

Personal Notes  
051127 First Sunday in Advent 002B  
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Raymond J. Jirran

In these Notes for Liturgical Cycle A, the Gospel according to Matthew developed into a relationship between an aged rabbi and his Pharisaic brothers, whom Matthew tried to evangelize. One theme running through Matthew was that the human organization of this world would not be the organization of the Kingdom of God. Liturgical Cycle B leaves Matthew for a new and different focus on Mark.

The new and different idea to expect from these Notes on Mark is overcoming evil makes God present. This is a Latino idea, using a circular rather than a Western linear sense of future oriented time.<sup>1</sup> The idea is not absolute, but relative to humans. Absolutely, of course, God is present in all of his creation; but God is present to humans when they overcome evil by being conscious of the presence of God.

The sense is like living in a small town, where a teen-ager can go to the big city, and Mom knows all about it back in the small town before she gets home. If the teen-ager's conscience lets Mom, Mom is present no matter where the teen-ager goes. God is present in a similar way. While God overcomes evil, humans must let God do that within their own hearts. Overcoming evil, thereby, makes God present.

The immediate scriptural issue for this Sunday is the thirteenth chapter of Mark, wherein Mark has Jesus warning his disciples to be on the alert for the coming of God. I think this thirteenth chapter troubles exegetes because, how can the disciples be worrying about the coming presence of God, when God is already present in the temple.

One scholar, P. M. Casey,<sup>2</sup> suggests Mark made up the story of the Temple; another scholar, David Seeley,<sup>3</sup> suggests Mark made up the story about watching for the master to return home, both to suit the historical Jesus. All I am thinking is that exegetes have a problem. I guess I lean toward the idea of the renewed presence of God with the overcoming of evil, rather than too much of a focus on the Second Coming, Parousia.

I have helped several people through their last illnesses and have experienced the presence of God as they overcame the evil inherent in their last illnesses with their

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<sup>1</sup> Frank J. Matera, review of Elliot C. Maloney, O.S.B., Jesus' Urgent Message for Today: The Kingdom of God in Mark's Gospel in *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No 4 (October 2004) 660-661.

<sup>2</sup> P. M. Casey, "Culture and Historicity: The Cleansing of the Temple," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 2 (April 1997) 308.

<sup>3</sup> David Seeley, "Jesus' Temple Act Revisited: A Response to P.M. Casey," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No 1 (January 2000) 56.

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love of God (and humans, like me). Isaiah 64:7 illustrates how the prophet drew the presence of God from misfortune, *we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands.*"

Isaiah 63:16b begins by addressing God directly, as *father* and *redeemer*. Exegetes involve this verse in a controversy over how much Jews at the time of Jesus looked for a Messiah.<sup>4</sup> Impatience with waiting for the Kingdom of God can bring guilt. Isaiah 64:5 proclaims, *our guilt carries us away like the wind*. The guilt of sin is evil. The way to get rid of that guilt is through the redeeming presence of God.

Guilt reflects itself in Psalm 80, a form of the Blues.<sup>5</sup> Pastoral Care of the Sick uses Psalm 80 in two places. The notion is God as shepherd, bringing goodness out of evil. Psalm 80:3c, *come to save us* brings good from evil. The vine, mentioned in Psalm 80:15, is a grape vine, which the psalmist earlier describes as left for fodder for boars.<sup>6</sup>

In this place, the vine (evil overcome) becomes a symbol for Christ, *the son of man whom you yourself made strong* (Psalm 80:16b). The original Hebrew is clearer, pronouncing that God authorized the son of man.<sup>7</sup> The question of authority was what confused the Pharisees, who asked by what authority Jesus worked his miracles.

The selection from 1 Corinthians draws good from evil. Paul is writing to lambaste the Corinthians for factionalism, but in this part of his letter, Paul describes the grace of their original conversion.<sup>8</sup> The Lectionary 1 Cor 1:3, *God our Father* reflects the *our father* of Isaiah 63:16b and 64:7. Paul takes belief in one God, the Father, for

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<sup>4</sup> Brendan Byrne, S.J., *Jesus as Messiah in the Gospel of Luke: Discerning a Pattern of Correction*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003) 80.

<sup>5</sup> Wilma Ann Bailey, "The Sorrow Songs: Laments from Ancient Israel and the African American Diaspora," in Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Randall C. Bailey, ed., (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 64.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Whitekettle, "Bugs, Bunny, or Boar? Identifying the *Ziz* Animals of Psalms 50 and 80," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No 2 (April 2005) 257

<sup>7</sup> Documentation lost.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Fiore, S.J., "*Covert Allusion*" in *1 Corinthians 1—4*, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vo. 47 (January 1985) 101-102.

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granted.<sup>9</sup> Paul is not giving up, writing that God *will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor 1:8), that is, the Second Coming. Through Cycles B and C, I intend to continue with the Greek in the epistles.

My new “apparatus” is an ability to identify word differences among the earliest manuscripts. The word *Christ* appears four times in the reading, 1 Cor 1:3, 4, 6, 8, 9. Some of the manuscripts omit *Christ* in verses 6 and 8. In verse 8, some manuscripts substitute *Parousia* or *Second Coming* for *Christ*. Evidently, the Church is trying to make a point. When Paul gives *thanks to my God* (1 Cor 1:4), some manuscripts have *our God*. The Church may not be convinced that the God of the Faithful was the God of the Corinthians. Interestingly, keeping *firm to the end* (1 Cor 1:8) has *beginning* in some manuscripts. Struggling to find God in Holy Scripture makes God present.

In 2002, available on the internet, these Notes emphasized the need for watchfulness. Mark 13:35 writes *you do not know when the lord of the house is coming* and then gives suggested times, breaking the day into four parts, from evening through morning, when the Faithful might be sleeping. Mark does not suggest a special need to watch at mid-day, when the Faithful expect to be awake and alert.<sup>10</sup> Mark implies the Faithful need to make an effort to be aware that God is present. In this way, sleepiness and lack of attention are an obstacle, preventing the Faithful from recognizing that God is present.

In conclusion the watchfulness of waiting for Christmas, of overcoming evil with penance and prayer, makes God present. As Isaiah and Paul proclaim, God is our father. Waiting is a cause for the Blues as expressed in Psalm 80. Overcoming evil, overcoming the Blues does make God present, especially as the baby Jesus at Christmas.

For more on sources see the Appendix file. Personal Notes are on the web site at [www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes](http://www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes)

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Plevnik, S.J., *The Understanding of God at the Basis of Pauline Theology, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (October 2003) 564.

<sup>10</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Mark 10:29: Order in the List, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (July 1997) 466-467.