

Paul and the Mystery of God (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time)

Romans 11:33-36—Paul and the Inscrutable God

³³ *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!* How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” ³⁵ “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things.* To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

1. Wisdom in Mystery:

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 *the wisdom of God in mystery* (Greek, *mysterion*), which God decreed before the ages for our glorification... [A]s 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 Corinthians 2:6-10)

2. The Jewish Scriptures:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure
and weighed the mountains in scales
and the hills in a balance?
*Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,
or as his counselor has instructed him?* (Isaiah 40:12-13)

Look at the heavens, and see;
and behold the clouds, which are higher than you...
If you are righteous, *what do you give to him;*
or what does he receive from your hand? (Job 35:5, 7)

Who has given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine. (Job 41:11)

3. God the Creator: “all things” (Greek *ta panta*) are from, through, and for God

The Living Tradition

Catechism: Of all the divine attributes, only God’s omnipotence is named in the Creed: to

confess this power has great bearing on our lives. We believe that his might is *universal*, for God who created everything also rules everything and can do everything. God’s power is *loving*, for he is our Father, and *mysterious*, for only faith can discern it when it “is made perfect in weakness.” (CCC 268)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1. Why does Paul say that God’s ways are “unsearchable” or “inscrutable”? How does this relate to Paul’s teaching on the “mystery” of God’s wisdom?

2. What does it mean to say God is “omnipotent” or “all-powerful”? Why does this doctrine matter?

For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P.; eds. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón; Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute, 2012).
2. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 11 (ed. Philip Schaff; repr.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994).