

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Jeremiah 31.7-9)

Israel is my firstborn son

The most remarkable feature of this prophecy of Jeremiah is that Jeremiah spoke it when the destruction of Jerusalem was certain. The city was about to collapse and its inhabitants be dragged into captivity across the desert on meat hooks. Yet Jeremiah proclaims that the Lord has saved his people! It is so certain that Jeremiah can speak of it in the perfect tense: it has virtually already happened. In the midst of disaster, he declares that the Lord is a father to Israel, and Israel his cherished firstborn son! Even the blind (ready for the gospel miracle!) and the lame will be gathered in. They will have to wait for the fulfilment, but the promise remains a beacon of hope. There are times in everyone's life when everything goes wrong and irremediable disaster strikes. In those dark moments we know that the same promise holds for us. In the Spirit, we can still cry out, 'Abba, Father'. The household of the Lord is a Church composed entirely of firstborn sons. According to the Law of Israel only sons had a right of inheritance, so even the daughters of the Church are rightly described as firstborn sons.

Question:

How can people 'from the farthest parts of earth' call God 'Father' if they have never heard of God?

Second reading:

(Hebrews: 5.1-6)

High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek

'He can sympathize with those who are ignorant or uncertain.' To single out these two characteristics and to grant that Jesus could be uncertain or ignorant is a bold assertion of Jesus' full humanity. Yet, ignorance and the ability to learn is a condition of humanity: the child Jesus must have learnt how to deal with fire and knives and dangers, and there is no way of learning so sure as initially getting it wrong. Similarly, uncertainty is a crucial human condition, at once an openness to learning and a reminder of humility. How certain was Jesus of what would happen in his Passion? He must have known that 'his head was in the noose', but the detailed predictions of the Passion are surely subsequently phrased in the light of the actual events. The two unique elements of his priesthood are total ability to sympathize with us, and his unmediated link to his Father. These make his priesthood, his representation of ourselves to the Father, and his wholehearted offering of himself in obedience to the Father, far more immediate than any formal priesthood, such as that of the priestly line of Aaron, could ever be.

Question:

As a man, did Jesus really learn? How much did he know of what the future held?

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Gospel:

(Mark 10.46-52)

Blind Bartimaeus

There are several remarkable things about this story. First, the scene is just when Jesus is leaving Jericho. Jericho is about three hours' walk from Jerusalem, up a great, rocky canyon. When you leave Jericho, you know you are just about coming to Jerusalem. It is the last village on the way, and the excitement of the great revelation of Jesus at the Passion is already upon them. The cured beggar dances on the way with them.

Second, he is the only person in Mark to call Jesus 'Son of David', drawing attention to Jesus' messianic ancestry, ready for his messianic entry into Jerusalem.

Third, in Mark Jesus says 'Your faith has cured you' only twice. The first time was to the woman with a haemorrhage, who had shown her faith with great courage by daring to touch Jesus' garment in the crowd. Now Bartimaeus shows the same stubborn courage in carrying on shouting despite the attempts to silence him. So they both show with courage that they really do put their trust in Jesus and are confident that he will help. If our faith is to save us, it needs to be real, courageous and stubborn. Lukewarm, tentative faith is not enough.

Question:

How do we show our faith and trust in Jesus?
