

Personal Notes
060514 Fifth Sunday of Easter 53B
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The 53 B Lectionary readings for this Fifth Sunday of Easter are about the self-esteem required in order to act. The Acts of the Apostles focus on Saint Paul, whose self-esteem changed drastically between his earlier life as a Jew persecuting Christians and his later life as a Christian. Psalm 22, that Jesus recited on the Cross (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me) was the favorite of Jesus, the psalm Jesus used in his spiritual development. I explained this in my Personal Notes for this Sunday, three years ago. These Notes are available on the Web at <http://www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes/Personal%20Notes.htm>. The Greek of 1 John 3:18-24 is directly about self-esteem and overcoming any sense of inferiority about anything. Finally the Gospel of John is about remaining in Christ.

Implicit in the First Testament is the fear of being without the presence of God.¹ Knowing about the presence of God requires growth and understanding. As Psalm 22:31-32b puts it in the Lectionary, "Let the coming generation be told of the LORD that they may proclaim to a people yet to be born the justice he has shown." This is an appropriate function of the Religious Affairs committee of the Newport News Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Just as African-Americans have reason to fear Euro-Americans, so did the first Christians have reason to fear the persecuting Saul (Acts 9:26), who, as a Christian, became Paul. Just as Barnabas took Paul under his wing (Acts 9:27) to enable him to function as a Christian, so are the clergy to educate racist Americans to enable them to function as Christians. Just as Paul needed protection from the Hellenists (Acts 9:29), so do non-racist Christians need protection from racists. This can happen, especially with the help of the NAACP. The help of the NAACP can enable people to live together in peace.

Acts 9:31, mentions Samaria as a place where the Church was at peace. The Samaritans and Judeans had a prejudicial relationship. This section of Acts is part of breaking down such prejudice.² Luke is grounding the preaching of the Apostles in the narrative history of what happened.³

¹ Joel S. Burnett, "The Question of Divine Absence in Israelite and West Semitic Religion," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 2 (April 2005) 215.

² Dennis Hamm, S.J., "What the Samaritan Leper Sees: The Narrative Christology of Luke 17:11-19," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 56, No. 2 (April 1994) 281.

³ Richard J. Dillon, "Previewing Luke's Project from His Prologue (Luke 1:1-4), the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April 1981) 208.

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In other words, Luke is bent on giving historians something with which to work. As history continues, Christian identity also continues to develop. That is why the Bible is constantly studied.

Historically, Jesus favored the 22nd Psalm. Margaret Barker thinks the 22nd Psalm is a reflection of the spiritual growth of Jesus.⁴ Psalm 22:26b easily fits Paul saying, "I will fulfill my vows before those who fear the LORD," namely the first Christians. The implied growth is extending the love of God from his Chosen People to the rest.

Part of the excitement of the 22nd Psalm is its 1964 discovery as part of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Academic politics still keep the contents out of public view. The public knows that verses 15-17 are preserved. The Lectionary only uses verse 17 and that on Palm Sunday. In technical terms, the "Estimated Contents" of what was found are "Unknown."⁵ Once academic politics are cleared, all the Faithful can look forward to more to learn.

Jews at the time of Jesus seem to have recited Psalm 22 as part of Tamid daily services at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.), in somewhat the same way the Psalm is still used at daily Mass. Dennis Hamm, S.J., compares some passages that include the 22nd Psalm. Hamm observes,

All three of the Synoptic writers name the ninth hour at the moment of Jesus' death....Luke omits the "cry of dereliction" by Jesus crucified (Psalm 22:2 in Mark 15:34) and turns what was a wordless scream in Mark 15:37 into a shouted prayer, quoting another psalm connected with the Tamid...Psalm 31:6: into your hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46).⁶

Just as self-esteem was required for Jesus to die on the Cross, so is self-esteem required in order to live a Christian life. 1 John 3:20-21 chases after condemning "...in whatever our hearts condemn...if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God..." I think John means that the Faithful ought not worry about

⁴ Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 30.

⁵ Patrick W. Skehan+, Eugene Ulrich, Peter W. Flint, *A Scroll Containing "Biblical" and "Apocryphal" Psalms: A Preliminary Edition of 4QPs^f (4Q88)*, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 2 (April 1998) 269.

⁶ Dennis Hamm, S.J., "The Tamid Service in Luke-Acts: The Cultic Background behind Luke's Theology of Worship (Luke 1:5-25; 18:9-14; 24:50-53; Acts 3:1; 10:3, 30)," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 2 (April 2003) 224-225.

their own unworthiness, but to trust that “God is greater than our hearts and knows everything” (1 John 3:20).

In other words, the love of God as expressed in Jesus Christ overcomes the lack of self-esteem appropriate to recognizing one’s own sinfulness. The ultimate of self-esteem, namely self-righteousness is always risky. The Gospel, “I am the vine, you are the branches (John 15:5)” means that, like vines, Christian virtue can go in many different directions. The Church uses this Gospel in Pastoral Care of the Sick.⁷ The resolution of the self-righteousness difficulty is as follows.

The proper place for the Faithful is on the Cross, in one way or another. Unless one is self-righteous, however, one does not belong on the Cross. Effective clergy say what needs to be said, despite any risk of untoward consequences. The Faithful, including the clergy, can know that Jesus remains in their hearts. How? “The way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us” (1 John 3:24). That is a spirit of love, especially as expressed across racial lines.

Pope John Paul II used John 15:4 in his "Letter on the Eucharist."

Chapter Two **The Eucharist Builds the Church**

Church Growth and Unity

21. The Council says that the “Church grows visibly in the world through the power of God” and this growth takes place “as often as the sacrifice of the cross is celebrated on the altar” (“On the Church” - #3). The Eucharist is present at the Church’s origins because the gospels note that Christ invited only [here John Paul II asserts what scholars deny as documented in various Personal Notes elsewhere.] the twelve apostles (the seeds of the New Israel and the beginning of sacred hierarchy) to the Last Supper. Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper laid the foundations for the people of the New Covenant. By accepting the invitation, the apostles entered into sacramental communion with Jesus. Since then, the Church Herself is built up by fulfilling Christ’s command, “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:24-25, Lk 22:19).

⁷ The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum: 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: Prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy: a Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1983) 67, 158.

22. Sacramental Communion renews and consolidates the baptized believer's incorporation into Christ. There comes about a mutual abiding, we in Christ and Christ in us. Jesus said, "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn. 16:5:4). He calls us His friends (Jn. 15:4) and tells us that we live because of Him (Jn 6:57).

By union with Christ, the People of the New Covenant are sent out as a "sacrament for humanity," a light to the world and the salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13-16). We are sent as the father sent Christ (Jn. 20:21) because the Eucharist aims to bring all mankind into communion with the Father.⁸

In his first encyclical, Pope Benedict cites 1 John 3:15 to express how to reduce words and speech to deeds and truth (1 John 3:18). In the following excerpt from his encyclical, the Pope Benedict XVI is trying to help the Faithful understand 1 John 3.

PART II

CARITAS

THE PRACTICE OF LOVE BY THE CHURCH AS A "COMMUNITY OF LOVE"

The Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love

19. "If you see charity, you see the Trinity," wrote Saint Augustine.⁹ In the foregoing reflections, we have been able to focus our attention on the Pierced one (cf. *Jn* 19:37, *Zech* 12:10), recognizing the plan of the Father who, moved by love (cf. *Jn* 3:16), sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem man. By dying on the Cross—as Saint John tells us—Jesus "gave up his Spirit" (*Jn* 19:30), anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit that he would make after his Resurrection (cf. *Jn* 20:22). This was to fulfill the promise of "rivers of living water" that would flow out of the hearts of believers, through the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. *Jn* 7:38-39). The Spirit, in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes

⁸ "Letter on the Eucharist: Pope John Paul II, A Simplified Version by Rev. Msgr. Vincent M. Walsh" (Merion, PA 19066: Key of David Publications, 2003) 12-13

⁹ *De Trinitate*, VIII, 8, 12: CCL 50, 287.

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their hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples (cf. *Jn* 13:1-13) and above all when he gave his life for us (cf. *Jn* 13:1, 15:13).

The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son. The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, this *service of charity*, on which I want to focus in the second part of the Encyclical.

*Charity as a responsibility of the Church*¹⁰

In the encyclical quoted above, not only is Pope Benedict XVI impressed with the readings for this Sunday, but so was that great African-American, Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955).¹¹ As Demetrius K. Williams of Tulane University puts it in "The Bible and Models of Liberation in the African American Experience," Bethune, in recounting her early childhood realization of self-worth when her teacher read to her of God's love from ...Acts 9...realizes that '(her) sense of inferiority, (her) fear of handicaps, dropped away' (quoted in G. Lerner: 136).¹²

¹⁰ 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/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_2..._1/30/2006 11/25.

¹¹ <http://www.lkwdpl.org/wihohio/beth-mar.htm> 060416

¹² Demetrius K. Williams, "The Bible and Models of Liberation in the African American Experience," in Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Randall C. Bailey, ed., (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 52. Gerda Lerner, Black Women in White America: A Documentary History (New York: Vintage, 1973).

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John 5:15 is more subtly feminist. Barker points out that a vine having branches is feminist, like a mother having sons.¹³ Breaking through sexism is one of the acts of charity appropriate to the Church. At John 15:4, Jesus tells the Faithful to “remain in me, as I remain in you.” The original Greek lays this out as a solemn command,¹⁴ therefore, something very possible. The Lectionary skips over Psalm 22:9-10 in this Fifth Sunday of Easter, but includes Psalm 22:9 Palm Sunday. Evidently, “let him deliver him” refers to birth delivery, something a First Testament, feminine, God, mid-wife is doing.¹⁵ Christian charity, developing historically into the present time, is able to backtrack and unscramble the creative power of almighty God exhibiting love and the pro-creative power of humans exhibiting love. Patriarchy contains sexist problems with which Christian charity still needs to deal.

How to translate Christian charity into more than words is the focus of these readings. Saint Paul begins in Acts, first acting in the wrong direction, but, then becoming Christian and finding the Lord. The 22nd Psalm is out of the prayer life of Jesus, concerned about abandonment by God, something that never seems to have occurred to Paul. 1 John is also about not being concerned about abandonment by God, so long as one seeks to follow the way of Jesus. The Gospel is about a vine with many branches, a call to commitment, without excessive self-righteousness.

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

¹³ Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 257.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ John W. Miller, “Depatriarchalizing God in Biblical Interpretation: A Critique,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003) 614.