

Folly

“Dame Folly is fickle, she is inane and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house upon a seat on the city heights, calling to passers-by as they go on their straight way: ‘Let whoever is simple turn in here, or who lacks understanding; for to him I say, Stolen water is sweet, and bread gotten secretly is pleasing!’ Little he knows that the shades are there, that in the depths of the nether world are her guests!”

(Proverbs 9:13-18)

In the Bible, Wisdom and its opposite, Folly, are personified. Madam Wisdom sets a banquet for human beings, a rich feast of understanding and instruction for right conduct to make a person pleasing in the sight of God. Dame Folly, by contrast, is like a city prostitute trying to attract potential “johns” who may be passing by her front door. She is a seductress bent on luring men to lose themselves in self-indulgence and the abuse of freedom.

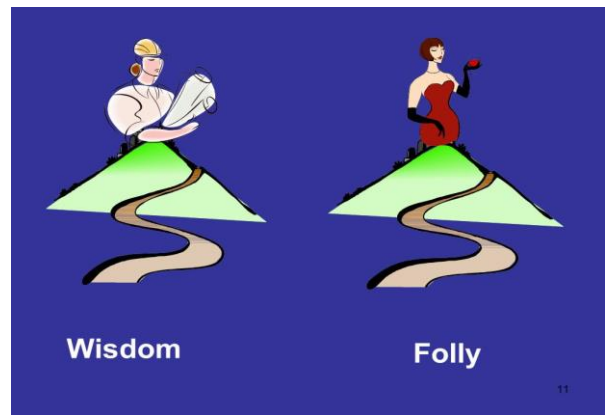
Of course, these are personifications of virtue and vice: they are not two, actual women. The point is that there is a contest for our hearts, minds and souls constantly underway in the life that we are living and it pays to be vigilant within the concrete circumstances of life as to whether we are engaging matters with an appeal to Divine Wisdom or if we are participating in some person’s folly.

Regrettably, “wisdom,” as a quality of life to be attained or sought, is not something promoted as it once was. The post-Enlightenment world in which we live stresses technical prowess and mastery over nature. Receptivity to what is disclosed in the nature of things as God has created them has been supplanted by an aggressive, utilitarian mastery. Perhaps a simpler way of putting it is that we don’t ask about the purpose or meaning that already resides in nature but, rather, questions along the lines of, “*What can we do with it?*” “*How can we make money with it?*” “*What can we make of it?*”

I am not opposing wisdom and technical achievement: Ideally, these two values would work hand in hand. The distinguishing characteristic of wisdom, as we receive it from the Bible and our Sacred Tradition, is that there is a respect for nature

has having the laws of the Creator imprinted on it. As stated in the U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults,

“It is God who brings creation into being; thus the physical world acts according to his plan found in the physical laws of nature. He also made man and woman in his own image and likeness. Human beings, then, are also directed according to God’s created plan, written in their hearts and implanted in their human nature . . . The natural law expresses the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and the lie. We come to know it through our human reason and through it’s confirmation in Divine Revelation.” (pg. 327)



In these terms, we can better understand where the Church is coming from on issues where she is at odds with the prevailing culture. In a general sense, her teachings challenge the world with the question, “*Just because we are technically able to bend nature to our will, is it wise to do so?*” Consider this question in terms of the manipulation of human reproduction, cloning, designer children, etc. And, does it accord with the truth to frustrate nature’s inherent goals such as when procreation is divorced from the meaning of marriage and sex? And, in the area of non-human nature, do our manipulations of nature for our own utilitarian purposes threaten to ruin our home planet? Is it wise to continue using and abusing as we do now? It may be good for business but is it really “wise.”

This reflection only scratches the surface of the matter at hand and my intention is merely to introduce the theme into your conscious and mine. The point is, we are called and summoned to live according to God’s Wisdom. It is nothing less than following his instructions to reach the goal which is our hearts desire.