

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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Job 14:1-14

NRSV

Job lives in "Uz" (1:1), south-east of Palestine, and so is a foreigner; as such, he is drawn to God by faith, not ethnic origin. God had blessed him with many children, huge herds of animals, and many servants; he has responded to God by ritual sacrifices. 1:9 asks: do humans serve God because of what they receive from him? Job is tested, to discover whether his faith is genuine. The process is to deprive him of his children, possessions and health, and see whether he still trusts in God. While Job remains convinced that his faith is genuine, his three friends have doubts, and go to great lengths to convince him that his misfortunes are due to his lack of faith. While they do console him, they also ask difficult questions. Each of the friends pose questions to him, about his fidelity, to which he responds. Our reading is part of Job's response to one friend's (Zophar's) speech, in which Zophar insists that Job's supposed guilt deserves to be punished.

Now Job addresses God. Humans have a limited lifetime, as does a "flower" (v. 2); like "a shadow" humans are transient – unlike God. Why do you, God, bother to consider us? (v. 3). Why make the effort to decide whether we are good or evil? How, being "born of woman" (v. 1), can you make humans "clean" (v. 4)? In vv. 5-6, Job suggests that God, because he determines lifetimes and limits what humans can do, ignore us. We would then be able to lead simple lives, like "labourers". Then vv. 7-10: a tree can live again, "sprout again", after dying, whenever there is water, but "humans expire". When humans die they are truly dead; "the heavens" (v. 12) are forever. Perhaps Job could hide away from earth, in "Sheol" (v. 13), the abode of the dead, until God is no longer angry with him. God might then remember him. Finally, Job wonders whether humans will "live again" (v. 14). Will God "cover" (v. 17, forgive) his waywardness?

Psalms 31:1-4,15-16

NRSV

In the Middle East, then and now, honour and "shame" were and are important: to lose face is horrible. The psalmist asks God to shelter him from those who think he is far from God. He asks God to "rescue" (v. 2) him from his detractors "speedily". Being his solid reference point in life, he asks God to "lead" (v. 3) and "guide" him in difficult times. Perhaps v. 9 is a clue to his problem: "my eye wastes away ... my ... body also"; perhaps he is terminally ill, or has leprosy ("an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me", v. 11). Good health was seen as a sign of oneness with God. He feels trapped (v. 4). His destiny ("times", v. 15), are in God's hands. Deliver me! May he experience God's enduring love (v. 16)!

1 Peter 4:1-8

NRSV

The author writes at a time when Christians suffered from bad neighbourly relations. They were seen as being like Jews, for some were Jews, and many read the Old Testament. Strange stories circulated about their worship practices: some thought that they worshipped an ass. They were thought to be anti-social. They were seen as unpatriotic because they refused to worship the emperor, and avoided Roman spectacles and festivals. Neighbourly relations are important; without good ones, you suffer. The author continues to give new Christians, many converts from paganism, guidance on being, and living as, Christians.

3:18 has told of Christ's suffering and death. He endured bodily suffering, so be prepared to suffer bodily too: "arm yourselves ...", v. 1. In Romans 6:2-14, Paul links Christ's death with baptism. You who are baptized are no longer eternally encumbered by sin; you are able to live as God wills, rather than satisfying your own "desires" (v. 2). 1 Peter calls Christians "a chosen people" in 2:9 and "people of God" in 2:10, so "Gentiles" (v. 3) means pagans. "Lawless idolatry" is worship of idols, a practice forbidden to Christians. They don't understand why you abstain from loose living, so they abuse you verbally ("blaspheme", v. 4). But they will have their immorality judged when Christ ("him", v. 5) comes again. To be "judged in the flesh" (v. 6) means *to die*; we all die. Jesus, after his death "made a proclamation to the spirits in prison" (3:19). So Christ will judge all, including those who have died, when he comes again – so they too can live eternally ("in the spirit", v. 6), as God lives.

The author expects Judgement Day to be soon (v. 7) so he counsels his readers: (1) calmness and self-control will help you pray better; (2) be fervent in brotherly love, for love overwhelms sin (v. 8); (3) exercise hospitality (v. 9) to fellow Christians, especially those travelling; (4) manage the various gifts given to you, using each to help others (v. 10); (5) if you *speak* in tongues, ensure that the utterance is truly from God (v. 11); and (6) if you serve others (or are a slave), do so to your best ability. "In all things" may God be honoured by how you live.

Matthew 27:57-66

NRSV

Joseph of Arimathea, a man of means, asks the Roman authorities to release Jesus' body. Here the burial shroud is a "clean linen cloth" (v. 59), the tomb is "new" (v. 60) and the stone door is "great". Mark lacks these details. Joseph lays the body in a tomb presumably intended for himself. He rolls a disk-shaped rock "to [against] the door" (v. 60); "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary" (v. 61) witness this. (A body was normally washed and then anointed with oil before burial, but in Jesus' case, there was no time to do this.)

Vv. 62-66 prepare for the resurrection. The religious authorities wish to ensure that the faithful do not steal Jesus' body and falsely claim that he has risen from the dead. A false rumour of resurrection ("the last deception") would be worse than the "first" (Jesus' claim to be the Messiah). The tomb is "made secure" (vv. 64, 66) and is guarded by soldiers.