

16th Sunday In Ordinary Time, Year A

The Book of Wisdom was written about 100 years before Christ by an unknown author who wrote in the name of Solomon. We do know that he was a Jew from Alexandria in Egypt and that he knew the bible thoroughly. He wrote especially to build up the traditional faith of his Jewish readers and to counteract the pagan influences of the culture.¹

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

This lovely poem extols in God all the attributes we long to see in leaders and those entrusted with power: caring, just, merciful, lenient. It makes the point that leniency is a quality that should be displayed in direct proportion to power, that is, the greater the power rulers have, the greater must be their leniency.³

13 There is no god besides you who have the care of all, that you need show you have not unjustly condemned. This is part of a teaching on why innocent people die. The answer is that God is both their maker and the one who cares for all. Since God's power is complete, it should not be challenged.¹

16 For your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all. The wicked say that their MIGHT is the norm of justice but their weakness and insecurity prompt them to use unjustly what strength they have. By contrast, GOD, who is ALL POWERFUL, is just and even merciful and willing to forgive.²

17 For you show your might when the perfection of your power is disbelieved; (by pagans) and in those who know you, you rebuke temerity. "Temerity" means foolhardy and recklessness. This verse is saying that the brunt of God's anger and vindictive justice is borne by the pagans who don't believe in Him and by the Israelites who rashly disregard Him.²

18 But though you are master of might, (Almighty!) you judge with clemency, (mercy) and with much lenience (forbearance) you govern us; God governs all men but especially the Jews. for power, whenever you will, attends you. God is omnipotent but He shows us that the greatest force in the world is not might, but love. His power and might are shown most visibly in the way he forgives.⁹

19 And you taught your people, by these deeds, that those who are just must be kind; and you gave your children good ground for hope that you would permit repentance for their sins. The lesson of all this is that by his merciful action, God teaches Israel to temper justice with mercy and he gives her reason to hope for mercy from Him.²

Romans 8:26-27

We are continuing this letter which was written by St. Paul in A.D. 57 or 58 to introduce himself and his teachings to the Roman Christians in preparation for his upcoming visit.⁴ This selection continues St. Paul's description of the future glory that awaits those who live the Christian life empowered by the Spirit.¹⁰

Brothers and sisters:

26 The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; When distress makes prayer difficult, the Spirit makes our groaning and sighing an impassioned prayer to the Father.⁴ for we do not know how to pray as we ought, The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being.⁵ (CCC 2560) but the Spirit himself intercedes The Holy Spirit himself intercedes for us, and intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.⁵ (CCC 2634) The Holy Spirit is the MASTER OF PRAYER.⁵ (CCC 741) with inexpressible groanings Christian petition, what St. Paul calls "groaning", arises from another depth, that of creation "in labor pains" and that of ourselves as we wait for the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. In the

end, however, with sighs too deep for words, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.⁵ (CCC 2631)

²⁷And the one who searches hearts This is an Old Testament phrase for God.¹⁰ knows what is the intention of the Spirit, Only God Himself understands the language and mind of the Spirit and He recognizes such Spirit assisted prayer.¹⁰ because he intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will. The same is said of the Son in 8:34 so we can say that both the Son and the Spirit request from the Father what we need, not necessarily what we want. The will of God for our life is the determining factor.⁴ The Catechism tells us that "Transformation of the praying heart is the FIRST RESPONSE to our petition."⁵ (CCC 2739) It goes on to tell us that in the Christian life there are several wellsprings where Christ awaits us to enable us to drink of the Holy Spirit: *the Word of God, the Liturgy of the Church, the Virtues of Faith Hope and Charity, and the Events of Each Day*. Prayer is actually an encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for Him.⁵ (CCC 2560)

This is a continuation of the seven stories told on the Day of Parables that we started last week.

Matthew 13:24-43

²⁴Jesus proposed another parable to the crowds, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

²⁵While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds This is commonly recognized as darnel, a slightly poisonous plant resembling wheat in the early stages of growth. Only when it fully matures can it be distinguished and separated from wheat.⁶ all through the wheat, and then went off.

²⁶When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well.

²⁷The slaves of the householder came to him and said, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?'

²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' His slaves said to him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

²⁹He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them.

³⁰Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn.'" God's earthly kingdom has both good and bad; the sorting will come at the end.¹⁰

³¹He proposed another parable to them. "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field.

³²It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. While the mustard seed is small, it is not the smallest of seeds, nor is the tree, which grows to a height of 10-12 feet, remarkably tall. The point of the parable is the contrast.² Another consideration is that the authentic works of God begin in a very small way.⁸ It becomes a large bush, and the 'birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.'" Birds represent the Gentile nations. Jesus' parable thus points to the spread of the gospel and acceptance of Gentiles into the Church.⁶ The kingdom which starts from near invisibility will shift quickly to its full grandeur with its universal, all embracing hospitality.¹⁰

³³He spoke to them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast At one level, yeast represents the grace of the kingdom that sanctifies the world through the Church. At the personal level, leaven is the individual Christian called to bring the gospel to those around him.⁶ that a woman

took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened.” This would be about 50 pounds of meal (flour), which here symbolizes the world. The parable thus highlights a great disproportion: just a little yeast is hidden yet it actively raises a significant amount of meal (flour).⁶ There is a surprising effect that a small movement can have on all society. God’s plan works almost invisibly to bring about its purposes.¹⁰

34All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables,
35to fulfill what had been said through the prophet: The prophet referred to here is David, who wrote the Psalms.¹⁰ *I will open my mouth in parables, I will announce what has lain hidden from the foundation of the world.* This is a reference to Psalm 78:2 which is different from what we said last week for this accents the positive function of parables: they enlighten the humble by revealing God’s mysteries.⁶ The most precious secret the universe holds is that the Son of God, the Word in whom and for whom the universe was created, has descended into the heart of this world and there he will abide, loving the world with the same love with which the father loves him.⁸

36Then, dismissing the crowds, he went into the house. Here again Jesus tells the parables to the crowd but he gives the explanation only to his disciples. **His disciples approached him** Consider that a disciple is nothing but a former member of the crowd who, having been called apart by Jesus, has chosen to follow him to his “house”, there to listen intently to his words.⁸ **and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”**

37He said in reply, “He who sows good seed is the Son of Man,
38the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom. These are the ones who hear the word and understand it. They bear fruits of righteousness and charity and they are oriented toward love of the brethren.⁸ **The weeds are the children of the evil one,** According to 1 John 3:10, these are identified by their unholy actions and their failure to love their brother.⁸ Here Jesus puts critics of Christianity on notice that not everything done within Christendom is a product of Christians.¹¹

39and the enemy who sows them is the devil. Because the field is the world and the whole world belongs to the Son of Man, the Devil has no separate field of his own in which to grow his weeds. Evil, according to Augustine, must feed like a parasite on what is good for all of its work is destruction. It is a great mystery how the same soil and rain nourish both seeds, yet each thrives according to its own nature.⁸ **The harvest is the end of the age,** This is a biblical image for the Day of the Lord, the time when God will judge all nations.⁶ **and the harvesters are angels.** This is not the job of any man, only of the angels.

40Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

41The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. The Last Judgment will determine the FINAL destiny of the righteous and the wicked and will purify the kingdom entirely.¹⁰

42They will throw them into the fiery furnace, The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, “eternal fire.” But that is not all, for the chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.⁵ (CCC 1035) **where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.** This describes the pangs of the damned excluded from the heavenly banquet.⁶ On July 13, 1917, the blessed Mother showed the Fatima visionary Lucia and her two cousins a vision of Hell. When the ground opened up, said Lucia, she saw “a sea of fire. Plunged in this fire were demons and souls in human form...floating about in the conflagration...and shrieks and groans of pain and despair which horrified us and made us tremble with fear.” “You have seen Hell where the souls of

poor sinners go,” the Blessed Virgin told the children. She then taught them the prayer to be said after each decade of the rosary: “O my Jesus, forgive us our sins; save us from the fire of Hell. Lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of your mercy.”⁷

⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The reward of the righteous reminds one of Dan. 12:3 “And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” In the end, there will only be two states of being: “the kingdom of the Father” and “the fiery furnace”. **Whoever has ears ought to hear.**”

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Wisdom” by John E. Rybolt, (2) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (3) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers Year A” by Aelred Rosser, (4) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans,” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (5) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (6) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch,” (7) “Catholic Replies 2” by James J. Drumme, (8) “Fire Of Mercy, Heart Of The Word” by Erasmo Leiva-Marikakis, (9) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study Cycle A” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (10) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, and (11) “Jewish New Testament Commentary” by David H. Stern.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.