**Sunday 13 October**

Wisdom 7:7-11 Solomon asks for wisdom

Psalm 89(90)12-17 A prayer for wisdom

Hebrews 4:12-13 The Word of God is alive and active

Mark 10:17-30 Costly discipleship

**Podcast link**

https://www.buzzsprout.com/2119621/15749235

1. **The Wisdom Background**

The *Book of Wisdom* is an extraordinary work, of the greatest relevance at the time of writing and even again today.

The context of writing is the key to unlocking the message and our reading. The book was written about the year 30 bc, in Alexandria in Egypt, with a specific purpose in mind. At the time, the Roman Empire presented itself as an unrivalled success on different levels: the military might of Rome, the hegemony of Graeco-Roman ideals in all aspects of life, culture and education, and, finally, the imposed stability of the *Pax Romana* which permitted great economic expansion, bringing wealth to the few and exploitation to the many. The propaganda of the Empire presented itself explicitly as God-given, part of the divine order of things, which could never be surpassed and which ought not ever to be opposed.

It would have been easy for young Jews living in Alexandria to conclude that not only was Rome “right” in military, cultural and commercial terms, but *also in religion*. It seems from the *Book of Wisdom*, that some young Jews, perhaps many, had walked away from their ancestral traditions, drawn by the brilliance and sheer dominance of the culture around them. The Wisdom of Solomon is explicitly directed to such young people. In a subtle and flexible way, the writer uses the culture itself (Greek language, rhetoric and philosophy) precisely to counter the culture and show the ultimate emptiness of its presuppositions. The youngsters were looking for something good (a spirituality and a life-wisdom) *outside the faith*. The youngsters should have realised that Hellenistic culture, for all its brilliance and supremacy, could not deliver what they were looking for because that culture was solidly based on the false and absurd premises of false and absurd gods and goddesses. If only the youngsters looked at their own inheritance, when properly presented as in the Book of Wisdom, they would see that what they were seeking abroad so to speak was to be found all along at home.

In other words, true wisdom is to be found in God, in the exalted monotheism of the ancient Jewish faith. Hence the prayer of Solomon, our first reading. The Responsorial Psalm is particularly suited to the reading.

The Gospel reading adds an extra edge to the teaching of the first reading. Already from the Book of Wisdom, we learn that faith is counter-cultural. The gospel reading tells us just how counter-cultural. In the time of Jesus, individuals could attach themselves to a revered rabbi or scribe, hoping to learn as much as possible, about the Torah and its application to life. Becoming a disciple, in the Christian vision, resembles that but it is nevertheless significantly different. First of all, there is no gospel story of someone presenting him/herself successfully as a disciple *on their own initiative.* Jesus chose his followers not the other way round, as remembered in the much later “You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). Secondly, while Jesus does of course offer a teaching and a wisdom, being a disciple of his means not only listening to his teaching but being attached to him and to his destiny in a way which is much more personal way and, in the event, a much more costly discipleship.

(ii) **The culture of today**

Even in a highly secularised culture, the “hungers of the heart” do not simply go away but emerge and re-emerge in different, sometimes unexpected ways. We do live in a culture of distraction, where possessions or sheer being busy can serve to shut out the deeper longings. Nevertheless, many of our contemporaries feel these deeper longings and find themselves drawn to meditation, yoga, Buddhism, even to more (c)overtly Christian projects such as the Camino de Santiago. Our job, in our day, to help people acknowledge such “restlessness” of heart (St Augustine) and to invited them to The Way, the trusted path not only to direction and meaning but also to deep personal happiness in Christian discipleship. Sometimes, we have to go abroad so as to come home.

(iii) **Reflections on today**’**s readings**

The Synodal Pathway is both new and not new at the same time. It is new is that a very different way of being church is gradually emerging. The buzz words are listening and discernment. For that, we all need wisdom — not just any wisdom but the wisdom which comes from God. We read about such wisdom in the Letter of St James:

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:17-18)

The first step is inner conversion of heart, a disposition which truly seeks not what I want but what God wants for us, for the community of faith. Good listening to each other depends on suspending my agenda and listening to others and discerning with others. The second step is genuine prayer from the heart. We need to pray, just as Solomon prayed in the first reading, for “the wisdom from above”. Any other wisdom might just be group dynamics or political games but not the wisdom we truly need.

The Synodal Pathway is at the same time *not* new. It is really a continuation of the Second Vatican Council, long delayed. The project of that Council was a positive dialogue with the world and contemporary culture as we find it right now. That Council was solidly grounded in the Word of God and offered the world the Good News, the proclamation of Jesus and the proclamation about Jesus.

Recent papal teaching has continued such proclamation in an exceptionally clear way. For example, Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his first encyclical:

Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. (God is Love, §1)

In a more personal and less academic way, Pope Francis, in his first Apostolic Exhortation, spoke as follows:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord” (The Joy of the Gospel §3)

The Synodal Pathway cannot be first of all about the church as institution (a “meeting about meetings”). Instead, it must be first of all about the Gospel, the proclamation of Jesus and the proclamation about Jesus, in words which our contemporaries can understand and engage with. Only then can we go on to ask an important but secondary question: how should we, the people of God, organise ourselves so as best to serve the Gospel vision? How should be be as church so that the Gospel shines through us? Only by putting things in this correct order, will we be free to let the Spirit take us where it will.