

Personal Notes
060903 Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time 125B
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Even as they muddle along, the Faithful are able to lead good Christian lives. That is the positive way of saying negatively that lip-service to the law is inadequate. The readings begin in Deuteronomy and Psalm 15 by showing how impossible it is to live up to the standards set by God. The readings proceed to the New Testament to remove those standards from abstract theory to concrete reality in the Epistle of James. In the Gospel, Jesus turns the thoughtlessness of the disciples into an explanation of how to meet the original standards.

The Lectionary readings use Deuteronomy to set the original standard set by the law. Psalm 15 continues with high praise for high virtue. The Epistle of James, where most of the focus will be in this commentary, is about doing more than hearing and knowing wisdom, wisdom that comes from the law. Finally, the Gospel of Mark describes the Twelve, perhaps munching on the grain of a distressed widow, making life difficult for Jesus.¹ The Faithful, however, remember those twelve as the original Twelve Apostles. The Gospel of Mark thereby presents the Faithful with an invitation to follow the path of the disciples, of trying to love as best they can.

The Lectionary begins with Deuteronomy 4:2 warning Israel not to add or subtract from the law Moses presents. The Lectionary is probably dressing down the Pharisees and some scribes (Mark 7:1) for making up laws. I am bothered that the Holy See imposes demands on the quality of the lives of the Faithful, consuming their very substance of body and soul, without committing its own birth control doctrine to infallibility. The problem in my mind is that the Holy See is setting up birth control laws as if they were part of the Bible, when they are artifacts of reason derived from Saint Thomas Aquinas and others. It never seems to occur to the authors of the Lectionary that the contemporary Church hierarchy needs to accept the admonition of Deuteronomy 4:2 about adding to and subtracting from the law.

Deuteronomy 4:7 completes the first reading by softening the legal standard by pointing out that the Lord is close to the Faithful, implying that such closeness enables God and the Faithful to love one another. The emphasis in Deuteronomy is on the wisdom of loving. The point of comparison is in the question, “what great nation has statutes and decrees that are just as this whole law?” (Deuteronomy 7:8).

Up until doing the research for this commentary, I had thought that loving enemies was a New Testament phenomenon. Evidently that is not so. Developing the whole law, C. Clifton Black cites George Keerankeri, S.J., explaining the First Testament command to love enemies, “‘Before it is a precept, love of neighbor as love of enemy is a gift (p. 58),’ whose actualization ‘depends on Israel’s faith in the creative power of Yahweh’ (p. 65).”

¹ Elliott C. Maloney, O.S.B., review of James G. Crossley, The Date of Mark’s Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 2005) 527.

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This explanation of love as a gift explains why the Commandments are impossible, without help.²

The second Lectionary reading continues in praising the whole law. Psalm 15:2, “whoever walks blamelessly and does justice,” is about recognizing the wisdom of the law.³ The Responsorial Antiphon about doing justice and living in the presence of the Lord translates, in United States society, into doing justice for those who, otherwise, would not find justice, especially widows and orphans (James 1:27). Paying widows living wages as housekeepers has never been an episcopal priority, as best I can tell. Many others also fit under the societal umbrella of widows and orphans, for example the emotionally or physically challenged.

In the third Lectionary reading, the Epistle of James defines what religion is supposed to do. Religion is supposed to care for “orphans and widows in their affliction” and keep “oneself unstained by the world.” Despite the fact that there are Catholic orphanages and widow employees, I do not know of any member of the hierarchy personally caring for any widow or orphan in his own household. James must mean that there are also other ways of being personally pure and undefiled before God and the Father.

Continuing with James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27, the passage which the Lectionary uses, crosses the prologue, James 1:2-27. According to Luke Leuk Cheung, the prologue breaks at verse 19. According to Patrick J. Hartin in the *Sacra Pagina* series, the break occurs earlier, at verse 11.⁴ For the purposes of this commentary, the break occurs at verse 19. The first part of the prologue concerns themes with the Jewish confession of faith, made up of Deut 6:4-9 and 11:13-21 and Num 15:37-41.⁵ The Lectionary uses Deut 4:6-8 today. The second part concerns “Obedience to the Law of Liberty for True Piety.”⁶ The second part does not seem concerned with the Magisterium of the Church. The Magisterium helps complete the whole law.

² C. Clifton Black, review of George Keerankeri, S.J., The Love Commandment in Mark: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Mk 12, 28-34 in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005) 716.

³ J. Ross Wagner, “From the Heavens to the Heart: The Dynamics of Psalm 19 as Prayer,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 1999) 256.

⁴ Timothy B. Cargal, review of Patrick J. Hartin, James, in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 4 (October 2004) 649.

⁵ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate® Dictionary: Eleventh Edition* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2003) 1147.

⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, review of Luke Leuk Cheung, The Genre, Composition and Hermeneutics of the Epistle of James in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 4 (October 2004) 642.

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When James 1:18 refers to “the word of truth,” James is advancing from the First Testament of the Jewish confession of faith to the Holy Gospel of the New Testament. James refers to the same Gospel in 1:21b, when he admonishes, “welcome the word that has been planted in you.” The Twelve did welcome the word, even as they muddled along.

One major Church muddling, is how it treated the astronomy of Galileo. See the review of Retrying Galileo, 1633-1992 in the July 2006 Catholic Historical Review.⁷ The reading from James contains two references to astronomy. James 1:17 refers to “the Father of lights.” Those lights are sun, moon, and stars. The “shadow” in the same verse may also allude to astronomical reality. The Church is now muddling less with astronomy than with patriarchy.

To my disappointment, Richard Bauckham does not list James 1:15, “birth by the word of truth,” in his examination of Gospel Women.⁸ In the same verse, “firstfruits of his creatures” refers to Christians taking a place with the Chosen People. James 1:21b urges the Faithful to welcome the word humbly, though James knows better than to claim humility for himself.

From studying the original Greek, I wonder how the various translations appear.

James 1:17

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	good giving ... lights
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	datum optimum ... luminum
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	best gift ... lights
<u>King James</u> (1611):	good gift ... lights
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	good ... all light
<u>New American</u> (1970):	good giving ... lights
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	good ... light

The Greek seems to suggest a giving gift, that Jerome translated best gift.

The difference between all light, light, and lights as representative of the sun, moon and stars is difficult. The difficulty is not as great in the original Greek.

⁷ Richard J. Blackwell, review of Maurice A. Finocchiaro, Retrying Galileo, 1633-1992, The Catholic Historical Review, Vol. 92, No. 3 (July 2006) 329-330

⁸ Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002)

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James 1:18

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	word of truth ... firstfruits
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	verbo veritatis ... primitiae
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	word of truth ... beginning
<u>King James</u> (1611):	word of truth ... firstfruits
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	the message of the truth ... first fruits
<u>New American</u> (1970):	word of truth...firstfruits
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	message of the truth ... first-fruits

Word in its various forms appears three times in the Lectionary. Sometimes *word* seems to mean *gospel* at other times the Holy Spirit.

Firstfruits is also a marker of the difference between Swiss clocks sequential time and Mediterranean enveloping time. Swiss time counts minutes, in a priority of time. Mediterranean time arranges sequences. According to Mediterranean time, after the firstfruits, the remainder of the harvest is already seen and available, in a priority of nature.⁹ James, then, regards the Gentiles as harbingers of the rest of those entering the Kingdom of God.

James 1:21

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	welcome the word
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	suscipite ... verbum
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	receive ... the word
<u>King James</u> (1611):	receive ... the word
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	accept ... the word
<u>New American</u> (1970):	welcome the word
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	welcome the Word

New Jerusalem capitalizing *Word* makes a difference.

James 1:22

<u>Lectionary</u> (1998):	the word
<u>The Vulgate</u> (circa 410):	verbi
<u>Douay-Rheims</u> (1582-1610):	the word
<u>King James</u> (1611):	the word
<u>Jerusalem</u> (1966):	the word
<u>New American</u> (1970):	the word
<u>New Jerusalem</u> (1985):	the Word

Two of the missing verses, James 1:22-23 seem to challenge the Magisterium, which, to some, seems muddling in its intransigency.

⁹ Bruce J. Malina, "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 16.

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But you must do what the Word tells you and not just listen to it and deceive yourselves. Anyone who listens to the Word and takes no action is like someone who looks at his own features in a mirror and, once he has seen what he looks like, goes off and immediately forgets it. But anyone who looks steadily at the perfect law of freedom and keeps to it—not listening and forgetting, but putting it into practice—will be blessed in every undertaking. (New Jerusalem Bible)

The Lectionary may pass over the mirror, because the mirror is a difficult passage of Sacred Scripture. Such difficult passages, however, are the source of greatest insight, as the Faithful try to delve into their meaning. Protecting the Faithful from the more insightful passages of Sacred Scripture looks like Magisterial muddling to me.

Trying to get at the meaning of the mirror, Luke Timothy Johnson wrote a whole scholarly article on James 1:22-25. Drawing from the literary Greek genre of the time, Johnson surmises that the Faithful of the Twentieth Century have difficulty understanding what the First Century Faithful originally assumed. In the First Century, one looked into a mirror to improve how one appeared before humans.¹⁰ By analogy, then, one looked to the law for the same purpose of improving how one appeared before God.

In the sight of God, charity required prioritization. Preferential treatment for the poor is one new improvement for the institutional Church. One scholar takes another to task for ignoring that the Epistle of James is an inspiration for the preferential treatment of the poor. Writing in Theological Studies, John H. Elliott (a Lutheran) Professor Emeritus of the University of San Francisco, a Jesuit college,¹¹ takes Luke Timothy Johnson to task with the following comment. “The inspiration provided by James for the church’s current preferential option for the poor is curiously left unexamined by this Roman Catholic author ... of Emory’s Chandler School of Theology and the Anchor Bible commentator on James (1995).”¹²

Preferential treatment of the poor fits the need of the poor disciples of Jesus. Jesus is angry at lip-service that ignores the poor, both here in Mark 7:6 and in Matthew 15:8. In Matthew, Jesus is also dealing with his disciples for breaking the law by not washing

¹⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Mirror of Remembrance (James 1:22-25),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 50, No. 4 (October 1988) 632-645.

¹¹ http://www.usfca.edu/fac_staff/elliotti/personalpage.html Accessed July 23, 2006.

¹² John H. Elliott, review of Luke Timothy Johnson, Brother of Jesus, Friend of God: Studies in the Letter of James in Theological Studies, Vol. 67, No. 2 (June 2006) 454.

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their hands before eating. Eating is a theme that dominates Mark 6:33-8:21.¹³ Elliott C. Maloney, O.S.B., makes three significant observations about Mark: (1) “the complete incompetence of the Twelve,” (2) “Mark is constantly being ‘corrected’ by both later Synoptics,” and (3) Mark is “very sophisticated in his understanding of legal matters.”¹⁴

Scholars struggle to use this legal issue of hand washing for understanding early Jewish-Christian relations, especially with Jewish Christians.¹⁵ Elsewhere, Jesus makes the same point about sincerity of heart in the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32).¹⁶ For Christians, there is room for muddling.

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon suggests Jesus is sarcastic when he related that the poor widow in Mark 12:41-44 put all she had into the temple treasury. Far from praising the poor widow, Jesus saw her as muddling and lacking prudence.¹⁷ The Lectionary uses Mark 12:41-44 at reading 155B, the Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time.

The readings for this Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time are about lip-service to the law. Deuteronomy 4 and Psalm 15 concern the impossibility of keeping the law without Divine help. The Epistle of James is explicit; to the point of lip-service. Mark 7 summarizes everything in the disciples thoughtlessly breaking the Pharisaic law and causing trouble for Jesus. Jesus breaks the conundrum by insisting that what is in the heart matters, no matter what the muddling external results.

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

¹³ 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) 650.

¹⁴ Elliott C. Maloney, O.S.B., review of James G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark’s Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity*, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July) 526-527.

¹⁵ Amy-Jill Levine, review of Herbert W. Basser, Studies in Exegesis: Christian Critiques of Jewish Law and Rabbinic Responses 70-300 C.E. in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 4 (October 2004) 640-641.

¹⁶ Wendell E. Langley, S.J., “The Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32) against Its Semitic and Rabbinic Backdrop,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No. 2 (April 1996) 231.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 53, No. 4 (October 1991) 589-604.