

Personal Notes  
021117 Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time, 157A  
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Raymond J. Jirran

The key verse in these readings is 1 Thessalonians 5:3. "When people are saying, 'Peace and security,' then sudden disaster comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."

Paul's point is that no one escapes what Shakespeare called "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Life is to be dealt with in Christ Jesus. This maturity has at least two aspects dealing with life. The first aspect is secular, acting reasonably, staying in touch with reality. The other aspect is religious, not only reasonable, but also grace-filled; staying in touch not only with reality, but with supernatural reality as well. Maturity is best understood amidst the tensions and disasters of life. Sexism by anyone, secular or religious, is one of the tensions and disasters of life.

By pointing out that no one escapes, Paul includes males as well as females, those of all stations of life. Gospel maturity is about changing what can be changed and accepting what must be accepted, both in tension with one another. Gospel maturity masquerading as a Marxist opiate of the masses is Gospel immaturity. That was Paul's point, now expressed centuries later as we work to transform society into the Mystical Body of Christ.

"Peace and security" is a false peace and false security, resulting from lack of the use of talents, from lack of thought. All seems well, except for those complaining about injustice, such as the injustice of sexism. All seems well, except for those unwilling to accept emotional immaturity as an excuse for kindness and gentleness. In a word, all seems peace and security except for those objecting to the status quo. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul writes that no one escapes objecting to the status quo.

What Paul was writing about was that status quo of having to die physically. Paul did not expect that to have to happen. When people died anyway, at least some of the Faithful worried. Paul writes that those physically dead will be bodily resurrected in order to meet Jesus when he comes again. Paul writes that physical death does not preclude that meeting. So, death of the spirit in disasters such as sexism, does not preclude a resurrection in the living Mystical Body of Christ.

Bette resents any male pontificating about women in labor. Similarly, I find objection in the scholar, Father Hans Urs von Balthasar writing, "I suffer hunger and thirst, nakedness and blows. I am the homeless one who slaves away at the work of his hands."<sup>1</sup> Disasters happen, are part of living. The solution is not to escape by lack of thought. The solution is to keep thinking in Christ, Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> *From Heart of the World*, Erasmo S. Leiva, tr. © 1979, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA. Used with permission as cited in as cited in Magnificat ®, Vo. 4, No. 9 (November 2002), pages 263 and 433

## **Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31**

verses 13-14: She obtains wool and flax and works with loving hands. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her fingers ply the spindle.

These verses are among the most objectionable sexist verses in the Bible. Of all people, Paul, in 1 Thessalonians tells how to deal with sexism and other disappointments in the analogy cited above and below

## **Psalms 128:**

verse 3 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of your home; your children like olive plants around your table.

These verses are also objectionable because sexist, as above.

## **1 Thessalonians 5:1-6**

verse 3 When people are saying, "Peace and security," then sudden disaster comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Maturity is accepting one's own limitations without disparaging one's own abilities. Gospel maturity is accepting the fact that the ability to love God is God's gift, a gift properly exercised within one's own station in life, whether in this life or the next. Church administrators like the idea of pray, pay, and obey for the Faithful. So long as church administrators love the Faithful, that approach works. Under the same conditions, the same approach works for both church and state. The French Revolution came because of distrust of royal government officials. The institutional church has stayed on the side of royalty, never encouraging the Faithful to think outside of the teaching magisterium. As we know from the case of Galileo, sometimes that magisterium can err.

A scholar<sup>2</sup> explains the maturity of the Cross.

For an understanding of the further meaning of "God has not destined us for wrath but to obtain salvation" in 1 Thess 5:9ab and "(that) we might live together with him" in v. 10b, it is not insignificant that these two interconnected benefits of Christ's death come at the end of the

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<sup>2</sup> Hendrikus Boers, "The Structure and meaning of Romans 6:1-14," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2001), pages 673.

paraenesis [exhortation, advice]<sup>3</sup> of **5:1-8**. Paul's admonitions in this section span a wide arch from the coming day of the Lord (**vv. 1-2**) all the way to the present circumstances of his readers (**vv. 3-8**). By making use of the image of a **thief** in the night in **vv. 1-2**, he is able to turn the expectation of the Lord's coming, which lies on a temporal plane in the future, into an existential challenge to his readers in the present in **vv. 3-8**.

verses 1-2 Concerning times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a **thief** at night.

verses 4-6 But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a **thief**. For all of you are children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober.

*Alert and sober* means *thoughtful*. **Thief** means disasters of life. For Paul the **thief** was taking life, life Paul expected to remain until the Second Coming of Jesus. For the rest of us **thief** is taking some aspect of life, such as sexism. The difficulty is accepting what the **thief** is doing until the Second Coming or parousia. What the Christian community did was adjust its expectations according to what was happening. People were dying.

That is Paul's message within the context of these readings. Adjust expectations according to what is happening. Do not fight reality. Recognize reality, then deal with it.

The scholar<sup>4</sup> continues.

Finally, the paraenetic context of the christological statements (vv. 9-10), in which Paul expresses how he expects his readers to live their lives in Christ in the face of the coming end (**vv. 1-8** and 11), shows that his

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<sup>3</sup> *Paraenesis* is not in the dictionary, but *paranesis* is, with the definition as given above. Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language: unabridged: second edition: based upon the broad foundations laid down by Noah Webster: extensively revised by the publisher editorial staff under the general supervision of Jean L. McKechnie: including etymologies, full pronunciations, synonyms, and an encyclopedic supplement of geographical and biographical data, scripture proper names, foreign words and phrases, practical business mathematics, abbreviations tables of weights and measures, signs and symbols, and forms of address: illustrated throughout (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), page 1302

<sup>4</sup> Hendrikus Boers, "The Structure and meaning of Romans 6:1-14," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October 2001), pages 674.

paraenesis is the final, most concrete level of the meaning of Christ in the passage.

Next Sunday, the Feast of Christ the King, is the final, apocalyptic Sunday of the liturgical year. What a penult to end the year, an apocalyptic, end-of-the-world note on feminism. December 1 is the First Sunday of Advent.

## **John 15:4a, 5b**

verse 4a, 5b Remain in me as I remain in you, says the Lord. Whoever remains in me bears much fruit.

## **Matthew 25:14-30**

verse 25 ... so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground.

To give *talent* its more ordinary meaning, the greatest human talent is the ability to think. Under holy obedience, that talent can be suppressed, but more often than not, when that talent is not used, the reason is fear of the consequences. Such lack of use is what is irritating Jesus in this passage. Jesus goes on.

verse 29 For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

In this passage, Jesus is unwilling to wait for the parousia. Jesus wants the Faithful to use their talents in the here and now. Jesus threatens, either use it or lose it. What Jesus has in mind for either use or loss is eternal life.

We can learn how Jesus thought from how his Holy Mother thought. This Gospel verse from Matthew must be understood within the context of Mary's Magnificat, part of which proclaims.

Luke 1:53<sup>5</sup> He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty.

The combination of the readings means that like love, thought is a God-given gift, something to be used, not buried in fear.

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<sup>5</sup> Henry Wansbrough, General Editor, The New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

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In the *Magnificat*® Day-by-Day readings for this Sunday, Father Hans Urs von Balthasar writes before he thinks. He writes as if he thinks he is God Almighty. Then he writes, “all life has its origin in impotence and even in disgrace ...”<sup>6</sup> To the contrary, God is the origin of all life and God is neither impotent nor disgrace. Balthasar and the *Magnificat*® avoid the issue of feminism here.

When the parish Faithful was invited to respond to the United States Bishops draft of their letter on women, I participated with Sister Camille, O.P. and several others. We tried to suggest what was reasonable. These Personal Notes are a similar attempt, something that needs doing within the Gospel context, searching for a church community consensus without too much encouragement from the hierarchy.

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<sup>6</sup>*From Heart of the World, Erasmo S. Leiva, tr. © 1979, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA. Used with permission as cited in Magnificat®, Vo. 4, No. 9 (November 2002), pages 264 and 433.*