

Homily  
September 22, 2024  
Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
24:05 – 36:34

Each week on Sundays and some Holy Days, we have three readings and a Psalm. Sometimes those readings bring us joy and hope. Other times, those readings – well, it's kinda like, "Ho-hum. We've heard that before." But today - the readings we have today are challenging.

Anybody feel a little uncomfortable as you were hearing from Wisdom or James, or the Gospel? Something ring true for you? They're uncomfortable.

Our First Reading comes to us from the Book of Wisdom. It's the last book in the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, to be written. It was written around 50 BC in the city of Alexandria, by Jews who were part of the diaspora – the spreading out of the Jewish people.

It begins with three powerful chapters. The first is a beautiful description of "Wisdom." It is followed by this chapter that we heard from. It is a negative reaction to those who would live by this wisdom, "The Jewish Wisdom Community," as I am going to call it, who are living in the midst of a foreign culture.

And the third chapter, you've probably heard it at a funeral. "The souls of the just are in the hands of God and no torment shall touch them. They seemed in the view of the foolish to be dead and their going forth from us utter destruction. But they are at peace." A powerful reading. The first clear message in the Jewish Scriptures of "Resurrection."

As I said earlier, the Wisdom Community were living in the midst of the Hellenistic, that is, the Greek culture. In that culture, for them, there was a tension. The Greeks and the Hellenized Jews were not happy about what one might call an "Old Time Religion" of this Wisdom Community, the community that tried to follow The Covenant of Moses in a foreign land. And their own brothers and sisters, the Hellenized Jews had bought into the culture of their time and place.

The Wisdom Community, as we heard in the reading, was reviled and persecuted by the Greeks and the Hellenized Jews. They felt the sting of challenge and accusation due to the Wisdom Community's way of life - placing God's wisdom as their guide and purpose. – This was obnoxious to them. It challenged them. It even, just by their seeing it, accused them of letting go of something very special and important.

The Letter of James, from which we heard, is very clear today. In the community, James is seeing verbal violence. And he says very clearly that jealousy, self-ambition, coveting, envying, even killing, if not literally, at least of one's good name or reputation, is not part of the life of a Christian. He makes very clear that among believers, such attitudes and behaviors are a violation of their life in Christ.

And Mark's Gospel account, Chapter 9. It's good for us to view it through the context of what's gone before it. Last week's first revealing of Christ's Passion in Chapter 8. You remember it. You know, Peter blurting out, "No you can't." Jesus saying, "Oh yes, I will."

Then that's immediately followed by the Transfiguration: Peter, James and John going up on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured and they hear the voice of God say, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

That's immediately followed by the cure of a boy with an evil deaf and mute spirit. And then our reading, which is the second prediction of Christ's Passion.

Then we find the disciples at home. And Jesus asks a question. It's a very simple question. "What were you arguing about on the way?" And we know there was silence because they were arguing badly about who was the greatest.

Sadly, this is repeated again in Chapter 10, when James and John come to Jesus and want to be one on the Right and one on the Left. Haven't they been listening?

Brothers and sisters, the disciples are caught up in two cultures. First, the Roman culture of their time. It was a culture about climbing to the next level on the backs of other people. Now that culture, which the disciples would have furiously denied that they were affected by, was a culture of patronage. If you wanted to get ahead, you had to get someone to be a patron, someone to help you up to the next level. And you would do anything to get there because it gave you more power, more prestige, the possibility of wealth. And sadly, in that culture, people would do anything they could to get to the upper levels.

But disciples are seemingly also caught up in the princely warrior version of the Messiah, which was rampant in that culture and the religion of their time. It's that Messianic Warrior version of Messiah that lay behind Peter's rebuke of Jesus, when he said, "No. You can't."

Well, Peter's bad idea, which Jesus clearly disowned when he looked at the other disciples and rebuked Peter, that bad idea still seems to remain in the disciples' minds and hearts. Why else argue "Who's the Greatest"? Who's going to be on top when the Messianic hope of victory over the Romans takes place? It would seem that the disciples – yes – were not listening.

My brothers and sisters, to listen to Jesus requires internalizing the Spirit of Jesus. This was true of the disciples at home with Jesus in the Gospel. But it is also equally true of the disciples at home with Jesus today: **us**.

There are two threads that run throughout our readings today. The first is jealousy, envy, social climbing, ambition, arrogance, human attitudes which are destructive. And secondly, buying the culture of the time in which believers and non-believers swim.

In our time consider jealousy, envy, social climbing, ambition, arrogance, attacks – passions of the human which are destructive. In our time consider the diluting of the wisdom of the Gospel and the wisdom of the Church

of Christ, the diluting of the meaning of human existence, marriage and sexuality, the inviolability of human life, justice, the responsibility for the moral quality of our lives.

God's teaching about all these matters is not accepted by the world around us. In fact, it is attacked as out-of-step. Well, we swim in this culture, don't we? Every one of us.

So, I'm going to ask you some questions to ponder. Yes. You're going to get some homework. And it's going to be challenging, for that is where the readings have led.

First: What is our level of participation in the destructive polarizing attitudes and behaviors in the present time in which we live? How do we play that game? Are we focused on listening, or attacking?

Secondly: We know that we cannot avoid swimming in the culture of our time. That's the nature of humanity. We have to do it. But the question is three-fold. In this culture are we just treading water, relying upon our power just to survive? Or are we being borne along by the currents and riptides of the culture, as we lose our Christian Catholic focus? Or are we swimming against the cultural current, stroking in the Way, the Truth, Wisdom and the Life of the Resurrected One and his Church?

Feeling challenged? I am feeling it. These are hard readings. They take us to places we may not want to go. But we must.