

Personal Notes
060709 Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 101B
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Listening to God requires not only an open mind, but also an open heart. That is the theme for the following Lectionary readings. The readings begin with God sending Ezekiel to the Israelites, knowing that the people are “hard of face and obstinate of heart” (Ezekiel 2:4) and may not listen. Listening is the human response for God’s patience.

Recognizing human frailties, Psalm 123:2 proclaims that the Faithful are paying close attention, like the attention a slave (the Lectionary uses the words *servants* and *maid*) pays toward its master. 2 Corinthians portrays Paul finding strength in his apparent weakness. Finally, in the Gospel, the people in his hometown reject Jesus and will not listen to him.

These readings join love, which means opening the heart enough to listen to the truth, with the larger theme throughout the Sundays about prioritizing truth over politics. Opening the heart enough to listen to the truth, in turn, means willingness to change how one habitually does things. Explicitly linking love with truth is a new element in these Personal Notes.

A translation note: The Hebrew for Ezekiel 2:2, “this very day” is an idiom, also used in Genesis 7:13, namely, “bone of the day.” Fortunately, the King James Bible got this one correct.¹ The Lectionary also has it correct.

In Ezekiel 2:4, God describes the Israelites as “hard of face and obstinate of heart.” That does not mean, however, that the Israelites are bound to resist Ezekiel. The Israelites may heed Ezekiel. God goes on, “And whether they heed or resist...they shall know that a prophet has been among them.” God could be difficult, but at this stage of his relationship with humanity, he is not. That is the very sense of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a prophet among the people.

Psalm 123:2 has “as the eyes of servants are on the hands of their masters,” meaning that the Faithful are listening. Psalm 123:3-4 goes on to describe the life of a slave. “We are more than sated with contempt...with the mockery of the arrogant, with the contempt of the proud.” Psalm 123 is one of the communal laments.² Psalm 123 means that the Faithful are willing to change their ways.

¹ Alister McGrath, In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture (New York: Anchor Books: A Division of Random House, Inc., 2001) 232.

² Wilma Ann Bailey, “The Sorrow Songs: Laments from Ancient Israel and the African American Diaspora,” in Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Randall C. Bailey, ed., (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 64.

Personal Notes
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2 Corinthians 12:9 and 10 are about loving to the point that one is willing to change habitual ways of dealing with people. Saint Paul started out with tremendous power, being able to put Christians to death. However, in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, after the Corinthians hurt Paul,³ he finally writes, “power is made perfect in weakness...when I am weak, then I am strong.” Paul means that, though he could be difficult for the Corinthians, he is not. That is why Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians without cost. Paul boasts that his preaching will not burden anyone in Corinth.⁴

The reason Paul tries not to be difficult is the same reason that God almighty is not difficult, namely love for the Corinthians. This does not mean God is not sometimes difficult, even to the point of making his own son sweat blood. For the rest of the Faithful, that means dealing with such realities as pancreatic cancer, child abuse, loss of pensions, ultimately death.

Children beginning non-Catholic Sunday School learn the following 1860 hymn, evidently based on Ephesians 3:17-19, rather than 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.⁵

“Jesus Loves Me” (1860)

Jesus loves me,
For the Bible tells me so:
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak, but He is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
The Bible tells me so.

The Lectionary uses Ephesians 3:17-19 at reading 171B, “Friday after the Second Sunday after Pentecost: The Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.” Since

³ Calvin J. Roetzel, review of Frank J. Matera, II Corinthians: A Commentary in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No 4 (October 2004) 661.

⁴ Harry P. Nasuti, “The Woes of the Prophets and the Rights of the Apostle: The internal Dynamics of 1 Corinthians 9,” The Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 50, No. 2 (April 1988) 255.

⁵ Words written by Anna B. Warner, music by William B. Bradbury. “Jesus Loves Me (1860), Then Sings My Soul (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2003) Robert J. Morgan (ed.), 138

the Lectionary does not use Ephesians 3:17-19 on any Sunday, this Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time becomes a worthy option. Ephesians 3:17-19 does not contain the contrast between weak and strong that both the hymn and 2 Corinthians 9:10 do.

I always find the thorn in the flesh mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:7 interesting. The Greek, in its broadest sense, means anything pointed, metaphorically a thorn, a plague.⁶ A footnote in the New Jerusalem elaborates. "Perhaps a disease with severe and unforeseeable attacks; perhaps the resistance of Israel, Paul's brothers by physical descent, to the Christian faith."⁷ Douay-Rheims uses *sting*, rather than *thorn*.⁸ A thorn in the flesh is worse than a cut, because a thorn in the flesh is a puncture, which often resists healing as it causes infection. Paul means that he has his own troubles and, therefore, is approaching the Corinthians with as much humility as he can muster. That notwithstanding, Paul realizes that he is special as were the Corinthians then and the Faithful to the present.

The Greek derivation for the Lectionary *abundance* of the revelation (2 Corinthians 12:7) is *hyperbole*.⁹ In English, *hyperbole* means extravagant exaggeration. Paul was a mystic. Paul had visions, an abundance of revelations.

2 Corinthians 12:7

Lectionary (1998):

abundance of the revelations

The Vulgate (circa 410):

magnitudine revelationum

⁶ William D. Mounce, Zondervan Greek Reference Series: The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House: A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1993) 417.

⁷ Henry Wansbrough, General Editor, The New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1985).1923 12b.

⁸ The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate and diligently compared with the Hebrew, Greek and other editions in divers languages (The Old Testament, First published by the English College at Douay, A.D. 1609 and The New Testament was first published by the English College at Rheims, A.D. 1582) With notes by Bishop Challoner and also The Encyclical Letter "On the Study of the Holy Scriptures." By Pope Leo XIII and a Preface by Rev. William H. McClellan, S.J. Woodstock College, Md. Also an Appendix containing an Historical and Chronological Index, a Table of References, Maps and other helpful matter. (Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire: Loreto Publications 2002).

⁹ Jeremy Corley, "The Pauline Authorship of 1 Corinthians 13," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 259.

Personal Notes
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<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	greatness of the revelations
<u>King James</u> (1611):	abundance of the revelations
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	extraordinary nature of these revelations
<u>New American</u> (1970):	abundance of the revelations
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	the exceptional greatness of the revelations (verse 6)

The earlier translations stressed the quantity of revelations, the later translations the quality. Saint Paul himself is a mystery and I leave it there. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 obliquely refers to a man who ascended to the third heaven.¹⁰

Changing focus to the Gospel reading, when Mark 6:1 writes that Jesus “came to his native place,” Mark means Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. There, his friends and neighbors will not listen to him, implicitly because they love neither him nor God enough. They hampered the ability of Jesus to act. “He was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying his hands on them” (Mark 6:5).

Jesus has a human reaction, “He was amazed at their lack of faith” (Mark 6:6). Mark 6:4, “a prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house” is a reminder of Ezekiel 2:4, “hard of face and obstinate of heart.” Nazareth was only one of several places including Chorazin and Bethsaida (Matt 11:21) where the preaching of Jesus was rejected.¹¹

Mark and Luke write of the same event in Nazareth from different perspectives. Luke is writing in a more organizational mode, but not in a time-sequence mode. Luke is organizing ideas. Luke begins with Nazareth in order to incorporate the two ideas of outlining the ministry of Jesus and developing the “harsh lesson concerning the progressive estrangement from the word of salvation of the groups that were closest to it [the ministry of Jesus] at first.”¹²

¹⁰ Kevin P. Sullivan, review of Murray J. Harris, The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greet Text, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005) 713.

¹¹ Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 148.

¹² Richard J. Dillon, “Previewing Luke’s Project from His Prologue (Luke 1:1-4),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April 1981) 221.

Personal Notes
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Agneta Schreurs offers psychological therapy for the hardheadedness described in these readings. She writes of a therapist trying to train other therapists in group therapy. Session after session went by, with the group continually attacking the group conductor, but the group conductor not retaliating. After a long time, the group came to its senses and apologized with tears. To make her point, Schreurs cites 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, as she writes, "what this man [the group conductor] shows is not weakness, it is the incredible courage to be gentle and meek, to stay with your own love in whatever circumstances."¹³ Such persevering patience on the part of the group conductor has to explain how and why Christianity has spread.

This spirit of love and openness to truth, despite weakness, causes me to address the "brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon," Mark 6:3. Mark is writing that Jesus had brothers. Accounting for this challenge to the Virgin Mary causes trouble. Plainly, Luke and Matthew thought Mary was a virgin. Less plain, but also clearly, Christian dogma influenced what was passed down through the Gospels. How to square this and some other passages (Matt 13:55-56; Luke 4:22, and John 6:42) with the Virgin dogma remains a challenge.¹⁴ Addressing the challenge to the perpetual virginity of Mary is an act of love toward those making the challenge, while running the risk of such a poor response, that believers take offence.

Trying to figure out who Mary of Clopas (John 19:25) was at the foot of the cross with Jesus is also a challenge. Mark 6:3, in the Lectionary readings, is of no help. The Scriptures give no indication that Jesus had a brother called Clopas. While Mary of Clopas was known to the early church, who she is today is unknown.¹⁵

The Evangelists are not always consistent. That Joseph was an artisan is not an article of dogma. That notwithstanding, while Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 do note that Joseph was a carpenter, Luke 4:22 does not.¹⁶ Love, open to truth, as a habit,

¹³ Agneta Schreurs, Psychotherapy and Spirituality: Integrating the spiritual dimension into therapeutic practice (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002) 178, 290 4.

¹⁴ "Some Doctrinal Variants in Matthew 1 and Luke 2, and the Authority of the Neutral Text," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January 1980), 67.

¹⁵ Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 204-213.

¹⁶ Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 73.

Personal Notes
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is always appropriate for the spiritual life. That is why these Notes consider the issues, however inadequately. As Vatican II demonstrated, the Church itself sometimes condemns a theologian, before it adopts what it first condemned. That openness to change is love at work.

In conclusion, love relates to truth by listening with an open heart and by leaving the heart open to changing habitual ways of understanding. Through Ezekiel, God tells the Israelites that they will know a prophet has been among them, whether they listen or not. Psalm 123 assures God that the Faithful are listening and are willing to change their ways.

Paul explains that the power of God displays itself in human weakness. That is why Paul points out to the Corinthians that he, Paul, is not being difficult toward them. Jesus also does not cause difficulty for his townspeople, who will neither listen nor open their hearts to him.

The meaning of these readings is that at least a modicum of love opens up truth in the first place. After that, within a context of prudence, more love enables the listener to change his ways. Ultimately, listening and loving are habitual, enabling the Faithful to prioritize truth over politics as an act of love.

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