

Week B 28: Alive and active

Today's second Mass reading is taken from the letter to the Hebrews. It gives us a powerful insight into the working of the spirit of God, into the mind of Christ. The text cuts through the human ability to posture and pose, to pretend and prevaricate, and, more disastrously, to believe in that pretence, for the only guide we really have is the word of God, revealed to us by the Spirit who ¹*has been given to us* for that very purpose.

For the word of God is not some static thing, immured in an ancient text. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that the word of God is living and working. These are verbs in the present tense, denoting current activity in the here and now. And we are told how the word is working in no uncertain terms. It is ²*sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning/judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Before the word of God no creature is hidden, all are exposed, laid bare to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account of ourselves.*

It sounds daunting and we could, understandably, be a little fearful at the thought of such an encounter. Could, except for one thing, which we forget at our peril. And it is today's Gospel reading that gives us the reassurance and the courage we need to continue on our way.

¹ Romans 5.5

² Hebrews 4.12-13

We are told that, as Jesus set out on a journey, a man ran up to him and asked: ³*Good Teacher/Didaskale agathe, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* Now that is an interesting question. For to be an ⁴heir, one capable of inheriting in 1st Palestine and the Graeco-Roman world in general, you needed to be a son, and thus in this case a son of God. This both Jesus and the man kneeling before him would have well understood. Rather it is his use of the word *good* that Jesus challenges: *Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone.* Was that a reprimand for the man, who, as a righteous Jew would have already known that and was, maybe, using the word to profess his faith in Jesus? Jesus then questions his observance of the Law and the Commandments, which the man has followed impeccably since his youth. Jesus is moved by his whole-hearted search for God: he looks on him and loves him and places before him the one thing he lacks to come to that which he desires: *Go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come, follow me.* And that the man couldn't do and went away sorrowful. And yet we do not know the end of that story. How many of us balked at the first call, panicked at the implications and at the last responded like Simon Peter: ⁵*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

³ Mark 10.17-30

⁴ cf Galatians 3.25-4.7; Romans 8.17

⁵ John 6.68

Our reassurance lies in Jesus' reaction to the man. He looked into the depths of his heart, saw his integrity, recognised his desire and was filled with love for him. And that is surely how he looks on us too: in love. As Pope Benedict reminds us: ⁶ *the touch of his heart heals us through an undeniably painful transformation, as through fire. But it is a blessed pain, in which the holy power of his love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally ourselves and totally of God.*

He offers us, what he offered the man, who met him, as he set out on a journey: *treasure in heaven*. It is an echo from the Sermon on the Mount: ⁷*lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* It is an invitation to freedom, freedom from ⁸anxiety, from troubling ourselves about many things, when only one thing is needful. It is an invitation to the freedom of the children of God, the heirs of the Kingdom: ⁹*for the Lord is Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*

⁶ Spe Salve para 47

⁷ Matthew 6.20-21

⁸ cf Luke 10.41-42

⁹ 2 Corinthians 3.17