

Anyone can develop a “poor me” syndrome. Perhaps the liturgy can help the Faithful cope with ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,’ past, present, and future. The idea behind these readings is twofold: (I.) when the Faithful let the truth of God’s politics determine what the Faithful accept as true, life is ever-new, positive, and exciting, because God, our Creator, is faithful and does love the Faithful; (II.) peace, not peace at any price, but peace at the price of doing what God wants delivers an unrequited joy, even with the Cross.

Isaiah 5:1-7

Verse 7c he looked for **judgment**, but see, **bloodshed!** for **justice**, but hark, the **outcry!**

The Nova Vulgata (NV)¹ has et exspectavi, ut faceret **judicium**, et ecce **iniquitas**, et **justitiam**, et ecce **nequitia**. When the Lectionary² has **judgment**, as in the verse above, the Lectionary means justice, with the implication that **bloodshed** and **outcry** bespeak neither correct **judgment** nor **justice**.

The Faithful need to think positive, that when the Faithful strive to do what is right, the Faithful enjoy both the **peace** of God and the God of **peace**, even if not at the surface level.

One scholar³ writes:

Already in Isaiah there is found a description of the people of Israel under the metaphor of some sprout or tree of righteousness which has been planted by God (Isa 60:21; 61:3, 11). Of course, the metaphor of the people of Israel as a tree or vine which is planted firmly around the mountain of God (e.g., Exod 15:17; 2

¹ 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

² 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)

³ Bernard F. Batto, “The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 2 (April 1987) 206-207.

Sam 7:10; **Isa 5:1-7**; Ezek 17:22-24; Amos 9:15; **Psalm 80:7-13**), but which may be uprooted or replanted (e.g., Jer 1:10), is a frequent occurrence in the Bible; this plant metaphor had its own distinctive origins and history of development, unrelated to our motif of planting **peace**. The metaphor of Israel as the plant of righteousness represents yet a third plant/planting image, in addition to the planting of **peace** and the planting of Israel in her land. The plant of righteousness metaphor seems to be an internal Isaianic development out of the metaphor begun in Isa 6:13, of “a terebinth or oak whose stump remains standing after it is felled,” and from whose stump will sprout a shoot (Isa 11:1, 10) which will form the stock of a new Israel. It is this renewed and restored Israel which “will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh” (Isa 61:3).

Writing about the Gospel of Mark, one scholar brings in **Isaiah 5**, and then goes on:

... attributes the presence of commerce in the courtyard to self-interest on the part of Jerusalem’s religious leaders, who are acting as if the covenant existed for their benefit alone; hence they limit the area of the temple accessible to Gentiles and reject or kill any prophet who demands of them righteousness (“fruit”) that the covenant was meant to produce. They think that by killing the Messiah or “heir apparent” of the house of Israel, they will be free to keep the benefits and blessings of the covenant relationship for themselves. Ironically, the measures taken by these leaders to preserve their monopoly culminate in the loss of everything they sought to preserve: the covenant, the temple, the city, and their own positions as leaders and overseers of these things.⁴

My experience has been that giving up aggrandizement, if not monopoly, I have gained everything I seek to preserve: the covenant, the temple of my own soul, the city of complexities in my own life, and my own position as a leader and overseer of these things, as a scholar. Let the Faithful pray a war on Iraq has the same ending.

Psalm 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20

Verse 20 ... **restore us** ...

⁴ Scott G. Brown, “Mark 11:1—12:12: A Triple Intercalation?” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 86.

The NV has **converte nos**, in other words, **convert us**. The Lectionary reading is positive, upbeat, and a petition, recognizing that if the Faithful do any good at all, that good is due to God's grace. This part of the psalm is in the first person, asking God directly for the grace to do the right thing.

Philippians 4:6-9

Verse 6 with thanksgiving make your requests known to God.

In other words, it is all right to ask things of God, but ask them positively, with thanksgiving for the grace that is already there, even in the asking.

Verse 7 ... the **peace** of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Verse 8 ... **whatever** is **true** ... think about these things.

Therefore, the Faithful are supposed to think, about **whatever** is **true**. This must mean thinking about depressing matters in non-depressing ways.

Verse 9 ... the God of **peace** will be with you.

John 15:16

[no comment here]

Matthew 21:33-43

Anyone following these personal notes may recall the following observation made for the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 18, 2002.

Others have sought to explain Matthew's peculiar use of the term [Son of David] more directly from within the Gospel itself. J. M. Gibbs has argued that Matthew intends the Faithful to notice a development in the crowd's acceptance of Jesus as the royal messianic Son of David. Beginning in chap. 9, it reaches a high point in **chap. 21** and would have gone on to a

full and adequate confession of Jesus as Son of God, had it not been for the perverse and blind opposition of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders.⁵

The positive side is that Jesus is God. Getting him accepted as God is another matter.

One scholar has a whole section titled “The Theological Significance of the Jewishness of Matthew:”

Underlying the passionate debate regarding the Jewishness of Matthew is the issue of anti-Semitism. Saldarini observes that Matthew has become “an embarrassment for Christians well disposed toward Judaism because of the way his polemics against his contemporaries have been used against the Jews” and expresses the hope that his book will relieve this embarrassment by demonstrating that Matthew’s polemic is not anti-Jewish but anti-Pharisaic; the reflection of a conflict within Israel. Similarly, Harrington warns that “without attention to its historical setting Matthew becomes a dangerous text, capable of giving encouragement to anti-Semites.” Like Saldarini, Harrington believes that the First Gospel is best protected from such horrible misuse by treating Matthew’s church as a group within Judaism.

I heartily agree with Saldarini, Harrington, and others about the need to effuse the anti-Semitic threat presented by Matthew’s rhetoric. Like them, I regard the author of the gospel as a Jew who vehemently opposed other Jews, especially those sympathetic to the Pharisaic movement, because they rejected the message about Jesus. I part company with Saldarini, Harrington, and others by seeing in this gospel evidence that for Matthew and his intended audience the parting of the ways had already taken place. One who holds this position by no means assumes that there were no further contacts between Matthean Jews and non-Christian Jews, or that conversions of individual Jews were no longer sought. It is a matter of emphasis. Because of the failure of Matthew’s Christian Jews to win many Jewish converts (the unifying theme of the missionary chapter, Matthew 10, is *pessimism* concerning the mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel), Matthew believes that the church’s future is intimately bound up with the mission to the Gentiles. By *dissociating* himself from unbelieving Jews (28:15) and

⁵ W. R. G. Loader, “Son of David, Blindness, Possession, and Duality in Matthew,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 44, No. 4 (October 1982) 571.

associating himself with believing Gentiles (24:14; 28:19), Matthew staked out a middle ground between Jews and pagans (21:43).

Verse 43 “...Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit.”

In the continuing battle against anti-Semitism, it may or may not be helpful to remind modern readers that Matthew’s anti-Judaism is of Jewish, not Gentile, origin. I am not convinced, however, that the case is strengthened by insisting, as Saldarini does, that Matthew’s group is simply a deviant sect within Judaism. In any event, regardless of Matthew’s social setting, modern anti-Semitism must be countered with stronger ammunition. The most effective deterrent to Christian anti-Semitism remains sound teaching about the faithfulness of God revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures in Romans 9—11.⁶

This faithfulness of God helps keep the Faithful upbeat and positive, no matter what, even against something as deadly and disastrous as anti-Semitism.

⁶ Douglas R. A. Hare, “How Jewish Is the Gospel of Matthew?” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 2 (April 2000) 275-276.