

A Commentary on the Book of Proverbs

Chapter 23:1-35: Precepts of Wisdom

Verses 1-9: Wise Conduct: Proverbs give practical guidelines how to conduct oneself in social gatherings. If you are invited to a dinner, especially with elites of the land, don't behave like a glutton. Be mindful of your host and his/her character; restrain yourself from crazy outbursts! Proverbs observe that eating with a stingy person is nauseating. The host will not have your friendship or wellbeing in mind. The host may have a cunning motive for inviting you to a dinner. Know your host! Wealth is a gift however pursuit of riches should not be the focus of life. It is foolish to engage in all corrupt ways to attain wealth for it will disappear like flight of birds. Follow wisdom's way of uprightness in all endeavors of life. One might miss joy of the goodness of life if obsessed with amassing riches; one could 'wear oneself out'. Those who are foolish or inimical to wisdom will not listen to the counsel of sages. Be diligent in searching and finding truth about people and events; don't be carried away by hearsay!

Verses 10-14: God is beside his creation: God is 'next of kin' to humans, therefore, protect the rights of 'widows and orphans' [the weakest in society]; do not cook up devious machinations to deprive them their rights. The land, house and jobs of the defenseless should be protected. Willingness to seek wise counsel and an informed conscience are important for a peaceful life. One of the concerns of Proverbs is disciplining the youth. Until recent times physical beating was practiced disciplining the youth, perhaps inspired by verse 13 and thought it was a divine injunction. Teachers and parents must use humane ways to remind the young of their mistakes and teach them to take responsibility for their actions. Punishment is meant to guide the youth to right path from a devious path.

Verses 15-35: Give your heart to Wisdom: a parent rejoices when a son/daughter listens to wisdom, loves truth and refrains from lies. Proverbs acknowledge that the fortunes of a wicked person often create confusion in the mind of a good person, a reason for envy. Why do the wicked prosper? One's trust in the Lord must be appreciated as true treasure and it is manifested in a life lived honorably, in loving service to others. In life, meditate on just ways that shape one into a compassionate person. Avoid sexual misconduct lest the zest of life will be robbed from you! Proverbs associate woes, groans, strife, troubles with drunkenness. To a drunkard alcohol is sweet in the beginning but a 'snake bite' in the end, a life lived unrealistically; drunkenness can drain all life's vitality and good health could vanish with such foolish behavior. Everything in excess damages both body and soul!

Father Jose