

Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. does not index Psalm 116. That notwithstanding, this Sunday contains considerable theology, about the divinity and humanity of Jesus and about the nature of the **holocaust**.

Thanksgiving is the term for these readings. **Thanksgiving** for the blessing of Abraham after the **holocaust**, **thanksgiving** with the psalmist in verse 17, **thanksgiving that it is God who acquits us** in verse 33 of Romans, and **thanksgiving** for the revelation of the **transfiguration** in Mark.

Amazingly, though this Sunday is about the Transfiguration, Pope John Paul II's, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae* cites none of the Lectionary¹ verses for this Sunday.

Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18

verse 1 God put Abraham to the test.
 He called to him, "Abraham!"
 "**Here I am!** he replied.

verse 11 But the LORD's **messenger** called to him from heaven,
 "Abraham, Abraham!"
 "**Here I am!**" he answered.

The Latin Saint Jerome uses² is *adsum* that I would translate more like the *present* properly used when a roll is called. Saint Jerome is Saint Jerome, whether in the *Nova Vulgata* or the plain *Vulgate*.

I have both the Nova Vulgata and the Novum Testamentum: Graece et Latine: Apparatu Critico Instructum edidit, Augustinus Merk, S.J., Editio Sexta³ and the more erudite 27th

¹ All indented verses, as below, are from 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 Latin, Saint Jerome, the Vulgate, 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.

edition of Nestle-Aland, Novum Testamentum: Graece et Latine.⁴ At least one has treated the Nova Vulgata as if the Nova Vulgata were significantly different from the Vulgate. To compare any difference among the three Vulgate versions to the difference among any of the English versions demonstrates unfamiliarity with the Latin versions. I purchased the Nova Vulgata for the specific purpose of making such comparison and the differences I find are at the confidence level of Greek iota subscripts, in other words barely discernible and not worth the effort to locate. At the same time I purchased the Nestle-Aland Graece et Latine, I also purchased the Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament that I only rarely use.⁵ These Personal Notes repeatedly highlight significant differences among the English translations.

verse 2 Then God said:
 "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love,
 and go to the land of **Moriah**.
 There you shall offer him up as a **holocaust**
 on a **height** that I will point out to you."

Moriah relates to legitimating David, Solomon, and Jerusalem. The scholar does not write that the story of Abraham was made up whole cloth to suit the political situation, but that political situation, namely where to worship, was an issue at the time Genesis was composed.⁶

³ Novum Testamentum: Graece et Latine: Apparatu Critico Instructum edidit, Augustinus Merk, S.J., Editio Sexta (Romae: Sumptibus Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1948).

⁴ Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum: Graece et Latine: Textum Graecum post Eberhard et Erwin Nestle communiter ediderunt Barbara et Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger: Textus Latinus Novae Vulgatae Bibliorum Sacrorum Editioni debetur: Utriusque textus apparatus criticum recensuerent et editionem novis curis elaboraverunt Barbara et Kurt Aland una cum Instituto Studiorum Textus Novi Testamenti Monasterii Westphaliae (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1999) Editio XXVII.

⁵ Nestle-Aland: Greek-English New Testament: Greek text Novum Testamentum Graece, in the tradition of Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger—English text 2nd Edition of the Revised Standard Version. The critical apparatuses prepared and edited together with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Munster/Westphalia by Barbara and Kurt Aland (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1998) Editio XXVII, (Eighth revised edition, 1994).

⁶ Antti Laato, "Second Samuel 7 and Ancient Near Eastern Royal Ideology," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 2 (April 1997) 267.

Pinning down **Moriah** is an interesting exercise. My atlas locates **Moriah** at the head of the Dead Sea, near Jericho, but with a question mark right on the map after the name. Hebron, mentioned in the scholarly article, is to the southwest of Jerusalem; Shechem, where the Samaritans worshipped, is about twenty-five percent farther to the north than Hebron is to the south of Jerusalem.⁷ **Moriah** does suit legitimating David, Solomon, and Jerusalem.

Height is the closest hint that Isaac would have been strong enough to resist Abraham. Isaac was accepting martyrdom. Christians use this as a precursor of what Jesus did. A scholar writes of Pseudo-Philo, whom I do not distinguish from Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.-ca. 50 A.D.) who wrote Biblical commentaries out of the Jewish community. Questions that Pseudo-Philo asked looked for answers. "What was Isaac thinking? Did he not resist?"⁸

Pseudo-Philo correlates the sacrifice of Isaac with the similar sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11:36b and the antics of Baalam in Numbers 22—24. The idea is to use the Bible to interpret the Bible. Jephthah's daughter can be regarded as a feminization of Isaac or Isaac as a masculinization of Jephthah's daughter. The Lectionary leaves out verse 3 that relates that Abraham used an ass. Balaam was an ass. There do seem to be parallels among these pericopes.⁹

verse 12 Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the **messenger**.

Alternate translations would use *angel* for **messenger**.

verse 13 As Abraham looked about,
 he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket.
 So he sent and took the ram
 and offered it up as a **holocaust** in place of his son.

How to connect this **holocaust** with *the Holocaust* remains to be seen.

⁷ Standard Bible Atlas , 2nd edition (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 1997) 3, 4, and ff.

⁸ The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism , general editor, Richard P. McBrien (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco: A Division of Harper Collins *Publishers*, 1995) 998.

⁹ 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) 481-507.

Personal Notes
030316 Second Sunday in Lent 26B
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- verse 15 Again the LORD's **messenger** called to Abraham from **heaven** and said:
- verse 17 I will bless you abundantly
and make your **descendants** as countless
as the **stars** of the sky and the sands of the seashore;
your **descendants** shall take possession
of the gates of their enemies,
- verse 18 and in your **descendants** all the nations of the earth
shall find blessing—
all this because you obeyed my command.”

The Lectionary avoids the sensitive term, *semen* for **descendants** that Jerome uses.

Descendants translates into Romans as the Jewish remnant Paul expects to become Christian. The sex scandal is purging the Church back to a remnant that will continue support the scandal. The Our Lady of Mount Carmel collection for February 16 was \$13,391 compared with \$17,095 a year ago. In his Sunday, February 23 Bulletin, Monsignor Michael D. McCarron attributed the fall-off to bad weather on the 16th. I cannot help but wonder whether discouragement with the hierarchy also contributed to the lack of vibrancy and energy needed to overcome such weather. A recovery will be easy enough to note in forthcoming bulletins. The March 2 bulletin showed the February 23 collection \$21,153 versus \$19,768 a year ago. The March 9 bulletin showed the February 2 collection \$26,917 versus \$18,666, the Monsignor successfully making his point.

With the Hubble telescope, **stars** takes on increasingly new meanings.

In the above scenario, Abraham kept his intention secret. Such secrecy causes modern and post-modern philosophers angst. The Czech philosopher, Jan Patočka, distinguishes Platonic secrecy and ancient Greek lack of responsibility from Christian openness and internalized acceptance of responsibility. Whether the distinction is merited is a matter of debate.¹⁰

The French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)¹¹ deconstructs language to an irreducible mystery or secret. Derrida is known for deconstructing the pillars of Western Civilization by insisting that language not only transmits meaning, but also alters and creates meaning. The foremost United States interpreter of Derrida, John D. Caputo,

¹⁰ Clayton Crockett, "Post-Modernism and its Secrets: Religion without Religion," CrossCurrents, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter 2003) 499, 506-508.

¹¹ James K. A. Smith, "In Memoriam: Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)," <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/142/24.0.html>

Personal Notes
030316 Second Sunday in Lent 26B
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takes this secret of Derrida to be the secret of faith as well as the foundation for all rational discourse, seeking an answer to the mystery of what everything means.¹²

Death and self-sacrifice is a mysterious internalized acceptance of responsibility. Self-immolation for someone else, ultimately for God almighty, ties into such an inner secrecy. The philosophical trick as undertaken by Benedict de Spinoza (1635-1677) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), is to separate ethics from religion. Kant is the foremost philosopher of the Enlightenment, of the use of reason. According to Spinoza and Kant, ethics is internal, religion external. In other words, as members of Lions International like to say, Lionism is not a religion, but is a way in which one can practice one's religion.¹³ Religion and ethics can be separated.

Finding a relationship between post-modernism and the Abraham holocaust is not of my making. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) struggled with the Abraham-Isaac scenario. Kierkegaard is a precursor of Twentieth Century Existentialism and a major influence on Protestant theology. According to Kierkegaard, a leap of faith against reason is required for the final religious stage of human development.¹⁴ Kierkegaard regarded Abraham as a singular exemplar of good faith.

With Kierkegaard, Derrida saw the matter as a ruin of ethical responsibility of Abraham to Isaac, his son, to Sarah, his wife and to the rest of the Abraham family. At this point, Derrida separates from Kierkegaard. Where Kierkegaard regarded Abraham as performing a singular benevolent act, Derrida regards Abraham as performing a universal act that all must perform, not benevolent except in a special sense. Once connected to God, everyone must sacrifice everything else for that God. Absolute sacrifice. Ultimately, this sacrifice, this gift, becomes the gift-sacrifice of death. The modern distinction between ethics and religion breaks down at this point. Ethics and religion once again cling together.¹⁵

Derrida goes on,

¹² Clayton Crockett, "Post-Modernism and its Secrets: Religion without Religion," CrossCurrents, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter 2003) 499, 506-508.

¹³ Clayton Crockett, "Post-Modernism and its Secrets: Religion without Religion," CrossCurrents, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter 2003) 507-508.

¹⁴ The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, sold and distributed by Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983, 1989, 1994) 464.

¹⁵ Clayton Crockett, "Post-Modernism and its Secrets: Religion without Religion," CrossCurrents, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Winter 2003) 511-512.

verse 15 Precious in the eyes of the LORD
 is the death of his faithful ones.

A scholar argues that this 116 Psalm is foundational for the Pascal Feast in Mark 14. Connecting the Lectionary readings, the scholar ties in this fifteenth verse with the anointing by the woman at Bethany.²⁰

verse 17 To you will I offer sacrifice of **thanksgiving**,
 and I will call upon the name of the LORD.

Saint Jerome uses *laudis* or *praise* for **thanksgiving**. My sense is that it is a sacrifice to offer praise during times of affliction, but that in those very times, such praise has its greatest worth.

verse 19 in the **courts** of the house of the LORD,
 in your midst, O **Jerusalem**.

Jerusalem has a function similar to **Moriah** above. **Jerusalem** also takes on the meaning of the hearts of the Faithful.

Saint Jerome uses *atriis* for **courts**. At Kent State University, there used to be an *atrium* in the Administration Building, which was not a place of judgment, but more like a **courtyard**, though fully enclosed, without any soil. At Oberlin College, where my wife Bette grew up, there is a courtyard in the middle of the Allen Art Museum. That atrium is open to the outside air and landscaped for serenity, peace, and contemplation. The Oberlin atrium houses a real **courtyard**. I would rather translate that **courtyards** of the house of the LORD.

Romans 8:31b-34

Verses 5:1-21 and **8:18-39** form consoling bookends of grace on either side of “the uncompromising demand for righteous conduct in 6:1—8:17.”²¹ Romans 5:1—8:39 is

²⁰ Mark Kiley, “‘Lord, Save my Life’ (Psalm 116:4) as Generative Text for Jesus’ Gethsemane Prayer (Mark 14:36a),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 4 (October 1986) 657.

²¹ Robert A. J. Gagnon, “Why the ‘Weak’ at Rome Cannot Be Non-Christian Jews,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 73.

Personal Notes
030316 Second Sunday in Lent 26B
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Raymond J. Jirran

Ephraem the Syrian (ca. 306-373) liked to counterbalance the First Testament with the New Testament, in a manner unlike Western thinkers.²⁵ Here Ephraem lines up a First Testament virgin, Elijah, with a New Testament virgin, John. Moses and Peter also go together, except that Peter was the quieter of the two.²⁶

The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8 and Luke 9:28-36 by John Paul Heil lays out in one place much of what is in these Personal Notes to the point that a specific mention of the text is justified.²⁷ Heil regards Moses and Elijah not so much as law-giver and prophet as souls assumed into heaven, all the while leaving Jesus on earth, raised from the dead in glory only later. According to Heil, the cloud engulfs Moses and Elijah, but not Jesus, to show the importance of Jesus. Unlike Moses and Elijah, Jesus and his followers would suffer violence and death before entering their glory.

verse 5 Then Peter **said** to Jesus **in reply** ...

verse 6 He hardly knew what to **say**, they were so terrified.

The Greek in verse 5 is a formula, used even when there is nothing to which to **reply**.²⁸ That same Greek formula is used in verse 6, “what to **say**.” The grammarian writes that

Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca. Edition Paris 1886. Vols. 161; Series Latina. Edition Paris 1844-66. Vols. 221.

²⁵ The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism, general editor, Richard P. McBrien (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco: A Division of Harper Collins *Publishers*, 1995) 471.

²⁶ St. Ephraem, Confessor and Doctor, *On the Transfiguration of Our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ*, Vossio, St. Ephraem Syri Opera Omnia, Cologne 1616, 686; John xvii 19, as cited in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: 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) 47, 73, ix.

²⁷ F. Scott Spencer, review of John Paul Heil, The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36 in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2001) 746-748.

²⁸ 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) 127.

Personal Notes
030316 Second Sunday in Lent 26B
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Raymond J. Jirran

the Greek is not saying that Peter is not thinking, but that Peter is lost for a way in which to express himself.²⁹ In cases like that, when I did not know what to say, my mother always taught me to say nothing. Might that character trait in Peter be why Jesus felt sorry for Peter's mother-in-law and healed her?

As the reviewer to Heil's book puts it, "Peter's mistake is not the product of a calculated theological equation of Jesus with Moses and Elijah; it is more a problem of not thinking at all, of speaking impetuously, 'not knowing what to say,' as Mark and Luke make clear."³⁰

verse 7 Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them;
 from the cloud came a voice,
 "This is my beloved son. **Listen to him.**"
verse 8 Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone
 but Jesus alone with them.

The apostles are stupefied as they watch Jesus, Moses, and Elijah carry on a conversation. Then a cloud covers Moses and Elijah to explain the vision with **Listen to him**, i.e. Jesus.

verse 9 As they were coming down from the mountain,
 he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone,
 except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Matthew 17:9 words it, "Tell the vision to no man." I use that verse to explain bad exegesis based on transliteration, "Television to no man," that is what the Bible says, making the point that private interpretation of the Bible is not always meaningful, and that there is a place for scholarship in exegesis.

verse 10 So they kept the matter to themselves,
 questioning what rising from the dead meant.

²⁹ 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) 120.

³⁰ F. Scott Spencer, review of John Paul Heil, The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36 in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2001) 748.

Personal Notes
030316 Second Sunday in Lent 26B
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Raymond J. Jirran

Questioning here seems like a good thing, a searching for an answer, a questioning designed to open souls to the parousia.³¹ Nonetheless, as Heil points out, Jesus only commissions his associates to preach the **transfiguration** after his death and resurrection.³²

To review the readings, Genesis is about the **holocaust**, the Psalm is about praising God in difficult times, Romans is about the Faithful Remnant, after the difficult times are over, and Mark is about the Divine life through grace that the Faithful share with the transfigured Christ.

³¹ Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J., "Questions, *Chreiai*, and Challenges to Honor: The Interface of Rhetoric and Culture in Mark's Gospel," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly , Vol. 60, No. 4 (October 1998) 671 includes this verse among the questions in Mark.

³² F. Scott Spencer, review of John Paul Heil, The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36 in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly , Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2001) 747.