The Virtue of Discernment & Wisdom - HE Metropolitan Youssef

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What is Wisdom and Discernment

- "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Hebrews 5:14)
  - Wisdom is for the Spiritually Mature
  - Lack of discernment is an indicator of spiritual immaturity

Wisdom in the Scripture

- Wisdom is a requirement for those who will serve as deacons
  - "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ... And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which [Stephen] spoke." (Acts 6:3, 10)
- Wisdom is one of the titles of our Lord Jesus Christ
  - "[Christ,] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Colossians 2:3)
- The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of wisdom and understanding
  - "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:2)
- Wisdom is one of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit
  - "For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12: 8)

Heavenly Wisdom vs Earthly Wisdom

- Wisdom of the world is called "cunning" or "craftiness"

    - "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their *own* craftiness'" (1 Corinthians 3:19)
- Heavenly Wisdom is that which comes from above
    - "Who *is* wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom." (James 3:13)
        - Wisdom of the world comes with arrogance, but heavenly wisdom comes with meekness.
    - "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking *exist,* confusion and every evil thing *are* there." (James 3:14-16)
        - If the wisdom that I have is self-seeking, selfish, with pride - then it is craftiness or cunning. It's not heavenly wisdom.
    - "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." (James 3:17)
- Examples of Earthly Wisdom
    - The Serpent in Genesis 3 who is described as "more cunning" than the other animals
    - Jezebel who used craftiness to acquire Naboth's field and have him killed, with some false witnesses
    - Rebecca, the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau - when she told Jacob how to deceive his father
    - Ahitophel's counsel to Absalom which would have enabled Absalom to steal the kingdom from King David - but the Lord dispersed the counsel of Ahitophel (as we say in the liturgy)
    - Balaam who in his earthly wisdom advised Moab to send their women to Israel to cause them to fall into the sin of sexual immorality and God will not be with them

How can we acquire Heavenly Wisdom?

1. **Prayer**: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5)
    - King Solomon, when he became king after his father, King David, felt the weight of his responsibility. And the Lord spoke to him and told him to ask for whatever he wants and King Solomon asked for wisdom. And he was the wisest man to ever live.
    - In the Bishop Canon: "You were granted... the wisdom of Solomon"
    - If this wisdom comes from above, let us ask for this wisdom from above

2. **The Scripture**: "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts." (Proverbs 119:99-100)

3. **Counsel:**
    - Any president in any country has many counselors; Many people retire and work as advisors

- Ask, and learn wisdom! Especially from the elders, from the clergy, from your Sunday School servants
- When you ask and learn with the spirit of a disciple, you will build up your wisdom
- St Athanasius described St Anthony as a bee - a bee flies from one flower to another flower to collect the nectar. St Anthony used to go from one father to another father to learn from them.

4. **Learn from the Mistakes of Others:**
   - You need to learn from your own mistakes, but don't wait to repeat the mistakes of others to learn!
   - You know from statistics, life experience, research, etc. how drugs have destroyed many youth. So learn from this! Don't go into drugs or smoking or gambling or alcohol... learn from the mistakes of others!
   - If someone told you that fire burns, you don't need to put your hand in the fire to know that it burns.

Wisdom is Needed for Making Decisions and Choices

1. Some decisions are well known to be very very bad
   - Drugs and sexual immorality
   - I know it is bad, I will stay away from it. This decision is easy.

2. Some decisions are well known to be very very good
   - Fasting, Helping the poor, Visiting the sick, Attending Youth Meeting, Going to Church
   - I know it is good, this decision is easy to make

3. Some decisions are more difficult - I don't know if this will help me or hurt me
   - e.g. you are accepted to a college in a state that does not have a church. Every situation is different, and it requires discernment to figure out what is the best decision for you.
   - Pray about wisdom from God to help me to discern
   - Ask myself which one is better for my Spiritual Life? Which one is edifying?
     - Is it edifying or wise to live in a place where the closest church is 4 hours away?
     - Is it suitable for me and my family?
   - Go and get the opinion of others
     - Get counsel from wise, godly people. Don't get opinion or advice from people who are not wise, or from people who are ungodly.
   - Use your mind
     - Make a table, write the choices and the pros and cons. In writing. And this table should not be filled in one session - my thoughts are in one direction now, but tomorrow may be in the opposite direction. I need to fill out this table over a period of 7-10 days. When I remember a point, I write it down.
     - So at the end, when I look at the table, it will be clear (through the guidance of the Holy Spirit) which decision I should make

- Don't make quick decisions. Quick decisions can be a hinderance to wisdom.
  - St Macarius one time had the idea to enter into the inner desert to find the anchorites. From outside, this decision looks good... but, he writes, "I examined this thought for three years to know whether it is from God or not from God."
  - Someone upsets you and you immediately say "okay I quit, this friendship is over... I'm not gonna talk to him anymore." - you did not use your mind, you followed your emotions. And since your emotions are negative, your decision was bad.

Wisdom's Benefits

- Wisdom protects you from falling into false spirituality
  - Someone might say "I want to grow in the virtue of obedience... I will obey everyone who is older than me." - it sounds good... but it needs wisdom and discernment. If someone older then comes and tells you to do something that is sinful, or that will not edify you, or that will hurt you, and you do it "out of obedience" - that is false spirituality! You need discernment and wisdom to know NOT to obey in that instance.
- Wisdom will help you in dealing with cunning and crafty people
  - They went to the Lord and told Him - "we know you are a man of God and you don't have any partiality and you don't fear people, so we want to ask you a question... should we pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" It's a trap. If He says yes, they will tell the Jews: "See? He is not the Prophet or the Messiah... He's encouraging you to submit to the occupying government." And if He says no, they will go to Caesar and say: "He is turning the people against your empire." It's a no-win question. The Lord, in His wisdom told them to show Him a denarii and He asked whose inscription it was... it's Caesars! He said "then it's Caesar's! So render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and render to God what belongs to God"
  - HHPS was attacked by crafty people like this many times because he was wise.
    - They asked him who will go to heaven? Christians, Muslims or Jews? And in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit he answered "he who has sound faith and does good deeds will go to heaven" - which is true.
    - Another time, he was asked about where a prominent Muslim leader was going after he died. Of course, HH couldn't say that he isn't going to heaven as that would cause issues between Muslims and Christians. But HH responded "he is going with his beloved Mohammad" - which was an answer that appeased both the Muslims and the Christians.
- Wisdom will help you to discern when to speak and when to be silent
  - There are times when silence is a sin - if St Athanasius was silent at hearing Arius' heresy, that would have been sin.
- Wisdom is needed in dealing with others
  - Some people clash with others - how to sympathize and how to empathize, requires wisdom
  - Rejoicing with those who rejoice, and weeping with those who weep
- Wisdom is needed in studying the Scripture

    - Some people use earthly wisdom to interpret the text - "No one will believe if you say that this is actually Body and Blood... no it must be a symbol"
    - Some people take one verse - "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved" - and throw out the rest of the Bible
- Wisdom will help you to know when to be submissive and when to be assertive

Wisdom vs Intelligence

- Wisdom is not the same as intelligence
    - Wisdom can be acquired by the experience of life
    - Many people who are not educated, but are filled with the Holy Spirit, you can find wisdom in their mind and heart.
- One thing that hinders wisdom is lack of knowledge
    - We need to read more and be particular about what we choose to read - not always just novels and stories; not wasting hours on social media; not just reading headlines.
    - Feed your mind with good reading
        - Food is the nourishment of our body
        - Spiritual Exercises like prayer and Scripture is the nourishment of our spirit
        - Reading is the nourishment of the mind
    - Choosing a spouse? Read books about choosing a spouse, about marriage, about the engagement period, about the role of man and woman in marriage, how to keep the bond and fellowship.
    - Having a child? Read about parenting, how to deal with children, characteristics of children at certain ages, etc.
    - People who read a lot from good resources are very wise. When you go and ask them for advice, their advice is very helpful.

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