

“What man can learn the counsel of God?”

Wis 9:13

You have probably heard me say before that if you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans for the future. It almost doesn't matter what we plan for our lives, God very often has other ideas. We can lay as many plans as we want: we can settle down to family life, or make a perfect home for ourselves, or draw up a strategy for our career or our retirement, and along comes the future and things turn out so differently from what we had expected. Certainly there are some long-term plans we need to attend to, a mortgage, for example, qualifications for a proposed career plan, and so on. It simply isn't practicable to live as if we will die tomorrow, at least not if you have responsibilities for other people. We all have to do *some* level of planning. But where we tend to come unstuck is when our master plan for life unravels and we have no plan B. When *that* happens we can find ourselves in a panic, feeling lost, perhaps confused or even angry, and – all too often – blaming God just because things aren't how we wanted them to be.

You might be surprised – or perhaps not? – at how many people leave the Church or stop believing in God just because life hasn't turned out the way they think it should have done. And, actually, that's because we think we know best, and we get cross when life contradicts us. Even though we may not think in exactly these terms, what most of us believe is that we know what's best for us and that we have no need of God. And we shouldn't be particularly surprised by this attitude, after all, that was Adam's attitude when he committed the original sin: he believed what the serpent told him, namely, that he could become his own god.

Each week, in the Creed, we profess our belief ‘in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.’ But how often do we stop to think what these words mean? Stop now, and think. Imagine the sheer, unadulterated power needed to bring an entire expanding universe into existence, out of nothing! He didn’t even gather together stuff that already existed and build it out of that, as we would have to if we were setting about a new project. No, God made everything that exists... out of nothing! Try to picture the strength, the might, the power, the foresight, the beauty, the goodness, the sheer imaginative creativity of such a Creator! He would have to be an artist, an engineer, a mathematician, a biologist, a chemist, a physicist, a designer, a mechanic, an architect, a communicator, a teacher, a trouble-shooter, a strategist, a nutritionist, a medic... oh, and He must have had a sense of humour.

How many of us can claim a skill set like that? And we still think that we ought to be able to know His intentions, as today’s first reading says? to divine His will and work out His reasonings? As the first reading goes on, ‘We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find [only] with labour,’ never mind ‘tracing[ing] out what is in the heavens,’ or in the mind of the One who *created* the earth and the heavens!

Perhaps, instead of getting cross when God’s plans do not coincide with our own, we could try something different. Instead of reacting with anger or despondency – instead of turning away from Him – we could take a long hard look at ourselves and ask Our Blessed Lord, ‘What must I do if I am to cope better with the precepts of your will? What is there about myself that I must change if I am to respond more joyfully to your will?’

I have a pretty good idea what my reaction would have been if you had asked me to die on a Cross. It would have been the same as the Apostles: I would have run away. But show me, O Lord, what I can change about myself – with the help of your grace – so that, instead of trying to fathom your will, I can learn to accept it without getting cross or

depressed, and without turning away from you. My perishable body – with all of its desires and urgings and longings – presses down on my soul, and weighs down my mind. Set me free, O Lord, from my attachments to the things of this world so that my soul may be free, instead, to fly upwards, and soar towards the heights of heaven, where you, the source of wisdom – indeed, Wisdom itself – awaits me. Straighten my path, show me what pleases you, and save me from myself, O Lord.