

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I

Wisdom 7:7-11

I prayed, and prudence was given me;
I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.
I preferred her to scepter and throne,
and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her,
nor did I liken any priceless gem to her;
because all gold, in view of her, is a little sand,
and before her, silver is to be accounted mire.
Beyond health and comeliness I loved her,
and I chose to have her rather than the light,
because the splendor of her never yields to sleep.
Yet all good things together came to me in her company,
and countless riches at her hands.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 90:12-13, 14-15, 16-17

R. (14) Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Teach us to number our days aright,
that we may gain wisdom of heart.

Return, O LORD! How long?

Have pity on your servants!

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness,
that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.

Make us glad, for the days when you afflicted us,
for the years when we saw evil.

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Let your work be seen by your servants
and your glory by their children;
and may the gracious care of the LORD our God be ours;
prosper the work of our hands for us!
Prosper the work of our hands!

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!

Reading II

Hebrews 4:12-13

Brothers and sisters:

Indeed the word of God is living and effective,
sharper than any two-edged sword,
penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow,
and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.
No creature is concealed from him,
but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him
to whom we must render an account.

Alleluia

Matthew 5:3

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

Mark 10:17-30

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up,
knelt down before him, and asked him,
"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good?
No one is good but God alone.
You know the commandments: *You shall not kill;*
you shall not commit adultery;
you shall not steal;
you shall not bear false witness;
you shall not defraud;
honor your father and your mother."
He replied and said to him,
"Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth."
Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him,
"You are lacking in one thing.
Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor
and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."
At that statement his face fell,
and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples,
"How hard it is for those who have wealth
to enter the kingdom of God!"
The disciples were amazed at his words.
So Jesus again said to them in reply,
"Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!
It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle
than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."
They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves,
"Then who can be saved?"
Jesus looked at them and said,
"For human beings it is impossible, but not for God.
All things are possible for God."
Peter began to say to him,
"We have given up everything and followed you."
Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you,
there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters
or mother or father or children or lands
for my sake and for the sake of the gospel
who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age:
houses and brothers and sisters
and mothers and children and lands,
with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come."

Exegesis

Wisdom 7:7-11

The *Book of Wisdom*, sometimes referred to as *The Wisdom of Solomon*, was written in Alexandria sometime after the Romans conquered that city in the year 30 B.C. It was written in Greek by a well-educated Jew who was influenced by the Hellenistic world that he lived in. The understanding of *wisdom*, *sophia* in the original Greek, merges the *wisdom* of Greek philosophy with the *wisdom* of sacred scripture.

The pursuit of wisdom, *sophia*, was certainly the heart of Greek philosophy. It was taught as something that could be attained through deep contemplation and reflection on the entirety of the created world. They saw an order and intricacy to nature that gave witness to a supreme intellect, a divine mind, that they called the *logos*. Wisdom was coming to understand the deepest meaning of life in the context of the created world in which we find ourselves. The goal of the pursuit of knowledge and the accumulation of human experience was to come to a place of understanding of truth and of life itself, i.e. being, human and divine.

The evolution of the understanding of wisdom, *hokma* in Hebrew, *sophia* in Greek, has a much different starting point in sacred scripture, i.e. it begins with God, the source of true wisdom. This is especially true in post-exilic texts. The fact that Solomon prayed for wisdom suggests that its source is divine. Proverbs Chapter 8 reflects on the divine origin of wisdom: “The Lord begot me (wisdom)... when He established the heavens, I was there... I was beside Him as His craftsman.” In this case there would seem to be a direct correlation with the Logos, the pre-existent Word, i.e., Christ. Wisdom 7:22-30 also reveals wisdom as divine: “the artificer of all... the refulgence of eternal light... and passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets.”

Jesus reveals Himself as Wisdom from God: “The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they said, ‘Look, He is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is vindicated by her works.” (Matt 11:19). Likewise, in Matthew 12:42 Jesus again identifies Himself with Wisdom: “At the judgement the queen of the south will arise with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here.”

Perhaps St. Paul reveals Christ as Divine Wisdom most succinctly in 1 Corinthians: “It is due to Him (God) that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us Wisdom from God...” (1 Cor 1:30). In his preaching on the paradox of the Cross in 1 Corinthians 1:18-30 St. Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world (foolishness) with the Wisdom of God, personified in Christ and perfected on the Cross. The wisdom of the world (foolishness) is displayed in human standards of wealth, power, prestige, etc. On the other hand, Christ Crucified, the perfection of self-giving love is the Wisdom of God revealed to us.

St. Paul preaches and prays for the gift of Wisdom enlightening the heart, e.g. “Remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of Him. May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened...” (Eph 1:17-18).

In praying for wisdom Solomon is not only praying for divine guidance, but he is praying for friendship with God as he desires to dwell with God. (See Wis 7:28). The Wisdom of Solomon is legendary, acknowledged by Christ Himself. It is such because Solomon had his priorities in right order. Being in right relationship with God is foundational to his life. Everything flows from this friendship.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 90:12-13, 14-15, 16-17

Psalm 90 is entitled *God's Eternity and Human Frailty – A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God*. It begins with the assurance that God has been our refuge through all generations, through all time. In theological terms God is outside of or beyond time. Time is a part of God's creation, a part of created reality. As human beings we are born into and travel through time. In the Greek language there are two words for time. One is *chronos* which describes chronological time. The other is *kyros* which speaks of a moment in time when all is present. God lives in *kyros* time. God lives in the eternal present. All of time is present to God. We in turn travel through time.

Our time on earth has a beginning and it has an end. Wisdom of heart comes with a consciousness of this reality. The psalmist reminds us that we are dust and to dust we shall return. The second image is that of grass that springs up in the morning and withers in the evening, a reminder of temporal reality. The true frailty of humanity is our mortality. Wisdom of heart is guidance for life, living this life in the reality that we are just passing through. The psalmist prays for a refuge from this reality and for love and joy on the journey to match our days of affliction. Ultimately, however, we are called to set our sights beyond this passing world, which is true wisdom.

Hebrews 4:12-13

Out pericope concludes a section in *Hebrews* that is entitled *The Sabbath Rest*. The sabbath rest is symbolic of the end of the journey, the arrival in the Promised Land, or ultimately the arrival into heaven resting in God. The Exodus journey is a paradigm for this journey and is referenced in Chapter 3: "Oh, that today you would hear His voice; Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion." Those who were rebellious on the journey perished in the desert and did not enter the Promised Land, into the sabbath rest.

Hebrews begins this section in Chapter 4 by reminding us that we are on a journey and that the promise of entering the sabbath rest remains. Then we are reminded not to harden our hearts. Some heard the invitation, "But the word that they heard did not profit them, for they were not united in faith with those who listened." (Hb 4:2).

Verses 12 and 13 conclude this discussion. *The word of God is living*. Some scholars point out that the Word of God should be capitalized as it is Jesus, the eternal Word made flesh as revealed in the prologue of John's Gospel. Some differ and suggest that it is referring to Sacred Scripture. My belief is that all of God's revelation is mediated by and through the eternal Word, the Christ. Therefore, Christ and Sacred Scripture is one and the same. I believe it was St. Jerome who said, "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." Scripture is God's living Word speaking to us. It is Christ who searches the depth of our being. Nothing can be hidden from Him. He is the source of all love and mercy, but He is also just. Sometimes Truth conflicts us at the depth of our souls in our sin and in our apathy.

Exegesis (Continued)

Mark 10:17-30

Our Gospel passage can be broken down into three distinct episodes. The first episode (10:17-22) is the encounter of the rich man and Jesus. The second story (10:23-27) captures the teaching of Jesus to His disciples about the difficulty of the rich of this world to enter the Kingdom of God. The third episode (10:28-31) reveals Jesus' promise to His disciples of the blessings of following Him.

The pericope, as in recent weeks, again begins with a reminder that Jesus is on a journey, a journey to Jerusalem. A rich man seeks out Jesus on the way and falls to his knees before Him. The only other account of someone falling to their knees before Jesus in the *Gospel of Mark* is the leper who begs for healing (1:40). In both instances it is a sign of great reverence.

The rich man calls Jesus the good teacher and asks the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He has it correct when he acknowledges that eternal life is an inheritance. An inheritance is a gift from a donor and generally there is nothing that must be done to receive the gift but be in right relationship with the donor. Yet, the man asks, "what must I do?" Jesus looks at him with love, which is ultimately the only thing necessary. Jesus tells him to unburden himself with his possessions, which apparently were the object of his attention and love, as he goes away sad. As in recent teachings Jesus is challenging him to get rid of the obstacles, in this case possessions, to a deeper relationship with Him.

The rich man tells Jesus that he has observed all the commandments, but only lists the last of the commandments with address relationships with others. The first three dealing with our relationship with God he omits. Jesus tells him to serve the poor and thus serve God, "For whatever you do for the least of these you do for Me."

Jesus turns to His disciples and us and reminds us of the dangers of our dependence on wealth. He uses the great example of the difficulty of a camel passing through the eye of a needle. I have heard (read about) this explained as follows: In the wall that surrounded the city of Jerusalem there was an opening near the gate that was oblong and shaped like the eye of a needle and so was referred to as the eye of the needle. Legend has it that a trained camel, once unloaded of its cargo could squeeze through it, which would be necessary after the gate was locked in the evening. The image of not being able to take possessions with us further deepens the analogy. Many scholars acknowledge this interpretation but warn that there is no historical evidence to substantiate it. In any event, Jesus points out the difficulty that riches and possessions can pose. Especially in an affluent society it is easy for people to become lulled into a false sense of security by creature comforts.

In the final section of our Gospel passage Jesus assures his disciples of the blessings that await those who sacrifice to follow Him. As in the story of Job those blessings include worldly as well as the gift of the Kingdom. He also sandwiches in the inevitable persecutions that will come with discipleship as He again turns toward Jerusalem and His Passion.

Reflection

The Gospel this weekend is often referred to as the *Parable of the Rich Young Man*. The man approaches Jesus and asks the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responds with a litany of the commandments. The young man responds with confidence that he has observed all of them faithfully from his youth. Then Jesus looks at him with love and says, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven: then come and follow Me.”

The parable focuses on what I feel is the biggest problem that we face in our affluent society today. Our creature comforts lull us into a false sense of security. The rich young man has done well for himself. He is in control. Even the question that he asks, “What must I do...”, carries the implication that he can do something to earn his way into heaven. He is thinking as human beings think; if I do something then I will earn something. He does recognize, however, that eternal life is inherited.

An inheritance by its very nature is a gift typically from a loving parent. All one has to do in the case of an inheritance is to avoid being disowned and cut out of the will. Jesus came into our world to restore us to our common inheritance with the Father. He taught us to pray, “Our Father.” We are His brother and His sister, and we are sons and daughters of God the Father. Our goal in life must be then to remain connected to God, the source of life and of love. All too often we find ourselves too attached to the things of this world and not to God.

The ancient city of Jerusalem was protected by a giant wall that surrounded the city. The gates were closed each evening at dusk to protect them from enemy attack. On both sides of the gate there was a hole in the wall that was oval shaped and was called the “eye of the needle.” One person at a time could squeeze through the hole. A well-trained camel could squeeze through the hole if he was not too fat. Obviously, all the cargo that the camel was carrying would have to be removed before the camel could enter. When Jesus says that it is easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven, perhaps He is reminding us that we cannot take the material good of this world with us.

Our first reading and our psalm remind us that true wisdom is knowledge that we are just traveling through this world. We are called to be in the world, but not of the world, as St. Paul reminds us. It is a matter of priority and focus. Jesus once said, “Wherever your treasure lies there your heart will be.” What do we really treasure, and where does our heart lie? Eternal life depends on that question for each of us. Come to the altar this weekend and every Sunday to receive the real treasure, the gift that is eternal, the gift of divine life! And so, we pray.... Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

Having lived a life dedicated to the pursuit of material wealth, my life is a personal witness to our readings today. I began my career as a Certified Public Accountant immediately after college. My life was dedicated to enhancing the financial position of my clients and of myself. I found it very rewarding helping others to achieve their financial goals and my own. Very quickly I was totally immersed in the business world. It became my life.

One day a friend and client invited me to lunch. He was looking for sympathy and an understanding ear as he had made a bad investment in a particular stock. It was an Initial Public Offering that had great promise, but due to poor management ended in bankruptcy. My friend lost his entire investment. I had never seen him so sad and depressed. He was looking for consolation and a bit of free tax advice. He had lost his entire investment of \$10,000.

I remember driving back to the office feeling very sorry for my friend. I was not feeling sorry because he lost a little money. Ten thousand dollars to him was a mere drop in the bucket as he was a multi-millionaire. I was saddened because I realized how much money was controlling his life. It was a beautiful autumn day with bright sunshine and beautiful colors and money had robbed him of his joy. It dawned on me that I too was deeply affected by ups and downs in my own business environment.

Like the rich man I had for the most part lived by the commandments and the moral teachings of the Church that I was raised in. I was going to Mass on Sunday faithfully. But I realized at that moment how far that I had drifted from Jesus. I had compartmentalized my faith and limited it to one hour on Sunday morning. The entire focus of my life was on the pursuit of material wealth. There was something missing in my life. It was the personal relationship with Jesus that I had once knew.

I don't believe that I intentionally turned my back on Jesus. It was more of a gradual drifting away. It was the busyness and demands of my profession that kept me preoccupied. I was caught up in the flow of a consumeristic society surrounded by like minded people. That encounter with my friend at lunch jolted me out of fast-moving stream that I was in and set me on the bank looking for more.

On the way back from lunch that day I ended up driving past the office and proceeded on to the Catholic Church. Like the rich man I knelt before Jesus and asked the same question as he did. I received the same answer! That was the beginning of my journey rekindling my personal relationship with Jesus, my commitment to follow Him, and my eventual ordination to the priesthood. I gave up everything and have received back one hundred-fold. God is good!

F. Glenn