

# HEARERS OF THE WORD



Proverbs 8:22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

## When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth

John 16:12 [Jesus said:] “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The Fourth Gospel is in two parts: The Book of Signs (1-12) and the Book of Glory (13-20+21). Within the Book of Glory, the farewell discourse of Jesus takes up most of five chapters. The outline is as follows:

#### THE BOOK OF GLORY (13:1-20:31)

- A. The Last Discourse (13:1-17:26)
  - a. Making God known: the foot washing and the morsel (13:1-38)
  - b. Departure (14:1-31)
    - c. To abide, to love, and to be hated (15:1-16:3)
    - b<sup>1</sup>. Departure (16:4-33)
  - a<sup>1</sup>. Making God known: Jesus' final prayer (17:1-26)

When a text is laid out in a pattern like this (a-b-c-b<sup>1</sup>-a<sup>1</sup>), the important question to ask is whether the physical centre of the pattern (here c. 15:1-16:3) is the centre of meaning or the heart of the matter. When the outer parts correspond (e.g. b and b<sup>1</sup>), then the reader is entitled to read one in the light of other.

In our case, the promise of continued presence through the Spirit is treated twice, that is, in chapters 14 and 16, and these chapters ought to be read in light of each other.

### KIND OF WRITING

The farewell speech is fairly well established as a literary genre in the Old Tes-



ARCABAS: TRIPTYQUE DE GLOIRE  
L'ÉGLISE DE LA TRINITÉ  
DE CAPVERN-LES-BAINS

tament and the apocryphal books of the intertestamental period. There are numerous examples, like the blessings of Jacob to his children in Gen 47:29-49:33, the farewell of Joshua to the nation of Israel in Josh 22-24, and David's farewell speech in 1 Chron 28-29. In the Deuterocanonical books we have the farewell speech of Tobit from his deathbed in Tobit 14:3-11. Elsewhere, the entire contents of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* are farewell speeches, patterned after Jacob's final address in Genesis. The *Book of Jubilees* gives farewell speeches for Noah (ch. 10), Abraham (chs. 20-22), and Rebecca and Isaac (chs. 35-36). Josephus includes a farewell address for Moses. The features found there are also here in John 13-17: imminent death, synthesis of teaching, promise of presence-in-absence, future challenges, the unity of the surviving members.

### OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

### Thought for the day

“Silence is the language God speaks and everything else is a bad translation” is variously attributed. Whoever penned it, it strikes a chord on the feast of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. As we stand before the absolute mystery of God, one and three, transcendent and immanent, greater than our hearts and yet closer to us than we are to ourselves, wordless prayer is fitting. And yet...the Mysterious Silence has been broken, if not by “mere” words then certainly by the Word made flesh, whose Spirit has been poured into our hearts.

### Prayer

God, beyond our minds and ideas, our hearts and our feelings, we believe absolutely in your love for each and for all. Let your astonishing love kindle in our inner selves a response of love and wonder. Amen.

There is an interesting and wide background to the Spirit in the Old Testament (both in Hebrew and in Greek). *The Spirit and creation*: Gen 1:2; Job 33:4; Ps 104:30. The Spirit is a saving power: Ex 14:21; 1 Kings 18:45. *The Spirit guides history and people*: Judges 3:10; 6:34, 1 Sam 10:1-13; 16:13. The prophets are inspired by the Spirit: Isa. 34:16; 63:10; Ezek. 18:31). It was expected that the final, messianic age would be the age of the Spirit: on rulers (Isa. 11:1-10; 42:1; 61:1); on the whole people; Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28[3:28] changing hearts of stone to hearts of flesh (Isa. 59:21; Ezek. 36:26-27). Late pre-NT Judaism emphasises the Spirit of prophecy, of revelation and guidance (Sir. 48:24), of wisdom (Wis. 7:7; 9:17; 1QH 12:11-13), and occasionally of praise.

### NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

The Holy Spirit is central to the religious imagination of the Fourth Gospel, being the link between God, the believer and Jesus. Here are some of the important texts.

*Jesus has the Holy Spirit*: And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on

him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit.' (John 1:32–33) On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37–39)

*Jesus' death "releases" the Holy Spirit:* When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (lit. *he handed over his Spirit*; John 19:30)

*The spirit is the special gift of the Risen Lord:* Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7) When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:22–23)

*Believers are reborn in the Spirit:* Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:5–8) But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23–24)

*The Spirit / Advocate has three tasks:* And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. (John 14:16) But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. (John 14:26) "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. (John 15:26)

## ST PAUL

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. (Rom 8:9–11)

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom 8:26–27)

## BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 12** Understanding later is a key feature of this Gospel: 2:22; 12:16; 14:25–26, 16:12–13; 20:9. This developed emphasis surely reflects the experience of the first generation of believers as they read the ministry in the light of the resurrection. "Now" continues the fiction that these words—from the hand of the evangelist—go back to the actual time before the death of Jesus.

**Verse 13** Spirit and truth are closely connected in the Johannine writings: John 4:23–24; 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6; 5:6. "Truth" here is interpersonal and even personal, because Jesus himself, in this Gospel, is the way, the truth and the life: *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6)

**Verse 14** Glory and glorification do not refer in this Gospel to honour, or reputation etc. Instead, glory is a category that has to do with revelation, precisely the revelation of God's compassionate love through the lifting up of Jesus on the cross and into the resurrection. "He will glorify me" needs to be translated as follows: the function of the Holy Spirit is to bring into the hearts of believers that very love between Jesus and the Father, so that God's compassionate love, revealed through the Pascal Mystery, may live in the centre of our being. In that exhilarating sense, "he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

**Verse 15** This wonderful gift of relationship takes us back to the Father, "For God so loved the world that he gave his

only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

## POINTERS FOR PRAYER

**1.** Wisdom about life comes slowly and sometimes painfully. Hearing the 'right' answer at the 'wrong' time does not help us. We need to be ready and open to receiving the truth if it is to have any impact. Perhaps you can recall some occasions when it was the 'right' time for you to learn a truth about life. Remember your experiences of growing in understanding and truth.

**2.** Perhaps the Spirit guided you through the words of someone close to you, or through the words and actions of people you read about or saw on TV. Or maybe understanding came to you when praying or reflecting on your life. Remember and give thanks for the people who have helped you to greater wisdom on your journey through life.

**3.** Wisdom is handed on from person to person, and from generation to generation, within families, within communities, etc. Are there any particular gems of wisdom that you cherish from what has been handed on to you?

## PRAYER

God, your name is veiled in mystery, yet we dare to call you Father; your Son was begotten before all ages, yet is born among us in time; your Holy Spirit fills the whole creation, yet is poured forth now into our hearts.

Because you have made us and loved us and called us by your name, draw us more deeply into your divine life, that we may glorify you rightly, through your Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.





# God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit

Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we are justified by *faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our *hope* of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's *love* has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

## INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

Our reading for the feast is especially well chosen. It brings together in a kind of experiential way the persons of the Trinity. Paul, of course, would never have used such a term but in texts like these you can see the seeds of the later doctrine.

## CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

Paul wrote to the Romans to help them resolve an issue which was central to his own mission: how both Jews and Gentiles might live in communion and in mutual respect. The specific challenges goes back to how much of Jewish traditional practice may be retained and, perhaps, imposed. In the mind of Paul, the so-called identity markers of Judaism—setting apart God's chosen people—simply no longer make sense in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection. Now that God has extended his covenant and opened his grace to all “without distinction,” such separation is not only not necessary but it even betrays a failure to understand God's project in Jesus.

## KIND OF WRITING

In the broadest terms, the later to the Romans unfolds in four major moments:

- 1-4: all have sinned; all in need of grace
- 5-8: God's grace in Christ
- 9-11: Jews and Gentiles in God's plan
- 12-15: How to live tolerantly

Our reading comes from step 2. At this point, Paul parades all that Christians have received in Christ—salvation,

faith, baptism, the continued moral struggle, Abba Father, the Holy Spirit and unshakeable faith in Christ. It is a mighty display, in the light of which the various divisions and differences are reduced to insignificance. It is a kind of implied *a fortiori* argument: with so much in common...and useful today!

The key Pauline triad of faith, hope and love is present here, in the same order as in 1 Corinthians 13:13 (contrast 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8). We may note, finally, that this whole argument from 5 to 8 is framed by affirmations about the God, Christ and the Spirit.

## RELATED PASSAGES

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37–39)

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12–14)

## BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 1** The second major section of the letter starts here with “therefore.” The very first word in Greek is “justified,” emphatically located.

“By faith” has two meanings. By the faith and fidelity of Jesus, God brought about our salvation. By our faith, that is by our trust in God who raised Jesus, we enter into that salvation. Peace is a summary word, with all its range of meanings in the Hebrew Bible, and, at the same time, an objective word describing the new situation of humanity in Christ. Notice the “we have.” Many manuscripts and some translations have “let us have.” The indicative is likely

correct.

**Verse 2** Access is a fairly rare word which can also be translated as approach. Grace is a huge topic in Paul. The base meaning is favour or gift. It is used in the OT to speak of God's election, based precisely on his gracious love. In the NT, it can mean God's initiative, God's call and God's gifts in the *charismata*. Here, the chief sense is God's gracious achievement in Christ. The corresponding human response is faith.

The temporal markers are important here. Paul does believe in the events of salvation as an objective reality already achieved in Christ. In the present, believers really live this reality, but not yet fully. The old “already-and-not-yet” should be kept in mind. Paul has a very strong tension towards the future completion of salvation. He is also sharply aware that becoming a disciple is never over, as we see in the next few verses (cf. Phil 3:12-14).

Elsewhere, Paul prohibits boasting, as a human achievement, but, of course, we may properly be confident and even boast of God's action in Christ.

**Verses 3-5a** Even though so much has been bestowed upon us, we suffer and we struggle. Paul's literary skill is evident here as he combines concatenated conjunctions with supple use of *anadiplosis* (= last word of a phrase taken up at the start of the next). Paul makes it clear that salvation is still a process, open to conversion and open to the future.

**Verse 5b** “Love of God” has two meanings, both of which are present here. The primary meaning is God's love for us on the basis of which we are able to love God. Cf. 1 John 4:19 for the same teaching. For the pour out of the Spirit see for example Isa 32:15 and Joel 2:28–29. For love at the end of Romans 8, see the citation above.

## POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Paul's awareness of the grace/gift an help us recognise, joyfully, all we have received.
2. Has it been my experience that suffering and endurance can be positive?

## PRAYER

God of every grace and gift, we come before in gratitude and great joy. Send your Holy Spirit once more into our hearts and lives that we may truly know your love and come to love you by the power of the same Holy Spirit. Amen.

# Wisdom speaks of herself

Prov 8:22 The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of long ago.

23 Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.

25 Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills, I was brought forth—

26 when he had not yet made earth and fields,  
or the world's first bits of soil.

27 When he established the heavens, I was there,  
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

28 when he made firm the skies above,  
when he established the fountains of the deep,

29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

30 then I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,

31 rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race.

## Layout of the book of Proverbs

I	1-9	The proverbs of Solomon son of David,
II	10:1-22-16	The proverbs of Solomon
III	22:17-24:22	Give ear, listen to the sayings of the sages
IV	24:23-34	The following are also taken from the sages
V	25-29	Here are some more of Solomon's proverbs
VI	30:1-16	The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh, of Massa
VII	31:17-33	Numerical Proverbs
VIII	31:1-9	The sayings of Lemuel king of Massa,
IX	31:10-31	The Perfect Housewife.

## INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

It has long been recognised that Wisdom speculation and, in particular, the personification of *Lady Wisdom*, lie behind some key Christologies of the New Testament: for example, Paul, John, Colossians and Ephesians. Our reading is chosen to show this earlier expression of God's presence in all there is (pantheism, really). It is not so strange if we recall the speech of Paul on the Areopagus: *For 'In him we live and move and have our being'* (Acts 17:28)

## ORIGIN OF THE READING

The reading comes from the book of Proverbs, the layout of which is given on the right. Our passage crowns the opening section of the book from chapters 1 to 9.

## KIND OF WRITING

It is poetry, showing the usual mark of parallelism. The tone of self praise may seem odd, but in fact it is common in the literature of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome. Technically, it is a

*aretology* or poem in the first person in which a divine figure lists his or her attributes. The layout of ch. 8 is:

Introduction (vv 1-3); the speech, in three main parts (vv 4-11, 12-21, 22-31) and the conclusion of the speech (vv 32-36).

## OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

There is a highly significant OT background to the figure of Lady Wisdom. She represents an attempt to speak of God as both present (immanent) and beyond (transcendent) and yet present in all that is (pantheistic).

Every faith has to "negotiate" this and Christians did it later with the doctrines of the incarnation and the Trinity. Some examples here may help: one is from the Hebrew Bible (MT) and the other is from the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX). These are important passages for the seeds of later doctrines.

Wisdom is portrayed as a woman, because just as men and women complete each other, wisdom completes the hu-

man being. In the culture, women were associated with fundamental needs: shelter, nourishment and companionship (and Wisdom, metaphorically). See especially Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24.

## BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verses 22-23** The preexistence of Wisdom is the foundation for her special "knowledge."

**Verse 24** Again, Wisdom precedes creation proper somehow, because she is really part of God.

**Verse 25-26** Even in translation, there is a hint of the feminine here because the verb is used mostly of women giving birth. Back to the very basics of creation, really. The ambiguity of the when of Wisdom's birth is intentional.

**Verse 27** The circle on the face of the deep indicates either the flat earth or its horizon. Wisdom was beside the Creator.

**Verse 28** The world picture of water below and above. We should not think this too odd, given our climate!

**Verse 29** The ancient symbol of watery chaos is tamed by the mere word of the Lord, as a parent commands a child.

**Verse 30** Two images, that of a construction engineer and that of a beloved child. Somehow, God creates with the help of Wisdom, always at his side. Through her, God is present in all that is. The vision is pantheistic, as distinguished from pantheistic.

**Verse 31** A marvellous summary of divine delight in all that is. cf. *You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.* (Wisdom 11:26)

## POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. God is all that is—recall an "epiphany" in nature.
2. God's delight is something we don't often think of—it includes you, believe it or not!
3. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. (Romans 1:20)

## PRAYER

God, taking delight in all you made, give us eyes to see you present in the constant wonder of creation.

# THE LITURGY

Proverbs 8:22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

### READINGS 1 AND 3

The Wisdom tradition is appealing to us today — both for the spirituality and cosmology. After the biblical period, it evolved in several directions, including towards the incarnation—the Word made flesh—and also towards the Holy Spirit and sometimes towards the BVM.

### THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 8 fits very well with its response: *How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!*

### SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

**First Reading**  
*Proverbs 8:22-31*

Our reading today is a poem, reflecting on Wisdom, a womanly figure alongside God at creation. It's a way of saying God's fingerprints are to be seen in all that is.

**Second Reading**  
*Romans 5:1-5*

This beautiful and inspiring paragraph is a picture of the Christian life: we are in love with God, through Christ Jesus, by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Gospel**  
*John 16:12-15*

After Jesus' ministry, what is the role of the Holy Spirit? That we make take to heart all that God did for us in Jesus.

### WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

**Monday 16 June**

*2 Corinthians 6:1-10*  
There is a great invitation in this reading: *today* is the day of salvation. Paul goes on to give a list of hardships endured as an apostle.

*Matthew 5:38-42*  
We are always tempted to meet violence with violence. Jesus' alternative is radical and different.

**Tuesday 17 June**

*2 Corinthians 8:1-9*  
A great dream of Paul was the collection

for the Christians in Judea and Jerusalem. Like any fundraiser, he tries to invite and to provoke the Corinthians Christians by underlining the remarkable generosity of the Macedonian communities, who are poor by comparison.

*Matthew 5:43-48*  
Jesus quotes the usual attitude—love your neighbour, hate your enemy—and then gives a series of penetrating arguments to offer his alternative vision.

**Wednesday 18 June**

*2 Corinthians 9:6-11*  
Why should the Corinthians give to Paul's collection? Here is gives arguments from faith and, intriguingly, from the nature of God.

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18*  
These two paragraphs surround the Lord's Prayer and represent a Jewish devotional triad: alms, prayer and fasting. Any attraction to showiness in religion is resolutely set aside.

**Thursday 19 June**  
*St Romuald, abbot*

*2 Corinthians 11:1-11*  
A rather human side of Paul is revealed in this reading. He has been replaced in the affection of the Corinthians by other preachers and he minds! But he really does love his Corinthians, as we hear.

*Matthew 6:7-15*  
The introduction to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew is central and helps us understand the prayer and its brevity. In reality, the Lord's Prayer is not so much a prayer as a form of words but a method or series of steps in prayer.

**Friday 20 June**  
*The Irish Martyrs*

*2 Corinthians 11:18, 21-30*  
Paul is unwilling to put himself forward and so the reading is full of ironic affirmations. This paragraph is valuable for the information about the upbringing and ministry of Paul.

*Matthew 6:19-23*  
The "voice" in these reading is the voice of Jesus, the bearer of wisdom. The first paragraph is clear enough and points us to what is of lasting value. It is easy to be distracted by the immediate and the tangible. The second paragraph speaks metaphorically of the eye as the "window" of the body. What is meant here is that our fundamental way of looking at the world and life affects every thing about ourselves and about our engagement with the world. How we *allow* the light in determines how much light we enjoy. This raises an essential question: where is my heart?

**Saturday 21 June**  
*St Aloysius Gonzaga, religious*

*2 Corinthians 12:1-10*  
Some people in Corinth were attracted to leaders with spectacular spiritual experiences. In Paul's mind, this is a wretched foundation for faith — and risks showing off. Nevertheless, he risks telling the Corinthians of his spiritual experiences, all the while affirming that this cannot be the foundation of the faith! It is a remarkable piece of writing — powerful in allusion and disclaimer.

*Matthew 6:24-34*  
This is a favourite passage from the Sermon on the Mount, prized by people well beyond frontiers of Christianity. The vision is Jesus is not "airy-fairy" detachment, but a costly choice of values and attitudes, grounded in faith in God. We might feel there's a risk of sheer impracticality but this is overcome by the general statement: "You heavenly father knows you need all these things."

