

Commentary: 25th Sunday Year B

Resources:

Wansbrough, Henry. *The Sunday Word: A Commentary on the Sunday Readings*. London; New York: Burns & Oates, 2012.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Light of the Word: Brief Reflections on the Sunday Readings*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993.

FIRST READING: Wisdom of Solomon 2:12, 17–20

¹² The godless say, “Let us lie in wait for the righteous one, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training.

¹⁷ Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; ¹⁸ for if the righteous man is God’s child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.

¹⁹ Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. ²⁰ Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.”

“In this reading, we have the taunts that those who refuse divine Wisdom make against those who embrace Wisdom – highlighting a major theme of the book: the contrast between divine Wisdom and folly.... It is remarkable that, in Matthew’s gospel, the taunts of the chief priests, scribes and elders against Jesus as he hangs on the cross use these very words. This use of scripture is typical of Matthew’s irony, and shows just how wrong they were. The reading therefore both prepares us for the prophecy of the Passion in the first part of the gospel reading and contrasts these boasts with the wisdom of simplicity represented by the child in the second part” (Wansbrough 218).

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 54

R. The Lord upholds my life.

¹Save me, O God, by your name, and vindicate me by your might. ²Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. *R.*

³For the insolent have risen against me, the ruthless seek my life; they do not set God before them. *R.*

⁴But surely, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. ⁶With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good. *R.*

SECOND READING: James 3:16–4:3

¹⁶ Beloved: Where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

4 Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ² You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

“The biting words of the second reading, which inexorably unveil man’s sinful interior in the sight of God, merely draw conclusions from today’s Gospel. Man’s striving for power and greatness, which unavoidably involves wars and prestigious battles, ultimately leads nowhere, for the “envious” and “ambitious” man is torn by inner contradictions. He strives for things that run contrary to his nature, he is in “disorder” and bristles at the “wisdom from above.” When he prays for the order granted by this wisdom, he accomplishes nothing; to the degree he wishes to be great, he “obtains nothing”, for, in order to receive, he must be like a child: “peaceful, lenient, docile.” Only Jesus’ teaching resolves the inner conflict within man, a conflict in which he is entangled and from which he cannot free himself” (Balthasar 238-9).

“The problem of unanswered prayers of petition is a difficult one. We do not really believe that we can change God’s mind and intentions by praying. Nevertheless, we express to God our needs and desires, although we are well aware that he knows them already. This is what a child does to a loving father, ‘Please, please!’ We even link arms with our mother, Mary, or even our brother and Saviour, Jesus, to increase the persuasive power. But every prayer of petition, just as a child’s prayer to a loving father, contains the hidden text that our Father knows best. The child or the praying Christian can want something desperately, but for true prayer must submit in obedience, sometime puzzled obedience, to the Father. Only so is the prayer an expression of trust and affection” (Wansbrough 218-9).

GOSPEL: Mark 9:30–37

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.”

“Jesus, not his opponents, determines his fate, and he does so in supreme freedom, as a deed of his utterly fearless courage, out of obedience to God” (Balthasar 238).

³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

“As the sound of his misunderstood prophecy fades away, Jesus takes the child, whose nature everyone understands, in his arms to demonstrate the truth proclaimed by his entire existence: the Greatest, God, proves his greatness by stooping down to place himself in the lowest place as a slave. A child, the weakest form of human existence, who by his very nature calls out for care and acceptance, is the real symbol of this God, who is accepted when one picks up a child: when one accepts, first of all, the humbled Son, but accepting in him accepts the Father as well, for the Father agreed to his humiliation. By his freely chosen slave’s service, God demonstrates to all the wicked and those obsessed with lust for power that he is supreme over all. Who among us has the courage to imitate him?” (Balthasar 238).