

A reading from the book of Wisdom.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The whole world before you, O Lord,
is like a speck that tips the scales,
and like a drop of morning dew that falls on the ground.
But you are merciful to all,
for you can do all things,
and you overlook people's sins,
so that they may repent.
Lord, you love all things that exist,
and detest none of the things that you have made,
for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.
How would anything have endured
if you had not willed it?
Or how would anything not called forth by you
have been preserved?
You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord,
you who love the living.
For your immortal spirit is in all things.
Therefore you correct little by little those who trespass,
and you remind and warn them of the things through which they sin,
so that they may be freed from wickedness
and put their trust in you, O Lord.



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – C 31

A reading from the second letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

We always pray for you,
asking that our God will make you worthy of his call
and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith,
so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you,
and you in him,
according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
and our being gathered together to him,
we beg you, brothers and sisters,
not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed,
either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us,
to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.

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PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – C 31

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it.
A man was there named Zacchaeus;
he was a chief tax collector and was rich.
He was trying to see who Jesus was,
but on account of the crowd he could not,
because he was short.
So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus,
because he was going to pass that way.
When Jesus came to the place,
he looked up and said to him,
“Zacchaeus, hurry and come down;
for I must stay at your house today.”
So Zacchaeus hurried down and was happy to welcome Jesus.
All who saw it began to grumble and said,
“He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.”
Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord,
“Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor;
and if I have defrauded anyone of anything,
I will pay back four times as much.”
Then Jesus said to him,
“Today salvation has come to this house,
because Zacchaeus too is a son of Abraham.
For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Wisdom 11:22-12:2

This passage from the Book of Wisdom is a fine pre-Christian exposition of the universality of the divine mercy. It begins by asserting the utter insignificance of human beings in language reminiscent of Second Isaiah.

Compare “speck that tips the scales” with “a drop from a bucket” in Isa 40:15. The thought of God’s transcendence serves to magnify the condescension of his mercy.

The mercy or love of God (the passage uses “love” as a verb but not as a noun, the latter being almost unique to the New Testament) manifests itself in two categories of action: in creation and preservation, and in the forgiveness of sin.

The striking and unique phrase “hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made” was taken up in the Sarum form for the blessing of ashes on Ash Wednesday: “nihil odisti eorum quae fecisti.” It so impressed Cranmer that he inserted it not only into his new collect for Ash Wednesday but also in the penitential office for that day and in the third of his Good Friday collects.

The thought is that though human beings have made such an awful mess of God’s creation, yet it still is God’s creation. His immortal spirit still dwells in all things (Wis 12:1), and human beings can therefore plead with God not to allow his handiwork to be destroyed, just as a painter or sculptor could not bear to see the product of his or her genius devoured by fire or smashed to pieces.

It is not clear whether the author, a Hellenistic Jew, is thinking in Hebraic or Greek terms when he speaks of the indwelling of God’s spirit in all things (see the Pentecost antiphon, “The Spirit of the Lord fills the whole world”).

The “spirit” could be, as in Greek thought, *sophia*, the agent of divine immanence; or, more biblically, it could be *ruach*, the creative power of the transcendent God at work in created things.

Probably the author thinks fundamentally in biblical terms but easily slips into Hellenistic language to express authentically biblical thoughts. The point is so incidental to his main concern (pleading to God that creation is his handiwork) that we should not use this passage to build up any particular cosmological or anthropological doctrine.

In the New Testament, the dominant conception of the Spirit is not universal-immanentist but eschatological. The Spirit does not dwell in all things and all persons but is a gift to those who believe in Christ Jesus.

Responsorial Psalm 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13, 14

In the original Hebrew this fine psalm of praise is constructed in an acrostic pattern. Each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, from aleph through teth.

It is a fitting response to the reading on the universal scope of the divine love and mercy. Note especially the last two lines of verse 9: “The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.”

Reading II: 2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2

In the latter part of the post-Pentecost season, the readings from the New Testament become progressively eschatological, thus leading up to the climax in the solemnity of Christ the King and the first Sunday of Advent. Like a musical composer, the Lectionary enunciates the theme that it will develop later on.

In German scholarship, 2 Thessalonians is often classed among the deutero-Pauline letters, but the basis for this is not very strong. Most English-speaking scholars assume that it was written by Paul himself after 1 Thessalonians in order to correct certain mistaken deductions that had been made either from the earlier letter or from the Apostle’s teaching on his foundation visit.

It appears that a false letter, purporting to be from Paul, had been circulated in the community at Thessalonica, asserting that the day of the Lord had already come. False prophets (“spirit” and “word”) were making the same claim. Probably this points to some early gnosticizing tendencies similar to those that appeared a little later at Corinth (1 Corinthians) and Philippi (Phil 3).

In the Gnostic systems, people were divided into various categories in virtue of their creation. Some were pneumatics, who belonged to the upper realm of light, and some were psychics or “hylics,” who belonged only to this world. The Christian gospel, as the false teachers understood it, revealed to a privileged elite their true nature. The gospel came, not to make people what they were not, but to restore the memory of their lost origin. Once they had recovered the knowledge of their true nature, there was no need for anything else, so the day of the Lord had really come. The elite already enjoyed immortality. For them the resurrection was already past (see 2 Tim 2:18).

This was, for Paul, a corruption of the Gospel all along the line, and his letters, when not directed against Judaizers (like the first part of Galatians, and Romans), were directed against the early gnosticizers at one point or another of their teaching. Here in 2 Thessalonians his answer is that the day of the Lord has not yet come, and that there is much of a highly apocalyptic nature which must happen first (see 2 Thes 2:3-12).

Gospel: Luke 19:1-10

Luke has added this story to his Marcan source from his special material. It illustrates a theme common to the Synoptists—Jesus’ eating with the outcasts of society. This type of behavior is attested in a remarkable number of different Gospel forms (parable, apho-

alism, pronouncement story [so here], and miracle story). This multiple attestation, as C. H. Dodd has argued, is strong proof of its historical character. Thus, one of the most certain facts we know about Jesus is that he ate with the outcasts.

Whether the story of Zacchaeus is based on a real occurrence or is a late composition we have no means of knowing. By his occupation Zacchaeus had excluded himself, in the popular estimation, from his people. He was a quisling who had thrown in his lot with the hated occupying power for the sake of pecuniary gain.

But for Jesus this does not disqualify the tax collector from the messianic salvation; he also is a son of Abraham (and for Luke this implies—since now it is not the Law that ultimately determines a person's relation to God but a person's attitude toward Jesus—that so also are Gentiles, as Paul had argued).

Zacchaeus' determination to see Jesus and his climbing up into the sycamore tree are taken as a sign of genuine faith, which could break through the barriers between God and human beings set up by the Law.

By entering Zacchaeus' house, Jesus dramatizes the coming of divine salvation. Zacchaeus' promise to restore what he had extorted from his fellow Jews is a measure of his repentance.

It goes far beyond the legal requirements of restitution (see, for example, Lev 6:1-7). Now he hears the word: "Today salvation has come to this house," that is, to him and his whole household or family.

As in Acts, the conversion of the head of the household carries with it all the other members of the family, a circumstance that led Joachim Jeremias to argue that the early Church practiced infant baptism in conversion situations.

This suggests that the story, even if based on a genuine incident in Jesus' ministry, had been shaped for the Gentile mission. Now comes the pronouncement in which the whole story culminates: "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."

Critical scholars today are divided on whether Jesus actually used the term "Son of man." But they are generally agreed that even if he did, he did not directly identify himself with that figure, since the Son of man was to appear in heaven at the end as a transcendental figure, while Jesus was a lowly figure on earth.

It was the post-Easter Church that identified Jesus first with the coming Son of man and later already in his ministry. But this identification was already implicit in Jesus' claim to be already dispensing eschatological salvation on earth.

In this saying it is the Church speaking as it looks back on the whole earthly ministry of Jesus as an accomplished work ("he came"); it is the Church confessing that in that history the Son of man came to seek and save the lost.

Such a claim was already implicit in the historical Jesus' conduct in eating with the outcast and in his interpreting that conduct by the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin.

Reginald H. Fuller