

Sixteenth Sunday *per annum*

Year A, 2026

Wis 12:13, 16-19 Rom 8:26-27

Ps 86

Mt 13:24-43

The righteous power of God

For the homily this Sunday, I want to reflect with you on the first three readings given for today's Mass. I say three readings because the responsorial psalm is a reading from the scriptures, even though we don't often think of it as such.

So first, from the book of Wisdom, which is the last of the books of the Old Testament. It was composed probably about fifty or so years before the birth of Christ by a Greek-speaking Jewish scholar in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, then one of the most cosmopolitan and cultured cities in the world. The author of the book of Wisdom had a profound knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures – the Pentateuch, the prophets, the psalms, the historical books, all the Old Testament. His teachings are therefore based on a lifetime of careful study of and prayer with the Hebrew scriptures.

The opening line of Wisdom is this: *"Love righteousness ... think of the Lord in goodness, and seek him in integrity of heart."* Righteousness, goodness, integrity. What we must *love*: the will. What we must *think*: the intellect. What we must *seek*: the spirit. Wisdom is a book of moral instruction: how we are to be like God in righteousness, goodness, and integrity. Be holy as God is holy (Lev 19:2). Be

perfect as God is perfect (Mt 5:48). Be merciful, as God is merciful (Lk 6:36).

With this in mind, let's reflect on two lines from the passage given to us today. The first teaches us something about God; it is an address to God: *"But though you [O God] are master of might, you judge with clemency, and with much lenience you govern us."* Wisdom teaches us that the perfection of God's power is shown by his clemency, his lenience. Now clemency is a disposition toward mercy, especially toward moderating the severity of punishment that is due. And it is under this title that God is addressed in the opening line of the first Eucharistic Prayer, the Roman Canon: *Te igitur, clementissime Pater...* – "To you, therefore, most merciful Father, we make humble prayer and petition." Most clement Father, most forgiving Father, most pardoning Father, most lenient Father, most merciful Father. This is the perfection of divine power: that God judges justly, meaning with mercy, clemency.

In the second passage from Wisdom, we learn that, by his own example, God teaches his people *"that those who are just must be kind."* This is for our moral instruction. If we are to be righteous as God is righteous, then it follows that we must be kind, especially toward those who have most need of kindness, mercy, leniency, forbearance, tolerance, pardon, clemency, which means toward those who have wronged us, somehow, to those who owe us, somehow.

To the degree that we are lacking in such kindness, we cannot be said to be righteous. To sinners, you see, God showed love, sending his Son to die for us while we were yet sinners, in rebellion against him, deserving of condemnation (Rom 5:8). And yet, God extended the possibility of pardon, mercy, clemency. By all rights, God could have punished us for our sin. But to demonstrate his righteousness, God pardoned, forgave. He showed himself to be clement.

This then is the kindness of God that we are bound to imitate. The human power to punish, to demand the satisfaction of our rights, must follow the divine example, where clemency demonstrates righteousness and where power is perfected through forgiveness.

The psalm, responding to the themes in the first reading, extols qualities in God that our readings over the past several weeks have been brining to the fore. *"You, O LORD, are good and forgiving, abounding in kindness to all who call upon you."* And a passage that by now we should practically know by heart: *"You, O LORD, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity."* The divine response to our waywardness and rebellion is not wrath and retribution, but mercy and forgiveness. In this God demonstrates his goodness, shows what true righteousness consists in. There is a divine *patience* at work that redounds to God's glory. God suffers our sinfulness and out of love for us, pardons, forgives. God is abounding in kindness.

In the second reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, the Apostle makes mention of a problem faced by anyone who takes the spiritual life seriously: how am I to pray? In Paul's words: "*we do not know how to pray as we ought.*" This ignorance on our part, this ineptitude, does not repel God or earn his rebuke. Rather it draws God near to us to supply for our lack of understanding. "*The Spirit too comes to our aid...*" and "*intercedes with inexpressible groanings*" for those who seek God, in whose hearts are a true desire for God.

In the eleventh chapter of Luke's gospel, the disciples saw Jesus at prayer, and when he was finished praying, one of them asked him, "*Lord, teach us to pray...*" And then Jesus taught them the Lord's prayer, in which they would call upon God as their own father. Further, Jesus taught them in that same prayer to ask for forgiveness: "*forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are in debt to us*" (Mt 6:12). That is a literal rendering of the Lord's prayer from Matthew's gospel. How I forgive those who are in debt to me, this is how I am asking God to forgive me in my debt to him. So if I suspect that I am in God's debt, that I owe God something, and if I want that debt to be canceled, forgiven, then I must cancel the debts of those who owe me. This is what and how Jesus teaches us to pray about forgiveness.

We don't know how to pray as we ought? "*The Spirit too*" teaches us, St Paul says. That little word "*too*" is important. Jesus himself was the first teacher, and now "*the Spirit too*" comes to the aid of our weakness. What we learn from this is that prayer is not only

something that we do, but it is something that God himself does in us. Our prayer is to the Father, using words given to us by the Son, and with an interior disposition shaped by the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for us as God searches our hearts and as we search for God. We are not alone in our prayer; both the Son and the Spirit teach us how to pray and both are actually at work in us in our prayer to the Father.

If you want to pray – and by prayer we mean to draw close to God – then you must become more and more like God, who in his might and power is kind, merciful, forgiving, clement. And as God draws you closer to him in prayer, he means to make you more and more like him. This is, to use Paul's words, "*the intention of the Spirit*," as the Spirit intercedes for us according to God's will. God's will for us is to be like him, righteous in all things, to truly be "*the holy ones*" so that the words of Wisdom might be fulfilled in us: "*those who are just must be kind.*"

Going back to what Jesus teaches us in the Lord's prayer, the forgiveness of debt, whether financial or moral debt, is one of the greatest kindnesses that exists. If you don't know how to pray, start there. Start by forgiving debts, canceling them out, setting others free from whatever they owe you. Start with the old debts. Set others free. Set yourself free from having to hold on to those *accounts*, from having to keep track of the debt and its "accumulated interest."

Such accounting is hard. It is mentally, morally, emotionally, and spiritually draining. Such accounting hardens our hearts the longer we hold on to the debts we are owed. Here's how to pray, how to make your prayer a reality: cancel the debts. Tear them up. Release others and yourself. Act in this way and you will show yourself to be truly wise and to be like God – holy, perfect, and merciful .

Is this hard for you to do, the canceling of debts owed to you, the forgiveness of wrongs that should be made up to you? Take courage, *"The Spirit comes to the aid of [your] weakness."* Let God worry about the reckoning. As for you, it is enough to fulfill the commands that open the book of Wisdom: *"Love righteousness ... think of the Lord in goodness, and seek him in integrity of heart."*