

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Adapted from 'Word of God'

THINE IS THE POWER This phrase has the force and fullness of English that is both grammatically and phonetically right. It is from the doxology with which Protestants conclude the Lord's Prayer. The *Didache* or "Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles," a manual of Christian morals and worship of the first or second century, adds "For thine is the power and the glory for ever." We Catholics, after we have said the Our Father "in the words our Savior gave us" respond with the phrase reversed and thus weakened: "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. "The longer doxology is found in the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople in the latter part of the fourth century. To return to our brief phrase, let us savor its meaning by emphasizing the definite article: Thine is THE power. What is THE power, above which there exists none greater? It is the power to be merciful, clement, forbearing. Such power is the attribute of perfect Fatherhood which is only in God. All other kinds of power are weakness in comparison. What godless ruler dare pardon his enemies? He is too weak to do that and so, in order to feel secure, he must destroy them. But God, according to the first reading of today, disposes of such strength that he is "mild in judgment" and governs "with great lenience" (Wis 12:18). This is especially well said by the collect of the twenty-sixth Sunday of the Year: *Deus, qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas...* which means "God, who manifesteth to the utmost thy omnipotence by pardoning and being merciful..." The ICEL version—"Father, you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness..." omits the *maxime* (to the utmost).

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

These verses are in praise of the justice and mercy of God's power. The Latin text has *virtus* throughout which radically means "strength"—such is the word used in the JB and RSVC versions. Knox translates verse 16 thus: "of all justice, thy power is the true source." Lord Acton's famous aphorism notes how difficult it is for human wielders of power to practice justice at the same time: "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." We are so accustomed to living in a world in which, at all stages of history, there has been so much dissociation between power and justice and between power and mercy that we have to ponder slowly such a passage of Wisdom as this, especially the last two verses: "Thou who art sovereign in strength dost judge with mildness, and with great forbearance thou dost govern us; for thou hast power to act whenever thou dost choose" (18, RSVC) and "Two lessons thy people were to learn from these dealings of thine;

ever should justice and mercy go hand in hand, never should thy own children despair of forestalling thy justice by repentance" (19, K).

Romans 8:26-27

We become beneficiaries of God's power by believing in the Gospel which, says Paul, is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom 1:16). Such is the general theme of this epistle. God's saving power "justifies" us, that is, it frees us from sin and death (chs 1 to 5) and "sanctifies" us, that is, gives us birth and growth as children of God (chs 6 to 8). "Our weakness" of which Paul speaks in the passage we read today is that of our infancy. Our new life in Christ has only recently begun. And we are as uncomprehending and as inarticulate as infants. As a child begins to try to speak, his parents try to help to turn its babblings into real words and to show it what the words mean. Similarly, the Spirit comes "to help us in our weakness" and articulate the words which we are trying to form and make them convey real meaning to the Father. Let us dwell for a moment on the first of the petitions we formulate in the prayer our Lord has taught us: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..." This must be a personal plea rising from the heart of each of us. What I am praying for is that, as I grow as a child of God, I will become a credit to my heavenly Father. Each person is unique which means that each person can say something about God, can manifest in his life something about God's glory, that no other created being can, not even an angel. But how can I know what is my unique way of hallowing my Father's name? in my infantile weakness, I am incoherent. I can only babble. So "the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words, and God who knows everything in our hearts knows perfectly well what he means..."

Matthew 13:24-43

The parable of the wheat and cockle (darnel, JB; tares, K; weeds, RSVC) shows that the conflict between good and evil will continue until the end of the world. This is contrary to the propaganda of Gnostic revolutionaries that what they call "good" will triumph by brute force over what they call "evil" before the end of time. To put it in another way, history will culminate in a final age of bliss on earth, thanks to success of Gnostic power politics. But God is master of his creation and of events. His will in regard to good and evil is: "Let them both grow until the harvest," that is, until the end of time.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Wisdom 12:13-19

Romans 8:26-27

Matthew 13:24-43

July 20, 2014

莠 子 的 比 喻

林 思 川 神 父

本主日的福音仍是選自瑪竇福音第十三章中的天國的比喻。首先是三個耶穌公開對群眾說的比喻：莠子的比喻(24-30) 芥菜子和酵母的比喻(31-33)；最後是耶穌私下為門徒解釋莠子的比喻(36-43)。

莠子的比喻(24-30)

這個比喻相當符合巴勒斯坦農業生活的實際情況。在耶穌的時代，農人按著節氣在自己的田中播下好種子，但之後卻常常在田中發現莠子。這是一種特殊的雜草，剛剛長出來的時候，外形和麥子相似，難以區分。但是等到成熟時，人們卻可輕易的將其由麥子中辨別出來，因為莠子所結的果實是黑色的，和金黃的麥穗截然不同。因此，農田的主人要求僕人們暫時別管莠子，等到收成之時再處理這些雜草。在收割時人們用鐮刀割下麥子和莠子，同時將二者分開。工人把莠子集中並綁在一起，以便後來燃燒，這些雜草是當時很好的燃料；而麥子則將被收入糧倉存放，供日後食用。

耶穌的比喻說好種子已被撒在田中，意思是一切人都受邀進入天主的國。耶穌宣講天國喜訊並非只針對某些特定的人，祂傳福音的對象是所有的人；但是耶穌並非天真的理想主義者，祂清楚知道，反對天國的邪惡勢力的存在。祂邀請一切人進入天國，不斷給予人悔改的機會；但是，那些不悔改的人最終必將遭受審判(瑪十一 20-24)，善人和惡人的結局絕對不同(瑪二五 32-46)。整個比喻強調的重點就是，莠子和麥子終究將被區別開來，各自有其不同的命運。被燃燒的莠子象徵罪人將遭受的審判，而善人將進入天父的家，有如麥子被收入糧倉。

芥菜子和酵母的比喻(31-33)

一個人在田裡撒下一粒小小的芥菜子，它竟然長成一棵枝葉茂盛的大樹，甚至小鳥也在這樹上築巢棲息；一個女人只用了一點點的酵母，卻使大量麵團發酵。「芥菜子和酵母」這兩個非常簡短的比喻，應該被看做一個雙重的比喻，因為它們表達一個相同的觀點：看來毫不喜眼的「開始」，卻產生令人難以置信的重大「結果」。比喻的目的只在於強調開始和結果之間強烈的對立性，至於事件的「發展」過程則完全不談。聆聽比喻的人經驗到一個在起初完全不能想像的重大成果，因而肯定這一切必然來自於天主的力量。

這兩個比喻說明：耶穌的宣講和工作，乍看之下微不足道，但是天主的國卻已在其中露出曙光，雖然只是一抹微弱亮光，天國的圓滿實現卻已隱藏於其中。對初期教會的基督徒而言，這兩個比喻的功能在於鼓勵他們堅持信仰，雖然他們只是毫不喜眼「小小羊群」，但是福音必將籍着他們而傳遍天下。

公開比喻的結論(34-35)

耶穌說比喻的目的，原本在於向一切人指出通往天國之路，但對固執不信的人而言，比喻則變成隱密的語言，使他們無法瞭解其中含意。瑪竇引用詠七八 2 的話，來說明這個事實。福音作者把聖詠的話當作先知的宣告，這些話在耶穌身上應驗了。耶穌宣講的就是「創世以來的隱密事」，亦即「上主的光榮威能，和祂所施展的奇蹟異行」（詠七八 4）。但是只有相信的人，才能由耶穌的宣講中看見天國業已降臨。

莠子比喻的解釋(36-43)

「莠子比喻」的解釋和「撒種比喻」的解釋一樣，都是初期教會把比喻運用在福傳宣講中的結果。這段解釋經文分為兩段：37-39 節是寓意性的解釋，40-43 節則是勸勉信仰團體善度信仰生活，以免遭受毀滅性的處罰。

「田地象徵世界」，這個解釋表現出瑪竇福音中常見的普世性幅度(瑪五 14；十八；二六 13)。人子在全世界撒下好種子，但邪惡的魔鬼卻在世上處處和人子作對。世界上的確有惡人存在，但到了世界終結之時，天使將把惡人篩揀出來，扔到地獄之中，在那裡只有哀號和切齒。

這個解釋反映出初期基督徒的教會觀和世界觀。因為田地代表「世界」，所以這個比喻與所指涉的範圍大於「教會」。人子的國度遠遠超越教會團體，教會屬於世界的一部分。就如信仰團體中同時含有好人與壞人一樣，邪惡的勢力事實上也是存在於世界上的，但是它們最後終將被擊潰。

福音作者主要所關心的畢竟是教會團體，瑪竇非常務實的指出邪惡勢力也侵入了教會，教會中有些成員過著不道德的生活，不守法律並引人犯罪，這些邪惡的勢力在世末之時將更為強大。但是，基督徒不必因此而憂心，因為這些不配在教會內生活的人，也必將被排除在圓滿的天國之外。只要基督徒在生活中忠於信仰，在末世之時他們必能和義人一起進入天國。

摘自「教友生活周刊」