

Personal Notes  
051120 Thirty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time 160A  
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In preparation for Advent, the Gospel is about the Last Judgment. The worshipping point is that the spiritual life requires self-discipline. In 1 Corinthians, Saint Paul joins with the Hellenistic Greeks to regard a fat belly as a sign of lack of self-control.<sup>1</sup>

The readings begin with Ezekiel, making a similar point about the essence of the spiritual life being self-control. At the basic level, Ezekiel is counseling the Babylonian Exiles that the Lord will find another shepherd king, like King David.<sup>2</sup> At a more fundamental level, Ezekiel is helping establish the interior life as the site of the Kingdom of God,<sup>3</sup> the third mystery of the rosary Mysteries of Light. At a judgmental level, Ezekiel 34:16 mentions destroying some sheep as 34:17 proclaims, *I will judge between one sheep and another*. Matthew 25:32b, as a *shepherd separates the sheep from the goats*, elaborates Ezekiel 34.<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:24 and 25 uses the word *destroy*, a work appearing twenty-two times in the undisputed Pauline letters, but elsewhere in the New Testament only five times.<sup>5</sup> Paul is unabashedly about the raw power of the Christian life. Paul wants to destroy death, itself.

Psalm 23 is famous, about the Good Shepherd guiding the Faithful through difficulties. Shepherding was a lowly occupation, so portraying God as a shepherd is making its own point about the external trappings of life. Saint Paul explains in 1 Corinthians that the Good Shepherd, Jesus, is conquering death for the Faithful. For a human, nothing is lowlier than death. As Susan R. Garrett puts it, "It will only be a matter of time until God will put *all* things in subjection under Jesus' feet (Acts 2:34-35; cf. 1 Cor 15:20-28; Hebrews 1—2)."<sup>6</sup> *Time* is treated below.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey R. Asher, review of Karl Olav Sandnes, *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles* in *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (July 2003) 480-481.

<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Clifford, S.J., "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (January 1993) 15.

<sup>3</sup> Dale Launderville, O.S.B., "Ezekiel's Throne-Chariot Vision: Spiritualizing the Model of Divine Royal Rule," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (July 2004) 364-361-362, 368.

<sup>4</sup> 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) 698, 705.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Corley, "The Pauline Authorship of 1 Corinthians 13," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April 2004) 260; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., "Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12-20," *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (July 1978) 394.

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One of the problems with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is poetry. Psalm 23 is poetry translated as prose. Over two hundred years ago, this anomaly began to bother translators as they began to appreciate the poetic nature of so much of the original language. The problem continues, as the Faithful try to grasp what is there.<sup>7</sup>

Funerals makes the Twenty-third Psalm available in four places,<sup>8</sup> Pastoral Care of the Sick in three.<sup>9</sup> Sunday liturgies use the Twenty-third Psalm four times in Cycle A and once in Cycle B.<sup>10</sup> Matthew 25:31-46 is available for Funerals.<sup>11</sup> As a type of

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<sup>6</sup> Susan R. Garrett, "Exodus from Bondage: Luke 9:31 and Acts 12:1-24," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 52, No. 4 (October 1990) 669.

<sup>7</sup> Alister McGrath, In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture (New York: Anchor Books: A Division of Random House, Inc., 2001) 247-249.

<sup>8</sup> N.a., 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>9</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 Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1983) 171, 188, 323.

<sup>10</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).194, 388, 716, 888, 975 (today).

<sup>11</sup> N.a., 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

final judgment, Psalm 23:6b concludes, *I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.*

Trying to follow chronological time in 1 Corinthians is difficult for the Western mind. Biblical Koine Byzantine Greek verbs do not show relative time, as English verbs do. In 1 Corinthians, Paul does show sequence, however, beginning with Adam, continuing through the Second Coming of Jesus. What Paul is showing is that Jesus, God, is conquering death itself for the Faithful. Jesus models self-discipline.

When 1 Corinthians 15:26 announces *The last enemy to be destroyed is death*, the Greek tense is present indicative. The Faithful in Western Civilization would tend to understand conquering death as something for future time, but that sense is not in the original Greek. Paul is difficult to understand.<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 15 is the earliest account of Easter.<sup>13</sup> The Gospels were written later.

Paul allegedly begins with a nonphysical resurrection. In that context, he omits the role of women. The realization by the Church of a physical resurrection only came later.<sup>14</sup> I do not expect anyone to preach on this aspect of 1 Corinthians 15 either.

Paul goes on, even though Jesus died, he also lives. 1 Corinthians is saying the same for the Faithful, who, though they die, also live. After listening to Paul preach, the Corinthians were wondering why, if they had eternal life, they were dying. Paul is undeterred. He insists that, ultimately, there is nothing for the Faithful to fear. When all is said and done, at the Last Judgment, Christ will hand over the Kingdom of God, to which the Faithful belong, to his Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

1 Corinthians 15:20, 23 presents Jesus twice as *firstfruits*, a harvest. Max Zerwick, S.J., explains the Greek for *firstfruits*, "consecrated to God in token of the entire

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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) 233.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce J. Malina, "Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 1-31.

<sup>13</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) 259.

<sup>14</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) 260.

harvest which they represent and for which they are substituted; each element having its application to the resurrection of Christ.”<sup>15</sup> As far as time in the Gospels is concerned, firstfruits enable the remainder of the harvest for Godly use. Potency is included in the act,<sup>16</sup> something with which the philosopher Aristotle, and Western Civilization with him, would disagree, but that is another matter. As a side note, for the purposes of the Faithful, the Black Apostolate magazine is entitled Josephite Harvest. Jesus, himself, is part of that harvest. Jesus is the first to make the point that death cannot hold him. If Adam brought death to everyone, Christ brings life, 1 Corinthians 15:22.

In the Pauline sense of time, the window of opportunity for the Gentiles closes when the Jews accept Christ. More importantly, Paul is expanding Christianity to include everyone.<sup>17</sup> The Kingdom is more in hearts than on the earth.

The Church itself as well as the different Evangelists combines with the First Testament and noncanonical parallels to reveal why the Evangelists present the parables as they do.<sup>18</sup> In this instance, Matthew is defining the Christian community, as one of several other Jewish communities. Matthew does this by setting out antitheses, for example Matthew 25:34, *then the king will say to those on this right* and Matthew 25:41, *then he will say to those on his left*.<sup>19</sup> The various antitheses set out the boundaries of the Christian community to this day.

The Last Judgment, in the final analysis, is about the Christian community, about who will be saved and who not. The Last Judgment of Matthew is fearful, because eternal life is but one option to eternal punishment, Matthew 15:46. That Last Judgment contradicts the Beatitudes. The difference is that at the Second Coming,

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<sup>15</sup> 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) 529.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce J. Malina, “Christ and Time: Swiss or Mediterranean?” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1989) 16.

<sup>17</sup> Murray Baker, “Paul and the Salvation of Israel: Paul’s Ministry, the Motif of Jealousy, and Israel’s Yes,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 2005) 479.

<sup>18</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) 55.

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence M. Wills, “Scribal Methods in Matthew and *Mishnah Abot*,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 63, No. 2 (April 2001) 241, 246.

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Jesus is judging as God, something other humans will also get to do, but not in this life.<sup>20</sup> In this life, all must pass through the door of death to conquer death. Paul was not expecting all to have to die before Jesus came again, but, because so much time has passed, the Faithful today do expect to die.

It seems to me that God's messengers, the angels are extra-terrestrial beings, also destined to assemble before Jesus on his glorious throne, Matthew 25:31. Jesus is God. As God, Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats, Matthew 25:32, undoubtedly having in mind the Jewish scapegoats. In the Richmond Diocesan Retreat for Black Catholics, held October 28-30, Matthew 25:35 had special meaning, *I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink*, meaning nutritious food and drink. Matthew 25:42 is similar, *I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink*. In the Greek, Matthew is presenting alternatives, rather than a generality followed by particulars.<sup>21</sup> Matthew continues to set the parameters of a Christian community.

In conclusion, salvation consists of defeating death itself, first with Ezekiel in the interior life, then with the guidance of the Good Shepherd in the Twenty-third Psalm. In 1 Corinthians, Paul spells out the theology of time, beginning with Adam, focusing on Christ, and ending when Jesus comes again at the Last Judgment. The Gospel of Matthew uses the beatitudes as the criteria for imposing eternal punishment on sinners and eternal life on the Faithful.

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>20</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, 252.

<sup>21</sup> Robert H. Gundry, "Mark 10:29: Order in the List," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 59, No. 3 (July 1997) 466.