

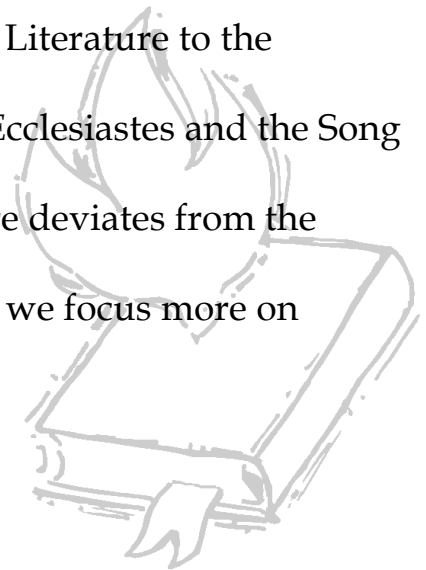
9th Day St. Anne Novena
Wisdom Literature
(St. James)

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
July 25, 2025

2 Cor 4: 7-15
Ps 236: 1bc-2ab; 2cd-3, 4-5, 7
Mt 20: 20-28

As we have journeyed over these last nine days throughout the Old Testament (from Adam and Eve to Noah and the Ark and Tower of Babel, through the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, from the enslavement in Egypt to its Exodus into the Promised Land, re-establishing the land and then losing it, finally to the Return to the Promised Land and then losing it a second time), we finally reach the question as to *how* we stay faithful to God. How is it possible for us to be faithful to the covenant?

The answer to this question brings us to the books of Wisdom Literature – at the University, it reduce Wisdom Literature to the abbreviation JaloPPES – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs (Solomon). In a way, Wisdom Literature deviates from the historical narrative of the Old Testament, where we focus more on



human emotion, in a great way *love* itself, that talk about this imager⁷ of suffering, lament, praise and praise of God that is made manifest in the New Testament writings, through the person of Jesus Christ.

Of all the gifts King Solomon could have asked the Lord to provide him during his forty year reign over the Promised Land, Solomon chose “Wisdom” – the ability to know right from wrong. Until Solomon fell, this gift of the Holy Spirit served him well and revealed him to be a wise and learned king. Then, like most of the other kings, Solomon fell to the temptations of sin and lost whatever good he did to the throes of the devil and his kingdom was divided after his death.

I was thinking about the subject of Wisdom Literature because in both of the parishes I serve, we have parishioners named “Sophia” that very much represents that kind of love and knowledge that each of us need to seek if we ever wish to gaze at the loveliness of God for the rest of our existence. Over at St. Patrick’s Church in Momence, one “Sophia” and her mother have been teaching in religious education for a number of years to our second graders who receive their first communion each year. Stacy West and daughter Sophia have been teaching our kids in

religious education for a number of years. I was thinking about all the children that have passed through Stacy & Sophia's lives, all these seven year-olds who enter the classroom with their innocence intact (we hope!) and this joy in their hearts that Stacy & Sophia tried to maintain while teaching them the basics of faith.

We all know that as we grow up, we children often *lose* that innocence when we are adults because, along with that wisdom we acquire, we also learn about envy, sloth, lust, anger, greed, gluttony, and worst of all pride, namely those seven vices contrary to the love of God. With age, adults often become more serious in, more ironic and we are more sarcastic and we often forget about the innocence of children that we once possessed. More often than not, Stacy & Sophia were able to encounter that innocence practically every Sunday they were teaching and there is a joy to encountering that innocence. Yes, kids can be immature and yes, kids often do "kid things" that can drive us crazy. Yet, kids have an innocence that God tells us we need to embrace if we ever want to get to the kingdom of heaven.

The other Sophia is a parishioner from St. Anne's. Sophia Menigoz

she and her fiancé Whittaker celebrated their marriage over a year ago. Whittaker attended a year of study through our Christian Initiation program, receiving the sacraments at St. Patrick's and then celebrating his wedding with Sophia at St. Anne's. Whitaker's parents live in Taiwan and teach children over at a Lutheran school; parents Gene and Shelly often communicate with me about their highs and lows in ministry with those they serve, many in that area who have endured many difficulties in life.

Had I not met Sophia and Whitaker, I would not have met Gene and his wife Shelly, who have dedicated their lives to taking care of some of the poorest of the poor in a country that is on the other side of the world (and, frankly, have endured a lot more struggles than we have here in the states).

I look at these two Sophias and encounter two women with vastly different experiences who have received the same love of God in their lives. The one here at St. Anne's has a beautiful voice and whenever we want to sing any kind of Marian songs, many in the community turn to her (in fact, at First Communion time when we preceded the Mass with

the crowning of the statue of our Blessed Mother, Sophia was the one that sang for the sake of the kids and it was absolutely spectacular!). The Sophia at St. Patrick's faithfully attends Mass with her boyfriend Edward, who volunteers so often at our parish because he really loves his Church and the people he serves.

If we can embrace that gift of the Holy Spirit, that gift of wisdom and that gift of self-sacrificial love, we can grasp why we read these stories from the Old Testament and learn how they are fulfilled in the New, through the New Adam, the embodiment of perfect wisdom and perfect love. Over these nine days, we have passed through all the struggles of the major players of the Old Testament who stayed with God, who then *failed* God and the lesson brought forth from their failures. God teaches us that the secret to get to the other side to the New Testament is learn about and have knowledge of God (= faith), to know that loving God and loving others is following the example God gave us (= love) and the hope that by living as God does and by modeling what God does, we will gaze upon this Wisdom and Love for the rest of our existence (= hope).

If we are doing this right, if we understand the lessons of our past failures and how God suffered for those failures on the cross so that we would have a chance to change, then we will learn how to get to the other side by allowing God to carry us since we cannot reach heaven on our own. When we allow God to work *through* us to carry others, God will carry us as well. The purpose of life is for not us to accumulate things but for us to give those things away for the sake of others, for us to sacrifice for the sake of the other. When we live this way, then so many good things result from what we do.

Here in our parishes, because of those kind of sacrifices we have experienced from others and have done by ourselves in God's name, some marvelous things that should not have been possible at either parishes have taken place. Here at St. Anne's, those of faith who allow God to lead them have accomplished so much at the parish, from Eucharistic Adoration to Novenas to various prayer services for the sake of others. Because of the generosity of our faithful, we were able to upgrade the air conditioner system and the sewage system. Through your help, our roof was upgraded and the buildings were tuckpointed –

we have kept up with the basic needs of our campuses. Because of so many good souls, the mayor of St. Anne's donated a generator to the parish and our parish hall now is being utilized for our food pantry. We have offered our hall as an emergency shelter for the seniors in our area.

The wisdom that God provides us is one that tries to help everyone in win-win situation in our lives, I lifestyle where everyone benefits from what we are doing. If we choose to live this way, then we need your help to get us there in God's name. This is how the body of Christ works – you and me both living this faith life together. If we truly embrace this wisdom, then everything we do is directed by God and not by human intervention; one gets us to heaven and the other probably will not.

So we come here today on this last day of the Novena, reminding ourselves of the Old Testament story of disobedience and being unfaithful to God. We learn that when we *are* faithful to God, if we *embrace* the wisdom of God rather than cast it off, if we love one another as he has loved us, that there is no greater love than to lay down our lives for each other in God's name, if we have this particular understanding of God the wisdom of what to do with that knowledge,

by giving it to others, then we may suffer briefly on earth but on the other side of life there will be no more tears, no more crying and no more pain. If we embrace the wisdom of God, we then realize God overflowingly provides all that is necessary for our salvation and that is *more* than enough to sustain us on earth.

God bless all of you for sticking with us these nine days. Please continue to pray for the success of the Novena and please know we are praying for you and for all people that we meet. This is our prayer.