

HOMILY

The Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time *August 15/16, 2009*

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There are two birds that fly over our nation's deserts: one is the hummingbird; the other is the vulture. The vultures find the rotting meat of the desert because that is what they look for. They thrive on that diet. But hummingbirds ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead they look for the colorful blossoms of desert plants.

The vultures live on *what was*. They live on the past. They fill themselves with what is dead and gone. But hummingbirds live on *what is*. They seek new life. They fill themselves with freshness and life. *Each bird finds what it is looking for. We all do!*

That is the essence of today's teaching from God. In life there are two birds. The one bird looks for foolishness and stupidity; the other looks for wisdom. In the desert of this world, you have your scavengers who are angry and ungrateful; but you also have those who hum a grateful hymn of thanksgiving. The irony is that you find what you are looking for.

Paul says be careful how you live—not as unwise, but wise, making the most of every opportunity.

When was the last time you heard the word “wisdom”? Wisdom is a virtue that has gone out of our vocabulary. To acquire it, wisdom takes too much time, too many failures, too many hard knocks, too much listening, too much being still and watching. You cannot download wisdom from some third party vender, so we prefer to move and do without. But Paul warns that if we are careless, we will miss opportunities. Every day we are bombarded with choices, and wisdom is required to make the most of them. We must be wise and make the most of every opportunity. But Paul also says that we must make the most of each opportunity because the days are evil. What does he mean by “evil”?

Most of us spend our days getting children to school, working at our jobs, preparing meals for the family, and doing our chores. What could possibly be evil in that? But let me ask you: What is your attitude while doing all these things?

Paul gives us a long list in Chapters Four and Five of dos and don'ts for Christian living. In fact, he challenges us to follow these admonitions:

- ◆ Put off your old self.
- ◆ Put off falsehood.
- ◆ Do not let the sun go down on your anger.
- ◆ He who is stealing must steal no longer.
- ◆ Get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, slander and malice.
- ◆ There should be no hint of sexual immorality, impurity or greed.

Just as these dwell on destructive behavior, he also insists on replacing the bad with the good.

- ◆ Speak truthfully to your neighbor.
- ◆ Share with those who are in need.
- ◆ Do something useful with your own hands.
- ◆ Build others up.
- ◆ Be kind, compassionate and forgiving.
- ◆ Be imitators of our God.

Do you know what wisdom is? It is not the accumulation of facts or even experience; this is simply knowledge. Wisdom is the ability to discern what is true, right and lasting. Paul is right when he tells us in Verse 17: *“Do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the lord.”*

Wisdom discerns between what is right and what is wrong. Wisdom insists that there is good and there is evil. The wise are careful. They make the most of every opportunity. They understand there is evil in the world and they seek the will of God to live right. That is wisdom. And wherever we are, whether making or missing those opportunities, we are to be thankful. Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, therein we should be content.

It's like the story of the man who goes to his rabbi and complains, “Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?” The rabbi answers, “Take your goat into the room with you.” The man is incredulous, but the rabbi insists, “Do as I say and come back in a week.” A week later the man comes

back looking more distraught than before. “We cannot stand it!” the man tells the rabbi. “The goat is filthy.” The rabbi then tells him, Go home and let the goat out and come back in a week.” A radiant man returns to the rabbi a week later exclaiming, “Life is beautiful! We enjoy every minute of it now that there’s no goat—only the nine of us!”

It’s a matter of perspective, isn’t it? We can be grateful or we can be bitter. We can seek wisdom or we can live as fools. What are you looking for in life?

