

Matthew is the Gospel for those who feel persecuted and put upon.<sup>1</sup> Matthew is directly about the child abuse of Herod and indirectly about whatever other abuse the Faithful may endure. The reading from Sirach concerns how to handle abuse, with a view toward eternity. The Responsorial antiphon for Psalm 128 is about fearing the LORD, rather than abuse. St. Paul in Colossians admonishes the Faithful to forgive one another. In the final analysis, the issue is patience and love.

### **Sirach 3:3-6, 14-16**

The reading does not consider child abuse by parents, but rather is about parental abuse by children.

### **Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5**

### **Colossians 3:12-21**

Verse 15, *let the peace of Christ control your hearts* is pertinent to abuse; for example the abuse of society towards the elderly. In Matt 2:15, where Jesus is called the Son of God, as a stand-in for Israel,<sup>2</sup> Jesus is also a stand-in for all those persecuted.

Verse 18 about wives being subordinate to their husbands, like verse 3 in Psalm 128 about the wife being like a fruitful vine, requires careful reading in the light of the possibility of spousal abuse.

In his apostolic letter, *On the Most Holy Rosary*, Pope John Paul II mentions Col 3:17-19 in Chapter II, "Mysteries of Christ—Mysteries of His Mother"

#### **From "mysteries" to the "Mystery": Mary's way**

24. The cycles of meditation proposed by the Holy Rosary are by no means exhaustive, but they do bring to mind what is essential and they awaken in the soul a thirst for knowledge of Christ continually nourished by the pure source of the Gospel. Every individual event in the life of Christ, as narrated by the Evangelists, is resplendent with the Mystery that surpasses all understanding (cf. Eph 3:19): the Mystery of the Word made flesh, in whom "all the fullness of God dwells bodily"

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara E. Reid, O.P., "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 238, 241

<sup>2</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, "Observations on the 'Miracle Chapters' of Mathew 8-9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 564.

(Col. 2:9). For this reason, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* places great emphasis on the mysteries of Christ, pointing out that “everything in the life of Jesus is a sign of his Mystery.”<sup>3</sup> The *duc in altum*” of the Church of the third millennium will be determined by the ability of Christians to enter into the “perfect knowledge of God’s mystery, of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:2-3). The Letter to the Ephesians makes this heartfelt prayer for all the baptized: “May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, so that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power—to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:17-19).

The Rosary is at the service of this ideal; it offers the “secret” which leads easily to a profound and inward knowledge of Christ. We might call it *Mary’s way*. It is the way of the example of the Virgin of Nazareth, a woman of faith, of silence, of attentive listening. It is also the way of a Marian devotion inspired by knowledge of the inseparable bond between Christ and his Blessed Mother: *the mysteries of Christ* are also in some sense *the mysteries of his Mother*, even when they do not involve her directly, for she lives from him and through him. By making our own the words of the Angel Gabriel and Saint Elizabeth contained in the *Hail Mary*, we find ourselves constantly drawn to seek out afresh in Mary, in her arms and in her heart, the “blessed fruit of her womb” (cf. *Lk* 1:42).<sup>4</sup>

Mary is a stand-in for dealing with patriarchal abuse of women. She is no Pope. She is no bishop. She is no priest, yet she is very *full of grace*.

## **Colossians 3:15a, 16a**

Reemphasizes *let the peace of Christ control your hearts*.

## **Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23**

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<sup>3</sup> Footnote 30: No. 515.

<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae*, at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2ROSAR.HTM>, 10/16/02, paragraph 24, page 12-13 of 26.

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Verse 13 portrays Herod as murderous in a manner similar to the later portrayal of the Jewish leaders.<sup>5</sup> Verse 13 also portrays Herod as threatening the order of God with sin, the refusal to accept the will of God. Once that order is accepted, community and transformation follow.<sup>6</sup> Matthew terms Herod king of the Jews throughout Chapter 2, the converse of Jesus, whom Matthew also terms king of the Jews.<sup>7</sup> Herod is abusive; Jesus is not.

Verse 15, *out of Egypt I called my son*, portrays Jesus as an antitype or recapitulation of Israel as a whole. Verse 20, *go [back] to the land of Israel*, implies that Jesus is an antitype of Moses himself.<sup>8</sup>

Verse 19 is the last verse of 17-19 that reflects a “new Exodus” following the Greek translation of Jeremiah 38. The translations made for English generally come from the Hebrew rather than the Greek. The new Exodus motif stems from Jeremiah 38:20, *This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased*. The verse also connects with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist (Matt 3:13-17). Jesus stands with the Faithful as they confess their sins. Finally, Jesus withstands the temptations of Satan as he begins his ministry (Matt 4:1-17).<sup>9</sup>

Verse 20, *the child's life* in the Greek and Latin means the child's spirit or soul.

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	sought the child's life
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	quaerebant animam pueri

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<sup>5</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) 65.

<sup>6</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.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 25.

<sup>8</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) 513, 519, 525, 526.

<sup>9</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) 519, 526.

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<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	sought the life of the child
<u>King James</u> (1611):	sought the young child's life
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	wanted to kill the child
<u>New American</u> (1970):	sought the child's life
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	wanted to kill the child

Verse 22, *Archelaus was ruling over Judea*, Archelaus was commonly referred to as Herod. His father, Herod the Great, was also Herod. Josephus refers to Archelaus as *king*.<sup>10</sup>

Verse 23 is difficult to understand. Evidently, *Nazorean* means flower in the Hebrew and the reference is to the root of Jesse flowering in Isaiah 1:1, rather than to a place, like Bethlehem.<sup>11</sup> The New Jerusalem does not give a scriptural reference for verse 23.

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	He shall be called a Nazorean
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	Nazaraeus vocabitur
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	He shall be called a Nazarene
<u>King James</u> (1611):	He shall be called a Nazarene
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	He will be called a Nazarene
<u>New American</u> (1970):	He shall be called a Nazorean

A footnote indicates not only that the town of Nazareth is not mentioned in the First Testament, but that no such prophecy can be found either. A reference is made in Isaiah 1:1, the flower bud.

<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	He will be called a Nazarene
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Consider that Matthew may be writing from a scholarly place in Caesarea for Jews, whether Christian or not. Matthew assumes knowledge of the First Testament. Matthew does not hesitate to offer a new interpretation of that knowledge, without being too precise about exact First Testament quotations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mark D. Smith, "Of Jesus and Quirinius," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 286.

<sup>11</sup> Maximilian Zerwick, S.J., English Edition adapted from the Fourth Latin Edition by Joseph Smith, S.J., Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblico—114—Biblical Greek (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1994) 143.

<sup>12</sup> This and the following paragraph draw from Ronald N. Liburd, "Textual Harassment? A Hermeneutical Perspective on African American Preaching," in Yet

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In Hos 11:1-2 Hosea shares the pain of his unfaithful wife as the pain of God with the unfaithful Israel following the Exodus from Egypt. God continues to love Israel; Israel persistently experiments with worshipping false gods. Seven centuries later, Matthew reflects on what Hosea means to him to proclaim that the prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus. *Out of Egypt I have called my son.* Preaching follows such a Matthean pattern, explaining what the Scripture means to the preacher. The difference is that Matthew is part of the inspired Bible, whereas current Christian preaching is not.

According to historical criticism, so meaningful to postmodern interpretation, the proof-text method of Matthew amounts to “textual harassment.” In other words, to satisfy himself in the First Century, Matthew abused what Hosea wrote in the Eighth Century B.C. Sacred Scripture has many difficulties.

Whether what happens is abuse or not depends on total context. In any absolute sense, the relationship between human creature and God his Creator cannot be abusive. When one is totally responsible for what one creates, one cannot abuse. When one simply participates in what one creates, such as in the act of procreation, one can be guilty of abuse. There is such a thing as child abuse suited for consideration in these readings.

For the purpose of these Notes, Sirach is not only about the relationship between child and parent, but also about the converse relationship between parent and child. If parents do not expect to be abused in their old age, they ought not to abuse their underage children or their own parents. Psalm 128 is about the difficulty of cross-generational relationships, admonishing the Faithful to *fear the Lord and walk in his ways*.

For the purpose of these Notes, Colossians is also best read with converse connotations. If husbands want to be loved, they need to love their wives; if wives want to be in charge, they need to accept the charges of their husbands. If parents want their children to obey, parents must seek that obedience as pleasing to the Lord, rather than themselves in any abusive manner. If fathers do not want to become discouraged with their children, they ought not provoke and thereby abuse their children into discouragement. In the final analysis, the issue is patience and love.

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with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Randall C. Bailey, ed., (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 87-89.

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For more on sources see the Appendix file.

#### Appendix B

The Feast of the Holy Family in Cycles B and C in 2003 and 2002; the Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time, 126C 040829; the Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time 129C 040905; the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time 150C contain comments for this reading in Sirach.

The Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time in Cycle B, 030105 contains comments for this reading from Psalm 128.

If you would like to see previous comments, simply make the request and I will send them to you. I am placing this offer in the updated, attached Appendix. I do not again intend to repeat the offer in the main body of my comments.