

The Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A)

<i>First Reading</i>	Sirach 15:15-20
<i>Response</i>	Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!
<i>Psalms</i>	Psalms 119:1-2, 4-5, 17-18, 33-34
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 2:6-10
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 5:17-37

The sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time for year A continues our study of 1 Corinthians. And we're continuing our journey in 1 Corinthians 2, and Paul's going to keep talking about this theme of the wisdom of the world and the Gospel—like this contrast between the mystery of what God has revealed through the Gospel and the lofty words of human wisdom.

So the reading for today is from 1 Corinthians 2:6-10. And here Paul gives his famous statement about the mystery of what eye has not seen and ear has not heard—this mystery of what God has in store for those who love him. So let's listen to the reading, and then we'll back up and try to unpack what Paul's saying here to the Corinthians. Chapter 2, verse 6 says this:

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man conceived,

what God has prepared for those who love him,”

God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.¹

So the lectionary stops there. What is this passage talking about? What’s Paul talking about here? Well, as I mentioned in the beginning, he’s continuing this contrast between the worldly wisdom of philosophers—with which the people of Corinth would have been familiar just by virtue of being Greek—with the secret wisdom of God that Paul’s imparting here. And so the first thing I want to highlight here is, when Paul says the word wisdom, *sophia* is just the standard Greek word for wisdom. But notice Paul describes Christianity here, in a sense, as a kind of philosophy. He has a wisdom to bring to them. But it’s not a worldly wisdom; it’s a secret wisdom. It’s not a wisdom of this age, but it’s a secret and hidden wisdom of God.

Now why do I make that first point? Well, the one reason I want to emphasize it is because this is not how we think about Christianity today. If you look at most Christian circles today, whether it be Catholic or Protestant...this is not true so much of Eastern Catholics, in Eastern Orthodox. But in the west in particular, we don’t tend to think of Christianity as having a secret wisdom. Did any of your catechism teachers ever tell you, “Okay, now I’m going to tell you the secret wisdom of the Church’s faith”? No. Because for so many of us, the faith is something that we receive from our parents...because our experience of faith is part of the local institution of the parish or the diocese or the Catholic school, those worldly institutions can sometimes give us the impression that Christianity is just one more religion, one more human expression of the religious search for God that happens to manifest itself in western Europe and western Christianity and the United States and western culture. And it’s one of many different traditions—faith traditions—that people have throughout the world, which happens to give allegiance to this man, Jesus of Nazareth...you know, the Christ.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

We can think of Christianity as just another religion rather than a secret philosophy, a secret wisdom—that there’s some mysterious element to Christianity, that there’s something hidden about Christianity, that there’s something that’s imparted to the wise that not everybody in the world is going to understand. That’s how Paul conceptualized the Gospel. Of course, he always preached the Gospel to anyone who would hear it, but he also recognized that there were levels of understanding. And he’s going to get to this in the letter to the Corinthians...that some people are still at the level of infants. They have an understanding of the Gospel, but it’s pretty minimal; it’s pretty basic. They’re at the baby level, the infant level.

And then there are other people—as Paul mentions here—who are mature. And what he means by that is not just physically mature or intellectually mature. He means spiritually mature. He means that there are aspects of the Gospel that are so mysterious that you really can’t grasp them at the first stages of faith. They need to be imparted to you. You need to have a divine wisdom to grasp these supernatural mysteries—this secret wisdom, this hidden wisdom of God—which is, in a sense, infinitely superior and infinitely transcendent to the human wisdom of the philosophers of this world. And that’s what he wants to impart to the Corinthians. He wants to give them this wisdom of God that’s not of the wisdom of this world, but the secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before all ages for our glorification.

So in other words, it’s similar to the mystery we’ve seen elsewhere Paul talk about. Something that God has been having as part of His plan for the beginning, but which only recently has been unveiled, has been revealed to those who have the eyes to see through supernatural faith.

Okay, so what is that wisdom? Notice what he says, second point:

...it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.

Alright, now buckle up here. I’m trying to keep myself to a minimum. I don’t want to go too far. But whenever Paul uses the terminology “this age,” don’t blow past that too quickly. That is a technical term. It’s something that he’s drawing on the

Judaism of his day and Jewish cosmology—in other words, just theology of the world—to refer to what I would call the “old creation.”

Okay, what do I mean? Well, as we’ll see over the course of our study of Paul, Paul operates out of a first century Jewish cosmology—a theology of the world—and then first century eschatology, an expectation of the end. And in Jewish eschatology, there was a concept of what scholars call “the two worlds” or “the two ages.” In rabbinic literature, the Hebrew expressions are “this age,” the *ha olam haza*, this age...and then the “age to come,” *ha olam habah*. It can also be translated as “this world” or “the world to come.” And “this age” or “this world” refers to the present sphere of reality, the visible creation—the heavens, the earth, the land, the sea, the sky, the stars—the visible world that we all live in, but which is fallen, which has sin in it, and which is under the power of wicked forces...like the demonic spirits within the world. That Jewish cosmology of “this age” speaks about this fallen world, this fallen universe.

But then there’s an expectation in Judaism that there is also a future age to come, the “age to come” or the “world to come,” which I refer to as the New Creation, in which God will take this fallen world and make it anew...into a new heavens and a new earth. And so what Paul is doing here is he’s introducing the Corinthians to this idea of “this age” and the fact that the rulers of this fallen age...they have a wisdom, yes, but they don’t understand the mystery of what God has in store for those who love Him. The mystery of the glorification that’s going to take place at the resurrection of the dead and in the New Creation.

So in standard Jewish eschatology, what the expectation was—just as a kind of basic rule—that this age would one day pass away to be replaced by the age or the world to come...and that world to come would be a new creation. And one of the expectations linked with that was the resurrection of the dead. In other words, there would be a final judgment and a final resurrection, and the righteous would live forever in their bodies in a new creation, in a new heavens and a new earth, which would be called the “world to come”—*ha olam habah*.

So what Paul’s doing here in Corinthians is he’s saying to them, “Look, the rulers and the wise of this age, like the kings and the philosophers, they didn’t get it.

They missed it. They didn't understand who Jesus was. What I'm going to tell you is a secret wisdom, a truth that none of the rulers of this world understood, because if they had understood it...

...they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:8b)

Notice here, Paul doesn't say, "they crucified Jesus of Nazareth" or even "they crucified the Christ." He says they "crucified the Lord of glory." And now the Greek word here for "Lord" is *kyrios*. And this is the most frequently used term in the Jewish Old Testament and the Greek Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures—for God, for the Lord. So here Paul is using a term that gets frequently applied to the divine Lord in the Jewish Scriptures, but he's applying it to Christ. Now it is true that that term can also be used to refer to earthly lords. For example, Caesar himself could be called *kyrios*. He could be called the lord. So there's a contrast being set up here between the lords of this world (who didn't recognize who Jesus was) and then the Lord of glory.

What's the Lord of glory? He's the one who's the ruler of the age to come, the world to come. See, His identity was hidden from the rulers of this age. And although Paul doesn't make explicit who he has in mind here, you can imagine him thinking here both of the leaders...the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, who played a role in charging Jesus with blasphemy and handing him over to the Romans, but he's especially focused on the Roman rulers, the Roman lords. The Roman rulers like Pontius Pilate himself, who was the one who actually carried out the crucifixion of Jesus. So what he's showing here is that the lords of this age did not recognize the identity of Jesus. It was secret. It was hidden from them. If they would have recognized it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Now I'm going to come back to that at the end of the video in just a minute and kind of answer the frequently asked question, "Well, why didn't they know who He was?" or "Did they know who He was?" To what extent did they grasp the identity of Jesus and to what extent did they miss it or not be able to see it?

I'll treat that at the end, but for now I just want you to follow the logic of Paul's thought here. So he's saying none of the rulers of this fallen world understood

God's plan. If they would have, they wouldn't have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written...and here he quotes two famous texts from Isaiah. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what God has in store for those who love Him.

Those two passages—if you go back, it's a kind of pastiche of two texts from Isaiah. And Paul will frequently do this. Sometimes when he quotes the Old Testament, he'll take a verse from one text and a verse from another text, and he'll mold them together and make them into a new text. Now you might think, well, why does he treat the Scriptures that way? If one of my students did that on a term paper, I'd take off points, because you're taking the text out of context. But remember, in first century Judaism, that was actually something very common, because they didn't just see the Bible as a human document or a collection of human documents. They saw it as inspired Scripture. So although it was authored by different human beings in history and time, ultimately the divine author, the primary author is God. So there's a kind of supernatural unity to this humanly diverse set of books.

So in rabbinic interpretation of Jewish Scripture, it was very common to take one verse of Scripture and juxtapose it with another verse of Scripture and put it together, because they're both authored by the same God. There's a kind of unity of authorship there. And Paul follows that method of rabbinic interpretation here—or he exemplifies it, actually. He's one of the earliest witnesses to it. So he takes a verse from Isaiah 64:4 and he blends it with Isaiah 65:17.

Why does he do that? Well, if you read through the full context of Isaiah 64 and 65, the context of the verses Paul is giving us here is nothing other than a prophecy of the world to come—although Isaiah doesn't use that language. Isaiah uses the language of a new Heavens and a new Earth. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you the quote that Paul uses, but I'm going to back it up and put it in context. So just listen to the context of the text he's quoting. In Isaiah chapter 64:1,4, this is what Isaiah is speaking of—quote, he's addressing God here:

O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at thy presence...

From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides thee,
who works for those who wait for him.

And if you skip down to chapter 65, verse 17...if you keep reading the oracle of Isaiah, it climaxes in this declaration:

“For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth;
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind.

There’s that language of Paul, it hasn’t entered into the mind or heart of man what God has in store for us.

Okay, so what’s all this about? What do you mean, Dr. Pitre? The upshot is this. Paul takes two lines from the end of the book of Isaiah, and he doesn’t just evoke their content. He’s also expecting you to go back and look at the context. He’s evoking the whole context. And the context of the verses that Paul’s quoting here is Isaiah’s famous prophecy of the new Heavens and the new Earth, and of God coming down from Heaven:

O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down...

...to earth and make a new Heavens and a new Earth.

So, what’s the upshot? What’s the point of that? The point of that is this. Paul is communicating to the Corinthians—and this is going to be really central for the whole rest of the letter—that the secret wisdom of the Gospel, the secret wisdom, the secret message of the Good News in Christ, is that the new Heavens and the new Earth that Isaiah spoke about and the coming of God from Heaven to Earth that Isaiah prophesied about has taken place in the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Lord of glory who has come down into the world—into this world, which is ruled by the Romans and full of sin and full of demonic powers—and

brought the beginning of a new world, the beginning of the New Creation...the inauguration of a new Heavens and a new Earth which began with His resurrection on Easter Sunday, which began with the empty tomb. And that's what God (that Paul says) has revealed to us—meaning me and you and Corinthians—through the Spirit. So the Holy Spirit has revealed this mystery of the coming of God and the redemption of the world in Christ Jesus.

So, that's the Good News. And that idea of this world and the world to come, the old creation and the new creation, is going to be essential for understanding the letters of Paul over the next 3-year cycle of reading through all the letters of Paul. If you can understand that Paul sees reality as having two overlapping spheres—this fallen world that we live in and then the New Creation, the world to come, that Christ has brought into the world, ushered into the world in which we also dwell. In a sense, we live in both worlds, this world and the world to come—the old creation and the new creation. We belong to both in different ways. If you can understand that he sees reality through those lenses, you're going to understand his theology. I promise you. If you stay with us, I'll come back to this idea of the old and new creation over and over again. He begins his letter to the Corinthians with it, because that's really the mystery of what's going on here, is that although it looks like we're just still living in this world of sin...it looks like this world is the same as it was at the time of Caesar. The reality is that the Lord of glory has come into the world and that the rulers of this world didn't see Him, and they crucified Him. And precisely through His crucifixion, He brought in the New Creation. He ushered in the New Creation with His resurrection and His ascension into Heaven, in which we can all participate.

Okay, in closing, I'd like to end with something from the living tradition here. One of the questions I get asked whenever I cover this text or other texts in the Gospels is: "Well, Dr. Pitre, did the leaders in Jerusalem—did the Sanhedrin, did Pontius Pilate—did they know who Jesus was when they crucified Him? What does Paul mean when he says if they would have known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory?"

Well, it's fascinating. This is one of those cases where I can't recommend highly enough to go back to the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. And here I bring one

of my favorite books for a little show and tell. This is a little book called St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. It's five volumes, as you can see. There's a lot here. And although sometimes people are a little put off by the *Summa* because it's so long, actually, if you're pressed for time on theological questions, the *Summa* is where you want to go. Because Thomas will often give very concise answers to very complex theological questions. So the kind of questions that take many modern theologians a whole book to answer, Thomas will answer in a page or two. And that's why the *Summa* means the summary of theology. It's really a summary treatment of all these questions.

So one of the questions he deals with here actually has to do with the text for today from 1 Corinthians 2. And it's on the question of whether the persecutors of Jesus knew who He was. So let's read what St. Thomas says and see how he answers that question. This is from the *Summa Theologica*, part 3, question 47, article 5. And Thomas Aquinas says this:

It seems that Christ's persecutors did not know who He was...

And he gives some reasons for that, which I just skipped over. But he says:

On the contrary, It is written (1 Cor. 2:8): If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. And (Acts 3:17), Peter, addressing the Jews, says: I know that you did it through ignorance, as did also your rulers. Likewise the Lord hanging upon the cross said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34).

So Thomas says:

I answer that, Among the Jews some were elders, and others of lesser degree. Now according to [one] author, the elders, who were called rulers, knew, as did also the devils, that He was the Christ promised in the Law: for they saw all the signs in Him which the prophets said would come to pass: but they did not know the mystery of His Godhead. Consequently the

Apostle says: If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.²

So notice, what is Thomas saying here? Classic Thomas. He's saying yes and no. On the one hand, Thomas is saying they did and they should have known He was the Messiah, because they could have known from the reading of Scripture that He had fulfilled certain prophecies that established His identity as the long awaited Messiah. What they could not know, however—simply from reading the Scripture and simply from the use of their reason, St. Thomas says—was the mystery of His Godhead.

In other words, the leaders and the rulers should have known that He was the long awaited Messiah; He was the king. But what they could not know—apart from grace—was that He was God made man. And if you remember, when Peter says:

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)

What does Jesus say to him?

“...flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17)

So that's the mystery that Paul's getting at in 1 Corinthians 2. It's the mystery of the fact that the one that they crucified wasn't just the Messiah but was the Lord of glory Himself. That is the secret of Christianity. That's the hidden wisdom of God.

² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt III, Q. 47, Art. 5