

Personal Notes
060402 Fifth Sunday in Lent 35B
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How do the Faithful account for suffering? Is acceptance of suffering a psychological defense mechanism to deny that God is an abusive Father? Does suffering find its purpose in the remission of sins? Does the experience of suffering bring the Faithful closer to God? How is Christian suffering related to masochism and sadism?

For those in the human condition, the answer to these questions cannot be absolute. In the final analysis, humans must act on imperfect knowledge. The following Personal Notes look for guidance from the Lectionary readings in Jeremiah, Psalm 51, Hebrews, and John.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 is part of a Deuteronomic First Testament turnaround. Jeremiah is among the writers suffering in Babylonian Exile, who turn away from the First Temple Judaism of Moses and turn toward the House of David in the line of Josiah (ruled 640-609 B.C.).¹ Psalm 51, written in Exile, became one of the seven Christian penitential psalms. The Church liturgy uses Psalm 51 at funerals.²

Hebrews 5:7-9 is a cry from Jesus that his Father might spare him a horrible death by crucifixion. John 12:20-33 explains that the suffering and death of Jesus glorify God. The Church also uses John 12:20-33 at funerals.³ The following reflections mix the Scriptures as the reflections try to come to terms with suffering.

¹ <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/religion/01951...> 1 /2 3/5/2006.

² N.a., 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) 271, 304.

³ N.a., 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) 244, 245.

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In his suffering from Exile, Jeremiah 31:31-34 recognizes dissolution of the covenant of Moses with a promise of a new, future covenant.⁴ Jeremiah was a Deuteronomist, disgusted with the religion of the First Temple, hoping for a better religion with a Second Temple, following King Zerubbabel.⁵ Zerubbabel went into exile in 597 B.C., but returned about 520 B.C. to lead the Jews back from Exile, under the patronage of the Persian King Darius (550-486 B.C.).⁶ The Second Temple is the Temple where Jesus worshipped, in the context of the Gospel of John.

Jeremiah 31:32, *for they broke my covenant, and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD* fits a context of suffering bringing people back to their Creator. Sin needs redemption through suffering. Part of redemption is a clearer understanding of sin. Human knowledge is always imperfect and, because imperfect, a source of suffering in understanding the relationship between suffering and sin. One issue is the criteria for sinfulness, whether internal or external to the penitent.

The primacy of conscience is set forth in Jeremiah 31:33, *I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts*. The Deuteronomic meaning is that God will replace the cold hard stone tablets of the Ten Commandments of Moses with a legitimate sense of good and evil emanating from the Prophets. Answers to the questions set out in the first paragraph have no entirely satisfactory answer, at least in this human life. That is why God can promise in Jeremiah 31:31-34, *I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more*.

Continuing that thought, the antiphon, Psalm 51:12a, *Create a clean heart in me, O God* is multifaceted. The word *clean* carries a sense of the clarity and radiance of the heavens.⁷ Psalm 51:4, mentions sin, *of my sin cleanse me*. Psalm 51:15, written in Exile, offers a promise, *I [a sinner] will teach transgressors your [God's] ways, and sinners shall return to you*. Jesus, who undoubtedly, many years later, prayed Psalm 51, takes it upon himself to fulfill the promise.

Even though fulfilling the promise, as the Son of God, Jesus, too, must suffer. Jesus is the Son of God according to Hebrews 5:8. That notwithstanding, his inheritance

⁴ William L. Holladay, "Elusive Deuteronomists, Jeremiah, and Proto-Deuteronomy," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 1 (January 2004) 70-73.

⁵ Ehud Ben Zvi, review of Raymond F. Person, Jr., The Deuteronomic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 3 (July 2004) 457.

⁶ <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/Z/Zerubab.asp> 1/2 3/5/2006.

⁷ J. Ross Wagner, "From the Heavens to the Heart: The Dynamics of Psalm 19 as Prayer," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 1999) 256.

will only come due in the next life. Suffering, death, and resurrection must come first.⁸ Such is the spirit in which John 12:23 writes, *whoever hates his life in this world.*⁹

Hebrews 5:7-9 lays out the high price of sin; the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 5:7, Jesus prays *with loud cries and tears*. The verse goes on, *he was heard because of his reverence*. *Reverence*, in the Greek, means caution, in the sense of trepidation before almighty God. Suffering can bring people into an awesome sense of who God is.¹⁰

Slaves in the United States also found a type of glory in the Cross. Writing in a context of how Romans 11 uses Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ronald N. Liburd, of the historically Black Florida A & M University cites experience “as the central component to an appreciation of the nature of African American preaching.” The current issue of The Journal of African American History has a relevant article, “Marsa Never Sot [Master Never Shot] Aunt Rebecca Down’: Enslaved Women, Religion, and Social Power in the Antebellum South.”¹¹ The article exemplifies experience shortcutting explanations for suffering.

As Charlotte Brooks put it, “Mistress’s religion did not make her happy like my religion did. I was a poor slave, and everybody knowed I had religion, for it was Jesus with me everywhere I went. I could never hear her talk about that heavenly journey.”¹² Experience can shortcut the need for answering the stabbing questions in the first paragraph.

⁸ Scott W. Hahn, A Broken Covenant and the Curse of Death: A Study of Hebrews 9:15-22”, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 3 (July 2004) 421.

⁹ Stanley B. Marrow, “Κοσμος in John,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 95.

¹⁰ William D. Mounce, Zondervan Greek Reference Series: the Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House: A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1993) 224.

¹¹ Brenda E. Stevenson, “Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca Down’: Enslaved Women, Religion, and Social Power in the Antebellum South,” The Journal of African American History, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Fall 2005) 345-367.

¹² Octavia V. Rogers Albert, The House of Bondage, or Charlotte Brooks and Other Slaves 34 as cited in Brenda E. Stevenson, “Marsa Never Sot Aunt Rebecca Down’: Enslaved Women, Religion, and Social Power in the Antebellum South,” The Journal of African American History, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Fall 2005) 357 and footnotes 19 and 55.

The Hebrews of the Epistle lacked that experience. The Hebrews of the Epistle are recently converted Hellenistic Jews who had lost confidence in the sacrificial efficacy of the crucifixion and death of Jesus. Hebrews 5:7-9, used by the Lectionary here, is part of a broader presentation of the priesthood of Jesus in Hebrews 4:14—5:10.¹³

Another difficulty with Hebrews 5:9 is the sense of perfection, *when it was made perfect*. That translation bothers me. The sense is when the experience was consummated, when, what had to be, was over. My concern is in not seeking stress beyond what is useful for loving neighbors. My concern is the result, for example of a hair shirt, making one irritable and unkind, rather than even-tempered and pleasant.

Hebrews 5:9

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	and when he was made perfect
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	et, consummatus,
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	and being consummated
<u>King James</u> (1611):	and being made perfect
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	but having been made perfect
<u>New American</u> (1970):	and when he was made perfect
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	when he had been perfected

Since consummation is an aspect of married love, Hebrews 5:9 serves as a segue into the Gospel of Saint John and the first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI. Benedict begins Part I of *Deus Caritas Est* with an examination of *A problem of language and “Eros” and “Agape”—difference and unity*. Benedict confronts the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) for saying that the Church had poisoned the most precious thing in life, the love between man and woman, *Eros*. Benedict writes that the Church “declared war on a warped and destructive form of it [Eros].”¹⁴ Benedict concludes, that, with the Church, “No longer is it [Eros] self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved; it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.”¹⁵

¹³ Alan C. Mitchell, S.J., “The Use of *πρεπειν* and Rhetorical Propriety in Hebrews 2:10,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 54, No. 4 (October 1992) 689, 697.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, “Encyclical Letter: *Deus Caritas Est* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and All the Lay Faithful on Christian Love,”
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclixals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_2... 1/30/2006, 3/25 section 4.

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, “Encyclical Letter: *Deus Caritas Est* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and All the Lay

Benedict continues. Without citing the verse exactly, Benedict quotes John 12:24, “the path of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, and in this way bears much fruit.”¹⁶ The context of John is, Greeks asking to see Jesus. Greeks represent secular knowledge in Western Civilization. Jesus tells the Greeks that his glory will come from the Cross. The Greek language, here, encourages such selflessness.¹⁷ The Cross, however, remains an incomprehensible mystery for non-believers; and can be barely comprehensible for Christian believers.

Another author, Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., writes that John 12:23 is written in response to the Greeks, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*” The reference here is to the future, as it is in John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; and 12:27 (*Father, save me from this hour*). While Satan may appear to rule, ultimately, Jesus will stand in judgment over all. The point Moloney is making is that John treats what Jesus says as Scripture, so that Scripture is fulfilled when John 12:23 is fulfilled.

Moloney is a distinguished scholar, a former President of the Catholic Biblical Association of America. Moloney gave the 2003 Presidential Address. Moloney was chosen to finish Raymond E. Brown’s posthumous Introduction to the Gospel of John.¹⁸ Raymond E. Brown is the scholar most known for writing The Birth of the Messiah. Moloney differs with Mary L. Coloe, P.B.V.M., who also wrote on the passage under consideration here.

Faithful on Christian Love,”

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclixals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_2... 1/30/2006 4/25 section 6.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, “Encyclical Letter: *Deus Caritas Est* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women Religious and All the Lay Faithful on Christian Love,”

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclixals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_2... 1/30/2006 4/25, section 6.

¹⁷ Loren L. Johns and Douglas B. Miller, “The Signs as Witnesses in the Fourth Gospel: Reexamining the Evidence,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 56, No. 3 (July 1994) 530.

¹⁸ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., “Raymond Brown’s New Introduction to the Gospel of John: A Presentation—And Some Questions,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003) 2.

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In 2004, Coloe presented the *now* of John 12:23 as the future.¹⁹ In 2005, Moloney presented this *now* as now, the present. Moloney does not cite Coloe, though he does take Kelli S. O'Brien to task because she "ignores much recent scholarship."²⁰ These Notes have used the article by O'Brien, "Written That you May Believe: John 20 and Narrative Rhetoric," CBQ 67, (2005) 284-302 for Readings 029B Third Sunday in Lent 060319; 063A Pentecost 050515; and 065B Second Sunday in Ordinary Time 060115. These Notes intend to continue using O'Brien, the Moloney disclaimer, notwithstanding. Despite either the apparent arrogance of Moloney or my lack of understanding, these Notes will also continue using Moloney and Coloe.

The Lectionary emphasizes the point that the Cross is a necessity. After obliquely referring to the crucifixion, John 12:28-30, *Then a voice came from heaven ... the crowd there heard it and said it was thunder ... Jesus answered and said, 'This voice did not come for my sake but for yours'.*²¹ A few verses later, at John 12:48 the meaning becomes explicit. In the words of Loren L. Johns and Douglas B. Miller, "Jesus' word will serve as judge."²²

Margaret Barker, the Hebrew scholar who treats of Jesus in her The Great High Priest, writes that,²³

The Fourth Gospel emphasizes the exaltation of Jesus and links it firmly to the crucifixion (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34), but the earlier tradition of exaltation had been a mystical ascent such as that of Moses when he was made 'God and King' (Philo, *Moses* 1.155-58).

¹⁹ Mary L. Coloe, P.B.V.M., "Welcome into the Household of God: The Foot Washing in John 13," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No 3 (July 2004) .406, 407.

²⁰ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., "The Gospel of John as Scripture," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 2005) 457, 465 fn. 38.

²¹ Craig E. Morrison, O.Carm., *The "Hour of Distress" in Targum Neofiti and the "Hour" in the Gospel of John*," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005) 601.

²² Loren L. Johns and Douglas B. Miller, "The Signs as Witnesses in the Fourth Gospel: Reexamining the Evidence," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 56, No. 3 (July 1994) 523.

²³ Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 13.

Barker goes on,²⁴

The people are exhorted to contemplate the Messiah enthroned in heaven who is also the one lying slain on the altar (cf. John's word play on the themes of crucifixion and exaltation: 'the Son of Man is lifted up,' John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34).

M. C. Tenney describes John 12:33 as a footnote to John 32 to explain "that the lifting up of the Son of Man indicates the way in which he was to die."²⁵ Jesus then goes on to fulfill his own Scripture. John uniquely treats whatever Jesus says as, *ipso facto*, Sacred Scripture.

These Lectionary Scriptures deal with suffering in an integrated manner of what it means to lead a Christian life. To keep the topic united, the various verses are uncharacteristically mixed, in these Notes. Jeremiah is about turning inward, to personal conscience. Psalm 51 is about repenting sin that keeps the Faithful from their God. Hebrews explains that God, too, suffered, in the person of Jesus. Finally, the Gospel explains suffering for secular Greeks, insisting that suffering has purpose in drawing the Faithful to their God.

For more on sources see the Appendix file. Personal Notes are on the web site at www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes

²⁴ Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 67.

²⁵ The quotation is of Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., "Raymond Brown's New Introduction to the Gospel of John: A Presentation—And Some Questions," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003) 9. In footnote 27, Moloney writes, "I borrow this description of the evangelist's intervention in 12:33 as a 'footnote' from M. C. Tenney, "The Footnotes of John's Gospel," *BSac* 117 (1960) 350-34."