

Personal Notes  
040314 Third Sunday of Lent 30C  
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Jesus atones for sin. Through that atonement, the Faithful can liberate themselves from sin. That is the meaning of the following readings.

In the first reading, Moses approaches God with a sense of guilt and audacity. Moses wants to know the name of God. In the second reading, the psalmist seems to shake his head in disbelief at human sinfulness as the psalmist urges people to free themselves from sin through praise and blessing God. In the next readings, Paul and Jesus have little tolerance for unrepentant sinners. Paul warns that history records the displeasure of willful sinners, implicitly like the ones at Corinth. Jesus uses a parable about an unfruitful fig tree and is somewhat more subtle, but very forceful for that. "If you do not repent, you will all perish."

Guilt, defined as a breach of expected human behavior involving a penalty,<sup>1</sup> belongs to all humans. No one acts correctly all of the time. God overcomes such human guilt through his loving embrace. These readings can be taken about guilt and that embrace.

In the readings from Exodus, Moses first hides his face, evidently feeling guilt in the face of God almighty. Moses then wants to know the name of God. Moses argues that if God wants Moses to represent God before Israel, then Moses needs to know the name of God. God replies with three intriguing answers. First, when God says that his name is "I am," he means that he is whoever he says he is. A better translation might be "I am present as I am present."<sup>2</sup> God seems to begin by laying a guilt-trip on Moses for asking.

God then explains what he means, referring to himself as *God* and then as *Elohim* and YHWH. *Elohim* and YHWH represent two traditions that sponsored writing down the oral traditions of the Jews. The Lectionary translates both as *Lord*. However, it is *Lord* with a difference.

The *Lord* in verse 4 is *Ehyeh*, a personal name for how God refers to himself. As a generic impersonal name, *God* throughout is *Elohim*. In the Bible, God does seem to fear being misunderstood, as he tries to explain himself. Sin, however, is defiance, not misunderstanding. God explains that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

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<sup>1</sup> See Merriam-Webster's Collegiate @ Dictionary: Eleventh Edition (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2003) 555.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelis Den Hertog, "The Prophetic Dimension of the Divine Name: On Exodus 3:14a and Its Context," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2004) 213-228.

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Verse 6 is the only place in the First Testament referring to the God of all three, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is a mighty God and, as Jesus would point out later, God of the living, not the dead. That takes some explaining. The mightiness of God is relevant to humans. By explaining the mightiness and goodness of God, Exodus is setting up a guilt-trip for the Israelites and the Faithful in their response to God. The price for knowing the name of God is accountability for the Law of God. The Law and the Covenant were practically synonymous until Paul unscrambled the two.

Before the guilt-trip, Exodus shares how the Israelites are to name YHWH. God calls himself *Ehyeh* in verse 14 but when the term is used the second time in the same verse, in the third person, it becomes *YHWH*. *YHWH* is the name for the Faithful. The Lectionary does not pick apart these name distinctions.

Just as the Faithful would expect a little child to feel guilt addressing the father of the family by his first name, so might the Faithful expect themselves to feel guilt addressing God by his name, *YHWH*. Neither these Notes nor the Lectionary uses *YHWH* to refer to the Father. *Father* is the term Jesus teaches the Faithful to use. The loving mercy of God is found in that name, *Father*.

Psalm 103 skips over the wonderment of God to cut right to the chase, guilt before that wonderment. The psalmist proclaims that the Faithful should keep God in focus because God is rich in mercy and is anxious to forgive them their guilt.

The Lectionary from 1 Corinthians is a little more subtle, warning in verse 10 about not grumbling. The omitted verses 7-9 are more Pauline mentioning and precisely naming a list of sins. In order to invoke the mercy of the Father, Paul is trying to lay a guilt-trip on the Corinthians and through them on the Faithful. Verse 12 exemplifies the matter. “Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure, should take care not to fall.”

Jesus, in the Gospel of Luke is not much better than Paul is. Jesus admonishes in verse 3, and again in verse 5. “But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did.” Here Luke has Jesus answering a question Jesus himself proposed. “... do you think they were more guilty ...” The idea behind this type of writing, used classically by Homer, is to encourage those addressed to think and reconsider what has gone before.<sup>3</sup>

After asking his listeners to consider their own guilt, Jesus then goes on with a parable about a fig tree not bearing fruit. The parable means that if the Faithful do

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Elbert, “An Observation on Luke’s Composition and Narrative Style of Questions,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 1 (January 2004) 101 and 105.

not repent, they will bear the anger of God. With the blood of Christ, repentance mitigates and expiates guilt. That is the loving response of Jesus, God the Son, to human guilt, for whatever reason.

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, perhaps, variations on the name of the Lord as found in the Hebrew and mentioned above.

## **Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15**

In verse 2, the Deuteronomic historians conflate God with an angel of the Lord, “suggesting amnesia about older cultural understandings of divinity.”<sup>4</sup> A latent guilt resides in that history.

The burning bush that is not consumed illustrates the inexhaustible loving kindness of God toward the Faithful, a harbinger of the inexhaustible manna in the desert, and the inexhaustible graces of the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup> Through the Law, Moses mediates between God and the Faithful. Later, through Faith, Jesus does the same.

The first reading from Exodus is about God, who for the first time in history sends his prophet, Moses, to other people. Moses is plainly frightened at the prospect. That Moses hides his face when he approaches the bush is part of how prophets appear before the time of Jesus. The prophets hide themselves in order to highlight their message,<sup>6</sup> feeling guilty to do any more.

Bringing Moses into these readings ties in with the Transfiguration readings last Sunday. All of this pertains to human guilt. In the first Testament, Moses and Elijah react with fear, i.e. guilt, in the presence of God, Moses hiding his face, Elijah covering himself with his cloak.<sup>7</sup> The Exodus of Jesus, the subject of the conversation of the three, removes the fear, i.e. guilt. The three speak face-to-face resting on the rock of forgiveness emanating from God the Son.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark S. Smith, “Remembering God: Collective Memory in Israelite Religion,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2002) 649.

<sup>5</sup> See Jon D. Levenson, “Some Unnoticed Connotations in Jeremiah 20:9,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 1984) 225.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Britt, “Prophetic Concealment in a Biblical Type Scent,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 40, 49, 56, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Britt, “Prophetic Concealment in a Biblical Type Scent,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 56.

## **Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11**

The Lectionary uses Psalm 103 as follows:

<u>Readings</u>	<u>Page in Lectionary</u>	<u>Verses used</u>		
30C	188	1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8,	11	(8a) Lent 3 (today)
60B	459	1-2,	11-12, 19-20	(19a) Easter 7
79A	579	1-2, 3-4,	8, 10, 12-13	(8a) Ordinary 7
81C	589	1-2, 3-4,	8, 10, 12-13	(8a) Ordinary 7
83B	599	1-2, 3-4,	8, 10, 12-13	(8a) Ordinary 8
130A	825	1-2, 3-4,	8, 9-10, 11-12	(8) Ordinary 24

The Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 22, 2004 already has some comments on this psalm.

Care for the Sick uses Psalm 103, *Part III: Readings, Responses, and Verses from Sacred Scripture: Responsorial Psalms L, Praise and thanks to God for his merciful love*, page 296.<sup>8</sup>

Funerals also uses Psalm 103 as a Responsorial in a Vigil for the Deceased with Reception: Liturgy of the Word on page 40 and as a Responsorial in 13 Funerals for Adults: Responsorial Psalms on page 226.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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) 40, 226.

In verses 1 and 2, the psalmist distinguishes between an exterior blessing of the soul that can be translated *throat* and an interior blessing of being that can be translated *my life*. God merits both an external and an internal blessing. *To bless* is scripturally defined “to acknowledge someone in his position of power and in his claim to high dignity with all due formality.”<sup>10</sup>

In verse 3, the psalmist proclaims, “He pardons all your iniquities” and in verse 7, “He has made known his ways to Moses, and his deeds to the children of Israel,” meaning the Faithful have no excuse for not following the Lord. The meaning includes accepting the forgiveness of God in an attempt to be good. Goodness involves working one’s way through conflicts, conflicts that often include unavoidable guilt. The Faithful make difficult choices, because there is no other choice and, then, leave working out any guilt in those choices to the mercy of God.

Verse 8 about God being rich in mercy and slow to anger runs parallel with the prophet Micah 7:18. Micah uses the psalm to address the present needs of the people,<sup>11</sup> in this case dealing with guilt. Trusting in the mercy of God is the way to remove guilt.

Hans-Joachim Kraus, the great scholar of the psalms uses the word *guilt* in his description of verses 11 and 12. “The incomprehensible extent of this act of goodness [i.e. not punishing human failures] is emphasized in v. 11, while v. 12 describes the absolute separation of the guilt ‘from us’ (from the community of Yahweh ...”<sup>12</sup>

## **1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12**

Verses 1-5 are about the new exodus Jesus makes. This is the exodus of expiation for the guilt of sin. Paul explains. After passing through the waters of baptism, Jesus spends forty days in the desert fasting, analogous to the forty years the Jews wandered in the desert after passing through the waters of the Red Sea. The life of Jesus is taking the place of Israel and the rest of humanity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> F. Horst, “Segen und Segenshandlungen in der Bibel,” *EnTh* ½ [1947] 31 as cited in Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*, translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1961, 1978, 1989) 291.

<sup>11</sup> Sue Gillingham, “From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism,” *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 471-472.

<sup>12</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*, translated by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1961, 1978, 1989) 292.

Saint Paul warns the Faithful not to tangle themselves up with a secular notion of what it means to be good. Saint Paul has little use for “merit-mongering” as an escape from guilt. Paul regards Sacred Scripture as guide and safeguard for the Faithful to do good and avoid evil.<sup>14</sup> Paul is blunt toward the Corinthians. Luke, writing later, below, softens that bluntness.

## **Matthew 4:17**

If the Lord is saying to repent, then there must be guilt about which to repent.

## **Luke 13:1-9**

Neither Paul nor Luke care much about how modern historians worry about chronological time. Paul makes little to no effort to establish closely-knit sequences. For Luke, chronology serves as a vehicle for presenting his organization of ideas, rather than as a vehicle for historians to dissect time.

This readings section of Luke 13 is part of a larger section from 9:51—18:14, the journey to Jerusalem. This readings section of the narrative imputes guilt for sin eventually liberated by the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>15</sup> The emphasis from Luke is on a sense of liberation from, rather than atonement for, sin and guilt. With the fig tree, Luke focuses on future liberation, rather than atonement for the past.<sup>16</sup>

Just as Luke takes Jesus on a journey toward Jerusalem so does the Church take the Faithful on a yearly journey through Lent toward the Jerusalem of the Passion, Cross, and Resurrection of Jesus. Through the liturgy, the Church invites the Faithful not only to recognize their guilt but also to get free from that guilt through the

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<sup>13</sup> W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, Jr., “A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew,” 352 as cited in Jeffrey A. Gibbs, “Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (Matt 3:13-17),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 518 footnotes 32 and 2.

<sup>14</sup> 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) 292, 299.

<sup>15</sup> Richard J. Dillon, “Previewing Luke’s Project from His Prologue (Luke 1:1-4),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April 1981) 221.

<sup>16</sup> Susan R. Garrett, “Exodus from Bondage: Luke 9:31 and Acts 12:1-24,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 52, No. 4 (October 1990) 658 and 669.

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sacrifice of the Cross, repeated daily in an unbloody manner in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

The readings from Exodus demonstrate that God knows the way back to himself, through guilt. Exodus reaches through the Transfiguration to God almighty. Through Faith, God will help expiate sin. The psalmist sings a gentle warning to stay on track. 1 Corinthians is blunter about keeping on the straight and narrow. Luke has Jesus sending up his own warnings, but in a sense of liberation rather than atonement for sin. Jesus atones for sin. Through that atonement and their own repentance, the Faithful are liberated from sin.

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