

A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs

Chapter 22:1-29: What does give honor to life?

Verses 1-5: The Good Name: A good name, one's honor is more important than wealth; gracious, benevolent attitude is preferred than silver and gold. Name signifies the whole person as created in the image of God; honor is to appreciate goodness or as image of God human being is called to reflect God's compassion in all conduct. The disparity between rich and poor needs to be discussed within God's will for the wellbeing of all his creation. All are equal in God's eyes, who is creator; it is human greed that creates inequalities. A lover of wisdom knows what is abominable to the Lord and keeps oneself away from dark deeds. The foolish who follow folly are unwilling to listen to wisdom; they run into evil and pay for it with their lives. With 'fear of the Lord' comes humility, honor, true riches and a purpose driven life. The wicked pursue a tumultuous path in life; the wise know the boundaries that need to be kept, respected.

Verses 6-8: Wisdom Shapes Character: one of the main instructions of Proverbs is to train young generation in the ways of wisdom, formation of the mind, and its impact should last till the end of life: these include matters faith, discernment of good, how to be industrious and avoid laziness, approach life with hope and enthusiasm in difficult times and show kindness to the poor. Proverbs acknowledge that money wields power, a flaw in human nature that revels in domination of others. The poor, vulnerable borrow money from the rich and give up their independence; they become slaves to the lender of money [its parallel today could be enormous credit card debts one incurs]. The ordinary/poor folks need to think twice before borrowing money and consider first the means to repay [name, honor is more important than riches]. 'One who sows iniquity reaps calamity' [verse 8]. Criminal behavior inflicts pain on others and the criminal himself/herself falls into a pit of one's own making.

Verses 9-16: Generous Heart 'The generous one, he will be blessed, for he shares bread with the poor'. Generosity is God's character; blessing of God flows into the heart that considers God as source of all gifts. 'Get rid of the scoffer and strife disappears and quarrelling and insults cease'. A troublemaker, liar is a provocateur, who poisons the well, destabilizes community; do not listen to such people but give them chance to come to their senses and realize their folly. A knowledgeable person meditates wisdom and shapes life accordingly and he/she is in God's care; one who intends doing evil is cut off from God's friendship. Attraction to folly is natural to humans; the 'rod' of wisdom, her instructions, helps the young people to ground life in 'the fear of the Lord'. The wicked use abrasive and subtle ways to oppress the poor or deny them their rights' to get rich or to be in control. The naïve, poor who entrust their hard-earned savings with such people will surely regret it.

Verses 17-29: Love Wisdom!: Listening, understanding and obeying wisdom go with one's trust in the Lord. Heart that loves wisdom enriches others with transforming and healing words. Proverbs warn that the justice system should not discriminate against the poor, for God is the defender of the 'poor, orphans and widows'. Proverbs discourage friendship with an irrational person, 'a heated man'; association with such people make one irrational. Do not engage in

imprudent borrowing and indebtedness to others that ruin your life; be content with what you earn by hard-work. The way of the world is that rich landowners move land boundaries to encroach on adjacent land that belongs to the poor [Example: King Ahab taking Naboth's vineyard-1King 21; also a social situation that many Israelites experienced returning from exile, their ancestral land and homes occupied by rich landowners]. Proverbs appreciate a hard worker, his/her skills, talents, a blessing to the community.

Father Jose