

Personal Notes  
041219 Fourth Sunday of Advent 10A  
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Reading Sacred Scripture as an outside observer is insufficient for entering the Kingdom of God. Accepting the Word as a personal interpretation expressed in life is also required. Peter S. Williamson wrote his doctoral dissertation from the Gregorian University in Rome on Catholic principles for interpreting Sacred Scripture. One of those principles is personal actualization on the part of the Faithful.<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah 7:14, about the Virgin birth, becomes difficult when one realizes that scholars indicate that the original Hebrew for *virgin*, is *young woman*, who may or may not be a virgin. The difficulty is complicated when one considers the development of the doctrine of Mary, the Virgin, before, during, and after birth.<sup>2</sup> When one considers, however, what the dogma has to do with how the Faithful live their lives, the dogma has more for the scholars than for the Faithful to worry about. The Faithful can accept the divine Virgin birth without much of a problem.

Pious devotion interacts with living reality at the level of human sexuality. The Virgin Mary exemplifies human sexuality at its best, raising God in a human family. Through grace, the Faithful do the same thing in their everyday lives, as they raise their children to the love of God. Such is the meaning of Emmanuel; God is with us, personal actualization of Sacred Scripture. Next Sunday is the feast of the Holy Family.

Psalms 24 is another of the royal psalms whereby Jesus is from the line of David as Matthew explains.<sup>3</sup> The Davidic Jesus comes as the Good Shepherd, looking after his people as a good and kind ruler. The beginning of Romans points out that Jesus extends his Chosen People to the Gentiles,<sup>4</sup> to outsiders, something very pertinent as priests from outside the United States occupy rectories within the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter S. Williamson, "Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 2003) 327-349; Dale Launderville, O.S.B., review of Peter S. Williamson, Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, in The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 2003) 460-464.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Globe, "Some Doctrinal Variants in Matthew 1 and Luke 2, and the Authority of the Neutral Text," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January 1987) 52-72.

<sup>3</sup> W. R. G. Loader, "Son of David, Blindness, Possession, and Duality in Matthew," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 1982) 571.

<sup>4</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Why the 'Weak' at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 66.

The Faithful in the United States are on their own to interpret Sacred Scripture for themselves, as never before.

### **Isaiah 7:10-14**

Isaiah 7 is about not forming alliances.<sup>5</sup> For the Faithful, this means actualizing Sacred Scripture by not forming alliances with anything but God, the Infant Jesus. Verse 13 refers to the House of David, something with which Paul is not overly impressed. Across the centuries, the Church has taken a far different Christmas attitude.

### **Psalm 24:1-2, 3-4, 5-6**

*Let the Lord enter; he is the king of glory*, the Responsorial antiphon, refers to the hearts of the Faithful letting the Lord be their love. Psalm 24 identifies with the exodus movement into the Promised Land,<sup>6</sup> in this case, the love of God by the Faithful.

This reading is used as follows in the Lectionary.

<u>Reading</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>verses</u>	<u>Sunday</u>
10A	54	1-2, 3-4, 5-6,	(7 and 10b) Advent 4 Today
524	1124	7, 8, 9, 10	(8) February 2, The Presentation of the Lord

Psalm 24 only has ten verses, the first six of which are used here, and the last four at the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. In 2005, February 2 falls on a Wednesday, when the feast will be celebrated. Ash Wednesday, Lent, begins the following Wednesday, February 9. Verses 6 and 7 form a transition between this fourth Sunday of Advent and The Presentation.

Verse 6, *that seeks the face of God* is what the Good Thief did on his cross, asking Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom.<sup>7</sup> Verse 7 exhorts the Faithful to *Lift up, O gates* [of your Faithful hearts], *your lintels* [that is the tops of the

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher T. Begg, "2 Kings 20:12-19 as an Element of the Deuteronomistic History," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 1 (July 1986) 30.

<sup>6</sup> 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) 4.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Hamm, S.J., "The Tamid Service in Luke-Acts: The Cultic Background behind Luke's Theology of Worship (Luke 1:5-25; 18:9-14; 24:50-53; Acts 3:1; 10:3, 30)," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 2 (April 2003) 229.

gates].<sup>8</sup> At Christmas, the liturgy presents the Infant Jesus to the Faithful; at the Presentation, the liturgy presents the Infant Jesus to God. By receiving Jesus at Christmas and presenting themselves to God at the Presentation, the Faithful can actualize the readings in their own lives.

## **Romans 1:1-7**

Verses 1-5 point out that Paul is an apostle to the Gentiles; he has no jurisdiction over either believing or unbelieving Jews.<sup>9</sup> In verse 5, *the obedience of faith*, is a response to the disobedience of Adam, a personal actualization of Sacred Scripture, first in Jesus,<sup>10</sup> then in Paul, and finally in the lives of the Faithful.

In verse 3, Paul does mention David as part of a creedal<sup>11</sup> formula. According to William O. Walker, Jr., that formula is not anything Paul himself wrote originally.<sup>12</sup> Though admitting the Davidic covenant, Paul is basically unimpressed. Had the Davidic Covenant been central to Pauline thought, Paul would recognize the promise to David fulfilled in the reign of Jesus after the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20-28). Of the nine covenants found in the First Testament, Paul discounts six. Paul emphasizes the Covenant with Abraham and Moses. Paul also has a lesser, but special place for the covenant with Jeremiah.<sup>13</sup>

Paul does not yet recognize *the Spirit of Holiness* in verse 4 as a person. Matthew, writing later, does. Paul does have high regard for the Spirit. In Pauline theology,

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<sup>8</sup> Joel Marcus, "The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18-19)," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 50, No. 3 (July 1988) 445.

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Why the 'Weak' at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 66.

<sup>10</sup> R. Barry Matlock, "'Even the Demons Believe': Paul and πιστις Χριστου," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2002) 308.

<sup>11</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) 81.

<sup>12</sup> William O. Walker, Jr., "Galatians 2:7b-8 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 4 (October 2003) 570.

<sup>13</sup> Charles H. Talbert, "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 18-19.

the resurrection and exaltation cannot be understood without the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> Through grace, the Holy Spirit dwells within the hearts of the Faithful.

Grappling with the Holy Spirit of God can be disconcerting. Humans do not control God and that is the point of actualizing Sacred Scripture. The Jewish leaders thought Jesus an imposter, deserving of death. Except for the resurrection, death would have accomplished the aims of the religious leaders of the status quo.<sup>15</sup> In Romans, Paul invites the Faithful to participate in the resurrection through grace. Death, therefore, has no more meaning for the Faithful than it does for Jesus. Such is the joy of the newborn King of the Jews.

### **Matthew 1:23**

The liturgical emphasis is on the virgin birth.

### **Matthew 1:18-24**

In Matthew, the Lord's Prayer outlines order, community, and transformation, a theme extending throughout the Gospel. That outline serves as a way for the Faithful to interpret Sacred Scripture into their own lives. During the Christmas Season, Matt 1:21 and 23 express the life of Christ as a manifestation of the saving presence of God.<sup>16</sup> The lives of the Faithful do likewise.

Verses 18 and 20, in the Greek, express Holy Spirit as a proper name.

Verse 19 is about Joseph trying to figure out what to do now that Mary is pregnant. I cannot help but wonder why commentators do not suppose that Mary explained her situation to Joseph, input Joseph had as he was figuring what to do. The Greek for *decided* and *intention* is not as determinative as the English is. The Greek carries the implication that Joseph was weighing his options. Conviction at a public trial may have meant death for Mary. No one ever considers that, even before Jesus,

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<sup>14</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) 563.

<sup>15</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Study," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 1 (January 1987) 71.

<sup>16</sup> Warren Carter, "Recalling the Lord's Prayer: The Authorial Audience and Matthew's Prayer as Familiar Liturgical Experience," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 57, No. 3 (July 1995) 529.

Mary was confronted with the possibility of an unjust trial and execution.<sup>17</sup> No one ever supposes that that Mary shared her experience with Jesus, preparing him for his life.

No one seems to notice that in Matthew, Joseph gets to name Jesus; while in Isaiah, his mother names him. Matthew quotes Isaiah that *they* shall name him, but the earlier Lectionary reading has the virgin naming him. The *they* in Matthew refers to the people of Israel recognizing Jesus as the Good Shepherd.<sup>18</sup>

Matthew is tender toward Joseph, recognizing Joseph as the husband of Mary and Mary as his wife. Matthew does not explicitly use the virginal conception as support for the divine sonship.<sup>19</sup> As time went on, the Faithful became concerned that the virgin birth be recognized unambiguously, as it now is.<sup>20</sup>

Matthew has two basic convictions about the Faithful. Matthew is convinced first that the Faithful do the will of the Father as found in the law, second that Jesus is their savior, as seen here in verse 21. Love is the heart of the law and of the prophets.<sup>21</sup> The Faithful actualize this dimension of Sacred Scripture by making the Christmas Season the season of love.

Looking forward to Epiphany, the revelation to the Gentiles, Matthew writes nothing about Bethlehem here, but only later, in Chapter 2. In Chapter 2, Matthew makes the point that the chief priests and scribes knew about Bethlehem. Matthew would be trying to make the point that the religious leaders at the time of Jesus were

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<sup>17</sup> Angelo Tosato, "Joseph, Being a Just Man (Matt 1:19)," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 41, No. 4 (October 1979) 547-551.

<sup>18</sup> John Paul Heil, "Ezekiel 34 and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 4 (October 1993) 700.

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey A. Gibbs, "Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 3:13-17)," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 514.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Globe, "Some Doctrinal Variants in Matthew 1 and Luke 2, and the Authority of the Neutral Text," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January 1987) 52-72.

<sup>21</sup> Terence L. Donaldson, "The Law That Hangs (Matthew 22:40): Rabbinic Formulation and Matthean Social World," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 57, No. 4 (October 1995) 705.

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missing the forest for the trees; they knew the facts and the details without combining them with human love at the heart of the ministry of Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

To summarize, personal actualization of Isaiah means that the presence of God with the Faithful, Emmanuel, ought to manifest itself with the Faithful. With Psalm 24, God should enter the hearts of the Faithful in all his glory. Romans includes all people among those chosen by God to actualize his presence. Matthew goes back to cite Isaiah to explain what God meant by what Isaiah proclaimed, namely that the Faithful were to be born again in the Christmas Infant, Christ Jesus.

For more on sources see the Appendix file. When these Notes refer to prior references to Sacred Scripture, the purpose is to invite readers to request what was written previously. I intend to make this announcement of purpose one more time before relegating it to the Appendix.

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<sup>22</sup> John Nolland, "The Sources for Matthew 2:1-12," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 2 (April 1998), 291-292.