

Serving Others in God's Love: Religious Freedom Week 2018

Lectionary Notes for the Sunday before Independence Day

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 1, 2018

First Reading – Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24

- The Book of Wisdom comes to us in Greek and was likely written about a hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ. It is addressed to a people struggling to maintain a cohesive religious identity against cultural forces and the temptation to wholesale capitulation and assimilation.
- The book aims to edify the people of God in their suffering and to offer the hope of a vision of justice and eternal life with God despite the covenant with death into which the wicked of the world have entered. Solomon reminds the faithful that God is not the author of evil, and that “God did not make death.” Rather, everything God has made is good, and has an integrity which is ordered to a justice which does not die.
- Like Jesus in today's Gospel, the Book of Wisdom asserts that contrary to what may *appear* to be the case—that the people of God are condemned to oppression and suffering—the truth is that “God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him.” It is only by the envy of the devil, that death entered the world.
- Today, we cling to the promises of God fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in which we already share. Knowing the promises of eternity, we seek to remain in his company and we work to bring others into his company despite the apparent contradiction this often poses to the world. We seek to grow as missionary disciples, living in wisdom and serving others in God's love, through prayer, fasting, speech, and action to bring others into house of God built on the Wisdom who is Christ the Lord.

Responsorial – Psalm 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13

- God is to be praised for raising his faithful up from the netherworld and the realm of death. And we give thanks to his holy name, by which we are saved from divine judgment by his grace and by his favor which lasts a lifetime.
- It is He who changes our mourning into dancing. Our suffering, even our death, can be changed by the Lord who clothes us with His gladness even when the world is shaking around us.
- Those who live contrary to the designs and plans of God are courting destruction and death—not simply the death of the body, but the death of the soul. Living in a way contrary to the purposes of our human nature made in the image of God inevitably leads to suffering and mourning. The lies we tell ourselves and those we accept from our culture lead to ever more complex justifications which inevitably damage our spiritual health, sending us into spirals of sin which further blind us. Such justification without repentance ultimately leads to destruction. It is only by loving God's truth more than human praise that we can come to true repentance, which frees us to live in accord with God's purposes revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God.

Second Reading – 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15

- This section of St. Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth focuses on the need for the Corinthians to be generous to the Church in Jerusalem. The Church in Corinth is abundant in material wealth and should supply from its abundance. Corinth gives to Jerusalem, which, abundant in spiritual wealth, prays for Corinth. And so there is a unity between these churches, a union of material and spiritual gifts which are themselves signs of the great gift they have been given through incorporation into Christ's Body.
- St. Paul thus highlights the centrality to the Christian life of service to those in need and of solidarity among the churches.
We serve others, because the very way by which God redeems us from sin, suffering, and death is to empty himself, though rich in his divinity, and to become a man like us in all things but sin. As men and women being conformed to Christ, we are all called to give from the treasury – material or spiritual – that God has entrusted to us.
- We in the United States, ought also to keep this letter in mind when we consider [the situation of Middle East Christians](#). What do we owe our brothers and sisters who face violent persecution?

Gospel - Mark 5:21-43 OR 5:21-24, 35b-43

- The longer form of the Gospel this Sunday relates two stories: a bleeding woman is healed after twelve years simply by touching Jesus' cloak and the daughter of the centurion, Jairus, is raised from the dead. The shorter form of the Gospel tells only of Jairus' daughter.
- Jesus sees a reality that is beyond the observation of the crowd. The people gathered at Jairus' home see that the girl is dead. Yet they do not see the presence of an eternal reality and power that authors only what is good, and nothing which takes goodness away. What they do not see is the miraculous power of God to create, and re-create, what He has made.
- Our culture is similarly blind to the miraculous, but it is also blind to the natural. Those who do not acknowledge the truths about human nature disclosed by the human body, or who believe that we can be completely autonomous, suffer from a kind of double blindness of both natural and supernatural realities. Yet Christ is the light which illumines the world, casting out the double blindness of our sin and ignorance.
- Jesus is not merely a prophet, who sees the world in view of the higher things of life, and then reveals them. Jesus not only knows the higher things, but what he knows and wills is the perfect knowledge of the Father — his knowledge is causative, creative power. That is, Jesus wills what he knows and his will is efficacious. The girl is not dead. She is asleep and not dead precisely because this is the reality which conforms to his knowledge and will, in accord with the truth and goodness of his nature.
- Those who mock and ridicule him are not invited into the house because their impious ridicule indicated not only a lack of belief but a willful resistance to the truth

of who Christ is and what he can do. They cannot witness a miracle because they would not believe it.

- In *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict XVI notes that “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (no. 1). Faith gives the Christian a vision to see the world anew, or rather, aright. Thus, the Pope-emeritus also claims that faith liberates reason from its blind spots (no. 28).

Sin clouds our vision, leading to blind spots that only Jesus Christ in the gift of faith can heal. By availing ourselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we allow Christ to purify our vision, and [serving others in God’s love through evangelization](#), we participate in Christ’s mission to help others come to see things as they are.

- Where we can find common ground with others, evangelization may take the form of dialogue. However, as St. Thomas Aquinas argues, when foundational principles are not shared, effective dialogue may be near-impossible. And so evangelization also takes the form of patient witness to the liberating love Christ. Bearing witness to faith in Christ through acts of charity and mercy can plant the seeds of conversion in those who do not see the truth of the Gospel.

We do well to recognize our similarity to the woman in the Gospel. We ourselves are bleeding, and we are healed only by coming to Christ. None of us stands above or afar off from the sins and struggles of our brothers and sisters, precisely because we too find ourselves constantly forgiven by God for the very sins that drive us away from him. His favor lasts forever. That’s the good news that we bring to a world desperate to hear it.