

Weekly Reading – Monday, June 22, 2009

Let's look now at the lessons for Sunday, June 28, 2009, which is the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time and Proper Eight. It will also be a Sunday that many congregations move to their "summer schedule." This week the Old Testament options come from II Samuel and Wisdom of Solomon. I will limit my comments to the former.

II Samuel 1: 1, 17 - 27

This is David's lament for Saul and his son, Jonathan. "How the mighty have fallen." It is a model of public tribute in a time of loss and tragedy. It is solemn stately, moving. Given the fact that Saul was in some sense David's adversary, it is also instructive as a political document and act. David embodies the idea of being generous in victory, even if his victory is only indirect. The rhetoric of this tribute and lament is stirring. Beyond that, what's to be said. Some have made a good bit out of David's words of affection for Jonathan in 1:26, suggesting that the two were lovers. Who knows? It hardly seems the main point of the text as a whole, and is at best conjecture. That central point seems to be honoring of great, if flawed, figures with respect and dignity. It is also a reminder that all the mighty, whoever and wherever, will one day fall as that is the nature of mortal man. As the protests unfold in Iran, the mighty there too will one day fall. Perhaps not this time, but maybe next time.

II Corinthians 8: 7 - 15

This is quite a rich text on the themes of giving, generosity, and what we often call "stewardship." Paul is urging the Corinthians to complete their offering for the church in Jerusalem. The preceding verses in the chapter are worth study and reflection, particularly vs. 5, which includes, "They gave themselves first to the Lord, then to us in keeping with God's will." This is the right order. Giving is first of all to the Lord, not just to a human cause or project. Paul is referring here to the giving of the church in Macedonia, which is to say that he is not above pointing to the example of one church to motivate another. Is there a place for "competition" in the Body of Christ? Maybe so. Paul roots his theology of giving in the generosity of God and in act of God in Christ, "who though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor." In verse 11 Paul urges the Corinthians to "finish the work," that is complete the offering which they had begun the year previously. The idea and exhortation to "finish the work," has broader application. So often we begin well but don't finish.

Mark 5: 21 - 43

This week's gospel lesson is a long one, in part because of Mark's technique of "sandwiching" one story inside another. He begins with the story of the sick 12 year old child of the synagogue ruler, then breaks away to the story of the woman with the 12 year bleeding condition, before returning to the child and the synagogue ruler. Clearly, there are a lot of "12s" going on here. What is their significance? 12 is the number of the tribes of biblical Israel. Is a New Israel being configured? Generally, when Mark interweaves two stories like this he is using one to interpret the other. With that in mind, a couple of observations. In both instances, the figure in need of help and healing is female. There's no doubt that females

rated lower on the pecking order at that time, some would say they had no rating at all. So in some sense Jesus' concern for the woman who was bleeding and the synagogue ruler's concern for his daughter both illustrate God's concern for those society may not value or value as much as others. From these a new Israel is gathered. There's more. Both the woman with the bleeding condition and the synagogue ruler take huge risks in their search for healing. The woman defies the requirement that a person with her condition not be out in public or touch a rabbi. She dares both. The synagogue ruler, by throwing himself at Jesus' feet, risks his social and religious status. Sometimes desperation can make us do terrible things. But sometimes desperation can also lead us to stop worrying about what others think and just risk it all. Seems the case here. I believe it was writer Graham Greene who said, "There is an alliance between truth and desperation." Don't quote me/ him on that without checking. But Mark stresses the power of faith and risk in healing. No risk, no healing.