

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Sira 3.17-20, 2)
No need to boast

Readings from this book of Ben Sira (or Ecclesiasticus) come only half a dozen times on the Sundays of the three-year cycle. It is probably the oldest of the Greek books of the Bible, written in Hebrew by an experienced scribe at Jerusalem a couple of centuries before Christ. The version we have was translated into Greek for the Jews of Alexandria by the grandson of the author.

The book is full of worldly as well as divine wisdom, and a real appreciation of human nature. There is often a streak of dry wit as well. Here he reminds us that pride is often a cover-up for insecurity. The truly great person has no need to create an impression, can afford to be open and appreciative and ready to learn from others.

Such openness is attractive and winning among our fellow human beings. More important, it gives a solidity and authenticity that leave us open also to the quiet word of the Lord. 'To the humble the Lord reveals his secrets.' This is the quality of Jesus who is 'meek and humble of heart', who rides as king into Jerusalem not on a prancing warhorse but on a donkey.

Question:

Do I ever really convince other people (or even myself) by showing off?

Second reading:

(Hebrews 12.18-19, 22-24)
The City of the Living God

This final reading from the Letter to the Hebrews brings together the two main themes of the Letter: the superiority of the priesthood of Christ to that of the Old Law, and the theme of pilgrimage, concentrating here on its goal.

Just like the Israelites in the desert of the exodus, the Church is still a pilgrim Church, wending its way unsteadily towards its final goal. In soothing the nostalgia of the Hebrew priests who still yearned for the old rites of the Temple, the author compares the two pilgrimages of the Old and New Testaments and points to the superiority of New Testament pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage of the Old Law was to Sinai and to the unbearably awesome experience of God on the mountain. The goal of the Christian pilgrimage is the heavenly Jerusalem, where all is peace and perfection.

There is the contrast, also, of the two covenants, the one made on Sinai, destined to be broken repeatedly throughout the history of the Chosen People, and the eternal new covenant mediated by the priesthood of Christ, destined to remain for ever as the secure basis of our adoptive sonship and inheritance.

Question:

Is the church still on pilgrimage? Do you see it as advancing or stationary?

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Gospel:

(Luke 14.1, 7-14)

Invitations

Two parables about invitations to table. Both are from Luke's special material, without parallel in the other gospels. He moves in a higher stratum of society than Mark and Matthew, and often has in mind the implications of the gospel for their situation.

The first parable, however, like several of Luke's parables, seems to be developed from a little Old Testament proverb: 'Do not give yourself airs, do not take a place among the great; better to be invited, "Come up here", than to be humiliated' (Proverbs 25 .6-7).

At first sight, this seems a merely worldly precaution, a false humility engineered to gain attention. But, for Luke, a banquet is always an image of the heavenly banquet of the Lord. So the message is a moral one too: don't think yourself better than you are.

The message is also typical of Luke's open and straightforward approach. One is reminded of the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector at prayer, where the latter prays only 'God be merciful to me, a sinner.' The second parable also is typical of Luke, his stress on the inherent danger of wealth, on the need to use wealth well, and his concern for the poor and neglected in society.

Question:

Who would be thrilled with an invitation and could never return it?
