Wine of Wisdom

Today I want to give you a gift. It is a very valuable gift, but I’ll have to leave it to you to decide whether it should go on the gift register. And I’ll be honest I hope it will influence how you behave in Parliament and how you vote.

It’s a bottle of wine.

Now to be precise it’s not the wine itself but something which this bottle symbolises. In the Bible, in the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is personified as a woman calling to all “Come, eat of my bread and drink the wine I have made.” It is the opportunity to consider wisdom, to drink this draught which the Bible says is more valuable than silver or gold, and wine of whatever vintage, that I want to give you today.

**WISDOM AND HUMILITY**

In the book of 1 Kings as Solomon stepped out of the shadow of his father, David, and took over the reigns of the kingdom, God asked him what he needed to fulfill this task. All sorts of answers may have come quickly to mind: riches to fill the budget black hole, a prosperous economy, political security. But he recognises what he truly needs is wisdom if he is to govern the people and to able to discern good from evil.

Here we see not only the importance of wisdom but also the first step if we are to drink the wine wisdom offers, we need to recognise that we need it. It is an essential part of wisdom and being wise, and it is reinforced throughout the biblical books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, the humility to recognise our need.

This humility is demonstrated by having the ability to listen. Proverbs 12:15 “The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.” This means that to be wise will mean to be “a life long learner”, to use a phrase popular in education circles, seeking wisdom at all times wherever it may be found.

Sometimes wisdom will be found with those with whom you may profoundly disagree. This is shown in the Book of Proverbs which copies sections from the nations who are around Israel, particularly Egypt, which was, to put it bluntly, the opposition.

I pray that you will have the wisdom to truly listen and so seek more wisdom. I particularly pray that you will listen and consider our advice when we come to you with matters about which we and our communities are concerned, which I hope we will do also with due humility.

**Paths to Humility**

One of the ways in which Wisdom encourages such humility is to remind us of the uncertainty of the future and how our actions may look then. So Proverbs 27:1 says “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.”

This bottle of wine, in a sense, gives us the same advice. This bottle was left in the Cathedral a couple of weeks ago, I really don’t know where it came from. The label says that it is a Cabernet Merlot “The Prime Minister 2001” and there is a line drawing of John Howard. On the back it advises that it should be drunk before 2007. How true that was.
Such irony would have appealed to the writers of wisdom as it reminds us of the vagaries of political life and the bitter aftertaste it can sometimes bring.

Recognising such things recommends humility in the present and helps us acknowledge our ongoing need for wisdom.

It is my prayer that you would humbly desire such wisdom, not to believe that you already have but would seek it. For this State needs politicians who will seek wisdom so that you may govern us and be able to discern good from evil. I encourage you to take a long drink of the wine of wisdom, and reading the book of Proverbs would be a great place to take a taste.

**WISDOM AND ETHICS**

The book of Proverbs was written as a sort of manual for life in court and government in ancient Israel and grew out of Solomon's Court. There were many such books around in the ancient world, many of them old versions of “How to win friends and influence people”, about how to succeed in your ambitions and manipulate others.

What make Proverbs different is its strong ethical core, particularly in the areas of truthfulness and justice, both of which are areas which remain of concern in our modern world and I believe we long to see wise politicians.

**Truthfulness and Honesty**

You may have heard that last Sunday is known to many as *Star Wars Day* as it was May the 4th. You can always spot an Anglican when watching Star Wars for when they hear “May the Force be with you” they respond “and also with you”. However to mark the day my twin 14 year old boys decided to have a Star Wars movie marathon. I couldn't help but notice that in the otherwise forgettable *Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones* Obi-Wan when speaking to Anikin about his love interest Padme says “…and don't forget she's a politician. They're not to be trusted.”

This is what our children are learning and sadly all too often our political leaders are living down to this and reinforcing this image and seemingly have gone to the dark side. Wisdom encourages speaking truthfully and honestly.

There is a beautiful Proverb, “An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips” (Proverbs 24:26). Dare I say then that in that regard may there be more kissing in Parliament. But perhaps at times there should be more silence. Proverbs 17:28 says “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.”

We need our politicians to demonstrate wisdom that when they need to speak they speak truthfully.

**Righteousness**

The book of Proverbs however is not simply a pious book, it is a book of real politic recognising that leadership takes place in the midst of many dangers and distractions. Unsurprisingly it warns against the dangers of pride, gossip, greed, lust, and given my main visual aid today alcohol, it memorably says through drink “Your eyes will see strange sights and you mind imagine confusing things.” (Proverbs 2:33) There is the wine of wisdom but not so much wisdom in wine. There have been many in positions of responsibility both inside and outside Parliament who should have heeded all such warnings.

But Wisdom is not only concerned about private morality but public justice as well: not just honest speaking, but honest prices, honest goods, an honest day’s pay. These are all thing that leaders should be concerned with, especially on behalf of the poor.

These people and their concerns need to be listened to but it is also easy for the big end of town to drown out their concerns with promises of reward and support. This is why corruption is so destructive. It is so easy for those who have to get more, whilst
those without have less, as is becoming more prevalent in Australia and around the world.

Sadly a bottle of wine has come to signify both of these ideas, the need for speaking truthfully and dangers of corruption and undue influence. We should heed its warning. Whilst the wine of corruption may taste sweet Wisdom says it corrupts the heart (Ecclesiastes 7:7) and perverts the way of justice (Proverbs 17:23). Integrity is not just the name of a commission but something to be lived out.

In our State with the growing number of people reliant on welfare and charity we need not only to make sure they are listened to but also to let them have a voice and chance of earning an honest days wage.

Wisdom in Proverbs says to those in power “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” Proverbs 31:8

We need leaders who will speak for those who do not have a voice. All of this is part of the wine of wisdom.

**WISDOM AND JESUS**

Yet we have not really got to the heart of wisdom. The repeated refrain of wisdom is “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom” The wisdom in which one is to live in this world is look to one who made it. It is in knowing this God of justice and truth that is the foundation for both the humility and ethical core shown in Biblical Wisdom.

The book of Proverbs gives a great taste of his wisdom however the best vintage came with Jesus for we see him living out what we have been considering today. He spoke truthfully, he cared for the poor, needy and disadvantaged and his ministry was often marked by extreme humility.

But he not only demonstrated wisdom he came as wisdom himself. As Wisdom in Proverbs said “Come to me and drink my wine”, Jesus says mirroring this statement “Come to me all who are weary and are heavy laden and you will find rest. (Matthew 11:28)

The wisdom which he shows us is quite different from what some may think of as wisdom as our reading from Philippians reminds us

Our world seems to encourage us to do things out of selfish ambition. Many through the ages and around the world continue to use their positions of authority for their own advantage

Yet Jesus shows that the truly wise path is one of giving humble service. Despite who he was, the Wisdom of God and the Son of God, Jesus did not use that to his advantage but Jesus gave himself for us, served us in dying for us so that we may know the extent of God’s love and care. And the resurrection is God’s vindication of that path and vocation. The resurrection of Jesus which we have so recently celebrated is God’s tick of approval on such sacrificial wisdom that Jesus shows and calls us to follow.

And Jesus used an image which has been used ever since to remind us of this path of wisdom in sacrificial service, when he took the wine and said, “This is my blood shed for you.”

Here is the ultimate wine of wisdom and it is a gift beyond all value yet freely given. May we all drink deeply from this cup of wisdom. As we do so it cannot but put us under its influence, for we will both know God’s love and be resourced to follow Jesus’ path, using the positions we have in humble, truthful, righteous and serving wisdom.