

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

13 October 2024



Collect

May your grace, O Lord, we pray,
at all times go before us and follow after
and make us always determined
to carry out good works.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

Catholic social teaching has often enough been described as the Church's best-kept secret. Commonly cited principles are the preferential option for the poor, human dignity, care for our common home, subsidiarity, participation, the common good and solidarity. It only takes a moment's glance to see that these are at odds with the "prosperity gospel" preached in some churches claiming to be Christian. Its essence is that wealth, health, success and well-being are God's gift to believers via a kind of heavenly contract.

It's possible that occasional scandals about the life-styles and financial transgressions of prosperity evangelists can feed onlookers' self-righteousness. It's also possible that people who believe they are not subject to the prosperity gospel actually subscribe unconsciously to its assumptions. One can easily enough ascribe one's good fortune to the practice of virtue, or for that matter believe that bad fortune is the result of moral failure.

Human beings are chronically at the mercy of what they own or aspire to own. It does seem a humanly impossible task to maintain freedom of heart while investing the necessary time and effort in securing one's material needs. Jesus offers a life-line – "everything is possible for God" – but as the old saying goes, only if we "let go and let God."

A reading from the book of Wisdom 7:7–11

I prayed, and understanding was given me;
I entreated, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me.
I esteemed her more than sceptres and thrones;
compared with her, I held riches as nothing.
I reckoned no priceless stone to be her peer,
for compared with her, all gold is a pinch of sand,
and beside her silver ranks as mud.
I loved her more than health or beauty,
preferred her to the light,
since her radiance never sleeps.
In her company all good things came to me,
at her hands riches not to be numbered.

First Reading

It may or may not become clear to the assembly as they attend to this reading that the “I” who is speaking is King Solomon. The author of the book of Wisdom places a prayer on Solomon’s lips that parallels the one in 1 Kings 3:3-14. Unlike the god-like rulers of other nations, the king is presented as no different from other human beings. He too has to ask for the gift of wisdom.

In the process Solomon appears entirely noble and altruistic, untainted by any base motive. He claims to esteem wisdom more than power, wealth, health and beauty, even the light. His declaration that riches came to him as a result seems to find confirmation in Jesus’ saying – “Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well” (Mt 6:33) – and in what he has to say about riches in today’s gospel.

The ideal portrait of Solomon that is painted here is at odds with the later idolater and maladministrator, but discerning historical fact from the Solomon legend is an impossible task. As the reading appears in the lectionary, it is a sincere and devout prayer, if rather tinged with self-praise. Its purpose is to extol the gift of wisdom and to commend it to all and sundry. This will be what readers have in mind as they proclaim the text.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 89:12–17

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

Make us know the shortness of our life
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Lord, relent! Is your anger for ever?
Show pity to your servants. **R.**

In the morning, fill us with your love;
we shall exult and rejoice all our days.
Give us joy to balance our affliction
for the years when we knew misfortune. **R.**

Show forth your works to your servants;
let your glory shine on their children.
Let the favour of the Lord be upon us:
give success to the work of our hands. **R.**

Responsorial psalm

Psalm 89/90 is a prayer that reflects on the transitoriness of human life in comparison with God’s timeless stability. Overall, there is a certain wistfulness. But that tinge of melancholy is well and truly swept away from the start by the exuberant response: “Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!”

There’s mention of “wisdom of heart” in the first stanza of the responsorial psalm. This is not so much an answer to an exemplary prayer like Solomon’s as a painful lesson learned from the human condition. Life is lamentably short. The prayer that’s voiced at this point is an urgent plea to be spared God’s unrelenting anger.

The mood of the remainder of the responsorial psalm lies somewhat in between the enthusiasm of the response and the desperation of the first stanza. On behalf of the people, the psalmist prays hopefully for God to bestow love, joy, favour and success on them. The reader is therefore called to communicate markedly changing moods in the praying of this psalm.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 4:12–13

The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts. No created thing can hide from him; everything is uncovered and open to the eyes of the one to whom we must give account of ourselves.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

10:17–30

Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, 'Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You must not kill; You must not commit adultery; You must not steal; You must not bring false witness; You must not defraud; Honour your father and mother.' And he said to him, 'Master, I have kept all these from my earliest days.' Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, 'There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! The disciples were astounded by these words, but Jesus insisted, 'My children,' he said to them, '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 a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' They were more astonished than ever. 'In that case' they said to one another 'who can be saved?' Jesus gazed at them. 'For men' he said 'it is impossible, but not for God: because everything is possible for God.'

[Peter took this up. 'What about us?' he asked him. 'We have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'I tell you solemnly, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not be repaid a hundred times over, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land - not without persecutions - now in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life.']

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

Second Reading

Today's short text from Hebrews serves as the conclusion to a mini-homily that runs from 3:1–4:13. The author starts by comparing Jesus favourably with Moses. Jesus is son, Moses is servant. This leads to a lengthy exploration of God's promise of a "place of rest" and the urgency for believers to respond to the word of God "today."

This word of God, the author contends, is a weapon of judgement wielded by a warrior. It penetrates into the deepest recesses of the human heart. Nothing is hidden from its piercing probe. It lays bare all secret thoughts and intentions. This may sound rather ominous but it prepares us for our ultimate reckoning.

None of this is new teaching; it is authentically Jewish. Various Old Testament writers characterise God's word as creative, dynamic and decisive. Some early Church fathers saw a likeness between this text and the first chapter of John's gospel.

This is a text that bears much reflection, even as it is proclaimed. Readers should allow the assembly time to digest its import along the way.

Gospel

On the whole, ancient Jewish tradition viewed prosperity as a sign of God's favour for living righteously. The first verse of last week's responsorial psalm said as much, as does Dt 30:15-16. It's this widespread belief that explains the disciples' astonishment at Jesus' assertion that it was very hard for the rich to enter the kingdom. Jesus is uncompromising, even though Mark reports that he "looked steadily at him [the rich man] and loved him." It was necessary – but at the same time humanly impossible – for him to be free from the grip of wealth. Only God can and does make it possible.

A pastoral judgement will need to be made as to whether the longer or shorter text is proclaimed. If the longer, two points of detail become of interest. The first is that none of the lists of the commandments in the Torah has a command not to defraud. Does Jesus insert this because he suspects or knows that the man has acquired his wealth by cheating others? It would have been common enough in the society of the time. Gaining riches unjustly would be further reason for voluntary dispossession.

The second point comes from Jesus' reply to Peter. He speaks of leaving one's father but not of regaining one. Perhaps this is because, as Jesus insists late in Matthew's gospel, "You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven" (23:9).

A more general issue is raised by Jesus' promise of a hundredfold to those who leave ties and goods for his sake. Centuries of Catholic tradition has associated this with the call to religious life, but the saying long predates the emergence of this specific way of following Jesus. It originally applied to all.

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of Wisdom 7:7–11

I prayed, and understanding was given me;
I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.
I preferred her to sceptres and thrones,
and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her.
Neither did I liken to her any priceless gem,
because all gold is but a little sand in her sight,
and silver will be accounted as clay before her.
I loved her more than health and beauty,
and I chose to have her rather than light,
because her radiance never ceases.
All good things came to me along with her;
and in her hands uncounted wealth.

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 4:12–13

The word of God is living and active,
sharper than any two-edged sword,
piercing until it divides soul from spirit,
joints from marrow;
it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
And before God no creature is hidden,
but all are naked and laid bare
to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark 10:17–30

As Jesus was setting out on a journey,
a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him,
"Good Teacher; what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good?
No one is good but God alone.
You know the commandments:
'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery;
You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness;
You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.'" "
He said to Jesus,
"Teacher; I have kept all these since my youth."
Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said,
"You lack one thing; go, sell what you own,
and give the money to the poor;
and you will have treasure in heaven;
then come, follow me."
"When the man heard this,
he was shocked and went away grieving,
for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples,
"How hard it will be for those who have wealth
to enter the kingdom of God!"
And the disciples were perplexed at these words.
But Jesus said to them again,
"Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!
It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle
than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."
They were greatly astounded and said to one another;
"Then who can be saved?"
Jesus looked at them and said,
"For mortals it is impossible, but not for God;
for God all things are possible."
[Peter began to say to him,
"Look, we have left everything and followed you."
Jesus said "Truly I tell you,
there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters
or mother or father or children or fields,
for my sake and for the sake of the good news,
who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—
houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields—
but with persecution—
and in the age to come, eternal life."]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time I)

May the Lord bless us and keep us.
Amen.

May he let his face shine upon us
and show us his mercy.
Amen.

May he turn his countenance towards us
and give us his peace.
Amen.

May the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.
Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time I, Roman Missal p. 714)