

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

8th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Sira 27.4-7)

The Test of Speech

The wise sage of Jerusalem collected many proverbs and pithy sayings. Most of them are severely practical, as in this short reading. Here he presents us with four images of testing someone by their speech. He does not deny that there are other ways of proving a person's worth and generosity, but these four aspects of testing by speech are as clear as any. This reading is chosen to introduce the sayings of the gospel reading on discerning people by their fruits. There is no way of telling what people are except how they act.

In fact, the Book of Sira is rather a favourite with Luke. He takes at least two of his sayings and transforms them into parables to illustrate two of his special emphases in Jesus' teaching. Luke is the evangelist of prayer, and a saying on a widow's earnest prayers (Sira 35.14) illustrates the need to persevere in prayer in Luke 18.1-8 (the Parable of the Unjust Judge), and the Rich Fool (Sira 11.19) is used to illustrate the acute dangers of hoarding wealth in Luke 12.16-21.

Question:

Which is the most testing of the criteria given in this reading?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 15.54-58)

Christ's Victory over Death

For most people, death is a terror: the one thing certain about life is that it will end in death. For Paul, death is a triumph which he awaits eagerly, longing to be fully united with Christ and to share fully in Christ's victory.

This Christian attitude, totally at variance with the views of those who do not know Christ, and with our natural human instincts, is the reason why the Church has given the last four Sundays to meditation on the transformation that will take place at Christian death. Paul is so convinced of the overwhelming power of Christ and his victory over sin that there is no hesitation: this mortal body will put on immortality. Quite how this will be is still not entirely clear: Paul says it is foolish even to ask what sort of body the dead will have. But he insists that there is continuity: the seed that dies is transformed, but 'each kind of seed has its own kind of body'; the risen person is in continuity with the person in this life. There are no conditions attached, no threat or fear of hell, being cast into outer darkness 'where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth', as in so many of Matthew's parables

Question:

Why does Paul never mention the word 'hell' or consider it?

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Gospel:

(Luke 6.39-45)

Judging Others

Matthew gathered together the teachings of Jesus on the basic requirements of Christian morality into the Sermon on the Mount; that formed a sort of manifesto for the Kingdom of Heaven, starting with the eight Beatitudes. Luke gathers many of the same teachings into his 'Sermon on the Plain', starting with four Beatitudes. This has provided the gospel readings for the last three Sundays.

Matthew, writing for Christians of Jewish origin, stressed Jesus' teaching on the law, and how Jesus made it more interior and often more demanding. Luke, always aware of the needs of the poor, stresses more our social obligations. As he draws to a conclusion, he gives us two of Jesus' warnings, expressed in the vivid language and with the fierce exaggeration and wit that is so characteristic of Jesus' teachings. The first, the splinter and the log, warns us to use the same standards in judging ourselves as we use in judging others. The second, the sound and rotten fruit, is perhaps a double warning. You can judge people only by their actions. More profoundly, it is also a challenge: don't flatter yourself on your achievements until you are good through and through, until the store of goodness in your heart is really overflowing.

Question:

Is it ever helpful to point out other people's faults?
