

Personal Notes
060305 First Sunday in Lent 23B
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The poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), worded it this way, "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways."¹ The readings for this First Sunday in Lent are about the different facets of the love of God. The Faithful do not see light directly, but only through reflection or a prism, so they recognize the love of God not directly, but only through reflection or a prism of their own experiences.

By analogy, how a diamond reflects light depends on the way the diamond is cut, whether round brilliant or one of the fancy cuts, such as the mixed Princess, rose, Antwerp rose, double Dutch rose, heart, oval, pear, stars, butterflies, emerald, triangle, kite, trapeze.² The list goes on. The point is that love, like diamonds, comes with many different facets and types of brilliance. Love is anything but simple. Love also changes with individuals as they mature and over time as social customs and civilizations change.

The readings for today give the Faithful facets of the love of God within a Lenten context. The Genesis readings begin with a sort of contract or covenant, between God and Israel. Psalm 25 is about humans not keeping up their side of the covenant. Psalm 25 is about combating sin with love. The Church uses Psalm 25 at funerals³ and at visits to the sick.⁴ 1 Peter is about Jesus stepping in to intercept

¹ John Bartlett, edited by Emily Morison Beck and the editorial staff of Little, Brown and Company, Familiar Quotations: A collection of passages, phrases and proverbs traced to their sources in ancient and modern literature: fifteenth and 125th anniversary edition, revised and enlarged (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980) 507:14.

² <http://www.answers.com/%22diamond%20cuts%22> (accessed February 12, 2006 1:55 p.m.).

³ N.a., International Commission on English in the Liturgy: A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and published by Authority of Pope Paul IV: Order of Christian Funerals: Including Appendix 2: Cremation: Approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1998) 224, 254, 262, 268.

⁴ The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum: Approved for use in the dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See: Prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy: a

and block the evil in the hearts of humans with his own divine love. The Gospel is about the Lenten need to make an effort to be good and resist the temptations of Satan. None of this is simple. All of this is complex.

In Genesis, love appears as God giving humans another chance with no mention of any insistence humans be good in return. As Margaret Barker words it, "The promise to Noah, that the eternal covenant *with all flesh* was secure for all future generations, was itself a product of the crisis of the exile, after the destruction of the first temple (Gen. 9:12-17)."⁵ Barker retranslates Gen 9:14-15 as Gen 9:16, "and when the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature (Gen. 9:16)."⁶ *Every living creature* is a translation of the Hebrew for *all flesh*.⁷ Since flesh is the source of much sin, this passage shows that the facets of Divine love permeate every aspect of life. With the Noachic covenant, the love of God is unconditional.

That notwithstanding, the Day of Atonement was an effort to preserve the covenant despite sin.⁸ Psalm 25 recognizes the need to be good and to have God show how to do it. Psalm 25:8, *he shows sinners the way*. Unconditional love is not part of the bargain. Human response, imperfect as it must be, is demanded. Trying to meet that demand is the purpose of Lent.

Human responses require thinking. Psalm 25 is an alphabetic acrostic, meaning that each verse begins with another of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In Psalm 25, each line actually begins with the next letter of the twenty-two letter Hebrew alphabet and is twenty-two lines long.⁹ Anthony R. Ceresko, O.S.F.S. writes¹⁰ that

Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1983) 172, 283.

⁵ Margaret Barker, The Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 293.

⁶ Margaret Barker, The Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 89.

⁷ Margaret Barker, The Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 290.

⁸ Margaret Barker, The Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 83.

⁹ Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P., "The Use of "Panels" in the Structure of Psalms 73-78," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No 4 (October 2004) 537.

Personal Notes
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Frank Moore Cross has reminded us of the impact of the alphabet in the evolution of human civilization: "(T)he invention of the alphabet was a unique as well as a revolutionary gift to human culture, marking a major transition in the history of human thought and social institutions." Indeed, Cross links the alphabet with the origin of logic and skepticism in Greece and "the prophetic principle" in Israel:

The older elitist and relatively static and hierarchical societies of the Near East gave way to new, dynamic societies, alphabetic societies which reached their pinnacle in the ancient world in Israel and Greece: Israel with its prophetic critique of state and temple, democratic Greece with its gift to humanity of logical thought and critical skepticism.

The Faithful in the United States carry on a sense of skepticism expressed in difficulty obtaining papal approval for the American English Lectionary. Love is fraught with difficulties and is not simple. The difficulty translating 1 Peter 3:19-20, for example, brings out the many-sided aspects of love.

What I wondered about in the Greek was who was unbelieving and who was waiting. The Greek has the inanimate *patience* waiting. The verb is third person, singular, middle imperfect, indicative. This means that *patience* is the subject doing the waiting. However, because the waiting reflects back upon itself, in the middle voice, the English translation can have either God or the *spirits in prison* doing the waiting. The English translations sometimes have the spirits waiting; at other times God waiting. The pertinent parts of the translations are highlighted below.

1 Peter 3:19-20

Lectionary (1998): In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been **disobedient** while God patiently **waited** in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water.

The Vulgate (circa 410): in quo et his, qui in carcere erant; spiritibus adveniēns praedicavit, qui **increduli** fuerant aliquando, quando **expectabat** Dei

¹⁰ Anthony R. Ceresko, O.S.F.S., "Endings and Beginnings: Alphabetic Thinking and the Shaping of Psalms 106 and 150," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 1 (January 2006) 44.

patientia in diebus Noe, cum fabricaretur arca, in qua pauci, id est octo animae, salvae factae sunt per aquam.

Douay-Rheims (1582-1610): In which also coming he preached to those spirits that were in prison: which had been some time **incredulous**, when they **waited** for the patience of God in the days of Noe, when the ark was a building: wherein a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water.

King James (1611): By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were **disobedient**, when once the longsuffering of God **waited** in the days of Noah, while the ark was a [sic] preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

Jerusalem (1966): and, in the spirit, he went to preach to the spirits in prison. Now it was long ago, when Noah was still building that ark which saved only a small group of eight people “by water,” and when God was still **waiting** patiently, that these spirits **refused to believe**.

New American (1970): In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been **disobedient** while God patiently **waited** in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water.

New Jerusalem (1985): and, in the spirit, he went to preach to the spirits in prison. They **refused to believe** long ago, while God patiently **waited** to receive them, in Noah’s time when the ark was being built. In it only a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water.

Part of the issue, above, turns on *the spirits*. How does the translator regard *the spirits*, as humans dying before Christ or as devils. In the first case, Jesus goes to the dead who have died before him to announce the Good News, therefore, *preach*. This is part of the Apostles Creed; *he descended into hell*, meaning *Hades*, the place of the after-life. In the second case, Jesus goes to show that the devils blasphemed at not believing God, because Jesus fulfilled the Word of God. In this case, a better translation than *preach* would be *announce*.

The facets of love involved focus both on humans and on evil spirits. They also focus on human imperfectability passing on the Word of God in both the original manuscripts and the final eclectic Greek text and subsequent translations. Part of repentance for human imperfection in the New Testament involves the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Finding a prudent confessor can be a difficult task.

1 Peter 3:21 has *an appeal to God for a clear conscience*. The Greek implies a request for Baptism by the catechumen.¹¹ A clear conscience can be compatible with mental illness.

Agneta Schreurs, in Psychotherapy and Spirituality: Integrating the spiritual dimension into therapeutic practice, cites data that clergy often refer parishioners to psychotherapists, while therapists never refer patients to clergy.¹² This means spiritual direction and psychotherapy are only integrated with difficulty. As reluctant as clergy are to step away from psychotherapy, at least they are more willing than psychotherapists are to step away from spiritual direction. In his love, God both demands that humans live holy lives and God requires persistence and insight striving for such sanctity, even through the love facets of psychotherapy.

The 1 Peter 3:18-19 Greek text is in poetic form with 20 marks of critical apparatus, meaning that the original manuscripts are not uniform. It looks to me as if the original Greek was sung, so that the different words of the different manuscripts fit the rhythm, leaving different traces in the manuscripts. The Greek text for 1 Peter 3:18-22 also indicates five other places for parallel, relevant passages. This complex reading is important for how the Church has historically perceived the many facets of the love of God.

As a final note for 1 Peter 3:22, *authorities and powers* refers to civil authorities.¹³ This means that the love of God overcomes the political vicissitudes of life in anything but a simple manner. The Church liturgy for Lent approaches the complexities.

The Ordo observes that the first three weeks of Lent call for “a life of Gospel conversion.” In the weekday passages for the second half of Lent, “Christ is presented as the healer and life-giver The shift from the ‘ethical’ to the ‘Christological’ is no accident.”¹⁴

¹¹ Max Zerwick, S.J. and Mary Grosvenor, A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament unabridged, 5th, revised edition (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1996) 712.

¹² Agneta Schreurs, Psychotherapy and Spirituality: Integrating the spiritual dimension into therapeutic practice (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002) 33.

¹³ Henry Wansbrough, General Editor, The New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1985).2005, fn I.

¹⁴ The Order of Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours and Celebration of the Eucharist: 2006: Year B: Sunday Cycle: Year 2: Weekday Cycle: Archdiocese of Louisville: Dioceses of Arlington, Covington, Lexington, Owensboro, Richmond, Wheeling-

Personal Notes
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The Ordo goes on,

... hitting us again and again with demands which we not only fail to obey, but which we come to recognize as being quite beyond us, the Gospel passages are meant to trouble us, to confront our illusions about ourselves its purpose is not to confirm us in our sense of virtue but to bring home to us our radical need of salvation.

Accepting that the Gospels deliberately upset the Faithful, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is with the wild beasts not as a Second Adam in a new Garden of Paradise, but as the Christ, the antitype of Israel, whom he will baptize with the new Spirit of Love.¹⁵ The first reading, Genesis 9:10, mentions *wild animals*. While Mark associates beasts with the temptations of Jesus, they do not appear in Luke. Love is a “many-splendored” thing, to use the words of the 1955 movie and song,¹⁶ appearing in many complicated guises.

Looking to Revelations 4:6, Barker gives the wild beasts an esoteric value. “The sequence of Satan, beasts and angels suggests that these beasts were not the wild creatures of the Judaeian desert, but rather the beasts of the visionaries, the living creatures around the throne. (Rev. 4:6).”¹⁷ A facet of love is mystical. Another facet is time-bound.

Actual love fits into a time frame. Mark 1:15, *the kingdom of God is at hand*, brings an ancient Middle Eastern sense of time. The time for the kingdom of God is the actual now and not either the possible now or the future. The meaning is that the kingdom of God already is.¹⁸ Love is like that, actually present, though extending into both the past and the future in a complex and complicated way.

Charleston, Rev. Peter D. Rocca, C.S.C. (comp.), (Mahwah, new Jersey 07430: Paulist Press Ordo, 997 Macarthur Boulevard, 2005) 60. Taken from “The Spirit of Lent,” Mark Searle, in *Assembly*, Volume 8:3 © Notre Dame Center for Pastoral Liturgy, Notre Dame, IN.

¹⁵ John Paul Heil, “Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 1 (January 2006) 63-78.

¹⁶ [http://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla%3A..\(accessed February 12, 2006, 9:44 p.m., page 1/2\).](http://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla%3A..(accessed February 12, 2006, 9:44 p.m., page 1/2).)

¹⁷ Margaret Barker, The Great high Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: A Continuum imprint, 2003) 30.

Personal Notes
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In summary, the meaning of these readings is that the love of God for the Faithful as individuals is as complex and complicated as the love of the Faithful for one another. Love is at least as complicated and as beautiful as light. Just as the Faithful agree never to hurt one another again, so do the Faithful (implicitly) and God (explicitly) agree never to hurt one another after Noah's flood.

Psalm 25 is a complex acrostic offering of everything contained and to be contained in the alphabet, that is, written language. Psalm 25 also looks to God to show the way to find him. 1 Peter is a mixture of Jesus resurrecting and judging the dead after his resurrection. In a mysterious way, Jesus stands between an all-loving God and a sometimes-sinful Faithful human. Finally, the Gospel of Mark reveals divine love at its most complex vulnerability to temptation. This complex vulnerability also belongs to the Faithful as they develop their own love of God and love of neighbor.

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

¹⁸ Bruce J. Malina, "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 16.