

22nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C” *What is too sublime for you, seek not*
August 31-September 1, 2019 Cathedral of Saint Paul
Readings: Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24; Luke 14:7-14

Visiting the State Fair provides a chance to expand my city horizons a bit, and this is good. But as I visited various booths, I quickly noted how little I knew about animals, in visiting with the sheep farmers or goats, tractors or trailers, farm implements or even the types of fish in the DNR Pond. There is so much that I do not know.

According to our first reading today, humility gives you a true estimate of yourself so that you will do what should be done and avoid what is beyond your understanding and strength. Surprisingly, a few verses are left out of the reading and I think it would make more sense to have them in there. “In matters that are beyond you do not meddle, when you have been shown more than you can understand.”

We are cautioned against seeking those things that are too sublime for us. It appears that the warning today has to do with needing to stay in our lane, to use a popular phrase. It is a tough call because we do not conceive of our Lord asking us to stop learning. But more likely, it is a warning to those whose intellectual pride could be their downfall.

I recall the story of Archbishop Ireland who, anxious for the first Mass after nine years of construction of this Cathedral, insisted that the floor had settled. The workers should put the pews in place. Well, the floor had not settled, and we have the dip in the floor to prove it. Stay in your lane.

Nor ought this reading be used to justify telling the lay faithful to be unconcerned about theology or Church practice, as if, “Don’t concern yourself, we have it under control.” We know that to be a dangerous attitude. Truly, an educated laity only strengthens the Church. At the same time, sometimes a little knowledge is dangerous; we may know just enough to think that we possess a degree of knowledge far beyond the actual reality. We can embarrass ourselves or lose credibility.

Beyond all that, there is another consideration. Are we seeking to know the ways of God, to arrogate to ourselves things that properly belong to Him? Have we tried to remove the mystery from God or the bible? In his monumental encyclical on modern biblical studies, Pope Pius XII issued *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943 to address the significant advances in understanding the biblical texts better.

Though he endorsed many new approaches to the study of biblical texts and manuscripts, including understanding the intentions of the authors, he also cautioned about the difficulties inherent in Sacred Scripture. He wrote about the impatience of some who cannot find their wished-for solution in Scripture, noting the wisdom of Augustine, noting that:

“...God wished difficulties to be scattered through the Sacred Books inspired by Him, in order that we might be urged to read and scrutinize them more intently, and, experiencing in a salutary manner our own limitations, we might be exercised in due submission of mind.¹

In short, let us keep the mystery. Let us embrace our limits, even as we seek greater knowledge and understanding. Above all, let God be God. The impatience we display is regrettable and the hubris we exhibit is both unbelievable and demonstrably unjustified. We look at past generations as if they knew nothing in comparison to us, we the enlightened ones.

Our reading from Hebrews contrasts two groups of people: the Israelites gathered for the sealing of the Covenant and the promulgation of the Law, and those gathered with Jesus at Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. At the end of time, God will dwell among us, and the visible universe will be transformed, restored to its original state, and at the service of the just.²

¹ Pope Pius XII, *DIVINO AFFLANTE SPIRITU*, paragraph #45 (30 September 1943). St. Augustine, *Epist.* 149 ad Paulinum, n. 34 (PL 33, col. 644); *De diversis quaestionibus*, q. 53, n. 2 (ib. XL, col. 36); *Enarr. in Ps.* 146, n. 12

² (CCC# 1044, 1047).

Our Gospel tells the parable of a wedding in which the moral of the story is that when we take the lesser place, we will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. Our earthly journey is leading somewhere beautiful, but we also are called to help bring about that Kingdom of Righteousness by seeing our earthly life, not only as a preparation, but as a foretaste.

Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on to help bring about God's kingdom on earth.

With Labor Day weekend upon us, our thoughts invariably turn to the future, a new season a new academic year. Time marches forward and in faith we can see that time moves towards a purpose, not aimlessly, but it marches towards the heavenly homeland to which we are called.

Let us pray for the grace to see that He is with us on this journey, and amidst all the changes in our lives, our loving Father is the constant, guiding us along the path.