

Personal Notes
050821 Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time 121A
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The ways of God are unfathomable. The footprints of where God has been are, in the Greek, untraceable.¹ The judgments of God are beyond human wisdom. The question is how are the Faithful to understand human imperfections not only individually in themselves, but also institutionally within their families and church and state. Human imperfections hit close to the bone for those marginalized, misrepresented, and falsely accused.

Isaiah prophecies an overthrow of the imperfect Jewish government. Despite a difficult situation, Isaiah remains confident and full of hope for the future. Isaiah does more than simply believe. He also seeks understanding. Humans even understand time imperfectly. Isaiah does have a different sense of future time than those in the United States of America.

Future time for the ancients is best expressed in the USA as “already, but not yet.”² To have meaning for the ancients, the future was already present, at least potentially. Especially for the elite, society was static and meant to extend into the future. Those in charge belonged in charge by Divine Mandate. When Isaiah prophecies an overthrow of the imperfect Jewish government, his purpose is to show that God is in charge, after all.

Only in recent times, especially in the USA, have the marginalized participated in seeking their own identities, whether personal, familial, national, or international. The best among the “Jesus books” arising out of the recent search for the historical Jesus, represents Jesus as “the marginal Jew within first-century Palestinian Judaism.”³ Only now have the Faithful had the intellectual tools to realize that societies have never remained the same and are able to change and be more inclusive. Social order, sometimes imperfect, is not entirely by Divine mandate. This reality is especially important for the Black Apostolate.

In using Isaiah 22:22, the Lectionary ties the ancient prophecy about placing *the key of the House of David on Eliakim's shoulder* to Matt. 16:19, *I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven*. The parallel is even greater than that. Isaiah 22:22, *when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open* parallels Matt. 16:19,

¹ 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) 486.

² Bruce J. Malina, “Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 9.

³ Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., review of John P. Meier, A Marginal Jew; Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Vol. 3, companions and Competitors in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No 4(October 2002) 771.

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whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Bible stories are so incredible that they stymie the imperfect human historical imagination. The Lectionary reading in Isaiah makes the point that an historical substratum for the involvement of God in human history exists. Contemporary historical records from outside Israel and Juda reflect what happened elsewhere to confirm the reality of Bible History. While Shebna, Eliakim, and Hilkiyah, as mentioned in the Lectionary, are not at the top of the popular imagination, the three do have an historical substratum as part of the identity of Western Civilization.

To be more historically specific, Shebna,⁴ in Isaiah 22:15 was the comptroller or governor of the palace during the reign of Hezekiah.⁵ The best dates for the reign of Hezekiah are 716 or 715 to 687 B.C. Five verses later, Hilkiyah⁶ in Isaiah 22:20 is son of Josiah (who ruled from 641 or 640 to 609 B.C.). Eliakim,⁷ in Isaiah 22:20 of the Lectionary, also known as Jehoiakim, ruled Judah from 609 to 598, B.C.

To recapture some of the contemporary history intimated in the Isaian Lectionary readings: in 687 B.C., Juda lost its independence to Assyria. As conquerors frequently did at the time, the Assyrians took some Jews into exile. Contemporary well-known Assyrians rulers included Sennacherib (705-682 B.C.) and Assurbanipal (669-627 B.C.).⁸

About the time Assurbanipal died, Josiah (640-609 B.C.)⁹ began annexing the Assyrian provinces of Samaria, Gilead, and Galilee.¹⁰ In 622 B.C., while rebuilding the First

⁴ <http://www.answers.com/Shebna> 7/11/2005.

⁵ <http://www.answers.com/Hezekiah> 7/11/2005.

⁶ <http://www.answers.com/main/ntquery?method=4&dsid-2039&dekey=Jehoiaki&gwp=8&...> 7/10/2005.

⁷ <http://www.answers.com/Eliakim> 7/10/2005.

⁸ An Encyclopedia of World History: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern: Chronologically Arranged, William L. Langer, comp. and ed., 5th ed. Revised and Enlarged with Maps and Genealogical Tables (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972) 46.

⁹ <http://www.answers.com/Josiah> 7/11/2005.

¹⁰ An Encyclopedia of World History: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern: Chronologically Arranged, William L. Langer, comp. and ed., 5th ed. Revised and Enlarged with Maps and Genealogical Tables (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972) 45.

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Temple, Josiah apparently found the Book of Deuteronomy that he had publicly read. In 597, Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and exile began again. Jeremiah the Prophet preached in Jerusalem from about 628 to 586 B.C., when Jerusalem fell to Babylon. After that, avoiding the Babylonian exile, Jeremiah went into Egypt, where he continued prophesying doom unless the Jews repented abandoning their LORD and trusting in human military might. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah predicted a Messiah would eventually come to deliver the Jews from their military conquerors.¹¹

Within such an historical context, all four of the New Testament Evangelists struggle in their qualifications about what they meant ascribing Messiahship to Jesus.¹² Jesus was not what they expected. From all that Israel and Judea had been through, the Evangelists had to explain how it was that, somehow, nothing had changed, all the while, somehow, everything had changed. Even prophesying the change, Isaiah had problems, as the reediting of the Book of Isaiah shows.

Isaiah 22 is part of the First Book of Isaiah, chapters 1-35.¹³ While the Biblical Books were always under revision, the basis for Isaiah 22 would have been under the first Exile, beginning in 687 B.C. The Second Book of Isaiah began in Exile after 582 B.C. During this time, the Book of Ezekiel was composed and Deuteronomy brought up to date. After Cyrus defeated the Babylonians, in 539 B.C., he permitted the Jews to return to the Holy Land.¹⁴

From 520 to 515 B.C., the returned Exiles rebuilt the Temple, thereby beginning the Second Temple Period that lasted until destroyed by the Romans in 71 A.D. Before the final destruction, Herod the Great expanded the Temple from about 17 to 63 A.D.¹⁵ In 332 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered Palestine, after which came the Romans,

¹¹ The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, sold and distributed by Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983, 1989, 1994) 444.

¹² Brendan Byrne, S.J., "Jesus as Messiah in the Gospel of Luke: Discerning a Pattern of Correction," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003) 80.

¹³ The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, sold and distributed by Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983, 1989, 1994) 432.

¹⁴ An Encyclopedia of World History: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern: Chronologically Arranged, William L. Langer, comp. and ed., 5th ed. Revised and Enlarged with Maps and Genealogical Tables (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972) 46.

¹⁵ <http://www.idolphin.org/chron.html> 7/12/2005.

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under whom Jesus lived.¹⁶ Jesus had the Isaian keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, keys he conferred upon the Apostles.

The 138th Psalm is not so sure about having keys to anything. The Responsorial antiphon asks the LORD; *do not forsake the work of your hands*. If the Psalmist were not worried about being forsaken, he would feel no need to remind the LORD he, the psalmist, was there. When Psalm 138:6 says, *the lowly he* [the LORD] sees, *lowly* refers to the marginalized and misrepresented.

Three exilic captivities are closely associated with the Second Book of Isaiah. The first happened in 597 B.C. Jeremiah preached that the Jews should not side with the Egyptians against the Assyrians, a message that the Kings of Judah did not accept. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem again, forcing a second, more complete exile. Stripped of leadership, Judah was desolate, but still rebellious. As a result, a final exile of yet more people into Babylon began in 582 B.C.

In his letter to the Romans, the theology of the Cross and Resurrection, especially in God's redemptive plan for the Jews, now returned from exile, overwhelms Paul.¹⁷ Romans 11:33, *unsearchable* his ways, in the Greek, has the sense that God leaves no tracks for humans to follow. *Inscrutable are his judgments* offers mysterious meaning to the Cross. Romans 11:36, *from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be glory forever* is said as the priest raises the host and chalice during the Eucharistic Prayers from the Sacramentary, just before the "Our Father." Priority belongs to the initiative of God's redemptive grace, not human action.¹⁸

In total context, these Lectionary readings are about the meaning of the Messiah. Three points are relevant. First, later Christians made much more of the expectation of a Messiah than did contemporary Jews. Second, Jesus determined what it meant to be the Messiah; no one determined that for him. Third, with Messiah belong passion, death, and resurrection.¹⁹

¹⁶ An Encyclopedia of World History: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern: Chronologically Arranged, William L. Langer, comp. and ed., 5th ed. Revised and Enlarged with Maps and Genealogical Tables (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972) 46.

¹⁷ 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, 424.

¹⁸ Vincent M. Smiles, "The Concept of 'Zeal' in Second-Temple Judaism and Paul's Critique of It in Romans 10:2," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 2 (April 2002) 294.

¹⁹ Mark J. Goodwin, "Hosea and 'the Son of the Living God' in Matthew 16:16b," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No 2 (April 2005) 279.

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That Jesus is the Messiah is a sign of hope through the suffering associated with life on planet Earth. When people claim authority without meaning that hope is present in the suffering they endure, the claim is false, the authority undermined. For example, the authority of Bill Clinton as president combined hope for his political decisions with suffering through his personal life. Similarly, the authority of George W. Bush stems from hope that his difficult decisions are correct despite the suffering associated with the many criticisms of his decisions.

Inclusiveness means prioritizing truth over politics, especially truths emanating from the marginalized that undercut the self-righteousness of those in power. The Gospel of Matthew is about turning power structures upside down. In the instance of the readings for today, impulsive, relatively dense, Peter is given authority to run the Church. Even when Peter gets it right, he gets no credit. Jesus said, "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father." (Matt 16:17b).

The Lectionary uses the Gospel for today also for Readings 591, the June 29th Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, when the Pope traditionally gives the pallium to archbishops as signs of their metropolitan authority. Matt 16:13-20 is important for the founding of the Church.²⁰ Episcopal authority, nonetheless, is tricky business, as Saint Jerome (347-419 or 420) points out:

Bishops and priests, not understanding this place [of forgiving sins], have taken to themselves something of the arrogance of the Pharisees, so that they believe that they may condemn the innocent and forgive the guilty. But the Lord looks not to the sentence of the priests, but to the way of life of those who are judged.²¹

Matt 16:16b, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* is the key verse to all of the Lectionary readings for this Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time. By referring back to Hosea 2:2, *the Israelites...will be told they are 'Children of the living God,'* Matthew enters an ecclesial or church-community dimension into his Christology.²² Human imperfection is perfected in the Church.

²⁰ Jack Dean Kingsbury, "Observations on the 'Miracle Chapters' of Matthew 8-9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978), 562.

²¹ Jerome, "Exposition from the Catena Aurea," The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Three: From Pentecost to the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 256.

²² Mark J. Goodwin, "Hosea and 'the Son of the Living God' in Matthew 16:16b," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No 2 (April 2005) 265-283.

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When Jesus refers to *his disciples* in Matthew, *his disciples* are ordinarily stand-ins for the Church, as is the case here, in Matt 16:18.²³ Furthermore, as the Biblical scholar from Cardinal Stritch College, John M. Perry writes,

... since the disciples of the risen Jesus understood him to be the divinely empowered builder of God's eschatological temple-community (Matt 16:18; Mark 14:58; 1 Cor 6:19), they interpreted Hos 6:2 as referring to themselves as the eschatological community raised up on the third day with and by Jesus through the power of the Spirit to be God's true temple.²⁴

At the time, Jewish religious leaders thought Jesus duped the crowds into considering him a prophet.²⁵ Jesus was a nonprofessional, not a member of the clergy.²⁶ What God is doing is mysterious and untraceable, even to the present.

These readings are about the inscrutable, pathless ways of God. Isaiah promises the keys to the kingdom that Peter receives. Psalm 138 reminds God not to forget the Faithful, all the while Saint Paul marvels at the wonders of God. The question is how are the Faithful to understand human imperfections not only individually in themselves, but also institutionally within their families and church and state? Let this quest for understanding be part of the prayer of the church.

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

²³ Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No 3 (July 1996) 469.

²⁴ John M. Perry, "The Three Days in the Synoptic Passion Predictions," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 4 (October 1986) 644.

²⁵ 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) 64.

²⁶ Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., review of John P. Meier, A Marginal Jew; Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Vol. 3, companions and Competitors in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No 4(October 2002) 771.