

Personal Notes
050807 Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time 115A
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The question hidden in the Lectionary is what role does anxiety have in the religious life? Psalm 85:11 sets out a basic tension of consciousnesses: *kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss*. Frequently, presenting the truth is unkind, most importantly in cases of fraternal correction, particularly at funeral Masses. Justice and peace are also a difficult match, because peace comes at a cost of an overpowering force. In human terms, peace and justice are difficult terms to match. The Divine is required.

The human balancing act implied above can tear apart a delicate conscience. While it is true that a theoretical personal oblation to God can make a morally mature person at one with self,¹ the practical application of finding a balance is next to impossible. These readings are about the anxiety inherent in leading a religious life.

Obedience is one escape, by which the Faithful simply accept the judgment of another. Such obedience lost its acceptability, however, when used as the defense of Holocaust actions by the Nazis at the Nuremberg trials. There is a point at which blind obedience becomes blind to evil. Recognizing that there is such a point, especially towards those unrepresented or misrepresented, causes anxiety, *prima facie*, on the very face of it. The relevance to the Lectionary is in Romans, where the sense of ethics in Paul is the impact of behavior on others,² small consolation, trying to match justice with peace, that is, political correctness. The covenant as found in Moses and Elisha is also relevant.

In 1 Kings 19:11-12 the peace-bringing power of crushing rocks and earthquakes³ is balanced with justice enveloped in a tiny whispering sound. Recognizing what is happening, Elijah, portrayed as a new Moses, a covenant mediator,⁴ hides his face in his cloak. A certain amount of anxiety is present in the prophet.

¹ Richard A. Horsley, "Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 8—10," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 589.

² Richard A. Horsley, "Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 8—10," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 586.

³ Richard J. Sklba, "'Until the Spirit from on High Is Poured out on Us' (Isa 32:15): Reflections on the Role of the Spirit in the Exile," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 1 (January 1984) 11.

⁴ Kathryn L. Roberts, "God, Prophet, and King: Eating and Drinking on the Mountain in First Kings 18:41," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 4 (October 2000) 634.

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Psalm 85:8 and 9 contrast hearing with seeing. The verse says *I will hear* but the antiphon prays *let us see*. The ancients valued seeing over hearing. When God proclaims *peace* (Psalm 85:9), the psalmist proclaims *fear* (Psalm 85:10). Where Psalm 85:14 in the Lectionary translation has *justice* walking before the LORD, another translation would be *righteousness* goes before the LORD.⁵ Trying to live a holy life does bring a certain amount of anxiety, even at the level of praying the Lectionary.

The psalms practically institutionalize anxiety. For example, Psalm 85 is one of communal lament. The Lectionary choice highlights an invocation to God (Psalm 85:8, 9), a confession of trust (Psalm 85:10-14), a petition (Psalm 85:8), words of assurance (Psalm 85:10-14).⁶ Such a communal lament is appropriate for those misrepresented and unrepresented, such as Black Catholics and others.

In Romans, Paul deals with his own anxiety, as he explains the role of the Jews in the redemptive plan of God.⁷ In the original Greek, *my conscience* in Romans 9:1 carries a sense of consciousness.⁸ In contrast to consciousness, Romans 9:3 is *on behalf* of Paul's own people rather than *about* Paul's own people.⁹ Paul may be writing of his charismatic ecstasy in the Spirit. Romans 9:5, *the Christ, who is over all* may also be translated that God is over all. Max Zerwick, S.J. offers the following:

⁵ Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 475.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Jeffrey S. Lamp, "Is Paul Anti-Jewish? *Testament of Levi* 6 in the Interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 2003) 412.

⁸ 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) 434; Richard A. Horsley, "Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 8—10," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 581.

⁹ 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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May God who is over all be blessed for ever! Amen
and
The Messiah according to the flesh who is over all, God blessed for
ever, Amen.¹⁰

The idea in Romans 9:5 is that the origin of Jesus is in God, in a divine rather than human manner.¹¹ In the final analysis, it takes the Divine to relieve human anxieties about doing what is right and holy. As best I can tell, self-centered pride is the most effective, but misguided, relief for holy anxiety.

Paul, explaining the role of the Jews in salvation, is tangled up with his own ethnic assumptions and biases (Rom 9:1-11:36; Rom. 3:1-4; Gal 2:15; 1 Thess 1:9). Paul is trying to establish a church free from ethnic preconceptions, but his own ideas about what is involved, from an Afrocentric perspective, “may have been at best naïve and at worst ambiguous concerning the role (and power) of ethnic identity.”¹² In his public ministry, Jesus insists on the overriding power of God over all things. This overriding power of God energizes the various apostolates to the poor.

Matthew 4:17—16:20 is about the public ministry of Jesus.¹³ Matthew 14:25, about *walking on the sea*, is about peace and justice; peace because Jesus calms the sea, justice because Jesus saves Peter from his disbelief. Kindness and truth also meet here; kindness by inviting Peter to walk on water, truth by beginning *to walk on the water, toward Jesus* (Matthew 14:29). As holy as Peter was, he did exhibit considerable anxiety.

¹⁰ Max Zerwick, S.J. and Mary Grosvenor, A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament unabridged, 5th, revised edition (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1996) 479.

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 Brad Ronnell Braxton, “The Role of Ethnicity in the Social Location of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24,” in Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Randall C. Bailey, ed., (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 29.

¹³ Jack Dean Kingsbury, “Observations on the ‘Miracle Chapters’ of Mathew 8-9,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 565; R. Barry Matlock, “‘Even the Demons Believe’: Paul and πιστις Χριστου,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2002) 312-313.

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These readings are about religious anxiety before the power of God in 1 Kings tempered by an act of faith in Psalm 85, rejuvenated as Paul reconsiders the Israelites in Romans 9:4, and faced with disbelief at the suspension of the laws of gravity with Peter *beginning to sink* (Matthew 14:30). The role of anxiety in the religious life is complex and varied, ultimately only resolved by God himself.

At this time (in 2005), some Personal Notes are already on the web site at www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes. I have not yet established a firm procedure for uploading Personal Notes.

For more on sources see the Appendix file.