

Personal Notes
050612 Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time 91A
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That God is covering the backs of the Faithful is the unifying theme of these readings for the Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Lectionary begins with Exodus, as God begins to reveal himself as Father, in addition to the all-powerful God.¹ Through Moses, God reminds the Faithful that God did cover their backs as God led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Psalm 100 portrays God as the Good Shepherd, again covering the backs of his Faithful flock. The Lectionary uses this Psalm as follows.

<u>Readings</u>	<u>Page in Lectionary</u>	<u>Verses used</u>	
51C	399	1-2, 3, 5 (3c)	Easter Four
91A	346	1-2, 3, 5 (3c)	Ordinary Eleven
#19	1079	2, 3, 5 (3c)	Common Texts

The Lectionary exhibits sloppy scholarship by documenting the same reading as verses 1-2 twice and as verse 2 once. The backs of the Faithful do need covering as they pray the Lectionary.

Romans invites the Faithful to contemplate God in the light of Saint Paul, who, while persecuting Christians, had his back covered by God. Paul, therefore, is both conscious of and not in love with the law.² Over-reliance on human direction got Paul into deep trouble persecuting Christians. Romans deserves reading within that context.

Jesus and God act *on behalf of* the Faithful. Romans uses $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho$ four times, translated as *for* by the Lectionary. $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho$ has slightly different meanings when grammatically used with the genitive and the accusative. With the genitive, $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho$ carries the sense of *on behalf of*. With the accusative, $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho$ carries the sense of *beyond* and *over and above*. In Romans, Christ acts $\upsilon\pi\epsilon\rho$ the Faithful, covering their backs.³ Funerals offers this consoling reading.⁴

¹ Mark K. George, "Fluid Stability in Second Samuel 7," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 32-33.

² Brendan Byrne, S.J., "The Problem of $\text{Νομ}\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ and the Relationship with Judaism in Romans," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 294-295.

³ John Paul Heil, "From Remnant to Seed of Hope for Israel: Romans 9:27-29," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2002) 707.

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The image is of the Father offering his Son as a guarantee of his love,⁵ as Abraham was prepared to do with his son, Isaac.⁶ This sense of the love of God overcomes the trials and tribulations inherent on the Weather Channel and both throughout the cosmos and within individual life-experiences. While the presence of evil does give atheism a certain amount of sense, the presence of good as described in the Lectionary makes even more sense.

The Gospel of Matthew dialogues with the Pharisees in presenting Christ to the Gentiles. In Matthew 9:36, the Jewish leaders offer no leadership.⁷ The dialogue with the Pharisees is similar to my dialogue with the Americans in the United States as I present Christ to the same Gentiles, all across the globe and beyond, through the Internet. In similar fashion, all of the Faithful in dialoguing with one another are able to dialogue with others, all of the time. Through Matthew, God reveals himself as covering the backs of the Faithful, when, apparently, there is no other Good Shepherd to act on their behalf. The Gospel of Matthew embraces the notion of Shepherd and sheep for the leaders and the Faithful, throughout.⁸

Matthew 9:38 is dear to the Josephites who name their magazine The Josephite Harvest. That, however, gets ahead of the story, because Jesus sends his disciples first to the lost sheep of Israel, rather than pagans or Samaritans (Matthew 10:5).

⁴ 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) 223.

⁵ Joseph Plevnik, S.J., "The Understanding of God at the Basis of Pauline Theology," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 4 (October 2003) 562.

⁶ Robert J. Daly, S.J., "The Soteriological Significance of the Sacrifice of Isaac," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 1977) 48.

⁷ 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) 62.

⁸ John Paul Heil, "Ezekiel 34 and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 4 (October 1993) 698, 700-705.

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Eventually, the Samaritans become part of the original Christian communities, evidence for which still exists.⁹

Matthew is making the point that the religious leaders, the Pharisees, leave the backs of the Faithful unprotected. As that happens, God himself makes up the difference. In this passage, Jesus sends his disciples to preach and heal, but not yet to teach.¹⁰ The difference between preaching and teaching is that preaching is less open-minded. Open-mindedness is a requirement for finding Jesus Christ.

In chapters 8 and 9, Jesus begins his ministry of healing, the Messiah, Servant of God, Son of God.¹¹ As his contemporaries heard it, *Son of God* would not have necessarily referred to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, but simply as a nice compliment or claim to a compliment. Matthew is developing how Faith takes shape.

In the first verse of the Lectionary, Matthew 9:36, the crowds begin to get a glimpse of who is Jesus. Matthew intends that readers and listeners notice a growing acceptance of Jesus by the Faithful. Had it not been for “the perverse and blind opposition of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders,” the crowds in Matthew would have recognized Jesus as Son of God.¹² Leadership, or lack thereof, does make a difference.

Matthew 10:1, mid-way in the Lectionary reading, begins a new discourse on effective leadership. The prior discourse is about clueless shepherds; the new discourse is about the new leadership Jesus offers.¹³ The issue is both that and how God shepherds the Faithful.

⁹ Reinhard Pummer, “New Evidence for Samaritan Christianity?” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 41, No. 1 (January 1979) 98-117.

¹⁰ John Paul Heil, “Ezekiel 34 and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 4 (October 1993) 702.

¹¹ Jack Dean Kingsbury, “Observations on the “Miracle Chapters” of Mathew 8-9,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 565.

¹² W. R. G. Loader, “Son of David, Blindness, Possession, and Duality in Matthew,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 1982) 571.

¹³ Terence J. Keegan, O.P., “Introductory Formulae for Matthean Discourses,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 3 (July 1982) 416.

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The 91A Lectionary readings for the Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time encourage the Faithful to contemplate their God covering their backs as they Exodus out of this life into the next. God protects the Faithful as a fatherly Good Shepherd, reconciling himself to the Faithful, despite their sins. In his dialogue with the Pharisees for the benefit of the Faithful readers and listeners, Matthew insists that God does not lord it over the Faithful, but rather covers their backs as a Good Shepherd.

For more on sources see the Appendix file.