Wisdom is a form of knowledge but of a different kind from the knowledge involved in science and technology. In the Bible, wisdom is primarily of a practical nature. It has to do with what it means to become a person whose life is marked by integrity and goodness and by the ability to fulfill their responsibilities as parents, teachers, politicians, or people who through the media can influence society for good or ill.

Today’s reading from the book of Kings is at the origin of Solomon’s reputation as a person of great wisdom. Given his choice of asking God for wealth, power, or a long life, he asks for something of a different nature. He asks for understanding and discernment, in other words, for wisdom.

We are often faced in life with having to make decisions of one kind or another. Sometimes the issue is a relatively minor one. At other times, it engages us at a deeper level. That is the case with the decision to marry or to enter a seminary or other form of religious life or to leave one’s country of birth to escape violence, oppression, or poverty.

The wisdom we need for these kinds of issues is the fruit of experience and of reflection on it. It is for this reason that wisdom is often associated with older people, especially those who have seen many things, have listened to, and learned from a wide range of people, and have recognized and come to understand their own failings and mistakes and those of others.

In the Gospels, Jesus is presented to us as a teacher and an embodiment of wisdom. They quote a saying of his about wisdom. “The queen of the south,” he declares, “will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon and see something greater than Solomon is here.”

The wisdom which Jesus taught has to do with our relationship with God but also with one another, with society, and with the earth. It is one thing, for example, to have the scientific and technical knowledge to create a weapon of great destructive power or to invent a more sophisticated form of electronic communication, and a different one to decide whether and how such things should be used. It is for this reason that wisdom is so important for people in positions of authority and power in political and economic life.

What is distinctive of biblical wisdom is the way in which it presupposes and builds on fundamental convictions about the value of life, the importance of family and community, and the need to be open to, and in relation with, God.

The challenge of being able to relate to one another and to the broader society in positive and helpful ways is something that we begin to learn about as children. Subsequent growth in the spiritual and moral life entails a deepening of our capacity for discerning good from evil and the better from the good.

Today’s gospel contains three brief parables about the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven. The kingdom, which Jesus proclaimed, is not a land or territory but a state of heart. It is ultimately God himself. What the Gospels announce is that in Jesus God is present in our midst in a new way. We become part of the Kingdom above all through faith, love, and hope.

In today’s gospel, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a treasure hidden in a field and to a pearl of great prince. When people find such things, they are ready to go to any expense and to make whatever effort is required to take possession of them. The kingdom, Jesus is suggesting, and all that it involves are of such value that people should be willing to do what is necessary to pursue and to enter into it. To recognize that is the beginning wisdom.