

God is helping us live his holy life.

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

This is best read with the sense of the Monday, November 4, Poor Clare sermon of Father Walter A. Cerbin, S.S.J. Emphasizing the **bold** words helps make the point that God himself is coming near to and even into our hearts.

Thus says **the Lord God**:

I myself will look after and tend my sheep.

As a shepherd tends his flock

when he finds himself among his scattered sheep,
so **will I** tend my sheep.

I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered
when it was cloudy and dark.

I myself will pasture my sheep;

I myself will give them rest, says **the Lord God**.

The lost **I will** seek out,

the strayed **I will** bring back,
the injured **I will** bind up,
the sick **I will** heal,
but the sleek and strong **I will** destroy,
shepherding them rightly.¹

As for you, my sheep, says **the Lord God**,

I will judge between one sheep and another,
between rams and goats.

The idea of the shepherd being foolish to track down his sheep *from every place ... when it was cloudy and dark* is better supported by the contrary idea that the shepherd knew what he was doing. Sheep do not get lost. Lambs do. A lamb separated from its mother is the object of a lot of noise, from both lamb and mother. Since the shepherd knows the territory, he likely knows what has happened and can go to pick up the stray, without jeopardizing the flock.

Sheep do not get lost. Matthew 25:31 in commissioning the Faithful to evangelize, refers back to this passage in Ezekiel 34:12-13. There is more. The Shepherd is

¹ 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) 974.

struck, alienated from his sheep. With the help of the Almighty, the Shepherd returns to the flock, bringing peace and prosperity. The Faithful are to do the same.²

Ezekiel is not fostering the *pray, pay, and obey* mentality of a pie-in-the-sky future Messiah. Zephaniah does that. Ezekiel expects a here-and-now Messiah, an earthly king.³ Just as Father Cerbin preached about finding spiritual direction through nature itself on Friday, November 8, so Ezekiel finds nature providing the abundance God offers, including peace in the land.⁴

Psalm 23:1-2, 2-3, 5-6

The Lectionary uses this psalm in the following readings: 31A, 49A, 107B, and 142A. See the comments above.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

The First Testament offers nine covenants, covenants with (1) Noah (Gen 9:8-17); (2) Phinehas (Num 25:10-13); (3) Joshua (Joshua 24); (4) Josiah (2 Kings 23), (5) Ezra (Ezra 9—10); (6) David (Isa 11:10); (7) Abraham; (8) Moses; and (9) Jeremiah (Jer 31). Were Paul's letters treating the Davidic covenant as highly valued, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 is where Paul would have revealed his interest with a mention of the resurrected Jesus.⁵ Paul does not highly value the Davidic covenant, though the Church does in its liturgy for today.

Another interesting theological note concerns angels. 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 with Philippians 2:9-10, proclaims that "even angels will fall under the jurisdiction of believers, since they also fall under Christ's."⁶

² John Paul Heil, "Ezekiel 34 and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 55, No. 4 (October 1993) 706-707.

³ Adrian M. Leske, "Context and Meaning of Zechariah 9:9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 4 (October 2000) 665.

⁴ Bernard F. Batto, "The Covenant of Peace: A Neglected Ancient Near Eastern Motif," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 2 (April 1987) 202-203.

⁵ Charles H. Talbert, "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 1 (January 2001) 18-19.

⁶ Paul M. Hoskins, "The Use of Biblical and Extrabiblical Parallels in the Interpretation of First Corinthians 6:2-3," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April 2001) 297.

Mark 11:9, 10

No comment.

Matthew 25:31-46

Matthew is concerned about people on the margins of society. Warren Carter, one of the few scholars ever mentioned in the body of these notes, has published a book entitled *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* reviewed in the current edition of *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*.⁷ The reviewer notes a scholarly misconception “that gender was not of significance within the emerging Christian communities.” In other words, Matthew has a potential for insights into feminism.

The shepherd motif runs throughout Matthew. Warren Carter writes of “God’s sustaining presence” garnered from Matthew 25:31-46,⁸ the readings for this Sunday. God’s rule is associated with “the least” (Matthew 25:40, 45).⁹ God enables the Faithful to accept God’s protection as a shepherd and, then to be shepherds themselves, one to the other.

Feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, and the like are the corporal works of mercy.¹⁰ These are more than admonitions. They are also ways of praying, thinking, and acting. The worldly approach is folded into a Godly intention, to become Godly.¹¹

⁷ Elaine M. Wainwright, R.S.M., review of Warren Carter, Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading (Bible and Liberation, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000) in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 564-566.

⁸ Warren Carter, “Recalling the Lord's Prayer: The Authorial Audience and Matthew's Prayer as Familiar Liturgical Experience,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 57, No. 3 (July 1995) 529.

⁹ Mark Allan Powell, “The Magi as Kings: An Adventure in Reader-Response Criticism,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 62, No. 3 (July 2000) 470.

¹⁰ The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism Richard P. McBrien, general editor (New York: HarperSanFrancisco: A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1995) 854.

¹¹ Lawrence M. Wills, “Scribal Methods in Matthew and *Mishnah Abot*,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April 2001) 246-249.

Over time in the late third to the early fourth centuries, an anonymous author tempered the condemnations of this Matthean passage. The anonymous author wrote in Syriac, a work translated into Latin and known as *Liber graduum*. *Liber graduum* would have it that Matthew 25:40 is about what happens to the Godly, not about what happens to the ungodly.¹² Matthew 25:40: “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

The Faithful will live with God for eternity, enjoying the presence of God. Just as the Faithful make God present to others, so, by that action, does God make himself present to the Faithful.¹³ God is helping us live his holy life.

There are many technical problems with verses 40 and 45. First the Lectionary:

verse 40 And the king will say to them in reply,
 “Amen, I say to you, **whatever** you did
 for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

verse 45 He will answer them, “Amen, I say to you,
 what you did not do for one of these least ones,
 you did not do for me.”

The grammarian calls the problems to attention.

ἐπι with an accusative of measure in a non-temporal sense is found in **Matt. 25:40 and 45**: ἐφ' ὅσον (οὐκ) ἐποίησατε where the **Vulgate** renders “quamdiu” although the sense is “in so far as,” or better (as direct object) “(so much as =) whatever,” (“What you have (not) done to one of these little ones, you have (not) done to Me”).¹⁴

The *Nova Vulgata* still uses *quamdiu* twice.¹⁵

¹² Robert Doran, “The Agraphon at *Liber graduum* 3.3,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April 2001) 303.

¹³ Mark Allan Powell, “Matthew’s Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 58, No. 3 (July 1996) 472-473.

¹⁴ Maximilian Zerwick, S.J., English Edition adapted from the Fourth Latin Edition by Joseph Smith, S.J., Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblico—114—Biblical Greek (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1994, page 42.

¹⁵ Nova Vulgata: Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio: Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II ratione habita iussu Pauli PP. VI Recognita Auctoritate Joannis Pauli PP. II Promulgata

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King James uses **inasmuch as**, twice.¹⁶

Douay-Rheims: **as long as**, twice.¹⁷

Jerusalem: **in so far as**, twice.¹⁸

New Jerusalem: **in so far as**, twice.¹⁹

New American: **whatever** and **what**, thereby followed by the Lectionary.²⁰

Editio Typica Altera (00120 Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979, 1986, 1998) ISBN 88-2209-2163-4.

¹⁶ General Editor, The Reverend Cain Hope Felder, Ph.D., The Original African Heritage Study Bible: King James Version (Nashville: The James C. Winston Publishing Company, 1993).

¹⁷ The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate with Annotations, References, and an Historical and Chronological Table: The Douay Version of The Old Testament, First published by the English College at Douay, A.D. 1609: The Confraternity Edition of The New Testament: A Revision of the Challoner-Rheims Version Edited by Catholic Scholars under the Patronage of the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (New York. P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1950).

¹⁸ Alexander Jones, General Editor, The Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition (Garden City, New York: Double Day * Company, Inc., 1968).

¹⁹ Henry Wansbrough, General Editor, The New Jerusalem Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1985).

²⁰ Saint Joseph Edition of The New American Bible: Translated from the Original Languages with Critical Use of All the Ancient Sources: Including The Revised New Testament and the Revised Psalms Authorized by the Board of Trustees of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and Approved by the Administrative Committee/Board of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference: with many helps for Bible reading: Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation, How to Read the Bible, Historical Survey of the Lands of the Bible, Bible Dictionary, Liturgical Index of Sunday Readings, Doctrinal Bible Index, and over 50 Photographs and Maps of the Holy Land (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1992).

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In his translation, Saint Jerome avoided a one-to-one relationship between the recipient of the good deed and Jesus. I wonder whether that is the controversy. In another place, the grammarian writes, “εφ ὅσον **in as much as**, or rather as direct object (so much as =) **whatever**.”²¹ Considering some of the people for whom the Faithful do good deeds, the notion that good deeds are done not only for the Christ but also to the Christ carries the day for God helping us live his holy life.

A story: In the seminary, we were taught to think of and to call people otherwise known as *bums*, *Christies*. When we would leave the seminary and walk the streets of Washington, D.C., Christies would eagerly approach us, because they knew we would give them a handout, not much, but a handout nonetheless. Among ourselves, we wondered whether we wanted to be so taken advantage of and decided that we did. Later, when I found out that our former Novice Master daily walked about a mile from the Baltimore Motherhouse to a church where St. John Nepomucene²² Neumann regularly said Mass, I inquired whether the tradition of never refusing a Christie still prevailed. As I understood it, while the former Novice Master continued his daily walk, continuing handouts invited physical harm beyond what prudence permitted as drugs infiltrated the inner city.

What about a vow of obedience? Or a vow to obey one's spouse? Bear with a story. One of the seminary rules was that if one were late for an exercise, one should report the event to the Rector. One day, after reporting tardiness too often to the Rector, my response to his irritation was that it was his rule I was following, not my own. There was no other point to my report, other than to follow the rule, a rule that was a real pain. One can accept such painful rules as an act of love. I do not think I ever bothered him with that again. Perhaps I was never late again. I suppose that is the test, whether we are cafeteria Catholics picking and choosing what to accept or accepting whatever it may be we discern that God places on our plate. We do need God's shepherding help to live his holy life.

²¹ Max Zerwick, S.J. and Mary Grosvenor, A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament unabridged, 5th, revised edition (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1996).

²² The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism Richard P. McBrien, general editor (New York: HarperSanFrancisco: A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1995) 711 and 913. Nepomucen is the way John Nepomucen, the patron saint of the Czechs, who lived from 1350 to 1393 is spelled. Neumann uses an extra e at the end, Nepomucene.

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In the Magnificat® Day-by-Day readings for this Sunday, Father Robert Hugh Benson is a novelist writing about theology, about friendship with God.²³ Losing one's own identity, as Father Benson describes that loss, is too easy. In this passage, for example, Father Benson leaves no room for dealing with the likes of wayward bishops. Father Benson leaves it too easy to confuse the status quo with the will of the Father. Each individual has access to truth independent of human power, of human politics. The problem is substituting human politics, whether personal or group, whether one's own or others, for the power, i.e. the politics, of God.

²³ Father Robert Hugh Benson, *From the Friendship of Christ, 1955, The Newman Press, Westminster, MD* as cited in Magnificat®, Vol. 4, No. 9 (November 2002) 348, 349, and 430.