

22nd Sunday after Pentecost / October 25th

First Illumination: Leviticus (19:1-2,15-18)

Leviticus can seem like a rulebook for priests, but chapters 17 through 26, the Holiness Code, carry holiness out of the sanctuary and into daily life. The Hebrew word for holy, qadosh, means set apart for God. Here, being set apart shows up in a courtroom, in what we say about others, and in the grudges we carry. Notice the refrain “I am the Lord,” closing each group of commands like a signature. This is also where Scripture first says “love your neighbor as yourself.” Listen for those words; Jesus reaches back to them in today’s Gospel.

Psalm Illumination: 1

Psalm 1 stands at the doorway of the Psalter, introducing the songs that follow. Its first Hebrew word, ashrei, translated “happy,” describes a life that is truly flourishing. The “law of the Lord” is torah, meaning teaching or instruction more than rules. The word for “meditate” suggests murmuring the words aloud, turning them over again and again. Both pictures come from the farm: a tree rooted by running water, and chaff, the light husks the wind carries off at threshing. Listen for which one you are invited to become.

Epistle Illumination: 1 Thessalonians (2:1-8)

This letter is very likely the oldest writing in the New Testament, sent by Paul around the year 50 to a young church in Thessalonica, a busy port city in northern Greece. Paul and his companions had arrived there after being beaten and jailed in Philippi, and they had to leave Thessalonica in a hurry when opposition arose. In those days traveling speakers often worked the crowds for money and praise, and Paul wants this church to know his team was different. The Greek word behind “nurse” describes a nursing mother caring for her own children. Listen for how Paul measures his ministry: not by what it gained, but by what it gave away.

Gospel Illumination: Matthew (22:34-46)

We are in the Temple courts in Jerusalem, in the final days before Jesus’ arrest. One group after another has come to trap him with hard questions, and now a lawyer, an expert in the law of Moses, takes his turn. Later Jewish tradition counted 613 commandments in that law, so asking which is greatest was a familiar debate among teachers. Jesus answers by joining two verses: the call to love God from Deuteronomy, part of the Shema prayed daily by faithful Jews, and the command from Leviticus to love one’s neighbor, which we heard earlier. Then he turns the tables with a question from Psalm 110. Listen for the question no one could answer.

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