
WORD MADE FLESH

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Beloved*

Wisdom 7:7-11; Hebrews 4:12-13; Mark 10:17-30

Entering the presence of the beloved, all which previously held value and claimed one's attention - one's commitment and desire - withers and fades. In the presence of the beloved, the deepest recesses of the heart are known; nothing is hidden, all is "naked and laid bare" as the writer of Hebrews tells us. In the book of Wisdom, today's first reading, we are invited to look upon our beloved.

I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called on God and the spirit of wisdom came to me.
I preferred her to scepters and thrones...
I loved her more than health and beauty, and I chose to have her rather than light...

This is a hymn of joy born of the presence of the beloved. All the precious and treasured gifts so sought after in life, authority, power, health, beauty and knowledge, fade in the presence of the beloved.

The man who comes to Jesus in today's Gospel, is seeking the secret to inheriting eternal life. He was trying, yet again, to accumulate another trophy to witness his success in the world. A concern for that which is Eternal is often used for such purposes. Jesus glimpsed the deep recesses of his heart and laid it bare. This man of virtue, having kept all the law from birth, remained in love with his own life and virtue. Jesus points to the one thing lacking in this man's life which has set him seeking the secret to eternal life: being grasped by the beloved which frees one from all anxiety and opens one to the wonder of being. Jesus says to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: then come follow me."

How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God, to dwell in the presence of the beloved. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." And, alas, alas, most of us are rich. Most of us carry the burden of commitments -- responsibility, knowledge, honour, aspiration, goods, health, beauty -- stacked high upon our back. We are bent over, blinded to the beloved and insulated by our burden from the wisdom which awakens us to the kingdom of God.

Today's hymn from the book of Wisdom is distressing: a love song that falls upon the ear as a judgement because it calls from such a far-off place. Like the man who came to Jesus, like Jesus' disciples, I too would feign to walk away humiliated, no match for what is required, no match for the love that is offered. So, with the Psalmist, I pray that I also may come to know the shortness of my life so that I may gain wisdom of heart. And, with you, in this season of Autumn, I ask the Lover of all human beings to fill us with wisdom so "we will sing for joy."

David J. Goa

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