

28th 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 7:7-11

The Book of Wisdom, written in the 1st century B.C. is known to us only in the Greek. It is generally held certain that Greek was the original language. For this reason it is not contained in the Hebrew Bible; nor is it in the Protestant Bible, having been discarded by Martin Luther around A.D. 1520. Because it is known that Jesus and the apostles used the Greek (Septuagint) translation of the Old Testament, Wisdom has always been considered canonical by the Catholic Church. In fact, the Muratorian Fragment (A.D. 155-200), the earliest known list of writings approved as Scripture for use in the Church at Rome, and which gives a fairly orderly treatment to the titles contained in the New Testament, includes Wisdom as a New Testament book.

The book is divided into 3 parts:

- 1) Wisdom & Human Destiny (chapters 1-5),
- 2) Solomon & The Quest For Wisdom (chapters 6-9), and
- 3) Wisdom At Work In History (chapters 10-19).

Today's reading comes from the second part and describes Solomon's (or at least the author's who borrowed his name) praying and the riches that came to him.

⁷ ¶ I prayed,

Solomon's prayer is given in 1 Kings 3:7-9 and 2 Chronicles 1:8-10. The author's version of this prayer is given in Wisdom 9.

and prudence was given me;

Prudence is understanding. The author develops a parallelism: Prayer – pleaded; prudence – wisdom. Solomon preferred wisdom over power, riches, health, comeliness, and light. Solomon prayed for wisdom and it came to him along with all these good things.

I pleaded and the spirit of Wisdom came to me. ⁸ I preferred her to scepter and throne, And deemed riches nothing in comparison with her, ⁹ nor did I liken any priceless gem to her; Because all gold, in view of her, is a little sand, and before her, silver is to be accounted mire. ¹⁰ Beyond health and comeliness I loved her, And I chose to have her rather than the light, because the splendor of her never yields to sleep.

Wisdom never ceases to exist (see Wisdom 7:29-30).

11 Yet all good things together came to me in her company, and countless riches at her hands[.]

2nd Reading - Hebrews 4:12-13

Last week we started our study of the Book of Hebrews, as did our Episcopal and Lutheran brothers and sisters; they however, heard more verses (we had 3, the Episcopalians 10 with an optional 8 more, the Lutherans our 3 with an optional 7 more). This week we study Chapter 4, verses 12 & 13 while the Episcopalians and Lutherans study Chapter 3, verses 1 through 6 which discuss how Jesus, the faithful son, was superior to Moses. Not to worry though, next week they will get our reading for this week in addition to our reading for next week and we'll all be caught up again.

Our reading today is about God's warnings based on Israel's infidelity and tells us to persevere for the word of God judges rightly. Since nothing is unknown to it; it is light, those of the present generation will be judged worthy or unfit to enter God's rest. This is the particular judgment.

12 Indeed, the word of God

This refers back to verses 7 through 11. When you hear the word of God, crisis comes. The word of God is His judgment, and you are judged by how well you have kept His covenant.

is living and effective,

This description is calculated to show what the word does: it produces life (Deuteronomy 32:47), it achieves its purpose (Isaiah 55:10-11). Although some commentators might see Jesus incarnate here, this interpretation is not necessary to understanding this passage.

sharper than any two-edged sword,

A two-edged sword cuts no matter which way you swing it. A common metaphor (Isaiah 49:2; Proverbs 5:4; Wisdom 18:16). Here we are talking about its power in respect to judgment, and the fact that you can't escape it.

penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow,

The conception of man was that he was composed of body, soul, and spirit and like joints and marrow they are intimately connected. The statement that the Word is sharp enough to separate them is made to emphasize its penetrating power.

and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.

The Word has a knowledge of human beings which only God has (Acts 1:24; 15:8).

13 No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.

The Greek root of the word “naked and exposed” is related to the Greek noun for “neck”. This describes, in terms a soldier would understand, how vulnerable we all are when it comes time to be judged by God.

Gospel - Mark 10:17-30

This week we conclude our study of Jesus’ second instruction on Christology and discipleship. Last week we heard His teaching on marriage and divorce, and also of His blessing of the children. We now hear Jesus’ teaching about riches. This teaching consists of three units on wealth and the kingdom:

- 1) The story of the rich man.
- 2) Jesus’ instruction to His disciples.
- 3) His teaching about rewards for giving up riches.

We will hear all three.

17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up,

Only at the end of this story (verse 20) do we learn that the man is wealthy. The parallel gospel story (Matthew 19:16-22) tells us the man was young.

knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher,

A rarely used form of address for a rabbi. Acknowledges Him as a teacher of the spiritual life.

what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

The kingdom of God

18 Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good?”

Jesus is not rejecting the praise He has been offered, He wants to show the depth of this man’s words: He is good, not because He is a good man, but because He is God, who is goodness itself. The man has spoken the truth but he hasn’t gone far enough.

No one is good but God alone.

See Psalm 118:1-4; 1 Chronicles 16:34; 2 Chronicles 5:13; Ezra 3:11; Romans 7:18.

19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.’”

Jesus then recites the second part of the Decalogue (the ten commandments); the part that deals with our relationships with each other (Exodus 20:12-17; Deuteronomy 5:16-21). “You shall not defraud” could be a restatement of “you shall not steal,” or it could be a reference to the 9th and 10th commandments which deal with coveting. If it is the latter case, He has addressed all seven commandments that are to govern our human relationships.

Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). The commandments are the very core of the Law and keeping them is necessary for attaining eternal life. Christ brings these commandments to fulfillment in a double sense. First, He helps us to discover their full implications for our lives. Second, His grace gives us strength to counter our evil inclinations, which stem from original sin. The best commentary on this passage is Matthew 19:17b *“If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments”* and Matthew 5:20 *“I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven”*.

20 He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.”

21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him

This love is based on the man’s genuine efforts and success at observing the commandments (verse 20).

and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing.

You are not far from God’s kingdom (see [Mark 12:34](#) where Jesus praises the scribe).

Go, sell what you have, and give to (the) poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

In Judaism wealth was often taken as a sign of divine favor and there was an obligation to give alms to the poor. What makes this man’s case so hard is that he is to forego even the privilege of almsgiving for the sake of sharing in Jesus’ lifestyle of total dependence on God while proclaiming the coming of His kingdom. Jesus knows that this man has a generous heart. God calls everyone to holiness, but holiness is reached by different routes. It is up to

every individual to take the necessary steps to discover which route God wants him to follow. It is not an absolute commandment for all to give everything away, but we are not to place obstacles in the way.

22 At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

These possessions were probably property ownership with the financial benefits which result. This points out the difficult choice which must be made by all – whether to cast aside the impediments, whatever they may be, and follow Jesus or not. The rich man asked the question, but Jesus’ answer was too hard for him.

“But the young man went away sad, so anyone can see how far he kept those commandments of the law. I think he spoke with more pride than truth when he answered that he had kept them” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (ca. A.D. 417), *Letter to Hilarius* (No. 157)].

“He did not follow. He just wanted a good teacher, but he questioned who the teacher was, and scorned the identity of the One who was teaching. ‘He went away sad,’ bound up in his desires. ‘He went away sad,’ carrying a great burden of possessiveness upon his shoulders” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (ca. A.D. 416), *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 34,8].

23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples,

Again, the private instruction for the disciples

“How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”

If the rich see their wealth as a reward from God, they have erected a barrier to full participation in God’s plan. In themselves material things are good; they are resources God has made available to people for their development in society. But, excessive attachment to things is what makes them an occasion to sin. The sin lies in “trusting” in them, as if they will solve all life’s problems, and turning one’s back on God. St. Paul calls covetousness, idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Christ excludes from the kingdom of heaven anyone who becomes so attached to riches that his life is geared around them. Or, more accurately, that person excludes himself.

24 The disciples were amazed at his words.

They are astonished. From childhood they have been taught that riches are a reward and Jesus has just told them they can become an impediment.

So Jesus again said to them in reply, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to pass through (the) eye of (a) needle than for one

who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

Tradition points to a literal interpretation rather than conjecture about a narrow gate in the city wall. There is a similar rabbinic proverb mentioning an elephant.

26 They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, “Then who can be saved?”

Since nearly everyone has an inclination to be attached to material things, the disciples now see salvation as an impossible goal. No one can be saved if we rely on human resources. God’s grace makes everything possible. When we pray the Our Father we ask for our daily bread – not just a meal, but a Eucharistic meal which makes us part of God’s covenant family and gives us His grace.

“The rich man ‘went away sad,’ as you have heard, and the Lord says: ‘How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ At length the disciples became very sad when they heard this and they said: ‘If this is so, who then can be saved?’ Rich and poor, listen to Christ: I am speaking to God’s people. Most of you are poor, but you too must listen carefully to understand. And you had best listen even more intently if you glory in your poverty. Beware of pride, lest the humble rich surpass you. Beware of wickedness, lest the pious rich confound you. Beware of drunkenness, lest the sober excel you” [Saint Caesar of Arles (ca. A.D. 542), *Sermons* 153(2)].

27 Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.”

Jesus quotes Genesis 18:14 which recalls God’s power to fulfill His promise to Abraham (see also [Luke 1:3](#)).

28 Peter began to say to him, “We have given up everything and followed you.”

Peter, as spokesman for all the disciples points out that they have done what the rich man couldn’t. Behind this statement is the question: “What is the reward for accepting the challenge of discipleship?”

29 Jesus said, “Amen, I say to you,

Here, Jesus answers the underlying question.

there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel ³⁰ who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands,

Anyone who leaves behind his possessions will receive great rewards in this life.

with persecutions,

Opposition is part of the reward for giving things up out of love for Jesus. A Christian's glory lies in becoming like the Son of God, sharing in His Cross so later we can share in His Glory (Romans 8:17b *"if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him"*) (2 Timothy 3:12 *"all who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"*).

and eternal life in the age to come.

Not only will we get rewards here on earth, we will gain our inheritance as children of God (Romans 8:17a *"and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"*).

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