

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Wisdom 2:12,17-20

The Book of Wisdom is unique in the Bible as being the product of a Greek frame of mind, for the author is believed to be a Hellenized Jew (a Greek who is a Jew) thoroughly familiar with Greek culture.

Against the background of Egyptian worship of animals and mockery of Jewish trust in God, the author devotes much of the first part (chapters 1 through 5) of the book to the ineffectiveness of such mockery when God has promised immortality to those who remain faithful.

Although the book itself claims that it was written by Solomon, this is an example of the use of a pseudonym; a device often used in the ancient world to highlight the importance of a literary work – here the author used the prestige of Solomon, the greatest of the wise men of Israel. The book was probably written at Alexandria around the last years of the reign of Ptolemy Dionysius (80-52 B.C.), very close to the Christian period but before the Roman conquest.

[The wicked say:] ¹² Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, Reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training.

This draws on Isaiah 3:10 in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures). From 2:12 to 5:23 the sacred author draws heavily on Isaiah 52-66. His teaching on retribution is the fruit of meditation on these chapters in their Septuagint form, and he sets forth that teaching in a series of characters or types taken from Isaiah, presented in their Isaian sequence and embellished with additional details from elsewhere.

¹⁷ Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him. ¹⁸ For if the just one be the son of God, he will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. ¹⁹ With revilement and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience. ²⁰ Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him."

2nd Reading - James 3:16-4:3

Three weeks ago, and again two weeks ago, we heard from the first section of the

Epistle of James where he taught that accepting what comes from God means doing what He says and not being a respecter of persons or status. These teachings point to the need for there to be no discrepancy between what one receives from God and the way one puts it into practice. Last week he heard from the second section where we learned the central idea of his epistle: a faith which does not translate into good works is a dead faith.

Today we hear from the third section where Saint James tells us to recognize the source of disagreement.

16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice.

These expressions also occur in the list of vices in 2 Corinthians 12:20: *“For I fear that when I come I may find you not such as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; that there may be rivalry, jealousy, fury, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.”*

17 But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity.

In terms that emphasize the contrast with earthly wisdom, Saint James gives a beautiful sketch of Christian wisdom which reminds one of the beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) and of Paul (Galatians 5:22-23).

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.

This verse is ambiguous. The fruit of righteousness could either mean a harvest that is just or a reward for just conduct. This harvest may be sown either “for” or “by” those who make peace. The connection with the previous verse is through the word “peace.” By emphasizing peace James sums up, by contrast, his condemnation of false wisdom and prepares the hearers for the consideration of hostilities in the community which follows. Although “wisdom” is not mentioned in the verse, the phrasing is similar to the association of wisdom, peace and justice in Proverbs 3:9,17-18.

4:1 Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from?

Note the contrast with the last word of the previous verse: “peace.”

Is it not from your passions

Literally, “your pleasures” (see Titus 3:3)

that make war within your members? ² You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war.

The generality of verse 4:1 is now specified with examples. The translation used for the New American Bible is a little weak. It is better to take “kill” as the logical consequence of “covet but do not possess” rather than pair “kill” with “envy”. The footnote in the Revised Standard Version says “you kill and you covet.”

You do not possess because you do not ask.

This is a negative echo of the gospel appeals to prayer (Matthew 7:7-11; Mark 11:24; John 14:13-14; 1 John 3:22).

³ You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

The proper approach to prayer is indicated in James 4:4, 7-10 (also 1 John 5:14; Matthew 6:33).

Gospel - Mark 9:30-37

The gospel reading for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time gave the first of three instructions which Jesus gave to His apostles: That if you are to be a follower of Jesus you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow in his steps. Today we hear from the second of His three instructions. Remember, the apostles are receiving these instructions in the sense in which they know that Jesus is the Messiah.

³⁰ They left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it.

Just like His first instruction, He is teaching His apostles privately prior to public revelation of His mission. The public ministry in Galilee is over.

³¹ He was teaching his disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men

Being “handed over (delivered)” will become increasingly prominent as His passion story proceeds (see 14:21, 41; 15:1, 10, 15). Although there may be some allusion to His betrayal by Judas, the more basic meaning concerns the divine plan of salvation in which Jesus death is pivotal.

and they will kill him,

In none of Mark’s passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) is the precise mode of Jesus’ death made clear.

and three days after his death he will rise.” ³² But they did not understand the saying,

and they were afraid to question him.

In light of the passion prediction we heard in the previous prediction, and the explanations surrounding it, you would think they could hardly fail to understand. The suggestion is that Mark is developing an increasingly negative portrait of the disciples.

³³ They came to Capernaum and,

Capernaum is Jesus' base of operations in Galilee.

once inside the house,

What house is not clear. Matthew 4:13 notes that Jesus established a residence in Capernaum and Mark 1:29 tells us that Peter had a home there where his mother-in-law was. Perhaps they were one and the same place.

he began to ask them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴ But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.

Matthew 18:1 adds "in the kingdom of heaven" but here the emphasis appears to be the present group of disciples.

³⁵ Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."

A similar teaching is in Mark 10:43-44. The ideal of leadership as service will be exemplified by Jesus as the gospel story continues.

"Let vanity be unknown among you. Let simplicity and harmony and a guileless attitude weld the community together. Let each remind himself that he is not only subordinate to the brother at his side, but to all. If he knows this, he will truly be a disciple of Christ" [Saint Gregory of Nyssa (ca. A.D. 380), *On The Christian Mode of Life*].

³⁶ Taking a child

The child is not so much a symbol of innocence or humility as someone without legal status and therefore helpless. The child can do nothing for the disciple; to receive the child is to do a good act for an insignificant person, without hope of earthly reward.

he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me."

The idea behind the saying is that whoever receives someone's emissary receives the man himself. So whoever receives a child receives Jesus, and whoever receives Jesus receives the Father who sent Jesus.

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