

23rd Sunday Ordinary Time
September 6, 2015
Readings: Isaiah 35: 4-7; James 2: 1-5; Mark 7: 31-37

“How is any of this going to help me get a job?” I still recall vividly when a high school classmate asked this question to the teacher. He was less than impressed with the relevance of the material being communicated, and so with an exasperated tone of voice blurted out his question. “What difference does any of this make?” I do not recall the teacher’s answer, but it should have been: “It won’t, and neither will anything else in this school because with an attitude like that who in their right mind would ever hire someone like you?”

On a weekend dedicated in our country to Labor, the Church’s wisdom has much to offer us on the value and relevance of labor and knowledge. The human person desires to know, even if my classmate did not. We want to know about things, for we are by nature inquisitive. God has implanted in us a desire to know, to seek, to question, to wonder. But we also need to bring home the bacon! So why do so many fail to see its value?

Perhaps we have only seen value in education as a means to an end and not as a value in itself. Magazines proudly list the average starting salaries of their graduates, but I do not recall a statistic about the percentage graduates who continue to actively read books, or otherwise keep up with lifelong learning. Our society is diminished because of it. T.S. Eliot posed the question:

Where is the life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?¹

The poem forces us to re-evaluate our presuppositions about the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge may come

¹ T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from the Rock*, 1934

through analysis—that is, taking things apart. But wisdom consists in “putting things together.” Yes, there is an inherent tension between the two, as we all have lives to live and sometimes wonder if it is worthwhile to speculate and think lofty thoughts, while the laundry needs to be done and the dishes are stacking up in the sink.

But my classmate was not alone in asking such questions—the early 3rd century theologian Tertullian asked these rhetorical questions:

What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?²

You see, Athens was the place of pagan philosophy, while Jerusalem was the place of faith and revelation. Tertullian did not want to be bothered with “useless speculation!” I will always defend the value of knowledge and its pursuit, but if I were forced to choose, I would rather be wise than brilliant, for wisdom cannot be measured in an ACT score. Our Catechism teaches us: “At its core the piety of the people is a storehouse of values that offers answers of Christian **wisdom** to the great questions of life.”³

Wisdom is evident in your lives of faith and sacrifice. We do not have to go searching deep into the shelves of libraries to find it. It is present in your grandparents, your parents, those whose experience gives them a perspective tried, tested and true. “You cannot love that which you do not know.” In the end, it is not just about ‘knowing’ the Catechism, but in living it through lives of faith and service and being open to receiving God’s grace.

² Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph #1676