

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Zephaniah = zef-uh-Ni-uh

The tone of this reading is urgent but also generous. Something ominous is on the horizon. But the prophet trusts in the decency of his audience, appealing to it. A note of care prevails through the reading.

remnant = REM-n*nt

Slight pause between "people" and "humble."

Note the emphatic parallel between "do no wrong" and "speak no lies."

LECTIONARY #70

READING I Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12–13

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Zephaniah

Seek the LORD, all you **humble** of the earth,
who have **observed his law**;
seek **justice**, seek **humility**;
perhaps you may be **sheltered**
on the **day** of the LORD's **anger**.

But I will **leave** as a **remnant** in your **midst**
a **people humble** and **lowly**,
who shall take **refuge** in the **name** of the LORD:
the **remnant** of **Israel**.

They shall **do no wrong**
and **speak no lies**;
nor shall there be **found** in their **mouths**
a **deceitful tongue**;
they shall **pasture** and **couch** their **flocks**
with **none** to **disturb** them.

READING I Zephaniah prophesied in the land of Judah during the reign of King Josiah (640–609 BC). His writing is part of a group of texts known as the twelve minor prophets. His work is considered "minor" not because of any lack of important content but because the Book of Zephaniah and the other eleven books of the minor prophets are much shorter in length than those of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

The prophecy of Zephaniah takes place at a time when Babylon was soon to destroy Jerusalem and send the Israelites

into exile. Zephaniah accuses the people of Judah of being far too prideful, and so he seeks to counter their arrogance with a message that calls them to reform and humility. The prophet speaks of a "remnant" who will successfully "take refuge" in the Lord on the day that he comes to seek vengeance for the nation's wrongdoing. Zephaniah hopes that, on that fateful day, the Lord will discover several contrite lowly ones, whose humility of heart will counter the pride of the people.

Throughout the Old Testament we can see the belief that the people held, that

even after suffering a major disaster, such as a famine or a military collapse, some portion of God's chosen people would remain. Isaiah and Jeremiah likewise prophesied that some of the Israelites would be saved as a "remnant," who would one day be redeemed (for example, see Isaiah 6:13 and Jeremiah 31:7–14). It is also important to notice that Zephaniah suggests that salvation will take place by taking refuge in the Lord, not by standing up to warring invaders. Instead "they shall pasture and couch their flocks with none to disturb them." Thus, Zephaniah calls for a conver-

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 146:6–7, 8–9, 9–10 (Matthew 5:3)

R. Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of heaven is theirs! or Alleluia.

The LORD keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets captives free.

The LORD gives sight to the blind;
the LORD raises up those who were
bowed down.

The LORD loves the just;
the LORD protects strangers.

The fatherless and the widow the
LORD sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
The LORD shall reign forever;
your God, O Zion, through all generations.

READING II 1 Corinthians 1:26–31

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Consider your own calling, brothers and sisters.

**Not many of you were wise by human standards,
not many were powerful,
not many were of noble birth.**

**Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise,
and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong,
and God chose the lowly and despised of the world,
those who count for nothing,
to reduce to nothing those who are something,
so that no human being might boast before God.**

**It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus,
who became for us wisdom from God,
as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,
so that, as it is written,
“Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord.”**

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhn-z

The persuasion of this highly effective reading relies on a series of effective parallels and repetitions.

Note the repetition of “Not many.”

Note the repetition of “God chose,” as well as the parallels from “wise” to “strong” to “world,” finishing with the inversion of “nothing” into “something.”

despise = dih-SPĪZ

righteousness = Rĭ-chuhs-nis

sanctification = sangk-tuh-fih-KAY-shuhn

Note the repetition of “boasts”/“boast.”

sion of heart that replaces pride with humility, as the people place their complete dependence upon God.

READING II

This reading from 1 Corinthians serves as a perfect bridge between our first reading and the Gospel. In the first reading we heard how God protects those who are humble, and in the Gospel for today, we will hear how the Lord calls “blessed” those who are meek and humble of heart. The theme of this passage from 1 Corinthians is quite simply that God chooses those whom the world

considers to be fools in order to put to shame those who consider themselves to be wise. In all three readings, it is clear that God does not operate according to the standards of this world; belonging to God’s kingdom requires selflessness rather than selfishness.

Paul has just finished telling the Corinthians that he preaches Christ crucified, which is considered folly according to the wisdom of the Greeks (1 Corinthians 1:18–25). Now he reminds them that they are considered chosen by God, not because of wisdom or nobility, but rather, because

of their faith in Christ, which the world sees as weakness. The mission of those chosen by God is to cling so tight to this faith that others will see that human boastfulness is empty and counts for nothing. What matters is being able to boast of one’s faith. Paul employs the beautiful phrase, “Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord,” which he will repeat to the Corinthians in his second letter (2 Corinthians 10:17). With this strong faith, and not futile wisdom, the Corinthians may count themselves part of Christ. Relying solely on this wisdom, they know that God has saved them (redemp-

Emphasis on "teach." This reading includes some of Jesus' best-known instructions.

The power of this reading depends on the rhythm you establish between the words that anchor the phrases paired in each beatitude. Say "blest" rather than "blessed."

Emphasis on "reward" and "great."

TO KEEP IN MIND

When you proclaim of the Word you participate in catechizing the faithful and those coming to faith. Understand what you proclaim so those hearing you may also understand.

tion), freed them from the way of sin (sanctification), and called them to live upright before God (righteousness).

GOSPEL Today's Gospel passage from the beginning of the fifth chapter of Matthew opens a reading of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5 to 7) that will continue for the next several Sundays in Ordinary Time. Jesus' inaugural preaching event takes place on a Galilean hillside to which crowds were coming from near and far (Matthew 4:25). When Jesus sees the crowd, he gathers his disciples

GOSPEL Matthew 5:1-12a

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

When Jesus saw the **crowds**, he went **up** the **mountain**, and **after** he had sat **down**, his **disciples** came to him.

He began to **teach** them, saying:

"Blessed are **the** poor in **spirit**,
for **theirs** is the **kingdom** of **heaven**.

Blessed are **they** who **mourn**,
for **they** will be **comforted**.

Blessed are the **mEEK**,
for **they** will **inherit** the **land**.

Blessed are **they** who **hunger** and **thirst** for **righteousness**,
for **they** will be **satisfied**.

Blessed are the **merciful**,
for **they** will be shown **mercy**.

Blessed are the **clean** of **heart**,
for **they** will see **God**.

Blessed are the **peacemakers**,
for **they** will be called **children** of **God**.

Blessed are **they** who are **persecuted**
for the **sake** of **righteousness**,
for **theirs** is the **kingdom** of **heaven**.

Blessed are **you** when they **insult** you and **persecute** you
and utter **every kind** of **evil** against you **falsely**
because of me.

Rejoice and be **glad**,
for your **reward** will be **great** in **heaven**."

closest to him and begins with the pronouncement of the beatitudes, telling them what it means to be counted among the "blessed" in God's kingdom.

While Luke portrays Jesus proclaiming four beatitudes (Luke 6:20-23), Matthew's version contains nine. A major difference between them is that Luke focuses on a preferential option in this life for the poor, the hungry, and those who mourn, while Matthew broadens these categories to make them more about a spirituality centered on the kingdom of heaven. For example, in Matthew, it is not simply the

"poor" who are blessed, but the "poor in spirit." It is not simply the "hungry" who are blessed, but those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness." In all the beatitudes, those who are deemed "blessed" are those favored by God because their suffering in this world will be overturned under the reign of God. Keeping the attitudes of the kingdom in this life will lead to a reward in the heavenly kingdom. S.W.