

The overriding thought for this Sunday is that life is not fair, and then you die. The tragedies of life can free us from secular attachments for the more necessary attachment to the Almighty, especially in the person of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 55:6-9

The Lectionary¹ has

Verse 6 Seek the Lord while he may be found

The Nova Vulgata² carries the notion while it is still **possible** find him.

Psalm 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

This Psalm is also used on page 741 of the Lectionary for readings 112A, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, where verses 2-3 are not used, **8-9**, and **17-18** are used, separated by verses 15-16.

Psalm 145 is alphabetical acrostic,³ in other words, disciplined according to the alphabet, rather than simply an emotional outpouring.

From Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., continued:

Chapter Two

Methods for Studying and Praying the Psalms

¹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Roman Missal Restored by Decree of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and Promulgated by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Lectionary for Mass: For Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America: Second Typical Edition: Volume I: Sundays, Solemnities, Feasts of the Lord and Saints (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998)

² Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio: Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II ratione habita iussu Pauli PP, VI Recognita Auctoritate Joannis Pauli PP, II Promulgata Editio Typica Altera (00120 Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979, 1986, 1998) ISBN 88-2209-2163-4

³ Hanan Eshel and John Strugnell, "Alphabetical Acrostics in Pre-Tannaitic Hebrew," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2000) 444.

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First Principle “Today” Has Its Own Grace⁴

Father Peter seems particularly sensitive to what happens “each and every day,”

Psalm 95 is an example with which to begin a discussion not only because it reflects enough structure and variety to apply its principles to other psalms but also because Psalm 95 is the traditional “invitatory psalm” of the divine office or official prayer of the Church. For many centuries, Psalm 95 invited the monks, nuns, and congregations to prayer at the early dawn of each new day. While the psalm itself was chanted by a special choir or by a solo voice, the congregation intervened about every four lines with an “antiphon.”

The “antiphon” consisted of a refrain linked with the feast for the day or with the liturgical cycle. It often included the word “**today**” from verse 7 of Psalm 95: “O that **today** you would listen to his voice!” The word “**today**” of Psalm 95, typical of the book of Deuteronomy, made the ancient mystery of Christ’s birth or Pentecost happen again in the moment of prayer and worship. An example of this theology of “actualization,” actualizing now what happened then, occurs frequently in Deuteronomy. For example:

“Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you **today**; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive **today**. The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire (Deut 5:1-4).

See as well Deut 6:20-25 with its repetition of “us” not “them.” This theme of “**today**” recurs frequently in Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 4:4, 8; 6:6; 7:11; 11:8, 13, 27, 28, 32; 13:18; 29:12, 15; 30:2, 8, 11, 16, 18, 19). The book of Deuteronomy recasts the instruction and laws of Moses in the form of great sermons (like the Gospel of **Matthew** does in depicting Jesus as one who preaches and teaches so that later generations re-experience, spiritually or liturgically, in new and different circumstances, what God accomplished for their ancestors in the days of Moses.

⁴ Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., The Spirituality of the Psalms (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002) ISBN 0-8146-2599, 9-10.

There are other similarities besides “**today**” between Psalm 95 and Deuteronomy. (Although Psalm 95 has been influenced by other parts of the Bible, like **Isaiah 40-55**, here the concentration is upon its relation with Deuteronomy.) Like Psalm 95, this fifth book of the Torah frequently warns the people against temptation (e.g., Deut 6:10-15; 8:6-20). Very similar to Psalm 95:8 is the passage: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah” (Deut 6:16). Deuteronomy, like Psalm 95, alludes to the anger of the Lord against sinful Israel (Psalm 95:11; Deut 6:15; 9:16-22), to the wonders which Israel witnessed (Psalm 95:9; Deut 6:22; 10:21; 11:1-9), and to the promised rest (Psalm 95:11; Deut 12:10). Indeed, to appreciate the movement of thought in Psalm 95, especially in verses 7b-11, one needs to glance over the first ten or twelve chapters of Deuteronomy.

Further attention will be given to Deuteronomy in order to understand better the seemingly abrupt transition in Psalm 95 from verse 7a to 7b. (In the second half of verse 7 the joy of an exuberant hymn quickly switches to a prophetic warning.) Here, however, the focus has been on Deuteronomy in order to gain a sense of the forcefulness of the word “**today**.” This new day—a day with its own set of hopes and problems, of feasts and liturgical seasons—has its own special graces and inspiration.

The first recommendation for a method in reading the psalms intelligently and profitably is to believe firmly that God has a special grace for all creation this day in the psalms. This unique grace repeats what has been given to God’s ancient people, yet the repetition comes new as though for the first time. It answers the needs and hopes of “**today**.”

Second Principle Read the Text of the Psalm

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Third Principle: Read the Text with Imagination

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Fourth Principle: Read the Psalms According to Its Key Words

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Fifth Principle: Read the Psalm with Other Parallel Passages

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Sixth Principle: Read the Psalms according to the Liturgy and Classic Spiritual Writers.

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Seventh Principle: Consult Commentaries

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Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

Verse 23 I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better.

One scholar observes:

Usually, [Greek, written in the Latin alphabet] refers to the eschatological completion envisaged in association with Jesus (1 Thess 4:14, 17; 5:10; 2 Cor 5:6-8; **Phil 1:23**; 3:20-21). Jesus is God's eschatological agent as well as the goal of Christian completion. The combination "will raise us up with Jesus" and "will place [Greek, written in the Latin alphabet] both us and you (with Jesus)" can scarcely mean that God, with Jesus, will place Paul and the Corinthians before a public tribunal...⁵

cf. Acts 16:14b

[no comment here]

Matthew 20: 1-16a

The Lectionary has **16a**, but the Nova Vulgata only has 16. The reason for the **a** escapes me.

One scholar observes,

⁵ Joseph Plevnik, S.J., "The Destination of the Apostle and of the Faithful: Second Corinthians 4:13b-14 and First Thessalonians 4:14," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January 2000) 92-93.

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In sum, **Matthew** depicts a world in which the rule of Satan and the rule of God coexist (13:24-30, 36-43). Consistently aligned with the rule of Satan are all representatives of worldly power: Gentile rulers, Jewish leaders, “great ones” (20:25)—all who are currently first but who are destined ultimately to be last (19:30, 20:16). God’s rule is associated with those who lack power in this world: servants (10:24-25; 20:27; 24:45-46), the meek (5:5), children (18:1-4; 19:13-15; 23:15-16; cr. 11:25), little ones (10:42; 18:6, 10, 14), the “least” (25:40, 45)—all who are currently last but who are destined ultimately to be first (19:30; **20:16**).⁶

The Magnificat® quotes C. S. Lewis. C. S. Lewis is a famous, well-respected writer for whom I have no respect, thinking he is too shallow even for my community college students. Once I had to go back to a student to say that my opinion that C.S. Lewis was too shallow for him, pious pabulum, was more personal than I had realized. Others share that student’s high opinion of C.S. Lewis, as did his pastor at the time.

⁶ Mark Allan Powell, “The Magi as Kings: An Adventure in Reader-Response Criticism,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2000) 470.