

Personal Notes
061224 Fourth Sunday of Advent 12C
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The Fourth Sunday of Advent is setting the stage for the wonder of a new precious life and peace. Mica 5:4a identifies the Messiah with peace. Psalm 80:4, the Responsorial antiphon, is also gentle. "Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved." Hebrews moves away from the slaughter of animals to doing the will of God. Luke 1:39-45 implicitly compares Mary with Judith and Jael to favor a new, hopeful, gentleness.

The Catholic Biblical Quarterly offers the Faithful insights for the readings of the Fourth Sunday of Advent. The first insight is a parallel between Judith 13:18, Judges 5:24, and Luke 1:42. Judith and Jael were violent women, saving Israel from her enemies. As Brittany E. Wilson puts it, Judith and Jael are "the only named women in the entirety of Israel's writings, both canonical and noncanonical, who kill a person with their own hands and are then exalted for assisting the people of Israel."¹ Violence would not be appropriate in the new dispensation begun with Mary. The gentleness of Luke 1:42 is modeled on and contrasts with the violence of Judith 13:18 and Judges 5:24. With Mary, the situation would be well enough in hand, that violence would not be needed to make the point of the presence of God.

Richard J. Dillon takes another angle. When John the Baptizer is examined apart from the Christian purposes of the Gospel narrative. Dillon writes, "No messiah was envisioned between them [John and Jesus], however much Christian appropriation of the Benedictus [of Zachariah when he named John the Baptizer] has institutionalized the *ανατολη* [the rising sun, [Luke 1:78]] as a name of Christ."² That relationship with God has to be why the disciples of John the Baptizer persisted in the writing of Saint Paul.

Dillon continues, Elizabeth and Zachariah as a childless couple, represent "a nation without a future."³ Dillon goes on, "no particularly strong connection is forged in the OT or in early Judaism between God's covenant with Abraham and the destiny of the house of David."⁴ Israel, at the time of Jesus, was not sitting on the edge of its

¹ Brittany E. Wilson, "Pugnacious Precursors and the Bearer of Peace: Jael, Judith, and Mary in Luke 1:42," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 3 (July 2006) 442.

² Richard J. Dillon, "the Benedictus in Micro- and Macrocontext," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 3 (July 2006) 473-474.

³ Richard J. Dillon, "the Benedictus in Micro- and Macrocontext," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 3 (July 2006) 464.

⁴ Richard J. Dillon, "the Benedictus in Micro- and Macrocontext," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 3 (July 2006) 471.

Personal Notes
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seat, awaiting an all-conquering military messiah. While the concept was present, much of an expectation was not. John and Jesus were both able to go about their business gently without much fanfare.

Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, another scholar, warns that, although Luke is gentle in his concern for the disfranchised, Luke 1 should not be drawn too closely to liberation theology. Luke 1 accepts economics, modes of production, and a complex class structure inimical to liberation theology.⁵ Liberation theology is more political than Luke.

While Luke 2: 2 mentions the Roman politician Quirinius, Luke omits the prophet Mica. Mica would have been useful for narrating why the Holy Family went to Bethlehem because of Quirinius. What makes most sense to Mark D. Smith is that “Joseph went to Bethlehem to maintain the legal status of his property as well as to take advantage of a tax loophole.”⁶ Joseph is gentle? Following Mica?

To the contrary, dragging a pregnant wife for miles on a donkey, when she is about due, sounds abusive, rather than gentle. This set Bette and me into one more discussion about my forcing a theme onto the readings, a theme present in my mind [Joseph was non violent. He did not start an armed revolution.] but difficult for others to detect. I have always regarded these essays as a sort of annotated bibliography for the Lectionary.

My intention, therefore, is to change the format into that of an annotated bibliography. This will eliminate the footnotes and move that material into the body of my Notes. I intend to stay with the Greek for the benefit of the insights I gain there, not because my Greek is special. My hope is to put the themes I see in a section with the Greek. I ask readers to help me with this change with their suggestions and observations.

Gentleness toward others is not the same as self-discipline required for gentleness. The passage from Hebrews 10:5-10 used by the Lectionary is part of Hebrews 7:1—10:25 about the sacrificial priesthood of Jesus. In his gentleness, Jesus accepted

⁵ Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, “Let My People Go! Threads of Exodus in African American Narratives,” in Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Randall C. Bailey, ed., (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 141.

⁶ Mark D. Smith, “Of Jesus and Quirinius,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 283, 290.

death on a cross. Jesus died once and sacramentally continues to do repeat his sacrifice for everyone at Mass.⁷ The approach of the New Testament is gentle.

The psalmsinger chosen by the Lectionary is also gentle, invoking the image of a shepherd to ask for the presence of God, to shine forth and save his people.⁸ The divine presence is described as light,⁹ something dear to Poor Clare nuns. Light is inherently gentle. Psalm 80 is a lamentation, suitable for offering hope to those suffering from such social ills as racism.¹⁰ The vocabulary used at Psalm 80:18, the man of your right hand," dignifies humanity.¹¹ Psalm 80 was probably begun when Israel was in exile, seeking deliverance and restoration.¹² The Advent message is that it is not necessary to exercise power over others in order to tap into the power of God.

The following is from the "Encyclical Letter: *Deus Caritas Est* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops Priests and Deacons Men and Women Religious and All the Lay Faithful on Christian Love."¹³ Paragraph 41 draws from Luke 1, utilizing

⁷ Craig R. Koester, "Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future of Humanity," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 112.

⁸ Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 60.

⁹ Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 185-186.

¹⁰ 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) 164.

¹¹ Alexander A. Di Lella, O.F.M., "The One in Human Likeness and the Holy Ones of the Most High in Daniel 7," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 1977) 2.

¹² Alexander A. Di Lella, O.F.M., "The One in Human Likeness and the Holy Ones of the Most High in Daniel 7," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 1977) 115-16.

¹³ Benedict XVI, "Encyclical Letter: *Deus Caritas Est* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and All the Lay Faithful on Christian Love," http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclixals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_2..._1/30/2006_20-23/25. I am somewhat anglicizing the grammar.

verses just before and just after those in the Lectionary for today. Both the Lectionary and Deus Caritas Est use John 2:4, Deus Caritas Est in paragraph 41, the Lectionary in Reading 66C for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. Brackets [] indicate personal insertions by me.

PART II

Caritas

THE PRACTICE OF LOVE BY THE CHURCH AS A “COMMUNITY OF LOVE”

The Church’s charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love ...

Charity as a responsibility of the Church ...

Justice and Charity ...

The multiple structures of charitable service in the social context of the present day ...

The distinctiveness of the Church’s charitable activity ...

Those responsible for the Church’s charitable activity

32. Finally, we must turn our attention once again to those who are responsible for carrying out the Church’s charitable activity. As our preceding reflections have made clear, the true subject of the various Catholic organizations that carry out a ministry of charity is the Church herself—at all levels, from the parishes [not the Domestic Church, the familyh?], through the particular Churches, to the universal Church. For this reason it was most opportune that my venerable predecessor Paul VI established the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* as the agency of the Holy See responsible for orienting and coordinating the organizations. And charitable activities promoted by the Catholic Church. In conformity with the Episcopal structure of the Church, the Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are charged with primary responsibility for carrying out in the particular Churches the program set forth in the *Acts of the Apostles* (cf. 2:42-44): today as in the past, the Church as God’s family must be a place where help is given and received, and at the same time, a place where people are also prepared to serve those outside her confines who are in need of help. In the rites of episcopal ordination, prior to the act of consecration itself, the candidate must respond to several questions which express the essential elements of his office and recall the duties of his future ministry. He promises

expressly to be, in the Lord's name, welcoming and merciful to the poor and to all those in need of consolation and assistance.¹⁴ The *Code of Canon Law*, in the canons on the ministry of the Bishop, does not expressly mention charity as a specific sector of episcopal activity but speaks in general terms of the Bishop's responsibility for coordinating the different works of the apostolate with due regard for their proper character.¹⁵ Recently, however, the *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* explored more specifically the duty of charity as a responsibility incumbent upon the whole Church and upon each Bishop in his Diocese,¹⁶ and it emphasized that the exercise of charity is an action of the church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning.¹⁷

32. ... 35 are treated at Reading 095B, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, 060625.

36. When we consider the immensity of others' needs, we can, on the one hand, be driven towards an ideology that would aim at doing what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem. Or we can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any event nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive if we are to keep on the right path, without falling into an arrogant contempt for man, something not only unconstructive but actually destructive, or surrendering to a resignation which would prevent us from being guided by love in the service of others. Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbors, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbor but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. In her letter for Lent 1966,

¹⁴ Cf. Pontificale Romanum, *De ordinatione episcopi*, 43.

¹⁵ Cf. Can. 394; *Code of the Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 203.

¹⁶ Cf. Nos. 193-198: pp. 212-219.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 194: pp. 213-214.

Blessed Teresa wrote to her lay co-workers: "We need this deep connection with God in our daily life. How can we obtain it? By prayer."

37. It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work. Clearly, the Christian who prays does not claim to be able to change God's plans or correct what he has foreseen. Rather, he seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work. A personal relationship with God and an abandonment to his will can prevent man from being demeaned and save him from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism. An authentically religious attitude prevents man from presuming to judge God, accusing him of allowing poverty and failing to have compassion for his creatures. When people claim to build a case against God in defense of man, on whom can they depend when human activity proves powerless?

38. Certainly Job could complain before God about the presence of incomprehensible and apparently unjustified suffering in the world. In his pain he cried out: "Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! ... I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? ... Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me" (23:3, 5-6, 15-16). Often we cannot understand why God refrains from intervening. Yet he does not prevent us from crying out, like Jesus on the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? [asking why God did not allow him to die already! Or at least pass out.]" (Mt 27:46). We should continue asking this question in prayerful dialogue before his face: "Lord, holy and true, how long will it be?" (Rev 6:10). It is Saint Augustine who gives us faith's answer to our sufferings: "*Si comprehendis, non est Deus—'if you understand him, he is not God.'*"¹⁸ Our protest is not meant to challenge God, or to suggest that error, weakness or indifference can be found in him. For the believer, it is impossible to imagine that God is powerless or that "perhaps he is asleep" (cf. 1 Kg 18:27). Instead, our crying out is, as it was for Jesus on the Cross, the deepest and most radical way of affirming our faith in his sovereign power. Even in their bewilderment and failure to understand the world around them, Christians continue to believe in the "goodness and loving kindness of God" (Tit 3:4). Immersed like everyone else in the dramatic complexity

¹⁸ *Sermo* 52, 16:PL 38, 360.

of historical events, they remain unshakably certain that God is our Father and loves us, even when his silence remains incomprehensible.

39. Faith, hope and charity go together. Hope is practiced through the virtue of patience, which continues to do good even in the face of apparent failure, and through the virtue of humility, which accepts God's mystery and trusts him even at times of darkness. Faith tells us that God has given his Son for our sakes and gives us the victorious certainty that is really true: God is love! It thus transforms our impatience and our doubts into the sure hope that God holds the world in his hands [ignoring the well-known song by the same name] and that, as the dramatic imagery of the end of the Book of Revelation points out, in spite of all darkness he ultimately triumphs in glory. Faith, which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the cross, gives rise to love. Love is the light—and in the end, the only light—that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practice it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in his way to cause the light of God to enter into the world—this is the invitation I would like to extend with the present Encyclical.

CONCLUSION

40. Finally, let us consider the saints, who exercised charity in an exemplary way. Our thoughts turn especially to Martin of Tours (+ 397), the soldier who became a monk and a bishop: he is almost like an icon, illustrating the irreplaceable value of the individual testimony to charity. At the gates of Amiens, Martin gave half of his cloak to a poor **man**: Jesus himself, that night, appeared to him in a dream wearing that cloak, confirming the permanent validity of the Gospel saying: "I was naked and you clothed me ... as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt 25:36, 40*).¹⁹ Yet in the history of the church, how many other testimonies to charity could be quoted! In particular the entire monastic movement, from its origins with Saint Anthony the Abbot (+ 356), expresses an immense service of charity towards neighbor. In his encounter "face to face" with the God who is Love, the monk senses the impelling need to transform his whole life into service of neighbor, in addition to service of God. This explains the great emphasis on hospitality, refuge and care of the infirm in the vicinity of the monasteries. It also explains the immense

¹⁹ Cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini*, 3, 1-3: SCh 133, 256-258.

Personal Notes
061224 Fourth Sunday of Advent 12C
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initiatives of human welfare and Christian formation, aimed above all at the very poor, who became the object of care firstly for the monastic and mendicant orders, and later for the various male and female religious institutes all through the history of the Church. The figures of saints such as Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, John of God, Camillus of Lellis, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Giuseppe B. Cottolengo, John Bosco, Luigi Orione, Teresa of Calcutta to name but a few—stand out as lasting models of social charity for all **people** of good will. The saints are the true bearers of light within history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love.

41. Outstanding among the saints is Mary, Mother of the Lord and mirror of all holiness. In the Gospel of Luke we find her engaged in a service of charity to her cousin Elizabeth, with whom she remained for “about three months” (1:56) so as to assist her in the final phase of her pregnancy. “*Magnificat anima mea Dominum.*” She says on the occasion of that visit, “My soul magnifies the Lord” (*Lk* 1:46). In these words she expresses her whole program of life: not setting herself at the center, but leaving space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbor—only then does goodness enter the world. Mary’s greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify God, not herself. She is lowly: her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord (cf. *Lk* 1:38, 48). She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God’s initiatives. Mary is a woman of hope: only because she believes in God’s promises and awaits the salvation of Israel, can the angel visit her and call her to the decisive service of these promises. Mary is a woman of faith: “Blessed are you who believed,” Elizabeth says to her (cf. *Lk* 1:45), The *Magnificat*—a portrait, so to speak, of her soul—is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate. Finally, Mary is a woman who loves. How could it be otherwise? As a believer who in faith thinks with God’s thoughts and wills with God’s will, she cannot fail to be a woman who loves. We sense this in her quiet gestures, as recounted by the infancy narratives in the Gospel. We see it in the delicacy with which she recognizes the need of the spouses at Cana and makes it known to Jesus. We see it in the humility with which she recedes into the

Personal Notes
061224 Fourth Sunday of Advent 12C
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background ruing Jesus' public life, knowing that the Son must establish a new family and that the Mother's hour will come only with the Cross, which will be Jesus' true hour (cf. *Jn* 3:4; 13:1). When the disciples flee, Mary will remain beneath the cross (cf. *n* 19:25-27); later, at the hour of Pentecost, it will be they who gather around her as they wait for the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14).

42. The lives of the saints are not limited to their earthly biographies but also include their being and working in God after death. In the saints one thing becomes clear; those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men but rather become truly close to them. In no one do we see this more clearly than in Mary. The words addressed by the crucified Lord to his disciple—to John and through him to all disciples of Jesus: "Behold, your mother!" (*Jn* 19:27)—are fulfilled anew in every generation. Mary has truly become the Mother of all believers. Men and women of every time and place have recourse to her motherly kindness and her virginal purity and grace, in all their needs and aspirations, their joys and sorrows, their moments of loneliness and their common endeavors. They constantly experience the gift of her goodness and the unfailing love which she pours out from the depths of her heart. The testimonials of gratitude, offered to her from every continent and culture, as a recognition of that pure love which is not self-seeking but simply benevolent. At the same time, the devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him—a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God's love to become in their turn a fountain from which "flow rivers of living water" (*Jn* 7:38). Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power. To her we entrust the Church and her mission in the service of love;

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
You have given the world its true light,
Jesus, your Son—the Son of God.
You abandoned yourself completely
To God's call
And thus became a wellspring
Of the goodness which flows forth from him.
Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.
Teach us to know and love him,
So that we too can become
Capable of true love
And be fountains of living water

In the midst of a thirsting world.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 December, the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, in the year 2005, the first of my Pontificate.

Benedictus PP. XVI

The Notes continue. When I examine my conscience as a member of the institutional Church, by my participation I become responsible for the very conscience of that Church. Any such examination, requires the gentle love espoused in the Lectionary readings. To quote the encyclical no. 36, "guided by love in the service of others," loving the Church is made difficult with an Encyclical such as this one.

In a spirit of examining the conscience of the Church, this section of the Encyclical is a self-serving misrepresentation of the spiritual life I experience. How to square my experience with the Encyclical is another question. The sexual abuse cover-up of his hierarchy never occurs to Deus Caritas Est, when in paragraph 31 the encyclical mentions, "The *Code of Canon Law*, in the canons on the ministry of the Bishop, does not expressly mention charity as a specific sector of episcopal activity."

Nor does it occur to Deus Caritas Est that when Jesus cries out "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus is exhibiting humor for those who understand the real presence of God in difficult times. My reference is to a friend who died from brain cancer. He once asked me why people regarded him as holy. My response was that he continued to crack jokes in his terrible condition. When I suggested that that was what Jesus was doing with the above phrase on the cross, my friend nodded in ascent that such was the type of humor he exhibited, too.

Deus Caritas Est does not seem to understand prayer as a legitimate cloistered apostolic work. Deus Caritas Est makes no attempt even to recognize misogyny, let alone correct it.

Deus Caritas Est does not understand the *Magnificat* at all. The *Magnificat* is not a paeon to passivity, but, rather, a proclamation that God is managing to reveal himself through human activity. I disagree with Deus Caritas Est, "Mary's greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify God, not herself." Rather, Mary's greatness consists in the fact of what God is doing to make her great. Deus Caritas Est seems to be feathering episcopal authority at Mary's expense.

The papacy will not even use the word *dialogue*, let alone engage in dialogue. There is a New Zealand scholar who examined all the Vatican Document language for her doctorate and found that *dialogues* is never used for exchanges between laity and

Personal Notes
061224 Fourth Sunday of Advent 12C
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clerics/Magisterium.²⁰ Of such is the significance at Regensburg when Benedict said he would dialogue with Muslims. On the positive side, the lack of dialogue means that by trying to ignore me and my kind, the Magisterium treats me gently. I try to do the same by not forcing these Notes on the Magisterium.

The Lectio for this Sunday contrasts the gentleness of Mary with the violence of Judith and Jael. Gentleness allows for hope and peace. Bethlehem, mentioned in Mica, is a gentle place. Psalm 80 is also gentle, looking for a savior. Hebrews describes the gentle Jesus, substituting the offering of his own body for that of animals. In its concern for the poor, the Gospel of Luke also exudes gentleness and gentility. Deus Caritas Est is an attempt to move the gentleness of Jesus out to all humanity through the Church.

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

²⁰ Kim E. Power e-mail from H-Net Discussion List on International Catholic History, Monday, October 16, 2006 10:54 PM. Dr. Power's phone numbers are 03 9421 1730 and fax 03 9421 1731. As of October 16, 2007, her web site had changed to www.pilgrimagetotheheart.com.au