

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

This was written about 100 years before Christ by an unknown author in Alexandria, Egypt. He sometimes wrote as Solomon so people would pay more attention to his writing. Many of the people were abandoning Judaism under the pressure and persecution of the godless, so he wrote in such a way that wisdom was presented in a new, attractive way. He was a profound scholar and very well versed in the scriptures. The theme is presented in 1:4 "Into a Soul that plots evil, wisdom enters not."⁵ This section seems to be a prophecy of the Passion of Jesus and is apparently based on Isaiah's fourth Servant Song.⁵

The wicked say: The wicked the author has in mind are fallen away Jews who are probably seen as a type of the wicked in general.⁵

12Let us Here follow five things that the pagans intend to do and the evil they plot gets worse each time: #1. **beset** (harass or make trouble for) **the just one**, This could be a personification of the chosen people as well as a prophecy regarding Jesus.² **because he is obnoxious to us**; The just one makes evildoers uncomfortable, sometimes by what he or she says in confronting injustice and sin, and sometimes just because he or she lives a different life that by its contrast highlights the sins of the evil ones.⁴ **he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training.** Deeply ingrained in the pagan lifestyle are food (2:6-9), fun (2:10-11) and fornication (2:12-20). Since these people did not believe in anything other than survival of the fittest, it was only logical that they should rid themselves of any annoying Hebrew moralist by condemning him to a shameful death.¹ In their view of life and death, the wicked show a practical atheism and attribute man's origin to chance. Their concept of man is completely this-worldly and they deny survival after death.⁵

17Let us #2. **see whether his words be true**; When a person does something wrong, he must either change or find fault with what is "right." **let us** #3. **find out what will happen to him.**

18For if the just one be the son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes.

19With revilement and torture let us #4. **put the just one to the test** Their only proof of his goodness would be if he didn't die because the wicked confine their thoughts to earth, to the now, to things that can be seen. **that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience.**

20Let us #5. **condemn him to a shameful death**; In the last verse it says: "put the just one to the test" and here it says: "condemn him to a shameful death." These two phrases are paired with today's gospel reading where Jesus teaches that "the Son of Man will be handed over to men and they will kill him."⁶ **for according to his own words, God will take care of him.** While this is true, God does not always do it our way.

James 3:16-4:3

While this letter is addressed to the 12 tribes in dispersion (the whole church), it is primarily written to the Christian Jews. James is writing about Christian conduct.

Beloved:

16Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. Here James attacks the signs of false wisdom and in the next two verses he explains the qualities of true wisdom.

He is saying that there is a kind of litmus test for wisdom. We can know the source of the wisdom that we see around us by looking at the qualities that accompany it.⁷

17But the wisdom from above The Jewish sages always agreed that the true wisdom comes from above. It was not the attainment of man but rather, was the gift of God.⁸ **is first of all pure**, This means morally pure, holy and able to approach God.⁸ **then peaceable**, This word has a special meaning which means being in right relationship between man and man and between man and God. True wisdom brings men closer to one another and closer to God.⁸ **gentle, compliant**, This means that the truly wise man is forever ready and willing to obey God, whenever God's voice comes to him.⁸ **full of mercy** Christian mercy or pity is mercy for any man who is in trouble even if he has brought it on himself. It is not just an emotion, but practical help.⁸ **and good fruits**, This means that the true wisdom responds with practical help, with action, and not just emotion.⁸ Pope Benedict's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, has a warning to those whose devotion to "religious duties" ignores the cry of their fellow man. It labels such a relationship—piety without service—as "arid". **without inconstancy** Wisdom from above is based on Christian principals and will not change.⁸ **or insincerity**. It is honest and without pretense or hypocrisy.⁸ This is a masterful sketch of Christian wisdom, which is a gift of God.⁵ Earlier, in James 1:5 we are told "If any of you is without wisdom, let him ASK it from the God who gives generously and ungrudgingly to all, and it will be given him."

18And the fruit of righteousness This is keeping the law of the Gospel and doing good works. Harmony and peace should be hallmarks of the Christian community.⁸ **is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace**. This means that the "peacemakers" of the Beatitudes create an environment around themselves that makes for holiness and they themselves benefit from the peace they sow.⁷

4:1Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? "Wars" and "conflicts" are an exaggerated reference to the contention and discord found among Christians, which makes it difficult for them to live together in harmony.⁷ **Is it not from your passions** "Passions" means the desires for money, for power, for prestige, for worldly possessions, for sexual gratification and for pleasure seeking as the focus of life. Barclay explains that all the evils which come upon man—revolutions and wars, stratagems and slaughters—spring from desire—the desire for more. **that make war within your members?** Jose Escriva says: "Heaven pulls you upwards and you drag yourself downwards." To obey the will of God is to be essentially selfless; to serve the will of pleasure is to be essentially selfish.⁷

2You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. Here St. James is describing the sad state to which free-wheeling greed for earthly things leads. The New Testament is clear that this overmastering desire for the pleasures of this world is always a threatening danger to the spiritual life.⁷

3You do not possess because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, He asks wrongly who shows no regard for the Lord's commandments and yet seeks heavenly gifts. He also asks wrongly who, having lost his taste for heavenly things, seeks only earthly things in order to indulge himself.⁷ **to spend it on your passions.** The Catechism points that when we praise God or give him thanks for his benefits in general, we are not particularly concerned whether or not our prayer is acceptable to him. However, we demand to see the results of our petitions!

It goes on to say that if we ask with a divided heart, we are "adulterers." God cannot answer us, for he desires our well-being, our life. If we enter into the desire of his Spirit, we shall be heard. It continues: "Do not be troubled if you do not immediately receive from God what you ask him; for he desires to do something even greater for you, while you cling to him in prayer."⁹ (CCC 2736) James

4: 7-10 puts it plainly how we are to pray: “Submit to God; resist the devil and he will take flight. Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you backsliders. Begin to lament, to mourn, and to weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into sorrow. Be humbled in the sight of the Lord and he will raise you on high.”

Mark 9:30-37

30 Jesus and his disciples left from there Following the Transfiguration, they came down from the mountain and Jesus drove a demon from a young boy after the disciples were unable to do so. **and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it.** The reason Jesus avoided as much publicity as he could was because he wanted to be alone with his disciples. He was walking in the shadow of the cross and was preparing them by giving them a great deal of pastoral and moral teaching.¹³ In Mt. 13:36 we learn that he explained points of his public preaching which they had not understood.

31 He was teaching his disciples and telling them, “**The Son of Man** This title alludes to the royal figure described by the prophet Daniel, who is enthroned in heaven, given authority over all nations, and his royal appointment signals the dramatic defeat of God’s enemies. Jesus often associates this title with his Passion.¹¹ **is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise.**” Here Jesus foretells his Crucifixion and Resurrection a second time in the Gospel of Mark. The prophecy was confusing and frightening to the disciples. They had an aversion to hearing about his death.¹¹

32 But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him.

33 They came to Capernaum This was where Jesus established his home and headquarters in Galilee. It is located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, about 23 miles from Nazareth. This is where Jesus began his public ministry and most of the incidents and discourses of the first part of the Synoptic Gospels occurred in or near Capernaum. It was one of the Galilean towns that Jesus cursed for their unbelief.¹⁰ **and once inside the house, he began to ask them, “What were you arguing about on the way?”**

34 But they remained silent. They were ashamed because they knew that they were discussing something that had been inconsistent with what Jesus had been telling them. **They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.** So long as they had thought that Jesus was not listening and that Jesus had not seen, the argument about who should be greatest seemed fair enough, but when that argument had to be stated in the presence of Jesus it was seen in all its unworthiness. If we took everything and set it in the sight of Jesus it would make all the difference in the world to our lives. And the fact of Christian belief is that all deeds are done and all words are spoken in his presence.¹⁵

35 Then he sat down, There was something very important about to be said when Jesus sits down to talk to his followers for this is the position taken by teachers in Mark’s culture. Solemnly, then, Jesus tells the Twelve a fundamental Christian truth: To rank first, one must be the last of all.² **called the Twelve, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.”** Greatness in God’s eyes is measured by humility and service to others, a principle put into practice by Jesus.¹¹ Anyone who does not strive to have this attitude of self-forgetful service, not only lacks one of the main pre-requisites for proper exercise of authority but also runs

the risk of being motivated by ambition or pride. Bl. Escriva wrote “To be in charge of an apostolic undertaking demands readiness to suffer everything, from everybody, with infinite charity.”¹²

³⁶Taking a child, he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it, he said to them, The greatest of all his disciples would be those who would be like little children. There was a nobility in His Kingdom, but it was opposite to the rank of the world. In His Kingdom one rose by sinking; one increased by decreasing. Since they didn’t understand the cross, he invited them to learn from a child. If we receive for Christ’s sake those who have little importance in the world’s eyes, it is as if we were embracing Christ himself and the Father who sent him. The greatest are the least, and the least are the greatest.¹⁴

³⁷“Whoever receives one child The word for “child” and the word for “servant” are the same in Aramaic.¹³ such as this The child/servant is an image of those who are weak, needy, poor, sick and helpless.¹² Welcoming them with affection is tantamount to serving both Jesus and the Father.¹¹ in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me.” If we want to be in the company of Jesus, we need to seek out the company of those in need. We often think that to be in the company of Jesus requires being “worthy” to be in his company. We think we have to be good enough. The emphasis in such a mindset is on ourselves. But Jesus tells us that to be good we must do good—especially to those who can do us very little good in return.²

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from (1) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (2) “Workbook For Lectors and Gospel Readers 2005” by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) “Saint Joseph Edition: New American Bible,” (4) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers:1997” by Lawrence E. Mick, (5) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (6) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers:2006” by Martin Connell, (7) “The Navarre Bible: Catholic Epistles,” (8) “The Letters of James and Peter” by William Barclay, (9) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (10) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (11) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark,” (12) “The Navarre Bible: St. Mark,” (13) “Mark: Good News for Hard Times” by George T. Montague, S.M., (14) “Life of Christ” by Fulton J. Sheen and (15) “The Gospel Of Mark” by William Barclay.

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