

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

LECTIONARY #166

Poetry communicates with sound and rhythm as well as meaning. Think of this text as a melody of praise and rejoicing.

An even, consistent reading throughout will kill the life of this text. Sense the up and down movement of rhythm and energy. Some lines require a burst of energy to convey the joy they contain.

Wisdom lauds her own majesty and ancient origins. "I was here before *everything* else," she asserts proudly!

Here begins the second description of the creation of the universe.

Don't drone through this "when he" litany; let your energy rise like a fountain spraying with increasing force.

"Craftsman" can be interpreted as "confidant" and suggests great intimacy between the Creator God and Lady Wisdom. Note how Wisdom "delights" and "plays" before the Lord and then "plays" on earth and "delights" in human beings.

The revelation that Wisdom delights in humanity is the intriguing finale to this reading.

READING I Proverbs 8:22-31

A reading from the Book of Proverbs

Thus says the **wisdom of God:**

"The **LORD** possessed me, the **beginning** of his ways,
the **forerunner** of his **prodigies** of long ago;
from of **old I** was **poured forth**,
at the **first**, before the earth.

When there were no **depths** I was brought forth,
when there were no **fountains** or **springs** of water;
before the **mountains** were settled into place,
before the **hills**, I was brought forth;
while as yet the **earth** and **fields** were not made,
nor the first **clods** of the world.

"When the **Lord** established the **heavens** I was **there**,
when he marked out the **vault** over the **face** of the **deep**;
when he made **firm** the skies **above**,
when he fixed **fast** the **foundations** of the **earth**;
when he set for the **sea** its **limit**,
so that the **waters** should not **transgress** his **command**;
then was I **beside** him as his **craftsman**,
and I was his **delight** day by day,
playing before him all the while,
playing on the surface of his **earth**;
and I found **delight** in the human **race**."

READING I

The voice we hear in this lovely poem is Wisdom, personified as a woman, sometimes referred to as "Lady Wisdom." She is a mysterious figure, so sublime that she seems almost divine, possessing attributes of God himself. In her self-portrait, she says that she was the "forerunner . . . was poured forth . . . and brought forth," poetic ways of presenting herself as the first of God's creations. Once she came into being, she worked alongside God as a coworker at creation. Her assertion that she was there before fountains and mountains, before the

hills and fields is so beautifully described that it is easy to envision Lady Wisdom accompanying God at each stage of creation. Wisdom's presence in the beginning reveals that creation itself is a reflection of God's wisdom, designed in harmony, beauty, and goodness.

Just as God delights in Wisdom, she delights in the human race. Both the poem and creation itself culminate with humankind. After the verses in today's reading, Lady Wisdom will speak to those who have heard her poem, advising them to "listen to me" and assuring them that the one who

finds her finds life, a teaching that is often associated with the Torah. In fact, an ancient Jewish interpretation sees Wisdom identified with the Torah that was present with God even before the creation of the earth. In the New Testament, Paul sees Jesus as the very presence of God's wisdom: "Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). We fittingly apply Wisdom's words to Jesus: "Happy those who keep my ways. . . . The one who finds me finds life" (Proverbs 8:33, 35).

For meditation and context:

TO KEEP IN MIND

Don't neglect the Responsorial Psalm just because you aren't proclaiming it. Pray it as part of your preparation.

You are presenting a logical argument that requires each step to reach its conclusion, so be sure each step is clearly presented.

Despite his use of logic, Paul's argument is infused with joy; don't leave out that aspect.

Pause before introducing this startling assertion. A trace of a smile would not be inappropriate. Remain upbeat as you increase energy on the new word of each line.

"And hope . . ." is a statement of faith, not a legal argument. Speak from your own conviction.

The Trinitarian formula is completed with the naming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit sustains our joy.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 8:4–5, 6–7, 8–9 (2a)

R. O Lord, our God, how wonderful your name in all the earth!

When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you set in place—

What is man that you should be mindful of him,
or the son of man that you should care for him?

You have made him little less than the angels,
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You have given him rule over the works of your hands,
putting all things under his feet.

All sheep and oxen,
yes, and the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea,
and whatever swims the paths of the seas.

READING II Romans 5:1–5

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom we have gained access by faith
to this grace in which we stand,
and we boast in hope of the glory of God.

Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions,
knowing that affliction produces endurance,
and endurance, proven character,
and proven character, hope,
and hope does not disappoint,
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

READING II

"We have been justified by faith." Paul's opening words affirm that we have already been justified, already brought into right relationship with God. Justification and the other effects of Christ's death and Resurrection are both a present and future reality, sometimes described as the "already and not yet" of salvation. In the present time, we believe and act and strive in hope of the future fullness of God's saving acts in Christ.

As Paul describes the accompanying fruits of justification, he brings together the present graces and the future expectation.

In the present, we have peace with God through Christ, through whom we have access to the grace in which we stand. At the same time, we boast in hope of the glory of God, focusing on the future. While boasting ordinarily stems from one's own actions, the boasting here is based on God's saving actions through Christ and in the power of the Spirit. Even suffering is reason for boasting, since the suffering that Paul refers to is the end-time affliction and distress before God's final intervention. The sequence progresses from suffering to endurance to character, and ultimately to

hope, bringing Paul back to his theological emphasis: our present experience of being already justified is grounds for the hope of future completeness and glory.

The most palpable gift and reason for hope is that the love of God has already been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God's abiding presence, constantly breathing within us, generously bestowing God's love and empowering us to love in return.

GOSPEL

In his farewell address, Jesus speaks to his friends,