

4th Sunday of the Year A

First Reading Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

Seek the Lord all you, the humble of the earth, who obey his commands. Seek integrity, seek humility; you may perhaps find shelter on the day of the anger of the Lord. In your midst I will leave a humble and lowly people, and those who are left in Israel will seek refuge in the name of the Lord. They will do no wrong, will tell no lies; and the perjured tongue will no longer be found in their mouths. But they will be able to graze and rest with no one to disturb them.

Second Reading 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Take yourselves for instance, brothers and sisters, at the time when you were called: how many of you were wise in the ordinary sense of the word, how many were influential people, or came from noble families? No, it was to shame the wise that God chose what is foolish by human reckoning, and to shame what is strong that he chose what is weak by human reckoning; those whom the world thinks common and contemptible are the ones that God has chosen – those who are nothing at all to show up those who are everything. The human race has nothing to boast about to God, but you, God has made members of Christ Jesus and by God's doing he has become our wisdom, and our virtue, and our holiness, and our freedom. As scripture says: if anyone wants to boast, let him boast about the Lord.

Gospel Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples.

Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: "How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy the gentle: they shall have the earth for their heritage. Happy those who mourn: they shall be comforted. Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied. Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. Happy the pure in heart: they shall see God. Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called children of God.

Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

Meditation

Paradox has sometimes been described as truth standing on its head. In today's readings the kingdom of God stands as the supreme paradox. In this kingdom everything which seems truly desirable is turned upside down. The prophet Zephaniah announces that those chosen to survive the dreaded upheaval of the "Day of the Lord" are not the rich and powerful but "a people humble and lowly". Paul informs the contentious Corinthians that God continues to choose not the wise, not the wellborn, not the strong, but the weak. Jesus himself claims that the genuinely blessed are not the prosperous and the successful but those who seem in fact badly treated by providence: the poor, the sorrowful, the needy, the persecuted. What is this kingdom of God? Is it a home for riffraff?

So it seems, according to the gospel. It is a place where tax collectors and prostitutes are welcomed before religious purists. It is a banquet whose guests have been gathered from the highways and the byways. It is a feast where the Lord himself sits down at table with sinners. It is not that the well-fed are unwelcome. Matthew, by offering a more spiritualised version of the beatitudes than Luke, suggests that the issue is attitude. Those who are well off by the standards of this world run the risk of complacency. Satisfied with all they have, they are content to seek no more.

Not knowing they are hungry, they ignore the Lord's invitation to come and eat of the true bread of life. Blest are they who know their need! They are free to seek first the paradoxical kingdom of God. And those who seek shall find.