

Personal Notes
050130 Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time 70A
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The question for these readings is what to do in the depths of worldly despair, when there seems to be no hope and God seems irrelevant? In the eight Beatitudes, the first three describe those suffering; the last five describe those relieving the suffering. In a circle, those trying to relieve the suffering, wind up suffering themselves.¹ In the final analysis, righteousness brings about persecution.² This lot awaits the disciples of Jesus.³

All of the above readily suits the situation of Black Catholics in the United States. The courage of one's convictions brings the righteousness of Matthew to bear on the difficulties. All of the Beatitudes are always appropriate. At times, it can seem as if God has abandoned the Faithful in their Beatitudinal quest to love him.

In the very first Beatitude, about the poor in spirit, Matthew may allude to the Holy Spirit.⁴ The same Greek word represents both the Holy Spirit and that in which the poor are poor in—the ultimate poverty. Zephaniah takes on a pay, pray, and obey Faithfulness that Matthew reverses. Zephaniah dates from the Seventh Century, B.C., in support of the reformer king, Josiah.⁵ Matthew disparages the religious establishment, in contrast.

The Lectionary takes as the Responsorial antiphon for Psalm 146, Matthew 5:3, *blessed are the poor in spirit*. The reversal of order described by Matthew means that the Divine order is not the human order; not that order is the same as chaos. The point is that God loves the disenfranchised.

1 Corinthians looks to human standards, for the sake of disparagement. When Paul relates *not many of you were powerful ... of noble birth* his implicit meaning is that

¹ Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No 3 (July 1996), 475.

² Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew's Gospel: a Literary-Critical Study," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 1 (January 1987) 63.

³ Barbara E. Reid, O.P., "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 238-239.

⁴ Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No 3 (July 1996), 463-465.

⁵ J. Clinton McCann, Jr., review of Marvin A. Sweeney, Zephaniah: A Commentary, in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No 4 (October 2004) 633-635.

neither was Abraham⁶ powerful or of noble birth according to human standards. Ultimately, the Divine order will prevail.⁷

Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13

What to do in the depths of worldly despair? The surviving clergy, on the one hand, may see themselves as the *remnant* in verse 12. The sexual scandals abounding, on the other hand, make those Faithful objecting to the abuse, rather than fleeing, the remnant. Considering the time of Jesus, one scholar asserts, “finally, the Jewish leaders attest to their evilness also in the way in which they relate to the crowds, revealing in this respect that they are ‘faithless’ to their trust.”⁸ The remnant may well be among the Faithful rather than the clergy.

In Zephaniah 2:3 and Matthew 5:5, the Lectionary translates the word *humble*. Saint Jerome uses other words. With this in mind, Zephaniah 2:3 and Matthew 5:5 are both presented here for comparative purposes, searching for the meaning of both.

Zephaniah 2:3

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	humble
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	mansueti
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	meek
<u>King James</u> (1611):	meek
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	humble
<u>New American</u> (1970):	humble
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	humble

Matthew 5:5

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	meek
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	mites
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	meek (verse 4)
<u>King James</u> (1611):	meek
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	gentle (verse 4)

⁶ Richard A. Horsley, “Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 8—10,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 576.

⁷ Mark Allan Powell, “The Magi as Kings: An Adventure in Reader-Response Criticism,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2000) 470.

⁸ Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: a Literary-Critical Study,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 1 (January 1987) 63.

New American (1970): meek
New Jerusalem (1985): gentle (verse 4)

Gentle is the translation I like from the Latin. People put upon by the strong sometimes find it in their best interests to be gentle.

Zephaniah 3:12
Lectionary (1998): humble
The Vulgate (circa 410): pauperem
Douay-Rheims (1582-1610): poor
King James (1611): afflicted
Jerusalem (1966): humble
New American (1970): humble
New Jerusalem (1985): humble

Humble carries a variety of meanings. The sense that I like is *put upon* rather than anything initiated by the victim. *Humility* in the sense of Zephaniah is a curse God turns into a blessing: not a blessing in and of itself.

Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10 (Matthew 5:3)

Funerals uses Psalm 146 during the Vigil for a deceased child.⁹ The Lectionary uses Psalm 146 as follows:

Reading	Page	Antiphon	Verses	Sunday
7A	34	cf. Isa 35:4	6-7, 8-9, 9-10	Advent 3
70A	533	Matt 5:3	6-7, 8-9, 9-10	Ordinary 4 = Today
128B	817	1b	7, 8-9, 9-10	Ordinary 23
138C	865	1b	7, 8-9, 9-10	Ordinary 26
155B	947	1b	7, 8-9, 9-10	Ordinary 32

According to the Vulgate, the Lectionary does not present all of verse 6, the reference to verse 6 notwithstanding. Sloppy scholarship. There is a problem with verses 9 and 10, unnoticed by me until now. In verse 9, *the LORD sustains*, here and in Ordinary 23; but *he sustains* in Advent 3, Ordinary 26, and Ordinary 32. In verse 10, the *Alleluia* is present here and in Ordinary 23, but not in Advent 3,

⁹ 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) 301.

Ordinary 26, and Ordinary 32. The Vulgate does not have the alleluia to end Psalm 146, but does have an alleluia to begin Psalm 147. There is an academic article on the whys and wherefores of such alleluias. What the Lectionary may be up to here escapes me.¹⁰ The question about what to do in the depths of worldly despair gets no easier.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Verse 26 is vocational, *consider your own calling*. The point is not to be tangled up in human respect, but to seek righteousness, expecting persecution for the effort. The ultimate sacrifice is accepting things getting so bad as to be poor in the Spirit, understanding that *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

1 Corinthians 1:26	
<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	calling
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	vocationem
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	vocation
<u>King James</u> (1611):	calling
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	called
<u>New American</u> (1970):	calling
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	called

The vocation is not only to the Kingdom, but also to the Cross.¹¹ Recent scholarship highlights the emphasis on honor and shame in ancient Mediterranean culture. Paul takes on this emphasis directly, despising the shame associated with the Cross.¹²

Matthew 5:12a

When things get tough, the tough get going, *rejoice* in the LORD, because *your reward will be great in heaven*. *Reward* is an important part of Matthew. Also, see Matt 10:41, 42, 20:1, 8. Matthew offers a non-violent alternative to the fight or flight choice, namely, rejoice.¹³ Here is an answer to the question about what to do in the depths of worldly despair. Rejoice.

¹⁰ Lloyd M. Barré, "Halelu yah: A Broken Inclusion," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 45, No. 2 (April 1983) 195-200.

¹¹ Benjamin Fiore, S.J., "'Covert Allusion' in 1 Corinthians 1—4," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 47, No. 1 (January 1985) 95.

¹² F. Gerald Downing, "'Honor' among Exegetes," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 1999) 67.

¹³ Louise Joy Lawrence, "'For truly, I tell you, they have received their reward' (Matt 6:2): Investigating Honor Precedence and honor Virtue," the Catholic Biblical

Matthew 5:1-12a

Matthew 5:1 begins the first of six discourses. The others begin at Matthew 10:1; 13:1; 18:1; 23:1; and 24:1.¹⁴ These readings only include the first discourse. In verse 5:1, Matthew portrays Jesus like Moses, going up on a mountain then teaching.¹⁵ What the Lectionary calls a mountain, the Faithful might call a ring of hills around the Sea of Galilee. The crowds then sit down, in anticipation of a lengthy presentation. Jesus would have sat facing the Sea.

As a teaching moment, Funerals uses this section of Matthew as one of the texts for Funerals for Adults.¹⁶ Pastoral Care of the Sick uses the same section.¹⁷ These verses offer consolation to those put upon in the social order. Divine order reigns over not only history and human society, but also the universe.

Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2002) 700; Barbara E. Reid, O.P., "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 241.

¹⁴ Terence J. Keegan, O.P., "Introductory Formulae for Matthean Discourses," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 3 (July 1982) 416.

¹⁵ D. C. Allison, "The Son of God as Israel: A Note on Matthean Christology," IBS 9 (1987) 78 as cited in 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) 517.

¹⁶ International Commission on English in the Liturgy: A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, Part III: Texts of Sacred Scripture: 13: Funerals for Adults, 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) 231.

¹⁷ Part III: Readings, Responses, and Verses from Sacred Scripture, 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) 301.

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Verse 3 in the Latin has the kingdom of the plural *heavens*, rather than the Lectionary singular *heaven*. The promise for the poor in Spirit is in the present tense. The promises for the meek and those who mourn are in the future tense, something not quite realized yet. The meek are promised the *earth* in the Latin, the *land* in the Lectionary. Such a conundrum is not the way things are supposed to be, according to worldly-centered standards. The promise in the Beatitudes of Matthew is that Divine order will prevail.

Verses 3 and 10 indicate that the community of disciples of Jesus already reflects the otherworldly social order on earth of the Our Father. Transformation of the disciples is also under development.¹⁸ *Theirs is the Kingdom of the Heavens*, of which there can be no higher.

In verses 6 and 10, where Matthew writes about righteousness, he touches on what is generally regarded as an accepted central theme of the Gospel. Also, see Matt 3:15; 6:1, 33; 21:32.¹⁹ The Faithful best find righteousness in the depths of their souls, rather than in external trappings. Righteousness offers a response to the question about what to do in despair. In other words, the best revenge is a life well led.

These readings are about the question of how to respond to the depths of worldly despair, when there seems to be no hope and God seems irrelevant. Zephaniah encourages the Faithful to remain steadfast, even through humiliations. Psalm 146:6c promises that *The LORD ... secures justice for the oppressed*. 1 Corinthians instructs the Faithful not to worry about worldly prestige. Finally, the Gospel itself spells out the Beatitudes, assuring the Faithful that the Kingdom of the Heavens belongs even to those poor in the Spirit.

For more on sources see the Appendix file.

¹⁸ Warren Carter, "Recalling the Lord's Prayer: The Authorial Audience and Matthew's Prayer as Familiar Liturgical Experience," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 57, No. 3 (July 1995) 522-523.

¹⁹ Louise Joy Lawrence, "For truly, I tell you, they have received their reward' (Matt 6:2): Investigating Honor Precedence and honor Virtue," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2002) 698.