

Liturgical Reflections 2008

1 January, Octave of Christmas or Mother of God.

Today's Gospel (Lk 2.16-21) has an anonymous angel appearing to the shepherds who announces the birth of Jesus Christ. I say anonymous, having noted in the last entries of '07 that an unknown angel appeared to Joseph compared with the known angel (Gabriel) to Mary. 'They (shepherds) made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child' (vs. 17). The word rhema is used for 'saying', often compared with the more familiar logos (word). It refers more to the subject matter or content of speech which has a definite meaning. Even though this rhema pertained to what the anonymous angel told the shepherds, it is closely tied in with his appearance and the multitude of angels glorifying God. Thus rhema here communicates (angelic) vision, not just meaningful speech.

Mary is presented as having 'kept all these things, pondering them in her heart' (vs. 19). Here we have a two-fold action: 1) keeping or suntereo which implies keeping or preserving something in a good condition and 2) pondering or sumballo which literally means throwing things together in the sense of comparing to reach a conclusion. Both verbs relate to the shepherds' rhema, again, the subject matter of what had been spoken. Only with Mary it's enhanced by the wondering of 'all who heard it,' i.e., the rhema.

Today is the octave of Christmas or 'end of eight days' (vs. 21) when, according to Jewish custom, Jesus was circumcised. More importantly, it was when he received 'the name given by the angel' which implies that for a whole week he had gone without a name.

As for the Incarnation with regard to a given (liturgical) year, consider several parts. It begins at/around March 25 with the Annunciation. From there we have nine months of pregnancy spreading in a hidden fashion throughout most of the year which culminates in Jesus' birth, December 25. Then the Christmas season continues forty days like the forty days after Easter to Pentecost, albeit with not as much force because with Pentecost, another divine person is going to be revealed. That is to say, Christmas reaches its culmination on February 2, the Presentation. Should we look at this spread of time across the calendar, we find that the physical presence of Jesus, as it were, is present but in a hidden fashion, for the bulk of the year. Technically speaking, he is not physically present from the Presentation to the Annunciation (February 2-March 25), about 1 ½ months, which is quite short. Then that time is when spring is getting underway after the dormancy of winter.

As for today as New Year, more than a few people don't find it meaningful, perhaps because due to the superficiality of celebrations and all that implies. But if we view a given new year liturgically, as having started with First Vespers of the First Sunday of Advent, things are quite different. Thus today as Octave of Christmas brings to close the first part of this new year...on a secular calendar it just begins but on a liturgical one it marks a completion.

6 January, Epiphany.

Today's Gospel (Mt 2.1-12) has the familiar yet thoroughly mysterious account of the wise men or Magi visiting the infant Jesus. It contains three numinous elements: Herod inquiring of his priests and scribes as to where Christ was to be born, his

summoning of the wise men themselves as to this event and finally, the same men being warned in a dream not to return to Herod. I might add a fourth or vs. 13 where an anonymous angel appeared to Joseph bidding him to take Jesus to Egypt.

As to the priests and scribes, without hesitation and with confidence they found a quote from Micah (5.2) that a ruler will come from Bethlehem. Several verses later Micah says that when the Assyrians enter Israel, seven shepherds and eight princes will defeat them...in other words, an external invasion. Surely Herod's advisors must have read the rest of Micah and have been familiar with the fuller context. I might add that not only was Herod troubled but all of Jerusalem and rightly so because if they knew Micah's prophecy, an invasion was immanent. Keep in mind that this invasion would come from east of Jerusalem whereas the more immediate threat was from Rome, located in the west. Confusion as to which direction would come the invasion was the tip-off that made Herod ask the wise men to search out the child with which they complied. Either they did this out of fear, simplicity or a desire to satisfy Herod. The text isn't exactly clear. Chances are that Herod sent spies after them which led to the slaughter of the innocents later in chapter two. Vs. 11 has the wise men entering a house, contrary to popular images of them at a manger.

As for the famous star which led the Magi to the exact spot where Jesus was, it's location was in the east. If we took that literally, the Magi, traditionally associated with Persia, would have seen it east of their homeland, the opposite direction of Jerusalem. Thus the star moved westwards, over the Magi and then to Bethlehem. This apparently confusing celestial movement had prompted Herod to ask his priests and scribes who used Micah to identify Bethlehem. If they didn't come up with a place real fast, maybe they thought the star would have kept moving which would bring it out over the Mediterranean Sea, well past the Promised Land.

13 January, Baptism of the Lord.

Today's Gospel is Mt 3.13-17 which begins straight away with John expressing a desire to Jesus that he not be baptized by him. Nothing is said about John recognizing Jesus despite all John's proclamation until this precise moment of recognition. John gives in when Jesus says 'For thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness (dikaiosune).' Mention of this word rang a bell with John in that it confirmed his preaching of the yet as unknown one to come. There's no identification of Jesus as Messiah or the like, just the 'kingdom of God' (vs. 2) and one who will come after John to proclaim it. That leaves it pretty much open as to the form this person will assume. John has been the voice (phone) crying in the wilderness whose time has not come to be silenced in favor of the word (logos). We could say that at this event, the baptism, John's phone is silenced.

Immediately after Jesus is baptized he leaves John as well as dikaiosune which just now has been brought to completion. The Gospel records Jesus as alone having seen the dove (Holy Spirit) descending upon him. Surely John must have seen it as well and perhaps even heard 'a voice' (vs. 17) with regard to Jesus as beloved son. Note that this voice is not specifically identified, only that it came from heaven. It brings to fulfillment John's 'voice crying in the wilderness,' for from this point onwards the 'voice' from heaven begins a new era, the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Christ's baptism sets the stage for the transition from the Advent-Christmas season to that of Lent, for immediately afterwards we have Jesus in the wilderness where he is tempted by the devil.

20 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

As of today we're back in Ordinary Time, this being the Second Sunday; apparently the Church has no First Sunday. Anyway, 2008 has just two 'ordinary' Sundays because Ash Wednesday is the earliest it can be, 6 February. Much later (1 June) does the Church resume 'ordinary' Sundays with the ninth one.

Last week we had Matthew's account of Jesus being baptized and today, John's (Jn 1.29-34). Several verses beforehand John says to the Pharisees that the Christ stands among you whom you do not know (vs. 27), implying that Jesus was already present in the crowd. Not only that, but he his origin is from the Jewish people. The problem was that they failed to recognize him which can apply to the bulk of Jesus' life in Nazareth of which we (and presumably the Jews) have no account. Compare their not-knowing with two instances of John's not-knowing (vss. 31 & 33), very different.

When Jesus does approach the Jordan, John recognizes him (vs. 29) by reason of having been a voice crying in the wilderness. I.e., this voice (phone) recognizes the logos as noted in last week's entry or as Lamb of God. Compare this to having recognized him as Son of God in vs. 34 or only after the Spirit's presence upon Jesus. Next John says that Jesus 'ranks before me, for he was before me' (vs. 30). We have a preposition (emprosthen, in front of) and an adjective protos (first) with respect to Christ, that is two ways of describing Jesus as 'first.' Even so, John claims that he did not know him but certainly must have had insight as to this emprosthen/protos or being a phone as opposed to logos. If not, he would have been unable to fulfill his crying (as phone) in the wilderness. John enhances his role as phone regarding logos by claiming that although he did not know him, his vocation as phone was that Jesus be revealed to Israel (vs. 31). Here the verb is phaneroo (to make evident) to Israel him already present 'among you' as noted in the first paragraph.

We have a second confession of John's ignorance regarding Jesus in vs. 33 or when he beheld the Spirit descending upon Jesus. John claims that there is one who sent him to baptize with water. No specific identity is given but most likely it is the Father since it is in reference to the Spirit and Jesus. It is only when John sees the Spirit does he both see and bear witness that Jesus is Son of God. That is to say, not only does John see but fulfills this seeing with martureo, to confirm. Compare martureo with phaneroo of vs. 31. Anyone can assent to the second, but only those who acknowledge Jesus as Lamb of God and Son of God can assent to the second.

27 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel is Mt 4.12-23 which skips over Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, which makes sense this liturgical year because Lent is so early. Right after the arrest of John the Baptist Jesus starts his public ministry, to carry it on and bring to completion. Matthew begins the ministry with a quote from Isaiah 9.1-2 mentioning Zebulun and Naphtali which "were brought into contempt" as the original Hebrew says. I.e., those two places were in the way of the Assyrian invasion recounted in 2 Kg 15.29. Actually vs. 2 of Isaiah reads in full, "In the former time he brought into contempt the

land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.” In other words, Jesus intimates that not only his preaching is for the Jews but for the Gentiles.

Vs. 2 of Isaiah reads, “The people who sat in darkness” which in Hebrew has the word for “going” as opposed to a static sitting. It’s more poignant in that the people were active in this darkness, not just hanging around passively. All in all vs. 2 doesn’t seem that flattering in light of earlier Jewish tradition, actually a presumptuous by Jesus to the untrained eye. It is reminiscent of the wise men who “had seen a star in the east which went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was” (2.9). In the Gospel passage at hand this star, if you will, has changed into a “great light” foretold by Isaiah.

After the insertion of Isaiah’s prophecy we have vs. 17 with Jesus’ first words intended for a public audience: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” It is exactly what John the Baptist said in 3.2 which initially makes it confusing to distinguish between the message of John and Jesus. Although there’s no account of John gathering disciples, chances are they came to him because they heard him as a “voice of one crying in the wilderness.” Such is the nature of a sound, any sound, to attract one’s attention. On the other hand, a light...and this means Jesus as “a great light” noted above...gets attention by silent illumination, not by making sound. Thus Jesus walking along the Sea of Galilee is a light who dawned upon his first disciples. Such a light attracts different than a sound, for “immediately they left their nets and followed him” (vs. 20).

2 February, Presentation of the Lord

Today completes the Christmas season which began some forty days earlier. The Gospel (Lk 2.22-40) begins with Jesus’ parents going up (the ascent for religious worship is commemorated in the Psalms of Ascent, Pss 120-134) to Jerusalem for the purification after childbirth prescribed in Lev 12.2-8. This calls for the sacrifice of a lamb which apparently Mary and Joseph couldn’t afford, the Gospel quoting Leviticus in vs. 24 (“pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons”) but without reference to the lamb.

Simeon is described as “righteous and devout (eulabes),” the latter being translated literally as “taking hold well” which fits in nicely with vs. 28, “he took him up in his arms.” Nothing specific is said whether or not Simeon was a priest who “came into the temple,” though that can be assumed because Leviticus requires it. Compare Simeon’s coming into the temple with Anna who “did not depart from the temple” in vs. 37. Simeon was looking forward to the “consolation (paraklesis) of Israel” (vs. 25), a term closely related to Paraklete or Holy Spirit in John’s Gospel. This term can also mean a calling to one’s aid or exhortation. There are two other references to the Spirit concerning Simeon: “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit” and “inspired (literally, led in the Spirit) by the Spirit” (vss. 26 & 27). The word for “revealed” here is *chrematizo* which can be used in response to an oracle.

Simeon is a kind of forerunner to John the Baptist in his prophetic utterances (vss. 29-32) which makes one wonder if John heard about him later on. Chances are that he did and pondered over those words in the desert which eventually formed the core of his message of repentance.

In vs. 34 Simeon says to Mary that Jesus is a sign (*semeion*: can apply as an omen from the gods)...not just a sign but one “that is spoken against.” The Greek literally

reads “into a sign.” The purpose of such antilego (to contradict, refute) is “that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” Here the verb is apokalupto which suggests an uncovering which can apply more to a general audience compared with chrematizo noted above (“it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit”), something more private. After all, this apokalupto fits in with Simeon calling Christ “a light for revelation (apokalupsis) to the Gentiles” (vs. 32). The object of apokalupto is dialogismos or “thoughts which intimated by the preposition dia pertains to thoughts of a calculating nature, not simply passing fancies we may entertain.

As for vs. 35 (in parentheses, RSV), it reads, “a sword will pierce through your own soul also.” Rhomphaia is the word for sword, more like a scimitar or a large, curved weapon which penetrates Mary’s psuche or soul, a faculty which essentially is invisible.

Finally we have the prophetess Anna who “did not depart from the temple” (vs. 37). Anna “gave thanks” (anthomologeomai, vs. 38), a verb suggesting making a mutual agreement. It can fit in with here continual presence in the temple which primed her for recognition of Jesus. No reference to the Holy Spirit as with Simeon is noted; it can be said that she had no requirement for such a Paraklete. Anna addresses other people present (“and spoke of him to all”) about the “redemption (lutrosis, a releasing) of Jerusalem.” Note reference to Jerusalem, not Israel as a whole.

Today’s Gospel concludes with “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom (Sophia); and the favor (charis, grace) of God was upon him.” Compare this charis upon Jesus with the Spirit upon Simeon (vs. 25).

3 February, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today is the last Sunday in Ordinary Time with Ash Wednesday this coming week. Just before a major block of liturgical time such as Lent-Easter...actually the longest of the year, some four months...we get a sense that something important lies just over the horizon. And so we bid farewell to Ordinary Time until 1 June when it resumes once again. Thus with respect to Lent-Easter Ordinary Time doesn’t have a clean cut-off point, but that major block of time is inserted within it. One of the most important aspects of this four month insertion is that we’re invited to alter our perception of time. I.e., for an “ordinary” one to one which is pertinent to (in this more immediate example) one proper for Lent.

Today’s Gospel consists of the Beatitudes (Mt 5.1-12), shortly after Jesus chose his 12 disciples, a good way to set the tone for the beginning of Lent. Each beatitude begins with “blessed” or makarios. As I’ve noted elsewhere, makarios is a weak adjective for the Hebrew 1 ‘ashry which begins the Psalter (“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked”). Here ‘ashry is closely associated with two other words, “the man” (ha’ysh) and “which” (‘asher). ‘Ashry derives from the Hebrew verbal root ‘ashar whose fundamental meaning is straightness which makes sense in the direction-towards-which the psalmist defines blessedness. Note that the relative pronoun, ‘asher is derived from this root, signifying a transitional state; it is associated with “man,” ‘ysh. Thus blessedness is an integral component of our human constitution. Thus we may say that to be ‘ashry implies being in a state of transition, of moving forward, of not standing still. Such blessedness is like that relative pronoun, ‘asher, signifying continuous alteration. As for the Beatitudes, the characteristics which Jesus mentions fit in well with this “transitional” nature of ‘ashry: poor, mourn, meek, righteousness,

merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, those who are persecuted. While essential for Christian living, it is also liberating to realize the transitional or provisional nature of the virtues.

6 February, Ash Wednesday

As I noted earlier, Lent is inserted within the larger stream of Ordinary Time. A deeper understanding of this season (along with Easter which follows immediately) centers upon a perception of time. Now we have a four month block of Lent-Easter time, if you will, which lifts our attention to another plane. Just being aware of the different quality of time's passage for the period of four months is an accomplishment.

Today's Gospel (Mt 6.1-6; 16-18) starts us off with advice to practice our piety (dikaiousune) in a hidden fashion. This term translates better as righteousness or what is right. Note two uses of the preposition pros: "before men" and "to be seen by them" (actually the first has emprosthen, similar).

As far as practicing good "in secret" (en to krupto), it occurs in three groups with two references each in this Gospel excerpt, all with reference to God the Father seeing thus: 1) "so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." 2) "Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." 3) "that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." It might be noted that in the context of these references Jesus gives the Our Father. In sum, we have the Father seeing in secret, not openly. As for the "room" of #2, the Greek term is tameion which is a private room or storehouse where precious household items are kept. All in all, this seeing in secret goes on continuously. It is a matter of us becoming conscious of it and aligning this awareness with that dikaionsune noted in vs. 1.

In conclusion, God's seeing in secret can be a way of changing our perception of time during Lent compared with the just completed Ordinary Time.

10 February, First Sunday of Lent

In a sense, Lent kicks off today, the first three days from Ash Wednesday being a kind of warm-up. Traditionally this First Sunday commences with Christ's temptation in the desert (Mt 4.1-11), right after his baptism. Since the Baptism was several weeks ago, memory of that event is fresh in our minds, so this year it's easier to make the transition.

The Gospel begins with Jesus entering the desert under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which descended upon him after his baptism (3.16). There are three names for the one tempting him: devil, tempter and Satan. Three temptations are presented to which Jesus gives an Old Testament response. Number 1 & 3 take place in the wilderness after the Israelites left Egypt, similar to Christ's situation in the desert. They are as follows:

- 1) Dt 8.3: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." The Hebrew lacks "word" yet has the source of human life issuing from God's mouth which suggests that he is speaking continuously or that his mouth is always open.

- 2) Ps 91.11-12: “He will give his angels charge of you...On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” The Hebrew has “to keep you in all your ways.” It is interesting that the next verse reads, “You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.” I.e., easy to apply to the devil who was tempting Jesus.
- 3) Dt 6.13: “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” The Hebrew runs, “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and swear by his name.”

Note that the Gospel says that Jesus was hungry only after forty days and nights, not specifically during that period of time. If taken literally, the other two temptations occurred then as well. Finally we have “angels came and ministered to him.” That would make sense for the second temptation when he took Jesus to “the holy city” or from the desert and set him on the temple’s pinnacle. Thus it is not unimaginable that the three temptations occurred after the forty days of isolation.

Nothing more specific is given as to this ministration, but gathering from the three Old Testament quotes, they could pertain to physical nourishment, keeping (shamar is the Hebrew, often applied to the Torah and frequently used in Ps 119), and worshiping God which includes serving. The Gospel says nothing about Jesus completing his forty days in the desert.

17 February, Second Sunday of Lent

Each year the Church gives us the Transfiguration (Mt 17.1-9) towards the beginning of Lent by way of consolation or putting this season in perspective. It occurs upon “a high mountain.” Usually such a place has a very limited area, so there was little room for Jesus, Peter, James and John. The Greek word for “transfigured” is metamorphoo, to change the form of...not in the sense of altering the human form but of allowing the divine to shine through. It was only when Moses and Elijah appeared that Peter desired to make “three booths” or skene which properly means tents. Again, keep in mind that the limited area of the mountain peak could barely accommodate three tents, let alone any for the three disciples. Shortly afterwards a bright cloud overshadowed them, reminiscent of Mt. Sinai yet different from it: “And the people stood afar off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness (haraphel) where God was” (Ex 20.21).

Jesus is at pains to put this incident in perspective or in a secondary role vis-à-vis the resurrection: “Tell no one the vision (of the metamorphoo) until the Son of man is raised from the dead” (vs. 9). Compared with the transfiguration, the resurrected Jesus does not appear in brightness but in ordinary human form.

24 February, Third Sunday of Lent

Today’s Gospel (Jn 4.5-42) is quite long, certainly very full, so only a few points will be touched upon here, that is, as related to the Genesis incident of Jacob at the well. The lengthy conversation with a Samaritan woman takes place at Sychar, “near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph” (vs. 5). The Genesis verse reads (33.19-20), “And from the

sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he (Jacob) bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent. There he erected an altar and called it El-Eloche-Israel (God, the God of Israel)." The proper name Sychar isn't mentioned here but refers to this place. Jacob builds this altar immediately after his reconciliation with his brother Esau whom earlier he defrauded of his birthright. Another reference to Shechem and Joseph is 48.22: "Moreover I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope (shekem or shoulder) which I took from the land of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow." Here Joseph was buried (Jos 24.32) which "became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph." This fulfilled Joseph's request in 50.24-5) not to be buried in Egypt but to be carried out by Moses in Ex 13.19 right before crossing the Red Sea.

Jacob is associated with meeting Rachel, his future wife, at a well (chapter 29) with a large stone which only many of shepherds could remove. However, Jacob was able to remove it on his own. This is not the Gospel well but is located in "the land of the people of the east" (29.1).

There is an interesting parallel with Jesus' conversation in Gen 24 when the anonymous servant of Abraham is sent to fetch a wife for Isaac (Jacob's father). In a sense he prefigures Jesus when he "gazed at Rebekah in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not." (vs. 21). Such gazing may correspond to Jesus' inquiry of the Samaritan woman about her background. Rebekah, like the Samaritan woman, ran to get other people. For the former, the key words are "when he (Laban) heard the words of Rebekah his sister, 'Thus the man spoke to me,' he went to the man" (vs. 30). For the latter, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did" (vs. 29).

Thus Jesus' words about worshiping the Father "in spirit and in truth" has this rich background.

2 March, Third Sunday of Lent

Today's Gospel (Jn 9-1-41)...which takes up Chapter Nine in its entirety...is like last Sunday's in that it gives a detailed conversation, this time with Jesus and the blind man whom he had just healed. Such details are important during this Lenten season in order to grasp more fully what is about to transpire in future conversations during Holy Week. Jesus begins by stating the purpose of the miracle he's about to perform: "that the works of God might be made manifest in him." The Greek verb is *phaino* which implies a bringing to light for the purpose of explanation. He continues with "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night comes when no one can work." This better situates *phaino* or *vis-à-vis* darkness. Note the word "sent:" it is similar in meaning to the pool of Siloam ("which means sent") in which the blind man washes and receives his sight.

After this we have a detailed dialogue between the blind man and Pharisees who turned out to be more blind than the man whose eyes were restored to health.

At the end of this dialogue we have the verse, “Jesus heard that they had cast him out.” Jesus didn’t hear directly, but word quickly traveled from the Pharisees to him which indicates the close-knit society and the way information was transmitted. Jesus responds to the blind man’s question (“Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?”) that “You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to (meta: with) you.” In the man’s question, the Greek literally reads, “that I may believe into (eis) him.” Here Jesus does not come out with a direct statement such as “I am the one who speaks with you.” Such indirectness is more suggestive when it comes to things divine, almost as though Jesus were speaking about himself in an impersonal or indirect fashion. A direct statement is rare; it would spoil the sense of mystery and freedom necessary for a person to assent to it.

9 March, Fifth Sunday of Lent

Today’s Gospel (Jn 11.1-45) is the third in a series of lengthy conversations Jesus has with various people, this time with dear friends, Martha and Mary. This one culminates with the resurrection of Lazarus, just before Jesus’ crucifixion. Little is known about him nor do we have any recorded words by him. It’s interesting to reflect upon Lazarus’ view of death and resurrection of Jesus, having been there, as it were, with fresh memories from after the grave. Of all people, he must have known first hand what transpired and where Jesus “went” after his death and before his resurrection. Lazarus requires help to remove his burial clothing whereas with the resurrection of Jesus, the “linen clothes were lying there” (20.6). There comes to mind the Lazarus of the parable, of being in Abraham’s bosom (Lk 16.22). In that instance the rich man bids Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to warn them about impending torment. To this Abraham responds that “They have Moses and the prophets;” let them hear them” (Lk 16. 29). Surely the newly resurrected Lazarus read the scriptures in a new light; then again, he was able to understand Jesus’ words about these scriptures predicting what was to happen. The New Testament has many references to the disciples not being able to understand the predictions until after the resurrection of Jesus. And so, when the “real” Lazarus heard of that parable later on as he must have, he was in a unique position with insight into the afterlife as well as knowledge that he will die a second time. Actually, Lazarus is the only person recorded who has died twice and rose once.

16 March, Palm Sunday

Yesterday was the feast of St Joseph, transferred, this year because of Holy Week. A good patron to begin the week in that we have no record of him having spoken. That is to say, the silence of Joseph can be aligned with the silence of Jesus as he proceeds through the various steps of his passion and death. While no account of Joseph being alive at this time is given, one wonders if he were present and what he may have been thinking.

The “short” form of today’s Gospel is Mt 21.1-11, his entry into Jerusalem, one week before his resurrection. Between then and his arrest we have in Matthew’s Gospel several important parables worth reading to get a sense of Holy Week: that of the vineyard, marriage feast, fig tree, ten maidens, distribution of talents and finally, the great judgment.

Today's Gospel begins with a quote from Zechariah 9:9: ("Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." The key description is "humble" or in Hebrew, haney, which derives from the verbal root hanah. This term has multiple meanings: to sing, answer, be afflicted. Such hanah may be compared with "rejoice" or gyl which connotes rejoicing in the context of leaping or performing a dance in a circle.

The crowds lay their garments of the road to receive Christ while others cut branches from trees. John's Gospel (12.13) has the Greek word phoinix or palm branches. From this term comes the bird of mythology which dies in fire and rises anew. Matthew has the people crying out "hosanna to the Son of David!" in vs. 9 which is lifted from Ps 118.25-6. There "hosanna" comes from the Hebrew hoshyha na or "please save." The verbal root yashah is that from which the proper name "Jesus" is derived, the significance of which most likely was not grasped by those uttering it.

Immediately upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus drives out the money-changers in the temple after which he leaves for Bethany on the slope of the Mount of Olives and home to Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Note that last Sunday we had the resurrection of Lazarus. Perhaps Jesus wanted to speak with him one week afterwards and one week prior to his own resurrection.

30 March, Second Sunday of Easter

Today completes the Easter Octave; each day of the past week holds the same force as Easter Sunday which bestows a special character, symbolic of an unending, undying reality. Only Christmas has an octave. Now that we've heard accounts about the resurrection during the week, after today there will be a subtle shift between that event and anticipation of the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. Thrown into the mix is Christ's ascension into heaven, nine days before Pentecost, just as important. So from now until Ascension we have Christ semi-present upon the earth. From the Ascension until Pentecost nine days later he is fully absent until the Spirit comes, making those nine days quite unique.

Today's Gospel (Jn 20.19-31) takes place "on the first day of the week" or one week after Christ rose from the dead. We find the disciples behind closed doors, quite unlike the night before Jesus suffered, when Jerusalem was busy with Passover. The disciples "were glad when they saw the Lord," a rather bland statement, which shows no amazement at Christ's presence among them. He "breathed upon them," a way to impart the Holy Spirit. However, this giving is more specific than Pentecost, for the disciples only, for it pertains to the forgiveness of sins. No witness are present as when the Spirit descended. Actually, that event is the third when we have the disciples gathered in one place.

Thomas was absent when Jesus breathed upon the disciples, so apparently he did not receive this gift of forgiveness in the Holy Spirit. He demands to feel Christ's wounds in order to believe. For example, vs. 25 reads "place my finger...and place my hand." The

Greek verb is ballo which connotes a more vigorous action of casting as opposed to a simple placing and touching. Thomas doesn't get a chance to ballo until another week had passed, again, with the doors being shut. Perhaps 19.37 can refer to Thomas, that is, the verse from Zechariah 12.10: "when they look on him whom they have pierced." This refers to Jesus on the cross after he died; no indication is that Thomas was there, so it can apply to him in a special way or when Jesus had risen from the dead.

The Zechariah verse reads in full, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that when they look on him who they have pierced, they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly over him as one weeps over a first-born." This verse, like the Gospel scene, can apply to the Spirit's out-pouring on Pentecost. The Hebrew verb for "pierce" is daqar which fundamentally means being run through by a sword. It fits in with Thomas' ballo or allows plenty of room for the casting of his hand into Jesus' wounds.

6 April, Third Sunday of Easter

Today's Gospel (Lk 24.13-35) doesn't deal with the resurrection per se but with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It occurs "that very day" (vs. 13) or the evening of the day of resurrection, so it is very immediate to the event. The disciples were "discussing together" what had happened or suzeteo which better translates as seeking together. This more intense verbal intercourse sets the condition for them to be unaware of Jesus approaching and walk along with them. Not only that, the disciples didn't recognize him, epigignosko or literally, know-upon. It's as though the su (or sum, with: indicates the intensity of discussion) of suzeteo precluded the epi (or upon-ness: the intensity of knowing) of epigignosko. I.e., the two conflicted making for blindness as to recognizing Jesus.

Finally Jesus interrupts with "What is the conversation?" The Greek has hoi logoi or "the words." Next the disciples present Jesus with the result of their common suzeteo which consists in a recount of the preceding day's events. Despite the intensity suggested by this verb, Jesus calls his fellow-walkers "foolish and slow of heart"...not with reference to what happened to Jesus but with regards to "all that the prophets have spoken." In a sense, Jesus is taking their minds off himself and shifting to the scriptures where the prophets foretold what occurred the past few days. This ignorance is signified by the adjective anoetos (foolish) which better runs as not thought upon, not reflected upon or failing to apply the power of nous mind which is endowed with the power of perception.

Despite "beginning with Moses and all the prophets," the disciples remained anoetos. It was only later when Jesus broke bread that their "eyes were opened and recognized him." That is to say, this gesture made them epigignosko and shed fully their suzeteo as noted above. In addition to this, we have two openings: one of the disciples' eyes (immediately afterwards Jesus vanishes) and another of the scriptures. The second took place on the road (cf. vs. 32) as opposed to the breaking of bread.

Despite the evening hour, the disciples hastened to Jerusalem, that is, or during the night. They had no concern about finding their way in the darkness because they brought along

that burning in their hearts when Jesus was speaking with them (cf. vs. 32). The impartation of this burning took place while they were on the road, that is, while it was still light. Recollection of that burning, especially after Jesus broke bread, was more than enough to guide the disciples back to Jerusalem in the darkness.

13 April, Fourth Sunday of Easter

This is the first Easter Sunday with a Gospel (Jn 10.1-10) not about the resurrection; that is to say, the second and third Sundays had them but not for the rest of the Easter season. Despite the paucity of accounts, from Easter Sunday one can look back from the resurrection to various aspects of Jesus' statements and parables about it...not that most speak directly of the resurrection but fit in neatly with it.

Today's Gospel has Jesus as a door to a sheepfold, the Greek word being *thura* meaning more of a double or folding gate. It gives the impression that to enter you have to push against the center of this *thura* which lets you in automatically. However, Jesus does not call himself here a *thura* but a *thuroros* or door-keeper. That comes in vs. 7. This first half of the Gospel, if you will, deals with the shepherd and sheep exiting the gate. Jesus makes a distinction between those sheep who recognize the shepherd's voice and a stranger (*allogrios*: can connote latent hostility) who doesn't. Right after this statement comes "but they did not understand what he was saying to them." That is to say, Jesus' listeners were not quite strangers but at the point where they could become his sheep by paying attention or giving way to that latent hostility of *allogrios*.

The second part of today's Gospel has Jesus identifying himself as *thura* (vs. 7) compared to a *thuroros*. An expanded sense of this Greek word is a porter...not just opening and closing doors but of escorting people with baggage, most likely to their rooms. Then in vs. 9 he calls himself a *thura* or door which operates both ways as opposed to going out (vs. 3). So we have Jesus as gate and its keeper, both functioning simultaneously. Finally, this two-fold nature is life: "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly" (vs. 10). One gets the impression that you can participate in both *thura* and *thuroros*.

20 April, Fifth Sunday of Easter

Today's Gospel (Jn 14.1-12) takes place at the Last Supper, three days before Christ's resurrection which centers around the "Father's house" (*oikia*) of vs. 2 which has "many mansions" or *mone*, from the verb *meno*, to stay or tarry. It's a paradox of sorts: *oikia* signifies an establishment where family members abide whereas *mone* is a temporary place, not unlike a hotel or motel. Compare *mone* with *kataluma* of Lk 2.7 (inn) which connotes something like a military billet and therefore a large, open barracks with no privacy. Thus a *mone* may be viewed as an attachment to an *oikia* or rooms beneath it, with the permanent residents living above. The English "mansions" is misleading, for it gives the impression that *mone* is much larger than an *oikia*. "If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" These words follow after this *oikia/mone* statement, almost to reassure the disciples that such a strange living place does exist and belongs to the Father.

Most likely the image just presented made the disciples question Jesus, for then he presents himself as the “way” or hodos in conjunction with further reassuring words as truth and life. This particular hodos leads to the oikia with mone. Obviously they wish to know more about the proprietor, hence Philip asks “show us the Father and we shall be satisfied” (vs. 8). That offers Jesus an opportunity to say that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. Not only that, but the Father “dwells in me” (vs. 10). The verb is meno, root of mone. That implies that Jesus, whose Father owns the oikia, lives in the section called mone or along with the temporary guests. But if Jesus is truth and life in addition to the way (way in the sense of leading to this unique household), the intended residents will have the opportunity, so to speak, of moving into the oikia after being in the mone and therefore partaking of the rights and privileges of what oikia, a fundamental institution of the ancient world.

27 April, Sixth Sunday of Easter

Today’s Gospel (Jn 14.15-21) follows upon the heels of vss. 1-12 which last week were described in terms of the distinction between oikia (the Father’s house) and mone (mansions or better, an annex to an oikia). Attention shifts from Jesus and the oikia’s proprietor, the Father, to the Holy Spirit who is presented as “another Counselor” or parakletos, one who both advocates and comforts. “Another” is a bit ambiguous: is it another with regard to the Father alone, Jesus alone or Father and Jesus? Note the giver of parakletos, the Father: with this in mind, Jesus could be the other parakletos only.

This parakletos or Spirit is familiar to the disciples in a paradoxical fashion because “he dwells in you” (vs. 17)...paradoxical because the disciples give no indication they are aware of this residency (It will reach fulfillment at Pentecost, 50 days later). However, this verse is two-fold: “dwells in you” as well as “will be in you:” present and future tenses combined. The verb for “dwells” is meno, the verbal root for mone or “mansion” already discussed. Thus the other parakletos already is present compared with the dwelling or meno pertinent to the oikia/mone image.

Only the Spirit is able to resolve the double nature of oikia/mone, a true revelation. It will be fulfilled “in that day” (vs. 20) or when “you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” Note the lack of verbs here in the sense of meno: in place of that we have a being-in of Father, Son, Spirit and disciples which combine yet transcend the oikia/mone image. The image comes to full embodiment in vs. 23: “we will come to him and make our home with him.” The Greek has mone for home: that means the Father or head of the oikia will enter the mone or so-called temporary apartments along with the Son. The preposition para for “with him” suggests an abiding alongside: somewhat ambiguous in that it involves intimacy and distance. Such coming of Father and Son depend upon agapao (the doing of agape) which is two-fold in vs. 23: from people to Jesus and from the Father to them.

1 May 2008, Ascension Thursday

Today’s first reading (Acts 1.1-11) deals with Christ’s ascension. Acts’ author (St. Luke) begins with “I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles

whom he had chosen.” “Began” or archo implies the act of governing from which comes the noun arche, beginning, authority. In other words, it has greater meaning for Christ’s “doing and teaching” in that they flow from his divine arche. Both run their course until “the day when he was taken up” or analambano, a verb used in the passive which connotes restoration and resumption concerning such “doing and teaching” in light of Christ’s divine arche.

“After he had given commandment” or entellomai pertains to instruction imparted verbally. And so we have Christ actively engaged through the Holy Spirit and passively “taken up” by the (unmentioned) Father. Luke says that this entellomai was given to the apostles, not to other people. Not that such teaching was esoteric or private but imparted in concentrated form, as it were, during the lifetime of Jesus when later like a kernel it will blossom in the church.

Vs. 3 expressly mentions 40 days or the time after Christ’s resurrection, a period marked by “many proofs” or tekmerion, a sure sign. This noun is allied with “appearing to them during forty days,” the verb being optanomai which doesn’t refer to a vision but presenting oneself to another person. During this 40 day period there’s a shift from entellomai or giving commandment to this otanomai with respect to the “kingdom of God.” Jesus’ very speaking about it is an otanomai...a presenting...which only can occur in his resurrected state as opposed to his corporeal one which is proper to entellomai. It’s a kind of half-way house, if you will, between Christ present in bodily form and Christ present through the Spirit.

Vs. 4 refines this by the verb sunalizo, an alternative of sunaulizomai, staying with. The verb, minus the preposition sun prefixed to it, means staying in the courtyard or bivouacking just outside a house, something temporary, which fits in with the 40 days at hand. This temporary staying-with is situated within the context of Jesus bidding his disciples “not to depart from Jerusalem, the verb being chorizomai, more a separation from a given place. That’s important due to the temple’s location in Jerusalem. It’s okay to chorizomai after there comes the “promise of the Father” or epaggelia (consent, decision). Such a promise hearkens back to when “John baptized with water, but...you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (vs. 5). Hear Christ refreshes his disciples’ collective memory of John some three years earlier or just prior to when Jesus entered his ministry.

The rather narrow confines of Jerusalem in which the disciples are to remain is essential to receive the Holy Spirit. It’s a kind of holy womb from which the church will emerge 9 days after Christ’s ascension into heaven. Vs. 8 speaks of this: “you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem...and to the end of the earth.” Here we have an arche...a point of origin...noted above from which flowed Christ’s “doing and teaching” now carried out by the church. Immediately after Jesus speaks these words “he was lifted up,” words reminiscent of Elijah’s ascension in 2Kg 2.9-12. The Acts account suggest humor in a situation commonly not taken as such. For it says that while the disciples were looking up into heaven where Christ had just ascended, two men appeared asking “why do you stand looking into heaven” (vs. 11)? With the same type of immediacy they say that

Christ “will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” Tropos is the word for “way” and has multiple means such as course, fashion, way of life, custom. Thus getting familiar with the way or tropos of Christ’s ascent primes us for his return which will have the same immediacy often spoken of in the Gospels.

4 May 2008, Seventh Sunday of Easter

The first reading (Acts 1.12-14) continues on the heels of last Thursday’s account of the ascension. It is fitting for this unique Sunday in between the Ascension and Pentecost or between Christ going up and the Holy Spirit coming down. The brief reading has the apostles returning to Jerusalem, the “upper room” or huperoon, something like an attic or study. Here they were 1) of “one accord” or proskartero...devoted to, keeping close company with...the intensity of which is signified by the preposition pros (towards which) prefixed to the verb. 2) “devoted themselves to prayer” or homothumadon...and adverb meaning with one mind, common consent. The text first mentions the apostles followed by “the women and Mary...with his brothers.” Despite their importance, in this situation prior to the Holy Spirit’s descent attention shifts to the apostles, foundations of the soon-to-be established church.

That’s all we have for today, really, keeping with the tone of this “in between” Sunday as we await Pentecost a week later. It sets up a certain suspense and anticipation, all located within the “upper room” where presumably everyone remained. However, vs. 15 continues with Peter apparently having stepped outside and preaching, his theme being that of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus followed by the choosing of Matthias to replace Judas. Only when the number twelve was restored are the apostles prepared to receive the Holy Spirit. It’s kind of like a table with the incorrect amount of supports (eleven): a twelfth is needed to make it more stable to receive the Spirit’s kavod or weight.

11 May 2008, Pentecost

Today sums up an entire stretch of liturgical time that commenced with 13 weeks and 4 days ago, Ash Wednesday. It was broken into two major sections: Lent and Easter, pretty much equal. We could specify an added “novena” time, that nine day period from Ascension Thursday until today. These days are unique in that Jesus is not present on earth, liturgically speaking. Actually, the “novena” is to be savored by reason of its shortness and preparatory time that we can fathom to some degree the meaning of today’s feast. We are left orphans for a short period, a time to make the transition from focus upon him to the Holy Spirit...who ultimately focuses upon Jesus but in a way different from how people in Gospels perceived him. Such was the constant message he was trying to impart to his disciples for three years of his ministry, that they could never perceive his mission correctly until he left them and gave the Spirit. In later centuries three more solemnities were added, a kind of stretching-out of Pentecost: Most Holy trinity, Corpus Christi and Sacred Heart. However, there’s a certain abruptness between today and tomorrow which is “Monday in Ordinary Time.” That is, on the morrow we wake up to this “ordinary time” not experienced since before Ash Wednesday. After coming off some three months of “extraordinary” time, we require adjustment, a time to cultivate our recollective faculty or memory, to see how it fits in with our daily lives. From Monday after Pentecost until the First Sunday of Advent some eight months hence,

we can play this out, a span not unlike the pregnancy of a mother-to-be, after which we discover a need to renew our sense of divine mystery.

The time of the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost is at "the third hour of the day" (Acts 2.15) or nine in the morning. Peter begins a lengthy discourse about the Spirit and Jesus, quoting the prophet Joel and David (Ps 16). This is interesting, for when Christ was physically present with his disciples many a time he said that scriptures had to be fulfilled. Clearly the disciples did not grasp his words, but now Peter does, for he is quoting the scriptures in the same vein as Jesus had done.

Everything above this point has been added to the Lectio Site under the file called Liturgical Reflections 2008: #1.

18 May, Trinity Sunday

Today's Gospel (Jn 3.16-18) is the sum of Jesus' teaching and mission, well known to everyone, especially vs. 16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." On the other hand, it gives little, if any insight, into the nature of the Trinity which Christian tradition has come to hold as three divine persons. Okay, it does mention God and Jesus but not the Holy Spirit. For any biblically based insights we have to turn to Jn. 14-17. Because the Trinity is a mystery...and earlier centuries have spilled plenty of ink (and blood) over it...such a feast as today makes it well nigh impossible to offer any meaningful insights. With this in mind, we have recourse to the liturgical year, the best teacher both practically and theologically. For example, this day takes place one week after Pentecost which, as I noted under that entry, sums up the Lenten and Easter cycles. Then on Monday after Pentecost we find ourselves posited rather abruptly within "ordinary" time. Trinity Sunday is followed by Corpus Christ and the Sacred Heart, two feast days which bathe in the odor of Pentecost, ways of savoring that extended period of Lent-Easter from which we have emerged. These two feasts deal with very earthy devotion to Jesus, added in later centuries, so to speak, as means to unpack the meaning of Pentecost. This unpacking is reminiscent of Jn 12.3 when Mary anointed Jesus' feet: "the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment." Immediately afterwards we have Judas complaining, "Why was this ointment not sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor?" This statement can be one way of describing what we encounter in "ordinary" time...how to handle the problem of evil and betrayal. Awareness of this statement and all it implies in light of the important liturgical time from which we emerged is now put into perspective. In other words, we're empowered to handle it, and one way (albeit subtle) is balancing the meaning between not-so ordinary time (Lent-Easter-Pentecost) with our common perception of space and time represented and sanctified by liturgical Ordinary Time.

25 May, Corpus Christi

Today is the second of three feasts after Pentecost. Last week we had the celebration of the Church's central mystery, the Trinity or three divine persons as one. The next one will be Sacred Heart, a very devotional type of feast but not celebrated on a Sunday. Corpus Christi stands in between. With these three celebrations there comes to mind Sg

1.3-4: “Your name is oil poured out; therefore the maidens love you. Draw me after you, let us make haste.” That is to say, currently we are following the scent or aroma of the Holy Spirit’s effusion after his descent at Pentecost which culminated the Lenten-Easter cycle.

Today we drop, as it were, from the loftiness and total inability to explain Trinity Sunday to the corporality of today or the body of Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist. It’s no small wonder how the Church can go from one extreme to another without hesitation or without confusion, for ultimately all mysteries of Christ slam together as one. We have become familiar with all the feasts during a given yearly cycle and need to pause in order to appreciate how radical are these shifts. Also the liturgical pace of a given day or more advances at just the right speed in order to sanctify the pace of temporal sequence. Both proceed at the same speed externally or to the untrained eye, but quite differently when you’re tuned into the difference. Liturgical time (Corpus Christi, for example) feeds into temporal time like an on-ramp to a highway. It goes along for the designated time and then exits gracefully.

Today’s Gospel (Jn 6.51-8) has Jesus as the “living bread which came down from heaven.” Such an image implies a corporeal, not spiritual, descent and can apply to the Incarnation. There comes to mind the striking imagery of Cyrus of Edessa regarding the Ascension. Although proper to that day, Cyrus has in mind the relationship between corporality and the spiritual realm: “How did our Lord enter into heaven though he was not seen to rend it asunder or open it? In a divine manner, just as he entered the upper room by closed doors...Just as water is taken up in the roots of olive or other trees and circulates by their branches and clusters as though by ducts, though neither tunnels nor channels are hollowed out within them, so by an ineffable miracle Christ entered into heaven without tearing it asunder. In the case of us in summer, when we take a drink of water, our body brings forth sweat, though our flesh is not rent asunder nor is our skin pierced.”

31 May, Visitation of the Virgin Mary

Normally these entries keep to major feasts, especially Sundays, but today is worth special notice. This particular year we have a unique confluence of two feasts for the Virgin Mary though only the former is noted: the Visitation and Immaculate Heart of Mary. Although the former takes precedence today, I prefer to focus on the second for a particular reason. Given the evolution of the Church’s history as reflected through her liturgy, the Immaculate Heart comes at the end...the very end...of the Lenten-Easter-Pentecost cycle. Granted, for some people it reflects a traditional Catholic type of spirituality. Be that as it may, by reason of its location in the liturgical calendar this feast has something broader to convey. It comes on the heels of the Sacred Heart which, as I noted earlier, is the third and final “aroma” of the Holy Spirit’s effusion poured out on Pentecost (the other two are Trinity Sunday and Corpus Christi). These feasts tend to make Pentecost linger in our midst just a bit longer. Thus if we count back from today’s specific feast (Immaculate Heart) to Pentecost to Easter and finally to Ash Wednesday, we end up with a period of 115 days, a large chunk of the calendar year as well as the liturgical one.

To shed a little more light on this sacred period, consider the Gospels of both Immaculate Heart and Ash Wednesday. The former has “a sword will pierce through your own soul also that the thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2.35). Rhomphaia is the word for sword, more like a large, two-handed one as opposed to a dagger-type weapon that normally comes to mind. A vivid image is the romphaia (the Septuagint uses this term) Goliath used against David which matches his enormity and ferocity against the much smaller David. Such a huge weapon pierces not Mary’s heart but soul (psuche), an invisible faculty. And so we have two very opposite images: the enormity of rhomphaia cutting through Mary’s psuche, not unlike a battle-axe attempting to swipe a feather. There is a purpose, however, in this imagery: “that thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” The Greek for “thoughts” is dialogismos which literally means a balancing of accounts and implies calculated thought. From it we get the word “dialogue” which in this context can apply to the human tendency to carry on an inner dialogue or produce an endless stream of thoughts. One negative reference to dialogismos is Mt 15.19: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.” That’s why such a huge rhomphaia is required: in order to cut through this continuous interior “dialogue” which often tends towards ill. Thus instead of the hearts of Jesus and Mary being laid bare, we have the human hearts laid open, and this revelation is effected through Jesus’ mother prior to his birth. Often tradition places the Simeon’s words to Christ on the cross with his mother standing by though Luke does not mention this in his Gospel. I.e., for that we have to go to John’s account. There a spear pierces the side of Jesus, an action considerably less violent, if you will, compared to the romphaia piercing Mary’s soul.

In contrast to the focus upon visibility in today’s Gospel, that of Ash Wednesday (usually Mt 6.1-6 is used) 115 days earlier has to do with hiddenness, even secrecy, as to the heavenly Father’s seeing. This seeing is a type of beholding of one’s behavior: “your Father who sees in secret will reward you,” pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” It could be said that such hiddenness runs parallel to though is very the hidden dialogismoi mentioned in the last paragraph. I.e., the Father sees in secret human thoughts which may appear hidden to us yet in reality are not.

In conclusion, the Lenten-Easter-Pentecost cycle of 115 days offers a way to advance through the upcoming Ordinary Time which technically began the day after Pentecost and lasts until Advent when the liturgical cycle begins anew. The balance of the two Gospels—Ash Wednesday’s hiddenness and Immaculate Heart of Mary’s piercing or openness—provides the pattern for effecting this passage.

1 June, Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The last several entries (actually from Pentecost onward) I’ve noted that we are making the transition from the grand liturgical cycle of Lent-Easter-Pentecost to so-called Ordinary Time. Although it began the day after Pentecost, the feasts of Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart and (Immaculate Heart/Visitation) create a certain aroma of that 115 day cycle which ended yesterday. One can’t make a transition that quickly from

such an important time, so we require some spilling-over, if you will. Now we “cruise” through the summer and autumn until the First Sunday of Advent when the liturgical cycle begins anew.

Today’s Gospel is Mt 7.21-27, right in the middle of Jesus’ public ministry. Here Jesus sets down the requirement for entering the kingdom of heaven, namely, doing the Father’s will. He condemns those who do good “in your name” which at first glance appears unjust, but it seems that Jesus wants acknowledgement of all good actions attributed to the Father, not himself. In other words, it is a failure to see the Father through Jesus: “Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied” (Jn 14.8). To this we get the response, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” Here a kind of double-vision is required: to see the visible Jesus and the invisible Father.

Next Jesus stresses the value of hearing “these words of mine and does them. The quality of hearing is shown through a comparison between building upon rock and building upon sand. Looking at this from the purely technical point of view, both sand and rock are unsuited for building: sand by reason of its instability and rock by reason of being too hard. Buildings (ancient or modern) would not be stable on either. However, if we keep in mind Jesus’ statement to Peter (“On this rock I will build my church”), the structure founded upon this type of rock is living...it tends to absorb the foundation into itself, thereby becoming part of the rock (church) itself.

This Gospel is situated just right after the recently completed 115 day cycle and sets the tone for our comportment until the First Sunday of Advent.

8 June, Tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

In today’s Gospel (Mt 9.9-13) Jesus comes to Matthew “sitting at the tax office,” most likely by the Lake of Galilee. There’s no clear indication why Jesus chose Matthew nor why Matthew left so suddenly after having heard the words “Follow me.” The same applies with respect to the place where both men went afterwards. Certainly it could not have been far because vs. 10 has Jesus and his disciples “at table in the house.” Better to say, they were reclining in Greek or Roman fashion, akakeimai. There’s no clear association with this house belonging to Matthew though it could be presumed; except for 10.3 we have no further mention of Matthew. Then again, this house could have belonged to one of the Pharisees who were present and asked why Jesus was among such a group of outcasts.

To counter the Pharisees asking why Jesus was there he responds “I desire mercy and not sacrifice,” a quote lifted from Hos 6.6 and again quoted in 12.7. Chesed is the Hebrew word for “mercy,” rather difficult to translate, and akin to the New Testament agape. Actually this verse continues with “the knowledge (dahath) of God rather than burnt offerings.” Chances are if Jesus mentioned this part of Hosea his audience would not have grasped it, equating dahath with something akin to intellectual knowledge only. Note that Jesus does not simply quote Hosea but says “go and learn what this means.” In other words, leave his presence and put into practice chesed after which will flow dahath. This

“going” is quite different from Matthew’s “following” Jesus and may be compared with it.

15 June, Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today’s Gospel (Mt 9.36-10.8) has Jesus moving about rather extensively on his mission as recounted in 9.35. The very next verse has a peculiar observation, “when he saw the crowds...” as if he did not see them beforehand. Anyway, this statement is a summary of sorts for a key feature of Jesus’ mission and which reveals both his humanity and divinity: “he had compassion for them,” the Greek being *splagchnizomai*: from it is derived the noun referring to one’s inner parts or viscera. That is, Jesus attained a point when he reflected upon his activity to this point and applies to it this deep expression. Automatically it leads to his saying to the disciples, “pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” This comes immediately after Jesus’ observation that the people upon whom he had *splagchnizomai* were like sheep without shepherds. He asks not for shepherds but laborers in the field, a different image...it is as though such laborers were to cultivate the field for the sheep to have pasture.

Chapter Ten begins with Jesus calling his disciples, more specifically, naming them, even though they’ve been mentioned earlier but not as a single group. Their chief mission is that of healing as vs. 1 reveals. One could say that the disciples are to apply their newly acquired healing authority on the basis of Jesus’ *splagchnizomai*.

22 June, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today’s Gospel (Mt 10.26-33) is a series of alterations: covered/revealed, tell in dark/ utter in light, whispered/proclaimed. Immediately there comes to mind the time of the Gospel, the day after the first full day of summer or its proximity to the longest day of the year. This is time to pause at the high end of the calendar and compare our position relative to six months from now or 21 December, the year’s shortest day. In other words, we’re like runners in a stadium who’ve past the far marker and are headed for the opposite end. Such an image may be helpful in bridging the two sets of Gospel alterations.

The notion of revealed (*kalupto*) intimates the turning-back of a veil, (*apokalupto*) which automatically brings to mind the Book of Revelation or Apocalypse. This view tends towards a reality less dramatic than commonly perceived in that what is hidden has a life of its own concurrently with what is not hidden...akin to two parallel universes which touch every so often as in this Gospel passage. It’s where they touch is the place of action and drama. And so when Jesus asks his disciples to speak in the light what he told them in the dark, there’s quite a transition; they are going from one universe to the other, so to speak. Bridging the two is the disciples’ task which they pass on to the church.

This clear demarcation of two parallel realities is summed up in vs. 32: “Everyone who acknowledges me before men I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven” (same with the next sentence, the inverse). The Greek text has inserted (acknowledges) “in me” as well as “in him,” both of which are situated before the preposition *emprosthen* (before). Thus tuning oneself to this in-ness is crucial whether it applies

now “before men” or later “before my Father.” It bridges yet transcends the two universes just noted.

29 June, Sts. Peter and Paul

Today as a proper Sunday is superseded by the feast of these two apostles with the Gospel being Mt 16.13-19. Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” I.e., he talks of himself as a third person which puts them on the spot. To this question they respond that some claim him to be John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or a prophet. All are legitimate responses, but there’s a subtle feeling that the disciples know they’re being set up and are afraid to admit it. Nevertheless, they have to give an answer. After this Jesus gets more direct by asking the disciples themselves to which we have only the response of Peter, not the other disciples. Peter’s response is done from a certain ignorance...it takes Jesus to verify that the Father had revealed his divinity to him. If Jesus did not respond with the correct answer, Peter would have considered himself just as ignorant as those who offered the names of John, Elijah, Jeremiah or another prophet (“for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you”). As we know, despite this accurate perception of Jesus, Peter denied him at a critical time. Even before this, vs. 22 has Peter remonstrating with Jesus when he was speaking about his coming passion. That is to say, as of yet there was no bridge between accurate perception and living by that perception which came later with the descent of the Holy Spirit. Peter did not realize the source of revelation (“but my father who is in heaven”). Immediately there follows the statement that Jesus will build his church (ekklesia) upon him as rock. The Greek word for “build” is *oikodomeo* which pertains more specifically to the construction of a house, a place to live in, as opposed to a more formal structure.

With reference to this building on rock, cf. the Gospel for 1 June of this year (Mt 7.21-27). There Jesus speaks about building a house upon (*oikodomeo* again) rock. A rock is just as unstable as sand in that some kind of binding element is required for the foundation to adhere to the rock. We could say the binder is faith which not only makes the building adhere but become part of the rock.

6 July, Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

The opening words of today’s Gospel (Mt 11.25-30) are important for an understanding of the text: “At that time Jesus declared.” The Greek reads literally “in that *kairos*” or in that opportunity. It comes just after Jesus utters words of condemnation against “cities where most of his mighty works had been done because they did not repent” (vs. 20). That somber warning serves to get attention as to what Jesus is about to speak.

He proceeds to say that his heavenly Father had hidden “these things” from the wise and revealed them to babes. It’s not exactly clear what “these things” mean, but they are situated with that *kairos* event opening the Gospel where one has to be attuned in an extraordinary way to perceive how everything Jesus is speaking about comes together. That can apply to all the words contained in chapter 11, not just condemnation of the above-mentioned cities. Within this chapter the role of John the Baptist receiving word about Jesus’ activity plays a big role, i.e., vs. 1-19. Better, these verses have in mind John hearing about Jesus from the confines of prison. Only “babes” or *nepios*

(singular) can grasp not so much John's role but his current condition as a prisoner. A nepios more specifically applies to an infant who has not learned to speak, so we're dealing with a very early age. It is to such that the Father reveals...apokalupto...“these things.” Keeping in mind that a nepios cannot communicate, we could say that such apokalupsis is effected without the means of language and even images. “Such was your gracious will.”

As for apokalupsis, it uncovers (the literal meaning of the word) two things: that the Father has handed “all things” to Jesus and that “no one knows (epignosko) the Father except the Son.” Such epignosis differs from those who are wise (sophos) and having understanding (sunetos). Usually the former is associated with philosophical inquiry whereas the latter literally is synthetic or the ability to situate things together. On the other hand, epignosis does not partake of this type of human activity. Literally it translates as “knowledge upon” and connotes having a bird's eye view as opposed to the more familiar gnosis. As for this knowing-upon, it is the Son who chooses a person...a nepios...for this, so it doesn't come from us. It is more specific, not just knowing-upon in a general sense but a knowing-upon with respect to the Son's relationship with the Father.

Immediately after these words and without a pause, comes Jesus' invitation to take his yoke in order to find rest. Again, the special type of epignosis just discussed is required to perceive how the heaviness of a yoke can effect rest. A yoke implies someone behind directing an ox which either carries a cart or draws a plough in a field.

13 July, Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Mt 13.1-23) speaks of the parable of the seeds which fell on various types of ground: rocky, thorns and good soil. At first glance, this sower doesn't seem to know what he's doing: it seems he would focus upon the good soil. Then again, the sower may wanted to do a horticultural experiment to see how his seed would fare on various types of ground. Those seeds which fell on rocky ground were the first to wither away. Contrast that with the Gospel of the Ninth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Mt 7.21-7, where those “who hear these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock.” There it was noted that building on rock is unwise compared with loose soil which enables the foundation to bind with the ground or unless the contractor uses cement as a binding element. Today, however, Jesus gives a parable countering this one: the seed which will bring forth fruit requires soil in which to hide and take root, not the flat, harsh surface of rock.

Later when the disciples asked Jesus to explain the parable spoken to the crowds on the beach, he defends his method with the words, “seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.” He backs this up with a quote from Isaiah 6.9-10 of similar words. A parable resembles a story in that it's more likely to sink in compared with giving an explanation of the various seeds. The warning contained there about dullness of heart and understanding can refer to Jesus' use of a parable: chances are much higher the warning won't apply in story form as opposed to an expository approach.

After quoting Isaiah, Jesus says that his disciples' eyes and ears are blessed, for they grasped both the parable and explanation of the parable which is fleshed out in vss. 18-23. The disciples are more fortunate than prophets "who longed to see what you see and to hear what you hear." We may include in this group is a present day prophet, John the Baptist, who hears from afar or from his prison cell (11.2). In this situation had to rely upon other persons to get word of what Jesus was doing...those bringing him the good news were like the seeds which fell on good soil. One can wonder how he received them from a distance, as it were, and was able to interpret them.

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Mt 13.24-43) follows on the theme of last week, the sowing of seeds upon various types of ground. Now we have three parables, all of which relate to growth, not so much the vicissitudes of their origins.

Parable #1 has a man who sowed "good seed:" kalos is the adjective used which implies that which is beautiful, something of greater value than that commonly held as "good." While the sower was sleeping, his enemy (no identification of this person until vs. 39, the devil) sowed weeds among the wheat. Instead of following his servants' advice, the man who sowed the "beautiful" (kalos) seeds preferred waiting until harvest time to sort the wheat from the weeds. Kairos is used here or the proper occasion for such a discernment. The servants were too anxious and had no comprehension of this kairos time. Apparently the enemy was the same, unaware that much later this kairos would come for separating the two and later, himself.

Parable #2 is equating the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed which grows so large that birds can nest there. Due to the sowing of multiple seeds, we can presume that the sower ended up with something of a grove of mustard trees all filled with birds.

Parable #3 differs from the strictly agricultural ones above by comparing the kingdom of heaven to leaven which causes the dough to rise. This is quite different from the unleavened bread which the Israelites took from Egypt in their haste in that it requires time to mature.

In vs. 35 Jesus quotes Ps 78.2 which runs in part, "since the foundation of the world" and differs from the actual verse: "I will utter dark sayings from of old." The Hebrew literally reads, "from before" where qedem (before) implies that which is early or the origin of something such as the world's creation. Though Jesus goes no further, vs. 2 of the Psalm continues the sentence with "things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us." In other words, he is implying familiarity with this psalm by his listeners. Much of Hebrew scripture centers around these and similar words, of the Israelites being in the lineage of an oral tradition which handed down earlier divine interventions. Chances are that the more discerning among Jesus' audience read the psalm in full which is a synopsis of Jewish history.

The remaining part of today's Gospel passage deals with Jesus' explanation of the parables not to the people but to his disciples. "In the house" suggests privacy, an

environment where he and they can share the parables apart from the crowds. The sending of angels to separate evil doers from the righteous (i.e., at the proper kairos) may be compared with parable #1's anxious servants who tried to anticipate this separation.

27 July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Mt 13.44-52) contains three parables with regard to the "kingdom of heaven," the same number as last week. That phrase is used a lot, presumably familiar to Jesus' audience and was first used by John the Baptist who said it "was at hand" [3.2]. Actually the verb is *eggizo*, "to be near." When you hear of a kingdom automatically comes to mind someone who rules it. And so we have Jesus who immediately takes up John's message as found in 4.17, words spoken in public after having been in the desert forty days and nights. Thus the "kingdom of heaven" as proclaimed doesn't mean full presence but a kind of approach not unlike the spirit communicated during the season of Advent. The following three parables (as well as the others) may be viewed in this light, as a type of drawing near:

Parable #1 has a treasure hidden a field which a man discovers, covers up and sells all he has to purchase the field. Interesting how he doesn't dig up the treasure immediately but re-buries it. Even more astonishing is that he goes for broke and buys the field which contains the treasure. Perhaps he thought this plot of land concealed other treasures or even had the capacity to replicate itself, hence the need for a large piece of land. Anyway, the treasure just discovered is bound to have a positive affect on this man's new purchase of land.

Parable #2 has a merchant selling everything to purchase a single pearl, a parable more straight-forward than the previous one. This word (pearl) doesn't occur frequently in both the Old and New Testaments; actually, Matthew has the only Gospel use, the current one, but Revelation speaks of the heavenly city's gates as twelve pearls.

Parable #3 compares the kingdom of heaven to a net cast into the sea after which the fishermen sorted out those fish which were of value. Of the three parables this one strikes most closely home to the disciples by reason of their coming from around the Sea of Galilee. *Sapros* is the Greek for "the bad" which more accurately means something which is rotten or putrid. I.e., such rotten fish were in the sea along with the healthy ones not unlike last week's parable of the wheat growing along with the weeds.

Only at "the close of the age" (*sunteleia tou aionos*) will a definite separation be made by the angels. They "will come out" which suggests that they had been hidden or standing on the sidelines, as it were, beholding what the net was catching and awaiting to see its contents. And so awareness of these beings tucked away in the background is a kind of intimation that something momentous is about to transpire, for as soon as they make their appearance, they start separating. *Sunteleia* was used in vs. 39 with respect to the harvest. It implies a combination of efforts as well as a joint payment for common expenses. Thus *sunteleia* is a term with communal implications. But instead of casting that which is *sapros* aside as did the fishermen, the angels will cast *sapros* into "the

furnace of fire” which doesn’t consume sapos but brings to another stage where sapos as men “will weep and gnash their teeth.”

29 July, Sts. Martha, Mary and Lazarus

Today is kindly sort of feast in that the three persons commemorated were close friends of Jesus. Within this same liturgical week also occurred the feast days of Sts. Joachim and Ann as well as St. Mary Magdalene. Unlike most saints the Church celebrates this collection of six were of a domestic nature: close to Jesus (let’s assume Joachim and Ann, the Virgin Mary’s parents, lived long enough to see Jesus mature) in that they were all friends or relatives. They didn’t accomplish anything great but offered Jesus friendship when he needed to take a break from his hectic ministry.

3 August, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today’s Gospel (Mt 14.13-21) takes place after John’s beheading: “He withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart.” The Greek kat’ idian for “apart” suggests going into isolation, “by himself.” Perhaps Herod might go after Jesus next, but there’s the good possibility Jesus wanted to be alone to reflect upon John’s ministry as a herald of his own. Matthew gives no account of Jesus’ thoughts on this matter but suggests it by being out on Lake Galilee.

Despite going to a “lonely place” (eremos topos: deserted place), the crowds got their before him which means that they were very familiar with such spots around Lake Galilee. No mention of disciples is made accompanying Jesus on his boat ride; chances are he went alone which offered the only opportunity to be kat’ idian. He might have seen the crowds (“about five thousand men, besides women and children”) swarming to the place he was about to land. Being out on the lake made him an easy target for them to follow, so ultimately Jesus had not choice but to disembark.

Since so many people flocked to the eremos topos ahead of Jesus, they were without food. This prompted Jesus to multiply the fish and loaves. Chances are that these people heard about John’s execution as well.

6 August, Transfiguration

The concluding words of Mt 16, which immediately precede the account of the Transfiguration (17.1-9) are : “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom (vs. 28).” Surely Jesus could have intuited this, but chances are he got a clearer picture of his listeners’ condition while speaking with them. No record is preserved as to how some listeners were qualified to see his kingdom and thus not taste death. It is left this way deliberately for future generations to put themselves in the same position. This ambiguity leaves open the distinct possibility that some will get the point and others won’t. Instead of taking it as unfair and along the lines of predestination, the ambiguity creates a deeper sense of mystery and excitement as to the results which are not yet perceived. Vs. 28 is an introduction of sorts about what is to occur; one could say that the disciples on the mountain did not taste death. But before this, vs. 1 says “after six days.” That means

Jesus had some time to explain what this not tasting of death meant regarding his kingdom.

The Greek word for “transfigured” is metamorphoo, literally to change into another form, shape or fashion (morphe). It differs from the more philosophic and therefore Platonic eidos which also can translate as form. Eidos is less material, if you will, than morphe, and connotes that which is seen or grasped at once. Thus a coined word like metaeido would not apply to Jesus on the mountain, and later Church Fathers were sensitive enough to perceive the distinction.

At the beginning of Jesus’ transfiguration “his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light.” A bit later “a bright cloud overshadowed” the disciples...despite this cloud’s brightness, it seems to be a bit less dim than Jesus’ appearance. The cloud was a morphe but one which was not metamorphoo. At the end of this event, Jesus bids his disciples not to tell of it until he rises from the dead. Looking at the transfiguration from the resurrection’s point of view, it is a lesser reality but important in that it prefigures the resurrection. Surely the disciples must have talked about the transfiguration from this perspective, not putting it before the resurrection in order of importance.

10 August, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today’s Gospel is Mt 14.22-33. After Jesus feeds the multitude in a remote place as described last Sunday, he “makes his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side.” As natives of that area, they must have known the weather forecast, that is, a storm was brewing. If it were up to them, they would not have gone by boat. And so vs. 22 has “made” (anagkazo)...he forced them in order to prepare another revelation of his divinity by walking on water. But before that happened, on his own Jesus dismissed the crowds. We could say that he wished to prepare them for that miracle which they were about to behold on the lake, a kind of spectacle equal to the multiplication of loaves and fishes.

After having let the crowds go, Jesus “went up on the mountain by himself to pray.” Again we have the phrase kat’ idian which occurs in 14.13 after Jesus heard about John the Baptist’s execution. There it was a “lonely place” (eis eremon or desert) while today kat’ idian is a mountain (eis to oros). Note in both instances the preposition “into” is used signifying being fully present to the reality of what those places contained.

Jesus left the mountain “when evening came.” Compare with vs. 15 or when the disciples approached Jesus about the lack of food. Thus the multiplication of loaves and fishes occurred quite late, in the semi-darkness, when the crowds were unable to see fully what Jesus was doing.

During this evening time Jesus takes a short-cut, as it were, (presumably to Gennesaret where the disciples landed, vs. 34) and comes across his disciples on the storm-tossed lake. He was walking on this difficult terrain all night or a good part of it, for he came across the boat “in the fourth watch” or just prior to dawn. This image of walking on

rough water is strikingly reminiscent of larva fields as in Iceland which resemble frozen waves. Negotiating such terrain is quite difficult. The disciples believe Jesus to be a ghost or phantasma or apparition, something which appears (phaino). This is an easy assumption given the storm, tossing of waves and semi-darkness of dawn. Such an atmosphere (that is, the semi-darkness) resembles the setting in which Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes as noted above. That evening it could have been stormy as well or at least the first signs of a storm, which continued all night. Keeping in mind the possibility that the crowd which had been fed were watching this drama, they too could have perceived Jesus as a phantasma from such a distance; if not as far out on the lake as when he got into the boat, at least when he set out on the water during the storm.

15 August, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Today's Gospel (Lk 1.39-56) recounts Mary's visit to Elizabeth and contains the Magnificat, traditional hymn sung at Vespers. There is no specific scriptural account of Mary's assumption, let alone the Gospels. It is something that we infer not only from scripture but from the Church's reflection upon scripture or what may be called tradition. A common response is to consider it non-biblical, a pious or fanciful add-on which detracts more than it adds.

Jesus is presented as clearly to have risen from the dead and then ascended into heaven, hence the term "resurrection" and "ascension" are applied. As for Mary, the word "assumption" is used to indicate that God took her bodily into heaven but only after she had died. With this in mind, consider the last two Gospel accounts of Mary. The first is at the cross of Jesus (Jn 19.25). Before he expired, Jesus entrusts Mary to his disciple John. The Greek text has (kat' idian) which literally reads "according to his own." This phrase implies that Mary was privy to John's insights both into the life of Jesus and later on Patmos where he composed the Book of Revelation. The second is prior to Pentecost when the disciples were at prayer with her (Acts 1.14). Just now Jesus had ascended into heaven and left eleven disciples, one less than the full complement required for Pentecost. And so Mary is present with the eleven and before the election of Matthias to make the number twelve. Certainly she must have been essential in an implicit way to setting the stage for this choice, for only after this could the Holy Spirit descend. No specific mention of her is made at Pentecost proper. Mary's role has been fulfilled, for Pentecost is for the disciples proper and thus for the nascent Church. In fact, Mary does not have to be present, if you will. Chances are that she was in John's house which hearkens back to Jn 19.27: "the disciple took her to his own home.

Thus Mary's presence to Jesus her son at Calvary as well with the kat' idian of John and her distance at Pentecost situates her role within the context of Jesus' earthly life and the Holy Spirit's descent. She is in between both, as it were, yet enfolds the reality of the two events which continue to nourish the Church to the present day. Here is where Mary is "assumed" or brought in: close to her son and close to the Church though not in bodily form.

17 August, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The opening verse of today's Gospel (Mt 15.21-8) reads, "And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon." This happens after Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and scribes. Note that the verse not only says that he went away but withdrew, *anachoreo*, which means he got away as far as possible from a distressful situation. This makes more dramatic the appearance of a Canaanite woman "from that region" who "came out." I.e., her coming out to Jesus is made all the more poignant by reason of Jesus' two-fold separation from his earlier locale.

To this foreigner Jesus gives a four-fold rebuke, quite strong for anyone to take, let alone a non-Israelite. Not only that, the woman was pleading not for herself but for her daughter: "he did not answer her a word," "Send her away," "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and "It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."

The Canaanite woman...again, keep in mind she was a foreigner and thus an outcast as far as Israel is concerned...proved herself equal to Jesus, if you will. To the fourth and most insulting remark she responded that even dogs eat leftovers from the tables of their masters. She, a dog, was entitled to the Israelite masters' crumbs. Then the dialogue breaks off abruptly, and she receives word from Jesus that her daughter is healed. This abruptness is indicated by vs. 29, "and Jesus went on from there." Between then and returning home the Canaanite woman had to wait and thus had time to ponder what can only be described as a personal victory.

24 August, Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Mt 16.13-20) about the primacy of Peter among the apostles occurs just before Jesus' transfiguration and passion. Shortly beforehand, Jesus confronts the Pharisees and Sadducees about "interpreting the appearance of the sky" (vs. 3) but unable to interpret the "signs of the times." The Greek verb for "interpret" is *diakrino*, literally as to judge-through, implying an ability to see through appearances to the core of reality. Something similar but more happens when Jesus asks "But who do you say that I am" (vs. 15)? *Diakrino* isn't used here when Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Like other people, Peter did not call Jesus Elijah, Jeremiah or a prophet (that would apply with *diakrino*, for example) but got straight to the heart of the matter as to Jesus' identity. So instead of *diakrino* being applied to Peter...rather, we could say in addition to it...his statement was revealed (*apokalupto*, vs. 17). The verb is in the passive as opposed to active obviously meaning that what he admitted to did not come from him.

A key function given to Peter after his confession of faith in Jesus is the ability to bind and loosen, *deo* and *luo*. These don't seem related directly to the function of a key which is to lock or unlock a door. The image (applied to the rabbinic forbidding and permitting) pertains to something like tying up and loosening a person bound with ropes. It works simultaneously in two places, heaven and earth; the latter is the primary focus point of *deo/luo*, not the other way around. Although later Catholic tradition spells this out in the context of the papacy, the Gospel passage is not specific as to what this means. That may sound unsatisfactory yet its very ambiguity sets the stage for the necessity of being

attuned to Jesus' words read in the spirit of *lectio divina* as opposed to rigorous or literal interpretation. It seems that Peter can now exert his *diakrino* fully and with confidence, absent from the Pharisees and Sadducees, as a means "to interpret the signs of the times" (vs. 3).

31 August, Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last week's Gospel had Peter acknowledge Jesus as "Christ, the Son of the living God." It concluded with "he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ." No explanation is given for them not proclaiming him such since their testimony would be incomplete despite their familiarity with Jesus. Such proclaiming had to wait until Pentecost when Peter spoke to the "men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem" (Acts 2.14). Thus it is interesting to compare the two testimonies of Peter: last Sunday's and that of Pentecost. Despite the obstacles between the two time events (which wasn't very long), the message is the same. Chances are that at Pentecost Peter must have recalled his testimony shortly beforehand and elaborated it in light of the Holy Spirit's descent.

Today's Gospel (Mt 16.21-7) begins with Jesus with the words, "began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things." The text uses the verb *deiknumi* for "show," a verb of action, which is more inclusive than speaking; it implies action. *Deiknumi* also reveals a different type of teaching by Jesus, a shift of emphasis from his earlier ministry where he did a lot of talking both with the disciples and crowds. This is signified by the opening words, "from that time" (*apo tote* or 'from then'). Upon hearing Jesus "show" about his immanent suffering and death, Peter fails to grasp the important transition indicated by "from that time." Before then he acknowledged Jesus as the Christ. However, now he remonstrates with Jesus as to this shift in emphasis or from speaking about his divinity to "showing" it. Peter completely seems to have missed the words "and on the third day be raised" although he got the others about Jesus' impending passion. It is possible that he recalled these words in their context, essential to the Gospel, at Pentecost. From Matthew's account, Peter seems to have been walking behind Jesus along with the disciples, for Jesus "turned" to him and rebuked him. He then added "Get behind me, Satan!" In a sense, this made Peter fall back even further from his accepted position behind Jesus. It was a turning-back from this to one of following Jesus as a tempter, right on his heels, to prevent his mission. Perhaps Jesus was thinking of his own forty days in the desert when tempted by the devil whom we could presume was behind Jesus' back whispering all sorts of things contrary to his mission.

7 September, Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Mt 18.15-20) deals with treatment of a brother who sins. It is a three-fold process starting with a one-on-one encounter moving to the involvement of several other witnesses and finally the church as a whole. It starts off with one person telling the accused his fault, the Greek verb being *elegcho* which connotes a rebuke or cross-examination. Correction of the wayward brother at this stage would be the ideal though Jesus tends to lean towards the second where "every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses" which is lifted from Dt 19.15. The Deuteronomy verse reads literally, "A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for

any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three shall a charge be sustained.” The third and final step is how to handle the brother at fault if he doesn’t listen to the church. Afterwards he will be treated as “a Gentile and tax collector,” that is, more or less as an outcast, a person who will remain within the Jewish community but as an outsider or worse, an occupier of the land such as the Romans.

The Gospel continues with what seems a right bestowed upon Peter, a binding and loosening (deo and luo) as seen several Sundays ago. The object here is more specified compared with that right and refers (as noted earlier) to the tying and untying of ropes, not with the image of opening and closing of a door as with Peter and his keys. Although the word “whatever” is indefinite (“whatever you bind on earth”), the pattern follows that as with Peter: the deo/luo starts on earth and extends to heaven, not the other way around. Today it seems to apply to reconciliation as with the three-fold process today’s Gospel delineates. Actually, the mutual binding and loosening is more democratic, if you will, involving the church as a whole. Thus Jesus lays supreme importance in his church’s unity where it counts, reconciliation, more so that with the case of Peter.

The Gospel concludes with a divine ratification of the reconciliation process of deo/luo. That is to say, we have “my Father in heaven” who will concur with “about anything they ask,” a fairly inclusive statement as to making requests. To make this heavenly presence operative within the church Jesus says that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” With respect to Jesus, the Greek has “into” my name, indicating a full presence within it. He seems to separate this name from himself by speaking of himself as “I in the midst of them.” In other words, first comes being “into” Jesus’ name followed by him being “in the midst of them.” With regards to the second, we have the preposition en or “in” compared with the more penetrating eis or “into” relative to Jesus’ name. However, as used with mesos (midst) it suggests Jesus being at the center of a circle...the church...around which the “two or three who are gathered” are situated. Thus awareness of this double presence of the Father in heaven and Jesus in the church assures that ultimately the process of reconciliation effected by elegcho (cross-examination) will be effected.

14 September, Exultation of the Holy Cross

Today’s feast day interrupts the normal flow of “ordinary time” Sundays, the Gospel being Jn 3.13-17. The larger context is Jesus’ conversation at night with Nicodemus who, unlike many of his fellow Pharisees, is sympathetic and wants to know him better. When the text says (vs. 2) “by night” chances are it was past the bedtime of most folks so Nicodemus wouldn’t be seen. Chances are he met Jesus at prayer, not uncommon for him to do when alone.

“No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven.” This verse seems to exclude two persons: Enoch who “walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Gen 5.24) and more explicitly Elijah “who went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2Kg 2.11). However, the sense of John’s verse implies that Jesus first descended from heaven at his birth and later ascended there at his Ascension. That is to

say, for Jesus, heaven is his native home unlike ours which must be acquired. Enoch and Elijah had no descent from heaven, just an ascent. Note that the Gospel verse uses the past tense: ascended and descended. It seems that Jesus is talking of an event that already had occurred even at this early juncture in the Gospel. Jesus' descent and ascent are of equal nature, one not being more significant than the other though the latter fulfills the former.

Next Jesus clarifies the nature of his ascent or the one that occurs before the Ascension, namely, his mounting of the cross. This first ascent is patterned after Moses who lifted up the serpent on a staff as recorded in Num 21.8. The important Gospel words are "as Moses lifted up" which means that a close following of the Numbers story (i.e., the "as") reveals much about the crucifixion. In Numbers the Israelites complained to Moses about their stressful condition in the desert, that they were better off in Egypt. Once the Lord had sent fiery serpents which killed many Israelites, Moses besought the Lord who told him to make the image of a fiery serpent and mount it on a pole. God didn't specify the material for this image though Moses used bronze, a color not unlike the serpent. As for the serpent itself, the Hebrew word is saraph whose verbal root means fundamentally to burn, consume. From it comes "seraph," an angel with six wings who appeared to Isaiah (6.2-3). These seraphim were about God's throne using their wings to conceal themselves out of reverence.

Moses set the saraph upon a pole or nes which in Hebrew can mean a banner or standard: "He will raise a signal for a nation afar off" (Is 5.26). Those Israelites who had been bitten were healed by gazing upon the bronze serpent upon this nes. In other words, their affliction was healed by looking upon an image of that which brought the affliction. They were commanded to stare down their mortal bite by confronting it face-to-face. Compare these Israelites with those present at the crucifixion: "They shall look on him (on the nes of the cross) whom they have pierced" (Jn 19.37). Insertion of this verse is deliberate that the "scripture may be fulfilled (vs. 36) and is lifted from Zech 12.10 which reads in full: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly over him as one weeps over a first-born." Here the "spirit of compassion and supplication," absent among the gazers who aren't recorded as being so affected, is imparted nonetheless. There is no record of them being in a dire situation as the Israelites who were cured by looking at the bronze seraph.

21 September, Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Mt 20.1-16) is about the owner of a vineyard who hires workers in four stages throughout a given day beginning at the third hour and ending at the eleventh one. In the end, each group receives the same wage, a denarius, as agreed upon (vs. 2). However, this wage pertained to those workers whom the owner met when he "went out early in the morning," not to those later in the day. Explicitly the text mentions that the owner is "going out" for the third, sixth and eleventh hours. For those whom he met at the third and sixth hours he agrees with them that "whatever is right I will give you" (vs. 4). For the eleventh hour crowd he simply says "go into the vineyard." Unlike the

previous groups, there's no mention of a wage for this last and most controversial group hired at the very end of the day's work. Even though they received the same wage as everyone else—and rightly these folks grumbled against them—their risk was in many ways greater. That is to say, they agreed to work in the vineyard without agreement of a wage which could or could not have been meted out. The sense of uncertainty was heightened because they've been idle all day which is worse than being occupied meaningfully. Thus the Gospel concludes rightly that “the last (those who were idle all day and were hired with no clear agreement as to a wage) will be first and the first (those who were hired early with a guaranteed wage) last.” Not a bad judgment, considering.

Entries for the past several weeks are missing due to hospitalization.

12 October, 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Mt 22.1-14) immediately begins with Jesus speaking with the chief priests and Pharisees in parables. Obviously he's aware that this indirect way of speech is a method designed to make them uncomfortable as well as to protect himself, for “they took counsel how to entangle him in his talk” (vs. 15). The Greek verb for “entangle” is *pagideuo*, to lay a snare.

A king issues a wedding invitation for his son's marriage on three separate occasions: twice by way of sending servants to the invited guests which is a one-on-one approach. The second instance met strong, even violent, resistance which is unusual for a joyous event. Surely it must have marred the wedding celebration when a hodge-podge collection of people arrived at the banquet whose chief purpose seems to fulfill a quota of guests in order to consume the food prepared. The king may have been pleased with this, but no mention is made neither of the son nor his bride: surely both must have been mortified. Without a doubt, the king is in charge, for later he not only throws out a man without a wedding garment but actually binds him beforehand. This violent action is stressed by the man being tossed into the “outer darkness,” that is, considerable distance from the banquet hall. One can imagine him roaming about the hall keeping an eyeball on each guest. His gaze must have filled them with considerable anxiety. So the quota of guests has been fulfilled but at an extreme cost to everyone involved, notably bride and bridegroom.

19 October, Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

As noted above, last Sunday's Gospel image of the wedding feast was out of the usual, to put it mildly...an event to avoid, if one could get away with it. Today's Gospel (Mt 22.15-21) follows right upon the heels of that one, showing the determination by the Pharisees to entangle Jesus “in his talk” or *en logos* (logos). By *logos* they meant his parable, more specifically, the disconcerting one about the wedding feast. Also, given the rich association of *logos* in the New Testament, we could almost say that the Pharisees wished to entangle Jesus in his own self, if you will, that self being the *Logos*.

In a sense, the Pharisees are correct when saying that Jesus does not “regard the position of men.” The Greek text reads literally, “you do not look into the face (*prosopon*) of men” or you do not consider what's on the surface of things as a facial expression.

The Pharisee's question...and their plan of attack to catch Jesus...is by asking whether it's lawful or not to pay taxes. We're not dealing with any tax but the one to Caesar, the dreaded Roman occupier of Israel. It's a rather stupid question, really, in light of the wedding feast parable. There the bridegroom's father dominated the picture, both with regard to harsh treatment of persons invited and the man caught without a wedding garment. With this in mind, the Pharisees...if they were truly perspicacious...would have avoided asking the question about taxes. Jesus responds by saying that Caesar should get what's lawful just as with God. To place Caesar more or less on this level of respect was, in Israelite eyes, outrageous but then again, something we'd expect from a ruthless father as in the parable.

The only logical conclusion to all this was the right one followed by the Pharisees: they marveled, left Jesus and went away.

26 October, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Now that we're in the last Sunday of October, there's a growing sense that the liturgical year is about to wind down, Advent being just a month away. We have a keener sense that the current liturgical year is growing old, akin to the onset of winter and shorter days, and need to pay attention to "last things" before the liturgical cycle is renewed yet again. Each renewal isn't a repetition or copy of the previous one which keeps on going endlessly, and this is reflective in true spiritual growth. Instead, there is a definite sense of constancy, of coming back to a point of origins, more like an ascending spiral which makes each liturgical year unique while retaining an eternal identity. In sum, the Church's liturgical year escapes the ancient temptation of eternal return while simultaneously engaged in history.

Today's Gospel (Mt 22.34-40) mirrors this growing sense of "last things" simply by reason of the growing tension between Jesus and Jewish authorities. Actually, the Gospel is very simple when a lawyer from the Pharisees asked Jesus a question: "Which is the great commandment in the law (Torah)?" Note that he asked not which is the greatest commandment, simply the great one. Immediately Jesus responded with a quote lifted from Dt 6.5: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Actually, the Deuteronomy verse is prefaced by the verse which flows into the one had hand with "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." It seems that this oneness regarding the divinity comes from hearing, that is, from listening to the Torah proclaimed in public. Emphasis is not upon seeing which, given the cultural milieu of the day, would have given rise to a multitude of gods.

As for the Deuteronomy quote, the Hebrew words for heart, soul and mind are *lev*, *nephesh* and *me'od* which correspond to the Greek *kardia*, *psuche* and *dianoia*. The last Hebrew term is interesting in that it can be an adverb meaning "exceedingly." Thus the love ('ahav/agapao) of God is done in abundance, excessively, if you will. Although this commandment was enshrined within Jewish tradition, John seems to have in mind the second one which Jesus speaks about and which he calls "old" (1Jn 2.7). At the same time John calls it a "new commandment" by reason that "darkness is passing away and

the true light is already shining” (vs. 8). This second commandment, similar to the first, is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Note the use of “neighbor” which can limit the ‘ahav/agapao to those persons in one’s immediate circle. This is both liberating and confining in that we don’t have to expend ourselves endlessly but focus upon “neighbors” or those close to us which as we all know can be much more difficult by reason of familiarity. Yet the sense of what Jesus is communicating seems less upon this difficulty and more upon a leisurely, relaxed type of loving which takes place within the confines of a small village environment.

Jesus sums up the Gospel with the use of the verb kremannumi: “On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” Better to put it as “hang” the Torah and prophets...hang in the sense of a door hanging or dependent upon its hinges.

1 November, All Saints

Today’s Gospel (Mt 5.1-12) contains the beatitudes which may be outlined as follows:

1-Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 3

Blessed, as found in the next seven verses or through vs. 11, is makarios or happy. The Hebrew equivalent is ‘ashry as in Ps 1.1, ‘Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.’ It derives from a verbal root whose fundamental meaning is straightness. From it derives the noun happiness and the relative pronouns who, which, that. I.e., a sense of transition is implied as well as being straight. Thus this sense is to be kept in mind with respect to the other beatitudes. For ‘kingdom of heaven,’ cf. 4.17 above. Note: the beatitudes of vss. 3, 10 and 11 are in the present tense; others are in the future tense. The first two of the three verses refer to the kingdom of heaven.

-Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 4

Mourn (pentheo: alternately, to lament with respect to the dead). Shall be comforted (parakaleo: alternately, to call, to summon). The preposition para (besides, near at hand) is prefaced to the verb kaleo, to call. From this verbal root comes Paraclete or Comforter, used of the Holy Spirit as in Jn 14.16.

-Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 5

Meek (praios: gentle, mild), the Hebrew equivalent being hany which comes from the verbal root with multiple meanings such as to answer, to sing, to be oppressed. Shall inherit (kleronomeo: to receive by lot). This verse is reminiscent of Ps 37.11, ‘But the meek shall possess the land and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.’

-Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 6

Righteousness (dikaiosune: integrity, virtue, correctness in thinking). Shall be satisfied (chortazo: to feed with grass or herbs, to fatten).

-Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. 7

Merciful (eleeo: to succor anyone afflicted). The same verb used twice.

-Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 8

Pure (katharos: clean, sincere), here related to the heart or kardia, source of thoughts, passions and purposes. In the verse at hand, such purity is equated with sight (of God).

-Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 9

Peacemakers (eirenopoios). The Hebrew for peace (eirene) is shalom which connotes wholeness.

-Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 10

Persecuted (dioko: to put to flight, to drive away). For righteousness, cf. vs. 6 above.

-Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 11

Revile (oneidizo: to upbraid, reproach). Persecute dioko: cf. vs. 10 just above). Evil (poneros: adjective, implying hardships).

-Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you. 12

Rejoice (chairo: to be happy). Be glad (agalliaomai: in the extreme sense).

Reward (misthos: payment for work, wages). Persecuted (cf. vs. 11 just above).

Prophets: cf. Mt 23.37, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you!'

-You are the salt of the earth. 13

-You are the light of the world. 14

Light (phos): cf. Jn 8.12, 'I am the light of the world.' In the verse at hand, compare salt/earth with light/world or ge/kosmos.

-Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. 16

Let shine (lampo: to be brilliant, radiant, conspicuous). Used 'before' (emprosthen) men or in front of them. 'Good works' or beautiful (kalos) works. Glorify (doxazo: to magnify, extol). Compare the preposition emprosthen (before-ness) related to men with doxazo as to your Father in heaven.

-Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 19

Relaxes (luo: to loosen, dissolve). Commandments (entole) as used in reference to vs. 18. This verse has a distinction between relaxing on one hand and doing and teaching on the other hand.

-Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 20

Righteousness (dikaiosune: last noted in vs. 10). Exceeds (perisseuo: to increase, to abound). Will (not) enter (eiserchomai: the preposition eis prefixed to the verb and used with another eis, into).

-Anyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool' shall be liable to the hell of fire. 22

Angry (orgizomai: connotes provoking). Liable (enochos: guilty), with respect to judgment or krisis. Here it is used with the preposition eis (into). Fool (rhaka: empty-headed). Hell (geenna: a dump for Jerusalem).

-So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 23-4

Offering (prosphero: connotes more the bringing of such gifts. Pros + phero). At (epi: upon). Altar (thusiasterion: applies to offering of animals as well as incense, Ex 30.1). Before the altar: not at (epi) it. Be reconciled (diallassomai: connotes changing of mind).

-Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court. 25

Make friends (eunoeo: to be well disposed). Accuser (antidikos: as in a court of law).

-If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away. 29

Causes to sin (skandalizo: to put an impediment in the way to make one to stumble).

-If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. 30

From you (apo): cast (ballo) at a distance.

-Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the city of the great King. 34-5

Do (not) swear (omnumi: implies calling a person as a witness, to invoke). Throne and footstool: reference is Is 66.1, 'Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.'

-Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 36

Do (not) swear: cf. previous verse. By (eis: in) your head.

-Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 39

Do (not) resist (anthistemi: to set against, to withstand). Strike (rapizo: with a rod or stick).

-If anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well. 40

Sue (krino: to judge, to quarrel). Coat (chiton: an undergarment). Cloak (himation: cloak or outer garment).

-If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. 41

Forces (aggareuo: to employ a courier to press into service). Mile: a Roman mile consists of about 4,854 feet).

-Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. 42

Begs (aiteo: to ask). Refuse (apostrephomai: to turn away). Would borrow (danizo: to make a loan).

-Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. 44

Love (agapao: to show agape). Pray (proseuchomai: pros or towards-which prefaced to euchomai, to pray with respect to God or for a person). Persecute (dioko: cf. vs. 11 above).

-You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. 48

Must be perfect (teleios: adjective; brought to an end, made complete).

2 November, All Souls

Today's feast is unusual in that it occurs on a Sunday. Then again, given the fact that we are approaching the end of this year's liturgical cycle, it is very appropriate. Most Sunday readings for November will deal with "last things" as we prepare for Advent on the 30th. Thus All Souls sets the tone for the few weeks between now and then.

The Gospel is Jn 6.37-40 which is situated within the larger context of Jesus as the bread of life and has eucharistic overtones. It begins with “All that the Father gives me will come to me” and is followed by “I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.” Before this descent or incarnation into corporeal form, Jesus has received already from his Father “all.” Nevertheless, this “all” or human beings who will receive his message of salvation, is located in the future and is dependent upon free choice either to accept or reject the pre-temporal possession by the Father. Here we have a tension between divine ordering already effected and people who can insert this ordering into their own lives or not. Such a tension may be viewed pessimistically yet should not; instead, it is a challenge which arouses a kind of spiritual curiosity as to its realization. Awareness of this fact should effect joy, not sadness, and even create an impetus to make the outcome favorable.

Next Jesus switches emphasis from the present tense of “all that the Father gives me” to “that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me,” in other words, a transition from the present to the past tense. We may take the latter (“has given me”) as a way that Jesus speaks within time as opposed to what took place in eternity before his incarnation (“gives me”). Both are one and the same, only are pre-temporal and temporal ways of speaking. “All that he has given me” remains with Jesus throughout the two terms just noted but does have a definite end or completion, the “last day,” when he will raise “it” (note the singular as opposed to plural “all”). This phrase is mentioned a number of times within chapter six as well as in Paul’s epistles. Still, it remains enigmatic, not clearly defined, which creates an atmosphere of ambivalence which can be secured only by hope, and that prospect makes it an adventure, not a duty.

Finally, Jesus makes a clear statement about the Father’s “will:” that “everyone who sees the Son and believes in (eis: literally, into) him should have eternal life.” First comes seeing followed by believing and finally, eternal life. This is interesting in that faith is defined as coming through hearing. However, the Greek verb is *theoreo* (noun: *theoria*) which suggests more a contemplation or close consideration of what Jesus is about. Once that is accomplished, the transition to believing is easier.

9 November, Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome

Today’s Gospel (Jn 2.13-22) takes place relatively early in John’s Gospel, right after the wedding at Cana where Jesus did “the first of his signs” (2.11). More specifically, Jesus went to Jerusalem at the Passover (i.e., the first time John records it) and found all sorts of unbecoming activity taking place in the temple which infuriated him. What riled him most were those who sold pigeons which seems less scandalous than the more raucous money-changers and those selling sheep and oxen for the sacrifice. Perhaps the reason Jesus singled them out for special wrath was that pigeons were provided for poor people and hence the sellers were more numerous. Not only that, chances are the merchants inflated the price for pigeons. Although Jesus was an infant when brought to the temple for his circumcision (Lk 12.7), he must have been familiar with the required offering, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” Chances are he must have heard later in life about the offering made by Jesus’ parents with Simeon “(righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel” (Lk 2.25) which was in sharp contrast to the merchants he

had just driven from the temple. By the way, the actual selling of all these animals was not in the temple per se but in the large courtyard before it. “You shall not make my Father’s house (oikos) a house of trade.” Note that Jesus calls the temple (hieron...it includes the temple precincts as well) an oikos, a term applied to a human residence.

When the disciples saw the wrath of Jesus...it must have come unexpected...they were reminded of Ps 69.9, “For zeal for your house has consumed me.” This verse is cited in part and continues in full with “and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” The precise time of this remembering is not noted, most likely after Pentecost when they could reflect upon Jesus’ words and actions under the Holy Spirit’s guidance. As in the Gospel, the Psalm verse refers to “house” or beyth as opposed to temple. Jesus was overtaken by “zeal” or qin’ath which implies anger. Though not specifically mentioned in the Gospel, the “insults” (cherphah, singular) attributed to God fall upon the psalmist; i.e., they are transferred to Jesus. Again, only a Spirit-filled outlook by the disciples could see this at a later point in time as one among many indications of Christ’s divinity. One could even attribute Ps 69’s verse and the three following it as a foreshadowing of the Jews who mocked Jesus later upon the cross.

The Jews asked Jesus for a sign or semeion for his qin’ath which appears a rather tame response to the upheaval Jesus had caused. At this juncture they were unfamiliar with him since he had just come on the public scene in dramatic fashion. Jesus responded by saying “destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Here the Greek word for “temple” is naos which connotes the structure’s inner part as opposed to the more inclusive hieron where the selling of animals were taking place. Thus we have an interaction between three terms designating the holy place at Jerusalem: first a hieron, second an oikos and finally a naos. Of all three Jesus uses the last to refer to his body (vs. 21). Here we have a second anamnesis or recollection of events by the disciples, for vs. 22 says that they remembered Jesus’ words “when he was raised from the dead.” Note that not only did the disciples believe Jesus’ word (logos, singular) but the scripture or those specific passages recorded throughout the New Testament that point to him.

16 November, Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Technically speaking, today is the last Sunday of “ordinary time,” next Sunday being Christ the King. Thus the liturgical year comes to a close in two weeks. The same applies to Matthew’s Gospel which we’ve been following: next week concludes his eschatological theme with the great judgment just prior to the arrest of Jesus. That signals an end of parables and a movement towards fulfillment of what they signify.

Today’s Gospel (Mt 25.14-30) follows upon the heels of the parable likening the kingdom of heaven to ten maidens, five of whom were foolish and five were wise. With this in mind, the Gospel for today begins with “for it will be” which in Greek is hosper, “just as.” This little word can signify a transition from the maiden parable to the one at hand, i.e., the exact same theme only worded differently. In brief, the theme is how to handle one’s time (and resources) in the absence of God’s presence. It implies prayer as a certain mindfulness of having been in this divine presence which essentially does not differ from not being in it: the five wise maidens and two diligent servants act as if their

master were present. What enlivens all seven is awareness that their master will return: one group when the bridegroom “was delayed” and the other when the master returned “after a long time.”

In the passage at hand we have a man distributing talents to three servants (a talent being equivalent to 15 years wages, no mean sum) and well as entrusting to them his property. No reason is given for the journey nor how to use the talents. Surely each servant must have known that their master was up to something important and must have pondered the reason for his departure. It was not a servant’s place to ask, just carry out orders. The only hint we have as to the distribution of wealth is kata ten idian dunamin or “according to his ability,” dunamis meaning literally strength which can apply to a person’s moral character, not just business abilities as this Gospel implies. The first two servants doubled what they had received whereas the servant with one talent hid it in the ground; obviously he had the least dunamis of the three servants. Still, he is to be credited with not having run off with the talent which must have been a temptation.

Later or “after a long time” the master (this is the first time he is identified as such) returns: again, no reason is given for his absence nor how long this time happened to be. The first two servants—the one with five talents and the one with two—received praise for what they had accomplished during this “long time.” Finally the third servant approached and handed over the one talent which had been buried in the ground. He is the only servant who describes accurately his master’s character: skleros or “hard,” reaping where he doesn’t sow and gathering where he doesn’t winnow. Skleros means unyielding or severe yet not necessarily unrighteous. Actually, the master proves himself generous in dealing with the first two servants which is a manifestation, if you will, of this skleros character, only its other side.

Finally, the master manifests his skleros side by casting the servant outside “into the outer darkness,” a phrase used in Mt 22.13. There we have an equally skleros king who gave a marriage banquet for his son. Evidently he was patrolling the hall and found a man without a wedding garment and thus cast him out, possibly to the embarrassment of his newly married son and his wife. The Gospel passage about the maidens does not use a phrase related to casting out but implies it when saying “the door was shut” to the five foolish maidens who went out at night to purchase oil. Their intent was good but misguided. The “outer darkness” of the passage at hand as well as the wedding feast differs from the “inner” one, if you will. The latter consists of shadows and semi-light from the building where you can still make your way, whereas the darkness which is exoteron our “outer” is full darkness, one devoid of any type of illumination.

23 November, Christ the King

Today’s Gospel (Mt 25.31-46) recapitulates not only Matthew’s account...it occurs just before the Passion...but the liturgical year which comes to a close this coming Saturday with First Vespers of Advent which is a more genuine New Year’s Day as opposed to January first. And so the six days between two Sundays are a transition period, a bit reminiscent of the “novena” period between Christ’s Ascension and Pentecost.

For the past few weeks we've been hearing about "last things" which is suitable for this time of year. However, there's a little appreciated identity between the end of a given liturgical cycle and the beginning of a new one. If we examine more recent Sunday Gospels, they bear a striking resemblance with those of Advent. In fact, if a person could discern the spirit of the season only by means of these readings, minus the color of vestments, etc, he or she would find barely the slightest difference. Thus the end and beginning of a liturgical cycle are close to identical insofar as they proclaim the end and beginning of Christ's mission: his coming in glory (end of liturgical year) and coming as an infant (beginning of liturgical year).

In the Gospel at hand we have the Son of man coming in glory (doxa) after which he will sit on his glorious throne or according to the Greek text, his throne of doxa. Thus his coming and presence consist of this divine glory, not unlike the above mentioned similarity between the end and beginning of two liturgical years. Several verses later (vs. 34) is a transition from viewing Jesus as Son of man to that of a king which intimates that before his coming, Jesus was not a king or better, kept that side of himself unmanifest.

Once the Son of Man is on the throne, "will be gathered nations" (vs. 31). No specific agent is mentioned which does this gathering. Compare with what follows, namely, "he will separate (aphorizo) them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." The Greek verb has a broader sense...it can apply to the determination of boundaries, excommunication and marking off for oneself. Often this separation is perceived in terms of an individual either ministering or failing to minister to Christ who identifies himself with the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked and imprisoned. However, a closer look shows that while this is valid for individual Christians, it applies to the nations which are being separated. This is enhanced by the first person plural (we) in the responses given to Christ with respect to his identity with the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked and imprisoned.

30 November, First Sunday of Advent

Today begins a brand new liturgical cycle which in a true manner is New Year's Day for the Church. The past week offered a time to ponder the transition from one cycle to another which takes place technically during First Vespers or Saturday evening. In other words, the Church celebrates "New Year's Eve" at sunset, not at midnight as is the custom on the first of January. Unlike coming to the close of a given year, liturgical time lacks a sense of progress commonly understood, not to mention making resolutions for the new year. In actuality, the end of the previous liturgical year precludes this custom since we're dealing with a realm lacking historicity, or better, transcending it. Regular events that occurred in secular time pale in significance to what the Church teaches during what looks and feels like the same kind of time but in reality is otherwise. It might be better to say that events which seemed so important have an air of unreality about them once they are lifted up and inserted within a different framework of time. And that time is not linear but cyclic. Furthermore, liturgical time avoids the ancient cyclic form based upon recurring seasons. There a new awareness of time comes to birth yet basically remained the same as the one before and so forth going back to time out of mind. The same applies for the future which is identical with the past.

The modern awareness of time's passage differs by its emphasis upon progress. However, that progress is fragile with the latent anxiety it may fall apart. Hence the popularity of concept "the end of time" which, despite the fear, offers excitement and hope, very different from the Church's which sanctifies and inserts time into a new realm. Many people want this but fail to realize it, having become unaccustomed to the two types of time flowing together but of completely different natures. Unfortunately, this gives rise to a temptation of shifting the Church's perception of time into preconceived notions as to Jesus' immanent return. The only point of contact between the two rests upon Jesus' words in the Gospels, no more. Never was the Church hung up about "end times" because always it enjoyed a seamless transition from one liturgical year to the other.

As was noted under 23 November's entry (the last Sunday of Ordinary Time), if someone were oblivious to everything liturgical except the readings, no distinction could be made between that Sunday, along with the ones just preceding it, and today. Those Gospels and today's are identical with their focus upon "last things." Herein lies the essential difference between liturgical and secular time: the latter has anticipation that the new year will bring improvement over the year that has just transpired whereas the former lacks this compulsive character and is more laid back with regard to future historical developments. For the Church, through the liturgy the two modes of time (past and future) are secondary with regard to the importance of the eternal present.

As for the Gospel at hand (Mk 13.33-7), it begins with two commands: take heed and watch. The first Greek verb is *blepo* which simply means to look or consider. The second is *agrupneo* which connotes not being able to get to sleep. Thus *agrupneo* applies to restlessness at night, not a pleasant state of affairs. Both commands rest upon ignorance of not knowing "when the time (*kairos*) will come." Here we have an example of *kairos* in the well-known sense of an event. If we substitute "event" for "time," the meaning is clearer and indicative of anxiety as well as hope. Both are backed up by Jesus saying "lest he comes suddenly and find you asleep"...that is, or find you neither *blepo* nor *agrupneo*, symbolic of night as just noted. Such watchfulness precludes being continually awake, an impossible task. Jesus simply offers the two commands to people that they may picture themselves situated in the same condition as the servants left in charge while the master is absent. The parable for 16 November (and this gets back to the virtual identity of the end and beginning of the two liturgical years) has the master going on a long journey whereas today the length is unspecified. For the latter, indeterminacy can increase the anticipation; if it were long as with Mt 25.19, one could avoid *blepo* and *agrupneo* for a significant amount of time.

In Matthew's account just noted, the master gives his servants talents to multiply whereas with Mark, he "puts his servants in charge each with his own work" which suggests not so much investing money but minding the master's household. Note that compared with the other servants, the master singles out the doorkeeper "to be on the watch," the verb being *gregoreo*, to be awake. The words which follow then read, "watch, therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house will come." That is to say, these words

are addressed to the doorkeeper specifically which, if we stretched it a bit, means that the other servants aren't held up to such a strict standard. To them the master had said *blepo* and *agrupneo* with the connotation of sleeplessness. Both are distinct from the doorkeeper being asked to *gregoreo*, to be awake, the task one would expect of such a person.

7 December, Second Sunday of Advent

Mark's Gospel, noted for its directness, gets right down to business without recounting the genealogy of Jesus Christ. In vs. 2 he mentions the prophet Isaiah yet that verse comes from Malachi 3.1. Isaiah's verse follows in vs. 2. It is though Mark makes no distinction between the two prophets, blending them to present a single message as a prelude to introduce John the Baptist.

The Greek verse of Malachi (that is, different in some ways from the Hebrew) cited by Mark runs: "Behold, I send my messenger before your face who shall prepare your way." The sending is in the present tense, an action already engaged. "Before your face" or *pro prosopou* implies that the messenger (*aggelo*: also used as angel) is in full view of everyone. "He will prepare (*kataskueazo*) "your way." Note the future tense; the people won't be doing the preparing but the messenger. Their task is to be receptive to what is being prepared. In addition to the act of construction, this verb involves an equipping or furnishing. Thus the messenger will equip (*katasekeuazo*) those walking on it that they may undertake the journey successfully. Obviously a way leads from one place to another and knowledge of where it starts and where it terminates. However, this knowledge belongs more properly to the messenger, not necessarily to those walking upon it.

The Hebrew of the Malachi quote from which Mark's is lifted reads in full, "Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts." The word *mala'ak* is similar to *aggelos* insofar as it can mean "angel." The verb for "prepare" is *panah* which means to turn; from it is derived the preposition "before" as in "before me." Compare "your way" noted in the 2nd paragraph with "the way" of the verse at hand which does not require preparation nor equipping but a turning. Malachi presupposes that the people had been engaged in the process seeking (*baqash*, in present tense; also means supplication) the Lord after which suddenly he "will come to his temple." So if it weren't for this seeking to which the people were accustomed over a long period, chances are that the Lord would not have made an appearance. Naturally his coming presupposes a termination of the "way," the Jerusalem temple.

In the verse at hand Malachi inserts "the Lord whom you seek" in between two statements about the messenger: the first is simply "my messenger" or *mala'ak* whereas the second one identifies him as a "mala'k of the covenant." One could say almost that there are two messengers here, a two-fold escort. The people knew this second messenger since he was an object of their delight compared to the first one ("my") who belongs to the Lord. *Chaphats* is the verb which like *panah* implies a turning or better, a

bending or inclining which they had been doing for some time. Also chaphats means taking genuine pleasure in someone or something which here is the covenant's messenger.

After the Malachi verse Mark adds one from Isaiah (40.3): "The voice of one crying in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Compare this preparing with the *kataskeuazo* of Malachi: the verb here is *etoimazo* or getting ready which is more in line with the English word. Now those addressed by Isaiah are bidden to get ready "the way of the Lord" compared with the messenger above regarding "the way." As in Malachi the (singular) way is already in existence. Isaiah adds the (plural) "paths" or *tribos* which apply more to a well-trodden (*tribos* is derived from *tribo*, to rub, wear down) road or foot path. One gets the impression that many *triboi* feed into the singular "way" which similarly belong to the Lord. Straightening out the *triboi* can be a more daunting task than "preparing the way of the Lord," for it implies reorganization of paths which had been used often and over a considerable period of time.

The Isaiah quote in and by itself runs, "A voice cries, 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" The voice which cries isn't mentioned in Mark; one could say that for him, John the Baptist is the voice whom he introduces in vs. 4. The crying is in the present tense and done impersonally: no specific reference is given as to its source. Also, nothing is intimated as to how long it had been crying. We do know that this voice originates in the wilderness or *midbar* usually associated as a place prophets and holy men frequented in order to hear this voice speaking. As with Malachi, the "way of the Lord" requires preparing or better, a turning, *panah* being used as well.

Isaiah uses the term "desert" or *haravah*, more specifically a totally arid, sterile environment compared with *midbar* which is punctuated with fertile places such as an oasis. With the definite article, *haravah* applies to the valley of the Jordan near Jericho and even the Dead Sea. With this utter desolation in mind, the voice also cries "make straight a highway." The verb is *yashah* which has moral implications as well. In the verse at hand, *yashah* applies to "highway" or *meslah*, a public way which is raised from the ground. This makes it more visible from a distance. Compared with the above mentioned way and paths, *meslah* is a broad, well-cared for route, here in a completely forsaken place. Like the other two routes (way and paths), it had been in existence. In order to make this highway *yashah* or straight is a more formidable task by reason of its isolated condition.

Having presented all this, now the stage is set for the appearance of John the Baptist who is in the desert. The Greek *eremos* is used as in the Isaiah quote of vs. 3 whose Hebrew counterpart is *haravah*. The absolute desolation of *haravah* makes John's message of *metanoia* or conversion all the more startling, for it comes from a place less expected. At the same time, the above noted familiarity with such deserted places and roadways gives an inkling as to what John says and as to whom will follow him.

8 December, Immaculate Conception

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth.” Thus begins today’s Gospel (Lk 1.26-38). As a preface to the time frame noted here, refer to Elizabeth in vs. 24 who “hid herself for five months”...in order “to take away my reproach from among men.” That is to say, Elisabeth was pregnant with John the Baptist and due to her advanced age, wanted to keep this pregnancy quiet. Thus Gabriel appeared to Mary in the sixth month of Elisabeth’s pregnancy or three months prior to John’s birth. It would be no surprise to Mary to receive a visit by Gabriel about 2/3 through Elisabeth’s pregnancy...in fact, she was expecting it about this time in order for the birth of John the Baptist to herald that of Jesus. In vs. 36 Gabriel reveals to Mary the time frame: “this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.” Certainly revelation of this had a lot to do with Mary’s consent to Gabriel, for in vs. 38 she says, “Let it be to me according to your word.” No further words are communicated by the angel which suggests that Mary made the journey to visit Elizabeth with the same haste that Gabriel had left her. With the time frame in mind relative to the two women, Mary gave birth to Jesus three months after Elizabeth, John the Baptist coming first. And so by his birth, John is a forerunner to Jesus.

“When the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy.” In other words, John could hardly wait to exit his mother’s womb so as to begin his role as a herald of Jesus. Surely memory John pondered long and hard over the pre-natal greeting affected as he waited many years in the desert. There he conceived his message of repentance which he intimated even in the womb. That is to say, not only did John recognize Jesus, he must have recognized his mother as being under the shadow of the Holy Spirit (cf. vs. 35) and thus not requiring repentance from sin. Later as an adult the recognition of the Baptist is testified by the words in John’s Gospel, “Behold, the Lamb of God” (1.29). Despite the temporal gap of some thirty years or so, immediately John was able to recognize Jesus as he had done when both were in the womb. As for the leaping in Elisabeth’s womb, the verb is *skirtao* which means to leap for joy. Surely John must have expressed the same *skirtao* upon seeing Jesus for the first time.

14 December, Third Sunday of Advent

The figure of John the Baptist permeates the second half of Advent by reason of his role of herald, that the birth of Christ is all the more immanent. Of course, his mention has nothing to do with the physical birth of Christ; John is operating a good thirty years after the fact. Still, it’s interesting how the Church is able to combine disparate temporal elements and weave them into a seamless whole.

Today’s Gospel (Jn 1.6-8 & 19-28) lifts three verses at the beginning of St John’s Gospel concerning the Baptist and skips to a later point where his mission is described in some detail. Thus mention of John is sandwiched in between the Gospel’s prologue about the Logos, embedding him, as it were, within the Logos.

Sandwiching John in this way sets up a comparison between him and the Logos. Compare John as “a man sent from God” with the “Word was with God” of vs. 1, a clear distinction of two relationships. With regards to the Word or Logos, it...and there is no

mention here of a person, that is to say, Jesus Christ...was pros ton theon. This phrase conveys the idea of being in-the-direction-towards (pros) God, a direct, immediate relationship. Furthermore, this phrase is the only instance of its kind among the Gospels. On the other hand, John was “from (para) God.” This preposition also can mean besides or in the presence of. Later in John’s Gospel it plays an important role when Jesus speaks of his relationship with the Father and Spirit (chaps. 14-6). The directness of pros ton theon is lacking, for there it had to do with the (impersonal) Logos compared with the various relationships of the three divine persons described by the preposition para. And so, to assign John as being para theou or “from God” reveals his role as forerunner of those who later would share the fullness of the divine relationship built around the preposition para or what it signifies in chaps 14-6.

Furthermore, para theou clarifies vss. 7-8 about John not being the light, for to be the light would mean that he had a direct towards-which relationship of the Logos, or one which is pros ton Logon.

Vs. 7 speaks of John’s testimony (marturia) concerning the light whereas vs. 19 uses the same word in verbal form. However, the latter verse speaks of a different marturia, if you will, for it occurred “when the Jews sent priests and Levites to ask him, ‘Who are you?’” It would not be surprising that while being asked John had in mind his marturia concerning the light. Hence questions about his identity are irrelevant which is evident by his terse answers to the Jerusalem authorities. Finally John reveals his identity as a voice crying in the wilderness. That is to say, he shifts from being witness to the light (which involves seeing) to being a voice.

21 December, Forth Sunday of Advent

Today’s Gospel (Lk 1.26-38) is exactly the same as for the Immaculate Conception just two weeks ago.

“(Gabriel) came to her and said, hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you.” The Greek reads something like going-into-her. The verb eiserchomai intimates this, and it is intensified by addition of the preposition pros which means in-the-direction-towards-which. And so we have an “into” coupled with a “towards” vis-à-vis Mary and her angelic visitor. Pros was mentioned in last Sunday’s notes pertinent to the relationship of the Logos with (towards) God. As for Gabriel’s encounter with Mary, the two words point to a direct, intimate contact which makes her response all the more understandable. Not only was Mary “greatly troubled at the saying (logos),” she “considered in her mind (dialogizomai) what sort of greeting this might be.” The verb dialogizomai also means to discuss, argue, question. It’s intensity, if you will, is signified by the preposition dia (through) prefaced to the verb logizomai, to count, reckon. Within this word we can see the noun logos, the “saying” from Gabriel which was a source of concern for Mary.

Gabriel speaks the most for any angel in the Bible, that is from vss. 30-33 and vss. 35-37. In other words, these verses are an unpacking of his saying or logos of vs. 29. It is notable that once Mary assented to Gabriel’s message, he left immediately. This is no time for lingering around, for Gabriel had to bring report to God for such a momentous

decision. Gabriel's mission is not unlike Abraham's faithful servant who was sent to fetch Rebekah as Isaac's bride (Gen 24). Abraham did not want a bride from the Canaanites among whom he dwelt but from "my country and my kindred" (vs. 4). This parallels Gabriel going to Mary of the house of Israel.

When Gabriel returned to God with Mary's favorable response, perhaps his response to was not unlike the atmosphere surrounding Isaac's beholding of Rebekah: "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there were camels coming." In other words, we can see God meditating...such in the Hebrew...as he awaited word from Gabriel. This verb, the only use in the Bible, means to take a walk and is related closely to *syach*, to speak or to sing. "I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways" (Ps 119.15).

When Rebekah and her entourage got closer to Isaac, she asked the servant about the unidentified man (Isaac) and once she had been informed, "she took her veil and covered herself" (vs. 66). The closer she got to Isaac...symbolic of Gabriel getting closer to God...the greater the anticipation and mystery. Chances are that Gabriel did not to publicize the news he bore but kept it under wraps until he came directly into God's presence. Only then could it be made public which parallels Mary's situation, she "went with haste into the hill country" to meet Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist. As for the servant's role, it is brought to fulfillment by the verse, "And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done." His work is all the more significant and shrouded in a certain mystery because never are we given his name.

25 December, Nativity of the Lord

The Gospel commented upon here is from Mass at midnight, Lk 2.1-14.

The Gospel begins with a "decree" or dogma from the Roman emperor, the Greek word meaning that which is decreed publicly and intended as a regulation. Here it pertains to a census with respect to the "world" or *oikoumene* which more precisely means the inhabited or colonized world. Everything lying outside this was either partially known or not known at all.

At the time Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem to comply with the Roman dogma, she gave birth to her "first-born son." In the same region an "angel of the Lord" (no name is given to this angel; chances are it wasn't Gabriel who was sent to Mary) appeared to shepherds. Accompanying this angel we have the "glory of the Lord" which shone around (*perilampo*) the shepherds, that is, embracing them with this heavenly light. Compare with Saul's (or Paul) conversion on the road to Damascus: "a light from heaven flashed about (*periastrapto*) him" where no mention is made of the divine glory, *doxa*. The former (*perilampo*) is gentle whereas the latter (*periastrapto*) is dramatic, like lightning flashes. It brings to mind Ezekiel's vision of the chariot: "and fire flashing forth continually" (Ezk 1.4).

The anonymous angel identifies the newly born baby as a sign or *semeion*, a term often associated with the gods as to an event that just happened or is about to happen. Then the

shepherds agree among themselves to go to Bethlehem to see “this thing” or rhema which first came to them as a semeion. Usually rhema refers to that which is said or spoken or in this context, that which the angel had spoken to them.

And so, at the birth of Jesus we have an interaction of that which is seen (perilampo and semeion) and that which is spoken (rhema). Despite the drama of having been surrounded by divine light, the shepherds rely more upon what they had heard, and that rhema leads them to the Christ child. Looking at this from a scientific point of view, the Word (Logos) of God as something uttered travels at a much slower speed than light. Although the ancients weren’t aware of this technicality, chances are they could intuit the difference of speeds. For example, during the approach of a thunderstorm we can discern the difference in speed it takes for lightning and thunder to reach us, the former arriving first. That which comes more slowly (Logos) is more reliable than that which comes almost immediately, divine light or doxa. The former allows for greater reflection and deliberation and tends to abide more consistently than light, however splendid it happens to be. That’s why Saul, having been blinded by the light, is more attentive to the voice that speaks to him which is Jesus Christ himself. If he paid more attention to the lightning-like flashes (periastrapto), perhaps he would not have been converted and would have forgotten the event despite its drama. In sum, a demonstration of the biblical principle that “faith comes by (the slower principle of) hearing.”

28 December, The Holy Family

For the feast of the Virgin Mary on 1 January, formerly known as the Circumcision, the Gospel is Lk 2.16-21. Today’s Gospel (Lk 2.22-40) occurs after the events recounted in that one though liturgically speaking, it comes first.

“When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses.” The Greek text reads, “when the days of their purification were fulfilled.” Reference is to Lv 12.3 & 6 concerning the male child’s circumcision. There it speaks of the mother whereas the Gospel has “their”...plural...presumably involving the father, mother and son or Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Leviticus has the mother present an offering to the priest “at the door of the tent of meeting” compared with the established temple in Jerusalem. It is there that Mary brought Jesus “to present him to the Lord,” the verb being paristemi. The only other Gospel use is Mt 26.53, the Garden of Gethsemane, with the accent upon sending: “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” Both instances appeal to the Law or Torah: “as it is written in the Law of the Lord” and “that the scriptures be fulfilled.” They are indicators that close attention must be paid to such Old Testament verses, running as they do throughout the course of the Gospels and therefore throughout Jesus’ life.

Prior to the mother bringing her child to the priest, Leviticus prescribes that she “touch not any hallowed thing nor come into the sanctuary.” The Hebrew reads literally, “touch not in all (that is) holy (qadash),” the verb being nagah which implies reaching out. Another meaning is to strike as with a plague, a forceful intimation of how removed the mother was from all things sacred. This partial withdrawal from that which is qadash puts the words “at the door of the tent of meeting” in perspective: the woman can

approach the holy place, but she cannot enter. However, the newly born male infant is holy: “Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord,” a verse from Ex 13.2 quoted in Lk 2.23. And so, we have a paradoxical, even awkward, situation: the mother prevented from touching holy objects and a male infant who is “holy to the Lord.” One gets the idea that the mother cannot touch her child; perhaps during this purification period the child was in care of mediates. They represented a kind of in-between space not unlike the same, barely discernable but important space between the mother and priest or outside and inside the temple.

This idea of purification finds a certain echo in John the Baptist: “I need to be baptized by you” (Mt 3.14), that is, be cleansed by Jesus. Though Jesus was holy and did not require baptism just as he did not require being presented in the temple, he as an adult went through this second purification “to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3.15). Jesus’ baptism brought to completion the first purification at the hands of Simeon, a kind of prototype of the Baptist, to whom the following description can be applied as well: “(Simeon) was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel” (vs. 25).

With regard to the required sacrifice, Luke quotes in part Lv 12.8, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” One was for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. This was “if she could not afford a lamb” (vs. 8), intimating that Mary and Joseph could not afford the more costly sacrificial victim. In a sense, they required not a lamb; their new-born son already was a lamb: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1.29).

-The End, 2008-