

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 2:8—3:4

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel:

The Lord GOD said to me: As for you, son of man, obey me when I speak to you: be not rebellious like this house of rebellion, but open your mouth and eat what I shall give you. It was then I saw a hand stretched out to me, in which was a written scroll which he unrolled before me. It was covered with writing front and back, and written on it was: Lamentation and wailing and woe! He said to me: Son of man, eat what is before you; eat this scroll, then go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth and he gave me the scroll to eat. Son of man, he then said to me, feed your belly and fill your stomach with this scroll I am giving you. I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. He said: Son of man, go now to the house of Israel, and speak my words to them.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 119:14, 24, 72, 103, 111, 131

How sweet to my taste is your promise!

In the way of your decrees I rejoice, as much as in all riches. Yes, your decrees are my delight; they are my counselors.

How sweet to my taste is your promise!

The law of your mouth is to me more precious than thousands of gold and silver pieces. How sweet to my palate are your promises, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

How sweet to my taste is your promise!

Your decrees are my inheritance forever; the joy of my heart they are. I gasp with open mouth, in my yearning for your commands.

How sweet to my taste is your promise!

Gospel: Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

The disciples approached Jesus and said, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?" He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father. What is your opinion? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 19th Tuesday of the Year

Ezekiel was a Jewish prophet who lived in Diaspora during the Babylonian captivity. He did not sound like the earlier prophets who lived in Judah and Israel. During his time the two kingdoms had been destroyed, the kingdoms of both nations obliterated, the people in captivity and the Temple in Jerusalem in ruins. He did not have the familiar images of home upon which to rely. He would create his own. And fantastic they would be. No one would eat a papyrus scroll and if one did, it would not taste like honey. It was the paper of his day.

He used this as a metaphor for the wonder, power and sweetness of God's Word. As a prophet, his tools of discerning God's Word were prayer, reflection and scripture. What he has described here was the way God's Word arrived in his mind and heart and made it to his lips to preach. He fully embraced God's Word and accepted his mission as a preacher of that Word to God's people. God's support was also present to Ezekiel, sweetening the deal. How do we approach God's Word in our lives? Is the challenge to us sweet? Does God fill our lives?

Why does Jesus say that a small child is greatest in God's Kingdom? It's not due to a child's innocence. Any one who has spent time around small kids can tell us that kids can be as far from innocence as are we. They are just as apt to cause trouble as adults can. The word humble is important to note. Humility is being able to admit and accept who we are; good and bad. Most of us will accept a false humility as reality. Knowing our strengths is as important, here, as knowing weaknesses.

A child in Jesus' society had no true status whatever. Children are completely dependant upon their parents for decades. Jesus has told us to let down our self importance and become dependant upon God as a child is dependant upon their parents. That's not an easy message to hear for people who seek independence and freedom. Then Jesus mentioned sheep. Animal husbandry is not my favorite comparison either. Sheep can be stupid; they have been bred for being dependant on their keepers. Exactly what did Jesus try to tell us of how we relate to God? God is the source of all our gifts.

God's grace supplies our needs. God gave Ezekiel his mission and the means to carry it out. God placed the Word with him. Jesus challenged his followers to rely on God for everything. His challenge is also to us. Do we rely on God for all things? God has gifted us with life, faith, family, friends and our very individuality. Can we be humble enough to live our life in God?

May the Spirit make our path to the Kingdom of God clear.

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