

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #106

READING I Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

A reading from the Book of Wisdom

A poetic and forceful reading with an uplifting message and a somewhat complex delivery. Proclaim with care to let its language settle on your assembly.

temerity = tuh-MER-uh-tee (audacity)

clemency = KLEM-*n-see

Slight pause between "children" and "good."

There is **no god besides** you who **have** the **care** of **all**,
 that you **need show** you have not **unjustly condemned**.
 For your **might** is the **source** of **justice**;
 your **mastery** over **all things** makes you **lenient** to all.
 For you **show** your **might** when the **perfection** of your **power**
 is **disbelieved**;
 and in **those** who **know** you, you **rebuke temerity**.
 But **though** you are **master** of **might**, you **judge**
 with **clemency**,
 and with **much lenience** you **govern** us;
 for **power**, whenever you **will**, **attends** you.
 And you **taught** your **people**, by **these deeds**,
 that **those** who are **just** must be **kind**;
 and you gave your **children** **good ground** for **hope**
 that you would **permit repentance** for their **sins**.

READING I

Our first reading is taken from the Book of Wisdom, also called the Wisdom of Solomon. Although the author is anonymous, we can surmise that he was a well-educated, Greek-speaking Jew, possibly from Alexandria, Egypt. Biblical scholars are divided about its date of composition, but sometime between the end of the first century BC and the beginning of the first century AD is reasonable. Catholics classify this book as deuterocanonical, meaning "second list of authoritative books," and part of the Bible, but most of our Protestant brothers and

sisters consider it to be apocryphal, meaning "of doubtful authenticity," and include it in a separate section of the Bible.

To best appreciate this reading, we should try to get a sense of the big picture. It is part of a lengthy reflection on God's faithfulness and providential care of the Israelites during the Exodus, which begins at Wisdom 11:2 and extends to Wisdom 19:22. The first element of this reflection is a brief retelling of the Exodus narrative based on Psalm 107. Second, the author introduces the theme of his reflection: the Israelites benefited from the very things

that God did to punish the Egyptians. Third, the author presents five examples, each in the form of diptych, that is, a text in two related parts. The five diptychs appear in this order: the miracle of water from the rock as compared to the plague of blood in the Nile, the miracle of quail in the wilderness as compared to the plagues of locusts and flies, the miracle of manna in the wilderness as compared to the plague of storms, the miracle of the column of fire as compared to the plague of darkness, and the tenth plague that brought freedom to

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 86:5–6, 9–10, 15–16 (5a)

R. Lord, you are good and forgiving.

You, O LORD, are good and forgiving,
abounding in kindness to all who call
upon you.

Hearken, O LORD, to my prayer
and attend to the sound of my pleading.

All the nations you have made shall come
and worship you, O LORD,
and glorify your name.

For you are great, and you do
wondrous deeds;
you alone are God.

You, O LORD, are a God merciful
and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in kindness
and fidelity.

Turn toward me, and have pity on me;
give your strength to your servant.

READING II Romans 8:26–27

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

The **Spirit comes** to the aid of our **weakness**;
for we **do not know** how to **pray** as we **ought**,
but the **Spirit himself intercedes** with **inexpressible groanings**.

And the **one who searches hearts**
knows what is the **intention** of the **Spirit**,
because he **intercedes** for the **holy ones**
according to God's will.

A brief and incisive reading from Paul in which he offers up a challenging teaching, that our ignorance might be interceded upon by the Spirit. The emphasis is on our weakness.

Slight pause between "himself" and "intercedes."

the Israelites and death to the Egyptians' first born.

The second of these diptychs is interrupted by several digressions, including the one from which today's reading is taken. The topic of this digression is God's power and mercy. Our author begins by praising God, who is all-powerful and who cares for the needs of everyone; there is no other god who can accuse God of dealing unjustly with his people. The author argues further that God's power is the "source of justice," which also allows God to be lenient, balancing justice with mercy. Although the

author's comparison is not obvious in this short excerpt, we should be reminded of the words of the wicked expressed earlier in the book, "Let our strength be our norm of righteousness; for weakness proves itself useless" (Wisdom 2:11). The wicked are the ones who by their words and deeds bring about their own destruction (Wisdom 1:12). The author of this excerpt concludes by saying that, just as God tempers justice with mercy, so too we must be kind in our dealings with others. Knowing that God allows for repentance of sin gives us hope for ourselves and all of humanity.

READING II

Once again, our second reading is a continuation of recent Sunday readings from Paul's Letter to the Romans. In the verses that immediately precede this reading, Paul writes about how Jesus' followers await with great hope the birth of a new creation. In today's reading, he explains that having been made children of God, "the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness." Implied here is the recognition that human aspirations will never reach their mark without assistance, because of the limitations brought on by sin. But the Spirit will inter-

A lengthy reading that consists of three different parables and the explanation of the first. The tone is instructive, of course, but also mysterious. The first parable is the most detailed.

Slight pause between "weeds" and "all."

This second parable involves a very familiar teaching. Proclaim it as if for the first time.

The third parable consists of a powerful image.

GOSPEL Matthew 13:24-43

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

[Jesus proposed another parable to the crowds, saying:

"The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field.

While everyone was asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off. When the crop grew and bore fruit, the weeds appeared as well.

The slaves of the householder came to him and said, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field?

Where have the weeds come from?'

He answered, 'An enemy has done this.'

His slaves said to him,

'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'

He replied, 'No, if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them.

Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, "First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn.""]

He proposed another parable to them.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field.

It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants.

It becomes a large bush, and the birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches."

He spoke to them another parable.

"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened."

cede for us over and above our human limitations, with "inexpressible groanings." The phrase "who searches hearts" is a reference to God, who can understand what the Spirit says, as it intercedes on our behalf. What a wondrous mystery! And what consolation to know that God hears us through the agency of the Spirit, even when we are unable to pray as we want.

GOSPEL Today's Gospel reading consists of a collection of three parables from Matthew's Gospel. The longer form of this Gospel reading also

includes an interpretation of the first of these parables. Parables are puzzles that take the form of fictional stories designed to engage the listener in active thought. Most, though not all, begin with a phrase like "the kingdom of heaven is like . . ." In other words, parables are comparisons. Also, "the kingdom of heaven" is not heaven. Rather, it describes the anticipated reality in which God's authority will manifest itself fully in creation and rid the world of discord, pain, and suffering.

The first of these parables is often referred to as the Parable of the Weeds and

Wheat. However, on a deeper level, it should be called the Parable of Feuding Farmers, because the weeds are merely instruments designed to dishonor one's enemy. In the ancient Near East and in many parts of the world even today, societies operated on the notion that the enemies of one's grandparents and parents are your enemies as well. To maintain your family's honor, you were obligated to challenge the social status of those enemies in some way—even if meant introducing weeds into your enemy's field! The typical farmer would have felt obligated to respond

When the disciples ask for an explanation, they are asking Jesus to deepen their initiation into the mysteries he is revealing to them. That Jesus complies eagerly is part of the excitement of this Gospel reading.

The tone that concludes this reading is decidedly apocalyptic.

All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables. He spoke to them only in parables, to fulfill what had been said through the prophet:

*I will open my mouth in parables,
I will announce what has lain hidden
from the foundation of the world.*

Then, dismissing the crowds, he went into the house. His disciples approached him and said,

“Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

He said in reply, “He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom.

The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers.

They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

[Shorter: Matthew 13:24–30 (see brackets)]

in kind, but this farmer does not retaliate and instead allows his honor to be compromised for an entire season until harvest, which is a symbol of God’s end time judgment, when the instruments of hatred can be destroyed in fire.

The second and third parables in this reading compare the kingdom of heaven to something that begins its existence very small but becomes very large when it comes to completeness. The mustard seed is very small, though in fact not the smallest seed found in Israel and elsewhere, and it can grow to as much as six feet. However,

it is not a tree. Rather, it is a gangly bush that sways easily in the wind, so it is unlikely to hold a bird’s nest. Anyone walking the villages and fields of the time would know that this is hyperbole, but it clearly makes the point: the reign of God will surely grow, and it will grow beyond imagining. Likewise, the parable about the yeast is surprising, but this time it is because of the enormous amount of flour involved. Biblical scholars do not have consensus about how big a measure was in first-century Palestine, but three measures likely would have amounted to forty to sixty

pounds of flour, which, when leavened, would create an enormous amount of bread! But such is the coming reign of God, encompassing all and being the source of nourishment for all. C.C.