

Personal Notes
060409 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion 37ABC
© 2009
Raymond J. Jirran

Dealing with the lengthy readings for Palm Sunday is a problem. The focus this time¹ is "At the Procession with Palms" and on the Epistle to the Philippians. The message drawn from these readings is that Christians love, even when they are not loved in return. This happens at a personal level throughout Western Civilization and helps account for the success of cooperation in the West, even when much hatred abounds.

Mark 11:15-18a, about Jesus driving out the money changers is about tough love. Since the Lectionary never uses Mark 11:15-18a, this Procession becomes the best place in which to work the material. As developed below, not everything comes up flowers and roses, whether the event is historical, or a story illustrating a point, or both.

The Lectionary provides two different readings for the Procession, Mark 11:1-10 and John 12:12-16. The rubrics direct using one or the other, but not both. Not knowing, in advance, which will be the reading, leaves little choice but to deal with both. The first choice presented is Mark 11:1-10. For that reason, these Notes assume that Mark 11:1-10 will be used in the Procession.

The "Hosanna!" of Mark 11:9 identifies Jesus with God. George Keerankeri, S.J. writes,²

Jesus shares the exclusive divine prerogatives of goodness with God...Although (Mark's) gospel does not explicitly call the demands of Jesus 'commandments,' and obedience to them is not named 'love,' they are in fact both, because of (the) pivotal divine command...to listen to Jesus, to obey him, is to obey God and hence to love God...When (Mark's) gospel characterizes the Passion as (Jesus') obedience to the will of God, it means precisely that it is the concretion of (Jesus') love of God."

Holy Week begins with the crowds expressing love for Jesus, though the love is shallow, weak, and unsustaining. After his ride into Jerusalem, Jesus becomes

¹ For previous comments go to <http://www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes/Personal%20Notes.htm>

² George Keerankeri, S.J., The Love Commandment in Mark: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Mk 12:28-34 93, 1021, 181, 113, 122, 191 n. 4, 232-238 as cited by C. Clifton Black, review of George Keerankeri, S.J., The Love Commandment in Mark: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Mk 12:28-34 in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005) 716-717.

angry at the lack of love and at the corruption he finds in the Temple. I associate three problems with this anger.

First, the Lectionary avoids controversial passages, even though the greatest insight into the meaning of Sacred Scripture comes from delving into just such passages. These Notes, therefore, delve. Mark 11:15-18A brings in the money changers.

Second, to my amazement, as much as Margaret Barker has on the Temple in The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy, Mark 11 is not included among her twenty-five page "Index of Biblical and Ancient Texts."³ I do not know what to make of that omission. I wonder whether the Index has, somehow, entirely overlooked Mark 11.

Third, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly⁴ joins the money changer problem. David Seeley questions whether Jesus actually drove the money changers out of the Second Temple or whether Mark created a story to show that the Second Temple was corrupt. The clerics of the Second Temple were already convinced that the pre-Exilic First Temple of King David was corrupt. That corruption caused the Exile into Babylon.

Seeley questions how likely it would be that Jesus could overturn the money tables without immediate retaliation. How likely would it be that no one was guarding the money? Seeley questions whether Jesus could have prevented people from carrying vessels through the Temple Courtyard, which measured about five football fields by three football fields. Had the disciples of Jesus become involved, they would have caused a major revolt. Seeley questions whether Jesus would have acted so uncharacteristically violently. Seeley does not assert that driving the money changers out of the Temple did not happen; only that he thinks the greater probability lies with Mark creating a story to illustrate his point that the Second Temple was outdated; that Jesus and his followers were the new Temple.

"At the Procession with Palms" includes an alternative reading to Mark 11:1-10. That alternative reading is John 12:12-16. In Mark 11:1-6, Jesus sends for a colt upon which to ride. In John 12:14, he simply finds an ass. While all of the four Evangelists treat the animal upon which Jesus rides,⁵ they all treat the event differently. For

³ Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 397-423.

⁴ David Seeley, "Jesus' Temple Act Revisited: A Response to P.M. Casey," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No 1 (January 2000) 55-63.

Personal Notes
060409 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion 37ABC
© 2009
Raymond J. Jirran

example, the colt the disciples find for Jesus to ride upon in Mark 11:2 doubles in number to become an ass and colt in Matthew 21:2.⁶ The historicity of what actually happened remains a problem.

That Jesus sits upon the animal carries special meaning for Scripture scholars. Jewish teachers sat when they taught. Mark 11:7 is one of five places Jesus sits to teach in that gospel. Matthew seats Jesus six times; Luke three times.⁷ The Evangelists and the Lectionary mean for the Faithful to do more than observe the Procession. In the Procession Jesus is teaching the fleetingness of human adulation.

In the alternative reading, John emphasizes the holy word of God as Scripture, Scripture that John also is writing. Should this selection from John be chosen, note the *as is written* at John 12:14 and *these things were written about him* at John 12:16. Significantly, John thinks the Faithful are better off than those who historically participated in the events. For John, vicarious participation is better. Those who participated historically did not understand the meaning, until the Holy Spirit explained, later.⁸ Through the liturgy, the Faithful are learning Christian love.

In John 12:15 and 16, Jesus washing the feet of his disciples receives a twofold interpretation. In John 12:15, Jesus is a model of humble service. In John 12:16, Jesus enables the disciples to participate in his Passion, Cross, and Resurrection. Judas and Peter are paired, Judas in John 12:6-11, just before the passage used here and Judas in John 12:16-20, as Judas leaves the scene. Mary L. Coloe, P.B.V.M. writes,⁹

... love is given in the knowledge that those who receive it will fail.
Such love is utterly gratuitous, given unreservedly—which shows that

⁵ Robert H. Stein, "The Matthew-Luke Agreements Against Mark: Insight from John," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July 1992) 489, fn 23. Matt 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19.

⁶ Neil J. McEleney, C.S.P., "Peter's Denials—How Many? To Whom?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 52, No 3 (July 1990) 468.

⁷ Terence J. Keegan, O.P., "Introductory Formulae for Matthean Discourses," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 3 (July 1982) 418.

⁸ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., "The Gospel of John as Scripture," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 2005) 457, 458, 465.

⁹ 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) .410.

Personal Notes
060409 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion 37ABC
© 2009
Raymond J. Jirran

the dynamism of this love lies solely with the lover. [Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., writes], "It is precisely in his unconditional gift of himself to people who do not love him that Jesus reveals who he is and what he is doing...Revealed here is God's love which transcends and challenges all human criteria and human experience."¹⁰

Another problem involves expressing the special sacredness of Philippians 2:6-11. The selection from Philippians appears in the Greek in the form of poetry about the eternal value of Divine love versus the fleetingness of human adulation. Poetry means that the early Church probably sang this selection as a hymn. The idea that the Faithful can follow Jesus through his Cross and Resurrection, loving those who do not love them in return, is fundamental to the Christian experience.

The Black experience in the United States moves beyond the abstract poetic expression to concretion in personal reality. Edward J. Blum writes,¹¹

¹⁰ Francis J. Moloney ("A Sacramental Reading of John 13:1-38," CBQ 53 (1991) 249 as cited by 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) 411 fn 32.

¹¹ Edward J. Blum, "There Won't be any Rich People in Heaven': The Black Christ, White Hypocrisy, and the Gospel According to W.E.B. DuBois," The Journal of African American History, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Fall 2005) 368.

-----Original Message-----

From: Edward Blum [mailto:edward_blum_4@hotmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, July 25, 2006 12:30 PM
To: jirran@western-civilization.com
Subject: Du Bois and religion

Good day,

I noticed that you quoted from an article that I wrote on W. E. B. Du Bois and religion. I wanted to let you know that my book on this topic will be out in early 2007, where I go into much greater detail about Du Bois's theological, religious, and spiritual imagination. I hope that it will be a benefit to many ministers, preachers, intellectuals, etc.
Best, and feel free to write back if you like,

Edward J. Blum

Personal Notes
060409 Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion 37ABC
© 2009
Raymond J. Jirran

[W.E.B.] Du Bois, in short, seemed to think that if the association of whiteness with godliness provided a rationale for racial oppression, then recognizing the blackness of Christ, or at least his nonwhiteness, might equip African Americans with another set of tools to counter exploitation and hatred.

By loving when they are not loved, Christian Blacks, like others in similar circumstances, contribute to the religious, economic, and political developments of Western Civilization. Love makes it possible for society to function, even when all things are not justifiably equal.

Jesus riding into Jerusalem and Jesus driving out the money changers are encapsulated in the Philippians 2:6-11 hymn. The hymn is about seeking Divine, rather than human, approbation for human activities. The point is that, first loved by God, Christians do not require love from their neighbors in order, first, to love their neighbors.

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