

Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. points to the 137th Psalm as including a dastardly curse that cannot be avoided because there are too many such curses spread throughout the Psalms.¹ The worst curse is not in the Lectionary,² about enemies killing babies. Stuhlmueller quotes Verse 9 exactly, "Happy shall they be who take your little ones / and dash them against the rock!"

At the time, the Jews were wondering just how eternal were the covenantal promises. If God was not dead, they wondered, had God turned against them?³ Amazingly, there is an answer. The answer is that reparation for sin is required to fulfill the covenantal promises. The readings can be taken as an active as well as a passive participation in the life of Christ. Lenten penance is designed to change the psalm curses into blessings.

Truth and **light** are the words for this Sunday.

Pope John Paul II's, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae* cites none of the Lectionary⁴ verses for this Sunday. The **Baptism** of the Lord suits these contemplations in that Baptism is a form of reparation for sin, a form far more gentle than the fire promised in the curses.

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

Since all history began as chronicles, before the more sophisticated approaches, Chronicles is special to a professional historian. The Lectionary only uses Chronicles

¹ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599, page 144.

² 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).

³ Mark K. George, "Fluid Stability in Second Samuel 7," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002), page 17

⁴ 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).

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on two Sundays over the three-year cycle. The historical dates are special. Babylon defeated Assyria in 605 B.C., shortly before the Babylonian exile when Jeremiah was preaching about the need to repent. Jerusalem fell in 587 B.C.⁵

As time went on, the Jews grew less and less sanctimonious about how well they understood Sacred Scripture. Jeremiah promised a return to the good times after seventy years, years that passed without good times returning. After the Babylonian exile, Israel never again existed as an independent sovereign state until after World War II. That meant that the messianic promises had to extend from seventy to seven times seventy years, a Sabbath round per the seventy Jeremiah years. At least that is how the scribes thought about time, at the time of Daniel.⁶

Truth developed through the **light** of time. A shift in responsibility occurred across time, from Great King David, to the priests and officials, to the people themselves. By mentioning *the people*, the first Lectionary verse, Verse Fourteen of the Psalm, works in a democratic element.⁷

verse 14⁸ all the princes of Judah, the priests, and *the people*

While Verse 15 does not seem to translate the Vulgate,⁹ difference in the translations are now well-enough established to assume and not bring to attention unless a significant difference in meaning results. In this verse "*Early and often* did the LORD, God of their fathers, send his messengers to them," *early and often* is not found in the Vulgate that I recognize. From now on these differences, because they are meaningless to me and seem meaningless to others as well, will be ignored.

⁵ Paul L. Redditt, "Daniel 9: Its Structure and Meaning," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000), page 237.

⁶ Richard J. Sklba, "'Until the Spirit from on High Is Poured out on Us' (Isa 32:15): Reflections on the Role of the Spirit in the Exile," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 1 (January 1984), page 16; Paul L. Redditt, "Daniel 9: Its Structure and Meaning," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000), page 246.

⁷ Adrian M. Leske, "Context and Meaning of Zechariah 9:9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 4 (October 2000), pages 667 ff.

⁸ Indented verses are taken from the Lectionary.

⁹ The Vulgate, Saint Jerome, the Latin 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

verse 15 *Early and often* did the LORD, the God of their fathers,
 send his messengers to them.

verse 21 All this was to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah:
 “Until the land has retrieved its lost Sabbaths,
 during all the time it lies waste it shall have rest
 while seventy years are fulfilled.”

The Vulgate refers to Chronicles as *Paralipomenon* that, literally, means *things left out*, namely out of Kings and Samuel.¹⁰ The Chronicler was gradually giving greater weight to the point that each generation held responsibility for its own destiny.¹¹

Psalm 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6

The antiphon from Verse 6 a b, carries a gentler sense of the curse.

verse 6 a b Let my tongue be silenced, if I ever forget you!

Verses 5 and 6 bring a similar curse to mind.

verse 5 If I forget you, Jerusalem,
 may my right hand be forgotten!

verse 6 May my tongue cleave to my palate
 if I remember you not,
 If I place not Jerusalem
 ahead of my joy.

There is joy to be *ahead* of here because Babylon turned out to be a nice place. Because many of the Jews became comfortable in Babylon, only a remnant returned to the remnant originally left in Jerusalem. Sin always occurs as a short-term joy at the expense of a long-term good. Sinners would be much happier did they give up their evil ways to return to the Lord. Such **truth** is difficult to come by without the benefit of the **light** of reason, reason that is useful to apply to this study of Sacred Scripture.

¹⁰ Merriam-Webster's Collegiate® Dictionary: Tenth Edition (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1993)

¹¹ David A. Glatt-Gilad, “The Root *kn* and Historiographic Periodization in Chronicles,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2000), page 257.

Ephesians 2:4-10

While Ephesians is Pauline, there is some doubt that Paul wrote it all.¹²

In Verse 10, Ephesians explains why we exist.

verse 10 For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works
 that God has prepared in advance,
 that we should live in them.

These *good works* are active rather than passive. Pauline theology is not excluding anyone but rather is fostering commitment to the covenant, to good works.¹³ How easy it is to exclude prophetic witness because that makes us uncomfortable.

On Sunday, March 9, Father Peter preached at the Poor Clare Monastery about not causing trouble, about being easy to get along with, about not gossiping, never mentioning the need to be prophetic about something like the following, simply inserted into the Sunday March 9 bulletin, for no apparent reason, without context.

“~**DID YOU KNOW?** From July 1999—June 2000, 48% of reported AIDS cases were among Black adults and adolescents?”

The local ordinary, Bishop Walter F. Sullivan, enables both the pastor, Michael D. McCarron and his Parochial Vicar, Peter T. Tran to act as just described. Since Bishop Sullivan is about to retire, I am calling attention to the behavior of all three, with the hope that the credentials for the next ordinary will be more than a doctorate in Canon Law, combined with a sparkling Irish personality. My hope and prayer is for improved administration of whatever diocese (or dioceses) result from the retirement of the current ordinary.

John 3:16

This verse does not appear in the Lectionary index.

¹² Raymond E. Brown, S.S., The Anchor Bible Reference Library: An Introduction to the New Testament (New York: Doubleday, 1997), page 621.

¹³ 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), pages 285, 299; R. Barry Matlock, “`Even the Demons Believe’: Paul and πιστις Χριστου,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2002), page 306.

A scholar points out that this is an oblique reference to the sacrifice of Isaac.¹⁴

John 3:14-21

In the Gospel of John, worldliness takes a twist. Just as Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew serve as a substitute for Jews, similarly in John does the world seem to replace the Jews. The world changes from a place God loves with his only begotten son, to a place antithetical to the LORD. The following verses hint at the change.¹⁵

- verse 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life.
- verse 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.
- verse 19 And this is the verdict,
that the **light** came into the world,
but people preferred darkness to light,
because their works were evil.

Verse 16, “For God so loved the world,” connotes *so much*, rather than *in this way*.¹⁶

The root word used by Saint Jerome for *condemn* in Verse 17 reappears in 19 as *verdict* and in 18, below, as *condemned*, twice.

- verse 18 Whoever believes in him will not be condemned,
but whoever does not believe has already been condemned,
because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- verse 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the **light**
and does not come toward the **light**,
so that his works might not be exposed.

¹⁴ Robert J. Daly, S.J., “The Soteriological Significance of the Sacrifice of Isaac,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 1977), page 68.

¹⁵ Stanley B. Marrow, “Κοσμος in John,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002), pages 98-98, 101.

¹⁶ 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, page 121.

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verse 21 But whoever lives the **truth** comes to the **light**,
so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

The **truth** is that the behavior of the three is only exemplified with the latest scenario as described. I have observed this type of behavior first-hand since the Carmelites left twelve or thirteen years ago. A scholar words it well to write, “we are saved by grace and are judged by works.”¹⁷

In conclusion, 1 Chronicles and the Psalm are about penance required to return to the Promised Land. Ephesians is about being saved through the Blood of the Lamb, while the Gospel of John is about **truth** and **light** making their way through the politics of deceit and deception.

¹⁷ Charles H. Talbert, “Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 16.