

Personal Notes  
061210 Second Sunday of Advent 6C  
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The Lectionary readings for this Sunday prepare the Faithful for Christmas with an expression of hope for the joy of the next generation producing a better life. Baruch is full of this hope, with at least some of the exiles having returned from Babylon in the hope of building a better life with the coming messiah. Though from the African-American diaspora, Wilma Ann Bailey labels Psalm 126 a lamentation, the psalm rejoices at the thought of God. Despite the difficulties of life, knowledge and insight can make joy possible.

The Epistle to the Philippians is an expression of prayer by Saint Paul for both knowledge and insight. Within the context of Advent, the knowledge and insight is that character matters both in winning the battle of life and secular endeavors, such as professional football games. The Gospel about the baptism of John expresses the insight that salvation consists in the forgiveness of sins with hope for the future.

The first reading is from the Book of Baruch, which some Protestants exclude from the Bible. Baruch 5:1 tells Jerusalem to “take off your robe of mourning and misery.” In the eternal scheme of things, sin is the reason for such mourning and misery. That robe of mourning and misery symbolizes the unconscious defense mechanisms, which the Faithful must live with, but lack the knowledge and insight to change. In that sense, no one is without sin. This robe symbol works for the Faithful both as individuals and as groups.

Baruch 5:2 goes on to urge the Faithful to wear “the cloak of justice from God.” This cloak of justice from God is the truth, as best the Faithful are able to obtain it at the conscious level. Truth is the key not only to knowledge and insight, but also to the forgiveness of sins. As the Gospel explains, repentance is key.

Baruch 5:4 refers to “the peace of justice.” Within the context of civil rights, if the Faithful want peace, they need to work for justice; they need to repent of injustice. The notion of civil rights admonishes the Church to examine its conscience with regard to the Faithful.

Baruch 5:5-9 portrays the exile as in progress. Baruch was a sixth century B.C. aid to Jeremiah.<sup>1</sup> Scholars question whether Paul regarded the Babylonian exile as continuing into his own day.<sup>2</sup> The issue for the Advent Season is longing for the messiah to return the Faithful from sin to justice.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.answers.com/topic/baruch-ben-neriah> (accessed November 6, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Charles H. Talbert, “Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 18.

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Bailey is interested in justice and civil rights. My personal prayer is for insight as to why Bailey considers Psalm 126 a group lamentation. Yet with a Steady Beat is considering how Black Christians stay the course. The Responsorial is that “The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.” Perhaps Bailey is using a numbering system different from the Lectionary.<sup>3</sup>

Almost exclusively, Protestant churches use the hymn “Bringing in the Sheaves,” inspired by Psalm 126:6. Knowles Shaw wrote the words in 1874 and George Minor set the words to music in 1880. The words are:

Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,  
Sewing in the noontime and the dewy eve;  
Waiting for the harvest and the time of reaping,  
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

*Refrain*

*Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves,  
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves  
Bringing in the sheaves, bringing in the sheaves,  
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves,*

Sowing in the sunshine, sowing in the shadows,  
Fearing neither clouds nor winter’s chilling breeze,  
By and by the harvest, and the labor ended,  
We shall come rejoicing bringing in the sheaves.

*Refrain*

Going forth with weeping, sowing for the Master,  
Though the loss sustained our spirit often grieves,  
When our weeping’s over, He will bid us welcome,  
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

*Refrain<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</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>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bringing\\_in\\_the\\_Sheaves](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bringing_in_the_Sheaves) (accessed November 5, 2006).

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My personal effort at sowing goodness for these readings is in the Greek for Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11. Paul picks up the theme of joy described above in Psalm 126 and mentioned at Baruch 5:9, “for God is leading Israel in joy.” With joy the appropriate theme for Christmas, that joy is implicit in Philippians 1:8, “how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”<sup>5</sup>

At Philippians 1:4, Paul expresses for whom he is praying. His Greek for the words *for all of you* is the same Greek used to express the *for you* to interpret Christ’s death at the last Supper (Luke 22:19, 20).<sup>6</sup> The Eucharist is a form of daily incarnation of the life of Christ into the lives of the Faithful, made possible by the Christmas joy for which Advent prepares. That preparation includes a sense of time not used in other liturgical seasons.

In English, the preposition *until* in Philippians 1:5, “until now” and Philippians 1:6, “until the day of Christ Jesus” carries two different meanings in the Greek. The first *until* expresses duration of time, looking backward. This is the life of Christians, having come this far by Faith. The second *until* expresses a deadline, looking forward.<sup>7</sup> The gist of both frames of time is that the participation of the Faithful in the Gospel message will carry them past Christmas until Jesus comes again, at the Last Judgment. The hope of Christmas brings joy to the finality of the Last Judgment.

Praising God has a practical aspect in Philippians 1:9, where Paul prays for “knowledge and every kind of perception.” The Greek for *every kind of perception* means insight. For example, professors are sometimes accused of having great knowledge without the practical insight required to understand what knowledge means. Paul is praying for such a sense of discernment. Philippians 1:10 puts it, “to discern what is of value.” The anticipated Nativity scene demonstrates what is of value, namely that character counts. Social trappings from the manger at Bethlehem to the cross at Golgotha and Calvary do not matter.

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<sup>5</sup> Lee A. Johnson, “Paul’s Epistolary Presence in Corinth: A New Look at Robert W. Funk’s Apostolic *Parousia*,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 3 (July 2006) 490-491.

<sup>6</sup> Jerry L. Sumney, “I Fill up What is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ’: Paul’s Vicarious Suffering in Colossians,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 4 (October 2006) 677.

<sup>7</sup> Max Zerwick, S.J. and Mary Grosvenor, A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament unabridged, 5th, revised edition (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1996) 592.

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What can the Faithful do by their own will power? For Paul, those who follow the law relying on their own will power are not able to accomplish the goal. For Paul, the Faithful can only follow the law through the grace of Christ. By excluding the effectiveness of the human will, Christianity is different from Judaism.<sup>8</sup> In Christianity, grace brings joy, even the joy at the prospect of a new generation carrying on the Gospel.

There is a problem at Luke 3:3 with John the Baptizer “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” because forgiveness comes through Jesus Christ, not John. Luke, therefore, systematically pushes John’s baptizing into the background and emphasizes, instead, John’s preaching.<sup>9</sup> The focus throughout Advent is Jesus as the Messiah.

The key insight from these readings is that the depressing aspects of life are countered by the joy of hope in the truth of justice promised by the Infant Jesus and fulfilled by his life as continued through grace, in the lives of the Faithful. I have participated with daily communicants as they prepare for their impending change of life from this to the next. That joy of expectation of better things to come sustains them at the hour of their death, as it has during their lives.

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>8</sup> Charles H. Talbert, “Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 17.

<sup>9</sup> Richard J. Dillon, “The Benedictus in Micro- and Macrocontext,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No 3 (July 2006) 477.