

Sundays between 18 and 24 September, Ordinary 25 Year B

We are now in 'Ordinary Time' again – that time of the Christian Year when (so we might believe) nothing extra-ordinary happens. Is it time for God's summer break? Or ours? In fact it's neither, of course.

Being in Ordinary Time means that we have both Continuous and Related Old Testament readings.

Continuous

Prov 31: 10-31

This remarkable passage gives the lie to those who imagine the world of the Old Testament as somehow akin to that of the Taleban who, with their strict and rigid interpretation of their tradition, confine women very narrowly to the domestic sphere. The wife extolled here is a canny business-woman, industrious and astute manager of household and estate, generous to the poor, universally respected and acclaimed for her wisdom.

Look at verse 23. Here is the man of the house – or, rather, the man about town. Is this really all he does, sit around with his contemporaries? Has the sage gone overboard with his praise of a capable wife?

Ps 1

In this the very first psalm in the collection we find set out the basis of all the psalms: those who delight in the law of the Lord will prosper; those who do not, will not.

Notice the image of the tree by a stream, flourishing and fruitful, and the contrast between the counsel of the wicked and the congregation of the righteous.

Related

Wisdom of Solomon 1:16 – 2:1, 12-22

Here we see a critique of short-termism. The ungodly have a limited vision, seeing only this life, short and sorrowful, and lacking mature perspective. In 2:12-22 we hear the musings of the ungodly as they plot against the righteous man whose uprightness brings shame upon them. *He became a reproof to our thoughts.*

Although this particular passage is not among those quoted in reference to the Passion of Jesus, its sentiments are very much at one with those that are. Look particularly closely at verses 16 onwards and see if they reminds you of the passion story.

Or

Jer 11:18-20

The prophet echoes the thoughts of the wise sage, but in terms of a different image, that of a gentle lamb led, all innocent and unsuspecting, to its doom.

There is however a new element, that of justice being done and being seen to be done. (verse 20).

Ps 54

Here again is the cry of a desperate man at the limits of his endurance. He cries to God for help.

In his attempts to understand the motives driving his persecutors, the psalmist announces that 'the strangers have not set God before them'.

Epistle Jas 3: 13 - 4:3, 7-8a

James turns his attention now to wisdom, that most prized of all divine endowments. The author recognises that there is an earthly wisdom which contrasts with the divine wisdom.

But this conflicts of loyalties – between earthly and divine wisdom – seems to suggest a tension in the community to which James is writing. James links the inner tension (which type of wisdom are our lives guided by?) with the resort to strife and squabbling.

Gospel Mark 9: 30-37

One of the key features of Mark's Gospel is Jesus' insistence upon secrecy – the so-called Messianic Secret. Time after time he performs a spectacular healing or other miracle, and sternly warns the audience to keep quiet about it.

In their puzzlement over this firm injunction of their Master, the disciples start a discussion which soon becomes a dispute. Which of us is the most important? Jesus' response tells us so much about his approach to human life and the life of God's kingdom. First he reminds his followers that his role throughout their experience of him has been as if he were a servant; that is the model of greatness they are to keep in mind.

Then takes a child (clearly this must have been the home of a young family) and sets the child before them as an example. If you want to welcome me, welcome this little child. The word 'respect' has been tossed into the maelstrom of popular culture, but with no very precise meaning or significance. To some, respect is something you have to demand; there is no question of earning it. Lose that respect and your lose everything. And such a loss must be met with firm, even violent consequences. To others, respect is something that is offered – perhaps cautiously at first, then with more confidence as the relationship grows and deepens; it cannot be demanded except as a sign of common courtesy. Jesus sees a respectful response to him taking shape in a respectful and caring tenderness towards the most vulnerable of people – little children.

In our reflection on the reading from The Book of Wisdom, we noted the way the ungodly bridled at the self-evident (but not ostentatious) virtue of the upright. *He became a reproof to our thoughts.* We might see here an example of the first understanding of 'respect'.