

WEDNESDAY MEETING – 8th February 2017

Wisdom & Freedom of God

Tonight we will start with a recap. For the last 3 weeks we have been talking about hosting the presence of God. Now we are not just ordinary people but we are hosting the presence, because God decides that we become the vehicle and He becomes the passenger. So, none of us are empty. We need to believe we are children of God and we are hosting His presence.

To host His presence, we saw the three keys that we need:

1. The Sacrament of Reconciliation
2. The Holy Eucharist
3. Praise and worship

When we praise and worship, we are hosting His presence and He is in our lives.

The Lord wants a person, a companion to take His presence, like any one of us. That person is going to be equipped by the Lord. **How?** We saw it in the character of Moses. God told Moses, "You go and bring my people back, go and tell these things to the people and to pharaoh," and Moses said, "I don't know if they'll believe me." He doubted if the people would believe and then God said the reason he did that was because he wasn't having a relationship with the Lord.

The same thing happens to us. We doubt Him and we don't know if God will do something. If I don't have an intimate relationship with God, then I will always doubt and have that cloud in front of me. So, Moses, didn't know what would happen and if the people would believe. Then God asked, "What do you have in your hands?" Moses answered, "It's a staff." It was just an ordinary stick that he would have used to move around and climb mountains. There was no power in this stick. Then the Lord told him to put it down and Moses put it down. As he put that staff down, that ordinary stick that he was using to climb around became a snake - a living thing. All this time there was no life in this stick, but all of a sudden, when it was thrown to the Lord, it had life.

The Lord was showing Moses, "I am beyond the supernatural. All you need to do is trust Me." He told Moses to take that snake back and when he took that snake, it turned back into the staff. Before, Moses was having the staff and it was his. When he gave it to the Lord, it came back with power.

There was a moment where Moses had to face a crisis - when he came to the Red Sea. He had the Egyptians on one side and the sea on the other, and there was nowhere to go. Even in our lives there are situations like that. It looks like you have nowhere to go and you're squashed in between and you don't know what to do.

At that moment, the man who doubted God - Moses - received the strength to trust God because by this time he had an intimacy with the Lord. He told the people "Don't worry. The battle belongs to the Lord." All Moses did was he raised the staff and the water parted and the people crossed.

The Lord is waiting to equip you and me with this same power. All we need to do is be open and say, "Yes Lord, I am going to be the vehicle." If we say, "I can't, I have a lot of work to do," and if we are going to postpone all that then we are going to miss that opportunity. When we host the presence of God, He is there and we have to receive the power.

Today I'm going to talk about the wisdom we are going to receive from God and the freedom of God. Without that wisdom from God, we will only have the wisdom from the world. Even the freedom we have is only what the world offers us. We are going to see what this wisdom and freedom the Lord is offering us when we host His presence.

For that we need to look at this Sunday's reading - taken from the book of Sirach. Before we go to the reading, I need to tell you the background to the chapter. The author was a Jewish man who loved the temple and the people and the religion. Because of that he saw the people in Israel at that time getting attracted to the Greek culture - which was hedonistic. That culture was all about orgies and sex and that was their life. This person was worried that the Israelites would get attracted and leave.

For that, he wrote about faith. This is the background this chapter is written on. It is talking about the choices and the law and the freedom we have got.

God has given us the freedom to choose anything - not like any other animals. Animals don't have the freedom to choose. If there is a dog in your house, you may love that dog, but if you wear your heels and trample his tail, will he smile and say, "Oh, this is my lady/gentleman." He will snap, because if there is pain he has been programmed to snap. That's why when people snap we tell them not to act like animals.

God has given us a free will and we are going to look at this freedom that the Lord is offering us. In the normal world, freedom is the belief that I can do what I want at any time - nobody can stop me. Everyone is looking for that freedom. A lot of people wait until they're 18. The parents also know, at 18, children have the freedom to do anything. When I was in a particular country, the mother was saying, "Next week is my daughter's 18th birthday." Now they can drink, now they can drive cars. Parents are waiting to give the children alcohol, the freedom of alcohol is there because after 18 you can't stop them. People also encourage them. The children are waiting for that moment of freedom, where they can say, "When can I do this?"

One of our people who was doing a school programme in one of the Colombo schools for A level students was saying, suddenly during the worship she had said, "People who are waiting to colour their

hair, to tattoo their body, to cut their hair differently - please raise your hands in the time of the Lord." All of a sudden she saw so many hands going up. These children were waiting for their advanced level because that was the end of that era of law. They were waiting for that moment to get a tattoo. People don't realize that when you get tattoos, you grow old one day. So at the moment with all the muscles you have a huge lion. After about 70 years, the lion is sagging and almost falling off your hand.

When I was working, we were not allowed to have short haircuts. There was a law which said no short hair for guys. We were waiting until we got our annual leave to cut our hair short. When there is a law that has been set, we are waiting to break that. The first day of our leave itself we go for a very short haircut. We used to do all that because we were desiring something deep in our hearts. Some people would come and say, "I fell asleep and the guy who cut my hair has used zero on my head."

What happens in this freedom is, regardless of what you like or want to do, you encounter law. We got freedom from the British, but that doesn't mean from that time we were able to do whatever we wanted. The country has a law. Most of the young and modern people believe that this law that is there is a block for their self actualization. They think they can't go beyond this because it's blocking them.

Remember that every choice that we make in life has a consequence whether you like it or not. We have the freedom to choose but there are consequences

There was a mother whom I knew who was a very liberal person and she came from a mixed marriage. She was saying, "My two sons have been given the freedom to choose whatever the religion they want because I don't want to push them." She herself was a Christian. Do you think that children can choose religion? With the greatest difficulty when we have them in our own religion do we get them to come to church. But here, this mother gave her children the freedom to choose the religion. These children ended up as drug addicts. One of the guys are still cursing the parents and saying, "They never gave us value."

We have a responsibility. Yes there is this word called freedom - but there are consequences you will have to face when you make these choices. You cannot get away from that. The choice is ours and the consequences are already laid down.

Lalith thaththa was telling us about an experience where he met a guy who said, "I cannot sleep. I'm on medication and I'm depressed and I'm struggling." Then thaththa had asked, "What happened to you and when did this happen?" He said that during the time of the insurrection, as a suspect they brought in an old man for questioning to the police station. In the process of questioning nothing happened, and this guy got so angry that he hit this old man so hard that he got a heart attack and he died on the spot. Thaththa had asked if that was the moment he couldn't sleep and this man said no. He said, "The next morning, when I was going out of the police station, there was a little boy outside. He said, 'My grandfather is inside. Will you be sending him home soon?'" That was the moment that hit me in my life."

You can make your choices but there are consequences that you cannot avoid. You have the freedom, because if you lose your freedom then you lose your joy from deep inside. You can be the most powerful

person, you may think you have all the authority to do anything - but the problem is, when you do it, there is so much of hurt and you lose everything from inside. We have seen how people get addicted because we have already made the choice of what we want. We have the freedom to do what we want - and that's what we think. You can do what you want but there are consequences.

Sirach 15:15

If you choose, you can keep the commandments, they will save you. If you trust in God, you too shall live.

God is always giving us a choice. We talk about the Ten Commandments and whenever we talk about these commandments we see it very negatively. We think it has been given for us to be punished. These Ten Commandments unites us deeply with God, though we are unaware of it. The first three commandments connect us to God and the other seven connect us to other people. We become one body and when we break one commandment, we have broken everything and gone against everyone. Fundamentally, nobody can avoid this. You cannot look at it in a negative way because God has given this for a reason.

Sirach 15:16-17

He has set before you fire and water; to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. Before man are life and death, good and evil - whichever he chooses shall be given to him.

The Lord is saying, "I have placed in front of you fire and water, death and life, good and evil. The choice is all yours - take it or leave it." You need to make the choice. What would happen if you choose fire? Definitely you're going to burn your hand! What if you have that faith and say, "No, nothing is going to happen. I'm going to put my hand into fire." What will happen? Still it's going to burn. Sometimes that's what happens in affairs. People say, "No I must go through this, I am going ahead. All these people are jealous of what I'm going to do." So you go and put your hand and now it's burning and you're wondering where you went wrong. We have made the wrong choice.

When a child puts his hand into fire, after that this child will never put it again. All parents block all the plug points and we are frightened that something will happen to the child. However when the parents aren't there, they will try to do it. The common thing parents say is, "Don't touch, I'll hit you." After it happens we say, "How many times did I tell you not to touch?" That's a standard thing of parents. They don't give the child a choice or distract the child. All that is shown is this one option and that's it. A lot of people say, "I've started drinking," but why do you drink? "I'm having problems at home," they say. Just because you drink so you think the problems will go off? Again it is the wrong choice. Or some will say, "I'm not happy and because of that I got involved with X, Y and Z." That's the only way they can fill their lives because that's their choice.

Will that choice give you freedom? Will that choice bring you joy? Even your family is broken, other families are broken and there is fire in that place. The choice is given to us by God - but with consequences. Either it is going to ruin us or bless us. God says, "I have given you the freedom - you choose what you want." Do you want your hand burnt? Go ahead. He isn't going to stop you and say not to do that, but He is simply teaching us about choices.

Sirach 15:18-20

Immense is the wisdom of the Lord; He is mighty in power and all seeing; the eyes of God are on those

who fear Him, He understands man's every deed. No one does He command to act unjustly, to none does He give license to sin.

God knows everything about you and me. He knows our needs. Proverbs 9:10 says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. People think the fear of God means you have to be frightened, but that is the beginning of wisdom. He is raising each and every one of us. Freedom has been given to everyone of us and He says, "I know what you want, but you belong to me." Here He is talking about freedom and about choices. How do we get it? We don't know how to make this choice. We don't have the wisdom. In the gospel, He is talking about a wisdom much greater than that of the world:

Matthew 5:20

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Why is Jesus attacking the Pharisees and scribes constantly? They knew the law and the commandments by heart. They were people who loved the religion, but their problem was that they twisted it the way they wanted. If they wanted to do something, all they did was twisted the law according to their own whims and fancies.

In yesterday's reading Jesus was rebuking the scribes and saying, "The commandment says you are supposed to look after your parents, otherwise you will be cursed. What do you do? You take the money you separated to look after your parents and have given it to the Lord." The Lord is saying, "You must surpass this."

Pope Francis describes this beautifully in the apostolic exaltation - Joy of the Gospel. He calls this 'Spiritual Worldliness.' He says, "...which hides behind the appearance of piety and even love of the church, and consists in seeking not the glory of the Lord, but human glory and personal wellbeing..."

We are trying to be righteous externally, at a surface level, but internally we are gone. Jesus is introducing something new. He is saying, "You must go beyond the Pharisees and the scribes."

What do you mean go beyond?

The law was given to the Israelites when they were brought from Egypt to the Promised Land. That law was given for the people to teach them how to behave, as well as how to act righteously. That was the old covenant. Jesus in the new covenant says, "You must surpass this. This is not for the nation of Israel, but this is for the entire world." Inwardly it isn't for us to just walk around but it has to come into our hearts and our hearts have to be changed.

What happens is, our whole life, we also pretend like the Pharisees and the sadducees. These commandments were given to enhance a relationship with the Lord, but what they did was make a gap between the people and God. Because of our sinful tendencies, we also act. So our entire life is an act and we want to show we are righteous. It is very painful to pretend to be righteous. What happens is, we tend to judge people. I want to show I'm righteous so all I do is, I see other people's faults. I can identify what is wrong because I'm trying to be righteous.

Even as kids we were trained to be nice at home. For Christmas we were told when taken for visits, "When you go to that house and when they offer for the second time, say, 'No thank you.'" We are kids and waiting to eat, and when they bring these nice things - cheese and biscuits - even though your heart is desiring for it, we are supposed to say, 'No thank you.' We are bending and shy and that person is insisting. You want to take but you can't take because you've been told not to take. Suddenly your mother will say, "It's okay, if the aunty is giving then you take." Then the one who said, 'No thank you', grabs it. 😊

That is what has happened to our lives. We are always saying no to this and that, but deep inside we are desiring for that. We are having lust and so many things inside us, but we are trying to show that we are righteous. It's a struggle and a pain in your heart. That's why people go through depression and sadness. The heart is something and outside is a different thing. The Lord is saying you have to go beyond this because this is something that is going to happen deep inside your heart.

Some people do religious work in this way. Two girls came and said they were leaving the church because they were fed up with the church and they didn't want to be Christians anymore. They had already decided which religion they wanted to be a part of. When they had come for counseling, and were asked why they made this choice, they said it was because of their father. Then they said, "Our father is a person who is having a prominent place in the church work. You name it, he is either the secretary or treasurer. He does the readings and he is really into it at church. But, he drinks like a fish. Everyday he is drunk, from morning until evening. But there is a statue and even though he is fully drunk he is there praying to the Lord. He scolds us and says, 'Why can't you pray?' Why should we pray like this? He scolds us in filth. When he gets his salary, he leaves it at the altar and won't give it to our mother because it's being used to drink and gamble. We want to teach our father a lesson, and that's why we want to go against this religion."

We can put people off because we haven't grown internally. The Lord is asking us today, "Are you leading a life outside by trying to be righteous or is your inside changed?"

Matthew 5:21

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

I would like to ask - how many of you have murdered someone? You and I haven't murdered anyone and that's great. We can be so happy with this - but see what Jesus says:

Matthew 5:22

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

We haven't murdered physically, but how many of us are angry with our brothers and sisters in our own families or even our neighbours? How many of us are carrying this in our hearts? The Lord says, "This is what is going to happen to you. You're only righteous outside." How many of us are

carrying this tonight? That's why we say, "We are praying and praying, and nothing is happening. There are no blessings for our family." Are you against anyone of your own family or your neighbours? Everyone of us are connected.

We have to go beyond. It is no longer about the nation of Israel, it is not just an act. This is for an internal life for you and I. This is what the Lord is going to offer. The Lord is asking us to stretch beyond.

Matthew 5:27-28

You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

This is all about your heart tonight. This verse mentions only a 'her', but it applies to 'his' as well. We must look at both parties because people think it's a men only show. It is applicable for everyone of you. If you're looking at a person lustfully, then you've already sinned.

God is talking about our inner attitudes. We need to go deep inside because this is a life we need to cultivate. How can we lead a life like this? We don't have the strength. He is saying, "Don't look at this one lustfully, don't be angry with your neighbour." But what can we do if we don't have the strength or the wisdom? The Lord is offering this to us. He is asking us to give an inner response. In the second reading, the Lord is teaching us how we can get this.

It is not about being righteous outside. The Lord is telling us, "Enough pretense." It becomes so heavy and deep in our lives that we can't sleep and we have to act again tomorrow morning. We don't have proper sleep because we are so caught up in the life we are leading. When you deal with your own life in the night, that's when you see yourself directly. You try to sleep and all these things come charging in. You can't sleep and the next morning we are back to pretending.

We need to have this wisdom to give this inner response. The Lord is offering us this answer: "Enough pretending. Here I am, giving you the power to choose today."

1 Corinthians 2:6

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

Maturity is not about age. Everyone of us would say we are mature in that case. This refers to maturity in christian life. That's why he said, "Not the wisdom of this age or the rulers of this age who are coming to nothing." There is something that is going to happen:

1 Corinthians 2:8-10

None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him" -- but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit...

The answer tonight is that there is a wisdom that the Lord is going to give us and that wisdom will come through the Holy Spirit so that you can make the right choices for God.

Otherwise we are using the wisdom of the world and that's why we are getting all the wrong choices. That's why the Lord says, "I have placed before you fire and water." What are we going to choose? Sometimes we are caught up and we don't know what to do and we already have the fire in our hands. The Lord is saying, "When you receive the Holy Spirit, you get the wisdom to choose between right and wrong." This wisdom will only come from the Lord. It is no longer about other people. We are no longer going to worry about what other people think. Tonight the Lord is saying, "This Holy Spirit of God is the answer to your life."

How do we get the Holy Spirit? It's through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That's why we need to have a connection with the Lord. When we don't have the connection, when we don't pray - that's the moment we burn our hands, because we have already made the wrong choice. How many people have done this!

Are you willing to host the presence? The Lord says, "If so, I am giving you wisdom through the power of the Holy Spirit." The Lord is offering this to you. All we need is to be connected to the Lord because He is going to take us and give us this great gift of wisdom. Then we will have the freedom to choose what is right. Otherwise we don't have a wisdom because our worldly wisdom isn't going to take us anywhere.

The Lord is asking you to receive this Holy Spirit. You're going to get wisdom that is not of the world, but wisdom of the Spirit and that is going to change your life and mine.

To whom do you invest most of your time? Are you going to get the wisdom of the tv or the wisdom of the Holy Spirit?

Every television programme gives a solution to a problem, they tell you

- what to eat,
- what to drink,
- what to do to look good –

The wisdom is given through that box. It is clear and easy to find Everything is offered free. If you're investing your time there then that's what you will get. All the dramas, the crisis and the situation is so close to our lives - the answer is given: Why are you worrying all this time? If you don't have anything - kill this person or get involved with someone's spouse. That's the way of life.

Tonight there is an answer. The Holy Spirit of God is giving you the choice where your hands are not going to be burned, where you're going to make the right choice where you can live happily in the presence of our God.