

Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel speaks to us about wisdom. Jesus begins by referring to the scribes and Pharisees as the wise and learned. He does so, not because they truly possess wisdom, for they do not actually possess any true wisdom. Rather what they possess is the appearance of wisdom without truly possessing its substance.

Some of you may know that I am working on a book on the theological understanding of the human person. What provoked me to take on this project is that today I see an “other” that appears to possess wisdom without actually doing so, namely artificial intelligence. I believe its rapid appearance in almost every space of our lives is prompting us to re-examine who we are as human persons. It's a question that the Church has always answered, but that we often fail to recognize. It's the wisdom of Christ. This same wisdom of Christ that exposed the false wisdom of the scribes and Pharisees to be a house of cards, also exposes artificial intelligence to be nothing more than a house of mirrors.

I call AI a house of mirrors because that is precisely what it does – it mirrors back our preferences and desires to us. It does not provide us with anything new, but simply uses our past data to predict and reinforce our preferences. It does so with such great precision that it is easy to offload thinking. For example, I rarely need to sit down and think about what I want to watch on TV, when AI can readily provide with with show that match my preferences and display them on my TV neatly ordered. All I have to do is click. Nor do I need to waste hours trying to figure out how to use my money when an Amazon's algorithm has pretty much figured out what I am going to buy anyway. I need merely click on the suggestion. AI can even answer my phone calls, reply to my emails, and make administrative decisions with incredible accuracy. Do we need a pastor to govern the parish, or could an AI system make all the decisions I was going to make anyway, only faster? Given all that, it raises a serious ontological question about the human person - am I just a series of data that can be unraveled by an algorithm?

This is the worldview of AI. It is the worldview in which we all now live. We are quickly being reduced to a problem that can solved by an algorithm - and not just being done by large corporations who are distant from us. It is being done in more intimate relationships. We are all likely aware that companies, salespeople, and marketers use AI to “figure us out” in order to sell us something. But many of us are not as quick to recognize that AI increasing dictates our more intimate relationships — those with friends and family. For example, teens and tweens are using AI to “figure out” their parents and teachers. Young adults are using AI to “figure out” their choice of their spouse and vocation. And many people are turning to AI to fill their intimacy needs. In the process, what we thought made us unique turns out to be nothing more than data that can be “figured out” and reflected back to us by algorithmic systems.

Against this worldly wisdom is the wisdom of Christ. This wisdom is an authentic wisdom, one that has been hidden from the world, from the scribes, Pharisees and AI. It's the wisdom that has been revealed to the little ones, which is St. Matthew's way of referring to disciples.

Disciples are given a wisdom from God. Recall, wisdom is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is through the Holy Spirit that we know God – that we can claim Jesus Christ is Lord. Once we know that Jesus is God, we also know the Father, as Jesus is the image of the Father, and thus reveals the Father to us.

Knowing Christ and the Father is the grounding for knowing ourselves as human persons; we are not primarily a series of data that can be interpreted and predicted by an algorithm. Rather, before there was ever even any data for these systems to collect about us,

scripture tells us that we were already known by someone else - namely God. God not only knew us before we were made, but he loved us and endowed each one of us with a purpose.

Whereas AI may use your past data to predict what type of career you should choose, it cannot tell you the purpose for which you were made. That comes from the one who knew you before you were ever created. St. Augustine framed it this way: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.

Here Augustine exposes the false wisdom of the world: the world will never satisfy us. Let me explain. We live better than 99% of humanity. Things we take for granted – such as being able to take a hot shower, being able to watch entertainment whenever we want, being able to cure diseases and choose from a variety of foods was not available to even the wealthiest of kings 100 years ago. But despite the fact that we live better than 99% of any human beings to walk the earth, we are also lonelier than ever before. Here is where Augustine comes into play.

While AI can predict our preferences, it does not know for what we were truly made, which is union with God. Nor does it know the unique path God has given each individual to achieve that end. And so it leads us down a different path; one where we try to fill the void, the loneliness, with things that are not God. This is the same thing Augustine attempted to do before his conversion. He bought into the false wisdom of the world and tried to find happiness in things, ranging from philosophies, to food, to sex; he tried it all, and nothing satisfied him. It was then that he realized that the reason he could not find happiness in these things was because he was not made for those things. He was made for God.

AI is nothing more than a more efficient tool for trying to satisfy our desires apart from God. It is merely a more efficient means for us to act as Augustine did prior to his conversion by filling our lives with worldly things. AI allows us to fill our lives with items from Amazon, videos from Instagram, and conversations with ChatGPT, Claude, and other chatbots 24/7 – literally all of these are open for business at any hour, ready to fill the void in our lives. But none of them are the purpose for which we were made, and this is why the loneliness epidemic is increasing exponentially in our society.

Friends, this is why I want to have a parish-wide conversation about AI. AI is affecting us in so many ways, many of which we hardly even notice. And whether or not you realize it, it is becoming omni-present, gradually forming the culture around us. It is not all bad, but increasingly it is shaping the environment around us, burdening us with a heavy yoke that come from its false wisdom. As disciples, we need to see what is going on, see the false wisdom of the world for what it is. Christ promises to free us from this yoke, replacing it with yoke that is easy and burden that is light. This comes when we truly understand who we are as human persons, when we understand that we are known by God, loved by God, and given our purpose by God.

I believe it is urgent that we begin to understand not the technology – in fact the technology is rather mundane and unimportant – but the ways in which worldly wisdom is pulling us away from who we are – persons made in God's image and likeness. I hope that you will consider exploring these ideas with me, not in isolation, but in actual conversation forged in relationship. Even if you cannot make the round-table discussions next Monday, let's find ways to engage each other on this topic, so that we can recover what it means to be human persons. For it is only when we realize our humanity in relationship with God and each other, that we can overcome the loneliness caused by the endless pursuit of worldly wisdom and realize the joy of living in with Christ and his church; with yokes that are easy and burdens that are light.

Brothers and sisters, Peace to you and to all who follow the wisdom of Christ.