

Personal Notes  
060423 Second Sunday of Easter 44B  
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Life is a process, written on the sands of time. Christians work through the vagaries of life with an understanding based on the life of Jesus Christ. Western Civilization Catholics pass this understanding through the filter of the One, Holy, Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. The Lectionary readings for this Sunday set out and explain the process.

The readings begin with Acts: 4:32-35, that describe the reaction of the Apostolic Church to the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24 shares the excitement of a deepening realization of what the love of God means. <sup>1</sup> John 5:1-6 uses metaphors of water and blood to grasp at a meaning for suffering within a context of Divine love. This is Divine Mercy Sunday. Finally, John 20:19-31 exemplifies a narrative process in which Thomas, the Beloved Disciple, and, by implication, Mary Magdalene grow in Faith as they learn to let go of their own incredulity. The Lectionary message is that Faith grows, working its way through repeated cycles of confusion to greater insight into the love of God.

In “Deus Caritas Est,” Pope Benedict XVI draws upon the reading in Acts 4:34 to claim a right for the Church to organize charity. To add a little confusion and temper the eagerness of the Holy Father, Sacred Scripture does not show everyone giving everything to the Apostles. Some people shared their wealth, rather than surrendering it completely.<sup>1</sup> Contemplative Poor Clare nuns give their all to the Institutional Church. Even the nuns, however, sometimes keep the civil titles to their property in their own names for the order, rather than in the names of their respective bishops. There is more on Benedict below.

Psalm 118 celebrated the Feast of the Tabernacles, the New Year. Psalm 118:13 refers to the LORD saving the Faithful from falling, as in being shoved off a cliff. Psalm 118 is a Eucharistic atonement ritual.<sup>2</sup> As part of the confusion for this Sunday, Benedict does not use Psalm 118 in “Deus Caritas Est.”

Psalm 118 is unraveling a process moving from confusion to greater insight into the love of God. The Psalm 118:15 reference to tents refers to a moving people, growing in Faith. Psalm 118:22 describes an ultimate confusion, moving from the stone the builders rejected to the main corner stone for the building. The reference

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 116.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 84-85.

is to religious leaders, the clergy.<sup>3</sup> Dealing with suffering is the main corner stone for the building of Faith.

In the United States, Blackness is practically synonymous with suffering from racial prejudice. The great Black writer, Langston Hughes, in Not Without Laughter uses the Bible as a commentary on ordinary life. Hughes objects to using Biblical imagery in support of “bourgeois ways.”<sup>4</sup> These Notes attempt to follow the Bible like Hughes.

To continue with the search for greater understanding, the Lectionary translates 1 John 5:1 in a confusing manner. The Lectionary reasoning works as follows. If God begets Jesus the Christ, then God is the Father, whom the Faithful love. Rather than refer to God in one place and Father in the other, the translation would be clearer for me, at least, if *God the Father* were used in both places. The Greek and the Latin stay with the *God* vocabulary and avoid the *Father* vocabulary.

The sexism in the use of pronouns for the translation of Benedict XVI, “Deus Caritas Est,” angers me. I am less distraught with sexism in the Lectionary. The use of *Father* in 1 John 5:1 exemplifies an unwillingness to move from the confusion of patriarchy to the greater insights, gleaned from feminist theologians, such as Richard Bauckham.<sup>5</sup> 1 John 5:2 goes on to describe loving a class of people, namely the *children of God*, such as women, when the Faithful love God.

What happens when others do not accept one’s own Christian insights? 1 John 5:4 answers the question with “the victory that conquers the world is our faith.” Sometimes, especially in modern times, the Faithful gain the insights before the Church hierarchy. Such anomaly expresses how the whole Church moves from one level of confusion to another level of greater insight. The case of Galileo illustrates my meaning.

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel C. Olson, “Matthew 22:1-14 as Midrash,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No 3 (July 2005) 437.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham Smith, “A Prodigal Sings the Blues: The Characterization of Harriett Williams in Langston Hughes’s *Not without Laughter*” in Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Randall C. Bailey, ed., (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 153.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 110 fn 4, 113, 192.

John 20:19-31, as shall be seen, is for “adult audiences” only. Recent biblical scholarship moves from form to narrative criticism for understanding. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., left his posthumous editor, Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., to work narrative criticism into his commentary on the Gospel of John.<sup>6</sup>

Kelli S. O’Brien and Moloney act as protagonists in this matter, with O’Brien bringing out the narrative qualities of the Gospel of John. O’Brien observes that Mary Magdalene and the doubting Thomas move from obtuse to greater insight into the Resurrection. She also gives special attention to the Beloved Disciple (John), who, rather than ministering to Mary Magdalene, goes off to have breakfast. The Beloved Disciple also had something to learn about Charity. O’Brien presents the whole Gospel of John in the cyclical confusion to the insight environment described here.<sup>7</sup>

Thomas is not shown doubting the female witnesses, only the male ones.<sup>8</sup> John 20:18, immediately before the passage the Lectionary offers, presents Mary Magdalene in the first person. “I have seen the Lord.” This is also what the other disciples say to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord” (John 20:25). At 1 Corinthians 9:1, that the Lectionary does not use either, Paul claims his apostleship based on having seen the Lord. “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?”<sup>9</sup>

John 20:23 covers an area of confusion. John 20:23 confers the ability to forgive sins upon the disciples.<sup>10</sup> As Richard Bauckham puts it, “John leaves it unclear whether women are present among the disciples on Easter Sunday evening (John 20:19-23),”<sup>11</sup> when Jesus bestows the power to forgive sins. In other words, denying

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Kelli S. O’Brien, “Written That You May Believe: John 20 and Narrative Rhetoric,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No 2 (April 2005) 284-302.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 269.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 285.

<sup>10</sup> Joel Marcus, “The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18-19),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 50, No. 3 (July 1988) 450.

women the priesthood is confusing and, out of this confusion, greater insight can be anticipated.

Robert Buchanan (not Richard Bauckham) brings out the “adult” sexuality hidden in where Thomas is sticking his finger in John 20:25. In the apocryphal tradition of the Gospel of Philip, Salome, the sister of Jesus, uses her finger to check the virginity of Mary at the time of the Nativity. In punishment for her lack of Faith, her finger practically burns off, until she touches Jesus for healing. The story is modeled on that of Thomas.<sup>12</sup> Since I am composing these Notes on March 26, the day after the Feast of the Annunciation, reference to the virginity of Mary is implied by the Lectionary.

The Gospel of John is written about the signs Jesus did in the presence of his disciples, John 5:30. The Gospel of John writes in a context of the Book of Wisdom, which is about signs and what they mean.<sup>13</sup> Signs point the way from confusion to greater insight. John 5:31 sets out the purpose of the Gospel, “that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God and that through this belief you may have life in his name.”<sup>14</sup>

Loren L. Jones and Douglas B. Miller identify John 20:24-29 as one of four problem passages. Here, Thomas is the problem. Despite what it may look like, the issue is not that evidence is not important. In other words, evidence is important. Jesus rebukes Thomas because of the type of evidence Thomas is demanding. Indirect evidence, faith, must be acceptable in the Christian life. The matter of evidence is the primary concern of this Gospel. Historians like primary evidence. Jesus insists that secondary evidence is enough in this case.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 283.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 229-230.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas K. Clark, “Signs in Wisdom and John,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 45, No. 2 (April 1983) 205.

<sup>14</sup> Debbie Hunn, *Who Are “They” in John 8:33?* the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No 3 (July 2004) 394.

<sup>15</sup> 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) 529.

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Throughout all of these readings, signs point the way from relative confusion to greater insight. At first, the Apostles are overwhelmed in Acts 4:32-35 by the sign of the Resurrection. The sign of God caring for his fallen people overwhelms Psalm 118. 1 John is about the sign of what loving God means for loving one's neighbor. Finally, the Gospel of John is about what the signs of the Resurrection mean for the Faithful as they move from confusion to greater insight into the love of God.

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