourselves.

This is the invitation Jesus offers to the young man in our Gospel. Until his encounter with Our Lord, his life has conformed quite well to a to

a plausible narrative. In his own eyes he is a virtuous man who just happens to be wealthy. He's a good man whose salvation is assured. He runs after Jesus in order to top up his self-assurance that he is doing everything right. Jesus throws him off balance by remarking that only God is good. Then he shatters his complacency by telling him, "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." And the man goes away sad, having learned that, in reality, he is not a good man who happens to be rich, but a rich man playing at being good, who is ultimately counting upon his wealth to save him. Fond hope.

In the movie, "The Matrix," Morpheus offers Neo a choice: "You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill...and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes." The blue pill offers comforting illusion. The red pill reveals the truth. In faith, we are offered an analogous choice. Will we desperately prop up comforting fictions about our world and our selves, or will we choose wisdom and embrace the truth? In making our choice we are emboldened by the conviction that the truth is not some nihilistic dystopia. The truth is Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." The truth is that the God who is Love has the last word in our world and in our lives. Compared to that Wisdom, everything else is muck and sand.