

Introductions to the Readings – August 2010

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 1

First Reading: Ecclesiastes 1: 2, 2: 21-23

Ecclesiastes is one of the seven books in the Old Testament referred to as Wisdom books. Wisdom literature reflects on how to live in this world in a way that is pleasing to God. The author of this book calls himself *Qoheleth*, a term that perhaps means “teacher.” Qoheleth has a pessimistic view of life, in part because he doesn’t believe in life after death. The wisdom he teaches is that one should not be burdened by anxieties, but rather live each day as a gift from God.

Second Reading: Colossians 3: 1-5, 9-11

In our previous readings from Colossians, we have seen how Christ is the only mediator between God and the world, and how our baptism has made us one with Christ. The author will today remind us of the heights to which Christ has raised us, and then call upon us to live up to this.

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 8

First Reading: Wisdom 18: 6-9

The book of Wisdom was written by a teacher who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, a center of learning for the ancient world. He addresses his writing to a group of Jews in this city who were being tempted to abandon their religious practices and beliefs. To bolster their faith, the author speaks of the memorable night of Passover when the angel of the Lord destroyed the enemies of the Jews.

Second Reading: Hebrews 11: 1-2, 8-19

Today and for the next three Sundays, the second reading will be from the Letter to the Hebrews. This document was written by an author we do not know to a community we cannot identify. In today’s section, the author encourages the community, whose faith is faltering, by calling to mind Old Testament heroes such as Abraham and Sarah. This passage offers the only definition of faith in the New Testament.

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 15

First Reading: Revelation 11: 19, 12: 1-6, 10

The book of Revelation was written around 95 AD to encourage people who were suffering persecution. It is written in symbolic language and uses many images – for example, a dragon to represent evil. In today’s reading, the Church is imaged as a woman giving birth to the Messiah. As the years went by, this imagery was extended to Mary.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 15: 20-26

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses problems his converts in the community are experiencing. Some members of the community had questioned the bodily resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrection as well. This passage is Paul’s response.

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 22

First Reading: Isaiah 66: 18-21

When the Jews returned from exile in Babylon, they found their beloved Jerusalem in shambles. In today’s passage, the prophet looks ahead to better days when people from foreign lands will flock to Jerusalem as the city God built.

Second Reading: Hebrews 12: 5-7, 11-13

The Letter to the Hebrews was written to people who had become dispirited and were losing faith. The author quotes a text from the Old Testament book of Proverbs, and finds in it encouraging words.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 29

First Reading: Sirach 3: 17-18, 20, 28-29

The book of Sirach was written by a wise teacher who lived 200 years before Christ. Sirach ran a school for young people in Jerusalem. In today’s section, he gives his students a string of wise sayings that will guide them in their conduct.

Second Reading: Hebrews 12: 18-19, 22-24

In today’s reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, the author contrasts two covenants. He begins with the covenant at Mt. Sinai, which was ratified amid fire and darkness. Then he speaks of the new covenant established by Jesus at Mt. Zion (which is another name for Jerusalem). The author then looks ahead to a glorious future in the *heavenly* Jerusalem.