

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Isaiah 62:1-5

NRSV

Persia has conquered Babylon and has permitted the people of Israel to return to a small parcel of land round Jerusalem. The land is ravished, and after initial elation, the people feel that God has ceased to care for them. The prophet has told of a new Zion – of a renewed city and people. The new Jerusalem will be built by foreigners (61:5); people will be more faithful to God; he will establish a pact with them that will last forever.

Now either the prophet or God tells of the cleansing of Israel's reputation ("vindication", 62:1): it will break forth with the suddenness of dawn in the desert – there one moment it is dark, and the next light. So too will her "salvation" be seen – to the extent that "all the kings" (v. 2, all nations) will see God's glory, his power, reflected in, and radiated by, Israel. When God made a pact with Abram, giving him new status as "ancestor of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:5), he changed his name. So too will God's people enjoy a new status: they will be a "royal" (v. 3) people protected by God. V. 4 tells us Israel's new status: she will become God's spouse. The image of Israel's salvation as "a burning torch" (v. 1) is reminiscent of the many torches illuminating the city on the Feast of Tabernacles, a festival like our Harvest Thanksgiving. God promises that no longer will he give Israel's harvests to her enemies (v. 8), as punishment for disobedience. God will be seen to love Israel again: a truly joyous event.

Psalms 36:5-10

NRSV

This psalm opens and closes in typical wisdom style. Vv. 1-4 tell of the "wicked", the ungodly: as the Spirit of God "speaks" in the very being of the godly, so "transgression" (personified) speaks to the ungodly. They convince themselves that God will not punish them (v. 2). They are thoroughly rotten; their ways are neither *wise* (v. 3) nor moral in God's eyes.

On the other hand, the faithful enjoy God's "love" (v. 5) and "faithfulness" (part of his covenantal pact with his people). God's integrity ("righteousness", v. 6) and justice is immense, as great as the "mighty mountains" and the "great deep". He restores, gives life to, all rational beings; he protects "all people" (v. 7). Vv. 8-10 say, using the image of a banquet, that knowing God's life-giving presence in the Temple ("your house") is the supreme experience of his love. In v. 9, to "see light" is to live. God's luminance, as encountered in the temple liturgy, dispenses good ("fountain") and enables us to live. Vv. 10-11 are a prayer: please, God, continue to love us and to restore us who are faithful at heart! Do not allow me to be oppressed by "the arrogant", the ungodly!

Early in this letter, Paul has noted that the Christians at Corinth "are not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1:7); even so, they appear to have written to him "concerning spiritual gifts" (v. 1): it seems that there are questions in the community. One gift is inspires speech. The tests for whether one speaks under the influence of the Holy Spirit are: (1) that one accepts Christ's authority and pledges obedience to him, "Jesus is Lord" (v. 3) and (2) that one does not *curse* Jesus (even under duress). Speech that fails these tests is influenced by other (*pagan*, v. 2) spirits.

"Gifts" is widely defined, and includes "services" (v. 5, *ministries*) and "activities" (v. 6, *operations*). Note the suggestion of the Trinity: "same Spirit ... same Lord ... same God" (vv. 4-6), and note also: (1) the Spirit himself is a gift of the Father; (2) Christ was sent to serve or minister; and (3) the Father is the source of all being and "activities", i.e. ways in which God's power is applied. With a common origin, all gifts are shown through the Holy Spirit, not for personal edification but "for the common good" (v. 7), for building up the Church. While the gifts in vv. 8-10 can be grouped, the precise meanings are uncertain: (1) "wisdom ... knowledge ... faith"; (2) "healing ... working of miracles ... prophecy"; (3) "discernment ... tongues ... interpretation". "Wisdom" and "knowledge" seem to be the ability to instruct; "faith" seems to be exceptionally deep faith – that God can do anything. "Discernment" is the ability to tell whether gifts genuinely come from God. "Tongues" may be unintelligible speech which needs "interpretation". Each of us receives a gift (perhaps not one listed); God chooses, not us.

John 2:1-11

NRSV

John uses symbolism extensively in his telling of the good news. He says in 20:31: "these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name". Our reading looks forward to Jesus' resurrection and glorification ("on the third day", v. 1), the Last Supper, and the messianic banquet expected at the end of time, when Christ comes again. The "mother of Jesus" appears for the first time in the gospel; the last time is when she stands at the foot of the cross. On both occasions, Jesus addresses her as "Woman" (v. 4), a title roughly equivalent to *Madam* today: Jesus is guided in his ministry only by the Father's will ("my hour ..."). Mary's words in v. 5 suggest that she believes in Jesus, as she does at the foot of the cross. Jesus has the water jars filled completely ("to the brim", v. 7) with water. In Judaism, the "rites of purification" (v. 6, washing before and after eating) were ceremonial, but in totally transforming water into wine, Jesus replaces the old (Judaism) with the new; wine is a symbol originating in Christ. In Isaiah, marriage between God and his people symbolizes the fulfilment of God's purpose for his people; here the abundance of good wine symbolizes the joy accompanying the arrival of the end of the era (as foretold in several prophetic books). John presents "signs" (v. 11) as aids to people in reaching his objectives (20:31). Jesus shows that God is present in his very nature ("his glory").