

Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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Here comes Lent. Again! Lent is a moveable feast. Its date is dependent on the date of Easter which, in turn, is dependent on the date of the full moon on or after the Spring Equinox. Got that?

The 40 days of Lent this year begins Feb. 22, when foreheads of the faithful and of the nonfaithful will be marked. Burnt fronds leftover from Palm Sunday supply the ashes that are distributed in churches, in chapels, on street corners, train depots, and even via some drive-through setups. This Ash Wednesday ritual, available to all without distinction or prejudice, has become a universal sacrament for multitudes of people, myself included.

That done, 39 days of Lent remain as we all too often find ourselves slouching toward Easter. I gave up giving up things like candy and gum during Lent long, long ago. In more recent years, I have gravitated toward Lenten readings, often rereading texts I have found deeply inspirational.

I'm glad Lent comes a little late this year. It has given me a little extra time to consider how I might do some soul seeing these 40 days.

Last year, I reread the Psalms. This Lent, I have decided to reread the Wisdom literature from the Bible. These books — Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes ([Qoheleth](#)), [Ecclesiasticus](#) (Ben Sirach), and the [Wisdom of Solomon](#) make up a healthy chunk of the Old Testament.

These books focus on life here and now on planet Earth. I have come more and more to appreciate this focus as I live longer and longer.

I like to think of the Wisdom literature as real-world theology in and for the real world. Early on in Proverbs, the voice of wisdom, described as a woman, does not inhabit church precincts, but lives in public places: "Wisdom cries aloud in the streets, in the open squares she raises her voice; down the crowded ways she calls out, at the city gates she utters her words" ([Proverbs 1:20-21](#)).

In another of the Wisdom books, she appears as hostess:

Wisdom has built her house,
she has set up her seven columns;
She has prepared her meat, mixed her wine,

yes, she has spread her table.
She has sent out her maidservants; she calls
from the heights out over the city:
"Let whoever is naive turn in here;
to any who lack sense I say,
Come, eat of my food,
and drink of the wine I have mixed!
Forsake foolishness that you may live;
advance in the way of understanding."
([Proverbs 9:1-6](#))

The Jerusalem Bible in its "Introduction to the Wisdom Books" tells readers: "This 'wisdom' ignores national boundaries. It gives little attention to religious thought, being concerned rather with human solutions. It treats the meaning of life, not philosophically in the Greek manner but by appeal to experience."

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So, I have not found a Eurocentric theology here. Nor have I found many abstractions in these Wisdom books. No [beatific vision](#), [hypostatic union](#) or other difficult-to-understand theologizing within these books. Even the themes of the Old Testament — law, covenant, election and salvation — appear only in the later written books, Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon.

Rather, the Wisdom books focus on human behavior and how I might avoid living the life of a fool and live a life of integrity. I need such a reminder most days of my life.

These Wisdom books vary greatly in scope and design. The Book of Job wrestles with suffering. It reads like a short story with ever-engaging plot twists.

But I don't look for tightly woven narratives in other Wisdom books. They are often filled with one or two liners encapsulating how to live a spiritual life in and through one's behavior. In other places, there are longer meditations on wisdom. The wise person, often juxtaposed with the foolish person, challenges me to live a life of integrity, just as these pithy sayings or longer reflections on living life did in past ages.

So, other than the Book of Job, reading much of the Wisdom literature takes a different tack. Beginning, middle and end aren't that important. Rather, the pearls of wisdom are at times strung willy-nilly while other times they are gathered around broad themes.

The Jerusalem Bible has conveniently inserted topical subheadings in some of the Wisdom books that have been helpful for me to find particular passages on specific areas of endeavor.

Of course, there are some parts of the Wisdom tradition that will rankle 21st-century readers, myself included. The image of an ideal wife presented in the [last chapter of Proverbs](#) might well be one. But then, Wisdom presented as a consort of the divine, if not a goddess herself, might iron out some sexist uneasiness.

One more thing I find both inviting and challenging about these Wisdom books is the focus on the here and now. As part of the Bible — the inspired Word of God — the divine presence is both encapsulated and expressed in individual and social behavior. Revelation has never been so close at hand!

In addition to the Introduction to Wisdom literature in the Jerusalem Bible, I have found [The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature](#) by Roland E. Murphy a helpful guide to further appreciate and understand this unique form and voice of biblical literature.

I hope not to become a spiritual slouch this Lent after receiving the sacrament of ashes. I will rely upon the Wisdom books of the Bible to help me welcome into my life the divine presence via soul seeing in the real world.