Reflection on: The Call of Wisdom at the Crossroads, June 23rd 2021 - Sr Marie

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at 7.30pm on Wednesday in the physical space of the meditation room at Wisdom Centre. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: *Eternal God,* through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Introduction: Recently I facilitated a quiet day on 'Wisdom calling at the crossroads'. It is one of the faces of Wisdom according to the spirituality of St Louis Marie de Montfort, our Founder. He saw Wisdom as the feminine face of God in the Old Testament and that same Wisdom personified in the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. From Crossroads I learn that the moment there is an intertwining of my life with Wisdom's word, whether I hear it from sacred scripture or the people and events Wisdom places on my path, life is possible, transformation is possible, with grace, anything at all is possible. Wisdom speaks—will I know how to hear what she says? Wisdom calls to us– will I/we know how to respond to her? Wisdom cries out-will she find me ready to echo her cries? In Proverbs we read *'At the crossways she takes her stand…I am calling to you, to all the people, My words are addressed to all humanity… Listen, I have something important to tell you, When I speak, my words are right, My mouth proclaim the truth for evil is abhorrent to my lips'* (Proverbs 8:1-8)

When Israel Meets Wisdom for the First Time: It is the time of the exile, (around 500 BC) and Israel finds herself in a painful, almost hopeless, position. "*We now have no leader, no prophet, no prince, no burnt offering, no sacrifice, no oblation, no incense, no place where we can make offerings to you."* Daniel 3:38. Full of longing, the people feel empty and depleted. Their hearts are ready, and the time is ripe for the surprise appearance of Wisdom! When Wisdom is recognized for the first time in Israel, the people are astonished to discover that: Wisdom seeks them in the midst of ordinary life – in the market place, in the streets, on the top of the city walls, at the entrance of the city gates. These are all very ordinary earthly places where people gather. They are business places and places where court cases are settled. Here life is at its worst (cheating, arguing, *etc.*) but also at its most exciting and challenging. Wisdom takes the initiative. She appears suddenly with no warning. Wisdom has no need of leader, prophet, prince, burnt offering, sacrifice, oblation, or incense. In the midst of daily life, not just in the 'holy of holies', we meet her!

She gives A New Message of Hope – Wisdom is for Each One of Us

Wisdom is beautiful and attractive, and she stands at the centre of the Wisdom Literature. Her primary mode of being is relational. Her connections extend to every part of reality: She is closely joined to the created world. She is an intimate friend of God. She delights in the company of human beings. No aspect of reality is closed off from her. In salvation history before the exile, intimate experiences of God were reserved to a few national heroes, who had certain functions with regard to the formation of the whole people of Israel. For example, Abraham (patriarch), Moses (first and greatest of the prophets), Gideon (judge), Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, and Daniel (later prophets), David and Solomon (kings).

Normally, what went on in the personal encounter with God was then communicated to the people in the form of covenant, commandments, food for the journey, or hopes for the future. These events became part of the collective memory of Israel and were celebrated in festivals and feasts. Now, in exile, Israel had no temple, no public sacrifices, and no priests. So, both in Egypt and in Babylon, exiled Jews began to meet in 'house churches' where they returned to their 'roots', sharing their 'family stories' of patriarchs and kings, the words of their prophets, and the proverbs of their culture. Here, they began to relearn their songs and to dance again.

What they learned was, perhaps, the most revolutionary discovery of their whole history. "When we thought of God as Yahweh, the relationship was between God as sovereign power and the whole nation. When we encounter God as Wisdom, the relationship is between God dwelling among us and each of us personally." More than 2,000 years later in a country far removed from Israel, Louis Marie de Montfort made the same astounding discovery: ***Wisdom exists for each one of us; and each one of us exists for Wisdom***. Love of Eternal Wisdom (LEW) 64

This is new, and it is 'Good News' from Wisdom. She offers a new relationship with God, with all of the created universe, and with others. It means that Wisdom, like God, is: wholly other (*i.e.*, bigger than the universe or ***transcendent***) but at the same time she is one with the universe she helps to create (***immanent*****).** And so, Israel comes to understand that Wisdom is the womb of the universe, the centre of all of relationships and the main pattern of interaction and interdependence. The cause of Wisdom's joy is ***threefold*****:** God, the world, and human beings and the essence of Wisdom's role is to weave the connections among all three.

Heartfelt News – Wisdom Offers a Way to Happiness

In the book of Sirach, for the first time, Sophia is linked with the Torah. This is the most original and the most important addition made by Sirach to our understanding of Wisdom. It means that the whole history of Israel and all the traditions of her Law are incorporated in the person of Sophia. Also, it is through Wisdom that the meaning of life is revealed, and communion with God becomes possible. In its larger meaning, Torah was never narrow and legalistic. If some of its laws seemed narrow and rigid, their real aim was to make holy every moment of the day and night. Its real aim was to enable the community to live in God's presence in its work, its prayer, and every moment of its existence.

At the heart of Wisdom's message in the Old Testament is a *keyword* that anticipates the beatitudes of the New Testament. It is the expression *'asrê* which means, "Oh! The happiness of…" Here, in the midst of agony, fear, and exile, what is there to be happy about? Wisdom suggests a surprising variety of answers. Oh! The happiness of the person who: has Torah in his/her heart; knows that he or she will be forgiven; takes pleasure in Wisdom's word; sees clearly the difference between good hearts and evil hearts; has compassion for the poor; bears fruit in his or her life and is thankful for it; enjoys the marvels and stability of the universe and seeks refuge in God.

The **spoken word** is Wisdom's way of inviting us; she seeks us before we seek her. In *Pr* 1:20-21 she: shouts with joy, speaks her words, lifts up her voice, invites, implores, warns and scolds, calls and promises wonderful things.

She **speaks** to people of every culture throughout the universe **through creation** itself; She also ***nurtures*** the silent word spoken through creation by means of: the ***spoken*** word (***torah = wisdom***). The word itself suggests the image of a garden where the word can grow through a tutor or guide and also the autumn rain that revives the vegetation of the soil after the burning heat of summer. The confidence, intimacy, loyalty, and mutual responsibility transmitted in the family or clan. The ability of that word to penetrate the heart, the imagination, the intelligence, and the will. The wide embrace and deep abyss of that word which reveals who God is and God's standards for human behaviour.

She also ***acts personally***. In *Proverbs* 1: 23 she says an amazing thing: *Look, I will **pour out my spirit** upon you; I will make my words known to you.* (Translation of K. O'Connor: ***Ruah*** means spirit or breath.)

The Wisdom Woman **promises** her followers to give herself completely, fully, and personally to them, to enter into relationship with them in which reveals all that she is.

Meeting Jesus Again – for the First Time! *It is always difficult to accept a new perspective **e.g.*** writing with the hand that you don't ordinarily use or looking through eyeglasses with a different focus or a different colour or experiencing the fear that always comes with a new horizon. *We are always invited to meet Jesus -- <u>again</u> -- for the <u>first</u> time!* We see this in the apostles at the time of the transfiguration; the early Church - the scandal of the crucifixion made the early Christians ask themselves - "Who is Jesus Christ? "and in Montfort - in his "love-encounter" with Eternal Wisdom.

A New Message – Good News to the Poor! What Jesus, who was Jewish, taught in common with other Jews was there is one God — the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, *etc.* Creation includes angels, humans, and evil spirits, the guiding source of all good lives is *Torah* — the Word of God, the Law, God is just and punishing but also forgiving and eager to bestow gifts and grace, the idea of the 'Day of the Lord' — a time when God will intervene suddenly and with great power to destroy the wicked and vindicate the just

He clashed with All Major Groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes) on the idea of purity and impurity, his attitude toward lepers and outcasts, his missionary zeal, his healing miracles, mode of initiation (baptism in water and the Holy Spirit), his idea of authority – Jesus had charismatic, personal, and moral authority. He never used the authority that comes with a certain 'office' or 'title' and his ideas of the Sabbath and intermittent withdrawals from society for prayer. But, in the end, Jesus differs from all other Jewish groups in His core message THE GOOD NEWS which is about *Abba*' - Father — a personal, individual relationship as son/daughter and The *Kingdom* of God within and among us. Some modern authors write Kindom (without a 'g') to avoid patriarchy and to emphasise relationships.

It is possible to identify the uniqueness of Wisdom's teaching with our ***heads*** by comparing it with the teachings of other Jews. But, as Montfort realized, it is even more important to explore its meaning for the ***heart***. If I were poor, despised, overtaxed, and excluded from the temple by impurity laws, how would I have heard this good news of Jesus? First, let us start from the side of Jesus. His 'Good News' would have been empty and powerless if it had not come from who Jesus is and was. Jesus was a mystic. That is to say that throughout his life he had an exceptionally profound experience of oneness with God. What is more, he preached that such intimacy with God was not reserved for priests, religious teachers, monks, or those the world regards as 'holy'. He offered intimacy with God to everybody – even those whom others called stupid or sinful.

How could he explain his mystical union with God? He called God '*abba'* – the word a small child uses to call to his 'papa' or 'daddy'. Other mystics speak of that experience in terms of marriage, or sexual union, or giving birth, or losing oneself, or merging with God. But Jesus experienced it and taught it as a parent-child relationship.

This suggests that Jesus prefers this image over any traditional sacred religious image of God (Lord of Hosts, the Almighty, Master of the Universe, Holy of Holies; that the word '*abba'* is not important because it expresses masculinity, but because it expresses intimacy; that, like the love of a good parent, God's love is warm, unconditional, and totally dependable; that God forgives unconditionally (parable of the Prodigal Son); that the experience of God as his *abba* was the source of Jesus' wisdom, his clarity, his confidence, and his radical freedom; that everybody – even the poor, even sinners, even outsiders – can experience intimacy with God; that every genuine mystic is a prophet and every true prophet is a mystic and that anyone who wishes to take Jesus seriously has to be prepared to become both prophet and mystic.

Jesus preached a ***social*** revolution rather than a ***political*** one, and all social revolution begins with deep ***spiritual*** conversion. A social revolution is one that turns the social relations between people in a society upside down. A political revolution is one that changes the power relationships in society by overturning one government and replacing it with another. Jesus was, first and foremost, the Wisdom of God become incarnate. Wisdom operates both as sage and as prophet. As ***Sage*** (wisdom teacher) he introduced: a ***spiritual*** revolution and a ***social*** revolution, an entirely new vision of our relationships with God, with one another, and with the whole of creation. As ***Prophet*** he knew that ***the struggle to dismantle the structures of power*** would be the unavoidable consequence of living out His social and spiritual revolution.

The wisdom teachings are to be found mainly in the sayings of Jesus – notably present in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7 and Luke 6), in other discourses of Jesus, and as commentaries on some parables; certain parables of Jesus whose purpose is to reverse common cultural and religious beliefs and the "I am" sayings in John's Gospel.

Beginning Meditation:
In preparation for your prayer today, I invite you to take the position you usually have for prayer. Gently call the focus of your attention to what you can feel in your body and see or hear around you. Maybe your mind is burdened with thoughts, regrets and loss from the past as well as worries about what your future may hold. Bring these thoughts and feelings before the Beloved, holding them gently in mind and allow yourself slowly to be still. Call to mind awareness of the present moment. This is where your Beloved waits for you now in the present. You may focus on a candle, your breathing, your special word…

Post Meditation

Eternal Wisdom and Creation Lady Wisdom in the Old (First)Testament	Incarnate Wisdom and Creation Jesus in the New (Second) Testament
She is the untarnished mirror of God's active power, the image of His goodness. (Wis. 7:26)	He is the image of the invisible God. (Col 1:16)
Yahweh possessed me (Lady Wisdom), the first fruits of his fashioning before the oldest of his works. (Pr 8:22)	He is the firstborn of all creatures. (Col 1:16)
With you is Wisdom who knows your works; who was with you when you made the world (Wis 9:9)	In Him all things have been created. (Col 1:16)
Strongly she reaches from one end of the world to the other, and she governs the whole world for its good. (Wis 8:1)	In Him all things hold together (Col 1:17) When the times had run their course, He would bring everything together Under Christ as head Everything in the heavens and on earth. (Eph 1:10)
I (Sophia) searched for rest and for a place to pitch my tent. I pitched my tent in Jacob. (Sir 24:8)	The Word became flesh And pitched his tent among us. (Jn 1:14)
Herself unchanging, she renews the world. (Wis 7:27)	For anyone who is in Christ there is a new creation. The old order is gone, and a new one is being born. (2 Cor 5:17)
She passes into Holy Souls, making them friends of God and prophets. (Wis 7:27)	You are my friends; I shall no longer call you servants. (Jn 15:14)

Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Moments of your personal prayer follow…**Amen**

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon.

Resources: *Wisdom cries out at the Crossroads,* Daughters of Wisdom Handbook
The Wisdom Literature, Kathleen O'Connor
The Divine Feminine in Biblical Wisdom Literature, Rabbi Rami Shapiro
Jesus Today: a Spirituality of Radical Freedom, Albert Nolan
Images of Jesus Today, James Charlesworth



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