

Personal Notes  
051009 Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time 142A  
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Self-righteousness is a carry-over concern from the last time these Personal Notes considered the 142A Lectionary readings, October 13, 2002. These Notes are now on the web site for review. In Readings 142A, the invitation to believe is a gift from God. It is not anything to be taken for granted, as if self-righteously earned. What can there be to be self-righteous about, if even some of the the original Greek is uncertain, as it is. In the final analysis, Faith is a gift, as in the words of Matthew 22:14, *many are invited, but few are chosen.*

A Benedictine monk and priest, David Holly, O.S.B., Cam., compared the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> editions of Nestle's Greek, pointing out the slight divergences.<sup>1</sup> Slight as the divergences are, his book is 149 pages long. As I have begun to examine Holly, I expected the 28<sup>th</sup> edition of Nestle's Greek, the edition used for these Notes, would include the observations of Holly in the documentation at the bottom of each page. That expectation is disappointing. The divergences in Holly are not in the documentation for the 28<sup>th</sup> edition.<sup>2</sup> What the divergences mean, therefore, is unknown, at least to me.

The Lectionary begins in the context of Isaiah 25 warning the Jews about what turned out to be the forthcoming Exile, if they did not repent. Although what the Lectionary presents is positive, in full context Isaiah is concerned about religious self-satisfaction, abusive presumption on the love of God. In the world of today, when the Faithful belong to a Church that unabashedly claims infallibility, abusive self-righteousness is easy.

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<sup>1</sup> David Holly, Comparative Studies in Recent Greek New Testament Texts: Nestle-Aland's 25th and 26th Editions (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1983) xii and 149 pages, see page 42 for the readings from Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Nestle-Aland: Greek-English New Testament: Greek text Novum Testamentum Graece, in the tradition of Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger. English text 2nd Edition of the Revised Standard Version The Critical Apparatuses prepared and edited together with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Munster/Westphalia by Barbara and Kurt Aland (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1998) Editio XXVII as well as Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum: Graece et Latine: Textum Graecum post Eberhard et Erwin Nestle communiter ediderunt Barbara et Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger: Textus Latinus Novae Vulgatae Bibliorum Sacrorum Editioni debetur: Utriusque textus apparatus criticum recensuerunt et editionem novis curis elaboraverunt Barbara et Kurt Aland una cum Instituto Studiorum Textus Novi Testamenti Monasterii Westphaliae (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 1999) Editio XXVII. page 522 for the readings from Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20.

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While the Lectionary readings prophesy only good things in Isaiah 25:6-10a, the full context includes foreboding about things to come. Isaiah is full of hope, nonetheless, through the uncertainties ahead. *On this mountain* [the New Zion, the New Jerusalem, and symbol for the souls of the Faithful] *he* [the LORD] *will destroy the veil that veils all peoples* (Isaiah 25:7a). That veil is the cause of human uncertainty requiring courage to overcome. Admitting uncertainty is one way to combat imprudent self-righteousness. Kenneth E. Wood, the current pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church enjoys doing that.

To live faithfully, self-righteousness is still not only legitimate, but even required. Christians do need to carry their crosses daily. No one, especially not Christians, ought to carry their crosses without corresponding self-righteousness. That is what the Responsorial antiphon means by *I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life* (Psalm 23:6cd). That self-confidence and self-righteousness, required for courage, is not the issue.

Humility before the facts is the issue. In this case, the fact is that the Faithful cannot even be sure that the original Greek is right, let alone the Lectionary translation. The Lectionary documentation for the verses used in the comforting Psalm 23, for but one example, certainly is wrong because self-contradictory.<sup>3</sup>

Even with wrong documentation in the Lectionary, the Church uses the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm at funerals<sup>4</sup> and visits to the sick.<sup>5</sup> Psalm 23:3a, *he* [the LORD] *refreshes my soul*, has

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<sup>3</sup> 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), compare pages 194, 388, and 888 (today) with 716 and 975.

<sup>4</sup> 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) 143, 223, 253, 267.

<sup>5</sup> 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

a wider sense of “teaching” and “instruction,” rather than a narrower sense of “legal stipulations” or even “the Pentateuch.” The LORD restores and revitalizes the human person.<sup>6</sup> Psalm 23:4b, *with your rod and your staff that give me courage*, does help the Faithful with courage in the face of uncertainty. The certainty that inspires Saint Paul in the Epistle to the Philippians emanates from living the very life of God through Jesus Christ, as expressed earlier in the First Testament.

When Saint Paul asserts that he knows how to live in a variety of circumstances, he means that he has the courage of his convictions, no matter what. The Faith of Paul enables him to weather any uncertainty. In Philippians, Paul urges the Faithful to keep up their own good works. Paul is confident that the glory of God in Jesus (Philippians 4:19a) extends to the Faithful. The Church, however, does not want the Faithful presumptuous, as the Gospel demonstrates.

The Gospel about the guests who refuse to come to the King’s wedding feast suits reliance on the love of God through uncertainty. Wondering about the background of Matthew helps to understand the spiritual life of the writer. The Gospel makes some sense to suppose that the writer, Matthew, may have been a diligent elderly rabbi, who knew both Hebrew and Greek, but preferred the Greek when quoting scripture.

Without challenging the given-wisdom that Matthew was originally a tax collector, I am suggesting another option. This Matthean rabbi, perhaps, had to deal with the relationship between the old parameters of the First Testament and the new of the New Testament. When Matthew 22:1a writes, *Jesus again in reply spoke to the chief priests and elders of the people*, Matthew may be addressing his equals according to the culture of his own day.<sup>7</sup>

Matthew may have personally been a chief priest and elder, at least an elder. The parable is about how the religious leaders fulfilled the Divine message, even as they falsified it.<sup>8</sup> How to present this wedding feast parable challenged Matthew.<sup>9</sup>

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Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1983) 171, 188, 323.

<sup>6</sup> J. Ross Wagner, “From the Heavens to the Heart: The Dynamics of Psalm 19 as Prayer,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 2 (April 1999) 254-255.

<sup>7</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. 58, No. 2 (April 1996) 242.

Contrary to the basic gentleness of the Gospel of Matthew, this wedding feast parable is one of those with a very violent ending, including *wailing and grinding of teeth* (Matthew 22:14).<sup>10</sup>

Jesus probably preached this parable many times under many circumstances.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars think that Matthew is trying to improve on what Luke wrote.<sup>12</sup> One difference between the parables is that Luke extends two invitations to the banquet, rather than the one of Matthew. The significance is that Luke extends the invitation to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.<sup>13</sup>

Saint Augustine (354-430) called the parable unique, emphasizing the difference with Luke 14:16-24.<sup>14</sup> The modern scripture scholar, Barbara A. Reid, O.P., words it

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<sup>8</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>9</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, 702-709.

<sup>10</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, 254.

<sup>11</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) 57.

<sup>12</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) 56-57.

<sup>13</sup> Neil J. McEleney, C.S.P., "Peter's Denials—How Many? To Whom?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 52, No. 3 (July 1990) 470.

<sup>14</sup> Saint Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels*, II, 71, 139 in "Exposition from the Catena Aurea," in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading and Meditation: Volume Four: From the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost to the Twenty-fourth and Last Sunday after Pentecost, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 201-202.

differently, to write, "Matthew intensifies and makes more explicit the evildoing and the enduring punishments."<sup>15</sup> Matthew and Luke use the story in different ways.

Matthew 22:1-14, used today, is updating the warnings of the prophet Zephaniah for the New Testament. Luke seems to ignore Zephaniah.<sup>16</sup> Matthew probably wrote after the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Since Evangelists themselves struggled to understand that about which they wrote, so should the Faithful today expect a similar struggle.

Saint Gregory the Great (540-604), Pope and Doctor of the Church, offers some consolation. The wedding is a figure of the present Church and the banquet a figure of the final, eternal Banquet.<sup>17</sup> Sister Reid takes one of the verses, Matthew 22:8, about being ready, as an "end-time virtue."<sup>18</sup> Taken together, all of the readings help prepare the Faithful for the week ahead. Struggle does not cancel virtue.

Like the prophet Isaiah, Father Charles E. Curran, raises a warning that Pope John Paul II was overly-confident about everything. Such a presumption easily passes down to the lower clergy and Faithful as a false presumption on the love of God. On the last page of his book, Father Curran takes his stand as follows:

... claiming too much certitude for noninfallible moral teachings ...  
downplaying any role for historical consciousness and experience in  
arriving at moral truth ... failing to point out that the magisterium needs  
to learn before it can teach ... By insisting on the certitude of truth for  
complex and specific moral issues, John Paul II has downplayed and

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<sup>15</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) 237-238. 248, 249.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel C. Olson, "Matthew 22:1-14 as Midrash," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 2005) 435-453.

<sup>17</sup> St. Gregory the Great, Pope and Doctor, *On the Gospels: Given to the People in the Basilica of the Blessed Martyr Clement*, PL 76, col. 1281, *Homilia XXXVIII* in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: A Manual of Preaching, Spiritual Reading and Meditation: Volume Four: From the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost to the Twenty-fourth and Last Sunday after Pentecost, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal, D.D. (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 226 and 239.

<sup>18</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) 252.

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even implicitly denied what has been the glory of the Catholic tradition:  
It is a living tradition.<sup>19</sup>

These Lectionary readings are about courage in the face of uncertainty. Isaiah begins by recognizing that his fellow co-religionists were not faithful to the Covenants. Such faithlessness notwithstanding, Isaiah preached great hope, in these readings, for the time when the New Jerusalem would come unto its own. Psalm 23 is about maneuvering through the uncertain trials and tribulations of life, confident that the Lord will accomplish his own all-loving ends.

Philippians gets to the significant part, proclaiming that the love of God through Jesus conquers all uncertainty. Finally, the Gospel is about the uncertainty of invitations to the banquet feast, with some refusing the invitation, others accepting the invitation, and one arriving uninvited. The uninvited guest shows that the invitation in the first place was important. Those refusing the invitation show that the gentle, loving kindness of God should not be misused, especially to tend to business matters.<sup>20</sup> The uncertain component necessary for love does not entitle one to abuse that uncertainty through presumption. Finally, the guests accepting the invitation show that the invitation is not due to anything the Faithful earn, but rather is something freely offered and freely accepted. As Matthew 22:14 puts it, *Many are invited, but few are chosen.*

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)

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<sup>19</sup> Charles E. Curran, *The Moral Theology" of Pope John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005) 254.

<sup>20</sup> Robert H. Gundry, "Mark 10:29: Order in the List," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 3 (July 1997) 472.