

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

## Twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

***First reading:*** (Wisdom 2.12, 17-20)

*The Good Man Taunted*

This is the first reading this year to be taken from the Book of Wisdom. This book was written probably at Alexandria, and was written in Greek, so is not included in the Protestant canon of scripture, which includes only the books written in Hebrew.

A major theme of the book is the contrast between divine Wisdom and folly. It also includes a wonderful poem on God's Wisdom, by which he created the world, 'the reflection of the eternal light, and the image of his goodness'.

In this reading, we have the taunts that those who refuse divine Wisdom make against those who embrace Wisdom. It is remarkable that, in Matthew's gospel, the taunts of the chief priests, scribes and elders against Jesus as he hangs on the cross use these very words. This use of scripture is typical of Matthew's irony, and shows just how wrong they were.

The reading therefore both prepares us for the prophecy of the Passion in the first part of the gospel reading and contrasts these boasts with the wisdom of simplicity represented by the child in the second part.

**Question:**

*Is there such a thing as specifically Christian Wisdom?*

***Second reading:*** (James 3 .16-4 .3)

*Peace and Prayer*

The reading from the Letter of James first contrasts quarrelling and ambition, and their evil effects, with the true wisdom which brings peace. Then it goes on to some stern words about prayer that is not heard, 'because you have prayed for something to indulge your own desires'. Is it wrong, then, to ask God for what we want? What about 'Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find'?

The problem of unanswered prayers of petition is a difficult one. We do not really believe that we can change God's mind and intentions by praying. Nevertheless, we express to God our needs and desires, although we are well aware that he knows them already. This is what a child does to a loving father, 'Please, please!' We even link arms with our mother, Mary, or even our brother and Saviour, Jesus, to increase the persuasive power.

But every prayer of petition, just as a child's prayer to a loving father, contains the hidden text that our Father knows best. The child or the praying Christian can want something desperately, but for true prayer must submit in obedience - sometime puzzled obedience - to the Father. Only so is the prayer an expression of trust and affection.

**Question:**

*What is the point of petitionary prayer?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Mark 9.30-37)*

### *The Second Prophecy of the Passion*

Mark gives us three formal prophecies of the Passion, of which this is the second. He uses the triple number frequently to stress the importance and sureness of an event. So Peter denies Jesus three times, and Pilate three times asserts Jesus' innocence. Jesus is shown to be fully aware of the fate that awaits him: he goes into it with his eyes open, and accepts his Father's will, especially in the awareness that his Father will not desert him, but will vindicate him by the Resurrection.

Again the disciples fail to understand the message: while Jesus had been giving them the message of triumph only through suffering and humiliation, they had been thinking about who would be first. So Jesus sets before them a child as the model. In what way is a child a model?

Children are notably and innocently selfish. Neither are they straightforward, for they can be devious and scheming from an early age. Is it that they know they cannot control a situation, and trustingly accept what they are given? The final saying suggests that it is this quality of dependence that Jesus proposes: the child is dependent on the will of the Father.

## **Question:**

*Why does Jesus put forward a child as a role model for us?*

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