

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Isaiah 62:1-5

Isaiah, the greatest of the prophets, lived during the period 759-694 B.C. He was of the tribe of Judah and his home was in Jerusalem. The kingdom was divided and Israel, the northern kingdom, was occupied by the Assyrians. Judah, the southern kingdom, although not occupied, is an Assyrian vassal state. In about the year 704, Egyptian ambassadors came to Jerusalem with presents and fine words to persuade the Judean king (Hezekiah) to break with the Assyrian king and to join a coalition against him. The king of Babylon has already been won over, and the Philistines are to be approached. A concentrated attack is to be launched against Assyria. All Jerusalem seems to favor the alliance – all Jerusalem that is, except Isaiah who knew that faith in the power of Yahweh would save the nation and that an appeal to an outside nation was an insult to Yahweh. If the alliance were made, bad things would happen to Judah. Isaiah even went so far as to discard his outer garment and put on that of a prisoner of war – he then walked barefoot through the streets of Jerusalem with a sign that said “So shall the king of the Assyrians lead away the prisoners of Egypt.” The king of Judah (Hezekiah) joined the alliance and the Assyrians marched down the Mediterranean coast, driving Egyptians and Philistines before them and taking city after city. The Assyrian king laid siege to Jerusalem and demanded an unconditional and immediate surrender. Now, the people crowded the courts of the temple, falling all over each other in their eagerness to make peace with God with their offerings. Isaiah, whose trust in God had never wavered, was praying in the Temple when King Hezekiah implored him to intercede with God in behalf of the Holy City. Isaiah assured the king that the Assyrian king would not occupy or otherwise harm Jerusalem. Holy scripture records: “Says the Lord: ‘For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.’ Then the angel of the Lord set out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies. Then the king of Assyria left, went home” (Isaiah 37:35-37). The afflictions which had come upon the people of Judah and Jerusalem were of their own making. By their wickedness they had drawn down upon themselves the wrath of Yahweh. Beneath an outward show of prosperity lay rotteness – commercial greed, extortion and graft, oppression of the poor, spendthrift luxury, drunkenness, glaring immorality. Isaiah strikes relentlessly at these vices of his people. He seeks to startle the nation into repentance and reform by predicting the doom that God is preparing for it, if it perseveres in its wickedness. But Isaiah is not merely the prophet of doom; he is also the prophet of hope and consolation. Many words of comfort are spoken to the people in the dark hours of affliction. Recall that the role of a prophet is not that of a soothsayer – he does not predict the future. The prophet’s role is to monitor the status of the covenant with God – to warn of the curses which will come if the covenant is not kept and to point to the blessings which will come through obedience. As Peter Kreeft says “A prophet is like a finger – we are not to look at him, but to where he points.”

Today's reading points to the glorious future which is in store for the faithful in the new Zion – the new Jerusalem. If it sounds familiar, we heard it last at the Vigil of Christmas.

62:1 For Zion's sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,

The names Zion and Jerusalem are interchangeable. The city of Jerusalem is built upon Mount Zion while the Temple is on Mount Moriah.

Until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her victory like a burning torch.

The day of vindication of God (Isaiah 61:2) shines brightly and quickly like a desert sunrise (Isaiah 60:1). Never did this hope seem closer to fulfillment than on the feast of Tabernacles, when lights were kindled "at the place of the water drawing" so bright that "there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated by the light of the place. The temple of Solomon was dedicated at the feast of Tabernacles and the Ark of the Covenant was introduced into Jerusalem by David at this feast. According to the Talmud, people lived in booths for the seven days of the feast. On the first night the temple area was brightly illuminated by lamps and torches and ceremonial dancing was done. Tabernacles is seen by some scholars as a renewal of the covenant as there was a regular reading of the Law.

² Nations shall behold your vindication, and all kings your glory; You shall be called by a new name pronounced by the mouth of the LORD. ³ You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the LORD, a royal diadem held by your God.

A diadem is a crown worn as a sign of royalty. This image refers back to the ancient practice of showing the local deity wearing a crown which was patterned after the city walls. Yahweh holds His crown in His hands because Jerusalem is His possession.

⁴ No more shall men call you "Forsaken," or your land "Desolate,"

When the covenant with Yahweh is violated, the curses are called down upon the people (Leviticus 26:21-22; 2 Chronicles 24:20).

But you shall be called "My Delight," and your land "Espoused."

The promises of Hosea 2:18-20 are not forgotten, even though Israel has had adulterous relationships with Baals.

For the LORD delights in you, and makes your land his spouse. ⁵ As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.

Adulterous Israel is restored to that joyful, innocent age of long ago when she was God's virgin spouse. This marriage theme evokes thoughts of the marriage feast at Cana (our Gospel

reading for today) and the marriage feast of the Lamb (Revelation 21:1-4). The Church, the new Israel, is the bride of Christ as foretold in Hosea 2:16-20 (Hosea 2:18-22 in the New American Bible and New Jerusalem Bible).

2nd Reading - 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

In Saint Paul's time, Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia and the seat of the Roman proconsul. Julius Caesar built it (44 B.C.) on the ruins of a Greek city of the same name. It had two ports – one in the Aegean Sea and one on the Gulf of Lepanto. Its excellent geographical position soon made it a prominent center of commerce, with a much higher standard of living than its neighbors. It was also a loose living city, rendering religious cult to the goddess Venus, a serious threat to those, Jews or Christians, who worshiped the true God.

Saint Paul established a Christian community at Corinth during his second missionary journey (A.D. 50-52). He preached the Gospel there for 1½ years, aided by Silas and Timothy. Due to his remarkable zeal, quite a number of people were converted to the true faith, some of them Jews. Very soon many Jews in the city became openly hostile to the Apostle's preaching, but since they had little social influence they failed to obstruct his work. This may explain why the proconsul Gallio refused to listen to the charges they brought against him (Acts 18:12ff).

More data are available on the social makeup of the Corinthian church than of any other. There was a solid nucleus of Jews but many pagans. The very top and bottom of the Greco-Roman social scale are absent. The social status of most is shot through with ambiguity – they rate high in some areas but low in others, e.g., rich but female (Phoebe), a city official but an ex-slave (Erastus), a skilled artisan but a Jew with a wife of higher social rank (Aquila). Fueled by frustration, such individuals did not cease to question and explore once they had accepted Christianity, and so generated a greater diversity of problems for Paul than any other church. In particular, they welcomed other visions of Christianity and competed with one another for spiritual prestige.

Saint Paul was in Ephesus when three influential Corinthians brought him a letter in which they and others asked for guidance on matters they found problematic. They probably explained and expanded on the information contained in the letter, asking him to go quickly to Corinth. Saint Paul preferred to postpone going to Corinth in order to give everyone more time for reflection and repentance – this is why he wrote his first letter, shortly before Easter 57. It is not a doctrinal treatise like Romans – it is more like an acknowledgment of their letter and answers about the things which were worrying them.

In our reading today Paul addresses the gifts of the Spirit and answers the Corinthian question of the hierarchy of spiritual gifts. Paul had discerned an egocentric competitiveness that was detrimental to Church unity.

⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; ⁵ there are different forms of service but the same Lord; ⁶ there are different workings but the same God who produces all

of them in everyone. ⁷ To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

Since all of the gifts have a common origin they should serve a common purpose.

“Since no one has the capacity to receive all spiritual gifts, but the grace of the Spirit is given proportionately to the faith of each, when one is living in community with others, the grace privately bestowed on each individual becomes the common possession of the others. . . . One who receives any of these gifts does not possess it for his own sake but rather for the sake of others.” [Saint Basil the Great (ca. A.D. 370), *Rules Treated At Length* 7]

⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; ¹⁰ to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues.

The list of gifts is not exhaustive (see also 1 Corinthians 12:27-30; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11). Precise definitions are impossible and many of the meanings which have been assumed are arbitrary.

¹¹ But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.

Since the same Spirit distributes (gives) and produces (makes them operate), no one should be puffed up with pride – all is given for the common good. One who possesses a gift and does not share it not only deprives themselves of its benefits, they deprive the entire community and the gift is lost.

“It belongs to God’s justice that He divides and to His power that He divides according to His will or because He wishes to give to each one what He knows will be of profit.” [Saint Ambrose of Milan (A.D. 385), *Letter to Bishop* 20]

Gospel - John 2:1-11

Our reading for today is the familiar wedding feast at Cana. It takes place on the third day from John 1:43. To understand the imagery involved, we must go back to John 1:1: “In the beginning...” This is Genesis imagery. John 1:29: “the next day”; John 1:35: “the next day”; John 1:43: “the next day”, which makes it the fourth day; Then today’s reading “the third day”. The third day, the day of resurrection, occurs on the seventh day of the Genesis imagery; the day of covenant when God’s new creation, Jesus, manifests His glory.

^{2:1} On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

Cana is located near (within 9 miles of) Nazareth which is where Mary was when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

² Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.

Marriage feasts were family affairs – the fact that Mary and Jesus and His disciples had been invited suggests that they were related to either the bride or groom. The marriage feast lasted for a week – quite a lot of mouths to feed.

³ When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

Mary's observation to our Lord is not precisely a request for a miracle, although she is obviously counting on the resourcefulness of her Son. Her concern suggests again that the feast is for a close relative who will be embarrassed.

⁴ (And) Jesus said to her, "Woman,

Nowhere in any of the Gospels does Jesus address Mary as "mother." To address someone as "woman" is not disrespectful, it would be like calling her "madam" in a formal setting. In Genesis imagery however, this is the name given to Eve before the fall when she was still sinless and pure in God's eyes. Mary is the New Eve, conceived sinless and sinless throughout her life.

how does your concern affect me?

Literally, "what to me and to you" – the precise meaning must be determined from the context. It is not a rebuttal or rebuke. The oriental way of speaking (Jerusalem is part of Asia, not Europe) can have different nuances. Jesus' reply seems to indicate that although in principle it was not part of God's plan for Him to use His power to solve the problem the wedding feast has run into, our Lady's request moves Him to do precisely that. Also, one could surmise that God's plan was that Jesus should work the miracle at His mother's request.

My hour has not yet come."

The term "hour" is sometimes used by Jesus to designate the moment of His coming in glory (see John 5:28), but generally it refers to the time of His passion, death and resurrection (see John 7:30; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1).

⁵ His mother said to the servers, "Do whatever he tells you."

Mary knows perfectly what her son's reply means – though to us it is ambiguous – she is confident that Jesus will come to the family's (His family's?) rescue. She has complete confidence in Jesus' ability to resolve the problem. She addresses the servants in the words of Genesis 41:55.

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings,

Jewish customs demanded washings before and after eating (Greek: *baptismois*). Stone was used because in Jewish belief stone could not contract ritual uncleanness.

each holding twenty to thirty gallons.

6 times 20 = 120 gallons; a lot of water, soon to become wine.

⁷ Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water."

Jesus' directions to the servants indicates that He had some special relationship with the host family – one does not go around giving orders to other people's servants.

So they filled them to the brim.

The fact that they were filled "to the brim" emphasizes the superabundance of the riches of redemption and also shows how precisely the servants did what they were told – it is important to be docile in fulfilling the will of God, even in small details. Christ's word alone is sufficient to effect the change and there are now 120 to 180 gallons of top quality wine.

⁸ Then he told them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it.

⁹ And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew),

Can you imagine the sniggering which must have been going on among the servers? They know that this is water which has been used for washing the feet of the guests; and now they are seeing the headwaiter drink it.

the headwaiter called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now."

At Gentile banquets one of the guests usually assumed the position of "master of the banquet" as a mark of honor. The familiarity with which this headwaiter addresses the bridegroom may indicate that the Jews followed a similar custom.

¹¹ Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee

The word "sign" repeatedly appears in the first half of John's gospel. Pre-eminent among these are Jesus' miracles, of which John records only 7. They are called "signs" not only because they worked to encourage belief, but because they signify Christ for what He is.

and so revealed his glory,

Although The Word concealed His glory in becoming flesh, the Gospel is witness to its having been perceived by men. The Gospel is testimony not to the Eternal Word but to the Word Become Flesh.

and his disciples began to believe in him.

Conclusion

This whole story, set in a Genesis format in John's gospel, also has a common theme:

Chapter 1 - The baptism of Jesus

Chapter 2 - The first miracle - *baptismois*

Chapter 3 - The encounter with Nicodemus - baptize with water and the Spirit. In 3:22 it appears that Jesus baptizes – the only note of His so doing in Holy Scripture.

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