

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Feb 14th 2017



Window with Rainbow In St. John's at Creighton, there is a window in the choir loft depicting Christ in Majesty, or Christ the King, seated on a rainbow. I had never seen this symbol depicted in a church in the States before I moved here, but I had seen it a few times in the UK and Ireland. I liked the symbolism: Christ, the embodiment of the New Covenant, seated upon a rainbow, the sign of the covenant between God and Noah. While I was in Ireland, I also learned to appreciate "rainbow weather," when little pockets of ragged clouds and rain would blow in off the sea, followed by a bit of sunshine, then more rain, etc. There was something about looking around for a rainbow when I got caught in the rain walking home, in finding a little brightness in a little struggle. Some research showed none of that was the intended symbolism for medieval iconographers. Rather, the image came from Revelations 4:3 depicting Christ, luminous as gemstones, seated on a throne surrounded by a brilliant rainbow. The light pointed to divine brilliance shining through. That's what's lovely about a good symbol, though: it can hold multiple meanings.

I thought of the rainbow – a symbol of God's covenant with Noah, of beauty in wet weather, of divine brilliance breaking through – because it is the sign that follows the first reading, in which Noah's obedience and trust allow the human journey towards unity with God to begin anew. It is a visible sign of what the psalm promises: "The Lord will bless his people with peace." It is also helpful to be thinking about signs by the time we get to the Gospel passage.

Today's Gospel passage makes no sense without yesterday's. Yesterday, we heard the Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign from heaven "to test him." Today Jesus warns the disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees. Leaven here is a symbol for their skeptical disposition, their need to see a sign in order to believe Jesus is from God. Leaven changes the bread by making it rise, just as their need to test Jesus changes their faith and relationship to God. Their skepticism makes it impossible for the Pharisees to

see that God is with Jesus, to see that sign in what Jesus has already done, just as a little leaven changes the whole loaf. In this metaphor, leaven makes the bread different from the bread used at Passover, another sign of God's covenant with God's people. Jesus is just trying to get the disciples to understand that He is the unleavened bread, the new sign of the covenant!

Sometimes it seems to take an overabundance of divine brilliance to get our attention. Have we eyes of faith to see what is right in front of us?

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