

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

17th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Genesis 18.20-32)

Abraham bargains with God

This delightful story continues the episode of last Sunday's first reading. It is reminiscent of a scene of bargaining in an oriental bazaar, a scene of deadly earnest, yet playful bargaining.

Abraham goes on pushing his luck, using laughably inadequate logic, until he has gone well beyond the point of any sort of reason. His partner in this game continues to show good-humoured tolerance, and, above all, an unbelievable willingness to forgive.

Some might find this process of bargaining to lack reverence for the almighty power of God, but it is an expression of Israel's intimate affection for the Lord. This attitude is all expressed in the special Hebrew name for God, which is never pronounced. The Lord himself will later show Moses the meaning of this intimate name of Israel's own God as 'God of mercy and forgiveness'.

This sacred personal name of the Lord is never pronounced, partly out of reverence (for the glory of the Lord is too awesome for that name to be on human lips), but partly also out of intimacy, just as we do not noise around in public the intimate terms of affection that are used only within our close family circle.

Question:

Can I bargain with God in this way?

Second reading:

(Colossians 2.12-14)

Baptized into Christ

In this powerful passage, we see the strength of Paul's image of our sharing in Christ's death and Resurrection.

Our life is hidden with Christ in God, since we were baptized into Christ's death and raised in his Resurrection. We emerge with Christ from the tomb, sharing his life, co-heirs with him and calling God our Father.

Paul sees the sin of Adam not as something that happened long, long ago, but as an analysis of our own sin, for 'Adam' means 'man' or 'humanity'. This sin, every sin, is a sin of disobedience to God. Christ is, in Pauline thought, the Second Adam. By his obedience to his Father on the Cross he wiped away, dissolved or overrode the sin of disobedience of the first Adam, the sin of humanity.

The sacrifice of Christ on the Cross is the complete expression of obedience to the Father, which restores our loving relationship to the Father. This is forcefully expressed by saying that Christ nailed to the Cross the record of our debt to the law. Circumcision was of no avail; it was only by being baptized into Christ's death and raised in his Resurrection that we could be restored.

Question:

What are the implications for Christian behaviour of sharing Christ's life?

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Gospel:

(Luke 11.1-13)

The Lord's Prayer

Luke is the evangelist of prayer. Again and again he shows us Jesus praying. At all the important moments of his life he needs this intimacy with his Father. So he is praying at the baptism; before the choice of the disciples he prays through the night; at the Transfiguration he is praying. Now the prayer of Christians picks up his own prayer.

Luke's rendering of the prayer he taught the disciples is slightly shorter than the version in Matthew. It begins with the simple call 'Father', rather than 'Our Father in heaven', a noble and affectionate simplicity. 'Thy will be done' is omitted, for it is Matthew who often insists on doing the will of the Father. Instead of 'give us this day our daily bread' Luke gives the insistent 'give us each day', which stresses the continuity of our dependence on God.

After this prayer follows a series of parables and images underlining the importance of persistence in prayer and continual prayer after the model of Jesus himself. Elsewhere, Luke will give us other parables: the Unjust Judge, again teaching perseverance in prayer, and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, teaching the importance of humility in prayer.

Question:

Have there been occasions when God has answered your prayers in a way you did not expect?
