

Personal Notes
050220 Second Sunday of Lent 25A
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As difficult as history is, to explain anything, history is essential for understanding Jesus. How do the Faithful begin to understand Jesus? With Genesis. The first promise made to Abraham concerned land, nations, and “all the communities of the earth” (Gen 12:3). God confirms that first promise with an oath. God confirmed his latter promise of descendants with a blessing without any requirement of a covenantal response. The two promises, land and descendants, arise out of different contexts. The first context, land, is leaving Ur to follow the LORD. The second context, descendants, is the sacrifice of Isaac.¹

God made the first promises centuries before revealing his Son, Jesus. Parallel with his Father, Jesus also makes two similar difficult to understand promises. The first promise is to those who leave everything to follow him. The second promise is to the courage in the face of uncertainty required to stick to that pursuit of God through Jesus.

Abraham only realized the original promise to become a blessing to the nations in the person of Jesus.² Abraham is a model for Israel not only in barren situations, but he is also a model for other nations.³ Ten years after the original promise of land, a promise made after Abraham left his home town of Ur, Abraham begot Isaac, someone essential for the original promise.⁴ Jesus is not only a second Adam, he is also a second Isaac, sacrificed to God.⁵ How this can be? How do the Faithful begin to understand Jesus?

Psalm 33 fully praises God in all his glory. This praise comes in a context of hope for the realization of the original promises to Abraham. One wonders whether Jesus, full of himself at the Transfiguration, sang Psalm 33. From Sacred Scripture,

¹ Michael S. Moore, “Ruth the Moabite and the Blessing of Foreigners,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 2 (April 2001) 205.

² Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 21.

³ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., “Deutero-Isaiah: Major Transitions in the Prophet’s Theology and in Contemporary Scholarship,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January 1980) 20.

⁴ Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Why the ‘Weak’ at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 80.

⁵ Bruce N. Fisk, “Offering Isaac Again and Again: Pseudo-Philo’s Use of the Aqedah as Intertext,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2000) 484.

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the Faithful know that Jesus sang psalms. The Responsorial antiphon makes the point, *Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.*

2 Timothy is about Faith as light. God fulfills his promise to Abraham with a gift of Faith that his promise will be and is fulfilled. The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross fulfills the promise God made to Abraham and, through Abraham, to the Faithful. Death itself is destroyed as an answer to the vicissitudes of life.

Matthew explains the promise to Abraham through the Christology of Jesus. Matthew makes the point that the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah is the same as the Son of God. Matthew links the Cross and glory. Unlike Mark, Matthew stresses that Jesus is the Son of God,⁶ in a Son of God-Son of Man duality, reminiscent of the duality of David, saint and sinner.⁷

The Lectionary reminds the Faithful of Mark, who presents Jesus as servant, as Son of Man, giving his *life as a ransom for many*. Mark is primarily concerned with discipleship, rather than Christology.⁸ In this Lectionary passage from Matthew, Jesus refers to himself as *Son of Man*. As a human, Jesus accepts frustration, part of which must have derived from Saint Peter.

The deacon Syrian Saint, Ephraem (+373), confessor and doctor, poses a series of questions, beginning with Saint Peter wanting to build the three tents.

If we should remain here who would tear up the writ against Adam, and who would pay his debt? And who would give him back his garment of glory? ... If He was not man, who was wrapped in swaddling clothes? If He was not God, whom then did the Shepherds adore? ... If He was not a man, whom did the Apostles behold in the Upper Room? And if He was not God, in what manner did He enter, *the doors being closed?*⁹

⁶ Jack Dean Kingsbury, "Observations on the 'Miracle Chapters' of Mathew 8-9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 565.

⁷ W. R. G. Loader, "Son of David, Blindness, Possession, and Duality in Matthew," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 1982) 584.

⁸ Gregory E. Sterling, "Jesus as Exorcist: An Analysis of Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No 3 (July 1993) 487.

⁹ St. Ephraem, Confessor and Doctor, "On the Transfiguration of Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ," Vossio, St. Ephraem, 686, John xvii 19, The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Two: From the First Sunday in Lent to the

Greek has three voices, active, passive, and middle. Middle does not exist in English. The Greek uses the middle voice to say *his clothes became white as light*. English does not use a middle voice, a manner of showing something the subject does for it. The implication may be that the clothes dazzle sharing in the triumphant good feelings of Jesus at the Transfiguration. At the Transfiguration, Moses represents the law, Elijah the prophets. Jesus is pleased with both because they understand him.

The cloud does not cover Jesus, but only Moses and Elijah, meaning that God wants the Faithful to listen to Jesus.¹⁰ How despairing is it to listen to Jesus who reaches out to the Faithful through the ages through an imperfect Church?

How difficult is it to understand Jesus? Does Jesus fulfill the promise to Abraham, as Christians believe? Is Faith in Jesus a true light to the nations, as Christians believe? Is the Cross properly linked to Glory, as Christians believe? A Christian answer to such questions about Jesus merits prayer.

Scriptural references to the Lectionary follow. Since the main purpose of these Notes is annotating the scriptural references in the index at www.western-civilization.com, references pertinent, but not fitting the flow imposed above, are included below. I do not assume that the reader is following the readings cited either in the Lectionary or in the Bible. Like the footnotes, the citations are for reference purposes for anyone interested. The large, bold letters facilitate locating exactly what these Notes are about.

Genesis 12:1-4a

Gal 3:8-10 balances the blessings of the nations in Gen 12:3 and Deut 27:26 with the curse of the covenant.¹¹ Paul argues that the law brings death, but that the love of Christ brings holiness and light, indeed, everlasting life.

Sunday after the Ascension, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 47-50, 73.

¹⁰ F. Scott Spencer, review of John Paul Heil, The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8, Mat 17:1-8 and Luke 9:28-36 in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2001) 746-748.

¹¹ Florence Morgan Gillman, review of Jeffrey R. Wisdom, Blessing for the Nations and the Curse of the Law: Paul's Citation of genesis and Deuteronomy in Gal 3:8-10 in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No 4 (October 2002) 784-785.

Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

Reading 146 B, Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 19, 2003, and Reading 117 C, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 8, 2004 already treat Psalm 33.

In 2003, when I was bringing Communion to Joe Dalton Beattie during his last days, I wrote, "This *trust*, this *faithfulness*, is the soul of Joe as his eyes light up and I interrupt his exhaustion after my attendance at Mass each morning."

The Lectionary omits verses 10-11 that proclaim the plans of nations will come to nothing before the Lord.¹²

The Lectionary omits verse 16, which links Psalm 33 with David. Verse 16 is difficult, because it refers to the king as *saved*.¹³ General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) avoids texts that "might create some difficulties" and pays attention "to the capacity of the Faithful to listen with understanding to a reading."¹⁴

2 Timothy

Verse 1:8b

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	Bear your share of hardship for the gospel
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	sed collabora evangelio secundum virtutem Dei
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	but labour with the gospel, according to the power of God
<u>King James</u> (1611):	but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	but with me bear the hardships for the sake of the Good News
<u>New American</u> (1970):	Bear your share of hardship for the gospel

¹² Joseph Jensen, O.S.B., "Yahweh's Plan in Isaiah and the Rest of the Old Testament," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 3 (July 1986), 453.

¹³ Adrian M. Leske, "Context and Meaning of Zechariah 9:9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 4 (October 2000) 671.

¹⁴ na, General Instruction of the Roman Missal: Liturgy Documentary Series 2 (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002) ISBN 1-57455-543-X #360 and 361, page 120.

New Jerusalem (1985): but share in my hardships for the sake of the gospel, relying on the power of God

2 Timothy 1:8b advises the Faithful to put up with the vicissitudes of the Gospel, as reflected in the varying translations, with the power that comes from Faith.

Cf. Matthew 17:5

Matthew 17:1-9

In his Apostolic Letter on the Rosary, Pope John Paul II mentions Matthew 17:2.

Chapter I

CONTEMPLATING CHRIST WITH MARY

A FACE RADIANT AS THE SUN

9. "And was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun" (Mt 17:2). The Gospel scene of Christ's transfiguration, in which the three Apostles Peter, James and John appear entranced by the beauty of the Redeemer, can be seen as *an icon of Christi contemplation*. To look upon the face of Christ, to recognize its mystery amid the daily events and the sufferings of his human life, and the to grasp the divine splendor definitively revealed in the Risen Lord, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father: this is the task of every follower of Christ and therefore the task of each one of us. In contemplating Christ's face, we become open to receiving the mystery of Trinitarian life, experiencing ever anew the love of the Father and delighting in the joy the Holy Spirit. Saint Paul's words can then be applied to us: "Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 18).¹⁵

White as light may also be an issue, since General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) instructs:

¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae*, at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2ROSAR.HTM>, 10/16/02, paragraph 9, page 4 of 26.

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When, in the dioceses of the United States of America, other cloths are used in addition to the altar cloth, then those cloths may be of other colors possessing Christian honorific or festive significance according to longstanding local usage, provided that the uppermost cloth covering the *mensa* (i.e., the altar cloth itself) is always white in color.¹⁶

In another place GIRM instructs the use of an alternative text “when it is feared that a certain text might create some difficulties for a particular group of the Christian faithful.”¹⁷

Apparently, it does not occur to GIRM that Black Catholics might have a difficulty with emphasis on *white*, which is incorrectly named a *color*.

An analysis of Matthew 17:14-20, Mark 9:14-29, and Luke 9:37-43a uncovers an oral tradition behind the Transfiguration, linking the Transfiguration with the healing of the epileptic boy the disciples were unable to help. The stories are linked to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God.¹⁸

In this George W. Bush era of tax-cuts for the rich and cut-backs of programs for the poor, the Lectionary offers nothing about taxes. The Lectionary reading does not imply that the response of Jesus in Matthew 17:24-27 is about civil taxes or taxes in general, rather than simply about religious taxes.¹⁹

For more on sources see the Appendix file.

¹⁶ na, General Instruction of the Roman Missal: Liturgy Documentary Series 2 (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002) ISBN 1-57455-543-X #304, page 102.

¹⁷ na, General Instruction of the Roman Missal: Liturgy Documentary Series 2 (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2002) ISBN 1-57455-543-X #361, page 120.

¹⁸ Gregory E. Sterling, “Jesus as Exorcist: An Analysis of Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No 3 (July 1993) 493.

¹⁹ Richard J. Cassidy, “Matthew 17:24-27—A Word on Civil Taxes,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 41, No 4 (October 1979) 573.