

World Day of Prayer Talk 7th March 2008

Sr Isobel Smyth

The focus of today's service is Wisdom – God's Wisdom; but who knows the mind of God? Who can grasp God's infinite Wisdom? In one of the readings it says: Where then does Wisdom come from?

Where is the place of understanding?

It is hidden from the eyes of all the living

And concealed from the birds of the air

A verse in the Book of Proverbs (8.30) tells us where Wisdom is found: In this book, Wisdom speaks for herself.

“I was by God's side, a master craftsman

delighting him day after day,

ever at play in his presence

at play everywhere in his world

delighting to be with the children of men and women.”

Wisdom then, is ever at play, delighting to be with people. For me, this says that we can learn through relationships. Through personal relationships we learn Wisdom, coming to understand the mystery of the “other” person. We learn not to take the “other” for granted and to be open to learning new things about them. So we give them space and freedom to change, to reveal to us new capacities of themselves.

In the wider community sometimes we learn Wisdom through conflict and tension, through different and quite opposite perspectives. Often, it is through these difficult and opposing perspectives that we find the way to a common solution.

God's Wisdom, therefore is to be found in others and we need to listen, to look behind the words, the façade, the projected image in order to find the truth and the Wisdom of what is said and done.

This is particularly so for those who are different from us. Buddhists tell us we learn most from the people we find difficult.

The World Day of Prayer is a great network of prayer. We are united in faith and prayer puts us for a short time into a relationship with women of a different culture and ethnicity.

But I am often struck by the fact that the service seems written in isolation from the rest of the reality from which it comes. Our services mention the ills of society. We are aware of social issues and political struggles – there is no mention of the “others” in society who are also struggling with these same issues. Where is the mention of the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Amerindians, all people of faith in Guyana society? On the whole, people of faith live in compact communities, in isolation from one another. Perhaps there is a Wisdom to be found in these relationships as well as others even though most people of faith think Wisdom is to be found in their own country. Do we believe that there might be a Wisdom in a faith other than Christian, for instance Islam which currently receives such a poor press? Are we willing to listen to other faiths and to go beyond apparent differences to discover the Wisdom at the heart of all faiths?

I have been privileged enough to journey into the world of other faiths, and, as in other relationships, God's Wisdom is there to be found. What do we find? At the heart of every relationship, no matter what the faith, there is: a call from God; a desire for God; a longing for happiness and meaning; a yearning for a better world and a commitment to love one's neighbour. The Golden Rule is to do unto others what you would have them do unto you. This belief is found in every religion. And of course religions have their own particular Wisdom and something to teach us all.

Let me finish with a story. A traveller in a desert notices at a distance a horrible and violent monster coming towards him. The traveller is frightened. As the monster gets closer, the traveller can see a bit more clearly the monster is not a monster, but a human being, rather ugly, but a human being none the less. After a while the traveller can see the person again, even more closely. He realises that the person is not ugly after all. Finally, when the traveller looks into the other's eyes, he recognises that this is his brother.