

Sancta Sophia (article)

Epistle: Proverbs chapter 8

In the book of Proverbs, there are a series of lessons presented to the reader. Our reading today is taken from the 13th lesson (ch. 8:1-36). Proverbs is part of the Wisdom literature of the OT. Other books in this category include Ecclesiastes, Job, Ecclesiasticus and also the Wisdom of Solomon in the apocrypha.

The lesson is given by personified wisdom herself. Wisdom pleads with the reader to receive her, and declares the treasures of her reward (vv4-21). Wisdom's part in creation is then set forth (vv22-31), and at the end of this lesson she adds her own exhortation to cleave to her (vv32-36).

This chapter, with its personification of wisdom, was interpreted Christologically from the earliest Christian centuries, i.e. relating it to the nature of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as the personification of Wisdom. Paul, the writer to the Hebrews, and John in his gospel, see in it terms which have their full meaning only in 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:24). Theophilus of Antioch, the first Christian writer to use the word 'Trinity' of the Godhead, speaks of 'God, His Word and His Wisdom'. We may believe that the Church Fathers were justified in seeing in the personification of wisdom in this reading as a foreshadowing of that revelation made clearer in the NT of three persons in the one God. Finally we may note that our Lord Himself refers to the personified wisdom of God (Lk. 11:49) when speaking of the prophets and apostles, the mouthpieces of God's wisdom, who were consistently rejected by God's people.

And so we find here, and elsewhere in the OT, that Wisdom is personified, which is a device used by the writer and other philosophers. Actually, Wisdom is not separate from God, rather, it is an expression of God, a quality or attribute of God. Wisdom is also a desirable quality to attain in this world, and so it is here expressed in worldly terms and how we can acquire it, as well as describing its transcendental quality or attributes of the Creator and being present at Creation.

Gospel: Matthew 13:54 - 58

This selection is concerned with *belief and unbelief* as well as a brief reference to Wisdom.

What is being taught here is that the disciples' faith is a gift from the Father: he has revealed to them who Jesus is, and he has revealed it by means of the miracles of Jesus, such as two feeding-miracles, the healing of many sick people, a Gentile girl, an epileptic boy, and the transfiguration.

Matthew introduces the conception of little faith (14:31, 16:8, 17:20). He is making it very clear that the disciples were not yet perfect believers: they did not yet understand all the implications of who Jesus was, and what his work would involve for him and for them.

Jesus is rejected

Matthew then relates the rejection of Jesus in a synagogue in his own country. The congregation there think that they know him and his family, and they take offence at his words and deeds. The story appealed to Matthew for inclusion at this point, because he had been comparing Israel to fruitless ground, and weeds, and the fish that men throw away; now he shows again that the words of Jesus were justified - the people in his own country did not believe in him. They did not recognise his *wisdom* and his works as the Spirit of God; they did not know that he was the Son of God, and that his true brethren were his disciples, not his physical family. They continue in their unbelief, and so Jesus refused to do miracles there, just as he had refused

to teach them earlier in this chapter, but had spoken to them in parables which they could not understand.

The congregation at this synagogue takes offence, because their eyes had not been opened. The saying recorded here, '*A prophet is not without honour*', was a well-known proverb.

Luke chapter 8 (Trinity 9)

The eighth Sunday after Trinity has as its intent *Wisdom*. The gospel reading is taken from Luke chapter two, in which the young Jesus is found by his parents in the Temple discussing matters with the rabbis. It is presented in that week as an indication of our Lord's perspicacity and wisdom at a tender age.

To illustrate the thirty years of growth which led to the climax of his baptism, Luke records but one incident. At the age of twelve a Jewish boy became *bar mitzvah*, a son of the Law, able to accept for himself the responsibilities and obligations to which his parents had committed him by the rite of circumcision. For Jesus this occasion was celebrated by a family visit to Jerusalem for the Passover.

When the seven-day festival was over, his parents started for home along with other pilgrims, not realising that Jesus was left behind. He was taking advantage of this opportunity to learn from the rabbis in the temple courts. To Mary's mild rebuke he replied in words of great significance for our understanding of his later career: that he is here on this earth to do the work of the Father who is in heaven.

Besides becoming a *bar mitzvah* he had become intensely aware of being Son of God, and henceforth he was to live his life not merely under the Law but under the higher authority of the Father of All, and in his ministry he became the very personification of Wisdom.

Frederick A. Shade