

or 'a man clothed in soft raiment'? The idea that they would have gone to the desert to see a trembling reed of a man is absurd. Even more so is that they expected a man dressed in finery. As one scholar wrote: "A dandy is the last person one would seek in the Palestinian desert." Jesus' teasing introductory questions reinforce the real answer. John was a prophet and more: he was the messenger sent to prepare the way for the Lord. Jesus' ironic wit may be discerned in two other passages. First, so as to demonstrate how the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask, Jesus highlights God's goodness by saying that not even one (evil) human father would give his son a serpent if he asked for a fish, or a scorpion if he asked for an egg. Secondly, He warns against false prophets (Matthew 7:15-20). They will come in sheep's clothing but inwardly will be ravenous wolves. The people will know them by their fruits. He asks pointedly, rhetorically and tinged with soft sarcasm: "Are grapes gathered from thorns or figs from thistles?"

-Stephen S

Entrance antiphon: O come, let us worship God and bow low before the God who made us, for he is the Lord our God.

First Reading: Isaiah 58:7-10

Psalms 111: Response: The good man is a light in the darkness for the upright.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! I am the light of the world, says the Lord, anyone who follows me will have the light of life. Alleluia!

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

Memorial Acclamation: When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

Communion Antiphon: Let them thank the Lord for his mercy, his wonders for the children of men, for he satisfies the thirsty soul, and the hungry he fills with good things.



Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A, 2023 Weekly Reflection: Jesus' use of humour: (2) Of thunder, trembling reeds, dandies, scorpions, snakes etc. : In the first article on Jesus' humour we encountered

what appears to be the humour of hyperbole – exaggerated metaphors to drive home a message. Humour takes many forms. Another form is that of irony or gentle sarcasm. Jesus' use of humour may not be readily apparent to a modern audience. If one tries to put oneself in the context of members of Jesus' audience, with their background of Jewish texts and day to day life in the Judea of that time, it becomes more clear how Jesus may have elicited smiles and knowing nods so that the Good News would be more fully understood, appreciated and accepted.

One use of irony may be found in the nickname Jesus gave to his apostles James and John. St Mark (3:18) tells us that the nickname He gave them was 'Bo-anerges, that is sons of thunder'. It seems that this nickname, since it is specifically referred to in the Gospels, was one that stuck. A reason for it may be found in the passage (Luke 9:54-5) where those apostles were rebuked by Jesus. Why did He rebuke them? They had proposed, so as to punish the people of a Samaritan village that would not receive Him, that they should 'bid fire come down from heaven and consume them'. Jesus seemingly considered their suggestion to be ridiculous. The irony in their nickname is obvious. Some scholars believe that James' and John's idea was gently mocked since they had foolishly and unsuccessfully suggested exactly the same fate for those Samaritans as that which the prophet Elijah had successfully invoked. Elijah invoked fire from heaven to consume 100 men and two captains sent from King Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:9-12).

Jesus uses irony to good effect when speaking to the crowds about John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7-10; Luke 7:24-27). He asks the people what did they really expect when they went into the wilderness to see John. He puts forward, apparently ironically, two possibilities: 'A reed shaken by the wind'?