

Scientists in Congregations / 3rd Sunday of Advent

The appointed texts for this week are:

Isaiah 61: 1-4; 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5: 16- 24; John 1: 6-8; 19-28

The class focused in on this line from the 2nd Reading, 1 Thessalonians 5: 19-20 which says, do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything.

The Biblical group had a field day with this text, since the Bible is full of examples of God testing individuals as well as the whole people of Israel! One of the first stories about faith is the testing of Abraham's faith. See Genesis 22; Moses and the people of Israel are repeatedly tested in the dessert, see especially Exodus 15 & 16; Job is tested for his faith (see the whole book); all the prophets speak of Israel's testing (and how often they point out the chosen people is "wrong" in how they are living!); Jesus himself is tested in the wilderness before taking up his work, e.g. Matthew 4; the people and Priestly class, repeatedly sought to test Jesus to see if he was the long awaited Messiah; see, for example, Luke 11.

The language group discussed that to fully test something you need to experience it yourself. Someone then brought up the expression 'The proof of the pudding' is in the eating'. The meaning of that expression becomes clear when you know that 'proof' here is a verb meaning to 'test'. The more common meaning of 'proof' in our day and age is the noun meaning 'the evidence that demonstrates a truth' - as in a mathematical or legal proof. The verb form meaning 'to test' is less often used these days, although it does survive in several commonly used phrases: [the exception that proves the rule](#), 'proof-read', 'proving-ground', etc. When bakers 'prove' yeast they are letting it stand in warm water for a time, to determine that it is active. Clearly, the distinction between these two forms of the word was originally quite slight and the proof in a 'showing to be true' sense is merely the successful outcome of a test of whether a proposition is correct or not.

The Scientific Mind-Set group spoke about how the entire scientific method is predicated on the idea of testing hypotheses based on prior observation. A hypothesis is tested, then based on the tests, modified, and tested again. There was discussion about how faith is the opposite of the scientific method because it can never be "proven". It can't be proven because no one's experience is reproducible! The group also discussed how one cannot test a supreme entity like God! There was also discussion about how in science it is easier to test a negative rather than a pos-

itive. One cannot typically, prove a positive in science, the best one can do is to say that a particular hypothesis is consistent with what has previously been postulated.