

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

25th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Isaiah 55.6-9)

My Thoughts are not Your Thoughts

This is the triumphant conclusion of the second major section of the Book of Isaiah: God's ways are utterly different from human thinking. The passage is obviously chosen because it looks towards God's 'irresponsible' behaviour in the gospel for this Sunday.

In many ways, it is comforting to think that God is not like us. One reason why we cling to God is to be liberated from ourselves and to be brought into his marvellous light, living a life freed from the restrictions, frustrations and self-centeredness that surrounds and penetrates us.

Obviously, God does not have our faults of selfishness, laziness, malice, lust and greed. More than that, not being bodily or limited in any way, God does not plan or think like us. God does not think things out, with 'yes' and 'no', working in concepts or sentences. God does not laboriously plan what to do, weighing consequences, advantages and disadvantages! Even our love is always tinged with self-interest and concern for ourselves.

God's love is entirely generous and outgoing, a limitless cascade of love, deluging and penetrating each of us.

Question:

Is it comforting or daunting to think that God is so different from us?

Second reading:

(Philippians 1.20-24, 27)

Paul Yearns to be Free

This is the first of four Sunday readings from Paul's letter to the Philippians. They were his favourite community, linked to him with a strong bond of affection and intimacy, the only community from which he would accept gifts of money.

Paul writes this letter from prison, not sure whether he is to live or die, not sure either which is his stronger desire. For life is his bond with the Christian communities he has founded, and who still need his help.

But the centre of his life is the total rootedness in Christ, of which death can only be the completion. As he writes elsewhere, the Christian has been baptized into Christ's death, dipped into Christ's death, and so is soaked in Christ's death, waiting only for it to be completed in Christ's Resurrection.

If we really believe this with the strength of Paul's conviction, it gives a whole new centre to life, a whole new perspective on the life that is Christ's. Death will then not be a matter of fear and dread, but only a slipping into the glory of the Resurrection.

Question:

Is it right to fear death?

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Gospel:

(Matthew 20.1-16)

The Payment of Wages

'It is not fair! They have hardly had time to roll up their sleeves, and the latecomers get the same wage as I do, having sweated it out right through the heat of the day.'

OK, but God is unfair. What are you going to do about that?

'But they didn't deserve it, whereas I worked all day.'

OK, you worked. But how did you deserve even to exist?

'Well, God gave me existence, but he might at least be fair.'

OK, and where would that leave you, if God were fair and gave you what you deserve? Do you want a God in your own image, vengeful, scheming, lazy, punishing (other people), complacent, selfish?

'Hold on! Not completely like me, but at least I am fair.'

No. God isn't fair at all. That is why Jesus enjoyed having parties with sinners and scum with whom you wouldn't be seen dead.

'Well, they will be different then, when they and I are dead - they'll be sort of cleaned up.'

Up to your standards, you mean? Are you sure God wants them 'cleaned up' like you? Perhaps God loves them just as much as you.

Question:

Could Jesus ever have said "Blessed are the hungry and dirty and dishonest"?
