

Personal Notes  
060716 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 104B  
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God can fix history. That is the story behind the following readings. The readings begin easily enough with God calling Amos to be a prophet (Amos 7:15). Psalm 85 is a lament about the reality of history in the making. Ephesians is about the ability of God to purify past human history. The Gospel of Mark is about the disciples correcting history in the sense of healing the sick. The readings for today are not only about healing bodies, but also about healing souls developing their identities within a context of sin and history.

Amos had some of the goods of this world. Owning cattle, he had to give up something, when God called him. Amos had been on a path of worldly success, which he gave up to prophesy with a message that could not have been good for business. Amos trusted the ability of God to make things right, eventually.

In Stockmen from Tekoa, Sycomores from Sheba; A Study of Amos' Occupations, Richard C. Steiner notes the distinction between the sycamore tree of North America and Europe and the sycomore tree of the area around Jericho. The sycomore tree was imported from Africa through Yemen to Israel. The various translations of Amos 7:14 help explain the verse.

Amos 7:14

Lectionary (1998):

The Vulgate (circa 410):

Douay-Rheims (1582-1610):

King James (1611):

Jerusalem (1966):

New American (1970):

New Jerusalem (1985):

I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores  
sed armentarius ego sum, vellicans sycomoros  
but I am a herdsman plucking wild figs

but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit

I was a shepherd, and looked after sycamores

I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores

I am merely a herdsman and dresser of sycamore-figs

Both the 1998 and the 1986 Nova Vulgata<sup>1</sup> have it right, *sycomoros*. Interestingly both the Nova Vulgata and the Douay Rheims<sup>2</sup> purchased more recently are reprints

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<sup>1</sup> 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)

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, which wore out.

Personal Notes  
060716 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 104B  
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Raymond J. Jirran

of copies made earlier. However, what is the difference between a sycamore and a sycomore?

American Sycamore (*plantanus occidentalis*)<sup>3</sup>  
Sycamore fig (*ficus sycomoros*)<sup>4</sup>

Plant type	tree	tree
Mature Height	70-90 feet	50-70 feet
Environment	Prefer full sun; soil should be wet	Prefers partial shade or partial sun to full sun; soil should be moist
Bloom colors	Red	White/Near white Parts of plant are poisonous if ingested. Handling plant may cause skin irritation or allergic reaction.
Leaves	Leaves, alternate, simple, lobed, with three main veins palmately arranged	

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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.

<sup>2</sup> 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).

The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate with Annotations, References, and an Historical and Chronological Table: The Douay Version of The Old Testament, First published by the English College at Douay, A.D. 1609: The Confraternity Edition of The New Testament: A Revision of the Challoner-Rheims Version Edited by Catholic Scholars under the Patronage of the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1950).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.horticoipia.com/hortpix/html/pc4232.htm> 060614.  
[http://www.domtar.com/arvbe/english/p\\_plocc.htm](http://www.domtar.com/arvbe/english/p_plocc.htm) 060614.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.horticoipia.com/hortpix/html/pc4232.htm> 060614.  
<http://davesgarden.com/pf/go/57821/index.html> 060616.

Personal Notes  
060716 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 104B  
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Raymond J. Jirran

Foliage Evergreen, velvet/fuzzy-textured  
Fruit Fruits, achenes in ball-like aggregate, on long stalks

Monocromatico from Rio De Janeiro (BR) (Zone 11) has the following:<sup>5</sup>

The Sycamore is historically one of the most important trees. It's cited in the Bible several times. The wood and figs have been used by people in Middle East for thousands of years. These trees can live for centuries. If I'm not mistaken, there are some trees that could be more than 2000 years old.

It's a fig tree, and a large one. The height depends on the soil and water available. The trunk is vigorous and can grow larger than taller sometimes, making it look like a Baobab. The leaves are simple, or more often lobate, with tiny hairs on its surface. Dunno much about cultivation, and never seen (or tasted) the figs myself.

The trees are different in foliage, fruit, height, and where they grow.

Even the history of the relationship between Amos and his fig trees requires the type of fixing only God can heal. The discrepancies among the various translations require human trepidation before settling on a resolution. All sorts of sin cloud human reason, sin that God can remedy in history.

Psalm 85 laments having turned away from God. Again, the inspired writer has confidence that God is a God of history. The lament also implies suffering from racial prejudice.<sup>6</sup> Psalm 85:13, *justice shall walk before him* is about the activity of God looking down from heaven,<sup>7</sup> in history. This phrase is also found in Isaiah 58:8, so was part of the original expectation of the Jewish people.<sup>8</sup> Psalm 85 proclaims that God can correct history gone badly. Laments are suitable prayers for those suffering from racism, sexism, or other unfair human biases.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://davesgarden.com/pf/go/57821/index.html> 060616.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 191.

<sup>8</sup> Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 474-475.

Personal Notes  
060716 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 104B  
© 2015  
Raymond J. Jirran

The Lectionary for this Sunday exemplifies history gone badly. One problem is with the documentation referencing Psalm 85. The Lectionary uses the exact same words from Psalm 85 in three places: (1) 5B, The Second Sunday of Advent; (2) 104B, the Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (here); and (3) 115A, the Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Lectionary uses Psalm 85:8 as the alleluia verse for the 2B, the First Sunday of Advent reading. The embarrassing problem is the inconsistency referencing verse 9, only part of which the Lectionary uses. Nowhere does the Lectionary acknowledge that only part is used.

There is an internal inconsistency between the references for readings 5B and 114B, and 115A. 115A has 9, 10, rather than the 9-10 for 5B and 114B. While none of the references is accurate, 9, 10 (by leaving room for the unfinished verse 9), is better than 9-10 (which appears to be a complete verse 9 before verse 10. This is one more example of sloppy scholarship, mentioned again below. Just as the sycomoros in Amos cause consternation, so does the Lectionary documentation for Psalm 85:9

The antiphon, then, makes great sense for me. “Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.” Kindness and salvation would mean setting forth the truth more carefully in the Lectionary.

Psalm 85:9, where “justice shall look down from heaven” runs parallel to Ephesians 1:3, “with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.” The Greek in Ephesians not only implies coming down from the heavens, but also reaching up to the heavens. The blessing is Christ. Christ heals history in all of its meanings.

When Ephesians 1: 4 holds that God chose the Faithful to be without blemish before him, Ephesians means that God is actively participating in human history to the point of correcting human mistakes. Utilizing Ephesians 1:4, Saint Irenaeus (ca. 130-202)<sup>9</sup> criticized the Gnostics for teaching that the created universe was a mistake God permitted. Irenaeus insisted that the created universe was a blessing in which God participated.<sup>10</sup> That participation is the significance of God making history right.

Ephesians is about the good will of God toward the Faithful. I wonder about translating *good will* as entitlement, a matter of entitled justice, rather than a matter of optional charity. Here I am thinking about correcting the consequences of racism and sexism. I am not arguing, just wondering. *Good will* is an excellent translation,

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<sup>9</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irenaeus> 060613.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Clifford, S.J., and Khaled Anatolios, “Christian Salvation: Biblical and Theological Perspectives,” Theological Studies, Vol. 66, No. 4 (December 2005) 748-749.

Personal Notes  
060716 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 104B  
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Raymond J. Jirran

as it is. Other nuances include taking pleasure, being pleased. Both racism and sexism require healing.

Time is a dissonant element in Ephesians 1:10, *the fullness of times*. This is not Western clock time, but eastern sequential time. The sense is that the time was suitable.<sup>11</sup>

There is another Western-Eastern dichotomy at work with the Greek word *οικονομια* in verse 10, translated, *a plan*. That plan refers to cosmic unity,<sup>12</sup> rather than, for example, taking up a collection for church kneelers. I suspect the hierarchy uses Koinonia for Parish Council in order to disabuse Koinonia members of any democratic sense of authority. As best I can tell, in the mind of the hierarchy, all authority rests with them. Koinonia is not in the dictionary. In that sense, at least, Koinonia does not belong in the West. My guess is that the hierarchy wants the Faithful to plan without decision-making authority of what plan to implement.

Neither is Koinonia limited to Eastern Christianity. Founded in 1942, Koinonia Partners is a small, interracial, Christian farming community in Americus, Sumter County, Georgia. Habitat for Humanity began there. Koinonia Partners took the term from the Acts of the Apostles, but exactly where, I do not know.<sup>13</sup>

Koinonia Christian Fellowship is an Ontario Canadian church founded in 1984. In 2001 this church released their first Praise and Worship CD entitled "Everlasting Love."<sup>14</sup> I doubt the hierarchy is trying to use either of these churches as models, churches that also use the term Koinonia. In taking charge of history, healing the scandals causing Protestant Christianity to flourish is something else for God to look after.

The Greek for *a plan* in Ephesians 1:10 is different from the Greek in Ephesians 1:11, *the intention of his will*. *The mystery of his will* is in Ephesians 1:9; *the intention of his will* is in Ephesians 1:11. The mystery is unraveled in the intention as explained in the way in which Jesus lived his life. The realization of the resurrection

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<sup>11</sup> Bruce J. Malina, "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?" *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 23.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 54.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.answers.com/topic/koinonia-partners> 060616.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.answers.com/topic/koinonia-christian-fellowship> 060616.

is the realization that God controls history and can remake human intentions into his own intentions. Joseph Jensen, O.S.B. suspects that the plan of God in Isaiah and the rest of the First Testament, is the same plan expressed in Ephesians 1:11.<sup>15</sup>

The sloppy scholarship in the Lectionary is part of the *mystery of his will* in Ephesians 1:8. The need is to meditate on the mystery of existence for the purpose of finding God.<sup>16</sup> The life of Jesus best describes the mystery of existence.

This Ephesians 1:10 is about all things being summed up in Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup> Paul is thinking of the whole cosmos, at the same time he is thinking of the sacramental life of Christ and the Church. When Ephesians 1:13 mentions *sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*, the reference is probably to Baptism. The sealing is of the Divine plan mentioned in Ephesians 1:10. In the First Testament, the high priest, in this case Jesus, did the sealing.<sup>18</sup> Paul's point is that God can and does correct past human mistakes.

Ephesians 1:13, *the word of truth*, means that the promises of Christ and his Church are real and correct. Ephesians 1:13 immediately links truth with faith, *you ... who have ... believed in him*. The marvel is that in Ephesians 1:14, the Faithful have become the possession of God *to the praise of his glory*. The relationship to academic history is vague at best, but not all that unlike either the life of Jesus or the lives of the Faithful.

From the Greek, my sense of entitlement, mentioned above, is at Ephesians 1:5, *the favor of his will*; 1:8, *the riches of his grace*, and 1:8, *in accord with his favor*. With all of the intellectual running around in Ephesians 1:2-14, the rite of Funerals has a place for this reading.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Jensen, O.S.B., "Yahweh's Plan in Isaiah and the Rest of the Old Testament," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 3 (July 1986), 455.

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 158.

<sup>17</sup> Donald A. Hagner, review of Peter T. O'Brien, "The Summing Up of All Things (Ephesians 1:10)" (pp. 106-219), P. J. Williams, Andrew D. Clarke, Peter M. Head, and David Instone-Brewer (eds.), The New Testament in Its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background in Honour of B. W. Winter on His 65th Birthday, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 2005) 555.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 249.

Mark 6:13 writes about correcting history in the sense of driving out demons and curing the sick. Though this verse is about the anointing of the sick, Pastoral Care of the Sick does not use this verse. Mark 6:7-13 is part of a recognized intercalation of Mark 6:7-32. The story about healing is the beginning a story that ends with the disciples asking Jesus what they will receive for following him. Inside that intercalating story is the story of Herod decapitating John the Baptist.<sup>20</sup>

Here in Mark 6:7, Jesus sends out the twelve, two by two. Luke 10:1 sends out the seventy or seventy-two disciples. Luke 8:3 establishes that Jesus had many women disciples. It seems likely, therefore, that some of the pairs going out to heal the sick were husband and wife.<sup>21</sup>

At this point, after indicating in Mark 3:13, that those whom Jesus chose for his disciples did not yet realize who Jesus was, Mark narrates their initial successes (Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-14; 3:13-19, and 6:6b-13(her)). Mark is leading his readers through the successes, doubt, failure, and final Faith in the risen Christ.<sup>22</sup> Mark is a narrative about discipleship. The purpose for the two-by-two was to assure there was evidence for the mission, ultimately to the mission to the Faithful of all ages.

There is another aspect of Mark 6:7-11 that interests scholars. Mark 6:7-11 is also found in Matthew 10:1, 9-14 and Luke 9:1-6. Overlapping traditions are at work. Robert H. Stein, however, is interested in elements of agreement between Matthew and Luke that Mark does not have. Historically, there must have been many traditions other than Mark available for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.<sup>23</sup> In all three Evangelists, God is piecing together his history for all generations to examine.

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<sup>19</sup> N.a., 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) 252.

<sup>20</sup> Scott G. Brown, "Mark 11:1—12:12: A Triple Intercalation?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 78.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: A Continuum imprint, 2003) 216-217.

<sup>22</sup> Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., "Mark 6:6b-30: Mission, the Baptist, and Failure," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2001) 662-663.

Personal Notes  
060716 Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 104B  
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Raymond J. Jirran

The readings for today are not only about healing bodies, but also about healing souls developing their identities within a context of sin and history. Amos leaves his career-path to prophecy for God. Psalm 85 promises that justice, redeeming justice, shall walk before God. Ephesians draws all healing from the ministry of Christ. Mark describes how this ministry developed in the life of Jesus and his disciples, down to the present.

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

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<sup>23</sup> Robert H. Stein, "The Matthew-Luke Agreements Against Mark: Insight from John," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July 1992) 485.