

Personal Notes
050918 Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time 133A
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The main catechetical effort by which the Faithful stay abreast of Church teachings happens at the Sunday liturgies. That effort is at the core of these Personal Notes, mainly concerned with the latest scholarship in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, a scholarly biblical journal. Sometimes the Magisterium gets directly involved with the prayer-life of the Faithful, as happened with the October 2002 Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae*.

Just as I index the scriptural citations appearing in articles in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly according to the Sunday Liturgies, so have I indexed the scriptural citations appearing in the *Rosarium*. The *Rosarium* appears in these Personal Notes, part by part, according to the appropriate Sunday Liturgies. That accounts for why these Notes quote *Rosarium* so extensively, below.

As a quasi-aside, the Nashville Dominican Sisters who teach at my Our Lady of Mount Carmel elementary school, in Newport News, Virginia, gave me my copy of *Rosarium*, cited in the footnotes. This will be the first time I offer my work to those Sisters. My attitude towards the Magisterium, while respectful, comes within my context of a college Professor used to the rights and obligations of academic freedom.

While preparing these comments, I visited a non-Catholic Christian friend, terminally ill in the hospital. By showing an openness to truth determining politics, even within the Catholic hierarchy, I opened his soul to my Catholicism. I see my attempt to prioritize truth over politics as ultimately evangelical.

While my attitude toward the Magisterium is evangelical, like the Sisters, my attitude is also different. Though different, my attitude is respectful. My personal attitude towards the Magisterium is seen most profoundly in the fact that I do not take advantage of the pastoral reasons whereby the Faithful generally are not even aware of their obligation to accept the fact that parishes in the United States are territorial, rather than personal or national.

Except for the dictates of the Magisterium, Our Lady of Mount Carmel is not where I would choose to practice my Faith in the Black Apostolate. My effort to bring the Black Apostolate into Our Lady of Mount Carmel has been and continues to be a missionary effort, now best expressed in the Latino Apostolate, an Apostolate that accepts Black identity. Such acceptance of Black identity is little known in the mainstream culture, but does involve what I do at Mount Carmel. I doubt too many understand that aspect of my efforts.

Last Sunday, Readings 130A, were about not getting angry. The readings this Sunday reflect a reason to get angry, namely being paid the same for a whole day's work as someone else for the last part of the day. The point is that once the Faithful have the life of Christ, nothing else matters.

Isaiah is about returning from exile to Zion. Zion is the end of everything. Zion represents the life of the Faithful with Jesus both in this life on earth and the next life in heaven.

Psalm 145 is very rational. Keeping the emotions in check is required when one feels cheated by God. The Gospel represents workers who feel cheated by the owner of the vineyard. Similarly, the Faithful can feel cheated by circumstances that prevent them from receiving the education required for the good life. Life is never fair, for example for those blind or otherwise handicapped, then we die. In these readings, Jesus warns the Faithful about this temptation to feel victimized when no victimization is taking place.

In Philippians, Paul insists that life in Christ is better than life in the body, but for the sake of the Body of Christ as the Church, Paul continues his evangelistic efforts.

Pope John Paul II has a lot of material in *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae* surrounding Philippians 1:21:¹ Charles E. Curran shows that Pope John Paul II likes to quote himself. Watch for that in the following selection. Curran also observes that John Paul II distorts and manipulates Scripture.² I find it difficult to suppose that John Paul II linked these musings on the Rosary in the context of the laborers in the vineyard unhappy with their ungenerous wages. My reason for including his words here are explained in the four paragraphs that begin these Notes. The Pope writes:

Mystery of Christ, mystery of man

25. In my testimony of 1978 mentioned above, where I described the Rosary as my favorite prayer, I used an idea to which I would like to return. I said then that “the simple prayer of the Rosary marks the rhythm of human life.”³

In the light of what has been said so far on the mysteries of Christ, it is not difficult to go deeper into this *anthropological significance* of the Rosary, which is far deeper than may appear at first sight. Anyone

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae*, at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2ROSAR.HTM>, 10/16/02, paragraphs 25-31, pages 13-16 of 26.

² Charles E. Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 48, 50-55, 146, 164, 177, 178, 199.

³ Angelus Message of 29 October 1978: *Insegnamenti*, I (1978), 76.

who contemplates Christ through the various stages of his life cannot fail to perceive in him *the truth about man*. This is the great affirmation of the Second Vatican Council which I have so often discussed in my own teaching since the Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*: "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man is seen in its true light."⁴ The Rosary helps to open up the way to this light. Following in the path of Christ, in whom man's path is "recapitulated,"⁵ revealed and redeemed, believers come face to face with the image of the true man. Contemplating Christ's birth, they learn of the sanctity of life; seeing the household of Nazareth, they learn the original truth of the family according to God's plan; listening to the Master in the mysteries of his public ministry, they find the light which leads them to enter the Kingdom of God; and following him on the way to Calvary, they learn the meaning of salvific suffering. Finally, contemplating Christ and his Blessed Mother in glory, they see the goal towards which each of us is called, if we allow ourselves to be healed and transformed by the Holy Spirit. It could be said that each mystery of the Rosary, carefully meditated, sheds light on the mystery of man.

Since John Paul II brought up his 1979 first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis*, above, comments by Curran may offer perspective. "...*Redemptor hominis* uses the term 'people of God' about twenty times. But the encyclicals of John Paul II do not develop this metaphor and fail to adopt it in dealing with the sins and shortcomings of the church."⁶ I, for one, like the workers in the parable, feel cheated by the scholarship of Pope John Paul II.

Curran is not finished. The question from the environmentalists is where do the rights of humans to destroy the earth end? *Redemptor hominis* does address the issue. Curran comments, "...John Paul II's personalism, by emphasizing the dominion of human beings over all of creation, is in theoretical opposition to the ecological concern he proposes."⁷ To return to the Apostolic Letter:

⁴ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁵ Cf. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 18, 1: PG 7, 932.

⁶ Charles E. Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 39.

⁷ Charles E. Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 99-100.

At the same time, it becomes natural to bring to this encounter with the sacred humanity of the Redeemer all the problems, anxieties, labors and endeavors which go to make up our lives. “Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you” (*Psalm 55:23*). To pray the Rosary is to hand over our burdens to the merciful hearts of Christ and his Mother. Twenty-five years later, thinking back over the difficulties which have also been part of my exercise of the Petrine ministry, I feel the need to say once more, as a warm invitation to everyone to experience it personally: the Rosary does indeed “mark the rhythm of human life,” bringing it into harmony with the “rhythm” of God’s own life, in the joyful communion of the Holy Trinity, our life’s destiny and deepest longing.

CHAPTER III

“FOR ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST”

The Rosary, a way of assimilating the mystery

26. Meditation on the mysteries of Christ is proposed in the Rosary by means of a method designed to assist in their assimilation. It is a method *based on repetition*. This applies above all to the *Hail Mary*, repeated ten times in each mystery. If this repetition is considered superficially, there could be a temptation to see the Rosary as a dry and boring exercise. It is quite another thing, however, when the Rosary is thought of as an outpouring of that love which tirelessly returns to the person loved with expressions similar in their content but ever fresh in terms of the feeling pervading them.

In Christ, God has truly assumed a “heart of flesh.” Not only does God have a divine heart, rich in mercy and in forgiveness, but also a human heart, capable of all the stirrings of affection. If we needed evidence for this from the Gospel, we could easily find it in the touching dialogue between Christ and Peter after the Resurrection: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Three times this question is put to Peter, and three times he gives the reply: “Lord, you know that I love you” (cf. *Jn 21:15-17*). Over and above the specific meaning of this passage, so important for Peter’s mission, none can fail to recognize the beauty of this triple repetition, in which the insistent request and the corresponding reply are expressed in terms familiar from the universal experience of human love. To understand the Rosary, one has to enter into the psychological dynamic proper to love.

One thing is clear: although the repeated *Hail Mary* is addressed directly to Mary, it is to Jesus that the act of love is ultimately directed, with her and through her. The repetition is nourished by the desire to be conformed ever more completely to Christ, the true program of the Christ life. Saint Paul expressed this project with words of fire: “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (*Phil* 1:21). [This is the verse used in the Lectionary for the readings at hand.] And again: “It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me” (*Gal* 2:20). The Rosary helps us to be conformed ever more closely to Christ until we attain true holiness.

A valid method...

27. We should not be surprised that our relationship with Christ makes use of a method. God communicates himself to us respecting our human nature and its vital rhythms. Hence, while Christian spirituality is familiar with the most sublime forms of mystical silence in which images, words and gestures are all, so to speak, superseded by an intense and ineffable union with God, it normally engages the whole person in all his complex psychological, physical and relational reality.

This becomes apparent *in the Liturgy*. Sacraments and sacramentals are structured as a series of rites which bring into play all the dimensions of the person. The same applies to non-liturgical prayer. This is confirmed by the fact that, in the East, the most characteristic prayer of Christological meditation centered on the words “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”⁸ is traditionally linked to the rhythm of breathing; while this practice favors perseverance in the prayer, it also in some way embodies the desire for Christ to become the breath, the soul and the “all” of one’s life.

...which can nevertheless be improved

28. I mentioned in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* that the West is now experiencing *a renewed demand for meditation*, which at times leads to a keen interest in aspects of other religions.⁹ Some Christians, limited in their knowledge of the Christian contemplative tradition, are attracted by those forms of prayer. While the latter contain many elements which are positive and at times compatible with

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2616.

⁹ Cf. No. 33: AAS 93 (2001), 289.

Christian experience, they are often based on ultimately unacceptable premises. Much in vogue among these approaches are methods aimed at attaining a high level of spiritual concentration by using techniques of a psychophysical, repetitive and symbolic nature. The Rosary is situated within this broad gamut of religious phenomena, but it is distinguished by characteristics of its own which correspond to specifically Christian requirements.

In effect, the Rosary is simply *a method of contemplation*. As a method, it serves as a means to an end and cannot become an end in itself. All the same, as the fruit of centuries of experience, this method should not be undervalued. In its favor one could cite the experience of countless Saints. This is not to say, however, that the method cannot be improved. Such is the intent of the addition of the new series of *mysteria lucis* to the overall cycle of mysteries and of the few suggestions which I am proposing in this Letter regarding its manner of recitation. These suggestions, while respecting the well-established structure of this prayer, are intended to help the faithful to understand it in the richness of its symbolism and in harmony with the demands of daily life. Otherwise there is a risk that the Rosary would not only fail to produce the intended spiritual effects, but even that the beads, with which it is usually said, could come to be regarded as some kind of amulet or magic object, thereby radically distorting their meaning and function.

Announcing each mystery

29. Announcing each mystery, and perhaps even using a suitable icon to portray it, is as it were *to open up a scenario* on which to focus our attention. The words direct the imagination and the mind towards a particular episode or moment in the life of Christ. In the Church's traditional spirituality, the veneration of icons and the many devotions appealing to the senses, as well as the method of prayer proposed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the Spiritual Exercises, make use of visual and imaginative elements (the *composition loci*), judged to be of great help in concentrating the mind on the particular mystery. This is a methodology, moreover, which *corresponds to the inner logic of the Incarnation*: in Jesus, God wanted to take on human features. It is through his bodily reality that we are led into contact with the mystery of his divinity.

The need for concreteness finds further expression in the announcement of the various mysteries of the Rosary. Obviously these mysteries neither replace the Gospel nor exhaust its content.

The Rosary, therefore, is no substitute for *lectio divina*; on the contrary, it presupposes and promotes it. Yet, even though the mysteries contemplated in the Rosary, even with the addition of the *mysteria lucis*, do no more than outline the fundamental elements of the life of Christ, they easily draw the mind to a more expansive reflection on the rest of the Gospel, especially when the Rosary is prayed in a setting of prolonged recollection.

Listening to the word of God

30. In order to supply a Biblical foundation and greater depth to our meditation, it is helpful to follow the announcement of the mystery with *the proclamation of a related Biblical passage*, long or short, depending on the circumstances. No other words can ever match the efficacy of the inspired word. As we listen, we are certain that this is the word of God, spoken for today and spoken “for me.”

If received in this way, the word of God can become part of the Rosary’s methodology of repetition without giving rise to the ennui derived from the simple recollection of something already well known. It is not a matter of recalling information but of *allowing God to speak*. In certain solemn communal celebrations, this word can be appropriately illustrated by a brief commentary.

Silence

31. *Listening and meditation are nourished by silence.* After the announcement of the mystery and the proclamation of the word, it is fitting to pause and focus one’s attention for a suitable period of time on the mystery concerned, before moving into vocal prayer. A discovery of the importance of silence is one of the secrets of practicing contemplation and meditation. One drawback of a society dominated by technology and the mass media is the fact that silence becomes increasingly difficult to achieve. Just as moments of silence are recommended in the Liturgy, so too in the recitation of the Rosary it is fitting to pause briefly after listening to the word of God, while the mind focuses on the content of a particular mystery.

To move from the words of Pope John Paul II on Philippians 1:21 in paragraph 26. back to the Liturgy, in Matthew 20:8, the Greek for the foreman of the vineyard refers

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to the administrator of a household or estate,¹⁰ something broader than a job foreman. Matthew 20:16, *the last will be first, and the first will be last*, is the key to the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew is particularly pointed at the Pharisees, people the Faithful might expect to show chagrin did they perceive themselves short-changed by a landowner.

All in all, once the Faithful have the life of Christ, nothing else matters. Isaiah is about returning from an exile of sin to a new life of grace. Psalm 145:18a, the Responsorial antiphon, reminds the Faithful that *The Lord is near to all who call upon him*. As it turns out, Philippians is about the relationship between the Rosary and the life of Christ in the hearts of the Faithful. As Saint Paul puts it in Philippians 1:21 and the Pope reminds the Faithful, *for to me life is Christ, and death is gain*. The meaning of the Gospel about the workers unhappy with their ungenerous pay is that next to a life of grace, shared with Jesus, nothing else matters.

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

¹⁰ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 135.