

Personal Notes
060917 Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time 131B
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The readings for this Sunday are about how to deal with suffering. The example of suffering that all must endure is death. Death, then, as a change, rather than as an end to life, brings the readings into focus. To find comfort in my own death is one thing; but to find comfort in the death of anyone else is something else. How this can be so, strikes me as the mystery contained in these readings.

The readings begin with Isaiah who offers consolation to those having returned to Jerusalem from Exile.¹ The Exiles returned to Jerusalem, but dismayed at what they found there, originally licked their wounds by singing Psalm 116. Jesus continued the tradition of singing Psalm 116 at every Passover.²

Neither Isaiah nor Psalm 116 realizes that eternal life solves all problems of this life. James goes on to warn the ecclesial church community not to excuse making this world a better place, because of their salvation or realized eschatology. Realized eschatology is the last things, that is eternal life, lived in the here and now. Finally, in the Gospel, Jesus becomes angry with Peter for trying to dissuade Jesus from accepting his impending death.

To recapitulate and elaborate, Isaiah 50 is Second Isaiah, written about 500 BC, after the return from Exile. This reading overlaps with Palm Sunday, anticipating the death of Jesus. The Lectionary uses this reading as part of Holy Week. What Isaiah 50:5-6 does is impose the responsibilities of the First Testament scapegoat upon the New Testament Jesus.³ This reading can be a comfort at a time of distress.⁴ The Faithful do not have to bear the weight of their own sins alone.

¹ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., "Deutero-Isaiah: Major Transitions in the Prophet's Theology and in Contemporary Scholarship," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 42, No. 1 (January 1980) 23.

² Mark Kiley, "Lord, Save My Life" (Ps 116:4) as Generative Text for Jesus' Gethsemane Prayer (Mark 14:36a), the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 4 (1986) 655.

³ Margaret Barker, The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy (London: T & T Clark International: *A Continuum imprint*, 2003) 54.

⁴ Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 94.

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The Lectionary uses Psalm 116 on Holy Thursday, as well as here. Care for the Sick⁵ and Funerals⁶ also use Psalm 116. Psalm 116:2 about the LORD inclining “his ear” reminds the Faithful about Isaiah 50:5, “GOD opens my ear.” Love is a two-way street between God and the Faithful and the Faithful and God. That love extends beyond death to comfort the suffering of those dying and the witnesses thereto. Psalm 116:3 continues singing about the cords and bonds of death, but with renewed hope for better things to come.

Only in the last several centuries have Western scholars begun to see the Hebrew poetry of the Psalms. There is a problem with the poetry and with the rest of the translation of Psalm 116. The problem begins with identifying the original inspired text, whether Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint, or the Latin Vulgate. The Council of Trent identified the Vulgate as the inspired Word of God. The current on-going retranslation of the Lectionary is using the Vulgate.

To continue with the translation difficulties, Psalm 116 poetically uses the same Hebrew word for *seized* and *fell into*. “The snares of the netherworld seized upon me; I fell into distress and sorrow.” The Psalmist uses the ambiguity of language to open up the mystery of death. The Hebrew poetry reveals a mysterious link between the netherworld and distress and sorrow. The Psalmist invites the Faithful to contemplate that mystery.⁷ Psalm 116:4 calls, “O LORD, save my life!” The Savior does that by offering eternal life to the Faithful.

⁵ The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum: 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: Prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy: a Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1983) 327.

⁶ 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) 227, 274.

⁷ Anthony R. Ceresko, O.S.F.S., The Function of Antanaclysis (ms “to find”/ms “to reach, overtake, grasp”) in Hebrew Poetry, Especially in the book of Qoheleth, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 1982) 559.

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The Psalmist probably has the courage of his convictions in Psalm 116:8, when he sings about God, “he has freed my soul from death.” I read the Psalmist to mean that God freed his soul from the fear of death, but not from death itself. By offering eternal life, Jesus gets beyond the courage of convictions. Jesus is convinced that he has eternal life. Jesus is convinced that, with love, he can bestow eternal life upon the Faithful.

The Christian belief in eternal life after death includes realized eschatology. The Lectionary instructs that just because the Faithful have a taste of the hereafter in the present is no excuse for neglecting the present. In helping form the church communities, the Epistle of James insists on demonstrating Faith with good works. What the Lectionary translates as “nothing to wear” in James 2:15, the Greek has “without clothes” or “naked,” far different in meaning from having nothing *suitable* to wear, as that phrase is usually taken. James 2:16 returns to the necessities of the body, such as keeping warm.

James 2:15 refers to a “brother or sister” having nothing to wear. Luke Timothy Johnson is convinced that the brother alludes to Abraham and the sister to Rahab, the prostitute who saved the lives of the scouts of Joshua. She, in turn, saved herself by hanging a scarlet cord outside her window, when Joshua came marching in and killed everyone else. (Joshua 2:18)⁸

James is constantly preoccupied with the difference between the verbal and the active commitments of the Faithful. The Lectionary James 2:14-18 is part of a longer passage, James 2:14-26, devoted to this disparity. The yet longer passage, James 2:1-26, is about showing deference to wealthy patrons, a deference found in some church communities, still. The total instructional package of James is 1:19-5:11,⁹ though the Sacra Pagina would limit the introduction, beginning at 1:27, rather than 1:19.¹⁰ The Lectionary focus concerns seeking the truth, regardless of political ramifications within the church.

Questions offer a segue from the Epistle to the Gospel. James 2:14 uses the rhetorical device of questions, for example, “Can that Faith save him?” Luke uses questions in a similar manner. Luke has 152 questions, only two of which use Mark and one of those is

⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, “The Mirror of Remembrance (James 1:22-25),” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 50, No. 4 (October 1988) 634, 642.

⁹ Donald J. Versepunt, “Genre and Story: The Community Setting of the Epistle of James,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 103, 109.

¹⁰ Timothy B. Cargal, review of Patrick J. Hartin, James, in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 4 (October 2004) 649.

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from this Gospel, namely Mark 8:28b, "But who do you say that I am?"¹¹ In asking the question, Jesus is looking beyond death into the next life.

Reading Mark is tricky and the more scholars delve into Mark, the trickier Mark becomes. Mark did not simply copy down established traditions. Mark also explained those traditions with theological sophistication. Twenty-first Century readers tend to read, without rereading. The way in which the First Century Mark wrote is not the way the Twenty-first Century Faithful of the West read.

At the time of Mark, readers practically memorized the passages, which were meant to be read aloud. With that in mind, in 1987 Mary Ann Beavis, examined Mark 8:27-33, concerned about how that passage fit into the structure of other stories. She found similar structure with Jesus before Pilate (Mark 15:1-5) and the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53, 56-65) and with the healing of the blind man (Mark 7:31-37).¹² Such a tight and careful reading explains why, earlier, in 1978, John Kloppenborg wondered about a relationship with Hosea 6:2.

John Kloppenborg questions whether Mark 8:31, "The Son of Man must ... rise after three days" alludes to Hosea 6:2, "on the third day he [Yahweh] will raise us up." Kloppenborg concludes that the connection is possible, but not necessary. 1 Cor 15:4 and Luke 18:33, however, do have a necessary connection to Hosea 6:2. In other words, there is precedent for Jesus proclaiming he must rise on the third day.¹³ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., regards this verse as part of a conundrum whereby prophets are slain for proclaiming the truth, in this case the truth of death in the very midst of everlasting life.¹⁴ Matthew and Luke both use Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33-34, concerning the three days.¹⁵

¹¹ Paul Elbert, "An Observation on Luke's Composition and Narrative Style of Questions," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 1 (January 2004) 101 and 102.

¹² Mary Ann Beavis, "The Trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53-65): Reader Response and Greco-Roman Readers," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 4 (October 1987) 581.596.

¹³ John Kloppenborg, "An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula 1 Cor 15:3b-5 In Light of Some Recent Literature," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 3 (July 1978) 363.

¹⁴ 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) 659, 663.

¹⁵ John M. Perry, "The Three Days in the Synoptic Passion Predictions," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 4 (October 1986) 637.

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In the Gospel of Mark 8:33, Jesus reacts strongly against Peter, calling him "Satan." The reason is that Jesus had trouble believing what he was saying about himself, that he had to die. Peter's thoughtless talk, constituted a temptation for Jesus.¹⁶ Contemplating this middle section of Mark 8:22-9:13 runs a risk overemphasizing discipleship at the expense of the crucial role of Christology.¹⁷ Concentrating overly much on Mark 8:33 runs another risk of regarding Mark as anti-Peter.¹⁸

Part of the problem may rest in the difference between Swiss clock time and Mediterranean enveloping time. Swiss clock time is sequential and what Jesus suffered. This is how Western readers understand what happened.

Mediterranean readers could see it differently. Mediterranean time envelops potency and act.¹⁹ In this way, Peter grasped the potential of Messianic victory without realizing the sequence of death that was essential to that victory.

The other Synoptic Gospels also use this turning point in Mark 8:30, "You are the Christ." Matthew embellishes it with "son of the living God," thereby stressing the Divine nature of Jesus.²⁰ Mark 8:31, insisting upon the human nature of Jesus, has Jesus calling himself "Son of Man."²¹ Suffering and death requires humanity, not Divinity.

What Peter said, seemed politically correct. Jesus may have already complained of the Poor Widow in Mark 12:41-44 putting all she had into the temple treasury. Peter in Mark

¹⁶ John Paul Heil, "Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 1 (January 2006) 77.

¹⁷ Karl A. Kuhn, review of Kevin W. Larsen, Seeing and Understanding Jesus: A Literary and Theological Commentary on Mark 8:22-9:13, the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 68, No. 2 (April 2006) 337.

¹⁸ E. Best, "Peter in the Gospel According to Mark," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 549.

¹⁹ Bruce J. Malina, "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 16.

²⁰ 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) 267-270.

²¹ Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., "Raymond Brown's New Introduction to the Gospel of John: A Presentation—And Some Questions," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003) 10.

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8:31-33 complains about the same thing in Jesus giving his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45) The Faithful find multiple readings as they juxtapose the same texts, thereby enriching their sense of the Divine.²² For example, F. Gerald Downing wonders why Mark 8:32; 9:18, 34; 10:13-14, 37 so constantly portrays the disciples of Jesus as at odds with him. Downing has no firm answer, leaving it for the Faithful to wonder as well.²³

Mark 8:34-35 is about taking up one's cross for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel. In this verse, Jesus is not portraying the Faithful as passively accepting the crosses of life, but as actively taking up the crosses of life.²⁴ In this way, someone suffering from the ravages of old age, for example, can offer up their crosses in the spirit of the New Testament. I have in mind, for example, Sister Rosario, PCC of the Bethlehem Monastery of Poor Clares. I know many others like her, as well, for example, in the Josephite retirement Manor in Baltimore.

The readings for this Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time help the Faithful cope with suffering and death. Isaiah is about comforting the disappointment at the end of the road returning from Exile. Psalm 116:9 is about facing death with faith in God, proclaiming, "I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living." James is about doing more than walking before the Lord. James is about doing good deeds in the name of the Lord, even as one contemplates death. Mark is about the reality of Jesus facing up to his own mortality with grace and acceptance.

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

²² Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 53, No. 4 (October 1991) 596, 600-604.

²³ F. Gerald Downing, "'Honor' among Exegetes," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 1999) 59.

²⁴ Robert H. Stein, "The Matthew-Luke Agreements Against Mark: Insight from John," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July 1992) 485.