

Donnybrook

10 November 2021

Welcome

We are hearing these days from the book of Wisdom, a book which is surprisingly close to our time. It was written just before the birth of Jesus, for the Jewish community in Alexandria, in Egypt. The place was full of different religions and philosophies, including the famous library. The young members of the Jewish community were attracted by the surrounding culture and were leaving the faith, as they say, in droves. The book of wisdom is a very sophisticated attempt to show them that what they are looking for in the outside world is to be found inside their own faith, if only it was presented properly and if only they looked into it deeply.

Topic

This is not at all unlike our own time and we can learn from the book of Wisdom.

Steps

The first step for the book of Wisdom is to recognise the hungers of the heart. These won't go away even if religious practice wanes. You can see this in the search elsewhere – meditation, yoga, mindfulness, even Buddhism, different attempts to cope with stress.

The second step is to recognise the need for wisdom and guidance, a way of living – precisely what the our first reading is about. Our first reading seems to be an instruction for a ruler, but Jews had no kings at the time. Instead, it is a metaphor: just as a ruler needs wisdom to rule, each individual needs wisdom to rule their own lives, to govern ourselves. In chapter 9, there is a wonderful prayer for wisdom.

The third step of the book of Wisdom is the point out firmly and fairly that the deep spirituality people seek elsewhere is really to be found in the faith of the ancestors. This is very like our experience – many do not know the richness of the Christian tradition when it comes to spirituality and contemplation. Some of the great books are quite accessible, such as those by Teresa of Ávila.

Conclusion

There is much more to the Book of Wisdom, a book close to our experience than you might imagine. My favourite passage is tomorrow's reading – an astonishing combination of poetry, spirituality and philosophy.