

Personal Notes
041128 First Sunday of Advent 1A
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Time is at the heart of these readings. For Western Civilization in 2004, time focuses on the future. There will be more on this later. In Ancient History, Mediterranean time is to a present orientation as Baltic time is to a past orientation. In the Mediterranean, Romans, who also looked to the past, were a Mediterranean exception. Middle Easterners, like Jesus, focused on the present.¹

Looking to the past locked in the present social order as something fixed. Over time, that present focus changed. Clocks developed as an aspect of Medieval History. The sense of time in 2004 includes the thinking of Newton, the Enlightenment, and Einstein. In the article upon which these remarks are based, I marked about thirty verses suitable for indexing according to the Sunday Lectionary readings. That means ideas like this, about time, may appear as many as thirty more places over the next three-year cycle. Though the article on which these ideas about time are based was the presidential address at the fifty-first meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association in 1988, I am only entering the verses into my index in 2004.

Modern concepts of time look to the future, sometimes far away, for example a college degree or an interstate highway. For modern people, time is something, for example, bought and sold. This future horizon risks misinterpreting the Lectionary readings. For the ancients, time did not extend beyond the horizon of one's immediate outlook. To take Isaiah as looking centuries in the future is misleading to the point of immoral. Some prophecies, therefore, were not fulfilled according to the meaning of the prophet.

The meaning of the original prophet is what was inspired for the original prophet. The meaning of the later prophet is what was inspired for the later prophet. The inspiration of later prophets might give new meaning to an old, unfulfilled prophecy; but that does not mean the original prophecy was fulfilled.

Psalm 122 is about God destroying the temple in Jerusalem because the Jews have become like non-believers. Interestingly, Psalm 122 ends the Lectionary readings for Cycle C, Christ the King, last Sunday; and begins them for Cycle A, the First Sunday of Advent, today. Paul to the Romans answers the destruction to the temple by explaining that the way to protect one against the wrath of God is by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.²

¹ The following three paragraphs draw from Bruce J. Malina, "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 25 and throughout.

² Charles H. Talbert, "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 21.

When the prophet Jesus warns about the coming of the Son of Man, he refers to a time-span within the life spans of his hearers. The message to the Faithful, therefore, is to expect Jesus now, rather than at some time in the great beyond.³ Ultimately, the Christmas story has a present immediacy.

Isaiah 2:1-5

Beating spears into pruning hooks sounds nice. The reality is that the Lord will do this by imposing terms on many peoples (verse 4). First Isaiah, Chapters 1—39, returns repeatedly to judgment and the glorification of Zion.⁴ Eventually, Zion comes to mean the souls of the Faithful. Isaiah is proclaiming a vast judgment extending from Israel in particular to all peoples, universally. Prophecies generally move back and forth from the particular to the universal and from the universal to the particular, meaning no one is left out, in the final analysis.⁵

Zechariah 9:10, a later prophet, takes Isaiah 2:4, used in this reading, to mention cutting off chariot, warhorses, and battle-bow.⁶ Zechariah 9:9 is about the Messiah arriving on a donkey. Isaiah, then, is pointing to an attitude of heart whereby people learn truly to love one another in the spirit of God himself.

Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9 ()

As the reader of these Notes may recall, the Responsorial antiphon, *Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord*, reflects back to the Transfiguration conversation between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah in the Christ the King readings.

<u>Reading</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>verses</u>		<u>Sunday</u>
1A	6	1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9	()	Advent 1 = Today
162C	983	1-2, 2-3, 4-5	(cf. 1)	Ordinary 34

Note the added verses (6-7, 8-9) for this First Sunday of Advent. The verses for Christ the King did not include the entire psalm. These verses include all of Psalm 122. The added verses call upon the Faithful to pray for peace.

³ Randall E. Otto, "The Prophets and Their Perspective," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April 2001), 234.

⁴ Richard J. Clifford, S.J., "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 1 (January 1993) 2, 16.

⁵ Paul R. Raabe, "The Particularizing of Universal Judgment in Prophetic Discourse," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2002) 652-653, 671-672.

⁶ Adrian M. Leske, "Context and Meaning of Zechariah 9:9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 4 (October 2000) 670.

Verse 9

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	pray
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	exquiram
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	sought (Psalm 121)
<u>King James</u> (1611):	seek
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	pray
<u>New American</u> (1970):	pray
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	pray

Exquiram is not the *orare* I expected. Evidently, the new translators wanted to change the psalmist from doing something in his own name, i.e. *seeking*, to pray for God to do it.

The Responsorial antiphon for Reading 1A and 162C are the same, though the Lectionary leaves the verse reference at 1A blank on page 6.

Psalm 122 is one of the Funerals choices, Part III: Texts of Sacred Scripture, 16.11 Antiphons and Psalms.⁷ The point of Psalm 122 is placing the love of God above all else, within an eternal sense of present time.

Romans 13:11-14

Verse 11 mentions time, that *the hour is now*.

More importantly, this section of Romans contributes to the impression that Christian Gentiles are the exclusive intended audience. When Romans writes about orgies and the like, pagans, rather than religious are the intended audience.⁸ Romans, then, aims directly at the present Faithful.

Cf. Psalm 85:8

The Faithful want and need the love of God shown now, not at some distant time. Such love is present when one can be purposively happy in the midst of an earthly

⁷ International Commission on English in the Liturgy: A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and published by Authority of Pope Paul IV: Order of Christian Funerals: Including Appendix 2: Cremation: Approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1998) 289

⁸ Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Why the 'Weak' at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000), 67, 75.

life destined to end in death. Salvation means grasping that love in the sense of alleluia, anyway.

Matthew 24:37-44

Verse 40 about being out in the field, implies ownership. This verse contributes to the impression that land ownership must have been common for the first Christians. The average size of small holdings was six to nine acres.⁹ This verse suits efforts by the Faithful to balance socialism with capitalism; socialism being good theory that does not work, capitalism being bad theory that does work. Socialism is good because it cares about the needy. Capitalism is bad because it does not care about the needy. In 2004, resolving the tension looks far in the future, rather than the immediate present or the distant past.

Verse 43 about letting one's *house* be broken into is in a context (Matt 24:3—25:46) of Jesus distancing himself from the temple, about to be destroyed. Jesus regards Jerusalem and the temple as abandoned by the Faithful.¹⁰ Jesus means that the true place to worship God is in the heart.

Verse 44, *an hour you do not expect* does not mean centuries away, but within the lifetimes of the Faithful.

The readings begin Advent with the Prophet Isaiah anticipating changing swords into pruning hooks (or plow shares according to some translations). Psalm 122 is about God imposing peace upon the world. Romans focuses upon the present, while the Gospel explains that the temple at Jerusalem, as a place of worship, would become the souls of the Faithful, as a place of worship. The timing of everything is now, rather than *manana*, tomorrow.

For more on sources see the Appendix file.

⁹ Robert H. Gundry, "Mark 10:29: Order in the List," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 3 (July 1997) 471, 472.

¹⁰ Francis D. Weinert, "Luke, the Temple and Jesus' Saying about Jerusalem's Abandoned House (Luke 13:34-35)," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 1982) 71.