

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jan 17th 2015

The first reading is a fascinating one from a fascinating book in the New Testament. Hebrews has had a variety of names. The original King James Bible called it "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews" indicating a guess that it was written by Paul, but that seems likely wrong.

Even the bit we read here is not in Paul's style. We know it simply as the Epistle to the Hebrews and its authorship is much debated and it is considered anonymous by most scholars now.

Probably it was written for Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem in the first or second century to help them hold up against persecution and to prevent them from losing faith in the teaching that Jesus was the Messiah. It had been a common belief that the Messiah would come as a military leader, and the notion that Jesus could have come in such a humble way was hard to accept.

Even the reading we see reflects an effort to mediate between the "Old Testament God" (often seen as smiting down enemies and such) and the God of the New Testament, to whom Jesus is our mediator. The first part of the reading begins by calling the word of God a "two-edged sword" but then ends with the comforting words that Jesus sympathizes with our temptation to sin.

Not being a trained theologian, I don't claim any credentials in trying to work all of this out. Like most of you, I try to take from the readings something that I can apply in my own life and hopefully do better. Here's the part that speaks to me: Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses. It's sort of like teaching one of your kids to ride a bike. They fall off a bunch before they learn to ride. Then they can ride. But that doesn't mean they never fall off again. But they get back up and ride.

Not many people would learn to ride a bike if they only gave it one try. Similarly, we wouldn't lead very good lives if we gave up after our first sin and decided that it wasn't worth trying to avoid more after that. Jesus wants us to ride the bike. He's running behind us just like our parents did yelling "keep pedaling!" And when we fall off — as we always do — he'll help us put bandaids on the scrapes and encourage us to get back on.