

Watch and be ready.

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

Notice that the **Isaiah** readings are from two different Chapters, **63** and **64**.

Watch and **wait** carry similar meanings. **Trust** also carries a meaning of **watch, wait**, be alert.

The Lectionary¹ and the Nova Vulgata² differ significantly. First the Lectionary. The bold print is explained below.

verses 3-6 No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you
 doing such deeds for those who **wait** for him.
 Would that you might meet us doing **right**,
 that we were mindful of you in our ways!
 Behold, you are **angry**, and we are sinful;
 all of us have become like unclean people,
 all our good deeds are like polluted rags;
we have all withered like leaves,
 and our guilt carries us away like the wind
 There is none who calls upon your name,
 who rouses himself to cling to you;
 for you have hidden your face from us
 and have delivered us up to our guilt.

Since the Lectionary uses the New American Bible:

 such as they had not heard of from of
 old.

 No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen,
 Would that you might meet us doing **right**,

¹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Roman Missal Restored by Decree of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Lectionary for Mass: For Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America: Second Typical Edition: Volume I: Sundays, Solemnities, Feasts of the Lord and Saints* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998)

² *Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio: Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II ratione habita Iussu Pauli PP, VI Recognita Auctoritate Joannis Pauli PP, II Promulgata Editio Typica Altera* (00120 Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979, 1986, 1998) ISBN 88-2209-2163-4

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that we were mindful of you in our ways!
Behold, you are **angry**, and we are sinful;
all of us have become like unclean men,
all our good deeds are like polluted rags;
We have all withered like leaves,
and our guilt carries us away like the wind.
There is none who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to cling to you;
For you have hidden your face from us
and have delivered us up to our guilt.

The differences are not much, the capitalization of two **words**. The **words right** (above and cf. below) and **word** (below) are in bold for the purpose of following those thoughts through these comments. The **word anger** helps follow the translation from translation to translation. Since the Douay-Rheims³ is the oldest translation from within the Church:

From the beginning of the world they have not heard, nor perceived with the ears: the eye hath not seen, O God, besides thee, what things thou has prepared for them that **wait** for thee.

Thou hast met him that rejoiceth and doth justice; in thy ways they shall remember thee: behold thou art **angry**, and we have sinned: in them we have been always, and we shall be saved.

And we are all become as one unclean, and all our justices as the rag of a menstrous woman: and we have all fallen as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

The Douay-Rheims version, verses 4 (not 3) -6 above, seems much closer to the Nova Vulgata than either the Lectionary or the New American.

King James (verses 4-6):⁴

³ *The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate with Annotations, References, and an Historical and Chronological Table: The Douay Version of The Old Testament, First published by the English College at Douay, A.D. 1609: The Confraternity Edition of The New Testament: A Revision of the Challoner-Rheims Version Edited by Catholic Scholars under the Patronage of the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine* (New York. P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1950).

⁴ General Editor, The Reverend Cain Hope Felder, Ph.D., *The Original African Heritage Study Bible: King James Version* (Nashville: The James C. Winston Publishing Company, 1993)

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For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that **waiteth** for him.

Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh **righteousness**, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art **wroth**: for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our **righteousnesses** are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Jerusalem (verses 3-6):⁵

such as no one has ever heard of before

No ear has heard,
no eye has seen
any god but you act like this
for those who **trust** him.
You guide those who act with integrity
and keep your ways in mind.
You were **angry** when we were sinners;
we had long been rebels against you.
We were all like men unclean,
all that integrity of ours like filthy clothing.
We have all withered like leaves
and our sins blew us away like the wind
No one invoked your name

New Jerusalem:⁶

at the unexpected miracles you would do.
(Oh, that you would come down,
in your presence the mountains would quake!)

⁵ Alexander Jones, General Editor, *The Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition* (Garden City, New York: Double Day * Company, Inc., 1968).

⁶ Henry Wansbrough, General Editor, *The New Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

Never has anyone heard,
no ear has heard, no eye has seen
any god but you act like this
for the sake of those who **trust** him.
You come to meet those who are happy to act **uprightly**;
keeping your ways reminds them of you.
Yes, you have been **angry** and we have been sinners;
now we persist in your ways and we shall be saved.
We have all been like unclean things
and our **upright** deeds like filthy rags.
We wither, all of us, like leaves,
and all our misdeeds carry us off like the wind.

The need to **watch** and be ready carries through these very differing translations. Some of the differences may be due to differing versifications in the original manuscripts. Though the Nova Vulgata is authoritative, so is the Lectionary. Now what? **Watch** and be ready.

Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16. 18-19

The antiphon is verse 4.

The Lectionary:

verse 4 Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

New American:

O LORD of hosts, restore us.
Let your face shine upon us,
that we may be saved.

I would translate the Nova Vulgata: God, convert (or turn) us, show your face, and we shall be saved.

King James:

O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be **angry** against the prayer of the people?

Douay-Rheims, Psalm 79:

Convert us, O God: and shew us thy face, and we shall be saved.

Jerusalem:

Yahweh Sabaoth, how much longer
will you smolder at your people's prayer?

New Jerusalem:

Yahweh, God Sabaoth, how long
will you flare up at your people's prayer?

The translation differences are truly different. With all of these differences in truth, the admonition to **watch** and be ready seems likely to cause political trouble. Perhaps that is why I have not found scholarly articles on these readings in *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Clerical conflict between truth and politics may also account for why Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. only published posthumously.

Picking through all of the difference through the rest of the verses seems like a waste of energy. Since **cherubim** is mentioned in verse 2 of the Lectionary, a look at the other translations becomes illustrative.

Nova Vulgata: **cherubim**
King James: **cherubims**
Douay-Rheims (Psalm 79): **cherubims**
Jerusalem: **cherubs**
New Jerusalem: **winged creatures**
New American: **cherubim**

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

verse 7b as you **wait** for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wait carries with it the sense of **watch** and be alert.

Psalm 85:8

There is a relationship between Psalm **85:13** and **Isa 58:8** in the phrase "**righteousness** will go before him."⁷ **Watch** and be ready for that **righteousness**.

verse 8 Show us Lord, your love;

⁷ Sue Gillingham, *From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 475.

and grant us your salvation.

Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. offers seven principles for studying and praying the Psalms. Readings 133A, September 22, treated the first principle, “Today’ Has Its Own Grace.” Readings 127A, September 9, treated the second principle, “Read the Text of the Psalm.” The Third Principle, “Read the Text with Imagination” is scheduled with readings 69C, the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, in about two more years. Today’s readings will lay out the fourth principle.⁸ The fifth principal, “Read the Psalm with Other Parallel Passages” is scheduled with readings 72C, the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, in about two more years. The sixth principal, “Read the Psalms according to the Liturgy and Classic Spiritual Writers,” is scheduled with readings 102C, the Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, again in about two more years. My intention is not to repeat myself. Readings 127A, September 9, also treated the seventh principle, “Consult Commentaries.”

Fourth Principle: Read the Psalms According to Its **Key Words**

Hebrew, like other ancient, Semitic languages, was primarily an oral language and only secondarily a written language. References to writing down the inspired **word**, or reading it from a written text, do not become frequent and dominant until the time of Isaiah (740-696 B.C.E.; see Isa 8:16; 30:8) and Jeremiah (627-587 B.C.E.; see Jeremiah 36), some five or six hundred years after Moses. Even the Hebrew **words** for scroll or book did not mean in their original or primary sense “to write down.” “Scroll” comes from a Hebrew **word** meaning “to roll”; “book” derives from a Hebrew **word** meaning “to proclaim” or “to announce.”

In any oral culture and, for that matter, even in a written culture, when people speak conversationally and especially when they orate publicly, the sound of **words**, their rhythm, and their repetition take on a unique significance. Music and poetry move on a momentum of sound and refrain.

The psalms belong to Israel’s oral culture. In order to perceive properly what the inspired poet is communicating, one needs to attend to **key words**. These are **words** that are repeated or that occur in strategic places as at the beginning, middle, or end, or at important transitions. Dependent upon one’s knowledge of the Hebrew language, key **words** can be recognized when they share very similar sounds or else are identical in sound but actually are to be translated differently in English.

Two examples, dependent on the Hebrew, come into focus in Psalm 8. “Your name” (v. 1), “your heavens” (v. 3), or simply “heavens” sound almost the same in Hebrew: *shemeka*, *shameka*, and *shamayim*. The heavens,

⁸ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., *The Spirituality of the Psalms* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599 pages 15-17.

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accordingly, proclaim the name of the Lord and surround the earth with what the name signifies: an intimate, personal presence or, even more pointedly, a special “vocation” or “calling.” The heavens with its stars, moon, and sun spell out the name of the Lord, our Savior and our God. A second example, the interrogative participle in “*how* majestic” and “*what* are human beings” (Psalm 8:1, 3), is the same in both cases: *mah*. The use of a single **word** unites the two exclamations (for that is what they are, rather than a question): How splendid or glorious is God’s name? What then must be the wonder of a human being—even if this human being at first appears so tiny and unimportant compared to the expanse of sky with its heavenly bodies? Thus, **key words** center the cosmos first around man and woman and, ultimately, around the Lord God. God, of course, is first and foremost, but God, as the text suggests, lays the world at the feet of man and woman, crowning them with glory and splendor.

The **key words** in Psalm 95—and there are quite a few of them—are immediately evident to a non-Hebrew reader. Most frequent are the **words** for “come” or “step forward,” “process,” “move onward.” These **words** in part one, then, become a motif in the second part that deals with Israel’s journey through the wilderness with Moses. Another key **word**, “his hand” or “hand of God,” is found three times:

- v. 4: In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
- v. 5: The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
- v 7a: For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

Because of their central, pivotal places in the psalm, the **words** “today” and “rest” also deserve to be recognized as **key words**.

As the phrase “**key words**” declares, each **word** acts as a key to open up new treasures and to communicate an otherwise hidden or mysterious meaning. **Key words** function this way both for the psalm and for the reader or community. A curious and very revelatory experience occurs when a group of people, studying a psalm, are asked to pick out their **key word**. The **word** should be truly key or truly significant in the psalm, but in this case, there are at least three **key words**. Different persons in the group will usually choose different **words**. Why?—because of personal insights or problems or experiences, unique to themselves. In this case, a study of the psalm from the vantage of a **key word** brings to light hidden aspects of the psalm that, in turn, can throw light upon the person choosing the **word**.

One such example is the **key word** (or, perhaps better here, the single key idea) of “come,” “step forward,” “move onward,” “stay on pilgrimage”:

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vv. 1-2: Only if people continuously move onward, not alone but as a community in worship, can they come into God's presence.

v. 4: At times one may reach exalted moments, and one's mountain peaks; at other times the person may feel depressed in the depth of the earth. Come—move onward! Neither experience lasts forever; it will pass. Reality is more in change than in inertia.

v. 6: Even ecstatic moments of prayer will pass away, and a person then needs to move onward, back to monotonous routine.

vv. 9-10: The goal is for all people to move onward, realizing that no one is ever destroyed by sin and guilt. As for Israel, so for God's people, these negative experiences are all anticipated, so that they can learn to struggle and to assist others in their struggle and move onward to peace.

v. 11: Even God's **anger** and oath are passing. As in the days of Moses (see Exod 32:14), so now God moves onward. God relents, as the prophet pleads so eloquently in **Isa 63:7-64:11**.

Most of all, perhaps, the key idea to “come” and “move onward” lies in what is most essential in any journey, whether Israel's in the wilderness, the community's toward the sanctuary, or one's own in his or her ethical striving. Only at the end is there any hope of rest—the last **word** in Psalm 95. This example shows how a psalm takes on new meaning or reflects hidden karats of beauty by rereading the psalm from the focus of one of its **key words**.

Is a good question “What is the key **word** for today's liturgy”? Is it worth an experiment to find out?

Mark 13:33-37

verse 33 “Be **watchful**! Be alert!...”

verse 37 “What I say to you, I say to all: **Watch!**”

The spirit of Advent is penance and repentance in anticipation of the Incarnation at Christmas. **Watching**, the need to concentrate, is part of that penance and repentance.