

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

28th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Wisdom 7. 7 -11)

The Riches of Wisdom

Unusually, the first reading seems to pair both with the second reading and with the gospel. It pairs with the second reading because divine Wisdom and the Word of God are similar: each is the way in which God makes himself known to us. It pairs with the gospel reading because the author of the Book of Wisdom esteems riches as nothing and prefers Wisdom, just as the rich man in the gospel is encouraged by Jesus to prefer the following of Christ to his riches.

The Book of Wisdom was written a bare half-century before the birth Christ, at a time when all hope of a personal Messiah in the line of David seemed remote. The only way in which God might enter into this world seemed to be by his Wisdom. This chapter goes on to show how God created the world and continues to rule it by his Wisdom. Divine Wisdom is described as the 'mirror of God's active power and image of his goodness', language seeking to describe how Wisdom is in God and yet is not exactly identical with the Creator. This language will be used also by Paul and John to describe the incarnation of the Word of God.

Question:

What does it mean to say that Divine Wisdom became incarnate in Jesus? How does it enlarge the way we think about God?

Second reading:

(Hebrews 4.12-13)

The Word of God

The Word of God can here be understood on two levels. The Word of God that is the scripture penetrates to the human soul. That is why we need to read the scriptures to come to know the ways of God. By this prayerful reading, we come to understand the world and even ourselves as God sees them, gradually growing in understanding of his will for us, how I personally can be penetrated by the Spirit of God and grow closer to the Lord. The author of the Letter is inviting readers to reflect on the psalm that speaks of the 'place of rest' for the People of God, and to understand that their arrival in Canaan, after the wanderings in the desert, was not the 'final place of rest' designed for them by God; they are still on pilgrimage. The Word of God can also be understood as the Word which became flesh, as in the Prologue to John's Gospel. Jesus is the Word of God become flesh, the image of his goodness, by which we can come to know God. The two senses are combined in the glorious vision, at the beginning of the book of Revelation, of the Risen Christ, the Lord of the Church, from whose mouth issues a two-edged sword, by which he judges the world.

Question:

Beneath its imagery, what does this reading mean by saying that the Word of God is sharper than a sword?

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Gospel:

(Mark 10, 17-30)

The Rich Man's Question

This exchange between Jesus and the rich man is often read with Matthew's parallel in mind, where Jesus tells the young man to sell his possessions 'if you would be perfect'. There are no such two levels in Mark's story. The questioner has a certain age, for he has kept the commandments 'from my earliest days'. He is in the full flush of wealth, and getting rid of his riches is not a mere counsel of perfection. Jesus is stressing the danger of possessions for everyone.

It is a curious fact that for many people, the more they have, the more they want. Conversely, the less people have, the more generous they are, knowing the value to other needy people of the little they have. It is not merely that we need to be free of the preoccupations and distractions of wealth. Wealth can be a good preoccupation if the worry comes from awareness of the responsibility it brings. Repeatedly, however, in the history of the Church, from St Anthony of the Desert, St Francis of Assisi and others, people have interpreted these words heroically and stripped themselves of all possessions to concentrate on the Kingdom of God. God's blessing is especially on the poor.

Question:

Is money a blessing, a distraction, a worry or an opportunity?
