

Liturgical Reflections 2010

This document begins with the new liturgical year, 29 November 2009.

29 November, First Sunday of Advent

Today's Gospel (Lk 21.25-28 & 34-6) is very much like that of the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mk 13.24-32). This similarity keeps in line with the observation made under that entry, namely, that the end and beginning of any given liturgical year has the same theme. If, for example, a blind person were to listen only to the readings and be unaware of everything else, he would hard pressed to discern a transition from one year to the next. This is an important feature to keep in mind as we commence a new liturgical cycle, the sameness yet difference between the two spans of time. The sameness precludes perceiving liturgical time as a never-ending repetition of cycles...rather, time advances not so much in linear fashion but spirals upward toward a divine goal. Also it suggests Jesus' words about the kingdom of heaven coming without visible signs, different from the dramatic cosmic description we have today.

As for the signs (*semeion*) in the sun, moon and stars, nothing is said about them, except that people will be terrified at them. In addition to this, disturbances in the oceans will induce perplexity or *aporia*. This term fundamentally means difficulty in passage, of being cramped in a tight space with barely enough wriggle room to get through. While in that confined space the sea's roaring (vs. 25) will be all the more terrifying. Note that such unspecified signs pertain to the world (*oikoumene*) or inhabited...“housed”...places on the earth compared with the physical dimension of the planet as a whole.

In addition to the signs in the heavenly bodies the “powers of the heavens will be shaken.” Here is a partial quote from the prophet Haggai which reads in full: “and I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land” (2.6). Verse seven continues with the same shaking applied to “all nations.” This latter shaking is to obtain “the treasures of all nations” which continues (and concludes) with one purpose: “I will fill this house with splendor.” Here “house” is reminiscent of the *oikoumene* noted above and for Haggai, represents the temple in Jerusalem. As for the divine splendor, the Hebrew word is *kavod* which alternately means glory. Thus the entire universe is shaken, not just the earth, in order that the Lord may lavish his benefits upon this temple. While these events are taken generally as pertaining to the end of times, the last judgment and so forth, in a few days something similar occurs at the death of Jesus: “and there was darkness over the whole land...the sun's light failed.” (23.44-5). Here the temple's curtain was torn in two which allowed for a manifestation of divine *kavod*, different from that of the temple and proper to Jesus himself.

Immediately after the powers of heaven had been shaken Jesus says that people “will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” That is to say, he will focus his presence similar to what the Lord had done in Haggai, his *kavod* filling the Jerusalem temple. Now redemption is nigh, *apolutrosis* being the Greek term, or the payment of a ransom.

Today's Gospel skips the parable of a fig tree (vss. 29-33) and continues with Jesus encouraging his listeners not to be weighed down by life's cares, *bareo* being the verb which stands in contrast with

his earlier words to “raise your heads.” Even though Jesus cautions about this relative to persons who are intoxicated, etc., nevertheless “that day” will come as a snare “upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth.” These words differ from the sense of *oikoumene*, the “housed” part of the earth and are broader. Certainly not all persons will be pre-occupied with drunkenness nor with life's concerns, yet all will be subject to becoming ensnared. The way to escape such ensnarement is to “watch at all times,” *agrupneo*, a verb which can apply to the experience of a sleepless night. *Kairos* is the term for “time,” the well-known biblical word for a special occasion compared with *chronos* or conventional time. Thus to remain watchful...sleepless...seems to apply not during regular time but to special occasions, and the Gospel warning about the Son of man's coming is one such occasion. The admonition to watch at all times...at all *kairoi*...is meant for his listeners to “escape all these things that will take place.” Escape suggests moving from one place to another yet here it means standing before the Son of man, standing before him “coming in a cloud with power and great glory” as noted earlier in vs. 26.

6 December, Second Sunday of Advent

Today's Gospel (Lk 3.1-6) doesn't begin with the birth of Christ nor with the preparation of his baptism while John the Baptist is in the desert, all vital material for the narrative's beginning. Instead, we have a precise time with respect to John's preaching: “In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...” John (as well as Jesus) are fully grown men, not infants, here at the beginning of a new liturgical year. The former is attaining the end of his ministry and the latter is about to begin his. Here's an example of how the Church freely moves in an order of time different from the secular one. You'd think she would start with the birth of Jesus, but no. The Church sets that aside for Christmas proper and focuses upon what temporally speaking is closer to the end of Jesus' life or his three year period of ministry. Such a focus serves to make the transition of the previous liturgical year to the new one. That transition, as had been noted, saw that the end of one year was barely distinguishable from the beginning of another.

“The word of God came to John in the wilderness.” We could take this as John already in the wilderness to whom the word...*logos*...came. No information is provided as to what had brought John there in the first place. One gets the impression that he entered the desert almost as soon as he came from the womb of his mother, Elisabeth. Nothing is said of John from his birth until the unspecified time of his withdrawal nor how he was motivated to do this. Compare John with Jesus after his baptism who was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit as opposed to the *logos* as in Lk 4.1-13. As soon as the *logos* came to John he left the desert and “went into all the region about the Jordan” (vs.3). This divine *logos* bade John to preach a baptism of repentance, of *metanoia*, for the forgiveness of sins.

Luke portrays the Baptist in terms of a voice, not a person, crying in the wilderness as taken from Is 40.3-5. Actually, these verses comprise the essence of today's Gospel. The passage in Hebrew differs in some degree from the Greek and sums up the Gospel's message: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” Luke's version runs as “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” As for the Hebrew, two roads are mentioned instead of one. From Luke we get the impression that there is one “way” from which a number of “paths” derive. Also the Hebrew text gives us two different types of waste places, *midbar*

and *haravab*. As for the former, it is where John spent time, connoting the traditional place of withdrawal both for temptation and preparation to fulfill promises made by God. Within this midbar a “highway” or *derek* is to be constructed, the most common word for such a passage. As for the latter or *haravab*, it suggests a sterile place, not so much the divine environment associated with *midbar*. Within this *haravab* is to be made straight a “highway” or *meslah*, implying a passageway raised up or on an embankment. So if we follow the verse of Isaiah, we have two types of passage in two types of desolate places, a double track, if you will.

The remaining verses from Isaiah describe valleys and hills being filled and raised, in other words, making the way through which both *derek* and *meslah* are to run. The purpose of both is summed up by revelation of the “glory (*kevod*) of the Lord.” Once the *midbar* and *haravab* have their roads laid out on a flat surface, only then can this divine *kevod* make itself be known. One can assume that John, having been in the wilderness before he heard the divine *logos*, lived there among an environment of valley and hills, not this flat plain. It was this *logos* that effected the transformation of both *midbar* and *haravab* into a place suitable...flat enough...for God's *kevod* to become manifest.

8 December, Immaculate Conception

Earlier notations on today's Gospel (Lk 1.26-38) relative to this feast have applied to various aspects of the Virgin Mary's response to the angel Gabriel. Because the Gospel for today always remains the same, the reflections here will examine the the person of Daniel. Only two previous references to him are in the Bible, Dan 8.16 & 9.21, where he is not identified specifically as an angel:

“Gabriel, make this man (Daniel) understand the vision.” The person who so commands Gabriel is not clearly specified but takes place in a vision as “one having the appearance of a man.” Next Daniel hears a man's voice, equally unspecified as to his identity, on the banks of a river commanding Gabriel to understand the vision. The vision at hand was one that had just been revealed (vss. 9-14), namely, a little horn which became greater. It is one of several in the Book of Daniel associated with rather difficult, if not bizarre, imagery and as pertaining to a vision “for the time of the end (*qets*).” This Hebrew word can apply to a prophetic end as well as destruction, usually the two being associated. Next Daniel falls into a “deep sleep” (*radam*), a verb which connotes snoring heavily. In other words Gabriel's act of speaking causes Daniel to fall into this state, an image with some humorous overtones. This is the same verb used to describe the sleep God brings upon Adam in order to create Eve: “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man” (Gen 2.21). As for Daniel, as soon as he experiences this *radam* Gabriel awakens him to know “what shall be at the latter end of the indignation.” The indignation is God's response to the little horn which had exalted itself and overthrew the sanctuary for the burnt offering.

The second reference to Gabriel in the Book of Daniel runs as follows: “While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.” As with the first verse, the one at hand refers not so much as to a vision but to Israel not having kept the divine ordinances. Here Gabriel comes to Daniel “while he (that is, I) was speaking in prayer,” namely, confessing his sins and those of Israel (cf. vs. 20). Gabriel reassures Daniel that he is “greatly beloved,” *chamad* being the verbal root which implies desire and covetousness.

Such is the Gabriel of the Book of Daniel who in Luke assumes the role of an angel, *aggelos*, or messenger, not unlike his earlier role with respect to the prophet. Note that Gabriel does not reveal his name to Mary, just the message he brought from God. However, chances are that Mary, a devotee Israelite, was familiar with the Book of Daniel and the person of Gabriel relative to the visions described there. No small wonder that “she was greatly troubled” (vs. 29) when this angelic being addressed her. The Greek verb *diatarasso* means being thrown into confusion or perplexity...not unlike the prophet Daniel and his confrontation with Gabriel. This verb has the preposition *dia* (through) prefaced to *tarasso*, “to stir up trouble.” That is to say *dia* serves to intensify its meaning and thoroughness of action as in the case of Mary. Furthermore, Mary “considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be.” Would it be like Gabriel's to Daniel causing him to fall into a deep sleep (*radam*) with the possibility of not waking up? And if she awoke, to what would she awake to? As for Mary, her considering...as the verb *dialogizomai* intimates...is a desire to balance all that was said and to come up with a resolution. Note again the preposition *dia* prefaced to *logizomai* (to count, reckon), an intensification of what was going on in her mind. Gabriel foresaw this which was why he said “Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God.” Similar words were said by Gabriel to Daniel as noted above, that is, “for you are greatly beloved.” He continues immediately with, “consider the word and understand the vision,” words equally applicable to Mary.

13 December, Third Sunday of Advent

Today's Gospel (Lk 3.10-18) continues with the response from those persons listening to the proclamation of John the Baptist which we heard last week. Keep in mind that we have John and Jesus (the latter who has not made an appearance yet is close at hand) as fully grown men, the former at the end of his career and the latter at the beginning of his, however brief, temporally speaking. Such is a fundamental theme of Advent, the weeks prior to Christmas, when Jesus is born. The Church has no problem at all switching from one temporal event to another or going from one end of the scale to the other. Liturgical or sacred time works freely from and within chronological time.

“What then shall we do?” The whole-hearted response of the multitudes to John's preaching of repentance. During last year's liturgical cycle Ordinary Time centered in large part around Mark's Gospel. There we encountered the term *ocholos* for multitudes which acted as a kind of Greek chorus highlighting the action and works of the principal characters. In the case at hand, John's response to those who approached him for baptism was nothing special, really, just basic common sense principles of right human behavior.

While people were approaching John they were all “in expectation” or *prosdokao*. The preposition *pros* (in the direction towards which) highlights the tension on the banks of the Jordan River. Nothing is stated clearly about the people discussing their *prosdokao* among each other. Instead, Luke says that “all men questioned in their hearts,” that is, privately and not openly. The verb here is *dialogizomai*, literally to reckon through (*dia*). It's yet another example of how a small preposition (*dia*: through) changes the meaning of a word and gives it something extra critical for a deeper appreciation of the context lying beyond translation. The sense we get is that the people were weighing thoroughly what John meant to them, more specifically, whether he was the Christ. They

had a notion of the Christ from their tradition. John doesn't come out clearly and deny he is the Christ. Instead, he emphasizes his role of baptizer compared with "he who is mightier than I." This mightier person John doesn't say is the Christ, but he will "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." It isn't clear whether the people, devout Jews as they might be, had any clear notion about the Holy Spirit let alone the Christ. John adds that this mightier person will baptize not just with the Spirit but with fire. There is no record of Jesus doing thus though John could be intimating the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost several years later. In other words, John could have in mind the end of Jesus' ministry and its significance here before Jesus even comes on the scene. If so, we have yet another example of Scripture's freedom from chronological time which is neither an abuse nor disdain of it but a sign of freedom from its circular, compulsive nature of wanting to returning back on itself.

20 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

This year we're fortunate in that we have almost one full week of this last Sunday of Advent. Today's Gospel (Lk 1.39-45) presents us with Mary's visit to her cousin, Elisabeth, who is also pregnant, that is, with John the Baptist. Upon reaching the house, the babe in Elisabeth's womb "leaped for joy," *skirtao* being the Greek verb. The classical usage of *skirtao* refers to gusts of wind as well as the bounding of lambs as found in several biblical references, one of which is Ps 114.14 (Septuagint): "The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs." There is a parallel image to that John's *skirtao* but with quite a differ sense as found in Gen 25.22: "The children struggled (*skirtao*) together within her." This refers to the two yet unborn Isaac and Esau within Rebekah's womb, a struggle destined to continue throughout their lives. The relationship between John and Jesus, however, was the exact opposite.

The unborn infants in the persons of their mothers prefigures their meeting much later in their lives on the banks of the Jordan River when Jesus came to be baptized by John. Chronologically, this meeting occurs three years before Jesus' death and even a much shorter time before John's beheading. From the womb John recognized Jesus, an awareness that breached the two intervening walls or the two wombs of the respective mothers. When he matured, one can only speculate what Elisabeth may have taught John in his youth about his cousin. The same may be applied to Mary talking about John with Jesus, not to mention future visits when the two youths may have met. Though the Gospels are silent on this, the probability of such meetings must be high. Also the discussions among Mary and Elizabeth as to their respective sons must have been quite interesting. To complicate the matter, we could bring in their husbands as well, Joseph and Zechariah. One can only imagine what they must have talked about. Yet again, there's the real possibility that Mary may not have visited her cousin and the youth John. That would mean taking Jesus along with here and having the two, Jesus and John, meet well before their destined encounter. But any visit among them was well within possibility as far as distance goes; the two cousins were relatively close, as intimated by Mary when she undertook the journey during her pregnancy, not a wise thing to do.

Although John and Jesus must have known about their respective homes, it seems they had a tacit agreement apart from that of their mothers...one born in the wombs of their mothers...that they would not meet in them until towards what turned out to be late in the lives of both. This physical proximity to Jesus without meeting him could have been too much for John to bear. Thus it may

have had a role of driving him into the wilderness, to put a necessary distance between both which enabled John to recognize Jesus among the many who approached him for baptism. As for John's departure for the desert, no specific time is given for it, presumably early in his life. Surely his mother Elisabeth and his father Zechariah would have encouraged him. After all, Zechariah was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (vs. 67) and prophesied about Jesus in vs. 68-70 in what has become known as the Benedictus. These words of blessing, uttered at John's birth, must have had just an important impact upon him as during that *skirtao* when he was unborn.

25 December, Christmas

There are three Gospel readings for today: Midnight Mass, Dawn Mass and Mass during the day. The entry here will concern the Mass for Midnight (Lk 2.1-14), just about the only time a feast day is celebrated with the exception of Easter where according to ancient tradition, Mass ends at dawn.

The familiarity of the Christmas scene can make it more difficult to retain freshness. One way of overcoming this obstacle is by attentiveness to the Gospel's opening words, "In those days." Quite a few significant documents in human history begin in such a manner, by locating the event about to be recounted within a specific time, one quite different from the present one. "In those days" is an ideal way for opening a classical text especially when the Gospel is being read aloud in public. These words grab your attention at the get-go, get you out of the present, and throw back to another era. It expands upon this by speaking about the milieu in which the action is to take place, namely, under the reign of Caesar Augustus. Thus we have the first Roman emperor at one end of the Mediterranean and the birth of an obscure baby at the other end in Israel. Between these two geographical points much was to happen that would transform the world.

The census decreed by Augustus was for "all the world" or *oikoumene*, more specifically, the inhabited world as opposed to the physical planet itself. *Oikoumene* furthermore denotes the Roman Empire; surely there was knowledge of people living beyond its borders, but those areas weren't considered civilized or up to the standards of Rome. And so when it came time for registering for this census...of putting one's name down as belonging to a particular place within this *oikoumene*...we have Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. It was an awkward time, for Mary gave birth to Jesus there. This intimates that she had to come to register despite her advanced pregnancy. Because a census is to determine the number of inhabitants within a given area, the newly born Jesus would have been numbered as well. However, nothing is said of this. In other words, Jesus may or may not have been registered in the Roman census.

At the birth of Jesus we see shepherds out in the field watching over their flocks. Although they too presumably had to register for the census, perhaps their more mobile, vagrant way of living enabled them to escape detection. If authorities moved into their area, easily they could have slipped away, even outside the borders of the empire itself. In a way, such shepherds are outside the bounds of *oikoumene*, hovering around its edges, moving in and out according to their own needs and those of their flocks. It was to such semi-migratory people the "angel of the Lord" first appeared, not those within the *oikoumene* proper. As noted above, we haven't information whether Jesus was born in time for being registered. If not, he would have an ambiguous part within this political entity called *oikoumene*. His being born in a manger, not in an inn, made him even more susceptible of not being

registered. Thus there is a real chance Jesus was equivalent to a slave or worse, with no legality in the eyes of the current government. However, in the end this worked to Jesus' advantage. No small wonder that much later when dragged before Pilate Jesus could say that "my kingdom is not of this world," that it does not belong to this *oikoumene* which clearly is of this world. It should be noted that Jesus uses the word *kosmos* for world. Although *kosmos* has a more appealing connotation (it can refer to a decoration, good behavior and decency), it can apply to government, that agency which presides over *oikoumene*.

27 December, The Holy Family

Today is the last Sunday of the regular calendar year, an incidental fact when it comes to liturgical time which operates on a wholly different perception of reality. As for time, today's Gospel (Lk 2.41-52) jumps ahead some twelve years from Jesus' birth almost in a matter-of-fact way; the previous event (circumcision) seems to have happened just yesterday and John's preaching which follows next in chapter three similarly seems to take place the next day. Such is the flexibility and freedom from chronological, linear time that the Church presents to us. This sense of time mingled with eternity isn't explained (in fact, it could never be explained adequately) but given in an indirect fashion which enables us to acquire it after a number of passes through several liturgical years. If we happen to miss something in one go-around, another comes along to help us.

"Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover." Such are the opening words of the Gospel. Their ascent to Jerusalem means that this is the twelfth time Joseph and Mary had made the trip since Jesus was born, so Jesus, despite being so young, had some familiarity with the yearly pilgrimage. During this trip, the family, along with many others going to celebrate Passover, sang the Songs of Ascent or Psalms 120-134. For example, Ps 122 opens with, "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'" All are sung some distance from the destination, Jerusalem, to which the pilgrims "lifted up their eyes to the hills" (Ps 121.1). The city may or may not have been within their sight, but the pilgrims knew they were headed in the right direction by their continuous ascent.

This yearly custom was inculcated into Jesus for those ascents recorded during his ministry. Though other ascents are not recorded, namely, between him being twelve years old and prior to being baptized by John, without a doubt they had a formative influence upon him. During subsequent "ascents," it is certain that Jesus recalled his earlier experience of teaching in the temple. So if Jesus had taught once in the temple while he was twelve years old, why couldn't he have continued teaching during subsequent visits, all the way up to the time he began his formal ministry? You can't help but wonder what Jesus had been teaching at this age and if he continued it for some years to come, what did it consist of? This period of time would cover the years from thirteen to approximately thirty when Jesus was baptized by John. There is no question that over those years some notoriety about his erudition must have sprung up among the Jewish elders. Also word travels quickly, and chances are that John the Baptist heard about this unusual young man's reputation even in the desert. Since it had grown for a number of years, Jesus' repute must have enabled John to recognize him more easily among the crowd at the Jordan River. The Gospel's closing words, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man," can apply to the ongoing, accumulative teaching year by year in the Jerusalem temple.

1 January, Solemnity of the Mother of God

Although today's feast is quite new and is a fine one to begin the calendar year, nevertheless the Church's focus always has been and always will be upon another mode of time often noted in this document. For the Church, the new year begins around the end of November and is not commemorated by the succession of numbers such as today, the first day of the year 2010. When you compare the calendar one with the beginning of liturgical year you get not so much a sense of time's passage but the deepening of a mystery, that of Christ within the world and realm of human activity. Thus one could with some justification call a given liturgical year a Book of Revelation, that is, a Book of *Apokalupsis* or a living book of uncovering, the uncovering of all the mysteries of Jesus Christ. If you don't get everything you want from a given feast day or Sunday, it comes round next year, often with a deeper understanding.

Today's Gospel (Lk 2.16-21) is within the general Christmas context of Jesus' birth, the discovery of the baby by the shepherds. As noted under the entry for Christmas day, these folks lived on the margins of society, a fact which may have enabled them to escape being registered for the census which was taking place at that time. The same might apply to Jesus himself; he may or may not have been registered making him pretty much an outcast and devoid of legitimacy as far as Rome is concerned. The shepherds went immediately to Bethlehem at the angel's behest. It turned out that these semi-migratory people were the first ones to make Jesus' birth public.

"Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened," *rhema* being the Greek noun for "thing." *Rhema* is akin to word being the subject of speech or that which was communicated to them by the angels. Thus they saw that which was heard (*rhema*), and that turned out to be the incarnate *Logos*. This *rhema* is that "which the Lord has made known to us" or made known to them by the angels. Having seen Jesus lying in the manger, the "made known the saying (*rhema* again) which had been told them concerning the child." That is to say, the shepherds, the semi-migratory people known for living among their sheep day and night, transmitted the *rhema* they first heard to others. The response? "All who heard it (the *rhema*) wondered at what the shepherds had told them."

Right after this excited announcement by the shepherds we have Mary expressing wonder in a two-fold manner: "(she) kept all these things, pondering them in her heart." That is to say, she protected (*suntereo*: *sun* or with & *tereo*, to guard or guarded-with) all the things or *rhema* which not only the shepherds announced but what had been announced to them by the angel, the first *rhema*. Secondly, Mary was "pondering" the *rhema* in her heart, *sumballo* being the verb which means literally a casting-together. *Sumballo* is quite vivid and reveals considerable mental activity as to the *rhema* of the shepherds. Once things had quieted down, the shepherds returned...no specific place is given but presumably their earlier positions before having come to Bethlehem. Here their glorifying and praising God is recounted as taking place among themselves, not other persons. One wonders what these shepherds did later on. Did they continue with their semi-migratory life in the fields? Did they visit the holy family at a late time to see how they were doing? Did they keep track of Jesus as he grew older? Any account as to this is not given but left to the imagination. However, surely their lives had been changed permanently.

3 January, Epiphany

Like most “fixed” feast days, this one has the same Gospel occurring each year (Mt 2.1-12) which deals with the visit of the wise men or Magi. The word “behold” (*idou*) in the first verse is intended to grab attention of the listeners more so than as with readers of the Gospel. It sets the stage for introducing the Magi who came from the East, the direction to-which *idou* summons our attention. Then as now that direction signifies a world (most likely Persia) completely outside the *oikoumene* or inhabited world mentioned in the entry for Christmas day. That *oikoumene* looked westward or to Rome and Greece, the two chief poles around which Mediterranean civilization revolved from which our Western heritage had emerged. That is to say, “from the east” pertains to civilizations like Persia, India and beyond well outside the *oikoumene* even though East and West were in contact to some degree. Because the East is so vast and little known, this area implies mystery, usually of a religious-mystical sort, let alone a chief threat to the Roman *oikoumene*. It is no small wonder that Herod, a puppet of Rome, “was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.” The last thing he wanted was an invasion from that direction.

The Magi saw the star in the East or in their native land which remains unspecified even though the word “Magi” suggests Persia. Instead of detracting from the narrative, this unknown land lends mystery to the Gospel, for the Magi headed back home to them after having brought gifts to the Christ child. A star is visible at night which means that the Magi traveled by night, a dangerous time to be out and about compared with the day. Their journey is reminiscent of Ex 13.21: “And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud...and by night in a pillar of fire...that they may travel by day and by night.” With this verse in mind, perhaps the star acted as a pillar for day and night.

It is interesting to observe that while the star-as-pillar guided the Magi westward to Jerusalem, it was Herod who dispatched them to Bethlehem. His knowledge of that place, informed by a desire to kill the Christ child, nevertheless brought the three men from the capitol to the town where Jesus had been born. And so Herod falls under the star's guidance even if he were unaware of it. Herod summoned the Magi secretly because as noted in the first paragraph, he was troubled...not just Herod but all Jerusalem. This secretiveness had a political end, namely, to keep the people quiet and not attract attention to the Magi when they left for Bethlehem. If the people followed the Magi, chances are they would have followed them not just to Bethlehem but further to the East. That is perhaps why the Magi “departed to their own country by another way,” to avoid being followed by the crowds from Jerusalem. Their departure (to Persia, for example) would have been a major threat not just to Herod's power but to that of Rome itself. Since their destination lay eastward, the Magi could have headed either north or south or even west, a ship on the Mediterranean, a much more circuitous route either north towards Greece or south towards Egypt. As for the “other way,” no star is guiding the Magi...they were too occupied rejoicing with their discovery of the Christ child...nor do we hear from them again.

10 January, Baptism of the Lord

Last Sunday was Epiphany when the Magi came to the baby Jesus. Today or one week later we take a quantum leap forward in time to the beginning of Jesus' ministry when he was approximately thirty years old. And so, Epiphany represents the end of the Christmas season which comprises the overwhelming bulk of Jesus' life. Actually, the Christmas season goes into a lower gear, more so than that of Easter, because as the liturgy proclaims on the feast of the Presentation (2 February), it is fulfilled. This ability to jump forward (and sometimes backward) in time is noted in other entries. To the modern reader it can be disconcerting yet instructive in that the Church is not so much concerned with the chronological succession of events but with the significance of Jesus, his words and deeds as they apply across the restrictions of space and time. This point is brought home further by keeping in mind the constricting locale of Israel under Rome, that so much *kairos*-related events occurred in such a small territory.

Today's Gospel (Lk 3.15-6 & 21-22) brings us to the banks of the Jordan River with John the Baptist awaiting the arrival of Jesus Christ. In many ways Jesus' appearance begins the liturgical year or better, those deeds, words and events which the Church incorporates into Ordinary Time, the bulk of her liturgical year. Parts of this Gospel were used in the Third Sunday of Advent, so keep that in mind while reading this entry. Thus the opening words "the people were filled with expectation" can apply now and throughout the rest of this liturgical duration. *Prosdokao* is the verb expressing this expectation, the preposition *pros* (direction towards-which) emphasizing what the people wished for. However, this expectation isn't spelled out; it is to be understood in light of John's earlier preaching (Lk 3.3-14) where he presented himself as a voice crying in the wilderness. The *prosdokao* of the people is taken in the same breathe, as it were, as their questioning, *dialogizomai* (to reckon through, *dia*-).

The object of *prosdokao* and *dialogizomai* is whether or not John the Baptism was the Christ. That means the people had some notion of the Christ, the anointed one. Luke's Gospel first mentions the Christ in 2.11: "for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." This was communicated by the angels to the shepherds who, in turn, passed on the message...the *rhema* (as noted in the 13 December entry)...to other people. Thus Christ was revealed by angels to shepherds, more or less outcasts of society. That the people around John the Baptist knew about the Christ testifies to the staying power of the shepherds' *rhema* from the angels some thirty years after the event. Since John recognized Jesus while both in the womb, chances are there must have a convergence of sorts between the people having received the angelic/shepherd *rhema* and John's recollection of the prenatal event.

Luke's account has no dramatic arrival of Jesus to be baptized by John. The context reads as follows: "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized." One gets the impression that Jesus was there among the people, almost unrecognizable, while the same people were wondering whether John was the Christ or not. Jesus never says anything in this regard but goes ahead with his own baptism. Even John's earlier words ("He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire") aren't manifest at this event. That will wait until later on in Jesus' ministry. And so when Jesus came from the Jordan he departed with the manifestation of the Holy Spirit to which no response is recorded by the people present.

17 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today we are back in Ordinary Time or more precisely, the last time being before two weeks before the First Sunday of Advent. Depending upon when Ash Wednesday falls (this year it's 17 February), the beginning of Ordinary Time is relatively brief before we enter the prolonged span of Lent-Easter-Pentecost. Here in 2010 this comprises the time from 17 February through 12 June, Immaculate Heart of Mary being the very tail end. Elsewhere I have noted this large segment of time reaches its full completion on the Immaculate Heart of Mary which was added to the calendar much later. Because this period lies at the heart of the liturgical cycle and comprises a considerable bulk of the calendar year, the few Sundays we have before Ash Wednesday appear a bit awkward in that we're conscious of Ash Wednesday looming up ahead. Furthermore, they are experienced in the shadow of the Christmas season which almost overlaps into Ash Wednesday in mid February. Actually, the feast of the Presentation on 2 February is when Christmas comes to an official close. Thus the beginning of Ordinary Time which extends to the Presentation is unlike that Ordinary Time which follows the Lent-Easter-Pentecost cycle which seems to have a life of its own.

Today's Gospel deals with the miracle of Cana (Jn 2.1-11) which traditionally the Church has seen as part and parcel of the Christmas season. And so this season, usually associated with the birth of Jesus, comprises a much larger dimension of time than that event. It is noted often in this document that the Church works on another level than the temporal one, moving from the birth of Jesus to the beginning of his ministry, all this within a few weeks. She skips the temporal part of Jesus' life which consists of some thirty years, the bulk of his life. A sharp reminder of this is the feast of St. Stephen and the Holy Innocents occurring right after Christmas. This reminds us that the Church's focus is upon the few short weeks of the birth of Jesus and his three years ministry...all quite limited when you come down to it, temporally speaking. Even though this three year period is familiar to us as documented by a given liturgical cycle, it is set against the background of Jesus' life of which nothing is recorded.

The opening verse of the Gospel intimates its theme: "the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage." In other words, Mary seemed to have priority as far as her invitation whereas Jesus, similarly invited, is mentioned pretty much as anyone else on the guest list. Later when the wine ran out, Jesus says to Mary that his hour has not yet come. This hour or *hora* is well known among readers of John's Gospel as being a *kairos* or special event. It seems that *hora* differs from *kairos* as being more specific to Jesus and his mission whereas *kairos* is applicable to special times in the lives of people. Insertion of *hora* this early in the story shows that from here onwards everything will be dominated by it, and that *hora* is Christ's death. "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son" (Jn 17.1). Mary's response to her son's statement, seemingly out of place during a wedding celebration, may be taken as both acknowledgment of this *hora* or a polite way of complying to her son as well as the guests...in other words, it can be a way of changing the subject from an embarrassing situation to a matter requiring immediate attention.

As for the wine Jesus had changed from water, it was contained in stone jars "for the Jewish rites of purification." Thus the wine served at the wedding...and such wine was introduced not at the celebration's beginning but somewhere well after that...was taken from these jars. Unknown to the guests, the wine from containers regarding purification could be taken as a way Jesus wished all the wedding participants to become clean. John notes that Jesus' disciples were also invited to the

wedding, so these newly appointed apostles must have had some connection with the wedding party. This is not surprising, given the tight-knit nature of society in those days. Note that the water had been changed into wine and served from the jars of purification, the disciples believed in him. In other words, they saw the implication not only of water changed into wine but were aware that the wedding participants had been purified albeit unknowingly. This would, of course, include the unmentioned bride and bridegroom. Perhaps over time this purification may have had a positive effect on all the people, and some of them may have joined Jesus' disciples or were more keenly aware of his later words and deeds right up to his crucifixion and resurrection.

24 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

It should be noted that we have just three more Sundays in Ordinary Time before Ash Wednesday before it resumes on 13 June. Therefore the time between now and Ash Wednesday is starting to loom more largely in our minds.

The first four verses of today's Gospel (Lk 1.1-4; 4.14-21) are taken from its beginning, whereas the rest jumps ahead to chapter four when Jesus commenced his public ministry. Luke is careful to say that his intent is two-fold: 1) to compile or set in order (*anataxso*) a narrative or *diegesis* of "what had been accomplished among us" or more accurately, what had been fulfilled (*plerophoreo*). Note too the preposition *en* for "among," "in us," most likely the seminal Christian community. 2) to write an orderly account or a *kathexis* which is *akribos*, accurate (vs. 3). And so Luke takes pains to combine elements he had heard from eyewitness and ministers of the word before setting them down in ink. The Greek for minister is *huperetes*, literally an under-rower or an under-seaman. We find this term again as the synagogue attendant in 4.20. Both the narrative and account are written in order to supplement or fulfill "the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed." Such information was received orally, *katecheo* literally meaning to sound something into one's ears, in order to make it register in one's mind. And so Luke combines the very best of oral tradition with his sophisticated Greek style.

Jumping ahead to chapter four, we have Jesus who "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee." When this occurred, a report or *pheme* went out; no indication is given as to who started it, just that it spread. *Pheme* means a voice from heaven in the sense of an oracle or divinization, so word about Jesus spread with rapidity and fervor about someone possessed by a god. If such was the case, the only natural human response was glory and adoration: "being glorified by all." Compare this with the shepherds of 2.17: "and when they saw it, they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child." As noted above, *rhema* translates as "saying." By comparison, *pheme* derives from the verb *phemi*, to declare or make known. Thus *pheme*, with its connotations of being an oracle from heaven, may be taken as a fuller proclamation or fleshing out of the shepherds' *rhema*. Both *rhema* and *pheme* relate to the spoken word.

Next, Jesus comes to Nazareth where he had been raised and went to the local synagogue "as his custom was." Even at this early stage of Jesus' ministry he had established a Sabbath day custom by which he was recognized. Still, it doesn't seem out of the ordinary for a Jew to attend synagogue on the Sabbath; perhaps there was something different about the way Jesus did this, an unrecorded fact. On the occasion when Jesus came into the synagogue, he was given the prophet Isaiah to read. He

did not choose it on his own but was handed it; the identity of the person who gave the scroll isn't given, most likely the attendant or *huperetes* mentioned in vs. 20 after Jesus finished. Since Isaiah was handed to him, the Gospel implies that automatically he went for those words foreshadowing his ministry, Is 61.1 & 2; 58.6. This is a fairly restricted portion of a book containing sixty-six chapters and therefore could have comprised several scrolls. After having read these verses, he closed the book (actually a scroll), returned it to the attendant and sat down. Each gesture in and by itself is highly dramatic, and taken together produce a riveting scene. No small wonder that the people's response was to fix their eyes upon him. The Greek verb here is revealing of this three fold gesture: *atenizo* or literally to look without blinking one's eyes or to stare. It is the same verb used in reference to Stephen while he was being stoned: "(Stephen) gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God" (Acts 7.55).

At first those in attendance were favorable to Jesus ("and all spoke well of him"), not unlike vs. 15 earlier when people had glorified him. It was only later...not recounted in this Sunday's Gospel...that people rose up against Jesus when he expounded upon his ministry. There Jesus does not quote nor allude to the prophet Isaiah which appeared to have gone over favorably. The references that got him into disrepute came from Second Book of Kings. Perhaps if Jesus had expounded more upon the Isaiah verses his message would have been more palatable for the audience. Nevertheless, by shifting to the prophet Elijah in an attempt to say that his message was intended not just for Jews but for Gentiles, did the hostility emerge. As for the attendant who originally handed Jesus the scroll and who presumably had greater knowledge of the scriptures, one can only imagine what went through his mind. Did he, like the shepherds above, take Jesus' quotations from Isaiah as a *rhema* and later proclaim it? Or did he amplify it into a *pheme*...an oracle...when Jesus first made his presence known in Galilee? Then again, did he join the crowd in attempting to cast Jesus of the brow of the hill (4.29)?

31 January, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 4.21-30) continues from last Sunday and still may be considered as at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In this passage again we find Jesus in his home synagogue after having expounded upon the prophet Isaiah relative to his mission. Note the three-fold enthusiastic response of the audience: 1) spoke well or *martureo*, to give witness 2) wondered or *thaumazo* (it can also express admiration), the object being Jesus' words. The intensity of wonder/admiration is brought out by the preposition *epe*, which reads literally as "wondered upon the graciousness of his words." 3) The eyes of those in the synagogue were fixed upon Jesus, *atenizo*, as noted regarding last Sunday's Gospel, or with the intensity of unblinking, staring eyes.

Up to this point Jesus has had a favorable response from members of his hometown synagogue with respect to his use of the prophet Isaiah even if they knew him to be Joseph's son. Acknowledgment of one's lineage is quite common in ancient societies and important for self-identity, so its mention here isn't necessarily pejorative. Jesus himself doesn't attribute being Joseph's son but does not object when it come from others. This designation gave Jesus an opportunity to bring up his earlier healings in Capernaum, namely, that the same should be expected at home. Note that Jesus initiated this, not the Jews. However, the shift from Jesus' mission vis-a-vis Isaiah, favorably received, to "the days of Elijah" suddenly provoke the audience to hostility. In

fact, this hostility may have been latent all along, just waiting for the slightest remark to bring it into the open. The reason was a sore point among the Jews: Elijah ministered to a non-Israelite and even restored her son from death. Another remark by Jesus angered the crowd, the cure of the leper Naaman (cf. 2Kg 5.1-19). This second case is even worse, Naaman being commander of the Syrian army and therefore openly hostile to Israel.

Compare the three-fold favorable response noted in the first paragraph with the one after Jesus spoke well about these two non-Israelites, “all in the synagogue were filled with wrath,” *thumos* being the noun which refers to the heart being the seat of anger as well as desire. Somehow one gets the impression that the synagogue attendant or *huperetes* noted last week, the one to whom Jesus handed the scroll, did not join the frenzied crowd but remained in the synagogue much like Mary pondering the words of Jesus relative not only to Isaiah but to the widow and Naaman. The *huperetes* or under-rower even may have assisted Jesus’ escape from the brow of the hill mentioned in the next paragraph.

This *thumos* reached a boiling point when the people led Jesus to the brow of a hill in an attempt to throw him off. However, Jesus manages to escape: “but passing through (*dierchomai*) the midst (*diamesou*) of them he went away.” The details of this escape aren’t present directly yet speak much about Jesus. His was not so much an escape as an evaporation which the two prepositions *dia* indicate: as prefaced to the verb and as used with respect to *mesos*, middle. This second *dia* intimates that Jesus did not go this way or that way around his assailants. He advanced right through them to the other side or away from the cliff. This almost casual evasion from near death is carried over to the next verse, 31: “And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath.” There the audience accepted Jesus favorably much as his hometown citizens. However, nothing is said of what Jesus taught in Capernaum; perhaps he may have considered his provocative words sufficient and could now move to a new stage of his ministry.

7 February, Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

“While the people pressed upon him.” Such are the opening words of today’s Gospel (Lk 5.1-11) where Jesus has his back up against the lake of Gennesaret as well as being pressed by the crowd on the shore. One could imagine this crowd gradually pushing Jesus closer and closer to the shoreline. He could go no further unless he got into a boat which was the case. Note that the people were eager to “hear the word (*logos*) of God.” Back in 4.36 we have mention of this *logos* but with respect to having cleansed a man with an unclean spirit: “What is this *logos*? With authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.” And so the crowd may have wanted to see more examples of this *logos* in action or with respect to healing, not so much as wanting to listen to Jesus discourse on various things, however sublime. As for the teaching, Jesus did it off shore from a boat; no details as to its contents are given. Simon was with Jesus in the boat whose job apparently was to stabilize it, keep from drifting and pointing toward the shore while Jesus taught. Again, nothing is said of Simon here except that after having finished teaching, Jesus asked him to fish in deeper waters. It would come as no surprise that the crowd did not disperse but wanted to see what happened. They were not disappointed, for certainly they could see that the men were taking in a huge catch of fish.

Once Simon, James and John had finishing bringing in the large catch of fish, Jesus said that they would be “catching men.” The verb is *zograeo*, literally, to take alive, which alters from hauling in fish. Here the aim is to take men alive, if you will, or better, give them life in the Holy Spirit. Just prior to having caught so many fish we saw Jesus preaching to the crowd, so the parallel between the two instances, the two instances of “taking alive,” was striking. As noted in the first paragraph, Simon alone is described as being in the boat with Jesus. Most likely James and John were further out on the lake fishing, so reference to just these three men is made concerning *zograeo*, taking men alive.

Upon returning to shore, Simon, James and John “left everything and followed him.” Such are the concluding words of today’s Gospel. Surely this “everything” they abandoned was the superabundance of fish, a significant sum of money for fishermen. Chances are they could care less about who got the catch. One can imagine easily that these men began their *zograeo*...taking men alive...as soon as they reached shore. This they did first by watching Jesus cure the sick and dealing with the Pharisees (vs. 17). The vivid image of *zograeo* must have heightened the attention of the three as they began no so much ministering to people (nothing if recorded yet of that) but by simply observing Jesus interact so at a later time they could do likewise.

14 February, Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Today is the last Sunday of Ordinary Time until we meet it again 115 days later on 13 June as the Eleventh Sunday. Technically speaking, only less than two weeks ago we finished the Christmas season with the Presentation on 2 February. Thus from the Presentation until the day before Ash Wednesday (Mardi Gras) or for two full weeks we have the rare opportunity of enjoying an interval, of being situated between two major liturgical seasons. Because such times are relatively uncommon, they are to be treasured in order to appreciate the difference between them. In addition, there’s a sense of renewal not unlike the feeling towards the end of Ordinary Time just prior to Advent. In many ways, this sense is more mature because we’ve come through one major liturgical bulk of time, Advent-Christmas, so are prepared for something better.

Today’s Gospel (Lk 6.17; 20-26) has four blessings given “on a level place” compared with Matthew’s account on the Mount. In addition to these blessings, Jesus presents four “woes” (*ouai*) to counter them. Jesus gives both blessings and woes after having cured a number of people, and they appear directed to his disciples only. Note the words “he lifted his eyes on his disciples” before uttering the blessings. The Greek text has for “on” the preposition *eis* or “into” as though Jesus were gazing intently at the twelve. The four blessings run as follows:

- 1) Being poor is equated with possessing the kingdom of God.
- 2) Being hungry means that it will be satisfied. However, nothing is said about this hunger, whether it’s for food or for spiritual blessings. The verb for “satisfied” is quite vivid, *chrotazo* or to fatten cattle as for the slaughter.
- 3) Weeping now will be transformed into laughing. The cause for laughing isn’t given, but the verb *gelaio* can also mean to deride, as deriding those persons who had caused the weeping.
- 4) Blessedness is equated with being hated “because of the Son of man,” this being the longest of the four blessings. In addition to rejoicing, Jesus bids his disciples to “leap for joy” or *skirtao*, similar to the gamboling of newly born lambs. *Skirtao* was noted in the entry under Fourth Sunday of

Advent (above) or the leaping of John the Baptist in his mother's womb when she met Mary pregnant with Jesus. The reason for *skirtao* is not to take delight in pain received for its own sake but for standing up to the truth which has its roots in prophetic tradition. Echo of this is found in 2 Chron 36.15-16: "The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy." The Hebrew for "remedy" is *marpe* which is derived from healing. In other words, not receiving the prophets prevents the people from being healed, something that would be fulfilled with the disciples in their ministry.

The four "woes" apply to those who are rich, are now full, now laugh and when men are speaking well of you (i.e., the disciples). Jesus had experienced this positive response in the synagogue, of being spoken well of, when he expounded on Isaiah. However, the people turned against him when shortly afterwards he spoke of the widow in the days of Elijah and the healing of Naaman, head of the Syrian army. Chances are Jesus wanted to remind the disciples of this recent experience, that they would experience the same later on: "for so their fathers did to the false prophets." The example of these two non-Israelites serve as an example to the disciples when they started their ministry to the Gentiles as opposed to native Israelites. Perhaps insinuated by Jesus' experience in the synagogue is an escape from the crowds along the pattern set by Jesus: "but passing through (*dierchomai*) the midst (*dia meson*) of them he went away." Here we have two instances of the preposition *dia* or through: one prefaced to the verb and the other in reference to "midst." Although the disciples may not follow this example literally, they will be able to effect it later with help from the Holy Spirit after Pentecost.

17 February, Ash Wednesday

As often remarked in this document (and this includes other years), today commences the most important liturgical season of the entire year. It runs to Holy Week and Easter after which it shifts gears to the time-after-Easter or time until Pentecost. Traditionally Lent has been considered as belonging to this world and the time after Easter as belonging to the next, a theme dear to the early Church which has been modified yet retains valid today. However, in later centuries the Church had added the feasts of Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart followed the next day by the Immaculate Heart of Mary. And so from today until this last "modern" feast day on 12 June, 115 days are given that we may reflect upon the most important teachings of the Church. That's a significant chunk of time from the conventional calendar containing 365 days.

Today's Gospel (Mt 6.1-6; 16-18) sets the tone for Lent, that is, praying and giving alms, both effected in secret. The phrase "in secret" or *en to krupto* occurs four times, so obviously Jesus is communicating something important here. Now jump way ahead to the Gospel at the very end of our 115 day cycle, Lk 2.22-36. Even better, let's narrow down Simeon's words to Mary, "and a sword will pierce through your own soul that the thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." Let's place this Gospel or more specifically, this particular verse, here at the beginning of our 115 day liturgical cycle. The intent isn't to displace the Gospel proper for Ash Wednesday but to show its ultimate goal. Actually, both Gospels have to deal with the revelation of human thoughts. Therefore starting today we could keep the Gospel from Luke before our eyes throughout the

coming 115 days and see where it leads, if it helps illuminate other scriptural passages as we move on to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

As the last paragraph says, the Greek phrase *en to krupto* or “in secret” occurs four times in today’s Gospel and dominates Lent as we set forth on our 115 day journey. Accompanying us, however (*en to krupto*, if it may be put that way) are Simeon’s words about a sword piercing Mary’s heart. *Rhomphaia* is neither a dagger nor a short Roman sword but a huge two-handed one, very intimidating. Just as intimidating is the sizeable soldier required to wield it. The goal isn’t to wound Mary either physically or spiritually but that “thoughts...may be revealed.” No small wonder such a potent weapon is required to crack these thoughts wide open. Thus our special liturgical time of 115 days is one of paradoxes, of alternation between “in secret” and the revealing of hearts...both done under the shadow not so much of the cross but of the two-handed *rhomphaia*.

21 February, First Sunday of Lent

In many ways Lent starts this Sunday with the Gospel recounting Jesus’ temptation (Lk 4.1-13). The four days from Ash Wednesday through Saturday serve as a kind of introduction, that is, preparing us for the season that has begun. Chapter three of Luke’s Gospel concludes with the genealogy of Jesus Christ and prior to that, his baptism. The lengthy lineage delineated between vss. 23 and 38 starts with Jesus’ immediate relations and works backwards all the way back to Adam. On the other hand, chapter four opens with “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit.” That is to say, the Holy Spirit is his heavenly counterpart to the human genealogy concluding with the first man, Adam. And so the human and divine balance each other without one dominating the other. Vs. 1 mentions the Spirit a second time: “and was led by the Spirit.” Luke says that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the same Spirit. The Greek has led in (*en*) the Spirit. Being full is one thing and being led or guided is another. The second mention of the Spirit pertains to Jesus being led into the wilderness for forty days. One gets the impression that once in the wilderness, the Spirit left him and Jesus had to find the Spirit within (“full of the Holy Spirit”).

“And the devil took him up.” No explicit mention of where this “up” might be. It could be on a mountain or up as in a vision. The second appears more plausible because the devil “showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.” The Greek noun *stigma* means a spot or the quickest perceptible moment of time, that is to say, a concentrated moment when time stands still and encompasses everything, not unlike a description of the present moment. Surely all the world’s kingdoms weren’t visible from a mountain no matter how high it was, so this *stigma* seems to be the vantage point from which Jesus could view them. Note that Jesus did not effect this *stigma* but the devil. A similar *stigma* seems to take place on the Mount of Transfiguration in next Sunday’s Gospel.

Jesus didn’t stay in the wilderness the entire forty days and nights because the devil took him to Jerusalem. Then again, this journey to Jerusalem could have occurred within that *stigma* or infinitely small yet concentrated period of time. The ensuing dialogue with the devil also could have occurred within this *stigma*. The same applies with the devil assaulting Jesus with “every temptation.” Normally to be tempted implies a lengthy process synonymous with Jesus being in the wilderness forty days and nights. One could say almost that this span of time, often symbolic as preparation for ministry (cf. Moses on Mount Sinai, for example), was similarly a *stigma*. The *stigma* of the

wilderness may also tie in with Jesus being “full of the Holy Spirit” as well. Since Lent consists of forty days, it too is a kind of *stigma*. The same may apply to any given stretch of liturgical time which as a whole functions as a *stigma* compared with the relative blandness of chronological time.

Finally, to counter this infinitely concentrated stigma we have mention of “an opportune time” or opportune *kairos* when the devil will meet Jesus again. This well-known Greek noun refers to an event, not one bound up with chronological time. While a *kairos* is under way, it may be as concentrated as a *stigma* yet differs from it by reason of having special significance, a contact between the divine and human. In the Gospel under consideration, there is no special mention of the devil coming in a *kairos* though implied is the passion and death of Jesus. Anyway, these are suspenseful words which hover in the background throughout the remaining Gospel.

28 February, Second Sunday of Lent

Traditionally, the feast of the Transfiguration (Lk 9.28-36) comes toward the beginning of Lent to serve as an encouragement for the duration of these forty days as well as to remind us of Christ’s divinity before his passion and death. This remains a valid point despite 2,000 of tradition and reflection upon the significance of Jesus Christ, his deeds and relationship with the Father and Holy Spirit. During Lent the Church rolls out her Big Guns, that is, assembles a formidable array of the best scriptural readings she has to offer. Within this short span of forty days when this array is spread out before us, the concluding words to John’s Gospel come to mind: “Were every one of them (what Jesus had done) to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” The measurement of the world is *chronos* as opposed to *kairos* which has the capacity to contain everything within a small point...that *stigma* of last Sunday’s Gospel...so John’s words hold true without exaggeration. John speaks like this, most likely having in mind the distinction between *chronos* and *kairos*, with respect to Jesus’ deeds. If he did mention his words, perhaps the universe itself would be too small to contain them, again, no exaggeration, for the universe, like the *kosmos* (that reality is contained within this word), is measured in terms of *chronos*, not *kairos*.

“And went up on the mountain to pray.” This occurs eight days after the words of vs. 27, “there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.” Some aspects of this beholding of the divine kingdom is about to occur on the mountain. By now the a practice of Jesus going apart to pray was familiar to the disciples, only this time it’s on an unspecified mountain. Peter, John and James were singled out to accompany Jesus, so chances are they didn’t think much of ascending with him. Then again, they may have had an inkling that something more was in store for them all by going up a mountain. On this occasion things turned out to be quite different, for “the appearance (*eidōs*) of his countenance was altered (*heteron*).” *Heteron* is an adjective modifying *eidōs* which can also translate as form, that which is seen, a figure. It applies to Jesus’ *prosōpon* or face, not his entire body as sometimes commonly perceived. Also nothing is said about this alteration being associated with any type of brightness. Thus it is left to the reader what type of alteration this may have been, keeping in mind the relationship Moses and Elijah had with God. On the other hand, such a *heteron eidōs* was necessary to hold conversation with Moses and Elijah, two chief representatives of the Old Testament...perhaps not for Jesus but for the benefit of these two men. This may have been the first contact Moses and Elijah had with Jesus; the former was familiar with

his *heteron eidos* because after he had conversed with God, “the skin of (his) face shone” [Ex 34.35]. Even though the conversation seemed to have been brief, we can say that it occurred within a *stigma*, noted in last Sunday’s entry, or barely measurable point where space and time are concentrated. That means the conversation could have lasted indefinitely.

The topic of conversation within this supposed *stigma* was Jesus’ coming *exodos* or departure (Exodus), yet to be fulfilled. Note the location of the Exodus pertaining to Jesus, the one about to be fulfilled, namely Jerusalem, as opposed to Egypt. Egypt was the place from which the Israelites left under the guidance of Moses. As it turned out much later on, Jerusalem became the ultimate goal of their Exodus or what became the capitol of the Promised Land. Thus Jesus takes that goal and makes it a point of departure, surely a fact Moses and Elijah must have known in spirit, especially the former. As for Elijah, he was taken up into heaven on a fiery chariot whereas Moses experienced death. While this conversation was transpiring, Peter and the others “were heavy with sleep.” This can be taken as being uninterested to such a degree that they nodded off. However, it can be understood as a sleep effected by Jesus’ garment which became “dazzling white,” the verb being *exastrapto*, “to flash as with lightning.” This is a vivid, even frightening verb, so exposure to it, even within the infinitely small and concentrated point of a *stigma*, was sufficient to dull the senses and make one fall asleep. At first, one may wonder how anyone could nod off when confronted with *exastrapto*. However, the sleep of the three disciples was more of a stupor not unlike death when confronted with the revealed divinity of Jesus Christ. Note that the men awoke on their own accord, not being prodded by Jesus nor his two illustrious companions. The verse here says that they “saw his glory” (not that of Moses nor of Elijah) which was possible only after they had witnessed the alteration of Jesus’ face.

Even though the “men were parting from him,” Peter asked Jesus permission to build three booths. That is to say, he was aware fully of their departure yet wanted booths made for them. Although Peter had fallen asleep, he wanted in on the conversation Jesus had with the two men. At this point “a cloud came and overshadowed them” and despite their fear, they entered. That is to say, after exposure to the alteration of Jesus’ face, his raiment flashing like lightning and finally his glory, only within the darkness of this cloud the Father acknowledged Jesus as his son or “chosen one.” Such an image, of course, is associated with Moses who entered the cloud on top of Mt. Sinai.

7 March, Third Sunday of Lent

“Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.” Words of Jesus from today’s Gospel (Lk 13.1-9) when asked about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. The verb here is *metanoeo* from which we get the well known term *metanoia*. Jesus proceeds to give an example, different from the one brought to him for comment or when the tower in Siloam fell and killed eighteen people. Obviously they weren’t guilty because of this calamity, yet the incident reveals an inclination to attribute any misfortune to the workings of fate and hence to the claim of determinism. Determinism isn’t wholly unattractive. In fact, it can be a convenient way to avoid responsibility, something to hide behind instead of taking responsibility. We get the latter sense from science which seems to lay out the innumerable conditions which direct every aspect of our behavior, including free will. On a deeper level determinism is satisfying to adopt because we enjoy being under the control of a force larger than ourselves, especially one that asks no questions.

Usually the elements which comprise a deterministic outlook are familiar so we can submit to them readily. The only requirement...and this is much more common than believed...is complete submission. Submission to determinism is quite different from *metanoia*. Instead of the familiar elements that go into deterministic behavior, those of *metanoia* are unfamiliar and unknown to us making it in a real sense an adventurous undertaking.

The noun *metanoia* has as its base *noos* (sometimes taken as *nous*) which means mind, perception, intent. It has the preposition *meta* as a preface which means after, with. In other words, *meta* signifies something that has taken place after the action or gesture belonging to the noun (or verb) to which it is attached. Thus it indicates that action is in the past to one degree or another. Not only that, the other meaning of *meta* as with can signify that something accompanies the noun or verb's action, that it does not act in isolation. And so to adopt *metanoia* as encouraged by Jesus is more radical than first imagined, even by the person who takes it freely. Jesus offers the gesture of *metanoia* yet doesn't spell it out. Actually, he can't because the outcome is unknown by the person who goes ahead and does it. In the final analysis, *metanoia* is more challenging and bold than submitting to a deterministic outlook on life.

The Gospel switches gears with a parable concerning a man who planted a fig tree. After three years without bearing fruit, the vineyard owner wishes to cut it down yet relents when the worker asks to wait apply another year's worth of intense cultivation. Apparently the owner respected his worker's observation because he concurred. Actually nothing is said of this immediately though it's implied after you've read this short parable. The three years of unfruitfulness followed by one more year of grace or a reprieve is implied. This added time is the last one after which the tree will be cut down, so it forms a threat of sorts. Perhaps the worker had in mind the tower of Siloam or had a relative among the eighteen killed when it fell. If the tower had one more year during which it could have been shored up, if you will, like fertilizing the fig tree, it might not have fallen and killed those people. In short, both examples offer some insight into the nature of *metanoia* even though the two parts of today's Gospel don't have a direct connection. In conclusion, the reader is to a certain degree left hanging...left in suspense...in light of the tower of Siloam and the fig tree to examine his own life and undergo *metanoia* instead of being chained to determinism.

14 March, Fourth Sunday of Lent

Today's Gospel (Lk 15.13; 11-32) is that of the prodigal son who "gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country." Given what we hear later of the father in this parable (servants, etc), the son who decided to set out came from a family that was well off. In other words, he must have taken along considerable resources not just for the journey but for settling down. No motive is given why this younger son decided to leave, not even that he was angry with his father nor jealous of his brother. Chances are it was youthful impetuosity, to be free not only from his father's authority but from that of his elder brother. He may have heard more than once in other contexts the words, "Son, you are always with me," namely, what the father says later to the elder brother. This loving statement reflects preference for the first-born son, a preference well known in ancient societies, and that may have irked the younger brother over an extended period of time. As for the two brothers, certainly an age gap exists but no indication is given as to how great this difference might be. Nothing is said of the mother either before the son leaves or when he returns.

Several elements of this parable may be paralleled with Joseph in Egypt and his relationship with his brothers who came there to reside. After all, they were desperate and sought relief from the famine, not having a clue as to Joseph being so highly placed and responsible for Egypt's survival. The points of comparison are: "a great famine in that country," the younger brother who says "I perish here with hunger" which is reminiscent of the seven lean years following the seven years of plenty (it affected Palestine just as much as Egypt) and finally, the younger brother's return to the father which is a kind of exodus from the "far country" in which he was living as a hired servant feeding the swine, again like the Israelites being enslaved to the Egyptians.

Before the younger brother returned home he rehearsed what he would say to his father: "I have sinned against heaven and before you." Even though he uttered such words in the distant land, we could say that the father heard it from a distance. This is borne out by the father who "ran and embraced him and kissed him," all this while "he was yet at a distance." The same adjective (*makros*) is used to express distance in the "far country" and "at a distance." So the father, in his exceptional ability to see, beheld his son in that "far country" to which he ran. To the elder brother this might have been an act of folly as reckless as the departure of his younger brother. That's why this parable is more about the elder brother, of how he responded with disgust at them both.

When the young brother returned from the "far country" to which he father ran, as it were, we see the elder one "in the field." That means he was nearby all the time as indicated by the words, "and drew near to the house." Chances are that while in the nearby field he heard the "music and dancing" which got his attention. Note that this brother returned home only upon hearing this; nothing is said about him being at home while his father ran "at a distance" to meet his long-lost brother. Also, the brother did not ask his father what was going on in the house; instead, he asked "one of the servants." When the father saw his elder son angry at the merry-making he "came out and entreated him." That is to say, he did not have to run far to meet him since they were in the same general area compared with the prodigal son. Another reason (though not stated explicitly) for the elder brother's anger could have been that he may have interpreted this unsettling event as something that could happen in the near future. That is to say, that the elder brother could have been thinking about the possible loss of his birth right to his long-lost brother. Here a certain parallel may be drawn with Jacob and Esau. Esau was the elder brother who sold his birth right for a bowl of soup, thereby forfeiting it to Jacob. Perhaps the elder brother may have had this story fresh in his mind, quite probable, for people at the time knew by heart stories related to their religious heritage and the force they exerted in their lives. The only difference—and this is a major one—is that the father's love for both sons was very different from that of Isaac toward his two sons. All one has to do is compare their responses.

21 March, Fifth Sunday of Lent

Today's Gospel (Jn 8.1-11) switches from Luke to John and returns to Luke's account of the Passion next Sunday, Palm Sunday. Apparently it was omitted in many ancient manuscripts and did not belong originally to John's Gospel, hence its omission from the Greek text. The Gospel begins right after an incident when Nicodemus sticks up for Jesus before the authorities who wanted to arrest him. When Nicodemus says that the law allows an accused person a hearing, the officers responded

sarcastically, “you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee.” That sets the stage for chapter eight when “Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.” Nothing is said about what he did there though chances are it was a place for him to get away and reflect. We see Jesus return there after the Last Supper, the place of his betrayal and arrest. Then early in the morning Jesus came to the temple followed by a large crowd. Such a large group of people at this time of day is unusual, especially when it comes to teaching, so it must not have escaped the authorities’ attention. The fact that so many gathered at daybreak means they rose much earlier to make their way to the temple area, that’s how powerful Jesus’ preaching was for them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who was caught in adultery and asked Jesus’ opinion as how to handle the situation. The most striking feature of this Gospel is not what Jesus had said but his gesture of writing on the ground. What Jesus had written is not the point; it’s the image of him bending down to the ground out of direct eye contact of those wanting him to concur in stoning the woman. It must have been stunning for this woman as well, a very tense moment when everyone did not know what would happen. Since there were plenty of people present who gathered to hear Jesus teach, they too must have been present, adding to the drama. As for the woman accused of adultery, her name is not given nor do we have further explicit information about her. Also it is interesting to speculate what her husband and the man with whom she had sexual relations must have thought. Perhaps they were hidden in the background somewhere watching the outcome.

After this incident, John’s Gospel begins in the Greek text with Jesus saying, “I am the light of the world.” Actually, vs. 12 begins with “Again Jesus spoke to them.” The audience could have been those gathered early in the morning in the temple or even the dispersed scribes and Pharisees. While chances are the latter had left, a few may have lingered in the temple area to see what Jesus would do. This is borne out by the Pharisees saying to Jesus “You are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true.” In the ensuing exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees we can imagine the woman caught in adultery somewhere in the vicinity. After her experience of having been pardoned she must have had a unique view on what transpired there.

28 March Palm Sunday

Today begins Holy Week, the most solemn week of the Church’s liturgical calendar where time literally stands still for those persons who give themselves over to participation in each of the mysteries. Upon their completion, it’s like having awoken from a dream...but one which you wish would keep on going. The only difference is that to which you awake isn’t reality you discover but the dream itself. The mood of the disciples depicted on the road to Emmaus on the afternoon of Easter Sunday sums it up for us. This mood is set by the disciples inviting Jesus to stay with them which he did. After the meal their eyes were opened and the hearts of the disciples were burning within them [cf. Lk 24.30-32].

As for this year’s account of the Passion, we have that of Luke [22.14-23.56]. The same format below will be followed with next week’s Triduum, that is to say, notations for Palm Sunday will center upon references to time or key moments on which the drama hinges. These central turning points, even though some may appear obscure, serve to slow down our sense of the passage of time

which may be described as transforming the usual flow of *chronos* into that of timeless *kairos*. Such is their effect when taken as a whole. They lift us up from the ordinary flow of events much like the disciples being with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration. With this in mind, the sequence runs as follows:

-22.14: “And when the hour came, he sat at table.” Although *bora* is the word for hour and has obvious chronological associations, it can be taken as a specific moment within a *kairos* or an event. Here it comes seemingly independent of what Jesus wishes, almost larger than him and those around him.

-22.18: “From now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Again, the coming of God’s kingdom seems independent of Jesus, that it has a mind of its own and comes when and where it wishes, like the blowing of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 3.8).

-22.22: “For the Son of man goes as it has been determined.” Yet another statement of an event in progress which includes Jesus yet, as it were, is larger than him. The Greek verb for “determined” is *horizo*, to mark off as a boundary.

-22.29: “And I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom.” The verb here is *diatithemi*, to place separately, arrange, set in order. The preposition *dia* as through suggests a thoroughness of this assigning process which took place in the relationship between Father and Son before it manifested itself among the disciples...a *kairos* event spilling over into *chronos*, temporal existence.

-22.34: “The cock will not crow this day until you three times deny that you know me.” The time Jesus speaks about concerning Peter is that of pre-dawn or first crack of light. The darkness is a good atmosphere for denying Jesus compared with the full light of day. The pre-dawn time as bordering between full night and full day heightens the sense of denial.

-22.37: “This scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was reckoned with transgressors;’ for what is written about me has its fulfillment.” The verb “fulfill” is *teleo* or to complete in the sense of bring to an end or perfection. Reference to this fulfillment is Is 53.12 which runs in full as “Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.” In short, an abeyance or tension existed between utterance of that verse by Isaiah and Jesus just before his Passion.

-22.45: “And when he rose from prayer.” After having asked the Father to remove the cup he is about to drink yet asks that the Father’s will be done, not his, Jesus finds his disciples asleep or more accurately and vividly, “sleeping for sorrow.” They fell asleep “a stone’s throw” away from Jesus as he had prayed.

-22.49: “When those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, ‘Lord, shall we strike with the sword?’” Reference is to Jesus’ disciples who could intimate his coming betrayal at the approach of the crowd.

-22.53: “But this is your hour and the power of darkness.” Another reference to *bora* or “hour,” the first one being in 22.14 relative to the beginning of the Last Supper. Here *bora* is closely associated with the “power (*exousia*) of darkness” or the better, the authority which darkness is about to exert. It begins its fulfillment in the next verse, “Then they seized him and led him away.”

-22.60: “And immediately while he was still speaking, the cock crowed.” *Parachrema* for “immediately” which suggests a being at or around (*para*) the affair at hand (*chrema*). I.e., the simultaneity of speaking with the crowing of the cock.

-22:69: “But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” Though no explicit reference to the Old Testament is given by way of fulfillment, this sentence is a kind of paraphrase of Ps 110.1, “The Lord says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’” At this juncture we find Jesus sitting...passive to events yet not dominated by them...while he awaits the Lord to place his enemies under him.

-23.5: “He stirs up the people...from Galilee even to this place.” *Hode* is an adverb for “this place” which alternately means to in this wise, thus. Therefore *hode* can have a temporal meaning as well as spacial one.

-23.12: “And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day.” The occasion for this dubious friendship stemmed from the abuse Herod showed toward Jesus. Luke has no account of Pilate scourging Jesus; Herod treated him “with contempt” or *exoubeneo*, literally, thought nothing of him which necessarily doesn’t imply scourging as with other Gospel accounts.

-23.30: “Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us;’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’” Reference is to Hos 10.8 which reads in full, “The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, ‘Cover us;’ and to the hills, ‘Fall on us.’” This verse intimates cessation of sacrifice to the Lord upon the altars.

-23.33: “When they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him.” The preposition *epi* (upon) is used for “to the place,” intimating that they had to ascend it.

-23.34: “And they cast lots to divide his garments.” Reference to Ps 22.18, “they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.”

-23.43: “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” Paradise was a Jewish word for the abode of the dead prior to resurrection.

-23.44: “And there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.” I.e., this darkness was between noon and 3pm, the brightest time of the day. Compare with the plague of darkness in Egypt: the Egyptians experienced “a darkness to be felt” [Ex 10.21] while the Israelites had light. However, this time the Israelites experienced darkness at the heart of their capitol, Jerusalem.

-23.54. “It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.” I.e., the day before the Sabbath. The Greek verb for “was beginning” is *epiphosko*, literally meaning to draw toward the dawn. This movement toward daylight beginnings at the previous day’s sunset and moves throughout the ensuing night.

-23.56. “On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.” Reference is to Ex 20.10, “But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.” Although Jesus’ followers obeyed the Sabbath, certainly they enjoyed no rest or *esuchazo*. However, this concluding verse of the Passion is an important introduction to the Resurrection accounts to follow.

1-3 April, Triduum

Because the four days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday comprise the most sacred time of the Church’s liturgical year, this entry considers them as a unit instead of separately. “Triduum” stands for three days which essentially does not include Holy Saturday. However that is the most unique day of the year insofar as no liturgy is celebrated, a way of imitating Christ in the tomb. St. John’s Gospel allows us to follow this sequence from Thursday through Sunday, our guide which knits the four days together. From the point of view of

chronological time, four days are very short. However, for those participating in the sacred mysteries, this short time is in truth a *kairos* event when our awareness of time slows down to almost a standstill and allows us to ponder events that yet have to be exhausted (cf. the concluding verse below, Jn 21.25).

In the First Sunday of Lent the Greek noun *stigma* was commented upon, that is, when Jesus was in the desert forty days and nights: “And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time” [Lk 4.5]. *Stigma* is the word for “moment” and *chronos* is “time.” That is to say, within this span of forty days *stigma* serves to stretch the fabric of time and space, thereby allowing an indefinite number of significant events to be effected. With this in mind, we can view the Triduum as a *stigma*, indeed, the *stigma* par excellence. After all, what transpires here is unpacked throughout the rest of the liturgical cycle, and even that isn’t enough which is why a number of passes on this cycle are required to get insight into just one given feast day.

The *chronos*-logical sequence of the Triduum has an outline of events moving from the Last Supper and on through Easter. Within it we as participants in the mysteries can stretch its rather small temporal fabric and discover numerous *stigma* which have meaning outside both their limitations and ours. References are made relative to specific times and places both physical and trans-temporal. In some instances quotes pertaining to the coming and going of both Son and Holy Spirit are made. These chapters have a number of such references, too much for insertion here, a fact to be aware of. And so the sequence runs as follows beginning with chapter thirteen of John’s Gospel and going to its conclusion:

-13.1. “Now before the feast of the Passover.” Here Jesus “knew that his hour (*bora*) had come to depart out of this world.” Compare this time with the *bora* which may be taken as a particular instance within the *kairos* event now transpiring. Vss. 13.1 through 14.31 take place during the Last Supper. As noted in 14.31 relative to *enteuthen* (hence), it appears that events took place after the Last Supper though it is not specified.

-13.18. “That the scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’” Reference is to Ps 41.9. The verse reads in full as follows: “Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” Here is the first of several instances when scripture is fulfilled, a past even finding fulfillment in the present.

-13.19. “I tell you this now (i.e., reference to Ps 41.9) before it takes place that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.”

-13.30. “So after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out. And it was night.” The time when Judas departed Jesus and the disciples, night being a symbol of Jesus’ betrayal and Judas’ fate.

-13.31. “When he (Judas) had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of man glorified.’” A juxtaposition between “night” and “now.”

-13.33. “Yet a little while I am with you.” *Mikron* is used for “little while.”

-13.36. “Where are you going?” *Pou* is the word for where which, unknown to the disciples, is not located in *chronos*. However, Jesus does say that Peter will follow afterward, *busteron*.

-14.3. “When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” *Ean* is “when,” *topos* is “place” and *hopou* is “where.”

- 14.16. “And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” Here Jesus is the first Counselor and the Holy Spirit is the second Counselor. Arrival of the second Counselor is yet to happen.
- 14.17. “For he dwells with you.” A contradiction of sorts; the second Counselor is already present within the disciples without them know it, this while having been with the first Counselor for several years.
- 14.19. “Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also.” *Mikron* is used for “little while” as in 13.31 above. Jesus says that because he lives, the disciples will live as well (future tense). Thus living in the present and living in the future belong to two different realities.
- 14.20. “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” *Hemera* is the word for “day” which is the equivalent to living outside *chronological* time. There Jesus, the Father and disciples will be “in” each other.
- 14.23. “And we will come to him and make our home with him.” That is, conditioned upon whether a person loves Jesus or has *agape* for him. Thus *agape*, coming and making home are linked.
- 14.25. “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.” The preposition *para* for “with” (you) is found numerous times throughout this chapter and others pertinent to Jesus’ last discourse. Here as in most *para* implies Jesus being alongside those who share in his *agape*.
- 14.26. “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things.” Here the Counselor is mentioned alone and not as another as in 14.16. His future coming will be marked by teaching Jesus’ disciples all things, the nature of which is left unspecified.
- 14.28. “I go away, and I will come to you.” The departure is soon to happen (Jesus’ death) and the other is not yet revealed though intimates Pentecost.
- 14.29. “And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe.” *Num* or now is Jesus speaking with the disciples about his going away and coming.
- 14.31. “Rise, let us go hence.” *Enteuthen* is the word for “hence” which means from this time or from this place...i.e., either space or time or both. The place to which Jesus bids his disciples to go is not specified. Presumably the Last Supper has been concluded, though chapter fifteen continues without reference to *enteuthen*. Perhaps it took place in another room or elsewhere.
- 15.19. “But I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” Here as elsewhere in these references *kosmos* is the “world” and in the verse at hand, the preposition *ek* for “out of” signifies removal from it. In other words, this *ek*-ness is the source for the world’s hatred.
- 15.25. “It is to fulfill the word...‘They hated me without a cause.’” Reference is to Pss 35.19 & 69.4. This fulfillment is the second reference to the Psalter, the first being in 13.18.
- 15.26. “But when the Counselor comes.” *Hotan* is the word for “when,” this when-ness not being specific as Jesus is speaking.
- 15.27. “You have been with me from the beginning.” *Arche* is the word for “beginning” connoting a principle which sets in motion a whole sequence of events.
- 16.2. “Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” *Hora* is the word for “hour” as noted 13.1. Here it has a negative overtone relative to the disciples. As to its actual coming, no specific time is mentioned.
- 16.4. “When the hour comes you may remember that I told you of them.” Here *hora*, Jesus’ words and remembrance are one and the same.
- 16.4. “I did not say these things to you from the beginning because I was with you.” Cf. 15.27 for the last reference to *arche*, beginning.

- 16.16. “A little while and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me.” Two uses of *mikron* for “little while,” last noted in 14.19. Such *mikron* can be measured in terms of *chronos*...the coming descent of the Holy Spirit...yet can be taken as, in the context of this entry, the next instance of a *stigma*. The significance of this *mikron* is spelled out in the next few verses.
- 16.23. “In that day you will ask nothing of me.” *Hemera* is “day,” last noted in 14.20. The reason for not asking is that Jesus “will see you again and your hearts will rejoice” [vs. 22].
- 16.25. “The hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but tell you plainly of the Father.” Cf. 16.4 for *hora* as “hour.” In both verses, it has yet to arrive not given an indication as to its arrival. Within this *hora* no longer will Jesus use figures or *paroimia* (also as proverbs)...words spoken beside (*para*) that which is deemed or supposed, the verbal root *oimai*.
- 16.26. “In that day you will ask in my name.” The last verse Jesus spoke of an hour and right after speaks of a “day” or *hemera* (cf. 16.23).
- 16.32. “The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered.” Here *hora* has a negative connotation. It is both laying in the future and already present, that is, relative to the disciples being scattered. In the first instance, they are not scattered but together. However, in their minds and spirits, uninformed by the Counselor, they are scattered interiorly.
- 17.1. “Father, the hour has come.” Here *hora* refers not to the scattering of the disciples as in -16.32 but to his glorification which has just commenced.
- 17.11. “Now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.” Two uses of *kosmos*, “world” (cf. 15.19). Note that Jesus says he is no longer in the *kosmos* yet at the same time that he is coming to the Father. I.e., this coming seems to be in a place of sorts between the *kosmos* and presence of the Father.
- 17.16. “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” Here a separation is posited between both Jesus and his disciples with regard to the *kosmos*. At the same time, Jesus has yet to come to the Father as noted in the last reference.
- 17.18. “As you did send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” Verbs are in the past tense indicating that both Jesus and the disciples are not there, in the *kosmos*.
- 17.24. “Father, I desire that they also...may be with me where I am, to behold my glory.” The object of Christ’s desire (*ethelo*) is to be where (*hopou*; cf. 14.13) he is, present tense. The verb is more along the lines of willing as opposed to desire commonly understood. In this where-ness those given by the Father to Christ will behold Christ’s glory.
- 18.1. “He went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley where there was a garden.” Verses from this point on shift from Jesus speaking (spiritually, if you will) of his mission to concrete places.
- 18.9. “This was to fulfill the word which he had spoken, ‘Of those whom you gave me I lost not one.’” This refers to 6.39, 10.28 & 17.12.
- 18.27. “Peter again denied it; and at once the cock crowed.” *Euthus* for “immediately” shows the concurrence of Peter’s denial of Jesus with sunrise or the slightest emergence of daylight, a sign of hope for Peter despite the terrible denial.
- 18.37. “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.” Earlier Jesus spoke of leaving the world or *kosmos* but here hearkens back to his entry into it.
- 19.9: “Where are you from?” *Pothen* is the word for “where” or better, from where, which applies to one’s origins, etc.
- 19.17: “To the place called the place of a skull which is called in Hebrew Golgotha.” The Greek text has for “to” the preposition *eis*, into, indicating full-presence-in.

-19.24: “They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” Fulfillment of Ps 22.18.

-19.25: “Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene.” *Para* is the preposition for “by” implying around in the sense of accompanying (cf. 16.25).

-19.27: “And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” I.e., John entrusted with the care of Mary, Jesus’ mother. It is the same *hora* (hour) when Jesus expired. Note the Greek phrase *eis ta idia* for “to his own home” which reads literally, “into those belong to him.”

-19.28: “Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), ‘I thirst.’” Fulfillment of Ps 69.21 which reads in full, “They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Jesus’ simple “I thirst” does not correspond exactly to the text.

-19.36 & 37: “For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, ‘Not a bone of him shall be broken.’”...“They shall look on him whom they have pierced.” References to Ex 12.46 (Passover lamb) and Zch 12.10.

-20.1: “On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early while it was still dark.” This was the day after the Sabbath which had ended the evening before.

-20.9: “For as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead,” Reference to Ps 16.9-10, “Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. For you did not give me up to Sheol or let your godly one see the Pit.”

-20.25: “Unless I see in his hand the print of the nails and place my finger in the mark of the nails and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” One words indicating two physical locations regarding Jesus’ wounds: *tupos* for “print” or place in the sense of pattern. Thomas wants to see the first *tupos* and place his finger in the second *tupos*. *Tupos* is not mentioned regarding Jesus’ side.

-21.4: “Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.” Easy not to recognize someone under such conditions. The same may apply to Mary Magdalene more or less at the same time of day (cf. 20.15).

-21.22: “If it is my will that he (John) remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” The disciples confused this remaining with not dying which Jesus affirmed. Perhaps insinuated is John later at Patmos where he composed the Book of Revelation.

-21.25: “But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” The concluding verse of John’s Gospel which juxtaposes Jesus as confined to a given place and time with the infinite number of books about him. In other words, we are presented with a kind of *stigma* where divine reality does not abolish the distinction between time and space but contains it.

11 April, Second Sunday of Easter

Today’s Gospel (Jn 20.19-31) takes place the evening of Easter, a time of day symbolized by “the doors being shut,” words which are repeated later in vs. 26. Twice Jesus says to his frightened disciples “Peace be with you.” The first precedes the showing of his hands and side (there is no mention of his feet). The second greeting is followed by “as the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” This harkens back to just two days ago when Jesus said, “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” [17.18]. Such words must have been fresh in the disciples’ minds and now have a special impact when they confront him suddenly and unexpectedly. The difference is mention of the world or *kosmos* in the latter. Chances are that by this statement after his

resurrection Jesus wants the disciples to recall his lengthy discourse about his relationship with them and his divine Father. As for vs. 21, the verb “send” is mentioned twice and has two different verbs. The first is *apostello* or being sent out on a mission. Here the Father sends out the Son, *apostello* being a verb usually associated with the mission of the disciples. The second verb is *pempo* which Jesus uses with regard to his disciples. This is a more common verb and has the connotation of dismissing whether positively or negatively. Both *apostello* and *pempo* are united by the connective “as:” “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Note that the first is in the past tense—the Son having accomplished the Father’s mission—and the second is in the present tense. This present tense intimates that the sending by the Father of the Son carries over to the sending of the disciples by the Son.

Jesus does not expand on the words just spoken but immediately breathes upon the disciples saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” He does so only in the context of them being able to forgive sins; nothing more is said of the Spirit. Presumably Jesus is relying upon the disciples’ recollection of his discourse on the Spirit as companion and advocate only forty-eight hours earlier. Again, we have no explanation or fleshing out as to how the disciples were to implement this command. Surely it must not have been as dramatic as the Spirit’s fiery descent at Pentecost but just as real. Perhaps the Spirit had to rest upon the disciples gently and abide with them in a hidden fashion until fifty days later. It was only then at Pentecost that they knew how to implement this forgiveness as well as having had the duration of fifty days to ponder the difference between Jesus being sent by the Father and Jesus sending them.

Thomas comes on the scene next, presumably the same evening, though no clear indication is given as to his arrival. Thomas states his desire for physical proof of Jesus’ resurrection which is taken up “eight days later.” In those intervening days Thomas must have engaged the disciples in lively debates about Jesus. Chances are Mary Magdalene was involved, the first person to have reached Jesus’ empty tomb. No appearance of Jesus is recorded, so it must have been a tense and confusing eight days. Chances are that such discussions took place behind those “closed doors” as opposed to out in the open, the temple area, for example. Actually, we get a strong sense of being closed in through a hearing of today’s Gospel.

Once Thomas accepts Jesus as having been risen, John says that Jesus “did many other signs...which are not written in this book.” John records the Thomas incident only since it has direct bearing upon faith in Jesus Christ. Still, this leaves unanswered the nature of other appearances by Jesus; even if he may have conversed further with Thomas. Actually, John says that Jesus had done signs or *semeion* which can also mean a mark or signal pointing to something greater than the *semeion* itself.

18 April, Third Sunday of Easter

As we move further from Easter itself and the octave of Easter which culminated on Low Sunday or last week, our attention shifts gradually to Pentecost. This is not so much evident at the moment but is behind our perception of time as we move through these fifty days between Easter and Pentecost. In sum, this time is one of waiting for a second Incarnation, as it were, that of the Holy Spirit.

Today's Gospel (Jn 21.1-19) begins with the words "After this" which seem not to refer to a particular period or time. However, we can take into account last Sunday when Thomas doubted the appearance of Jesus. "After this" also could refer to the words of vs. 30, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book." That can include a large number of signs (*semeion*) which necessarily do not pertain to actual appearances of Jesus. These, on the other hand, are presented in terms of revelations, the verb *phaino* being used. It means to make visible and differs from the verb *apokalupto* commonly associated with the notion of revealing and hence the Book of Revelation (*apokalupsis*), that is, the disclosure of something which has been present all along even though we may not recognize it. *Phaino* seems to apply to a manifestation which, if you will, comes in and off the scene as we see after Jesus' resurrection. Furthermore, this verb can apply to someone or something becoming present within a given situation after which it leaves; maybe or maybe not it will come again. In other words, *phaino* as found in John's account is vital for depicting Jesus yet intimates a provisional presence...provisional in the sense that the disciples must await the Holy Spirit's descent some fifty days later. As for what *phaino* intimates, it would be a temptation to associate it with a lesser reality, a kind of phantom which the disciples invented. However, the revealing at hand is quite concrete and involves extended dialogue on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias.

Vs. 4 presents us with Jesus standing on the beach at daybreak (*proi*) or that twilight period when it's neither fully day nor fully night. However, the twilight here is tending from darkness to light. As for this in between time, the ability to see may be hampered further by being by the sea which could distort one's vision. In vs. 7 John says that it is Jesus, not a revelation, a *phaino* of him. In a sense, this verb fits in well with the disciples not recognizing him during this transitional time or the movement from darkness to light. When Jesus addresses the disciples as "children" they have no objection as you think they might. Instead, they respond directly to his question about having caught no fish. Then again, they may wanted to go on with their work and not agitate this unexpected stranger on the shore.

When the disciples set out at Jesus' bidding to fish after a fruitless night they did so during the morning twilight. Most likely during this time John, "that disciple whom Jesus loved" or had *agape*, recognized Jesus ("It is the Lord!"). There may have been something unique about this twilight by the seas which evoked recent memories of Jesus' *agape* just before the passion and death. John's recognition happened close to the shore ('about a hundred yards off,' vs. 8), and from there Jesus bade the disciples to cast their nets. As for the *agape* Jesus had for John, this seems to shift or comes to a head with Peter: "Do you love (*agapao*) me more than these?" To this question Peter responds in all three times, "you know that I love you." The verb is not *agapao* but *phileo* which has to do with showing affection or acting in a friendly manner. *Phileo* could be taken as a response to a loving statement, a kind of reciprocity. It's interesting that vs. 20 (not in this Gospel proper) reads "Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved (*agapao*)...he said to Jesus, 'What about this man?'" It's almost as though we revert to the *agape* which Jesus had for John, a higher level than *phileo*, which despite Peter's profession of love for Jesus (his *phileo*), nevertheless roused jealousy in him.

25 April, Fourth Sunday of Easter

Today's short Gospel (Jn 10.27-30) is the first one for the Easter season (i.e., a Sunday in Easter) not dealing directly with the Resurrection. Instead of taking it as a paucity of scriptural passages referring to the Resurrection, we can view this Gospel and others for the remaining Sundays of Easter as a gradual shift in focus. That is to say a shift from the Resurrection to Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit, at this half way mark of the Easter season. Inferences to the Holy Spirit might not be evident at first glance but become clearer the more we subject the texts to a closer read, that is, in the spirit of *lectio divina*.

The context of Jesus' words was the Dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem (an eight day festival in December) and more specifically, on the portico of Solomon. "How long will you keep us in suspense?" say the Jews, the text reading literally, "How long will you take away the soul of ours?" Note the singular "soul" (*psuche*) with the plurality of Jews...one *psuche* belonging to a group of people. It is more striking given the physical circumstances of being on the portico in the cold of winter with pale sunlight. The suspension consists of the Jews wanting to know if "you are the Christ," and for him to tell them "plainly." The Greek for "plainly" is the adverb *parresia*; the same is used for the noun which suggests freedom of speech without recrimination for what one had said. To this Jesus responds simply that he had told them (*parresia* implied) yet their unbelief prevented them from hearing his words. Thus disbelief hinders freedom of speech, of speaking plainly.

From this point Jesus identifies his followers as sheep: "You do not belong to my sheep" or more vividly and to the point, "from (*ek*) my sheep." Use of the word "sheep" can be taken as a less than flattering description of people who follow Jesus which perhaps is further incitement for the Jews to stone Jesus as recorded in vs.31. As for the sheep, there is an order with respect to Jesus. They hear him, he knows them and they follow him. Thus we have hearing-knowing-following. The first and third pertain to the sheep while the second belongs to Jesus; around it the other two revolve. The knowing (*ginosko*) is the response by Jesus to the sheep hearing him. It is transformed...perhaps one could say transfigured...into the sheep following Jesus. The verb here is *akoloutho* which intimates going in a specific sequence or order, not just a random following of Jesus. One image that comes to mind is the order in which sheep enter a sheepfold, one behind the other. At this point the simple-minded image of sheep characterized by listening is altered or comes to maturity by following in the order...the *akolouthia*...which Jesus gives. Also, a counting of the sheep entering the sheepfold is implied to make sure all go in, and this going in is into the hand of Jesus contained, in turn, within the hand of the Father described in the next paragraph.

The result of this transformation from hearing into following through Jesus knowing the sheep is threefold: eternal life, not perishing, or better, "not coming to destruction into (*eis*) eternity (*aion*)" and finally, no one being able to snatch these sheep from the hand of Jesus. The verb *harpazo* (to snatch) is strong, involving not just stealing but a thorough plundering. A certain intimidation is hinted at by putting *harpazo* "out of my hand," that is, *harpazo* as right there in front of Jesus which certainly would stop someone. Not only is *harpazo* presented with respect to Jesus' hand but to the hand of the Father...not unlike the Father's hand being larger, both overshadowing and containing the hand of Jesus, almost telescopic-like. This hand-to-hand containing of the sheep which is immune to snatching (and hence plundering) is summed up by the last words of today's Gospel, "I and the Father are one." Literally this reads, "I and the Father one we are," a more dramatic and forceful statement which naturally leads to the Jews picking up stones which the next verse recounts.

As noted in the first paragraph, this passage has nothing to do with the Resurrection of Jesus Christ nor of the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. Yet upon reading it closely, it fits in well with this period of fifty days preparation for Pentecost, a better understanding of the relationship between Jesus Christ and his Father who, after all, are united by and with the Holy Spirit.

2 May, Fifth Sunday of Easter

At first glance, today's brief Gospel (Jn 13.31-33 & 34-35) seems more appropriate for Lent or Holy Week since it takes place just prior to the Last Supper. However, now that we're into the second half of Easter season—inclining with greater rapidity toward Pentecost and the descent of the Holy Spirit—we can read the same text differently. So often the Gospels record that the disciples did not comprehend what was transpiring until after Jesus rose from the dead. Liturgically speaking, we too are on this “other side” of Jesus' resurrection. Yet should we insert ourselves within the fifty day period between Easter and Pentecost (let alone the three year period of Jesus' ministry), still we have no comprehension of Scripture's meaning despite our having encountered Jesus as risen from the dead.

The Gospel begins with Jesus just having been glorified (*doxazō*) which is a biblical way of saying that he has manifested himself fully. Note the passive “is glorified” meaning that Jesus is the subject of this glory, i.e., he received it from the Father whom he includes quickly, “in him God is glorified.” The words “in him” indicate that Jesus is speaking of himself not unlike speaking of an object. If the active voice were used for such circumstances, easily people would think Jesus to be presumptuous if not out of his mind: “Now I am glorified.” This idea of being glorified calls to mind dramatic theophanies from the Old Testament, chief among which is Mount Sinai. That image is quite unlike the present one which takes places within a very crowded Jerusalem or within the context of a swollen population there for celebration of the Passover. While throngs were milling about, here we have Jesus and his small band of disciples in an upper room off what most likely was a crowded side street speaking about glorification, talk which perhaps shook even his disciples. No small wonder that after the Last Supper discourse Jesus and those with him withdraw to the relative isolation of the garden across the Kidron valley. Yet given so many people in Jerusalem, chances are that even that place had people milling about.

Within the apparently circumstances of a crowded Jerusalem and talk about glorification we have Jesus utter the key to his message: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” That is, if you have *agape* for one another. Apparently these words were lost upon the disciples, for Peter says immediately, “Where are you going?” The familiarity of this disregard for manifesting *agape* is so common that it requires no comment. One of the best ways to escape attention to it is not by arguing with Jesus but by changing the topic of discussion. However, that doesn't work with Jesus, for to Peter he says that he will deny him three times.

9 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

Next Sunday is the last Sunday of Easter before Pentecost, so as noted with regard to last Sunday's entry, the Gospel for today (Jn 14.23-9) can be read as preparation for that great feast which comes

after fifty days from the Resurrection of Jesus. As for today, we pick up the Gospel mid-stream, if you will, when Jesus is giving his discourse during the Last Supper. Some years ago I had outlined this discourse so I decided to include relevant notations for the verses at hand:

Vs. 23: Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

A man: the Greek text has a relative pronoun, "who."

Loves (*agapao*): here connected with keeping (*tereo*) of Christ's word or *logos*. Christ is the *Logos* who speaks a singular *logos*, a kind of reflection of himself.

Also dependent upon this condition ("if") is the Father loving (*agapao*) the person which similarly intimates a *tereo* of Christ's *logos*.

We will come to (*pros*) to him: direction towards-which and can intimate a continuous coming as well as arrival.

Home (*monē*): cf. vs. 2 as "rooms:" from the verb *meno* (to stay, abide). This is the only New Testament use of the term. Compare with Mt 6.6, "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door." *Tameion* is the word at hand, the only NT use which fundamentally means "storeroom."

With (*para*) him: connotes being-by, in the presence of but not quite fully "with" in the English sense.

Vs. 24: He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

Love (*agapao*): here suggests its opposite (hatred). Similarly, a lacking of keeping (*tereo*) means disobedience.

My words (*logos*, singular): compare the plural with the singular of the previous verse.

The word (*logos*): singular, here comes through Christ from the Father. Such hearing is related to a sending (*pepo*) by the Father. This verb connotes the giving of a commission.

Vs. 25: These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.

You: both uses are in the accusative case.

Christ's speaking is concurrent with his being with the disciples.

With (*para*) you: cf. vs. 23; intimates indirect presence. The Greek has the verb *meno* noted in vs. 10 as "dwells" and from which "room" (*monē*) is derived.

Vs. 26: But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Counselor (*Parakletos*): cf. vs. 16. Both verses show that the *Parakletos* is not present but is to come.

Holy Spirit (*Pneuma*): first identification of the Spirit as holy (*hagios*) in the chapters at hand. John's Gospel has two other references, 1.33 & 22.22 (i.e., at the beginning and end of the Gospel).

Will send (*pepo*): cf. vs. 24 with respect to the Father's word.

In (en) my name: distinct, as it were, from the person of Christ. "In my name" is first noted in vs. 13.

Will teach (*didasko*): first use of this term in the chapters at hand, future tense.

All things: unspecified as to what they pertain.

Bring to remembrance (*hupomimnesko*): future tense. This is the only use of the verb in John's Gospel. It suggests a causing to remember, indirect, as by the preposition *hupo* (under) prefixed to the verb. "So if I come, I will bring up (i.e., cause to remember) what he is doing" [3 Jn 10].

All: with reference to Christ having spoken. Compare with "all things."

Vs. 27: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

Peace (*eirene*, twice): in the sense of the Hebrew *shalom*, completeness, wholeness. "That in me you may have peace" [16.33].

This peace has two aspects, both with respect to verbs in the present tense: 1) It is first given (*aphiemi*). The other sense of this verb is found in vs. 18, "I will not leave you (desolate)" and 2) giving.

My peace (*eirene*): relative pronoun is used; compare with simple "peace" in this verse.

Hearts (*kardia*): the singular is used..."the heart of you" as in vs. 1.

World (*kosmos*): presumably in reference to "peace" but not explicitly mentioned.

Be troubled (*tarasso*): cf. vs. 1 for this verb and phrase.

Be afraid (*deiliao*): the only use of this verb in the NT. Both this verb and *tarasso* pertain to the singular "heart."

Vs. 28: You heard me say to you, "I go away, and I will come to you." If you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I.

Go/come: with reference to vs. 3, "And when I go...I will come." There the verb is *poreuo* (go; *erchomai* is used for "come"). In the verse at hand, *hupago* is used for "go" as in vs. 4, "where I am going." Again, note the preposition *hupo* prefaced to the verb. Most likely that is the verse related to "you heard me say."

To (*pros*) you: last noted in vs. 23 with respect to Christ and the Father.

Loved (*agapao*): bound up with the disciples rejoicing (*chairo*). This verse is next found in 16.20 with respect to the "world." "The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice" [3.29].

Go (*poreuo*): here with respect to (*pros*) the Father, direction-towards-which. The Father being greater than Jesus makes more sense with regards to what this *pros*-direction intimates.

Vs. 29: And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe.

It: with reference to the going away and coming back of the previous verse.

13 May, Ascension Thursday

Today we are on the verge of completing the fifty days belonging to the Easter season; in fact, we have moved beyond it but not quite fully. We must wait for Pentecost Sunday, nine days hence, the days after Ascension being the original novena. This brief period of time is unique in the liturgical season because the Ascension of Jesus obviously means that he has left earth and the disciples are now on their own. At the same time the Holy Spirit has not yet come, so this time is one of

abeyance, of suspension. It must have been confusing for the disciples even though they “returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Lk 24.52). One wonders what that joy must have consisted of...certainly real but not fulfilled. While the disciples awaited Pentecost, perhaps they expected Jesus to appear in bodily fashion as he had done after his resurrection. This isn’t said explicitly though somehow we get an intimation of its truth. As for today’s Gospel (Lk 24.46-53), it recounts the Ascension of Jesus more or less in outline; Acts, which is attributed to Luke, gives a fuller account as well as the Pentecost event and subsequent growth of the church.

Anyone who reads the Gospels is struck by the frequent interjection of “in order that the scriptures may be fulfilled” or the like. We have such an example here, “these are my words (*logoi*) which I spoke to you while I was still with you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Jesus mentions all three parts of the Hebrew testament: law, prophets and psalms, that is to say, the legal, inspirational and liturgical aspects of life. We can assume that the disciples were abiding faithfully by these three elements both before they joined themselves to Jesus as well as earlier on their own. As for Jesus’ presence, he acknowledges this by saying “while I was still with you.” The prepositions *pros* is used for “with (you)” which implies direction toward which. That is to say, either in movement toward a given direction or having a direct relationship with...to (*pros*)...the person or situation at hand. Just as the three-fold nature of the law, prophets and psalms formed the disciples in a kind of *pros* relationship with the disciples, so had the person of Jesus established a relationship with...*pros*...them in such a direct fashion. One could say by way of both hindsight and anticipation, the same will apply to the Holy Spirit at and after Pentecost. Only the Spirit’s role will be of constant pointing to Jesus.

Right after these words Jesus “opened their minds to understand the scriptures.” This can be unpacked by starting with the verb *dianoigo*, the preposition *dia* suggesting an opening through of the scriptures, an opening effected by dividing. Its object is the disciples’ minds, rather the mind (*nous*) of theirs or a singular *nous* or faculty of perceiving proper to a plurality of disciples. *Suniemi* is the verb to understand which means a bringing or setting together (*sun* or with prefaced to the verb). And so we could say that the *dia* of *dianoigo* is directed toward (*pros*) the disciples that they may have a setting together (*sun*) with respect to the scriptures. If that is so, then what Jesus said about his *logoi* or words he spoke while still with them will, after his ascension and Pentecost, serve to clarify the three-fold nature of the Hebrew scriptures, the law, prophets and psalms. Jesus proceeds to give an example: “that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.” Chances are that the disciples, even if they were very observant readers or listeners, could not nor had the capacity to see the Hosea reference (6.2) apply to Jesus. That verse, by the way, reads: “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up that we may live before him.” Surely once that is clarified by Jesus himself the disciples were enabled to see many references in law, prophets and psalms. Right away this brings up the misleading perception that the disciples were endowed with a special, even esoteric, capacity to see in the scriptures foreshadowings of Jesus. However, chances are that this was a kind of training in *lectio divina*, if it may be put that way, that Jesus wishes to transmit to his followers and hence to his church which will come into being shortly at Pentecost.

As for Jesus’ ascension proper, he bids the disciples to “stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” However, those words don’t apply exactly, for in the next verse Jesus “led them out as far as Bethany” when he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And so

Jesus qualified his command for the disciples to stay in Jerusalem, for they returned there or more precisely, “went up to the upper room” (Acts 1.13) until the descent of the Holy Spirit.