

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Daniel 7:1-3,15-18

NRSV

The book is set in the days of the exile in Babylon. Daniel is a famous character from that time; according to Ezekiel, he was renowned for his piety and wisdom. The book was written about 165 BC, in Daniel's name, to give hope to people who suffer persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Hellenistic ruler who tried to eliminate Judaism. Our reading is of a vision: earthly kingdoms will pass to make way for the kingdom of God. It presents past events as though in the future and continues slightly into the future.

Out of the primordial "sea" (v. 2), the chaotic "deep" of Genesis 1:2, stirred up by the spirit of God ("winds of heaven"), Daniel sees four beasts arise – all agents of God. The first three are like a "lion" (v. 4), "bear" (v. 5) and "leopard" (v. 6). The fourth beast is too horrible to be likened to any animal; it has horns. Another small horn appears, symbolizing Antiochus. Thrones are set in place and God ("an Ancient One", v. 9) takes his place, surrounded by attendants; his court sits in judgement. The fourth beast is put to death; the second and third are allowed to linger on. Then "one like a human being" (v. 13, or *a son of man*) comes from heaven and is presented to God, who gives him a universal, eternal, unconquerable kingdom (v. 14). (Christians saw this figure as the messiah, Christ, but to Jews he represented the archangel Michael and faithful Jews.) The interpretation begins in v. 16. *King* and *kingdom* are used interchangeably, so the "four great beasts" (v. 17) symbolize world powers that dominated Israel: Babylon, Medea, Persia and the Seleucids. The "holy ones of the Most High" (v. 18) are Jews who defied Antiochus' decrees against Judaism; there will again be an independent Jewish state which will last for ever. The current persecutions will end. God has permitted Israel to be conquered, but will act soon to rescue his people.

Psalms 149

NRSV

This psalm was used in a liturgical setting: note "assembly of the faithful". Worshipers are invited to sing "a new song", perhaps *new* because God continually reveals more of himself to the faithful. V. 3 tells us that hymns were accompanied by "dancing", the "tambourine" and the "lyre". Praise him because he delights in his people and gives victory (in some sense) to those who hold him in awe. (In v. 5 "glory" is a divine title.) May "the faithful" even "sing for joy" in their homes ("on their couches"). Vv. 6-9 appear to be a call to battle, to a holy war: may God's people execute on "nations" (v. 7) and "peoples" the "judgement decreed" (v. 9) by God.

Ephesians 1:11-23

NRSV

Paul writes to the "saints" (v. 1), those faithful to Christ in Ephesus. He gives

thanks for the blessings we have received through Christ: (1) bringing us into union with God; (2) *choosing us* (v. 4), before his creative act, to be set apart for him; and (3) as part of his plan, adopting us "as his children" (v. 5) – all of this through the love he expressed in sending Jesus. Through Christ's birth, life and resurrection we are absolved of our deviations from God's ways. Intellectually and through our experience of the Christian way we have come to know God's plan, i.e. to "gather up" (v. 10) all he has created, seen and unseen, to him.

Now Paul returns to *adoption*: we are offspring (inheritors) of God, and as such are forerunners ("the first", v. 12) of many who will come to Christ, living to praise God. Paul has been writing to mature Christians; now, in vv. 13-18, Paul speaks to neophytes in the faith, "as you come to know him" (v. 17), both Jews and Greeks ("you" is plural). "You" were marked as God's in baptism; it is the guarantee ("pledge", v. 14) of being God's children – those who, saved from sin, will have full union with God ("redemption"). Paul gives thanks for the fraternal "love" (v. 15) they have for all members of the Church ("saints"). May you too grow in knowledge and experience of God ("wisdom", v. 17) and receive new understandings of how God works in the world ("revelation"), so that you may come to know: (1) the future joy ("hope", v. 18) to which God has called you; (2) what it means to be joined in God with heavenly beings ("saints"); and (3) how much Christians can achieve using God's power. Christ is now raised and equal to the Father; he is above all angelic beings ("rule ... dominion", v. 21); now God's power acts through him eternally. Christ is "head" (v. 22) of the Church; it is his "body" (v. 23) – the "head" needs the "body", and the "body" the "head".

Luke 6:20-31

NRSV

In the presence of many people from Israel and beyond, Jesus speaks to his followers. Luke tells us of four *beatitudes* (vv. 20-22) and corresponding *woes* or warnings of deprivation in the age to come. Some are "blessed" (happy) by being included in the Kingdom Jesus brings. The warnings are prophecies, cautions. The pairs are: (1) the "poor" (v. 20) and the "rich" (v. 24); (2) the "hungry" (v. 21a) and the "full" (v. 25a); (3) the sorrowful (v. 21b) and the joyous (v. 25b); and (4) the persecuted (v. 22) and the popular (v. 26). The "poor" are those who acknowledge their dependence on God. The "rich" do not want to commit themselves to Jesus and the Kingdom; they are comfortable in their self-sufficiency. The word translated "consolation" (v. 24) is a financial term: they do not realize what they owe to Jesus. The "hungry" hunger for the word of God, the good news; the "full" are satisfied. In v. 22, "exclude" means being socially ostracized and excluded from the synagogue and Temple. The "Son of Man" includes Jesus and his followers: they will be persecuted, as Israel ("their ancestors", v. 23) persecuted Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos, but "in that day" (at the end of the era), they will be rewarded. Jeremiah 5:31 says that people spoke well of "false prophets" (v. 26). In vv. 27-29, Jesus expands on v. 22; he tells how to deal with persecution. Followers ("you that listen") should be willing to give all (even to standing naked, without an inner garment, "shirt".) When you give, do not expect reciprocity ("again", v. 30). Emulate God in your actions; seek to match his compassion!

