

Personal Notes
040307 Second Sunday of Lent 27C
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Fear of misunderstanding and being misunderstood is endemic to being human. Misunderstanding need not tear up the Christian soul. These readings uncover the Christian life as positive, cheerful, and accepting of misunderstanding as part of the way back and forth between the heart of God contemplating the Faithful and the hearts of the Faithful contemplating God.

Eight years after I first wrote this, Joshua D. Garroway wrote “‘Apostolic Irresistibility’ and the Interrupted Speeches in Acts,”¹ which makes a similar point. That article does not refer to any of the Readings for today.

Understanding between the Creator and his human creatures often develops with difficulty, slowly. One reason for the time it takes is interrupting God, for whatever reason. In the Transfiguration, Peter himself seems to interrupt God, with his suggestion to build some tents. Such misunderstanding and interrupting is part of the way God made humans.

Vocabulary is an issue in all communication. The vocabulary of the Christian Cross and Glory is difficult. Since I use *Transfiguration* to mean the experience narrated by the Evangelists, I capitalize the word. I also capitalize *Glory* and *Cross* for the same reason. *Narrative* also has a special, though not capitalized, meaning by softening the interchangeable meaning of proclamation and announcement for Luke.²

In the Transfiguration, Jesus is showing himself not only to be God, but also to be the suffering Christ. Not only can the Faithful expect to suffer with Christ, they can also expect to suffer misunderstanding with Christ. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” helps make the point of the vulnerability of the Faithful to sin even unintentionally.

At first, God saves the Hebrews from the slavery of the Egyptians as an often-misunderstood symbol of God’s desire to free the Hebrews from the slavery of sin.³ The psalmist calls upon the presence of God for light and salvation through any misunderstanding. Time can heal misunderstanding.

¹ Joshua D. Garroway, “‘Apostolic Irresistibility’ and the Interrupted Speeches in Acts,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 74, No. 4 (October 2012) 738-752.

² Richard J. Dillon, “Previewing Luke’s Project from His Prologue (Luke 1:1-4),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April 1981) 209.

³ Susan R. Garrett, “Exodus from Bondage: Luke 9:31 and Acts 12:1-24,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 52, No. 4 (October 1990) 656-680.

In Philippians, Paul shows how God wants to draw the Faithful to himself, by explaining himself through time. The Exodus from Egypt that enabled the Faithful to worship God in the Promised Land symbolized a later misunderstood exodus from this world that enables the Faithful to worship God in the next world. This heavenly worship is the often-misunderstood purpose of the Exodus in Luke 9:31 through Jerusalem.

Paul and Luke bring slightly different theologies to bear on their witness to Christ. Paul brings the theology of the Cross that leads to Glory; Luke brings the theology of Glory that includes the Cross. Both Paul and Luke, with their differing theologies, work to clarify misunderstanding of both the Cross and the Glory in the divine plan of things.

The immediate issue is examining how humans, in the process of interrupting, misunderstand God at best and refuse to understand God at worst. This fear of misunderstanding permeates all of the readings for today. A closer examination will embellish this observation.

Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli, S.T.D., S.S.L, D.D.: there are no liturgical observations for your consideration in these readings, except some cross references to other places to find the readings in funerals and visits to the sick and dying.

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

Abraham shows how not to interrupt and misunderstand God. Abraham and Sarah were already old when God made the promise of offspring and land. The point is, Abraham believed. Ten years after the promise, when Abraham was about 100 years old and Sarah 90, Sarah conceived.⁴

The first covenants, the ones with Abraham and Moses were not personal⁵ and did not permit interruption. Later, Jesus teaches the Faithful to think of God as *Our Father*, thereby permitting interruption, especially for the purpose of understanding. What about interruption for the purpose of not hearing about the Cross? God himself warns about not doing that, when God says *Hear Him* (verse 35) to the disciples present at the Transfiguration.

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 Mark K. George, "Yhwh's Own Heart," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 35.

Psalm 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14

The Lectionary uses Psalm 27 as follows:

<u>Readings</u>	<u>Page in</u> <u>Lectionary</u>	<u>Verses used</u>	
27C	167	1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14 (1a)	Lent 2
59A	454	1, 4, 7-8 (13)	Easter 7
67A	517	1, 4, 13-14 (1a)	Ordinary 3
	1190	1, 4, 7, 8b, 9a, 13-14 (1a or 13)	Nov 2, All Souls

Care for the Sick uses Psalm 27, *Part I: Pastoral Care of the Sick: Chapter One: Visits to the Sick: Response B*, pages 41-42 and *Part III: Readings, Responses, and Verses from Sacred Scripture: Responsorial Psalms D*, page 285-286.⁶

Funerals also uses Psalm 27 in *Part I: Funeral Rites: 1 Vigil for the Deceased: Responsorial Psalm*, pages 29-30 and *Part III: Texts of Sacred Scripture: 13 Funerals for Adults 3*, page 224.⁷

Philippians 3:17—4:1

⁶ 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 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 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983) 296.

⁷ 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 VI: 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) 40, 226.

At the time Paul wrote Philippians, the educated portrayed large stomachs as “signs of gluttony, slavery to one’s sexual appetite, and lack of intelligence.”⁸ Within that context, Paul urges moderation, not for the purpose of temporal life, but for the purpose of eternal life. When Paul refers to the belly in his epistles, Paul ties his teaching with the broader Hellenistic understanding of life.

In this reading, Paul also looks toward the Last Judgment as he encourages the Faithful to look to God for their eternal destinies through the Cross of Christ. Paul does not want the Faithful to interrupt God at the sign of the Cross. According to verse 19, about making a god out of the stomach, the wrath of God is at work for Paul. The first part of the wrath is in the crucifixion. The latter part is in the Last Judgment. For Paul, God judges the world through an often misunderstood Cross.⁹

Verses 20 and 21 are about heavenly citizenship, an often-misunderstood promised land reached through the exodus of death. This letter to the Philippians is about the last things such as the resurrection of the body, the Second Coming, and the Last Judgment. Luke goes on to incorporate the sense of the last things into Jerusalem as the Christian completion of their Faith journey.¹⁰

Cf. Matthew 17:5

This reference is from the Transfiguration narrative of Matthew.

Luke 9:28b-36

In verse 29, when Jesus was praying, his clothes became *dazzling white*. The Greek *dazzling* carries the connotation of flashing lightning. In this narration, the covenant of the New Testament is becoming personal. The evangelist makes the Faithful privy to the conversation between Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Moses

⁸ Jeffrey R. Asher, review of Karl Olav Sandnes, [Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles](#) in [the Catholic Biblical Quarterly](#), Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 2003) 480-481.

⁹ Jeffrey S. Lamp, “Is Paul Anti-Jewish? Testament of Levi 6 in the Interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16,” [the Catholic Biblical Quarterly](#), Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 2003) 413.

¹⁰ Joseph Plevnik, S.J., “The Destination of the Apostle and of the Faithful: Second Corinthians 4:13b-14 and First Thessalonians 4:14,” [the Catholic Biblical Quarterly](#), Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 89.

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led the first Exodus. Elijah was already in the second promised land, with Moses, where Jesus was about to go.¹¹ In verse 31, the Greek for the word *exodus* connotes a *going forth*, i.e. *death*.

In verse 31, Luke writes about what to accomplish in Jerusalem, the end of the journey for Jesus. Scholars wonder about exactly where Luke ended the journey to Jerusalem. Robert F. O'Toole, S.J., offers the following admonition against misunderstanding the meaning of the heavenly Jerusalem.

They (the disciples) and the later Christian community needed to hear again and again that Jesus the Son is a suffering Christ and that his followers must listen to him and be disposed to suffer with him and to serve rather than seek to be the greatest.¹²

In verse 33, when Peter suggests building the three tents, he is trying to keep the conversation going. Without thinking, Peter wants to know more. God is trying to make the point that Jesus is God. The cloud that comes to cover Moses, Elijah, Peter, John and James, does not cover Jesus. Moses and Elijah are not equal with Christ.¹³

Jesus being God comes with a price, namely a violent death that his followers can also expect before entering eternal Glory. Only after the resurrection do the Faithful understand. Only after the resurrection are the disciples commissioned to bear witness to the Transfiguration.

In conclusion, the psalmist sings, "The Lord is my light and my salvation," thereby recognizing that, without the reminder, the Lord is easily misunderstood. For the psalmist, understanding the Lord is the same as understanding the universe, the cosmos, and all creation.

The faith of Abraham stands out in these readings as the counter-measure to misunderstanding the Lord. A major characteristic of the Faithful is passing

¹¹ Brendan Byrne, S.J., "Jesus as Messiah in the Gospel of Luke: Discerning a Pattern of Correction," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003), 86-88.

¹² Robert F. O'Toole, S.J., "Luke's Message in Luke 9:1-50," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 1 (January 1987) 87.

¹³ 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.

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through a veil of misunderstanding through Faith. Faith is a legitimate answer to misunderstanding God.

The purpose of these essays is to annotate what is in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly for the Lectionary. Imposing my personal understanding runs the risk of submerging the significance of the research revealed. Not imposing my personal understanding runs the greater risk of meaningless jabbering. The fear of misunderstanding does permeate these Notes.

God struggles to make himself known to the Faithful in a manner analogous to the way the Faithful struggle to know God. Paul tries to get the Cross into the mix, Luke the Glory. Effort is involved.

Father Fernando Arizti, S.J. (1933-2007) painted the Transfiguration for me as a gift that is in my study, a cheering reminder of the Glory of Luke. Father Fernando's portrait is of a Jesus "full of himself" raising his Black hands, heart, and soul to the Father. This very pro-life portrait picks up the positive, cheerful, accepting of misunderstanding as part of the way back and forth between the heart of God contemplating the Faithful and the hearts of the Faithful contemplating God.

For more on sources, besides the footnotes, see the Appendix file.