

Personal Notes
050703 Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 100A
© 2005
Raymond J. Jirran

At this time, some Personal Notes are already on the web site at www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes My first reflections over these readings is dated July 7, 2002, three years ago. Democracy was the concern then. This time I am struck by the relationship between humility and difficulty. The context is local sermons proclaiming that Christianity is difficult. My suggestion to the contrary is that humility makes Christianity easy and light.

Zechariah 9:9 insists that the Messiah will come humbly, riding on a little donkey because he will banish huge horses, among other things. Zechariah 9:10 goes on to maintain that the Messiah will bring peace to the nations. Peace is a political construct, only possible when the one in charge is actually in charge. That takes humility.

Mark 11:1-11, not used in these readings, describes Jesus fulfilling this prophecy of Zechariah with his entrance into Jerusalem. After this grand entrance, then what? Jesus looks around the Temple, turns around and leaves for nearby Bethany with the twelve. In Mark 11:12-14, Jesus then looks at the fig tree to harvest figs. Finding none, Jesus curses the tree, an indication of the situation in the Temple where the harvest of souls was not to be found, either.¹

The Josephite Harvest magazine comes to mind, concerned about Black Catholics. The issue is the institutional church and its concern for the ravages of abusive power on victims. Josephites struggle to alleviate the abuse and care for the victims.

Zechariah 9:10, the prophet lived in the Sixth Century B.C., alludes to the royal psalms, not in the hope of an historian for a return to glory, but in the hope of a prophet with the future orientation of a Messiah.² Zechariah finds his contemporary civic leaders a burden causing depressing pessimism at the same time he is optimistic about the future Messiah.³

¹ Scott G. Brown, *Mark 11:1—12:12: A Triple Intercalation? the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 82-83.

² Sue Gillingham, *From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 476-477.

³ Stephen L. Cook, *The Metamorphosis of a Shepherd: The Tradition History of Zechariah 11:17 + 13:7-9*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (July, 1993) 459, 461.

Scholars think others added Zechariah 9—14 to the original Zachariah 1—8.⁴ The Book of Zechariah only has fourteen chapters. Zechariah 9 marks a shift from Zechariah 1—8, a shift from celebrating the monarchy to worrying about the present and hoping for the future.⁵ Jesus entering Jerusalem on the donkey gives it up, in the sense of applauds, the Spirit of God because of the future Resurrection.

The Book of Zechariah is part of intense interest in the last twenty years in two post-exilic minor prophets, Zechariah and Haggai. Since 1984, Scholars produced over 1200 studies.⁶ The riches of the Bible require humility to proceed before the difficulties involved.

Psalm 145:13 offers a different lesson in humility, a lesson arising out of sloppy scholarship. On page 678, the Lectionary documents the final two verses as 13-14, whereas, on page 938, the Lectionary documents the exact same verses as 13, 14.⁷ The official Nova Vulgata⁸ presents Psalm 145:13 in two different stanzas, only the

⁴ Bernard F. Batto, "The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No 2 (April 1987) 203.

⁵ Mark J. Boda, *From Fasts to Feasts: The Literary Function of Zechariah 7—8*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (July 2003) 390-407.

⁶ Paul L. Redditt, review of Mark J. Boda, Haggai & Zechariah Research: A Bibliographic Survey in *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No 3 (July 2004) 441-442.

⁷ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Roman Missal Restored by Decree of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Lectionary for Mass: For Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America: Second Typical Edition: Volume I: Sundays, Solemnities, Feasts of the Lord and Saints* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 678, 938.

⁸ *Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio: Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II ratione habita iussu Pauli PP, VI Recognita Auctoritate Joannis Pauli PP, II Promulgata Editio Typica Altera* (Liberia Editrice Vaticana: Editio typica prior: a. MCMLXXIX; Editio typica altera: a. MCMLXXXVI; 1986 Editio maior: ISBN 88-209-1523-5) 1035.

Because the following *Nova Vulgata* wore out, I began using the above beginning with the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 23, 2004. While the above volume is bound better and is the edition seminarians used at The Catholic University of America in the Spring of 2004, the 1986 date is twelve years before the one below, that wore out.

second of which the Lectionary uses. This means that the documentation on pages 678 and 938 are both wrong.

Holding Church authorities accountable for such sloppiness is beyond me. Accepting such lack of accountability does require humility, which, if present, makes the acceptance easy, but if not present becomes a stumbling block to the Father, especially within the context of *Humanae Vitae*, as counseled in 2002.

Psalm 145:14 refers to those who are *depressos*. Since Psalm 145 is an acrostic, the Psalm is more intellectual than others filled with pure emotion.⁹ Psalm 145:14 suggests that humility is the way to relieve depression. One becomes depressed because of frustration with the way things are; but if one is humble, one can accept that God is in charge of the way things are, even as a loving Father.

God so loves the Faithful that he puts his Spirit in them. The Lectionary writes of the Spirit of God dwelling in the Faithful. The Greek for Romans 8:9 and 11, three times carries the sense of the Faithful making a home for the Spirit of God within their hearts. Romans 8:12 is involved with the theology of Paul, proclaiming that the Faithful need not worry about their bodies if their souls are right. Romans is concerned about those stymied at the notion of a crucified Messiah.¹⁰

Not worrying about one's own body requires an act of profound humility as one accepts the human vicissitudes of life. In ever so subtle a way, Romans explains Zechariah and Psalm 145 to mean that the Spirit of God is about a human disposition within the soul as well as about a human disposition toward active political endeavors concerning the exercise of power, whether ecclesiastical or secular. Romans implies an active rather than a passive religious life.

Emphasizing the pronoun *you*, brings out the excitement of Romans. Romans 8:9 begins by observing the results of Christianity: you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, because you are making a home for the Spirit in your hearts. Romans 8:11 grafts the Spirit of Christ onto you, the Faithful. Romans 8:13 insists that you, in the person of the Faithful, will live, basically, in love.

Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio: Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II ratione habita iussu Pauli PP, VI Recognita Auctoritate Joannis Pauli PP, II Promulgata Editio Typica Altera (00120 Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979, 1986, 1998) ISBN 88-2209-2163-4

⁹ Hanan Eshel and John Strugnell, *Alphabetical Acrostics in Pre-Tannaitic Hebrew*, *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2000) 444.

¹⁰ Brendan Byrne, S.J., "The Problem of ? ? ? ? and the Relationship with Judaism in Romans," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 308.

Romans 8:1-39 reflects on how God can be righteous. The context can be the weather channel on television. The Romans passage insists that the justification of God cannot happen without understanding that Jesus is the Son of God.¹¹ In other words, humility at being creatures enables all the Faithful, including Jesus, to find Christianity light and easy.

The Lectionary connects the humility of Moses in the first reading with the humility of Jesus in the last reading. Numbers 12:3 relates that Moses was more humble than all the men on the face of the earth.¹² In this passage, Matthew does more than describe the humility of Jesus. Matthew also elaborates on the meaning of Messiah.¹³ Matthew 11:27, "No one knows the son except the Father, and no one knows the father except the son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." This preaching is part of the ministry of Jesus, an exorcism by the Spirit.¹⁴

Scholars have a difficult time trying to divine how Matthew outlined his Gospel. One view is that certain passages form kernels with other passages in a satellite relationship. The Lectionary readings for today are part of the satellite explaining the crisis in the ministry of the Messiah as expressed in the kernel about the role of John the Baptist asking, from prison, whether Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 11:2-6).¹⁵

The Gospel of Matthew begins by explaining that Jesus is the Messiah and then proceeds to narrate the ministry of Jesus. Jesus teaches with authority and performs mighty acts,¹⁶ none of which either spares him suffering or offers him the

¹¹ 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.

¹² Benedict T. Viviano, O.P., *The Least in the Kingdom: Matthew 11:11, Its Parallel in Luke 7:28 (Q), and Daniel 4:14, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 51-52.

¹³ Douglas R. A. Hare, "How Jewish Is the Gospel of Matthew?" *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 274.

¹⁴ W. R. G. Loader, "Son of David, Blindness, Possession, and Duality in Matthew," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 1982) 583.

¹⁵ Warren Carter, *Kernels and Narrative Blocks: The Structure of Matthew's Gospel, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No 3 (July 1992) 468.

¹⁶ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Observations on the "Miracle Chapters" of Mathew 8-9, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 565.

Resurrection. That sense that God the Father will and can make everything right is what makes Christianity easy and light to bear.

When Matthew 11:29 describes Jesus as humble, modern scholarship takes *humble* not as something Jesus does, but something that is done to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is humiliated. Jesus is, thereby, identified with the oppressed and powerless,¹⁷ making their oppression and submission easy to bear, even to the point where Karl Marx can call Christianity “the opiate of the masses.”

Meekness is associated with Matthew 5:5, the meek who will inherit the earth. Michel Talbot dedicates a whole chapter to what Jesus means by referring to himself as meek. Talbot likes the idea that meekness means non-violence and observance of the law. More generally, Talbot regards the meek as religious seeking to do the will of God.¹⁸

On the one hand, if one insists on clinging to one’s own spirit, then Christianity becomes a burden. On the other hand, Romans 8:9 insists upon taking on the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God makes Christianity easy as a practice and light as a burden.

For more on sources see the Appendix file.

¹⁷ Mark Allan Powell, *Matthew’s Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom*, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No 3 (July 1996) 466.

¹⁸ Benedict T. Viviano, O.P., review of Michel Talbot, “*Heureux les doux, car ils hériteront la terre*”: (Mt 5, 4 [5] in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No 2 (October 2004) 669-670.