

My word for this Third Sunday is **prayer**. **Prayer** is the life of **spirit** and **soul**.

The antiphon is "My **soul** rejoices in my God."

The Visitation is the pertinent decade of the Rosary, the second of the Joyful Mysteries.

A closer examination of my *pray, pay, and obey* phrase needs the modification, *unrequited*. The arrogant clergy would never *pray, pay, and obey* to serve the Faithful; although the humble clergy do so frequently. Correctly, all of the Faithful do need to *pray, pay, and obey*, but hardly in the sense would arrogant clergy have it.

Fifty years ago, Catholics were not able to find anyone to write a pamphlet on how to **pray**. The following comments are still of rare order. **Prayer** may be divided into oral, mental, and contemplative. The following comments are about mental **prayer**. Within the soul is a third voice, a voice not audible to the ear and not the voice of the **pray-er**, but a third voice. This third inner voice is controllable. Just as the first voice, that of the **pray-er**, the audible voice, can control whom it addresses, so the inner voice can chose with whom to dialogue. When that inner voice directs itself at God, **prayer** results. Not only can the **pray-er** control the direction of voice, the **pray-er** also has some control over the fantasies and dreams that go with the dialogue. Once *pray* is in place, *pay* and *obey* can get involved.

Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11

Isaiah 61:1 is the key to Third Isaiah.¹ First Isaiah is about being forced into exile because of lack of **prayer**. Second Isaiah is about **praying** to return from exile. Third Isaiah is about **praying** to lead a better life.

Isaiah 61 is used in three places in this liturgy: (1) First Reading; (2) Responsorial Psalm, and (3) Alleluia.

verse 1a The **spirit of the Lord GOD** is upon me,
 because the LORD has **anointed** me;

This **spirit of the Lord GOD** is the spirit of **prayer**. **Anointing** is a sign of the democratization of the Covenant. **Anointed** refers to those who seek to carry out the ideals of Deutero-Isaiah.² In Third or Trito-Isaiah, the Covenant is not simply with the

¹ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599, page 33.

² Adrian M. Leske, "Context and Meaning of Zechariah 9:9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 4 (October 2000) 666.

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royal household or with the clergy, but with the people themselves, as the next part of the verse shows. **Isaiah 61:1** are the introductory words to Trito-Isaiah's fifth Servant Song.³

verse 1b he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the **poor**,
 to heal the **broken hearted**

The **poor** and the **broken hearted** or **poor** in spirit are the people. This message is not that voluntary poverty and **poor** in spirit are rewarded with the presence of the Father, but that the Father is going to reverse the fortunes of the beat up remnant that has returned from exile into Jerusalem.⁴

The Latin⁵ for **broken hearted** is *contritis*, from which *contrite* is derived. A contrite heart with a firm purpose of amendment seems like the appropriate way to incorporate this verse into one's **prayer** life.

verse 10a I rejoice heartily in the LORD,

The Latin uses *Gaudens gaudebo*, alliteration, a sort of emphasis by repetition. This is the verse repeated under a different translation in the antiphon.

verse 10b in my God is the joy of my **soul**;

verse 10c for he has **clothed** me with a robe of salvation
 and wrapped me in a **mantle** of **justice**

Saint Jerome renders his Latin translation of Isaiah into verse. The Latin for **clothed** and **mantle** are derived from the same literary stem. **Clothed** with **justice** is the idea, an idea suited for **prayerful** dialogue.

³ Richard J. Sklba, "'Until the Spirit from on High Is Poured out on Us' (Isa 32:15): Reflections on the Role of the Spirit in the Exile," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 1 (January 1984) 14.

⁴ Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No. 3(July 1996) 463, 465.

⁵ 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

From Ezekiel the Faithful learn that God uses nature to draw close to humans, to show his presence, up close and personal. That idea, useful for **prayer**, is contained in

verse 11 As the earth **brings forth** its plants,
 and a garden makes its growth **spring up**,
so will the LORD GOD make **justice** and praise
 spring up before all nations.

The Latin has the stem for **germinate** in three places: (1) **brings forth**, (2) **spring up** and (3) **spring up**. **Prayer germinates justice** within the souls of the Faithful.

Isaiah 61:11 has been quoted extensively in October 6, 2002, for The Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time.⁶

Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54 (Isaiah 61:10b)

This is the Magnificat, Mary's prayer at the Visitation.

verse 46-47 My **soul** proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
 my **spirit** rejoices in God my Savior.

verse 48a for he has looked upon his **lowly servant**.

Lowly servant looks different from the **poor** in Isaiah above. Saint Jerome has Mary use *ancillae* in the Latin. *Ancillae* carries with it the notion of *maidservant*. In other words, this verse is pertinent to the misery of sexism.

verse 54a He has come to the help of his **servant** Israel.

Saint Jerome has Mary use *puerum suum* in the Latin. Especially in these days of sexual scandal, there would be sexual connotations with an overly literal translation, *his own boy*. Why not pray with both sexism and child abuse in dialogue? The politically correct English smooths over the challenge to the abuses the status quo perpetuates against women and children. Would a dynamic equivalence or a formal literal equivalence improve the translation? I lack the technical skills to have an opinion about the translation, but I know how I can **pray** the matter to include sexual and child abuse.

verse 50 He has mercy on those who fear him
 in every generation.

⁶ Bernard F. Batto, "The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 2 (April 1987) 202-203.

The Latin brings out the notion of **germinate**, at least in my imagination.

1 Thessalonians 5:116-24

verse 16 Rejoice always. **Pray** without ceasing.

verse 19 Do not quench the **Spirit**

verse 23 May the God of peace make you perfectly holy
and may you entirely, **spirit, soul**, and body,
be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 61:1 (cited in Luke 4:18)

verse 1 The **Spirit** of the Lord is upon me,
because he has **anointed** me
to bring glad tidings to the **poor**.

John 1:6-8, 19-28

There is a lot of audible dialogue here from John the Baptizer, dialogue reflective of his inner **prayer**.

These verses are an answer to **prayer, prayer** for the Messiah. Scholars tell us that the emphasis used for John to say that

verse 21 I am not the Christ

was an early Christian formula meaning that Jesus is the Christ.⁷

These readings are about **prayer, prayer** for a better life in Isaiah; **prayer** of rejoicing in the Magnificat, **prayer** without ceasing in Thessalonians, and **prayer** with John the Baptizer as he is questioned about the Messiah. This is mental **prayer** in dialogue with the Father, contemplating material things compounded into the Messiah himself during this Advent Season.

⁷ Bernard F. Batto, "The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 2 (April 1987) 206.