

Personal Notes

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Sunday after Trinity Sunday: The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

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Racism in the United States is about the sign of color, as a signifier of hatred, the opposite of Gospel love. The love of God, expressed as love of neighbor across racial lines, is an act of thanksgiving for these readings about the Eucharistic reality. The readings imply a racial dimension where they remind the Faithful not to forget that God brought them *out of ... that place of slavery* (Deut. 8:14b). The message is that the Faithful ought not to enslave others, especially through institutional racism. The message is that the Living Bread overcomes institutional inhibitions to Christian justice based on charity across racial barriers.

Color is the sign of race in the United States. These readings are about signs of a somewhat different nature, both ancient and contemporary. The principal sign is love expressed through the Eucharistic Lord, prefigured by the manna in the desert. The readings require courage to love in the face of uncertainty at the wonderment of the Eucharistic presence. Psalm 147:20 proclaims, *The LORD ... has not done this for any other nation.*

Racism is worldly. God, however, loves the world, as Jesus puts it in the reading, "my flesh for the life of the world" (John 6:51).¹ The Faithful are in the world and are to love the world, as does God. Transformation is the issue.

Deuteronomy begins the readings relating the Covenant with manna. The purpose of the manna is to show that people do not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God. The equation of food with the Word of God is almost commonplace in the Hebrew Bible.² Faith and love will make everything right. Jesus takes on the identity of Israel. Jesus fasted forty days, Israel wandered in the desert forty years. Jesus successfully withstood temptation quoting the words of today's Scripture, *that not by bread alone does man live* (Deut. 8:3).³

Deuteronomy is about three great issues: wealth, the king, and foreigners. The New Testament clarifies how they interrelate. Foreigners refers to modern racism, whereby the concept Chosen People expands to include all humanity. King refers to

¹ Stanley B. Marrow, "Κοσμος in John," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 1 (January 2002) 97.

² Jon D. Levenson, "Some Unnoticed Connotations in Jeremiah 20:9," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 1984) 223.

³ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, "Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 3:13-17)," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2002) 518, 526.

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the role of politics determining truth. True wealth consists not in material things, but in the love of God Almighty.⁴

Deuteronomy recalls bringing forth water *from the flinty rock* (Deut 8:15), a precursor of the water with which John baptized Jesus in the desert. Baptism is a sign of unity among the Faithful, a sign of casting off sins, even sins of racism. The Christian Exodus is an Exodus from the cold prejudices of this life into the warmth of the eternal love of God.

The Fathers of the Church reflected on the readings for today. Even without knowing about American slavery, what the Fathers thought is applicable. Saint Ephraim (+373), Deacon, Confessor, and Doctor of the Church warns about over-inquisitiveness concerning the Eucharistic mystery. "For if you pry curiously into these things you shall be called curious rather than a believer. Be therefore a believer, and without blame."⁵ Transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus is the ineffable mystery.

Saint Justin, Martyr (c. 100-165), connects the offering of fine flour by those cured of leprosy with the Eucharistic bread purifying sin in those predisposed. More immediately, Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons and Martyr (+c. 202) observes that as a grain of wheat first dies to be reborn, same as the Eucharist, so, too, the Faithful die to sin to be reborn in the love of God.⁶ On the matter of predisposition, the African Saint Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo and one of the Four Great Doctors of the West, writes, "It was not the piece of dipped bread that was poison to Judas. Yet he received it, and when he received it, *the enemy entered into him* (Jn.

⁴ Christopher T. Begg, "2 Kings 20:12-19 as an Element of the Deuteronomistic History," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 48, No. 1 (July 1986) 31.

⁵ Vossio S. Ephraim, Tome 3, Oratio 17. This is the second half of the Sermon (*Oratio*), which is, "Against Those Who endeavor to scrutinize too closely the mysteries of the Son of God," The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Three: From Pentecost to the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 122, 161.

⁶ St. Irenaeus, Bishop and Martyr, "Christ's Blood the Source of our Resurrection," PG 7, *Against Heresies*, Book 5, Ch. 2., in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Three: From Pentecost to the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 114, 161.

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xiii. 27).⁷ Predisposition mattered. Predisposition is a way of including racial prejudice.

Not only do the predispositions of humans matter, but so do the predispositions of God. In the First Testament, God likes to reward the Faithful with long lives. In the New Testament, God likes to reward the Faithful not only with long lives, but with eternal lives, as Saint John Chrysostom (354-407) points out.⁸ Chrysostom is one of the Four Great Doctors of the East, serving as Archbishop of Constantinople 397-407.

Love is the opposite of poor predisposition. God has an irrational, passionate love of humans. Such is the message of Sacred Scripture. That humans have an opportunity to offer a similar passionate, irrational love of God is rare, but present in Deuteronomy 6—11.⁹ Psalm 147 is so full of alleluias that editors changed the alleluias as the text moved from Masoretic to Greek to Qumran.¹⁰

These Solemnity readings are a joyful occasion expressed in the Eucharistic prefiguration; *with the best of wheat he fills you* (Psalm 147:14). Saint Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (371-394) and Doctor explains, “For in a man’s nature pleasure is of two kinds: one has place in the soul through calm, and one in the body through passion.”¹¹ Both are appropriate for the love of God.

⁷ St. Augustine, Bishop and Doctor, “Explanation of the Gospel,” PL 35, Tr. 26 in John, par. 11 *seq.*, col 1611 in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Three: From Pentecost to the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 144, 162.

⁸ Chrysostom in “Exposition from the Catena Aurea,” in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Three: From Pentecost to the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 108.

⁹ Jacqueline E. Lapsley, “Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No 3 (July 2003) 355, 369.

¹⁰ Lloyd M. Barré, “*Halelu yah*: A Broken Inclusion,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 45, No. 2 (April 1983) 195-200.

¹¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop and Doctor, “The Mystic Wine,” PG 44, On the Canticles, Homily X, col. 987 in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers: Volume Three: From Pentecost to the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, tr. and ed. M. F. Toal (P.O. Box 612, Swedesboro, NJ 08085: Preservation Press, 1996) 126, 161.

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In the Gospel, Jesus insists that his glory rests in his Eucharistic gift of self, penetrating through the Cross.¹² The Gospel of John links the Cross with Glory. In the Synoptics, Jesus refuses to perform any more signs in addition to feeding the five thousand. In these readings from John, Jesus upbraids the crowds for seeing the sign only as a sign of hope for an additional physical meal rather than as a sign of who Jesus was, namely God.¹³ John is the Gospel of Love because, in John, Jesus does offer an additional sign, namely the Eucharistic sign of love.

For those in the United States, the Eucharist is about a bond that transforms racism into a mutual identity in the love of Christ. Jesus is forceful, “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you do not have life within you” (John 6:53).¹⁴ Next to that, dealing with racism is nothing. John 6:56 insists that the Eucharist enables the Faithful to remain in Jesus and Jesus to remain in the Faithful. The sense of the original Greek for *in* is a commingling of life, reaching from the Faithful, through Jesus, to God Almighty. This reading is used in Funerals in two places.¹⁵

These readings bind the Faithful in relationship to one another and to God.

1 Corinthians is about the primacy of conscience giving way to a primacy of human

¹² Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., “Raymond Brown’s New Introduction to the Gospel of John: A Presentation—And Some Questions,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 1 (January 2003) 9.

¹³ Loren L. Johns and Douglas B. Miller, “The Signs as Witnesses in the Fourth Gospel: Reexamining the Evidence,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 56, No. 3 (July 1994) 531-532.

¹⁴ Loren L. Johns and Douglas B. Miller, “The Signs as Witnesses in the Fourth Gospel: Reexamining the Evidence,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 56, No. 3 (July 1994) 530.

¹⁵ 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) 241, 259.

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relationships, to a type of primacy of political correctness.¹⁶ Paul does not want the Corinthians eating meat sacrificed to idols if some Christians would interpret that meal as idolatry.¹⁷ Similarly, the appearances of racism are unsuited to Christian living.

Recapitulating, racism in the United States is about the sign of color, as a signifier of hatred, the opposite of Gospel love. These Eucharistic readings are about thanksgiving for the love of God expressed as love of neighbor, across racial lines.

For more on sources see the Appendix file.

¹⁶ Richard A. Horsley, "Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 8—10," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly Vol. 40, No. 4 (October 1978) 574, 579, 582, 586, 589.

¹⁷ See Calvin J. Roetzel, review of Frank J. Matera, II Corinthians: A Commentary in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 66, No. 4 (October 2004) 661-662.