

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Deuteronomy 30.10-14)

Moses' Final Counsel

The Book of Deuteronomy, purporting to be written by Moses, but, in fact, penned some centuries later, consists of four great discourses on the Law. This lovely passage concludes the last discourse, after which the death of Moses is recounted. It encourages the people to observe the Law.

The Law is not obscure, or difficult, or far away. They do not need to travel far or search deeply. The author is saying that it is Israel's natural inheritance, and is natural for them to observe, almost - as we would say - second nature. The Law was for Israel God's most precious gift, a revelation of the divine nature and the divine ways to the world, so a source of light and life. It revealed how Israel must behave in order to be God's faithful people. So, observance of the Law was not a tiresome obligation but a response in love to this gift made in love.

For Christians, the Law is brought to perfection in the incarnate Word of God, who is the perfect revelation of the Father, and is the Way, the Truth and Life. Israel saw the revelation of God's will, and so of his nature, in the Law; Christians similarly see the full revelation of the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

Question:

How can I come to know God's ways?

Answer: Read John's Gospel in the awareness that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and Life.

Second reading:

(Colossians 1.15-20)

Christ the Firstborn

This first reading from Colossians is a hymn to the pre-eminence of Christ. It falls into two stanzas, the first his pre-eminence as firstborn in creation, the second his pre-eminence as firstborn from the dead.

As firstborn in creation, he is the image of the invisible God, in whom all is created, just as, in the Book of Wisdom, Wisdom is called the image of God, the reflection of the eternal light and the mirror of God's active power. In Wisdom, in Christ, God can be seen. In the second stanza, as firstborn from the dead, Christ brings all things to perfection and completion.

The hymn is a sort of parabola, starting with God in creation, descending to Christ as Lord of the Church, and returning with Christ to completion in God. In the two closely related letters, Colossians and Ephesians, the author is concerned to define Christ's superiority to the so-called spirits of this world, 'thrones, dominions, rulers and powers', which must have been revered in that region of Asia Minor.

Question:

What is the relationship of image, reflection, mirror to reality? Does this help to an understanding of the divinity of Christ?

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Gospel:

(Luke 10.25-37)

The Good Samaritan

To many a Jew at the time of Jesus, the hatred of the Samaritans was such that a Good Samaritan was a contradiction in terms. It is striking that Luke changes the dialogue about the two commandments. In Mark's and Matthew's accounts, Jesus answers the question about the commandments, while in Luke, Jesus challenges the questioner, who then himself gives the right answer. It is also striking that, in his reply at the very end, the lawyer, despite Jesus' praise of him, cannot bring himself to pronounce the hated name, 'Samaritan', and says 'the one who ...'.

The dry humour of the story consists in the conscientious dilemma of the priest and the Levite: if the huddled traveller turns out to be dead, they will incur corpse defilement and be unable to perform their sacred duties! This legal dilemma makes the Samaritan's attentive generosity all the more poignant, for a Samaritan is free of any such hang-ups. Love shown to the unfortunate and the downtrodden is always a major theme for Luke. But note also the Samaritan's careful administration of his funds: he gives not a blank cheque but two days' wages, which he will supplement on his return if necessary!

Question:

Is the main point of Jesus' story to be generous or not to be judgmental?
