

Wisdom of Proverbs and Parables Seventh Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday,
February 21, 2017 8:15 AM **Sir 2:1-11; Mk 9:30-37** (St. Peter Damian, bishop and
Doctor of the Church) (We can live undisturbed, not without suffering, but maintaining one's
equilibrium in suffering.)

“Be sincere of heart and steadfast, incline your ear and receive the word of understanding, undisturbed in time of adversity.”

This is a type of proverb from the Book of Sirach, which is one of the books of Wisdom found in our Old Testament. Wisdom is one of the least appreciated aspects of our Old Testament. People often think in terms of the history revealed in the Old Testament, which is not exactly accurate in a modern sense, and they think of the Law written down in the Old Testament, which has its own kind of wisdom. They think of the prophets and all the remarkable events that the prophets interpreted. But then there is this body of wisdom. It's actually a profound wisdom, and it constitutes about a third of the Old Testament. In a way it's very important for Christians because it's upon wisdom that the New Testament gospels are actually based. **Jesus' parables are all types of wisdom teaching. A parable is an exaggerated proverb**, and so on. So we have very great reason for wanting to root ourselves firmly in this tradition that in a way **Jesus** was also situated in. **I think he was more a wisdom teacher than he was a rabbi.** Even in his day people called him “Rabbi,” but he was more a wisdom teacher. **He surely was not concerned with the Torah as it had developed, only in its original intention.**

So what is this wisdom all about? Some people wrongly think it's just really a kind of philosophy. That's not really true, not if we compare it to the philosophy of the Greeks or even the wisdom teaching of the East, India for example or China. The wisdom of Scripture is different. If you look to the **Greeks** or you look to the Hindus or the Buddhists or the Chinese, **their wisdom or their philosophy is really all about self-reliance.** It's about using knowledge, gaining knowledge and then using knowledge for your own personal benefit. And that's not necessarily wrong or bad, but it's not what the Bible is talking about.

What the wisdom of the Old Testament is talking about is relating to God and learning how to rely on God, even in terms of knowledge, that God is actually the source of knowledge,

that God will guide and direct our own personal choices, and that when we let God do this **we can live undisturbed, although not without suffering.** There will be suffering. This is all about suffering. But **it's about maintaining one's equilibrium in suffering.** It's about not "losing" it because of adversity, because of pain, because of failure. **It's about holding oneself together through the power of God, who is very close to those who seek him.**

And it talks about fear of the Lord. Fear of the Lord is not fear in the ordinary sense that we fear enemies or we fear misfortune. It's a different kind of fear altogether. **This fear here is a kind of reverence and it is an openness to mystery, to the reality that surrounds us and created us and leads us on that cannot be explained.** This is so different from Greek philosophy that is about explaining things. There is no explanation. **It's living without understanding** in a way. **It's living in darkness, but being led through it with a sort of equanimity, and it leads to lasting joy and mercy.** Mercy is of course associated with forgiveness, and **forgiveness is letting go of the past and moving onward.** And this is all part of living in the wisdom of God.

We must emphasize the fact that it is very possible—**it is very possible.** And that's the whole point of this book, to make people quite aware of **how possible it is to live a good life, not a life without suffering and not a life without disappointment, but surely a life without being forsaken, and not driven by anxiety and fear in a negative sense,** but rather fear in the positive sense of **reverence and awe for the mystery which we are in,** which we are part of leading us onward, saving us in times of trouble and promising us a glorious future.