

Pastoral Perspective

Holy Spirit's Gifts: Discoveries in Discipleship

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

WISDOM

(The last in a series of eight meditations for the Resurrection-Pentecost season.)

This meditation on Wisdom completes our series on the Holy Spirit, Gift of gifts, and on His sevenfold major gifts.

Many cultures in the ancient Orient spotlighted man as "a seeker of wisdom." Greek philosophy as well as Semitic ethic made wisdom the key and norm of "the good life." A Sunday-through-Saturday prudence guaranteed the human quality to life, endorsed its validity if not also its success, enhanced the religious instinct in man. In Old Testament times, genuine wisdom was identified with the observance of the Covenant Law, and in fact with the possession of the Spirit of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:2)

Especially in late Old Testament history, wisdom became a supreme value. The sage, illumined by faith, was master of the art of good living, could chart the rules of craftsmanship and moral excellence, evidenced practical speculation and "revealed divine mysteries." The pursuit of wisdom became a veritable cult — in fact, wisdom was regarded as a virtual personification of divinity. Divine wisdom was seen as "the blast of divine power, an effusion of the glory of the all-powerful, a reflection of the eternal light, a mirror of God's activity, an image of His excellence." (Wisdom 7:35) It dwelt in heaven, shared God's throne, lived in His intimacy. (Sirach 24:4, Wisdom 9:4, 8:3)

When Jesus came, His impact was made as Messiah (or Ideal-King), as Proclaimer of repentance, as Servant, as Master of Wisdom (see especially Matthew 5-7). He declared Himself greater than Solomon (Matthew 12:24), promised His followers wisdom (Luke 21:15), urged His listeners to "Come to me . . ." — the standard invitation of Old Testament wisdom (compare Matthew 11:28 and Isaiah 24:19).

Little wonder Jesus is variously identified as "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30), the first-born before any creature and the artisan of creation (Colossians 1:15). However, because the wisdom of this world

crowned its folly when men "crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8), God chose what was foolish in the eyes of the world to achieve His purpose (3:18). In other words, when the wisdom of this world thought Jesus, "God's wisdom," most dead, then was He most alive; when they thought Jesus, "God's wisdom," most speechless, then was He most the Word; when they thought Jesus, "God's wisdom," annihilated by the folly of the cross, then was He most effectively "Our wisdom, and our virtue, and our holiness, and our freedom." (1 Corinthians 1:30)

To put the gift of divine Wisdom in perspective, we need to reflect long and deeply on these five points offered by the New Testament writings.

First, the revelation of divine Wisdom is based on a paradox, a seeming contradiction. Human wisdom places great store in culture, fine speech, and intellectual skill. But it is not to the wise and prudent that divine Wisdom is accorded, but to the little ones. (Matthew 11:25) And, irony of ironies, by drawing Life from death, God enshrined the absolute wisdom of His ways in "the foolishness of the Cross."

Second, Christian wisdom grows from the seeds of Christian faith. The gift of the Spirit, Wisdom, is not acquired by human effort, but through the Father's self-manifestation. (Matthew 11:25) Wisdom is a divine reality, hidden and deep, impossible for the human mind to probe. It is offered only to those who listen and are docile to the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10-16) The great scientist, Louis Pasteur, testified to this very fact when he expressed a wish that his own faith could be as strong and simple as that of a Breton peasant woman.

Third, only once did Jesus label a sin as "unforgivable." This is the so-called sin against the Holy Spirit, the sin which consists in believing that we cannot be forgiven, ultimately the sin against hope. The gift of Wisdom is the exact opposite of "the unforgivable sin," because Wisdom reminds each of us of the need to pray continually for forgiveness of sins against the Holy Spirit. All of us sin against the Holy Spirit because there is much in us that has not yet died, and because there is much in us that has not yet risen. We need to be reminded, time and again, that the Wisdom of God (even in our own case) comes to the fore only "through the foolishness of the Cross."

Fourth, Luke speaks of Jesus growing "in wisdom, in stature and in grace with God and man." (Luke 2:52) The evangelist is testifying that Wisdom guided the process of growth by which Jesus came to the awareness of His own authentic identity, of His authentic relationship to the Father. We might ask ourselves: how are we growing — in the awareness of our own authentic identity "in Christ," in the awareness of our authentic relationship to Jesus? Put in somewhat different terms: How much Wisdom of the Spirit do we bring to the understanding and fulfillment of this statement from Paul: "In this way we are all to come to unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, until we become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ Himself." (Ephesians 4:13)

Fifth, since there is no gift of the Spirit apart from a discovery in discipleship, how much of the Spirit's Wisdom are we using to reflect upon what has happened to us? Or, what special gifts of the Spirit have become actualized in us, during the course of our lifetime, from the persons we have encountered? Or, what gifts lie dormant within us, waiting for the glance of recognition or the touch of resurrection which only comes with Spirit-given Wisdom? It is especially important to recall that the Spirit is never given to an individual (anywhere in Scripture) apart from others or apart from the service of others. In other words, the Spirit — and especially the gift of Wisdom — is directed towards the upbuilding of community. And the community of faith is best structured on the gift of divine Wisdom, for only then is the presence of the Spirit, "the soul of the Mystical Body," guaranteed.

Back in the days when the prophet Isaiah, through God's inspiration, first catalogued the gifts of the Spirit, human wisdom initiated the custom of charting the seven great wonders of the world. From that practice many lists have evolved: the seven wonders of antiquity, the seven wonders of the Middle Ages, the seven wonders of the natural world, the seven wonders of the contemporary world, the seven wonders of modern science, and (one need hardly be surprised!) the seven wonders of American engineering. None of these wonders — and some have already disappeared from the face of the earth — can begin to compare with the seven great "wonders of all times: the gifts of the Spirit which lift man from the horizon of time and place, him in relation to his eternal purpose!"

SALT:

Adding Zest To Intern Program

By JOHN DASH

After a session of role-playing with Bishop Dennis W. Hickey and Father Eugene Weis, Father Francis Pegnam announced that he "had a heck of a good time, impossible cases and no solutions."

His announcement came at the close of a session of Supervisors and Leaders Training (SALT) Program, brought to the diocese last year as part of the Diocesan Intern Program, headed by Father Edward Steinkirchner.

SALT, originally developed by Episcopal church groups, and now spread throughout U.S. religious and industrial communities, uses such management training techniques as establishing contracts, one-to-one confrontations and ventilation of feelings.

Father Steinkirchner convened the four-day program last week at Notre Dame Retreat House for 24 priests who will be supervisors of both deacon and priest interns and to complete the intern supervisory cycle of last year.

"We hope this will make for a better dynamic between intern priests and deacons and their supervisors. The purpose is to



Photo by Pat Petraske

Father John Whelan waits for reactions to the role playing.

enable them to be more effective in their ministries," Father Steinkirchner said.

Father Weis commented last week that the whole event was a "pleasurable, painful process."

Msr. John Maney noted that "The process itself becomes important. It just seemed to bring out things never thought of before."

Describing his reaction to a session of role playing he said he discerned the action of the Holy Spirit in the group. Father John

Whelan, one of the leaders of the session quipped, "Well, it's His week."

The most common reaction among priests who participated is one of satisfaction.

An evaluative session will be held in October to follow up last week's event and another training session next Spring will close the year's cycle.

Participation in the program is mandatory for pastors who wish to supervise deacon and priest interns.

Father O'Connor Notes 50 Years

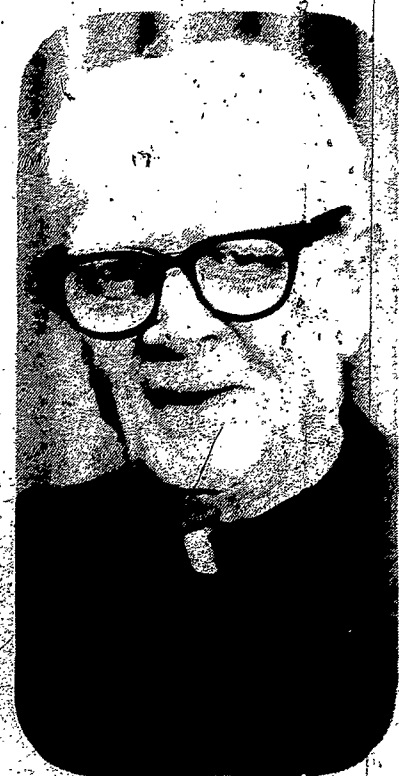
Lovingly called a "real character" by one of his friends, a vigorous 75-year-old Redemptorist priest, who is frequently seen striding the streets of downtown Rochester, "at quite a clip" observed this week his 50th anniversary of ordination.

Father Thomas O'Connor, CSSR, who is stationed at St. Joseph's church, celebrated a 9 a.m. Mass of thanksgiving at the church on Sunday, and was feted Tuesday and Notre Dame Retreat House by more than 50 of his confreres and brother Redemptorists.

Father O'Connor was born in Brooklyn in 1897 and was ordained a Redemptorist priest on June 17, 1923 by then Archbishop Patrick Hayes of New York.

He has been stationed in Rochester three separate times, as well as in Boston, the Virgin Islands, the Carolinas, Florida and Virginia. During WWII he served as an Army chaplain in England, France and Germany.

Father Albert Riesner, CSSR, pastor of St. Joseph's, said that when the ordaining prelate presented Father O'Connor with his chalice and patten, he told the new priest, "Imitate what you handle."



FATHER O'CONNOR

Father O'Connor "took those words seriously." Father Riesner said, "Even now he still says Mass and brings Holy Communion to the sick. He's quite a man."