

Personal Notes
050904 Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time 127A
© 2017
Raymond J. Jirran

The Lectionary readings for this Sunday are about the self-correcting administration of the Church. The Lectionary combines the love of Romans with the fraternal correction of Matthew. Psalm 95 expresses the courage required for fraternal correction as an act of enthronement of God in the hearts of the Faithful. The readings begin with Ezekiel, whom God orders to offer fraternal correction.

God tells Ezekiel to warn Israel of impending doom for guilt. God sanctions his order by dooming Ezekiel along with Israel, if he does not issue the warning. If Ezekiel does issue the warning and Israel fails to mend its ways, at least Ezekiel will be saved.

In the reading, the Lectionary is leaving the Faithful with an obligation to help the Church self-correct. Such self-correction is relevant to sermons received from the altar, not only as a means to correct the Faithful but also as a means for the Faithful to correct both pious pabulum and nonsense emanating from that same altar. The openness of Psalm 95:8 reflects a first requirement for self-correction.

Psalm 95 is one of the classic enthronement psalms, three thousand years old, something sung when enthroning the LORD as God.¹ In Psalm 95, God does not receive his power because Israel has conquered other nations. No, God has power as the creator of all nations (Psalm 95:2-5).² The Lectionary does not use Psalm 95:3-5, thereby missing part of the sense of total creation in the reading.

Psalm 95:8 urges the Faithful to be open to new things, *If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts*, as the Responsorial antiphon proclaims. Hebrews 4:7 repeats Psalm 95:8 to explain its underlying meaning of love.³ Love requires openness especially when opportunities arise to offer a priority to the poor, something very relevant in the Black Apostolate.

Romans offers a recapitulation of the Ten Commandments. My Greek focus is on the word *covet*. *Covet* what? Romans leaves the direct object open, rather like the former Josephite Archivist, Peter E. Hogan, S.S.J., who liked to wish people, "Have

¹ J. J. M. Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David: The Abiding Theological Significance of the Kingship Language of the Psalms," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2002) 677.

² J. J. M. Roberts, "The Enthronement of Yhwh and David: The Abiding Theological Significance of the Kingship Language of the Psalms," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 2002) 680.

³ Alan C. Mitchell, S.J., "The Use of *πρεπειν* and Rhetorical Propriety in Hebrews 2:10," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 54, No. 4 (October 1992) 691.

a happy ...” One difference is that Saint Paul is not happy about anything as he recapitulates the Commandment not to covet ...

Saint Jerome translated Romans 13:9, *covet*, with *concupisces*, transliterated as concupiscence, with sexual connotations. The Greek, Paul uses in Romans for *covet* is επιθυμῆσαι that William D. Mounce translates as to set the heart upon; to desire, long for, have earnest desire; to lust after, and specifically, in Romans, *to covet*.⁴ Though Romans does not specify what should not be coveted, the Faithful are free to fill in the blank. Romans 13:10 points the way.

Romans 13:10, *so the fulfillment of the law is love* concludes with vocabulary characteristic of the Apostle Paul. The translation above is from Jeremy Corley.⁵ The Lectionary changes the original order of the words to *love is the fulfillment of the law*. The Greek follows the sequence of words Corley uses. The Latin of the Nova Vulgata does likewise. No matter which way the phrase is worded, self-correction within the Church requires love.

I am struck and startled by the comment from *Catholic World Report*, “The NAB [New American Bible] Lectionary is notorious for ... patronizing to help the hearer, using the idiom of a sophomore high school health teacher to expand what it regards as vague expressions in the Biblical text.”⁶ The language of the next edition of the Lectionary will be a reflection of self-corrective administration within the Catholic Church. Self-correction never comes easily.

Throughout history, procedures have existed for remedying evil within institutional religion. Evidence for procedure exists in Deuteronomy 19:15 that sets forth the requirement of two witnesses.⁷ Remembering that in Matthew the disciples of Jesus

⁴ 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) 205.

⁵ Jeremy Corley, “The Pauline Authorship of 1 Corinthians 13,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 261.

⁶ *Catholic World Report*, “Lost in Translation?” Adoremus Bulletin, Vol. XI, No. 5 (July-August 2005), 2.

⁷ Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 230, fn. 26.

Personal Notes
050904 Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time 127A
© 2017
Raymond J. Jirran

represent “the Church,”⁸ the Gospel offers a procedure for fraternal correction, a procedure not institutionalized in the present administration of the Church. Current sexual scandals and concurrent civil judgments against the Church reflect a lack of institutionalized procedure.

The institutional nature of Matthew 18:18, used this Sunday, *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* was also read to the Church, at Matthew 16:19, two Sundays ago. Two Sundays ago, repeating the same words, the sentence was directed to Peter. In the process, Matthew used the same phrase in different ways. Matthew 18:18, for this Sunday, plainly means “excluding from and accepting back into the community.”⁹ Matthew 16:19 carries a more legalistic sense. In rabbinic traditions, the kingdom of heaven is frequently linked with the law.

The contextual difference between the two phrases, then, is that Matthew 18:18 (read this Sunday) refers to something done on earth about the Christian community recognized in heaven, whereas Matthew 16:19 (read two Sundays ago) refers to something done in heaven about the Church recognized on earth. To preach, then (as I heard on Sunday, July 24), that nowhere in the Bible does it say not to come to Church, may be overly simplistic, because the Church does have the right to exclude some from membership.

There is no question about pastoral wisdom ignoring this right, especially in the present scandalous circumstances associated with the hierarchy. The danger exercising the right of exclusion overrides the confidence required to exercise the right, something especially sensitive to the marginalized, misrepresented, and unrepresented Faithful. The pastoral right to emphasize is the right to accept back into the community.

When compared with the “Blessed are the peacemakers” beatitude of Matthew 5:9, Matthew 18:18 can be misunderstood as fostering a peaceful relationship with sinners. Such is not the case. The Greek for *peace* used here refers to rulers who establish security and socioeconomic welfare, as a deep commitment to the work of justice. *Peacemakers* in the beatitude refers more to justice than tranquility and order.¹⁰ This is one of the senses of *la paz* that I mean when I offer *peace* to my fellow Faithful at Mass. Christian charity is open to all.

⁸ Mark Allan Powell, “Matthew’s Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No 3 (July 1996) 469.

⁹ Joel Marcus, *The “Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18-19),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (July 1988) 451.

Personal Notes
050904 Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time 127A
© 2017
Raymond J. Jirran

The Lectio readings for this Sunday are about involvement in the self-correcting administration of the Church. Ezekiel begins by establishing an obligation to correct one another. Psalm 95 exhorts the Faithful to hear the voice of the LORD, even in fraternal correction. Romans urges the Faithful to covet nothing, meaning that the Faithful ought to be ready to both receive and offer correction. Finally, the Gospel is directly about self-correction, particularly self-correction emanating from 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.

¹⁰ Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew's Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No 3 (July 1996) 473-474.