

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Isaiah 66.10-14)

As a Mother Comforts her Child

We are used to the imagery of God as Father, the creator and initiator of all things. But there is no gender or sex in God; these distinctions are human and animal; God infinitely transcends such human limitations.

So there is also room and need for a gentler image of God as mother: 'As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you', promises this passage, even daring to invoke that most maternal and intimately loving and trusting image of the child feeding at its mother's breast. Such imagery for God as mother comes in other passages as well, such as Psalm 131, where the contentment of the believer in God is compared to that of a little child in its mother's embrace, or Hosea 11.1-4, in which God's loving care is described in terms of a parent leading and feeding a child - the child is now growing up, and God's maternal love continues throughout our lives.

One of the chief Hebrew words describing God's love for his people is *rahamim*, the plural of *raham*, which means a mother's womb. It appeals, therefore, to the instinctual gut feeling of a mother for her child, which can never be destroyed or overruled.

Question:

What are the implications in prayer of this imagery of God as mother? What is scripture teaching us by the imagery of God as father?

Second reading:

(Galatians 6.14-18)

The Triumph of the Cross

This is the final reading for this year from the fiery letter to the Galatians. It also provides the entry antiphon for Holy Thursday, as we enter upon the celebration of the Lord's Passion and Death. Paul is finally again comparing the law and the Cross. Instead of glorying in the physical mark of circumcision, the symbol of subjection to the law, he glories in the Cross 'branded on' his body - he must mean in a symbolic sense by baptism, unless he means the scars of the floggings he received - which makes him a new creation.

Everything is new about the Christian baptized into Christ, having left behind the old, mundane preoccupations to embrace the new freedom inspired by the Spirit. This sounds all very well, but we know, and Paul knows also, that it is a constant challenge to bring this new life and new scale of values into reality: 'The good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want - that is what I do', he laments when writing to the Romans. We are already reconciled to God, but only once does Paul say we are already saved. Even then it is 'saved in hope', which puts it into the future.

Question:

How far does my new life in Christ express a new scale of values?

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Gospel:

(Luke 10.1-12, 17-20)

The Mission in Action

The instructions to the 70 sent out are direct and simple. They are really sent out like lambs among wolves, without food, without distractions, without baggage, without spares. The version in the Gospel of Mark allows them sandals, presumably to enable them to make more speed on their journey, for the urgency of the task is paramount. They are not to be distracted by picking and choosing their accommodation or their food.

Direct, too, is their method: to impart the blessing of peace and to heal. No second chance: if the blessing is rejected, away they go, leaving the town to a fate worse than that of Sodom! Last Sunday's gospel demanded an uncompromisingly whole-hearted response to the call from the apostles themselves. This Sunday they demand the same response to their own message. Again, the absolute demands of Jesus! There is a wonderful simplicity about this message of the coming of the Kingdom: all that is involved is peace and healing. No squabbles, no fripperies, no complications of doctrine. If these can remain the focus of our Christian vision, we may make some progress towards bringing the Kingdom of God to reality in our own surroundings.

Question:

What sort of healing can I bring? Is this the most important aspect of the Kingdom?
