

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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Proverbs 8:1-4,22-31

NRSV

Wisdom, “understanding” is personified as a woman in this seven-stanza poem. Vv. 1-5 are the first stanza, and vv. 22-31 are the fifth and sixth. She “cries out” (v. 3) to all people everywhere (“all that live”, v. 4). Her message is primarily to young people. She speaks “utter truth” (v. 7) – she is absolutely reliable. She is completely opposed to anything dishonest or insincere. Her message possesses integrity and makes sense, to those who understand (v. 9). Her “instruction” (v. 10) is superior to all material goods. She offers “good advice” (v. 14) and “sound wisdom” with “insight” and “strength”. She guides those who rule justly (vv. 15-16). She reciprocates the love offered to her; she is found by those who “seek me diligently” (v. 17). While *walking* with great integrity, she brings material prosperity to all who listen to her (vv. 20-21).

Vv. 22-31 tell of her relationship to creation. God “created” (i.e. *generated*) her as “the first of his acts” – before he created, i.e. before “the beginning of the earth” (v. 23), before he created the “depths” (v. 24), etc. She was “brought forth”: the Hebrew word presents an image of birth, as in *begot* or *formed*. Vv. 24-26 use Canaanite mythological motifs (“depths”, “springs”, shaping of “mountains”) to say that wisdom existed before creation began. Again, v. 27 tells us that she *pre-existed* the world: she was present at creation, as a witness. She came to know God’s secrets in creating the heavens and the earth (e.g. in limiting the extent of the sea, v. 29.) She was “beside him” (v. 30) at that time. (Later authors, those of Sirach and Wisdom, show that she had an active role in creation.) Either she was “like a master worker”, a craftsperson, in creative acts, or the Hebrew can mean *little child*: a notion which fits well with “brought forth” (vv. 24, 25) and with the rest of v. 30. She was God’s “delight” and she *delighted* in his creation of humankind; she rejoiced both in God and in those created. When later *trans-culturated* into the Greek world, Wisdom becomes *logos*, the pre-existent divine Word: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”; he “became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:1, 14).

Psalms 8

NRSV

As a picture is framed, so is this psalm: vv. 1a and 9 praise God for his glory, his presence among us – as symbolized by his “name”. He is the *fashioner* of creation, greater than all creation. He has used modest means (“babes and infants”, v. 2) to overcome “foes” – perhaps the powers of chaos in Genesis 1:1. He is majestic and lofty, but also a craftsman (“the work of your fingers”, v. 3). V. 4 asks him: *what makes mere humans worthy of your attention and care?* (“Mortals” translates *ben’adam*, literally *son of man*.) Then v. 5: *You’ve made us only slightly lower than the heavenly council and allowed us to share in your glory*

and honour! (The word translated “God” is plural, and is *angels* in the King James Version.) Vv. 6-8 recall the first creation story: God has given us a share in his power by conferring on us authority over the rest of what he created.

Romans 5:1-5

NRSV

Paul has written that union with God (justification) comes through faith. “Peace”, a Jewish concept, expresses all the benefits of a right relationship with God – namely a partnership of reconciliation, eternal well-being and wholeness of life. “Grace” (v. 2) is God’s free and unmerited offer of mercy and love towards all people. Earlier (in 3:23), Paul has noted that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”, i.e. of what God intended for humans when he created us. Even so, through God’s grace, we “boast in our hope of sharing” (v. 2) in this glory, this gift of complete oneness with him in eternal life. Christ is our *entry point* to God’s grace. This *justification* has a second effect: even in times of trial (“sufferings”, v. 3, perhaps when beset with doubt that Christ loves us) it lead us to openness to God’s plans for us (“hope”, v. 4), for “suffering produces endurance” (v. 3, including patience *under fire*), which in turn “produces character” (v. 4, proven-ness under testing). This process makes us better able to be open to God. Our hope, unlike that we have in fellow humans, is assured (“does not disappoint”, v. 5), for God has given us his Holy Spirit, who is present in us, and who continually brings God’s love to us.

John 16:12-15

NRSV

After the Last Supper, Jesus continues to tell the disciples about the mission they are to undertake. The “Spirit of truth” (15:26) is the Holy Spirit; he will be sent to the disciples, the Church, by Christ “from the Father”. Jesus’ statement “yet none of you asks me, ‘where are you going?’” (v. 5) seems strange because the disciples have asked the question earlier (13:36, 14:5). Perhaps he is saying: overwhelmed with “sorrow” (v. 6), you are missing the main point: the coming of the Spirit. By leaving them, Jesus is able to send the Spirit, “the Advocate” (v. 7). One thing the Spirit will do is to show “the world” (v. 8, unbelievers, possibly Jews) that they are wrong on three counts: (1) their idea of sin is incorrect (v. 9); (2) the *righteous* (the Jewish authorities) who condemned Jesus were wrong: he is God’s agent (v. 10); and (3) he has defeated sin (v. 11). An example: healing on the Sabbath is not sinful.

Now v. 12-13: the disciples have much more to learn from Jesus, but they are not yet ready to comprehend it. The Spirit will expand on what Jesus has told them. In guiding them, the Spirit will speak what comes to him from God (as Jesus has spoken what the Father has told him). The Spirit will “declare” (v. 13) about events “to come”, not only prophecy about the end-times but also guidance in the way of Christ, after Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Spirit will elucidate for them that Jesus fulfils God’s plans; he will reveal the essential nature of God, and show Christ’s power (“glorify”, v. 14). Whether the word comes from the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit, it is the same.