

## Readings

First Reading:	1 Kings 17:10-16
Responsorial Psalm:	Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10 (1b)
Second Reading:	Hebrews 9:24-28
Alleluia:	Matthew 5:3
Gospel:	Mark 12:38-44

## Commentary

These readings are about confronting paradox and, then, starting all over again. The paradox in the Readings is that in the long term truth determines politics, although politics may determine truth in the short term. By *politics*, I mean power. By *truth*, I mean the relationship between human perception and reality. Paradoxically, a misperception, for example that the earth is flat, is always a risk humans take in any honest commitment to truth.

As humans, we must recognize that certainty, except in some rare philosophical sense, is beyond us. Certainty assumes perfection. Saint Thomas tells us that only God is perfect, thus, leading to one paradox after another in our lives.

The readings begin with the paradox of Elijah, telling the widow in Zarephath to bring him some food, despite the fact that she had practically none. With Faith, she brought the food and did not run out.

Psalm 146 notes that the LORD *sustains the fatherless and the widow ... but the way of the wicked he [eventually] thwarts*. The reading from the Psalm lists one paradox after another. The most significant paradox, perhaps, is *The LORD sets captives free*. Setting captives free is important for this era in which the Faithful recognize various forms of addiction as captivity.

Hebrews is about the paradox of God becoming human in the person of Jesus. After noting that Christ died *to take away sin by his sacrifice*, Hebrews concludes that Christ *will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him*. While Christ and the Faithful appear to die, the reality is that their lives change. Lives do not end in this world but continue into the next with God.

Finally, Mark tells the story of what the Faithful used to know as *the widow's mite*, now translated as *two small coins*. The paradox is that while the widow gave less than those who were rich, in the eyes of God, she gave more, because it was all she had.

Mark A. Yarhouse and James Sellers explain, "The purpose and effect of theological paradox is the humble, submissive and faith driven [sic] response to God. Paradox in strategic therapy is different. In therapy it is used as a tool to coerce and manipulate"<sup>1</sup> These Notes are about a Faith-driven response to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark A. Yarhouse and James Sellers, "Family Therapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal" (2009 manuscript in press) 239.

Yarhouse and Sellers go on, "Paradox in both [Christianity and psychological therapy] undermines our inflated and potentially arrogant assumptions about self and our perceived power and control over circumstances."<sup>2</sup> These Notes are about undermining inflated and arrogant assumptions.

Family therapists can present the paradoxes of dysfunctional families in an effort to manipulate relationships. This type of therapy is dangerous because family members may not respond in the way the therapist intends. Paradoxes, nevertheless, can cause us to rethink the power arrangements we take for granted. Such reevaluation is fundamental to restructuring society. The current political debates about health care illustrate the paradox of desiring but not delivering what is intended..

Reflecting on the life of Senator Edward M. (Ted) Kennedy, helps to bring a larger point home. Ted Kennedy had limited talent, but he worked hard as a steward of what he had. Being good stewards is part of the Christian vocation.

In the United States, the Faithful place great trust in education as an aspect of stewardship. Part of education is to present paradoxes in the relationship between truth and politics. Only after the Faithful recognize and examine paradoxes can change begin. Senator Kennedy was about bringing such changes.

The problem involves the virtue of prudence. Although that widow at the temple treasury gave all she had, Jesus may have been educating his disciples not to do that, because authorities would waste the contribution. Acting prudently according to the best lights one has is the prayer for these readings.

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### **Annotated Bibliography**

Material above the double line draws from material below the double line. Those uninterested in scholarly and tangential details should stop reading here. If they do, however, they may miss some interesting material.

#### **1 Kings 17:10-16**

1 Kings is not in the Sinaiticus.

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<sup>2</sup> Mark A. Yarhouse and James Sellers, "Family Therapies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal" (2009 manuscript in press) 241.

## Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10 (1b)

Codex Sinaiticus<sup>3</sup>

Where the Lectionary has *The Lord gives sight to the blind* at the beginning of verse 8, the Sinaiticus has that at the end of the verse; thereby reversing the order. I recognize no significance in the change.

The *Alleluia* in verse 10 does not appear either in the Sinaiticus or in the Lectionary for Reading 7A Third Sunday of Advent. While verse 10 does not appear for Reading 70A Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, an *Alleluia* does appear after verse 9, where the Reading ends. The *Alleluia* does appear in the Lectionary for Reading 128B, Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time.

I do not know what to make of the differences, except to be humble about what the exact words ought to be in English.

## Hebrews 9:24-28

Interestingly, the Sinaiticus does not spell out words such as "Christ." The abbreviation is "Cs". Nor does the Sinaiticus spell out God. The abbreviation is like "Gd". I am amazed that the printed version on the web also prints abbreviations, rather than changing what is there to the full word.<sup>4</sup>

Heb 9:25-28

Patricia A. Sullivan, "The Nonvowed Form of the Lay State in the Life of the Church"<sup>5</sup>

Sullivan argues that vows can work against the risks associated with thinking.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.codex-sinaiticus.net/en/manuscript.aspx?book=26&chapter=144&inputControl=420&lid=en&side=r&verse=10&zoomSlider=0> (accessed May 31, 2009). Psalm 146 in the Lectionary is Psalm 145 in the Sinaiticus.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.codex-sinaiticus.net/print.aspx?manuscript=true&imageType=standard&translation=true&transcription=true&transcriptionType=verse&phd=true&lg=en&quireNo=85&folioNo=6&side=r> (accessed August 5, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Theological Studies, Vol. 68, No. 2 (June 2007) 331.

Heb 9:24

Todd D. Still, "*Christos as Pistos: The Faith(fulness) of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews*"<sup>6</sup>

Still argues that Jesus is effective with the Father, because Jesus is reliably Faithful.

### **Matthew 5:3**

In the eclectic Greek, verse 5:3, *blessed are the poor in spirit*, is indented, indicating a hymn. The Sinaiticus does not indent the text.<sup>7</sup>

### **Mark 12:38-44**

The Sinaiticus Greek uses the letter, "c", rather than the Greek sigma or "s". In Verse 42, the Sinaiticus has *poor woman*,<sup>8</sup> rather than *poor widow*, which the eclectic Greek uses.

Mark 12:41-44

Robert Doran, "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector: An Agonistic Story"<sup>9</sup>

An agonistic story is one that compares "two people on an issue, and the unlikely candidate is always the one chosen," in this case the poor widow.

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>6</sup> the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 4 (April 2007) 750, 752.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.codex-sinaiticus.net/print.aspx?manuscript=true&imageType=standard&translation=true&transcription=true&transcriptionType=verse&phd=true&lg=en&quireNo=74&folioNo=2&side=v> (accessed August 4, 2009).

<sup>8</sup>

<http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/print.aspx?manuscript=true&imageType=standard&translation=true&transcription=true&transcriptionType=verse&phd=true&lg=en&quireNo=77&folioNo=2&side=v> (accessed August 29, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 2 (April 2007) 263, 265.