

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Wisdom 1.13-15; 2.23-24)

Immortality

The first reading, as so often, looks towards the gospel reading, where Jesus raises the little girl from death. It takes the opportunity to reflect on death in God's scheme of things. For those who have no faith, death rules everything. It is the absolute end, perhaps a release from suffering, but always a tragedy for somebody, the awesome end point from which there is no return.

The Book of Wisdom was written at a time when belief in immortality and the Resurrection was finally emerging in Israel. Earlier, Israel had believed that the dead dwelt in a sort of powerless half-life in Sheol (not unlike the Greek Hades), where it is impossible even to pray. Now Israel realized that the love of God for every person was so strong that it could never be broken off by death. As Jesus was to say, God is a God not of the dead but of the living.

This reading is wonderfully positive and ebullient, for God is a God of life in all its positive forms, all of which are a reflection of God's own life. The fullest of all these reflections is the life of each human individual, created in the image of God.

Question:

How should we envisage or imagine life after death?

Second reading:

(2 Corinthians 8.7, 9, 13-15)

Generous Giving

Paul's Letter to the Galatians shows that there was a major disagreement in the early Church between those who held that Christians must still obey the Jewish Law and those who did not. The Law party was led by the Church at Jerusalem under James, brother of the Lord. After all, Christianity is the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, the fulfilment of Judaism!

Paul set about healing the breach by making a great collection from his gentile Churches to take to the Church at Jerusalem as an act of homage and friendship. There seem to have been many poor people at Jerusalem, whom the people of such a bustling and successful harbour town as Corinth could help. Paul writes in this Letter giving the basic principle of Christian generosity: the imitation of Christ, who gave himself wholly in love. Yet he also gives the invaluable principle that each individual's conscience is the only yardstick. Not all of us can reach our human fulfilment by living in the destitution of St Francis, and each must judge his giving by his own conscience. Some Christian communities prescribe one tenth of their income in giving. Paul avoids any mathematical formula, for circumstances and obligations differ - as well as generosity.

Question:

Is some countries giving to the Church is part of tax. Is this a good idea?

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Gospel:

(Mark 5. 21-43)

Two Cures of Women

The author of the Gospel of Mark likes to combine incidents to show their joint significance, often, as here, sandwiching one story between the two halves of another. In this instance, the significance is surely that both recipients of Jesus' healing love are women. Only a minority of Jesus' miracles concern women, and the bringing together of these two, one a girl and the other an old woman, serves to stress their importance to Jesus.

It is unfair to accuse the Bible of being male dominated. A mother's devotion is a frequent image of God's love. There are plenty of feisty women in the Old Testament, who put their menfolk to shame by their courage, enterprise and initiative: Rebecca, Tamar, Deborah, Ruth, Esther, Judith.

Jesus' own relationships with women seem to have been easy and even humorous. One need only think of his playful bargaining with the Syro-Phoenician over the cure of her daughter, or the jokey exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, not to mention his delicacy towards the woman taken in adultery or the sinful woman who showed her love by weeping at his feet. Paul also clearly relied in many ways in his apostolate on the ministry of women.

Question:

What is Jesus' attitude to women? Is the Church fair to women?
