

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” TRINITY SUNDAY -C-
Proverbs 8: 22-31 Psalm 8: 5-9 Romans 5: 1-5 John 16: 12-15
By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

These Sundays (Pentecost, Trinity Sunday and Corpus Christi) can be difficult to preach. Not because there's nothing to say, but because what we say might be overly doctrinal, abstract and less proclamatory. (Proclamation is the announcement of God's wonderful works in our lives.) So, before we plan an "explanation" of the Trinity for this weekend, I would suggest doing what we normally do on an "ordinary" Sunday (or any preaching day), go to the readings in a prayerful listening mode and be open to what you hear.

This Sunday celebrates God encountered in three ways or aspects. I would suggest looking at the first reading for a particular way in which we encounter God (Proverbs 8:22-31----ever preached on Proverbs?). Here we find a reminder that the Israelite faith accentuates the personal aspect of the divine Mystery, God is the "one encountering". God's activity in our world was expressed in dynamic metaphors and today's first reading reveals one of them, "Wisdom of God". The metaphor can express poetically a radical sense of God's immanence to creation. (cf. "Trinity" in "The New Dictionary of Theology.") Suggested in this reading, I think, is the faith that God is encountered in creation, in the natural world around us. This might be a good preaching as people prepare for summer outdoor fun or holidays. It also might provide a "lighter sound" to this week's preaching, the reverse of what people come to expect on a "big feast".

As you reflect on the passage, notice the teaching is expressed in the form of Hebrew poetry, i.e. in aphorisms or sayings of two lines that parallel each other. The second line seems to repeat, expand or intensify the first, sometimes in positive, other times in a negative way. These lines are not meant to perfectly explain God and God's ways, but to open the mystery of God to us--- to evoke thought and elicit wonder. When you read wisdom literature, such as Proverbs, you feel more in touch with the Near East. It is another way of seeing the world and negotiating the mystery that is God. These ancient sages were aware that life is ambiguous. They were searching for new insights and ways of dealing with life. They were insistent on applying wisdom to everyday matters; encouraging justice, hard work, self control honesty, etc. They wanted to help us see meaning below the surface of the often-mundane things of life.

Isn't it a shame we don't have more readings from the book of Proverbs in the lectionary? One suspects such sayings are in touch with a wisdom not appreciated in our day of computer technology, space walks and DNA testing. But those of us who live in a second or third world

country, or who have a memory of grandparents from the “old country,” certainly can appreciate the sayings of these wise sages.

We learn from Proverbs that the sages were not shy or afraid to face the larger mysteries that addressed the source of our existence, life’s meaning, the nature of God, etc. We get the sense from today’s passage of a God who carefully designed the world, an architect/engineer who measured and planned, who “marked out the vault,” “made firm the skies above,” “fixed fast the foundations of the earth,” “set the sea its limits.” Wisdom is begotten of God from the very beginning, a first born. She is beside God as an artisan. She is a delightful and playful participant in the work of creation. What emerges from the reading is that God did not create the world haphazardly, willy nilly. From the beginning, God has planned creation and taken delight in it.

In Proverbs, Wisdom is presented as a prophet who speaks her piece. She is present at the creation of the world, and she is shown as an aspect or activity of God which is given speech. Does this suggest God speaking to us in creation and that this communication could be a source of wisdom for us? It's possible to link this feast to the wonders of the created world. Also, Wisdom, is a "playful presence" at creation, so we can link this feast to the beginning of summer fun and play---our play.

We play more in the summer, and this helps put our lives in perspective, especially we who are so overworked. There is little room for play in our regular lives, and this lack of space denies us a place where wisdom can speak to us, where God can break into our lives. Thus, when we take leisurely walks by the sea or a lake, eat outdoors at a meal slowly prepared on an open grill, pause to see our children in sports events, go to a fair, etc. we "run the risk" of meeting God who can bless us with wisdom and challenge the "normal" lives we lead which leave little "empty" space for an encounter with God.

The preacher might want to draw out the playful side of the reading, note especially the last verses, "I was God's delight day by day, playing before God all the while, playing on the surface of God's earth and I found delight in the human race." This reading also counters the overly serious nature of our religion and contrasts it with the faith we have in a God who is there in play and who “finds delight in the human race.”

The reading suggests an aspect of the Trinity that is not only about "transcendence," but about God's imminence to us in creation. God is not aloof or distant from the world, but known, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, through the mystery of the world around us. We discover God and learn Wisdom through God's created gifts that are the way God chooses to reveal. Yet,

we can reflect on the degradation of nature in our world, the destruction and pollution of the special and sacred place we find God. As the summer begins we could resolve to reverence nature in our frugal use of resources so as to find God in simplicity; to express our concern over legislation that may weaken environmental safeguards and to spend more time in nature and less time in front of the TV, shopping, busyness, etc. We could also be sensitive to those whose lives have little by way of free time, funds for outdoor trips, or are limited due to poor health. We might see what we could do to free their time as well this summer.

Finally, at the Eucharist, we discover the Wisdom of God made flesh in Jesus. Here God speaks Wisdom in created gifts of bread and wine, here we meet Christ who confounds our wisdom through a simple life lead for others, a life that revered all the created order around him, especially those poor and treasured by God.

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER:

Charles Morris, “American Catholic: Saints and Sinners Who Built America’s Most Powerful Church”. (New York: Times Books, 1997)

The story of how U.S. Catholicism developed into a distinctive subculture and then how Catholicism became America’s largest and most powerful church.

QUOTABLE

...in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand...and it was as round as a ball.... In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, and third is that God preserves it. But what did I see in it? It is that God is the Creator and the protector and the lover.

—Julian of Norwich, “Showings,” quoted in THE LIVING PULPIT, April-June 1999, page 31.

JUSTICE NOTES

“The more aware of a situation of injustice we are, the more reason for a severe judgment if we fail to do anything about it.”

Gilian Leslie O.D.C., “On the Side of the Poor,” in THE LIVING PULPIT, January-March 1993, page 23.

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

“Can you imagine what it’s like to have your boy on death row? Can you imagine what it’s like to visit him there every Saturday and tell him, ‘I love you. I’ll see you next week,’ when you never know if they’re going to call and say, ‘He’s up next—it’s time for his execution.’”

---- Jeanetter Johnson, Mother of Alan Gell, who was retried and found innocent because prosecutors withheld evidence that might have cleared him of first-degree murder

[The News and Observer, February 15, 2004, Raleigh, NC]

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates’ names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina’s, “People of Faith against the Death Penalty.”

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to...

- George C. Buckner #0054499 (On death Row since 10/8/93)
- James Williams #0441726 (11/3/93)
- Levon J. Jones #0217191 (11/20/93)

----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. CD Available: “FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C.” The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and PDF) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer.

To purchase go to: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the “Year C–CD” button on the

left and follow the instructions.

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (FrJude@JudeOP.org)

3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/> (Where you will find "Preachers' Exchange," which includes "First Impressions" and "Homilies Dominicales," as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, [Click Here](#).

DONATIONS

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Thank you and "Blessings on your preaching",
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