

Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P. brings a lot to this Sunday. To make it easier to locate, for those who have the book, the 51st Psalm is indexed for pages 5-8, 18, 56, 142, 156-7, 159, 160-162, 164-74, 176-7. Stuhlmueller is excited, with Saint Paul, about the new Covenant, abrogating the Mosaic Covenant and enlarging the Abraham Covenant.

The haunting words for this Sunday are from the funeral liturgy hymn, *Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.*

Pope John Paul II's, Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginia Mariae* cites none of the Lectionary¹ verses for this Sunday. The **Transfiguration** suits these contemplations in that the new Covenant transfigures the Faithful.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah the Prophet, had the unseemly task of warning Israel about the Babylonian Exile of 586 B.C.-538 B.C.² Verse 31 indicates a new Covenant.

verse 31³ The days are coming, says the LORD,
 when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel
 and the house of Judah.

A scholar notes nine First Testament covenants. They are: (1) Noah (Gen 9:8-17); (2) Phinehas (Num 25:10-13); (3) Joshua (Joshua 24); (4) Josiah (2 Kings 23), (5) Ezra (Ezra 9—10); (6) David (Isa 11:10); (7) Abraham; (8) Moses; and (9) Jeremiah (Jer 31). Like his contemporaries, Saint Paul did not take all nine with equal seriousness. The three Paul did take seriously, Paul did not treat equally. Like the Lenten Liturgy, Paul took the Abraham covenant seriously and the Jeremiah covenant even more seriously.

¹ 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 Concise Columbia Encyclopedia, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, sold and distributed by Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983, 1989, 1994) 62.

³ 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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Paul felt that the new Jeremiah covenant, fulfilled in Jesus, superseded the Mosaic covenant of the law.⁴ Jeremiah goes on to explain the new covenant.

verse 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers
 the day I took them by the hand
 to lead them forth from the land of Egypt;
 for they broke my covenant,
 and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD.

A scholar notes that verse 32 is about the intimate relationship between a husband and wife, a relationship God is building with his people.⁵

verse 33 But this is the covenant that I will make
 with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD.
 I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts;
 I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

The Friday Bible Study class at the parish used to delight in the “already, not yet” of Christian eschatology⁶ that does explain how the prophecy of verse 33 is fulfilled.

verse 34 No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives
 how to know the LORD.
 All, from the least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD,
 for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

The idea that nothing is a sin does not quite fit this new covenant. Traditionally, the Church has taught that the natural law is written upon the hearts of people as the Ten Commandments, —but that revelation is practically required in order to understand the natural law. The natural law is the basis for the position of the Church on birth control and abortion.

The Latin for verse 33 is they made my covenant ineffectual, *irritum*.⁷

⁴ Charles H. Talbert, “Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 20.

⁵ Mark K. George, “Fluid Stability in Second Samuel 7,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 35.

⁶ Brendan Byrne, S.J., “The Problem of ΝΟΜΟC and the Relationship with Judaism in Romans,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 303, 305.

The Latin for verse 33 is the inside of the body, entrails, viscera, *visceribus*.

Paul regarded humans as deeply flawed, incapable of doing good without Divine Grace. Jeremiah 31 gave Paul confidence that the Holy Spirit was that Grace. Therein lies God's healing power.⁸

Psalm 51:3-4, 12-13, 14-15

Psalm 51 is one of the Christian seven penitential psalms. Psalms 32, 38, and 130 are special in complementing Psalm 51. These psalms all blend individual with communal piety with a view toward justice. "This interaction assures a strong, healthy spirituality, so that personal sincerity keeps a heart and soul within external activity, while the latter prevents individual piety from degeneration into navel gazing and selfish or even morbid subjectivism."⁹

The Lectionary uses this Psalm differently on four different occasions:

Verses	Readings	Page	Title of Sunday
3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17	22A	146	First Sunday of Lent A
3-4, 12-13, 14-15	35B This Sunday	224	Fifth Sunday of Lent B
12-13, 14-15, 18-19	41A	339	Easter Sunday—Easter Vigil
3-4, 12-13, 17, 19	132C	833	Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time C

While there is no mention of the problem of David with Bathsheba in the Psalm proper, the directions to the psalm do refer to that adultery. Stuhlmueller's translation, "For the leader. A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba (Psalm 51:1-2)."¹⁰ Sin is portrayed in the Jeremiah sense as something

⁷ The Latin dictionary I use is Cassell's Latin Dictionary: Latin-English and English-Latin revised by J. R. V. Marchant, M.A. and Joseph F. Charles, B.A. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1952).

⁸ Charles H. Talbert, "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 20.

⁹ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599, pages 156, 157.

¹⁰ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599, page 168.

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personal between God and not only individuals, but in the psalm sense of the community.¹¹

David had heart, as distinct from Saul who had form following cultic practices. David kept asking God for guidance and expecting God to help.¹² Such prayer seems to be what we are doing with Bible Study.

The first verse in the Lectionary misses the *Miserere* of the former Latin. The Latin for verse 3 bears repetition, interlinear with the Lectionary. After the Latin comes the translation Stuhlmueller¹³ uses.

verse 3 Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness
Miserere mei, Deus, secundum misericordiam tuam;
Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;

 in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense
et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum dele iniquitatem meam.
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions

I grieve the loss in the translation from the Latin.

After examining the Hebrew, Stuhlmueller concludes, "God therefore forgives in the loving, tender, slow, nourishing way of a pregnant woman."¹⁴ Stuhlmueller observes that unlike Psalm 38:18, "I am sorry for my sin," Psalm 51 is a more personal admission of guilt. The Hebrew is much earlier than the Greek translation. Scholars prefer the Hebrew, if it is available.

The oldest Hebrew dates from the 11th or 10th century B.C.¹⁵ The earliest Aramaic dates from the 9th to the 7th century B.C.¹⁶ Aramaic was a commercial language used in

¹¹ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599, page 56.

¹² Mark K. George, "Yhwh's Own Heart," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 457-459.

¹³ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599, pages 142, 176

¹⁴ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599, page 171.

¹⁵ March 16, 2003, 10:41 p.m., www.encyclopedia.com/html/h/hebrewla.asp that is the Encyclopedia Britannica.

removing victims from the water. Suffering does not always bring us closer to God. Only grace does that.

John 12:26

See below.

John 12:20-33

The grammarian notes that in contrast to the Hebraizing of the Septuagint and the synoptics, John more closely follows Aramaic usage.²⁰

verse 24 Amen, amen, I say to you,
 Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies,
 it remains just a grain of wheat;
 but if it dies, it produces much fruit.

Verse 24 is cited above as the key to this Sunday.

verse 25 Whoever loves his life loses it,
 and whoever hates his life in this world
 will preserve it for eternal life.

The synoptics agree at Matthew 16:25, Mark 8:35, and Luke 9:24.²¹ This fourfold agreement strengthens the impact of the verse.

I would like to think of Jesus as calm, cool, and collected, yet here he says:

verse 27 "I am troubled now. Yet what should I say?
 `Father, save me from this hour?`
 But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour.

As I get into daily trouble trying to do what may be right, these verses ring true during this Lenten season.

²⁰ 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) 128.

²¹ Robert H. Stein, "The Matthew-Luke Agreements Against Mark: Insight from John," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July, 1992) 489.

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verse 28 Father, glorify your name.”
 Then a voice came from heaven,
 “I have glorified it and I will glorify it again.”

I think of people in terminal illness and of my own mortality and do relate to the above verse.

Last Sunday, Jesus came into the world because Jesus loved the world. This Sunday, the world is in trouble again.

verse 31 Now is the time of judgment on this world;
 now the ruler of his world will be driven out.

To say things people may not particularly want to hear, for example in order to bring God closer with the advent of the new local Ordinary is my personal sense of *But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour*. I am concerned about racism enabled by the current Ordinary as practiced in my parish. So, I am writing to the Pope and Apostolic Nuncio with copies to the Bishop and pastor and parochial vicar, with a prayer not to get too beat up in the process.

When it comes to zeal, separatism serves obedience and obedience grounds the covenant as Jeremiah 32-33 illustrate above.²² Silence in the face of patent racism is analogous to silence in the face of patent pedophilia. Scandal is not the issue so much as suffering retaliation for bringing certain truths to bear on behavior.

Jeremiah is about the new covenant that infuses the souls of the Faithful with the Holy Spirit; the Psalm is about sorrow for sin in a personal, contrite way that recognizes the need for grace; the letter connects sin, suffering, and grace, while John personalizes the relationship in Jesus. The Faithful are to expect the same relationship in their own lives.

²² 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) 288, 290, 291, 297, 298.