

While the Church ranks Easter above Christmas, the Faithful celebrate Christmas more than Easter. Why? Perhaps because the baby Jesus is non-threatening, whereas the resurrected Christ comes not only to save, but also to judge. Courage as the unknown aspect of the Last Judgment is part of the Christian life.

Courage is possible for both stupid and sophisticated purposes. Courage as a means, never justifies an end. Sophistication requires knowledge and prudence. Insofar as governing is concerned, prudence may be more important than knowledge. That no president of the United States has ever held an earned doctoral degree supports this thesis. Many pontiffs, however, have held earned doctorates. At the bottom line, the courage of one's convictions is always appropriate, no matter what those convictions may be.

Courage in the face of not understanding suits these readings. The prophets looked forward to the life of Jesus, without understanding, quite, what that meant. The Faithful, today, try to live out the hope-filled admonitions of Psalm 40 and 1 Corinthians with courage, but without understanding, quite, whatever it may be that is happening.

Such courage is present, now. In the Gospel, Matthew resounds through the centuries with John the Baptist proclaiming he only baptized with water, whereas the Messiah would baptize with the Spirit. That Spirit is the grace of courage for the Faithful who do not understand what is happening, for example with the recent tsunami.

Many times the survivors will comment that the recently departed faced illness with courage. Nuns such as the Poor Clares, and others like them, exemplify courage in the face of not understanding whatever it may be that lies ahead. And not caring, at least to the point of taking vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and enclosure.

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

In the missing verse 4, Isaiah lets the Lord know that he does not at all understand his life, if things are as good as his prophecies indicate. All Isaiah asks for is mercy from his God in his own case. Verse 3 shifts from the Messiah as an individual to the Messiah as the people themselves, *my servant, Israel*.¹ Verse 5 goes on in the spirit of that great-unwritten hymn, Alleluia, Anyway. Verse 6 also mentions Israel as *a light to the nations*, something Saint Clare of Assisi, founder of the Poor Clares, takes personally. *Clare*, means *light*.

¹ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, "Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 3:13-17)," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 523.

Isaiah 49:1-11 refers to the Exodus.² *To restore the survivors of Israel* refers to surviving the Exodus. For the Faithful, such a survival refers to passage from this life into the next. The Exodus journey ends in Zion,³ Zion that Third Isaiah understood as the hearts of the Faithful.

Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10

The prayer behind Psalm 40 sounds like Isaiah and the Faithful gathering courage as they face what they do not understand. *I have waited for the LORD, and he...heard my cry.* The Lectionary also uses Psalm 40 as follows:

<u>Reading</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>verses</u>	<u>Sunday</u>
64A	504-505	2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10	(8a and 9a) Ordinary 2 = Today
65B	508	2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10	(8a and 9a) Ordinary 2
78C	574	only the antiphon	(Psalm 40:5a) Ordinary 6
120C	781	2, 3, 4, 18	(14b) Ordinary 20

The missing verse 3, spelled out in Cycle C, explains why the psalmist needs courage in the face of not understanding. The psalmist shares where he has been, namely in *the pit of destruction...the mud of the swamp.*

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

While verses 1-3 make the Church at Corinth sound like a lovely place to be, these verses are just a warm-up for Paul to excoriate the Corinthians for their lack of understanding.⁴ Paul exhibits courage, later in this letter, telling the learned and sophisticated Corinthians that they do not understand their new Christian religion.⁵ Trying to correct misguided religion, trying to keep the bark of Holy Mother the Church from capsizing, many times requires courage in the face of not understanding what is happening.

John 1:14a, 12a

² Richard J. Clifford, S.J., "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 1 (January 1993) 3.

³ Richard J. Clifford, S.J., "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 1 (January 1993) 4.

⁴ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., "Tradition and Redaction in 1 Cor 15:3-7," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 4 (October 1981) 588.

⁵ Benjamin Fiore, S.J., "'Covert Allusion' in 1 Corinthians 1—4," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 47, No. 1 (January 1985) 85-102.

Not understanding what either *the Word becoming flesh* or becoming *children of God*, does take courage as the Faithful live out their lives. There is enough evidence for the Faithful to understand that God is good, without understanding the tsunami Satanic evil, even in the recesses of their own hearts at the level of the unconscious. Facing their own faults squarely requires courage from the Faithful.

The Lectionary twists the order of John by presenting verse 14a before verse 12a. The Gospel presents accepting the Word in the order of a cause for the Word becoming flesh. The Lectionary presents the Word becoming flesh as a cause for accepting the Word. In other words, in the Gospel, Faith produces acceptance, whereas in the Lectionary acceptance produces Faith. Trying to be clear, again, the Lectionary implicitly invokes Church authority to present Jesus, whereas the Gospel invokes the Faith of the Faithful for that same presentation. I do not see what the Lectionary is doing as a matter of which comes first, the chicken or the egg. The Gospel presents Faith first in the sequence of a cause bringing about the Incarnation. Faith, sometimes indeed, requires courage.

John 1:29-34

John the Baptist is unafraid to face the world, recognizing that Jesus, in verse 29, is *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*. The original Greek sense of taking away is a type of global sense, without reference to time, whether past, present, or future.⁶ The matter of the world is not simple. Jesus also comes to judge (John 9:39) the world that refuses to recognize him (John 1:10).⁷

In verse 30, *the one of whom I said*, connotes *the one for whom I spoke*.⁸

In verses 31 and 33, John comes right out to say *I did not know him*, not once but twice. John did not know his cousin, Jesus? John must mean that John lacked an understanding of an aspect of Jesus, an aspect so important, that John proclaimed he did not know Jesus at all. When John says Jesus is to be *made known to Israel*, John is taking the Israel of Isaiah as the Faithful, who, in turn, reveal Jesus to the

⁶ 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) 129.

⁷ Stanley B. Marrow, "Κοσμος in John," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002), 97.

⁸ 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) 31.

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world through the ages. John 1:32 and 34 are two of the seven (John 1:7(bis), 8, 15, and 19) places in the Gospel proclaiming the witness value of John the Baptist.⁹

Though there is scholarly dispute over the symbolism,¹⁰ John further goes on to show how John the Baptist muddled through. John baptizing with water symbolized the exodus from sin with the exodus from Egypt.

Not understanding often requires courage. People in authority often cannot explain why they head in the direction the Faithful follow. Sometimes the Faithful require courage when it seems as if the Ship of Church is headed over some Niagara Falls.

Isaiah 40:6 expresses hope filled courage to accept God saying *I will make you a light to the nations*. The Responsorial antiphon, *I come to do your will* is an act of courage in the face of not understanding the wait for the LORD. 1 Corinthians is the hopeful calm before the storm. What 1 Corinthians 1:3 means by *grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* will become more plain in the next several Sundays.

Paul is courageously praying for something these Corinthians do not have, *grace and peace*. In First Testament, *peace* does not mean order and tranquility, but rather deep commitment to the work of justice,¹¹ such as racial justice. John 1:12 explains the condition for the love of God, namely accepting him. In the Gospel, John further goes on to show how John the Baptist muddled through. John baptizing with water symbolized the exodus from sin with the exodus from Egypt. He then courageously applied this exodus both to Jesus and his Faithful followers without understanding the implications of his act.

For more on sources see the Appendix file.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Dennis M. Sweetland, review of Wai-Yee Ng, "Water Symbolism in John: An Eschatological Interpretation in" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003), 133.

¹¹ Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No 3 (July 1996), 474.