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by Pat Marrin

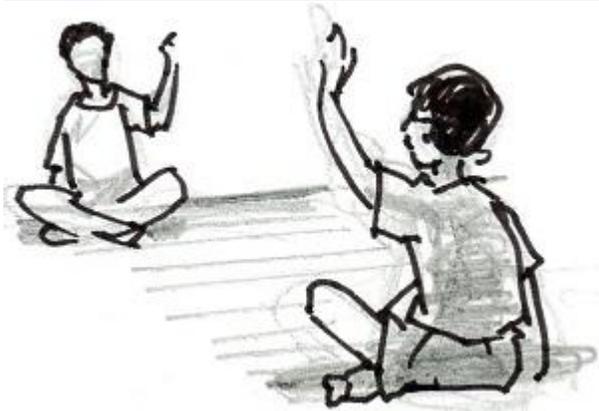
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“Wisdom is vindicated by her works” (Matt 12:19).

Isaiah 48:17-19; Matthew 12:16-19

Jesus' critique of his contemporaries for their indecision could apply to many examples of our own institutional paralysis. In today's Gospel, he compares his critics to children in the marketplace quarreling about whether to play a happy or sad game. The refusal to decide between John the Baptist's ascetic approach to righteousness and Jesus' own message of mercy effectively excused them from either course.

Harvard theologian Harvey Cox once captured the same failure in America to take a stand on big issues like racism and war with a similar phrase: "Not to decide is to decide." Anyone watching the partisan paralysis by Congress might conclude that the goal of politics is to prevent public policy from ever addressing real problems. If one side is for something, the other is against it.

The result is the death of conscience, the end of rational discourse and the deconstruction of a once creative and dynamic system for finding unity in diversity and common ground where competing interests are resolved to meet the larger needs of society. Democracy is more than an idea; it is a process of direct engagement and real decision-making.

Jesus invoked wisdom as the source decisiveness. Wisdom knows the difference between caution and prudence, which analyzes, discerns and then acts. The heart of Catholic Action, which accomplished so much in the 1950s and 1960s, inspiring community organizing and missionary programs in Latin America, was the formula "Think, Judge and Act." The goal of prudence was not just to study and talk about problems, but to do something. Wisdom is revealed in "her works," the results of discernment.

Advent is likewise a season of active anticipation and waiting. We must "prepare the way of the Lord" if we want God to come. The weeks of Advent call the faith community together to pose the challenge, "What are we waiting for?" The question focuses us not just on a desired future but also on what is holding us back, keeping us from addressing the suffering and injustice that prevents so many people from experiencing God's plan for our world.

If everyone had even a small action plan to address some immediate problem, what a difference it would make for all of us cumulatively. More listening, patience, civility, encouragement, humility, friendliness, generosity, imagine how these acts

could make Christmas come sooner and stay longer.

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