

Homily for November 13, 2021

***Reading the text from two points of view***

Today's first reading is from the last two chapters of the Wisdom of Solomon. The first paragraph is from chapter 18 and the second paragraph from chapter 19. This book is the last book written in the Hebrew Bible, dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century or maybe 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. The passage we heard today is a gem and is a great example of a text that can be read in its literal context and then be interpreted spiritually. So today I want to read Wisdom from two points of view, literally and spiritually.

It is helpful to know that from chapter 12 to chapter 19 of the Wisdom of Solomon we are hearing a retelling of the story of Israel. The section studies the work of Wisdom in guiding history from Adam to Moses and into the Exodus journey toward Canaan. At every stage, God intervened to advance his deliverance of his people, the Jews. Today's passage, when read literally, is a poetic retelling of the Passover, the story at the heart of Jewish identity. With this in mind, listen again to the opening verses:

*For while gentle silence enveloped all things,  
and night in its swift course was now half gone,  
15 your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne,  
into the midst of the land that was doomed,  
a stern warrior  
16 carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command,  
and stood and filled all things with death,  
and touched heaven while standing on the earth. <sup>1</sup>*

This is the poetic version of Exodus 12. It is the night when the angel of death entered the land of Egypt as a stern warrior and slay the first born male of every living creature and thereby filled all things with death.

But now listen to this reading through a spiritual lens, looking beyond its literal significance to it as an anticipation of the Nativity. Can you hear now that Jesus is the all-powerful word leaping from heaven – from the royal throne and came to a land that was doomed. But rather than administering death to others, on the Cross he touches heaven while standing on earth, and takes into his very body death in its entirety.

Now with these two lenses in place listen to the next part of our reading:

*<sup>6</sup> For the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew,  
complying with your commands,  
so that your children might be kept unharmed.  
<sup>7</sup> The cloud was seen overshadowing the camp,*

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (Wis 18:14–16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

*and dry land emerging where water had stood before,  
an unhindered way out of the Red Sea,  
and a grassy plain out of the raging waves,  
8 where those protected by your hand passed through as one nation,  
after gazing on marvelous wonders.  
9 For they ranged like horses,  
and leaped like lambs,  
praising you, O Lord, who delivered them. 2*

Literally this is describing what we read in Exodus 14 and 15, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Spiritually it is a way for us to understand what it means to be followers of Jesus. We too are, so to speak, in the desert of this world. By the cross of Jesus we have been delivered from the dominion of sin and the devil and celebrate God's protective care while we continue our journey towards our heavenly homeland.

I so appreciate the way the writer describes the protection of the hand of God as "they passed through as one nation gazing on the marvelous wonders of God".

This is indeed what we do at every Mass, gathered here with those from every nation on earth, and those already in the heavenly Jerusalem, we hear again the wonders of God as proclaimed in scripture and explained and applied in the homily. This allows us to then raise our voices in praise of God who is delivering us from all that could destroy us so that we can now pray our Collect for today with even greater meaning:

*O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy, bestow in abundance your mercy upon us and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may use the good things that pass in such a way as to hold fast even now to those that ever endure.*

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (Wis 19:6–9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.