

Personal Notes
030309 First Sunday in Lent 23B
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This first paragraph is designed for someone having difficulty focusing, whether because of medical problems or lack of preparation. Through all of these Personal Notes, Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. Spirituality of the Psalms, is special. Stuhlmueller does not index Psalm 25 for this Sunday. As for the other readings, Genesis brings out the Noachic hope for the future. The Psalm focuses on the positive aspects of love and truth. Peter sees the possibility of a good conscience, while Mark joyfully proclaims that the **Kingdom of God** is at hand.

There are some underlying assumptions for the following reflections. I spent the week of February 2-9, 2003 preparing for these readings contemplating the meaning of evil. Evil is (1) judgment of God, presumption, (2) falsification of the Commandments so that what belongs to God is given to anyone else, (3) cruelty or harm under any guise, (4) sanctimonious judgment of others, and (5) negative thinking. Evil is also despondent, depressed, dispossessed, full of past regrets, in a word, **wild**. Good is loving, positive, self-possessed, upbeat, full of future hope, in a word, civilized.

The word for this Sunday is **wild**, used twice in the Lectionary, once in Genesis, once in the Gospel. The need is to domesticate **wild** into peaceful harmony with God.

The reading from Pope John Paul II's, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae* is to see in Mark 1:15 that the **Kingdom of God** is at hand. Much of these Notes will be an explanation of the **Kingdom of God**. Forgiveness of sins is part of that **Kingdom**.

John Paul writes,

Another mystery of light is the preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming of the **Kingdom of God**, calls to conversion (cf. Mk 1:15) and forgives the sins of all who draw near to him in humble trust (cf. Mk 2:3-13; Lk 7:47-48): the inauguration of that ministry of mercy which he continues to exercise until the end of the world, particularly through the Sacrament of Reconciliation which he has entrusted to his Church (cf. Jn 20:22-23).

Some comments on the Sacrament of Reconciliation: Theologically, if the priest knows the number and kind of sins accompanied by a firm purpose of amendment, the priest may (unless the local ordinary rules otherwise) forgive the sins. If that is all that happens, Reconciliation is a worthy exercise. Facing up to one's faults is a wholesome psychological and religious experience. Where there is a problem is where the priest starts giving advice, including admonitions. What is little known is that the penitent can refuse the penance and the advice and go elsewhere.

Refusing the penance has happened. A teacher must use her anger to control her students. After hearing her sins, a priest asked Bette if she ever got angry. Bette

confessed that she did with her students and found herself berated by her confessor, to the point where she did not see how she could function professionally. What she confessed was a minor, inadvertent fault, not the loss of her reason in disciplining her students. The confessor did not understand the situation. St. Therese of Avila always worried about finding a prudent confessor. The sacrament of Reconciliation can be tricky.

The new liturgy encourages the penitent face-to-face with the priest in much the sense that a patron might speak with a bartender, baring his soul. The problem with that is that few priests have the good sense of bartenders when it comes to listening to people bare their souls. Bartenders will be non-judgmental, in the best sense of that term and that is the skill, when to be non-judgmental and when to judge. In the ordinary course of seminary training, priests do not receive professional course work inculcating what the counseling psychologists have learned, i.e. how to counsel using the tools of psychology.

Genesis 9:8-15

This reading is about the **Covenant** made with Noah. The Lectionary¹ uses the word *covenant* five times, translating two different words from the *Nova Vulgata*²:

- verse 9 “See, I am now establishing my **covenant** with you
 and your descendants after you
- verse 10 and with every living creature that was with you:
 all the birds, and the various tame and **wild** animals
 that were with you and came out of the ark.
- verse 11 I will establish my **covenant** with you...
- verse 12 God added:
 “This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come,
 of the **covenant** between me and you

¹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Roman Missal Restored by Decree of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Lectionary for Mass: For Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America: Second Typical Edition: Volume I: Sundays, Solemnities, Feasts of the Lord and Saints (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998).

² The *Nova Vulgata* is the official language approved by Pope John Paul II. These Personal Notes refer to the *Nova Vulgata* also with the following terms: Saint Jerome, Vulgate, and the Latin. 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.

verse 13 and every living creature with you
I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign
of the **covenant** between me and the earth.
verse 14 When I bring clouds over the earth,
and the bow appears in the clouds,
verse 15 I will recall the **covenant** I have made
between me and you and all living beings . . .

For **covenant**, verses 9 and 11 use *saturam*, which carries the connotation of statute or commonly agreed upon internal law. Verses 12, 13, and 14 use *foederis*, which carries the connotation of federation or commonly agreed upon external law. Saint Jerome uses yet a third word, *testamentum*, for **covenant** in the Psalm antiphon. *Testamentum* is the term I like.

The Noachic **Covenant** is not very personal, but between God and **wild** creation. As Mark K. George puts it, "In the Noachic **covenant** (Gen 9:8-17), no particular relational language is used at all to describe the relationship between YHWH and creation."³ This covenant follows a pattern found in similar non-Judaic writing that the inspired writer of Genesis could be expected to have known. There is a difference. The ancient non-Judaic myths refer to a primordial time of peace and harmony, broken by human disruption. The Judaic Covenant of Peace carries a future hope rather than a bygone memory.⁴

Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

For comparative purposes, see Verse 10 immediately following with the later Lectionary full translation used for the First Sunday of Advent, and the still later personal translation.

See verse 10 Your ways, O Lord, are *love and truth* to those who keep your **covenant**.

The Liturgist extemporized the *love and truth* part. The Psalmist is singing about universal harmony, a sort of Garden of Paradise to come.

³ Mark K. George, "Fluid Stability in Second Samuel 7," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 35.

⁴ Bernard F. Batto, "The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 2 (April 1987), 187-211.

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Some of my Notes have already commented upon this Psalm; this Winter, November 30, 2003, the First Sunday of Advent, will return to this Psalm. There⁵ verse 10 is translated as follows.

verse 10 All the paths of the LORD are kindness and constancy
 toward those who keep his **covenant** and his decrees.

The Psalmist is joining behavior, the law, with the **covenant**. **Wild** is evil, cruel, and misbehavior. Vincent M. Smiles points out, “**Covenant**’ often appears in synonymous parallelism with some word representing ‘law.’”⁶

January 26, 2003, The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time carries my previous reflections:

Psalm 25 is one of the alphabetical acrostic psalms. By following the alphabet, beginning each verse with the next appropriate letter, these psalms rely on reason more than emotion to sing their praise.⁷ Effective **repentance** requires the sound use of reason.

verse 8 Good and upright is the LORD;
 thus he **shows** sinners the way.

Saint Jerome⁸ uses *docebit*, to which I bring the sense that he will **teach** sinners the way.

⁵ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Roman Missal Restored by Decree of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Lectionary for Mass: For Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America: Second Typical Edition: Volume I: Sundays, Solemnities, Feasts of the Lord and Saints (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), page 15.

⁶ Vincent M. Smiles, “The Concept of ‘Zeal’ in Second-Temple Judaism and Paul’s Critique of It in Romans 10:2,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2002), page 291.

⁷ Hanan Eshel and John Strugnell, “Alphabetical Acrostics in Pre-Tannaitic Hebrew,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2000) 443.

⁸ *Saint Jerome, the Latin, and the Nova Vulgata* all refer to 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.

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verse 9 He guides the humble to justice
 and **teaches** the humble his way.

Saint Jerome uses a variety of words through this verse. For the first **humble**, Jerome uses *mansuetos*, to which I bring the sense of *gentle* or *non-disruptive*. For **teaches**, Jerome uses *docebit*, the same word he uses for **shows** earlier. For the second **humble**, Jerome uses *mites*, to which I bring the sense *lowly* in the sense of *free from harshness*.

Verse 10 [at the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time] is omitted, but this verse 10 brings the Psalm back to the covenant. The covenant and the law are closely linked.⁹ My translation of verse 10: *All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth for those who keep his commandments and witness his **covenant***.

Reading 136A, Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary time, September 29, 2002, carries further previous reflections.

Psalm 25 is an alphabetical acrostic psalm, more than a simple burst of emotion, but a reasoned explanation of God in history.¹⁰

Verse 5 guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.

The King James Version¹¹ and the *Nova Vulgata* (NV) add **on thee do I wait all the day**.

Verse 9 He guides the **humble** to justice, and teaches the **humble** his way.

For **humble** the NV has *mansuetos* (humble) and *mites* (poor). The *New Jerusalem Bible*¹² explains, in a footnote: “‘poor’ Syr.; Hebr. repeats ‘humble’. This means that the Syriac version has one thing, the ancient Hebrew another.

⁹ Vincent M. Smiles, “The Concept of ‘Zeal’ in Second-Temple Judaism and Paul’s Critique of It in Romans 10:2,” *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2002) 291.

¹⁰ Paul Overland, “Did the Sage Draw from the Shema? A Study of Proverbs 3:1-12,” *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2000) 441.

¹¹ General Editor, The Reverend Cain Hope Felder, Ph.D., *The Original African Heritage Study Bible: King James Version* (Nashville: The James C. Winston Publishing Company, 1993).

Verse 5, for this First Sunday in Lent, compares with verse 5 for the forth-coming First Sunday of Advent.¹³

verse 5 guide me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are God my savior.

verse 5 guide me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are God my savior,
 and for you I wait all the day.

Similarly, verse 7 for this First Sunday in Lent compares with verse 7 for the Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary time.

verse 7 In your kindness remember me,
 because of your goodness, O LORD.

verse 7 The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not;
 in your kindness, remember me,
 because of your goodness, O LORD.

The Lectionary does not always document when snippets are omitted.

verse 8 Good and upright is the LORD,
 thus he shows sinners the way.

Saint Jerome translates **thus** with *propter*. Saint Jerome is showing a causality between the sweetness and rectitude of God and his showing sinners the way. The way is away from the **wild** and disconcordant toward harmony in the Lord.

1 Peter 3:18-22

¹² Henry Wansbrough, General Editor, The New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

¹³ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Roman Missal Restored by Decree of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Lectionary for Mass: For Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America: Second Typical Edition: Volume I: Sundays, Solemnities, Feasts of the Lord and Saints (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 14.

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Verse 18 omits a phrase at the beginning, but then continues with the thought above.

- verse 18 Christ suffered for sins **once**,
the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous,
that he might lead you to God.
Put to death in the flesh,
he was brought to life in the Spirit.
- verse 19 In it he also went to **preach** to the spirits in prison,
who had once been disobedient.

From the Latin, *semel*, **once** connotes one time, rather than once upon a time, as implied in verse 19.

The Gospel will show Jesus **proclaiming**, where here he is **preaching**. The word Jerome uses for *put to death* is *mortificatus*, from which *mortification* is derived. The idea of mortifying the flesh in order to enhance the spirit is implied.

My view of the spiritual life is something alive, dynamic, burgeoning with potential rather than as something dead, static, and devoid of meaningful choices. As Ambrose (339-420), Confessor, Bishop of Milan, puts it, “this is the reason you received arms; not to stand at ease, but to fight.”¹⁴ The interior life is about loving God through the vicissitudes of life.

Saint Gregory the Great (540-603), Pope and Doctor, explains “that temptation is accomplished in three stages; by suggestion, by delight, by consent.” Gregory finds the same pattern in Original Sin, moving from gluttony, to vain glory, to avarice.”¹⁵

1 Peter goes on, explaining the Noachic flood.

- verse 21 This prefigured **baptism**, which saves you now.
It is not a removal of dirt from the body
but an appeal to God for a clear conscience

¹⁴ St. Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor, “The Season of Penance,” PG 57, hom. 13 as cited in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Two: From the First Sunday in Lent to the Sunday after the Ascension, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 4.

¹⁵ St. Gregory the Great, Pope and Doctor, “Given to the People in the Basilica of Saint John, which is called The Constantinian, on the First Sunday of Lent, PL 76, 1134, Sermo. 16 as cited in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Two: From the First Sunday in Lent to the Sunday after the Ascension, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 33.

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...

Evidently, **it** refers to **baptism**. The sense of this passage is that a clear conscience is a forlorn hope for humans, but a real hope **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ**.

Matthew 4:4b

No comment

Mark 1:12-15

Scholars ponder the sources used by the Evangelists. A so-called Q source is generally assumed. Robert H. Stein includes verses 12-13 to point out why. These verses are part of the Matthew-Luke agreements in Mark. The scholar hunts down other places where Matthew and Luke differ with Mark as a sign of some other, Q source.¹⁶

Again, verses 12-15 overlap verses from the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, last January 26. My comments then were.

verse 15 “This is the time of fulfillment.
The **kingdom** of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

Belief links **repentance** with the **covenant** and the Gospel. Bringing the Gospel from theory to practice, Mark uses Peter, James, and John as a formula. Sometimes, as here, Andrew makes the trio a quartet. This foursome is also found at Mark 1:29 and 13:3.¹⁷ The significance is that Mark passes over opportunities to single out or lessen the stature of Peter, Peter whose **repentance** is classic.

verse 12 The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert

Saint John Chrysostom (354-407), Bishop of Constantinople, shows that it takes a human to fast and be hungry. This sacrifice on the part of Jesus faked Satan into not

¹⁶ Robert H. Stein, “The Matthew-Luke Agreements Against Mark: Insight from John,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July, 1992), page 485.

¹⁷ E. Best, “Peter in the Gospel According to Mark,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978), page 557.

realizing that Jesus is God. Chrysostom points out that Moses and Elias also fasted forty days and they were hungry the whole time. Jesus was only hungry afterwards (cf. Matthew 4:2). As Chrysostom puts it, “Not to eat, and to hunger, is part of human infirmity. Not to hunger, belongs to the divine nature.”¹⁸

Chrysostom preached that the Spirit leads the Faithful, too, in a way similar to Jesus, into the desert to fast and to be with God. Chrysostom teaches that faith is dynamic and cannot stay still but must try to accomplish something.¹⁹

verse 13 and he remained in the desert for **forty days**,
 tempted by Satan.
 He was among **wild** beasts,
 and the angels **ministered** to him.

The word **ministered** derives from a Greek word for *deacon*. In the seminary, the Deacons were always happy to serve and find a place for service as a proud part of their office.

verse 14 After John had been arrested,
 Jesus came to Galilee **proclaiming** the gospel of God:
 “This is the time of **fulfillment**.
 The **Kingdom of God** is at hand.
 Repent and believe in the gospel.”

Proclaiming the Gospel of God will become part of the ministry of the followers of Jesus. At this point, Mark is establishing what Jesus did. Jesus is the one sent out to preach. Later the followers will be commissioned to do likewise.²⁰

¹⁸ Chrysostom, *ex Op. Imp., Catena Aurea Sancti Thomae* (Editio Joannis Nicolae, O.P., Lyons, 1686 (A complete edition in English of the Catena Aurea is in course of preparation.—Ed.) in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Two: From the First Sunday in Lent to the Sunday after the Ascension, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 6-7.

¹⁹ Chrysostom, *ex Op. Imp., Catena Aurea Sancti Thomae* (Editio Joannis Nicolae, O.P., Lyons, 1686 (A complete edition in English of the Catena Aurea is in course of preparation.—Ed.) in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Two: From the First Sunday in Lent to the Sunday after the Ascension, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 4.

²⁰ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., “Mark 6:6b-30: Mission, the Baptist, and Failure,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2001) 651.

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Repent comes from the Greek meaning to turn around, changing one's ways. The Latin, *paenitemini* carries more of the sense of doing penance.

I would rather translate "*This is the time of **fulfillment***" as, *The time has come*. The idea is that time is something like sand filling an hourglass. Philosophically, time is a measure of motion. Genesis and the Psalm carry a sense of the constancy of the seasons being a sign of the constancy of the **covenant**. The **wild** times are over, the harmonious times are here.

In a word, Genesis brings out the Noachic hope for the future. The Psalm focuses on the positive aspects of love and truth. Peter sees the possibility of a good conscience, while Mark joyfully proclaims that the **Kingdom of God** is at hand.