

Personal Notes  
051002 Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time 139A  
© 2017  
Raymond J. Jirran

Peace is the message in these Lectionary readings. For *peace*, Philippians 4:8 writes of *whatever is gracious*, using Greek for what sounds like *euphemism*, meaning that reality is anything but gracious. In that sense, *whatever*, as slang, takes on the meaning that graciousness is not found in reality, *whatever* takes on a relatively mocking meaning against graciousness. The Lectionary readings take on the concern for finding peace amidst a mock graciousness.

There are two core approaches toward graciousness. One is concerned about survival. This, however, fosters reluctance to receive anything as gracious; at the same time, it fosters graciousness towards others. In the Epistle, Philippians encourages the Faithful to receive graciousness through God from Jesus Christ and, thereby find peace through acceptance.

The other attitude toward graciousness is unconcerned about survival. This fosters eagerness to receive everything as graciousness; at the same time as unconcern about graciousness toward others. Philippians encourages those Faithful who are well-off to extend the graciousness they feel toward themselves toward others as well. Isaiah begins the Lectionary readings by explaining the matter through analogy.

The analogy in Isaiah 5:1 is about the friend with the vineyard. The friend is God. In this case, the vineyard is the people.<sup>1</sup> The vineyard only produces sour grapes, unconcerned about extending the sweet taste of graciousness to others. Wild boars and beasts of the field, as Psalm 80:14 puts it, will destroy that vineyard by the roots. Neither roots nor foliage will remain.<sup>2</sup>

Scribes probably set down both Psalm 80 and this part of Isaiah before the Exile, without concern for survival. Psalm 80:19, about the face of God shining on the Faithful, recalls the priestly blessing: "The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you" (Num 6:25; cf. Psalm 67:1 (MT 2)). This verse of the shining face of God is an image connected with judgment, exile and restoration (Deut 31:17-18; 32:20; Isa 54:8; 2 Chron 30:9, Psalm 80:3, 7, 10 (MT 4, 8, 20))<sup>3</sup> suited for those well-situated in life. Isaiah worries about the welfare of those Jews who are unconcerned about graciousness toward others.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joyce Rilett Wood, "Speech and Action in Micah's Prophecy," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 4 (October 2000), 649.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Whitekettle, "Bugs, Bunny, or Boar? Identifying the Ziz Animals of Psalms 50 and 80," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No 2 (April 2005) 250-264.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Bauckham, Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, Michigan/ Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 95, 97.

Personal Notes  
051002 Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time 139A  
© 2017  
Raymond J. Jirran

Scholars are hard-pressed to determine whether a Psalm, like Psalm 80, influenced early Isaiah, or whether Psalm 80 arose in response to the prophet.<sup>4</sup> Both deliver the same message, as the Responsorial antiphon from Isaiah 5:7a puts it; *the vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel*. As developed below, vineyard is Eucharistic in nature. The Christian search for peace among the readings extends historically from before the Exile down to the present.

In the original Hebrew, *vineyards* are not necessarily grape vineyards; though the vineyard of Isaiah almost certainly is.<sup>5</sup> From grapes come wine and through wine comes the Eucharistic Blood of Jesus. This means that God wants the Faithful to incorporate his life into their own. Philippians follows the pattern of Saint Paul, always encouraging the Faithful to take on the life of Christ through grace, which the Faithful have done through the ages and continue to do.

Saint Paul directs the Faithful, in Philippians 4:6, *to have no anxiety at all*. Philippians means not to worry about what is incoming, about the vicissitudes of life, but, rather to give the cares of the world, including mock graciousness, to God through prayer. Philippians does not claim that the peace that arises from prayer makes sense. What Philippians 4:7 asserts is that *the peace of God ... surpasses all understanding*. The peace of God begins by praying for little things even with little prayers.

Taking care of the little things, results in the big things taking care of themselves. Daily prayer can help the Faithful feel the graciousness of God and enable the Faithful to extend that graciousness to others. When Jesus turns the analogy of Isaiah into his parable about the landowner who planted a vineyard,<sup>6</sup> Jesus is concerned with those who are self-satisfied that God knows them, with people whose prayer is either non-existent or misdirected.

The Christian Faithful consider the parable of the ungracious Wicked Treacherous Tenants from hindsight, through the Resurrection. When Jesus originally preached this parable, however, that hindsight through the Resurrection was unavailable. In a manner similar to the relationship between Isaiah the Prophet and Psalm 80, scholars

---

<sup>4</sup> Sue Gillingham, "From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 471, 479.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Whitekettle, "Bugs, Bunny, or Boar? Identifying the Ziz Animals of Psalms 50 and 80," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 2 (April 2005) 257.

<sup>6</sup> Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April 1989) 240; P. M. Casey, "Culture and Historicity: The Cleansing of the Temple," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 2 (April 1997) 327.

wonder about the relationship between what Jesus originally preached and how the Evangelists present it, which influenced whom?

In the original setting in which Jesus preached, the existence of a pervasive Davidic messianism did not exist. Such an existence is an after-the-fact construct of Christian imagination. Christians recognized that the parable was about the impending transfer of the Kingdom of God (the third Rosary Mystery of Light) from Israel to include the Gentiles.<sup>7</sup> Unlike later Christians, the earlier Pharisees had little idea with whom they were dealing. Before the Christian era, Psalm 80 about *the son of man* was of little help.<sup>8</sup>

Not only the relationship between Jesus and his contemporaries merits examination, but also the relationship between the Evangelists and subsequent readers, like the Faithful. The Faithful revel in Matthew for the gentle beatitudes. Matthew, however, also has a rougher side, part of which includes what happens to the ungracious Wicked Treacherous Tenants in Matthew 21:33-46. Their end is a *wretched death*, Matthew 21:41.<sup>9</sup> The Faithful are predisposed to see peace and tranquility in the text of Matthew that is not always there. The issue is finding peace in the midst of mock graciousness and turmoil.

The problem is that ungracious Wicked Treacherous Tenants would appear to be the Church.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Matthew 19—23, his antipharisaic direction readily translates into anticlericalism for the Faithful.<sup>11</sup> That ease of translation means that the Evangelists probably did not tamper with the original meaning of the parable to suit their own apostolate. Instead, the Evangelists suited their apostolate to fit the parable. That notwithstanding, the full meaning of the parable only became evident after the Resurrection and not at the time it was preached. When Jesus preached, the parable

---

<sup>7</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, "Interpreting the Parables of Jesus: Where Are We and Where Do We Go from Here?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January 1991) 58, 72.

<sup>8</sup> Brendan Byrne, S.J., "Jesus as Messiah in the Gospel of Luke: Discerning a Pattern of Correction," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003) 80-81.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara E. Reid, O.P., "Violent Endings in Matthew's Parables and Christian Nonviolence," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 237, 248-249.

<sup>10</sup> Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 2 (April 1989) 244-245.

<sup>11</sup> Terence L. Donaldson, "The Law That Hangs (Matthew 22:40): Rabbinic Formulation and Matthean Social World," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 57, No. 4 (October 1995) 695.

Personal Notes  
051002 Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time 139A  
© 2017  
Raymond J. Jirran

simply served as an irritant to the religious leaders of the day, so much so that they plotted to kill Jesus. In this way, the religious leaders of the day gave more meaning to the parable than they intended.<sup>12</sup> This inability of human wickedness to upset the love of God is a consummate source of Christian peace.

Another problem is the series of questions and answers in the parable. Such narrative was a way of locating the truth as early as the Fifth Century B.C., extending through Hellenistic and later rabbinic times. In this scenario, the conclusion echoes the beginning, arising out of a non-Western culture.<sup>13</sup> Focusing on small towns and villages, away from big cities is also non-Western. Though Western Civilization is rooted in Christianity, those roots reach into non-Western civilization.

Western Civilization brings a perspective of large cities, with ancient Rome as a fulcrum between Ancient and Medieval History and again as a fulcrum between Medieval and Modern History. Jesus did not have such a focus during his active ministry. Sepphoris and Tiberias, the big cities of Galilee, are notably missing from the Gospel itineraries.<sup>14</sup> When Jesus goes to Jerusalem, he goes there to die. Westerners, therefore, require care to avoid bringing inaccurate assumptions to the Biblical text.

Peace, both Western and non-Western, is the grace of these Lectionary readings. Isaiah offers peace to the Faithful who distrust the lack of graciousness happening all about them. Psalm 80 reminds the Faithful that God loves them in their consternations over both how others treat them and how they treat others. The message from Philippians is to relax and let God do the worrying, especially beyond the point where worrying makes no common sense. Finally, the parable about the ungracious Wicked Treacherous Tenants reflects back to Philippians 4:6 making their prayers and petitions within a context of thanksgiving and implied peace for the wonderment and glory of God in all things.

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

---

<sup>12</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew's Gospel: a Literary-Critical Study," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 1 (January 1987) 61-62.

<sup>13</sup> Wendell E. Langley, S.J., "The Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32) against Its Semitic and Rabbinic Backdrop," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No 2 (April 2005) 242.

<sup>14</sup> Robert H. Gundry, "Mark 10:29: Order in the List," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 3 (July 1997) 472.