

16 May, Seventh Sunday of Easter

Today's Sunday is unique in that a few days ago Jesus had ascended into heaven. As for the previous Sundays of Easter, they dealt with his Resurrection in preparation not just for his Ascension but for the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Now that Jesus is ascended, we have a Sunday when he is not present; the same applies to the Holy Spirit who yet has to make his presence known to us. While this is no longer strictly applicable to us, are re-created nevertheless mysteriously they are re-created through the liturgy. Not that they are re-enacted but made present again in all their original force by the Church's yearly celebration. Anyone who follows the Gospel texts and related scriptural readings in the spirit of *lectio divina* knows what this means.

As with last Sunday's entry, today follows a similar theme, that is, insertion of notations taken from another document on the home page relative to the Gospel, Jn 17.20-6. This insertion runs as follows:

Vs. 20: I do not pray for these only but also for those who believe in me through their word.

Pray (*erotao*): last noted in vs. 15 with respect to the Father not taking the disciples out of the world.

For (*peri*, around, concerning) those only. The same applies "for (*peri*) those who believe in me."

In (*eis*, into) me: a fuller presence within Christ.

Through (*dia*) the word (*logos*) of theirs as the Greek literally reads.

Vs. 21: that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The key word to understand the sense of "one" is *kathos*, "as." Here *kathos* leads to a "triple in (*en*):" me, you and us.

Have sent (*apostello*): cf. vs. 18: "As you did send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." Did sent (*apostello*, twice): cf. vss. 3 & 8 with reference to the Father doing the action which here is transferred to Christ doing the action.

Vs. 22: The glory which you have given me I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one,

Glory (*doxa*): cf. vs. 5, "glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made." Also compare with vs. 24, "to behold my glory." Such glory originates with the Father, is given to the Son and then to the disciples. It has the ability to effect being "one" conditioned by *kathos* (as) noted in the previous verse.

Vs. 23: I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

In (*en*): the order here is first Christ with respect to the disciples and then the Father with respect to Christ.

Perfectly (*teleioo*): perfect passive participle used. The next reference of this verb is 19.28, "Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), "I thirst." In the verse at hand, the preposition *eis* (into) is used: "perfectly into one."

May know (*ginosko*): last reference is vs. 8, here with respect to the world's knowing that the Father sent the Son and the Father having loved the disciples as the Son.

Loved (*agapao*, twice), where *kathos* (even as) is important to understand the two uses.

Vs. 24: Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which you have given me in your love for me before the foundation of the world.

Desire (*thelo*): more with regards to willing than the desiring as signified by the noun *eros*. “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will” [15.7].

May be with (*meta*) me. Note the distinction between these words and “they whom you have given me.” Christ bids the Father that this latter group partakes, as it were, of being meta him. Such *meta* is “where I am.”

To behold (*theoreo*): compare with two uses in 16.10, “and you will see me no more; and again a little while, and you will see me.”

Glory (*doxa*): the object of *theoreo* (“which you have given me,” vs. 22).

In your love for me: the Greek text reads “because you have loved (*agapao*) me.” Vs. 23 has this verb with respect to the Father vis-a-vis the disciples.

Foundation (*katabole*) of the world: literally, a throwing or laying down. The preposition *kata* intimates according to a plan or intention. This is the only use of the term in St. John's Gospel. “I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world” [Mt 13.35]. Compare with other uses of “world” in St. John, mostly negative.

Vs. 25: O righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you; and these know that you have sent me.

Righteous (*dikaios*) Father: the only use of this term in St. John's Gospel and the only time applied to God the Father in the Gospels. “They were both righteous before God” [Lk 1.6].

Three instances of the verb *ginosko*: the kosmos not having it, Jesus Christ as having it and the disciples as having it.

Have sent (*apostello*) me: last noted in vs. 21 with the same implication. A close connection exists between the third *ginosko* and this sending.

Vs. 26: I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.

Two uses of the verb *ginosko* (compare with the previous verse): first with respect to “your name” (Father) and second with respect to making it known in the future; i.e., both the past and future uses of the verb.

Love (*agape*): compare with the use of *phileo* in 16.27, “for the Father himself loves you because you have loved me.”

Have loved (*agapao*): the verb used with the noun.

In (*en*) them/I in (*en*) them: two uses of the same preposition with respect to the noun and verb, love.

23 May, Pentecost Sunday

Today we have a short Gospel (Jn 16.12-15) which concludes the fifty day period of Easter as well as the Lenten season just prior to it. The nine days preceding Pentecost or those days originating with

the Ascension provided an opportunity to reflect on the significance of this rather lengthy period of time so its end won't hit us so abruptly. That abrupt end comes upon us with tomorrow or the day after Pentecost when the Church plunges us directly back into Ordinary Time. Really, this is quite an abrupt change when you think of it. Thus a major liturgical cycle is capped off, if you will. Though Jesus utters the words of today's Gospel shortly before his death, resurrection, ascension and the Holy Spirit's descent, they permeate these events by reason of the relationship between Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit. All this is done not so much in hindsight but now at the completion of the Church's most important cycle of her liturgical year.

As for the "many things" Jesus wishes to communicate to his disciples, they are not set down in writing, though we get an intimation of them from his appearances after the resurrection. "But there are 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." Such are the concluding words of John's Gospel. To bear (*bastazo*) these "many things" means to carry or support the words of Jesus words which suggests the image of a weight pressing down. It is interesting to compare this *bastazo* with the Spirit "resting on each one of them" [Acts 2.3] which, despite being Spirit, still had a divine weight...*kavod* (for that is the original meaning of this Hebrew word for glory...pressing upon the twelve.

Jesus speaks of "when the Spirit of truth comes" yet does not specify when it will be nor at this juncture could the disciples understand what he means. The leading into the truth at first suggests a guidance from outside but in fact is a guidance from without to within: "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" [Acts 2.4]. As for the "authority" of the Holy Spirit, the Greek text reads literally, "he will not speak from himself." And so the authority at hand is a speaking of the other two divine persons which puts the Spirit well into the background. And so when the Spirit does fill the disciples in the upper room, he does so not as himself, if you will, but as a combination (for lack of better word) of both Father and Son. Because such speaking has two voices, it requires some training and close attentiveness in order to get accustomed to this new way of communication. "Whatever he hears he will speak" suggests a temporal order: first hearing followed by speaking with the process repeated again, etc.

As for the Spirit to glorify (*doxazo*) Jesus, we don't hear specific references of the Spirit doing this from here on in John's Gospel, that is, pertaining to his death and resurrection. For example, Jesus asks his Father to glorify him (cf. 17.1). Nevertheless, given the relationship Jesus is revealing here, the Holy Spirit as in between, as it were, Father and Son, is not absent. The verse at hand is more specific regarding *doxazo* which consists in taking what is of Jesus and declaring it to the disciples. This taking is not specified nor limited, so we can assume it comes from Jesus' divine nature. Note that the verse does not say "and will give it to you." Rather, accent is upon announcing what comes from Jesus' divine nature which suggests some distance will exist between Jesus and his followers.

Although not said directly, the Gospel concludes with "he will take what is mine and declare it to you." Very similar words to those of the previous verse only here prefaced by Jesus' words, "All that the Father has is mine." So instead of glorifying Jesus, the Spirit will take everything from Jesus (and that everything is from the Father) and declare it to the disciples. All in all, the taking from Jesus mentioned in vss. 14 and 15 sum up the Spirit's role as declarer. The verb is *anagello* intimating that

in the near future the disciples and the growing church will function as such in imitation of the Holy Spirit, the taker of what belongs to Jesus and this coming from the Father.

30 May, Trinity Sunday

Today's Gospel is the same as for last Sunday (Pentecost) where several choices were presented, including that of Jn 16.12-15. Because of this unintentional oversight or not foreseeing that the same Gospel excerpt could be used for two consecutive Sundays, notations are made on the first reading (Prov 8.22-31) which deals with God's creation of wisdom, *chakmah*. It was easy for some in the early church to apply a passage like this to Jesus Christ as Son of the Father though that did not become the orthodox position.

While the change from Pentecost Sunday to Ordinary Time the day after was abrupt, the liturgy strings out the recently completed Easter season with Trinity Sunday today, Corpus Christi next Sunday and the Sacred Heart of Jesus the following Friday. These few weeks give an opportunity to reflect back on all that had transpired while despite the sharp divide between Pentecost Sunday and Monday in the Eighth Week of Ordinary Time, we slowly and gingerly make our way forward into a period of time we haven't seen until mid February.

Proverbs speaks of the pre-existence of wisdom in comparison with the created nature of the world. Wisdom isn't presented as some kind of divine being along with God but an activity endowed with speech. The comparison between wisdom and creation is given as an outline. What we have here is the coming into existence of two foundational elements of creation: mountains and sea, not the created beings inhabiting them. While reading these verses it is helpful to keep in mind the various words related to the act of coming into existence. Most verses in English begin with "when." For it the Hebrew uses the preposition *b* or *in* prefaced to the first word suggesting a presence-within that which is being created, not just its coming into existence with God leaving it on its own:

-Vs. 22: "Created me at the beginning of his work." The verb here is *qanab* which intimates more an acquisition or possession. The Hebrew lacks an equivalent of "at" and reads literally "acquired me the beginning of his way (*derek*)." *Derek* is the simple term for a road and here can refer to that which God is about to accomplish.

-Vs. 23: "Ages ago I was set up at the first before the beginning of the earth." The verb here is *nasak*, more as offering a libation or an anointing which intimates that wisdom was anointed not unlike a king in order to govern creation.

-Vs. 24: "When there were no depths I was brought forth." Depths or *tehomoth* is reminiscent of Gn 1.2 prior to God's act of creation which was spread out over six days: "The earth was without form and void (*tobu wabohu*)." The verb in Proverbs for "brought forth" is *chul* which also means to twist, turn around and intimates that this bringing forth of wisdom was done, if you will, in a twisting sort of way indicative of an artist making a kind of twirl or quick manual gesture to finish off his creation.

-Vs. 25: "Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth." The verb *tavah* for shaped means to sink, to seal, as though mountains were set as a seal upon the earth. Mountains are symbolic of God's eternity, a seal of sorts to remind people of that eternity when

they gaze at them. As for the hills, the verb *chul* is used as with depths in the previous verse.

-Vs. 26: “Before he had made the earth with its field or the first of the dust of the world.” The Hebrew for both fields and dust are of uncertain origin. The common verb *basab* is used for making. Compare the dryness of this material with the already mentioned wetness of the depths.

-Vs. 27: “When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep.” The verb *kun* means to set up, prepare, make ready, here relative to the heavens. This is one of two instances in this excerpt when wisdom is with God, the other being in vs. 30 (“I was beside him”). The verb *chuq* as drawing a circle implies a surrounding or embrace. An alternate meaning of *chuq* is bosom which here applies to the face of the deep...its surface...to restrain it from swallowing up the land. The noun for circle is *chug* which suggests being drawn by a compass. Both *chuq* and *chug* are very similar in sound, a play on words.

-Vs. 28: “When he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep.” This verb contrasts two opposites, skies and deep. The verb *amats* means to be firm and connotes a certain alertness as to what is transpiring, here the object being the skies, *shachaq* usually referring to clouds. The verb *hazqaz* means to make strong, that is, to secure not so much the wild, formless nature of the deep (*tehom*; cf. *tehomoth* of vs. 24) but how this deep manifests itself in the ocean or through its fountains, hence the ocean being symbolic of a threat against swallowing up the land.

-Vs. 29: “When he assigned to the sea its limit so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth.” The verb *sum* or to put, set in place, is used for assigned, another limitation God puts on the potentially uncontrollable and destructive force of water. The object of *sum* here is *choq* or limit which also means an appointed law or statute. The almost legal nature of this is further conveyed by the verb *havar* (transgress) relative to God’s command or *peh* which also means mouth. Thus a command issues directly from the mouth of God.

-Vs. 30: “Then I was beside him like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always.” *Amon* is master worker, from the verbal root *aman*, to prop, stay up, support, be faithful. To be near the Lord is to share in his creativity which is the theme of these verses. As noted in vs. 27, that verse and the one at hand are the only two when wisdom is given as beside God. Two verbs are similar: *shabah* for delight and *sachaq* for delight, the latter suggesting a type of rejoicing marked by contempt. The former suggests something gentler, a kind of caressing.

-Vs. 31: “Rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men.” The only verse of this passage not referring to mountains nor the sea but to humanity. A second use of the verb *sachaq* (to delight, as in vs. 30) here applied to *tevel* which is equivalent to the Greek *oikoumene* as opposed to the physical planet in and by itself. Given *sachaq* as marked by some contempt, it can disclose some of wisdom’s attitude toward this *tevel*. The verb *shabah* (also in vs. 30) is used with regard to the sons of men, a gentler form of delighting.

6 June, Corpus Christi

Today is the second Sunday after Pentecost when the majestic Lenten-Easter-Pentecost cycle is almost at a close...technically speaking, it closes this coming Saturday with the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Wisely the Church has inserted the two feasts of Trinity Sunday and Corpus Christi in order to mitigate the transition from this three-fold cycle to the extended period of Ordinary Time. We did experience this sharp transition, however, the day after Pentecost when we were plunged directly into Ordinary Time. No matter how much we may prepare for the

transition, it does hit us rather dramatically...kind of in-your-face. So instead of these two Sundays giving opportunity to reflect upon Pentecost in and by itself, they allow us to take in the larger picture of what had transpired since Ash Wednesday and how that three-fold cycle will govern the rest of the liturgical year or until the First Sunday in Advent which comes late November.

Today's Gospel (Lk 9.11-17) is preceded by the return of the apostles from their first experience of preaching God's kingdom and healing (cf. vs. 2), that is, without Jesus being among them. They were on their own with little or no guidelines except their brief experience of being in the company of Jesus. In hindsight, one would think this an exceptional privilege. However, a close read of the Gospels reveal that the apostles were both quite insensitive and ignorant as to what was going on most of the time. While they out and about on their own, king Herod got wind of their activity and confused Jesus (and/or his apostles) with John whom recently he beheaded. Thus the feeding of five thousand people is set against this background. If Herod was amazed at what had happened with the apostles, chances are truly he was stunned at the next event though nothing is recorded about his reaction. His attitude to a certain extent is echoed, however, in the verse after this Gospel passage, "Who do the people say that I am?"

"When the crowds learned it, they followed him." That is to say, the crowds learned of Jesus taking his disciples to Behsaida after their successful missionary endeavor. Such knowledge was passed very quickly in tight-knit ancient societies (again, refer to Herod). In light of this, word from the people to whom the disciples were sent may have spread just as rapidly or before the apostles returned to Jesus.

As for the crowds approaching Jesus, "he welcomed them," the verb being *apodechomai* suggesting a reception or taking into one's care. Just like the recently completed mission of the apostles, he "spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing." So if the crowds who got wind of the apostles out on their mission followed them, their instinct was correct. It led them straight to Jesus who continued, if you will, the apostles' mission. In light of this one gets the impression that as great as preaching and healing may be, there's more to what Jesus has to say. This moves into a realm proper to him alone, namely, the ability to impart what we now know as the Eucharist. Although the feeding of these people does not pertain directly to this (it was instituted at the Last Supper), still it is a kind of foreshadowing.

12 June, Immaculate Heart of Mary

Today's brief notations are an exception from the customary practice of commenting upon the Gospel passages of Sundays and major feast days. The reason? Today marks the very end of the Lenten-Easter-Pentecost liturgical cycle as it has developed over the centuries. Several times reference was made to it in previous entries, especially since Ash Wednesday forward through Pentecost. Since we're dealing with something very important though little appreciated, perhaps a consideration of today's Gospel (Lk 2.41-51) may be in order. Then again, today's feast (as was yesterday's, Sacred Heart) has a certain connotation of piety belonging to another age though it seems to remain somewhat popular. As for the liturgical cycle just completed, today marks the 115th day since Ash Wednesday when the drama of our redemption had begun. Not only are we a full third of the calendar year from that day (17 February), the seasons themselves are quite different,

having passed from winter to the threshold of summer. From next Sunday onward to the end of November we will be situated squarely within Ordinary Time, about five and a half months.

As for the Gospel itself, we have the scene when Jesus' parents unwittingly left their son behind in Jerusalem. Yet the passage more directly associated with today's feast is the prophecy of Simeon about Mary when she presented Jesus in the temple, so we'll focus on that briefly. To be more specific, the verse at hand is "and a sword will pierce through your own soul that the thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." We can appreciate this revelation here today or 115 days after Ash Wednesday after all the major events that had taken place. In contrast to this opening of Mary's heart we had the Gospel of Ash Wednesday (Mt 6.1-6; 16-18) which dealt with praying and giving alms in secret. The phrase "in secret" or *en to krupto* occurs four times, so obviously Jesus is communicating something important. In other words, he wishes to draw our attention away from visible reality to an invisible one where true seeing by the Father takes place all the time. This being "in secret" we have done throughout the just completed 115 days, and so we are in a position to have our hearts revealed, to paraphrase Lk 2.35. We could say now that our pilgrimage from Ash Wednesday has come to a conclusion, a full third of the calendar year, no small bulk of time. Because both the Gospel for Ash Wednesday as well as the one for today deal with the revelation of human thoughts, they are similar and a fitting model, if you will, to apply to the other two-thirds of the calendar year.

As for the Gospel proper, note that words applicable to Mary's heart are mentioned: "and his mother kept all these things in her heart." This keeping is applicable not just for the period of 115 days but for attentiveness to scriptural readings in other liturgical cycles when "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature," words preceding those relative to Mary's heart.

13 June, Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 7.36-8.3) gives a moving account of the unknown woman who brought a jar of ointment to anoint Jesus' feet. The way she is described ("a woman of the city who was a sinner") has a way stigmatizing this person for having engaged in sexual misconduct. One gets the impression that she just about the worst type of human around though in actuality she must have paled in comparison to the sins committed by people...men...who could, perhaps literally, get away with murder. This tendency to ostracize the woman stands out all the more in the context at hand, the Pharisee's house.

"If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is." Words from Simon the Pharisee which demean Jesus. "This man" and "prophet" are the core of the insult which must have been directly not just to Jesus but those present at the meal. Jesus responds deftly with "Simon, I have something to tell you." Right away this puts Simon in his place...publically, not privately...even before Jesus begins his story about the creditor who forgave two debtors. "Now which of them (debtors) will love him more?" The verb is *agapao* from which is derive *agape*, the lesson Jesus wishes to impart. It occurs again in vs. 47, "for she loved much." Only towards the end of this incident do we have an account of other people present at the meal. Their role was not unlike a chorus which responded, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" No intimation is given as to these guests wanting to be forgiven of their sins, just their exclamation which mirrors Simon's

rather sarcastic remarks, “If this man were a prophet...” When the guests had been seated, the “woman of the city” must have been observing Jesus beforehand and followed him to Simon’s home. No indication is given as to how she got in, perhaps having sneaked in or just walked on through the door as an uninvited guest.

The retort Jesus presents to Simon has three parts in comparison with the woman: he gave no water for washing his feet, no kiss and no anointing of his head. It is interesting that chapter eight, which follows this incident, begins with “Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages preaching and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.” With him were “some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities,” and chances are that the recently forgiven woman at Simon’s house was among them. In fact, she may have been responsible for gathering them, having made a very different impression on them than the one showed by Simon the Pharisee. From then on we lose sight of this remarkable woman whose history after Jesus’ death and resurrection can only be surmised.

20 June, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today’s Gospel (Lk 9.18-24) comes on the heels of Corpus Christi two weeks ago, so we should keep in mind that passage of Jesus feeding the five thousand as a kind of after-glow. Following such a dramatic event we find Jesus “praying alone” which is contradicted, in a sense, by the “disciples (who were) with him.” Such a scene is not unlike that of the garden of Gethsemani when the disciples were nearby but Jesus was alone. Then again, being alone for ancients might have been different from our notions. Because societies were so corporate and privacy lacking, solitude had to be sought right in the midst of interaction with people.

Surely the disciples were both confused and filled with joy at having witnessed their master feed so many people, this on the heels of their triumphant return from their first ministry. If he could do this now, surely they could do the same later if not outdo him. With both events in mind, we should not be surprised at Jesus asking, “Who do the people say that I am?” Note “the people,” presumably referring to those whom he just fed. In a sense, this question was an easy one instead of the disciples being asked directly for their response. It was not unnatural when the five thousand were receiving their food in the wilderness to claim Jesus to be John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets who has risen. That is to say, the first two men (John having been beheaded recently) were associated with inhabiting the desert in which they received their mission. The third element is intriguing: no specific prophet is mentioned (the disciples hadn’t a clue), but one could imagine such a prophet whose name hasn’t been disclosed inhabiting the desert and feeding people. As for the question put to the disciples, Jesus doesn’t respond but now asks them directly. Only Peter’s response is recorded, “The Christ of God.” Again, Jesus gives no response to Peter. The only thing Jesus says is that he must suffer at the hands of the religious authorities and be raised on the third day. That leads into the statement about denial which follows.

To resolve the two questions Jesus puts to the disciples...his identity as perceived by the people and the disciples...he sets down the well-known condition for discipleship: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” This taking up of one’s cross was familiar to most Jews, crucifixion being a common form of punishment. It is not far-fetched to

imagine Jesus and his disciples having seen numerous criminals crucified as they made their way around, especially visits to Jerusalem. Actually here we have the first reference to this mode of death, so it must have been quite frightening to hear Jesus speak about it. The words “take up his cross” doesn’t apply strictly to crucifixion itself but the arduous process of getting there. One’s mind automatically goes to the Via Dolorosa, the path Jesus took to Mount Calvary. That painful journey was a one-time deal, if you will. Jesus says “daily” which, of course, means taking up one’s cross for the rest of one’s life. In sum, “take up his cross” is a way of saying that anyone who follows Jesus will be perceived as a criminal condemned to the worst form of death, a far cry from the disciples triumphant missionary trip just prior to the feeding of the five thousand.

27 June, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today’s Gospel (Lk 9.51-62) opens with the words which read literally, “When the days drew near for him to be received up,” *analepsis* being the noun for “received up.” Chances are that this term refers to his crucifixion, though it smacks of the ascension, which had occurred earlier in chapter nine. Jesus’ resolve for this *analepsis* comes across through the words “he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” *sterizo* is the verb meaning to establish firmly and is repeated in vs. 53. Jesus must have had an intimation for completion of his ministry which is conveyed by the simple yet mysterious words of “when the days drew near.” No one in his company is recorded as having this intimation. Surely Jesus had ascended to Jerusalem many times before, including the Passover celebration, but this is the first time he “sent messengers ahead of him to make ready for him.” The village to which the disciples went was Samaritan, hence the long, historic hostility there toward Jews. The disciples must not have been alone, for already people had started their trek to Jerusalem for Passover. It should be noted that there must have been quite a few people en route for this most important of celebrations. Thus in addition to the Samaritans hostility to the Jews, they may have wanted to protect their village from being overwhelmed by travelers and people wanting to take advantage of them. At the same time, Passover must have been an economic boon for these villages, even Samaritan ones.

En route to Jerusalem Jesus met three men desirous of following him. The essence of his words to each respectively were 1) “the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head,” 2) “Follow me...leave the dead to bury their own dead” and 3) “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” These men might even have been Samaritans. Anyway, clearly Jesus’ reception was well received and accompanied by a desire to be his disciple. Jesus rebuked each man in his turn which intimates the urgency of “him to be received up” or his *analepsis*. All three would-be disciples came up with legitimate reasons to hold off a bit to prepare themselves before following Jesus, each of which Jesus rejected sharply. Perhaps he had enough of being slighted by the Samaritans, took that as cue to *sterizo* his face to Jerusalem and to get on with the most important part of his mission.

Chapter ten begins with Jesus appointing “seventy others” to go to “where he was about to come.” That is to say, these seventy amplify those messengers “sent ahead of him” of vs. 52 and could fan out not just to Samaritan villages but to others en route to Jerusalem.

4 July, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 10.1-12, 17-20) follows on the heels of last Sunday when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." This is the second time Jesus sent messenger ahead of him, the first being in 9.52 where the number of messengers is not given. However, in the case at hand we have a definite number, seventy men, who went "two by two." That makes thirty-five groups and at least thirty-five potential places to visit, no small amount by any standards. Obviously these men knew the route to Jerusalem, for they entered "every town and place where he himself was about to come." The considerable increase in number of messengers seems to reflect that "setting of face" noted in the previous entry by the Greek verb *sterizo* (to establish firmly). The seventy must have seen this plainly etched in face of Jesus and reflected in his urgency to get underway with their mission. As for the choice of sending these men in pairs, it can be assumed that Jesus knew the seventy fairly well so as to make appropriate companions. After all, two is a small number when your intent is as bold as to approach a town, each man wondering whether it will accept them or more importantly, accept their message. After all, the choice of liking or disliking either man or both was quite immediate.

After having made this division, Jesus said to the seventy men or thirty-five pairs that the "harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." So instead of appealing directly for workers in the field, Jesus advises beseeching the lord of the harvest to send them. At first glance this may be difficult to accept, given the large harvest at hand. Then again, the lord in charge knew the situation better than the workers who were too close to the action. In beseeching the lord there exists the possibility that he may send just a few or maybe no workers at all. It was his judgment call as not so much as to the harvest being "plentiful" but whether or not it was of suitable quality. We could assume that hired hands lacked that expertise. On the other hand, it can be assumed they more knew of the nitty-gritty details of the actual harvest compared with their master. And so, it is not unusual for a conflict to arise.

As for the thirty-five pairs of proto-missionaries, Jesus bids them to travel lightly and not be afraid to accept hospitality from the people they encounter. As for their being rejected, Jesus assures them that "the kingdom of God has come near." Being near is not the same as being at hand; the thirty-five pairs of disciples might be taken as representative of this proximity, whereas Jesus...who has yet to make his appearance...is the kingdom of God present. As for Jesus going to Jerusalem, surely he must have had very many places to stop en route given the rather large number of missionary pairs (thirty-five). Still, there was a chance that some places may not have accepted these groups who, in turn, reported them to Jesus.

The words of rejection were harsh: "It shall be more tolerable on that day for Sodom than for that town." *Anektos* is the Greek for "tolerable," clear enough, which means the capacity to bear or endure something. Obviously the dreadful fate of Sodom (and Gomorrah) is well known among both Jews and Samaritans, part of the narrative with which they grew up. To compare those villages unreceptive of the missionary groups to the two Old Testament cities is not necessarily an exaggeration but reveals the immediacy of accepting Jesus' message. One cannot help but keep in mind Abraham bargaining with God in Gen 19.22-33. Abraham seems to have won out at ten just men yet did not take it lower. So we can assume that Sodom and Gomorrah had...most likely as a total between them both...less than ten righteous men. The judgement upon both cities was effected by the two angels (cf. Gen 19.1) who presumably were the same men who visited Abraham (cf.

18.2). However, the first encounter has three men whereas 19.1 has two angels.” In other words, somewhere between the dialogue with Abraham at Mamre and Abraham’s bargaining with God this change from three men to two angels occurred. Perhaps it was a result of Abraham whittling the number from fifty righteous men to ten that had something to do with it. The three men may have good a clue from Abraham and decided to assume the form of dreaded missionaries who brought damnation to Sodom and Gomorrah.

11 July, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today’s Gospel (Lk 10.25-37) has Jesus dealing with one of the most maligned type of characters found in all societies, ancient or modern, a lawyer. This fellow asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. “Inherit” is a word one would expect from a lawyer, expecting Jesus to come up with a legal response for something completely gratuitous. However, right away Jesus retorts by “How do you read?” The source of this reading is the Torah from which the lawyer quotes unhesitatingly, “You shall love the Lord your God...and your neighbor as yourself.” The word “read” is *anagignosko* which means more specifically reading in public as in the synagogue. So that means the verse at hand is not intended just for an individual but for those in the synagogue, the entire congregation. The lawyer responds well to the question and as he was trained to do, realizing that he was put on the spot unexpectedly. In fact, probably he didn’t even expect Jesus to know what an inheritance was. As the story Jesus is about to tell, the neighbor, traditionally taken as a fellow Jew, is expanded well beyond this relatively narrow understanding.

Right after this brief but pointed exchange the lawyer “wishes to justify himself” by asking Jesus “who is my neighbor?” He assumed that this neighbor would be a fellow Jew as just noted, one in the synagogue familiar with *anagignosko*, reading the Torah aloud. To that Jesus begins the parable of the man who fell in among robbers and who was rescued by a Samaritan. While most Jews despised Samaritans, chances are that lawyers did so even more, given the fact they there must have been extended litigious arguments and affairs between the two groups. As for the (Jewish) priest and Levite who saw the man beaten up by robbers, their unwillingness to help is amplified by the words “on the other side.” That is to say, they crossed the road to avoid the man, perhaps pretending he wasn’t there. One can’t help but recall the parable of Lazarus and the rich man where “a great chasm has been fixed in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able” (and visa versa, Lk 16.26). By contrast, we have the directness of the words applied to the Samaritan: “came to where he was” which suggest that he did not cross the road even when he could have. Unlike the brothers of Lazarus, the Samaritan could go to “warn them lest they also come into this place of torment.” The Samaritan “had compassion” or *splagchnizomai*, to be moved inwardly as by one’s bowels. Thus the compassion shown here is of the deepest kind, a full expression of *agape*, if you will. Surely this image must have struck the lawyer deeply because he was of the same caste as the priest and Levite who passed by the wounded man.

As for the Samaritan, he told the innkeeper to whom he entrusted the wounded man that he will repay him when he comes back. We have no record of what happened upon his return, of what happened to both later on. Perhaps the Samaritan himself fell in among robbers who got word of his compassion for a hated Jew. If so, hopefully the man he rescued repaid the favor. As for the two perhaps having met, that would be a friendship established between former enemies, a Jew and a

Samaritan. The story ends here for us to draw our own conclusions except for the telling words addressed to the lawyer, “Go and do likewise.” Nothing is said of the lawyer’s response. Surely he must have foreseen this.

18 July, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

“As they went on their way, he entered a village.” Such are the opening words for today’s relatively short Gospel (Lk 10.38-42) which follows on the heels of last week’s story about the man who fell in among the robbers and who was ministered to by a Samaritan while the priest and Levite passed by. It makes you wonder if Jesus and his disciples actually encountered someone like this poor unfortunate along the way. If they did—and chances are high, given the dangers of traveling at that time—the disciples may have used the incident to test Jesus. Surely they weren’t above being like that lawyer who asked about inheriting eternal life.

Martha received Jesus (unspecified village) while her sister, Mary, “sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.” That means that beside having shown Jesus hospitality, it wouldn’t be surprising that her home turned into a synagogue of sorts to which others came spontaneously to hear Jesus teach. The Greek verb for “sat” (at the Lord’s feet) is *parakathēzomai*, literally, to sit beside, *para* (beside) being prefaced to the verbal root. It’s a comforting scene indicative of Mary’s attention to Jesus’ *logos*, the word used here for “teaching.” The verb *parakathēzomai* is used in conjunction with the preposition *pros*, “at the Lord’s feet.” *Pros* suggests full presence or attention to a specific direction. That is, the *para* associated with *parakathēzomai* takes on a new meaning, if you will, with this *pros* as it relates to the *logos* of Jesus. It is a kind of sitting beside (*para*) with attention directed toward (*pros*) Jesus. As for the *logos* or teaching, it is not specified but may have been similar to the robber and Samaritan just recounted: not so much for Mary’s benefit but for the disciples, to re-enforce a central teaching of his *logos*.

While Jesus was continuing with his *logos*, Mary’s sister Martha blurted out a request for her to help out. She figured that asking Jesus directly would get her sister to come at once. Instead, Jesus catches Martha off guard by calling her “anxious and troubled” or *merimnao* and *thorubazo* (verbs). The first suggests paying undue attention to minutiae and getting bogged down by them. The second derives from *thorubeo*, to make a noise or uproar like a crowd, quite vivid indeed. So when Martha hears Jesus thus speaking (though Greek wasn’t used but the sentiment was certainly there), she must have been reduced to silence. In fact, we don’t hear from Martha, for the incident comes to a close without anything further being said.

What catches one’s attention, however, is Jesus saying to Martha...and this is what generations have pondered in one way or another... that “one thing is needful.” Again, we have reference to the Greek which *henos estin chreia*. The mystery and appeal to these words over the centuries is that Jesus does not spell it out. Apparently he doesn’t want to...either to Martha nor to Mary nor to his disciples. Leave it at that and figure it out by pondering the Gospel incident as a whole and see what you come up with. Anyway, *henos estin chreia* is sandwiched in between the story about the Samaritan showing mercy when a priest and Levite passed him by and the beginning of Chapter Eleven which begins with “He (Jesus) was praying in a certain place.” Apparently that struck the disciples so forcefully that they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

25 July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 11.1-13) begins with "he was praying in a certain place," a fact noted at the conclusion of last Sunday's entry. As to the location of this *topos*, no details are given. Since mention of this *topos* occurs right after the incident with Martha, we can assume that she was familiar with it. However, Martha may have decided to tag along out of curiosity to Jesus' response to her pre-occupation with serving him to see by example what exactly was that "one needful thing."

One of the disciples asks Jesus about prayer (*proseuchomai* often has to do with the offering of prayers along the lines of worship) had in mind the way John the Baptist had taught his disciples...*kathos* or as John taught." He and the other disciples must have been familiar with that way and assumed that Jesus would carry on along the same line. There are no records of this, however. Chances are it dealt with repentance in chapter three. Much of what John said pre-supposed being alone in the desert which, in turn, pre-supposed solitary prayer, which later became a model used by the desert fathers. Also implied was keen insight into the messianic passages of the Old Testament about preparing the way of the Lord. More than prayer must have been on the disciple's mind. He must have been concerned about how John comported himself for such a prolonged period in the desert with little or no apparent communication with the outside world.

Jesus gives no response as to how or what the Baptist taught regarding prayer, let alone his solitary lifestyle. Right away he launches into what now is known as the Our Father, the tone of which is quite different from John's approach and rightly so because John's mission had been fulfilled. Certainly it wasn't highly charged by comparison and even may have been disappointing to the expectant disciples listening to Jesus, waiting to see how closely he would fit in with John. Then again, Jesus did not live a prolonged solitary life as John had done. They were more familiar with him being pretty much out there in public most of the time. At the same time, this was for only approximately three years. The disciples may or may have not known how Jesus lived during the bulk of his life at Nazareth.

After having presented the elements of the Our Father, Jesus tells a story about a man who asks a friend for three loaves of bread. What makes this normal request different, even inopportune, is that it happens in the middle of the night. Actually the word *anaideia* is used with translates as impudence, shamelessness. Instead of rebuking the man for this effrontery, Jesus praises it: "Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you." In other words, prayer is transformed from the customary way of worship implied by *proseuchomai* to a boldness approaching recklessness and no concern for a man sleeping with his children.

Jesus concludes his response to the disciple who asked about prayer in the context of John the Baptist's way by calling him (though indirectly), "you who are evil." *Poneros* is the adjective here, more as good-for-nothing, toilsome or just a pain. If Martha had been present as noted above, she would have concurred with this assessment of *poneros* which must have come as a shock to the disciple and other with him. Chances are that Mary, did not accompany her sister Mary as she went to that "certain place." Mary had no need for this, having grasped the difference between the way John and Jesus taught about prayer. If the disciple had been attentive to the dialogue that went on

in the house of the two sisters, he would have not asked about how the way of prayer differed between John and Jesus. Should his curiosity remained perked, it would have been wiser to ask Mary to teach him how to pray.

1 August, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 12.13-21) opens with the words "one of the multitude." *Ochlos* is a revealing word if we are to take it in the context of the opening verse of this chapter: "so many thousands of the multitude." We have the distinct impression that throngs upon throngs are pressing in upon Jesus made all the more dramatic by their treading upon each other. *Katapateo* is the verb here which suggests walking upon...walking upon people, all in an attempt to reach Jesus. As for listening to him, one would have to be in fairly close range to hear a voice unsupported by mechanical or physical devices. Just prior to this Jesus said that the "Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." The person who spoke up seems to have been completely oblivious to this, requesting that Jesus ask his brother about dividing an inheritance. That in a sense is a *katapateo*, a treading upon the discourse Jesus is presenting. Rightly we see some frustration with Jesus, "Who made me a judge or arbiter over you?" Despite many attempts to raise the awareness of the audience he was addressing, frustration is inevitable, given the pre-occupations with many people, that Jesus gets into these less than desirable situations. Still, he uses these situations to teach of other things and so bring round his audience. In the case at hand, the interruption about speaking on the Spirit in terms of an inheritance leads to a parable.

This parable consists of a man wishing to pull down his older storage places and construct new ones to accommodate the abundant harvest. Nothing is wrong with this plan and is something Jesus probably would have approved. However, what's bad about the situation is the man taking satisfaction in his construction project intended for him alone. Now contrast that with Joseph in Egypt. At that time Joseph built extensive granaries throughout the land and stored enough grain for the coming seven year famine in order that the people may survive this grievous long-term affliction (cf. Gen 41.47-9). Chances are that some in the multitude grasped this association, the story of Israel in Egypt being very much a part of their tradition. As for the question posed by the man, that is, relative to inheritance, it may not have been terribly surprising. In a society where lineage is important for self-identity, most of Jesus' listeners must have been pre-occupied with inheritance in one way or another. So when this pre-occupation is put in terms of a selfish attitude represented by the man wanting to build barns, his comparison with the generous Joseph must have affected them deeply. Then again, Joseph was helping Egyptians, dreaded enemies and oppressors of Israel. In conclusion, Jesus deftly got off a rather mundane subject and turned it around to reveal a deeper truth about how to live.

"So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Such is the last verse of today's Gospel. Note the preposition *eis* (into) for "toward." That is to say, riches are "into God" or in the process of entering more his presence. Jesus seems to put no restrictions on this entry...*eis*...which can continue indefinitely. Focus upon this continual *eis* sets the stage for the next verse where Jesus tells not the crowd but his disciples not to be anxious about corporeal concerns.

8 August, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 12.32-48) starts out on a cheerful note with Jesus saying that his Father is pleased to give them the kingdom of heaven. It ends up quite otherwise. In the same breath he asks his "little (*mikros*) flock," a phrase of endearment, to relinquish all possessions for it. Though Jesus has spoken of this kingdom earlier, admittedly it was vague and ill-defined, always put in terms of renunciation. The disciples and other listeners had nothing to go on about this kingdom, really, except Jesus' word. Despite all this, there must have been something mysteriously appealing to what Jesus was trying to communicate, a fact which remains just as valid today. One attractive aspect to this kingdom is that a thief cannot approach (*eggizō*) it meaning that the thief recognizes the kingdom yet stays away. As far as purses getting old and moths eating away one's prized possessions, they pale in comparison to what a thief can do...even murder you.

After a few verses about the durability of this kingdom for which everything is to be relinquished, Jesus speaks about watchfulness, of having one's loins girded and lamps burning for the arrival of one's master. This suggests being outdoors in the cold of nighttime as opposed to the daylight hours. The master had been away at a marriage feast, so it was safe for the servants to assume that he would come home quite late, well after dark. This notion of a late arrival is backed up by mention of the second and third watch of night when the servants should be prepared to wait upon their master. Even though Jesus speaks of the necessity to be ready (*betoimos*) because the Son of man is coming at an unexpected hour, again we can assume his arrival will be at night, that is, if we follow this story closely. As for the words "unexpected hour," the Greek reads *ou dokeite* or "does not think or suppose," the time one does not reckon the master will arrive. And so this applies equally to neglect of watching during the daylight hours. Still, this emphasis on nighttime harkens back to the above-mentioned thief who dares not approach the kingdom of heaven even under the cover of night.

Peter asks Jesus whether this story of the late-arriving master (*kurios*) is intended "for us or for all," that is, for all other listeners. It's safe to assume that rarely or unless specifically stated that Jesus speaks with plenty of people milling around him and his disciples in mind as opposed to a neatly arranged audience. We get glimpses of this even today in Near Eastern societies where things are done more out in the open than Western ones. As to Peter's question, Jesus stresses the role of a steward (*oikonomos*) instead of master. The former literally means one who cares for the household which includes family members and slaves, not just the physical possessions. It is the *kurios* who appoints a person...and this could include a trusted slave...to such an important position, of giving food "at the proper time." The well-known Greek word *kairos* is this "proper time" which applies more to an occasion. As related to food, it can mean making sure enough of it is on hand for three meals a day, no small task for the family, slaves and hired hands. Once this is made clear, Jesus turns attention, rather, re-directs it to his earlier words about the servants being prepared to meet their master. Instead of returning late (at night) from a marriage feast, the temporal duration is more spread out: "and will come on a day when he does not expect and at an hour he does not know." That is, the master can come anytime, day or night as opposed to the more likelihood of the latter which was suggested above.

So despite the urgency of being watchful, Jesus speaks of two servants who don't live up to this standard: one who is negligent and harsh (he beats his fellows due to the master's delay, thinking he

can get away with it) and the other who did not know the master's will. The former will get a more severe beating and the latter, no so severe. Nevertheless, the treatment meted out is quite horrendous because the verb *dero* is used which fundamentally means to skin, flay...an intense form of whipping being involved. Perhaps the negligent servant might not survive; the same could apply to the other one depending upon his physical constitution. With this fearful image in mind Jesus brings to a close the absolute nature of having one's loins girded and lamps burning which opened the Gospel. This severity doesn't stop here but carries to vs. 49 when Jesus speaks of his coming to cast fire upon the earth and wishing it were kindled already. There doesn't seem to be a transition at all here, simply that Jesus continued along with his discourse which gets harsher as chapter twelve draws to a close.

15 August, Assumption

As noted in previous entries for today's feast, the Assumption is one of those days which lacks scriptural support and cannot be explained in a forthright manner. This doesn't detract from its value but adds to its sense of mystery. In short, the Assumption can be grasped best by a slow, meditative reading of scriptural passages relevant to Mary done in the spirit of *lectio divina*. In other words, we understand the Assumption through *lectio* only as it leads to a silencing of our mental faculties. From that silence springs the mystery of this feast day. Thus the Assumption is a challenge not so much to be understood but a mystery first into which we must be initiated (that's the original idea of *mysterium*) in order to contemplate it.

Today has two readings, one for the Vigil Mass and the other for the Day Mass, the former being considered here, Lk 11.27-8, which consists of just two sentences. The Gospel begins with "as he said this." This refers to Jesus having spoken of an unclean spirit which was cast out and returns with seven others making the person worse off than before. Presumably an unknown woman was present when Jesus was speaking about this and grasped what he meant. She couldn't help but utter the words of exclamation, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked!" Although she says this in a spontaneous outburst, there's a chance she could have known Jesus' mother, Mary...and Mary herself may have been right there. So instead of attributing words of praise to Jesus for what he had just said, the anonymous woman attributed it to Mary. Although Jesus seems to shift attention away from his mother, she would not have taken this as an offense but would have concurred fully. It would come as no surprise that Mary would have recalled the words of her cousin Elizabeth, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb" [Lk 1.42]. Although that took place in her youth when pregnant with Jesus, Elizabeth's words were sufficient to keep Mary happy, *makarios*, from that point on.

Blessed or *makarios* can translate as "happy." As for Jesus' response, such happiness applies to persons who first hear the word of God and then keep it. The latter verb is *phulasso*, to keep watch or guard as well as to cherish something. It evokes Psalm 119, the longest of them all, which centers around the divine Law or Torah. In it we find many references to keeping the Torah, so it is well worth reading that Psalm in light of today's Gospel.

As for the Gospel, without missing a beat, Jesus responds with his own form of blessedness: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" We can just imagine the joyous

expression on the faces of both Jesus and the woman during this short exchange made all the more meaningful by its brevity. It wouldn't be surprising that the exchange took place in an instant. While done in the context of a larger group of people, many whom could have heard them, changes are they hadn't a clue as to what it meant. So instead of continuing with the theme of *makarios*, Jesus (and let's say with the woman's consent) decide to change the subject.

Immediately after the wonderful exchange of *makarios* Jesus speaks of the sign of Jonah, of how it symbolizes the coming death and burial of the Son of man. He also speaks of the queen of the South who came to listen to King Solomon, perhaps having in mind the woman with whom he just spoke.

22 August, Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 13.22-30) has a certain urgency about it which is appropriate as we draw to the close of summer and prepare for autumn. We can take it as a distant signal or warning to prepare ourselves for the weeks just prior to Advent as well as the Advent season itself. Here as in many Gospel incidents an anonymous person poses a question pertaining to a life-or-death situation. There's something appealing and comforting to anonymity because it is all-inclusive and reminds us that we all are troubled by the same issues and have the same questions. Should we knew the person's name here, it wouldn't add any information to the issue at hand. As for the question, it runs: "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" To pose such a question implies some familiarity, even if it's dim, of what it means to be saved and the natural curiosity as to how many people will be saved. Even deeper is implied a universal alienation from God though here God isn't mentioned outrightly but certainly implied.

To this anonymous person with his universal question Jesus responds with a rather narrow answer. "Strive to enter by the narrow door." To someone uninitiated, his response is indicative that an indeterminate few persons will be saved, though Jesus refuses to elaborate. The verb for "strive" is *agonizomai* which can be taken as to contend for a prize. *Agonizomai* introduces an element of competition and excitement to the matter at hand, thereby elevating it to another plane instead of worrying who will win and who will lose. Jesus' words are not unlike asking his questioner to enter a race, enjoy running it along with other competitors and taking aim for the narrow door which is a kind of finishing line. The very act of *agonizomai* is the issue at hand, not entering the narrow door though both go hand-in-hand. Most people would be focused on getting through the door, not so much on the race itself. Jesus qualifies the participants in this unique type of contest when he says that many will seek to enter it and will be unable. This inability to enter isn't specified; however, the more you consider *agonizomai* as an invitation to participate in a race, the better is your discernment between those persons who are eager for it and those who are mildly curious. Until this invitation to compete is given, both groups lived together like wheat and tares growing in the same field, barely indistinguishable from each other.

Jesus moves the image from the implied one of a race with the verb *agonizomai* to a householder who closes his door upon those beseeching him. His words are telling: "I do not know where you come from." Continuing with the image of a race, that would be equivalent to a referee standing at the finishing line (i.e., the 'narrow door'). He sees the contestants way off at the starting line, their

initial dash and progress along the track until they reach the finishing line. If the referee says to a racer that he doesn't know him, this is equivalent to saying that he had entered the race illegitimately and has no right to participate in it, let alone be qualified to enter through the narrow door.

The image shifts further from the household to the dreadful fate of those he shut outside his house. Apparently such persons who ate and drank with him are cast into the darkness. Though this time of night isn't explicit, it is implied by the words "when once the household has risen up and shut the door." Within this house are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and prophets...those who had engaged in *agonizomai* and who had entered the narrow door. The narrowness of this entrance is contrasted with "men (who) will come from east and west and from north and south and sit at table in the kingdom of God." No specific number of such people are given; they could be in the millions or a handful. One fact is certain, however, that they will come from all four cardinal points of the earth. As for participating in this banquet, the verb *anaklino* is used for "sit at table," implying a reclining on a bench according to ancient Greek and Roman fashion.

Today's Gospel began with a pressing question by an anonymous questioner which led him and others to a place he had not anticipated. His question wasn't answered, of course, but brought to another level as to participating...reclining...at table in the kingdom of God. "Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." Such are the last words with the indeterminate "some." Actually the inadequacy of Jesus' response to a legitimate though rather limited question expands out to an invitation, not a threat, to undergo that *agonizomai* to the narrow door and see what happens next. From our vantage point, the door not only is narrow but closer, making the invitation all the more appealing.

29 August, Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 14.1,7-14) begins with the first verse of chapter fourteen and advances to several verses later, 7-14. It runs as follows: "One Sabbath when he went to dine at the house of a ruler who belonged to the Pharisees, they were watching him." The verb "watching" is revealing in the context of Sabbath, the day of rest. Though Jews were forbidden to perform unnecessary actions on that day, *paratereo* suggests intense activity but of a mental variety which genuine observers of the Sabbath would have frowned upon. It means an intense observation with one's attention focused narrowly upon something or someone. Everything else taken as distractions are brushed aside without effort, for they are perceived as incidentals which fail to detract from one's focus. The preposition *para* (beside) intensifies the verb *tereo*, a kind of watching on all sides for the slightest deviation. Surely Jesus must have picked this up with all eyes upon him. It would not be surprising to find that Jesus pitied this mis-directed attention which should be attentive to observing the Sabbath day. After all, *tereo* is the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew verb *shamar* used in keeping both the Sabbath and the Torah.

Being the subject of such close scrutiny on this the weekly holy day of rest gave occasion for Jesus to offer a parable about vying for the best place at a banquet. "He marked how they chose the places of honor." The verb here is *epecho*, literally as to hold upon and refers to directing one's attention to something or someone, not unlike fastening upon it permanently. *Epecho* reveals the quickness of his mind to pick up and utilize a potentially harmful situation and turn it to his

advantage. Compare Jesus' *epecho* with the people around him who were *paratereo*. Both verbs are similar yet different: in the case at hand, the former pertains to the aiming of one's attention whereas the latter, though it involves this mental state, implies being attentive with a view towards something that might go wrong. If this is so, then indeed things will go wrong. Thus the situation in the house of one of the Pharisees is a duel between two types of attentiveness. That can be applied to the parable Jesus is presenting where at a marriage feast where a guest may have to relinquish his place to a more important person. So we could say that by favoring the "lowest place" as soon as you enter the house is a way of directing the previously misdirected *paratereo* to one sensitive to the situation at hand. The preposition *eis* (into) used with the "lowest place" suggests going into that last place and staying there. Even if one isn't invited to "go up higher," that is fine because you as guest are indifferent as to where you may be seated. The word *prosanabaino* consists of two prepositions prefaced to verb *baino*, to go. It means a going to or toward (*pros*) coupled with *ana*, up to and upon. The image thus presented is that the guest will go up to the host who is inviting him.

When Jesus finishes speaking this parable he addresses the Pharisee who had invited him. By now this man must be confused thoroughly because he doesn't know where to seat Jesus. He saves him from embarrassment (and that *paratereo* which must be going on among his fellows) by asking him to invite those who can't repay him for having been invited. This will make the Pharisee "blessed" or *makarios* (it also means 'happy') or happy at being relieved from engaging in *paratereo* as well as being the object of *paratereo*. The Pharisee may not grasp fully what is transpiring should he take up Jesus' offer—and perhaps he did later on—but is assured of "being repaid at the resurrection of the just." As for introducing the resurrection of the just here, it can apply to a rising...a rising which will occur only if one prefers that lowly place at the marriage feast which, in turn, opens up the possibility of being invited to "go up higher." Still, that implies a gamble as well as a challenge. There's a possibility the host may not invite one to that higher place. This falls in line with many of parables and sayings of Jesus which leave the situation unresolved yet with the possibility that one may work it out for oneself positively. Nothing clear-cut is offered which makes the words of Jesus all the more intriguing and worth pondering.

5 September, Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Great multitudes accompanied him." Such are the opening words of today's Gospel (Lk 14.25-33). *Ochlos* is the singular for "multitude" which implies a moving swarm of people, undisciplined and lacking direction as to where they are going. There comes to mind the potential for a leader to stir up these people in rebellion against some injustice or a desire for political revenge. However, we can envision Jesus in a very different way at the head of this *ochlos* along with his disciples who assist him in holding the crowd in check. This picture of a swarm makes Jesus' words all the more dramatic, "And he turned and said to them." That is, he turned around and looked at the vast swarm behind him. Their clamor must have been in his ears for some time, so it was time to address them. He may have been perturbed at some who chanted politically charged words, something the Jewish elders would use against him later on, not just here but in many other instances. Since so many were following, Jesus could not help but come up with an image that certainly would whittle down the crowd in dramatic fashion.

When addressing such a large audience, the people had to draw close to hear Jesus who must have spoken at the top of his voice in order to be heard. Some of his disciples and other followers may have relayed his message to those not able to be within hearing range. Jesus uses the strong word *miseo* (to hate) with respect to one's closest relatives, even one's own life. This hatred is not misdirected but used in reference to becoming a disciple of Jesus. Surely the twelve with him were pondering these words and must have had their hidden doubts. Though not recorded, their hesitation became evident in how they behaved at the time of Christ's passion and death. And so they became just as unruly and confused as the *ochlos*. As for the *ochlos* in today's Gospel, we don't know how they received Jesus' words but can surmise their response.

Jesus seems to have modified his strong words about following him by offering two examples of prudence: taking into account the building of a tower and negotiating with an enemy stronger than oneself. If a person doesn't exercise this prudence or translates it into whether or not he or she has the strength to hate one's closest relatives, then following Jesus isn't an option. As to most of the *ochlos* who heard all this we can assume most turned away and rightly so. However, we can credit the *ochlos* as having taken to heart the two examples Jesus had offered. The Gospel gives no clue as to their reaction but leaves us to ponder what might have happened as well as how the disciples must have felt being put on the spot, albeit indirectly. Having finished his words, Jesus turns again, not toward the people but toward his destination which is not given, perhaps Jerusalem.

12 September, Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today we have two Gospels, the longer or shorter version, the latter (Lk 15.1-10) being considered here.

Last week Jesus was at the head of an *ochlos* or crowd which he attempted to whittle down by using strong language, that is, about hating one's closest relatives. We don't know how the situation turned out but can surmise most had left; indeed, some of his closer disciples must have had their doubts. Today's Gospel begins with "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him." Surely we have here an undesirable group which may have been part of the *ochlos* just noted. They may not have been repulsed by the harshness of Jesus' words but hung around because they knew they were down and out and had nothing else to lose. Note the verb *eggizō* (drawing near) which is the exact opposite of what most the *ochlos* must have done when they drifted away, although that is not explicit but implied. While presumably the *ochlos* was dwindling and the tax collectors and sinners were increasing, we have another group, the Pharisees and scribes, a complicated mix. Without a doubt, they saw the immensity of the *ochlos* like an army on the move and wanted to see if it developed into a political threat, for example, to take over Jerusalem. However, their fears were allayed when the crowd began to dissipate. They must have felt additional disgust when in place of those rabble-rousers the other undesirables took their place. The Pharisees and scribes exclaimed not so much with wonder but with disgust...and who can't blame them..."This man receives sinners and eats with them." First comes the receiving (*prosdechomai*) or welcoming this with hospitality and then eating with (*sunesthio*) them.

Let's say that Jesus had received the sinners and was reclining at meal with them. Close by were the Pharisees and scribes (i.e., standing) whom Jesus addressed from the middle of the meal. The

sinners must have felt embarrassed with so many notables crowding around the banquet hall, intimidating them just as much as their host, yet felt that any words from Jesus would calm the situation just as he had done with the *ochlos* in last Sunday's Gospel.

Now Jesus has set the stage for a parable concerning ninety-nine lost sheep which the shepherd leaves to search out one lost sheep. Not only does the shepherd leave the ninety-nine, he does so in the wilderness (*eremos*), a place devoid of vegetation and full of wild beasts. The shepherd must have felt they would be safe: perhaps the *eremos* was too remote even for beasts of prey. Also the sheep may have been left there a brief period of time. Regardless, the shepherd returns with the stray sheep on his shoulders: "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." Words not unlike the father of the prodigal son to the so-called good son, "It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive" [vs. 32].

As for those who "need no repentance," they are not unlike the son who never disobeyed his father as well as the guests invited to celebrate the return of the prodigal son. Jesus calls these ninety-nine persons "righteous" (*dikaiois*) who are not unlike the Pharisees and scribes present among the invited sinners and tax collectors. There could have been a danger lurking among these invited guests to take delight at how Jesus handled his opponents with such deftness. Though unrecorded, we can surmise Jesus turning to them saying that they are in danger of losing their initial sense of having transgressed God and man and should keep it ever before their minds. As for the Pharisees and scribes, presumably they remained in the banquet hall to hear the next two parables which run through to the end of Chapter Fifteen. We don't hear their response, but chances are their tendency to murmur (which characterized them, vs. 2) resumed as soon as they stepped outside.

19 September, Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 16.1-13) is about the dishonest steward who was "wasting his (master's) goods." The verb here is quite vivid, *diaskorpizo*, which translates as to scatter through, as if this man were throwing his master's possessions to the four winds. No details as to this squandering is given which reached the master through reports ("What is this that I hear about you?"). Surprisingly, the steward was not punished as is the case in other parables but let off lightly with a dismissal from office. It turns out, however, that there was some interval between the master's dismissal and the steward's actual departure, for quickly he makes a move to save his position. As for the nature of his office, the term is *oikonomos* which literally means house-law (or custom), *oikos-nomos*, one in charge of dispensing and administering a large household. In an attempt to retain his position...for a steward was an important administrator and could have been a slave as well...he decides to relieve people under him of their obligations, a shrewd, calculating move which must have gotten the attention of the master. Such things were hard to conceal within a close-knit society, so almost immediately this move on the steward's part was broadcast throughout the household and beyond. Surely debtors to the master must have come from far and wide to take advantage of what was going on.

"The master commended the dishonest steward." Why not? It saved him the bother of dealing with these servants. The verb here is *epaineo*, literally to commend upon (*epi* being prefaced to the verbal root) and thus suggests that the master approved fully what the dishonest steward had done. Chances are this astute move to curry favor with his underlings reflected the equally astute way the

master comported himself both at home and in business dealings. More specifically, the master praised his steward for his shrewdness or *phronimos*, actually an adverb meaning “wisely” but in a worldly sort of way. At this point Jesus compares this wily fellow with “the sons of light,” that is, making him by way of implication a son of darkness. The sons of light lack the ability to behave *phronimos* and never could have accomplished what the steward had done, that is, writing off debts owed. Not that the sons of light would retain these debts but simply had no interest in collecting them. Thus it would not be far off the mark to call them irresponsible as far as human standards go.

Jesus concludes this parable with a curious exhortation: “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal habitations.” The adjective *adikos* is used here which is equivalent to the noun *adikia* as applied to the unjust steward (that noun is rendered better as ‘steward of unrighteousness’). Jesus focuses upon those servants under this fellow, not the steward himself. By so currying favor the steward relieves the underlings from their burdens, thinking that he is the one getting the better half of the deal. Actually it’s the master who is making out best of all as he watches all this transpire. Who knows...perhaps even secretly he encouraged his workers to curry favor with the steward and thus be relieved of their burdens. While the master may have lost considerable income, at least he had these people firmly in tow and thus obligated to him in the future. As for the “steward of unrighteousness,” we don’t know if he retained his job despite having been praised by his master.

Note, however, that Jesus says that the “unrighteous mammon” will fail. When this happens, they or the servants indebted to their steward and thus to their master will be received into the eternal habitations. “They” is indefinite and not specified which could apply to other stewards of the master’s large household. Instead of being relieved of measures of oil and wheat, the servants will enter these dwellings which are eternal. The word for “habitations” is *skene*, literally a tent as opposed to an established dwelling (*oikos*). That means the servants will reside in temporary places which ironically turn out to be eternal compared with the *oikonomos* or man in charge of his master’s *oikos*.

26 September, Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

This Gospel (Lk 16.19-31) concerns the parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus which is addressed within the context of the Pharisees, vs. 14 (‘who were lovers of money’). With this in mind, the parable is all the more striking.

As for the rich man (*plousios*), he “feasted sumptuously every day,” the adverb being *lampros* or literally, in a bright or very manifest fashion. The idea is that his feasting was ostentatious and everyone was aware of his excess which is how he wanted it. This public show makes sense in the next verse where the poor man (*ptochos*) Lazarus is “at his gate” or right there where everyone could watch the wealthy man feast away behind closed gates. The reason for such ostentation was to cower into submission people like Lazarus, all the while enjoying himself. In addition, there must have been guards at the gate to make the scene all the more intimidating. Meanwhile, Lazarus “desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table” while dogs were there licking his sores. That means Lazarus had a full view of the lavish meal intended to impress and cower. The food

which fell was not due to the sloppiness of the rich man and his guests but a deliberate gesture to intimidate people like Lazarus.

The parable moves quickly on with the death of Lazarus carried off by angels to the bosom of Abraham, a way of saying that Lazarus went right to the source of the father of all Israel. Note that the preposition *eis* (into) is used, “into the bosom of Abraham,” a kind of nesting where he would be cherished and nourished for all eternity. Even though Lazarus was a beggar, his miserable condition necessarily didn’t make him a candidate for holiness, but that’s beside the point, to contrast his position with the rich man about to be described in some detail.

After death the rich man found himself in Hades and “in torment,” *basanos* also meaning torture or inquiry by torture which later is described as “in this flame” (vs. 24), *phlox* suggesting an intense flash of fire. This man saw “Abraham far off” with Lazarus there in his bosom much as a child resting on its mother’s breast. He doesn’t address Lazarus but Abraham, the former never uttering a word throughout the entire parable. His voice must have been quite loud to cut across the distance (“far off”) and reach out from the flash of that *phlox* in which he was situated. Even in this situation horrible beyond imagination Abraham addresses the rich man as “son” which connotes some sympathy at having to watch him without being unable to relieve his torment. Lazarus isn’t presented as watching the rich man; Abraham wanted to protect him from this, pushing him deep into his bosom beyond the sight. Even though the parable takes place in Hades, we have the rich man on one side and Abraham (with Lazarus) on the other which must have been worse than the *phlox*, bad as that was. In other words, the rich man was forced to view Lazarus much as Lazarus watched the rich man at his gate. Instead of dogs licking his sores, the *phlox* is consuming the rich man without destroying him. And if the scraps of food which fell from the rich man’s table is thrown it, we can imagine the far greater riches that must have fallen from Abraham’s bosom and how they tormented the rich man.

The rich man saw Abraham “far off,” a fact spelled out further by the “great chasm” (*chasma*) of vs. 26. A chasm doesn’t have to be “great” in terms of width; chances are here such was not the case, that “far off” can be understood in terms of the chasm’s depth which represents the profound difference between the two men and their condition. The chasm serves to separate the rich man in Hades and the bosom of Abraham, two opposite realities yet in full sight of each other. With this depth in mind (as opposed to width), the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers as a warning. If Lazarus took up the offer, he’d end up in front of their gates just like in front of the rich man’s home. This really symbolizes the depth of that chasm. It’s spelled out further when Abraham refers to Moses and the prophets whose writings wouldn’t convince people like the rich man and his five brothers. Thus both those writings, the Torah and Lazarus if he had risen from the death, a type of Jesus, would have no effect at all.

In conclusion, mention of Moses (traditionally the author of the Pentateuch) and the prophets can be taken as a failure to read them in the spirit of *lectio divina*. If that approach were taken as opposed to using the writings to squeeze out all sorts of laws and regulations, chances are less people like the rich man would end up in Hades.

3 October, Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

When we come to October, there's a sense that we have moved definitively into a new season compared with September whose occasional warm days remind of us of summer just a month ago. Liturgically speaking, that means we have a greater awareness of having covered a considerable amount of territory, that territory when Ordinary Season had begun after Pentecost back in the spring. This consists not so much as movement in space but movement in time...not linear time but circular...with the end being renewal, not just a beginning exactly the same as the one before it and so forth. And spring itself seems so distant compared with the waning of the calendar year we're starting to become aware of more. So it seems when we're in a given season we're aware of the one just behind us and the one ahead. That's a quite a change here in New England.

At this juncture we're quite a way through Ordinary Time which is the largest segment of liturgical cycle, and we have a growing sense that it's getting old and in need of renewal (and that renewal is Advent). Awareness of this is subtle but not so much when a change of seasons comes around. All in all, attunement to the ebb and flow of various liturgical times and feasts within a given year is a sign that we are alive and even better, alive with the larger reality of the Church.

Today's Gospel (Lk 17.5-10) begins with a simple cry from the heart, the heart of Jesus' disciples: "Increase our faith!" The verb is *prostithemi* (to add to) with the preposition *pros* prefaced to the root *tithemi* thereby signifying a direction-toward which. Implied is that the disciples had faith already...this they knew...yet perceived some kind of lack. As for the type of faith involved, nothing is said explicitly, most likely faith in Jesus himself and his mission. What prompted them to exclaim these words were the words of Jesus about the danger of causing "little ones" to sin, this right after the parable (of last Sunday) which dealt with the rich man and Lazarus. Therefore it isn't at all surprising for the disciples to speak as such.

Without launching into a discourse about faith, Jesus compares it to the smallness of a mustard seed. As is the case elsewhere, he doesn't develop the comparison between faith and this type of seed. Rather Jesus says that such a seed would say to a mulberry tree, "Be rooted up and be planted in the sea." That is to say, a small seed, one which hasn't even begun to sprout, has the audacity to take on a mulberry tree. That type of tree isn't especially high but is known for rapid growth. Thus the comparison Jesus sets up is between something very small and big, that the former has the capacity to take over the latter despite the huge difference between them. Not only is the mustard seed tiny, it has the capacity to order the fast-growing mulberry tree to be planted in the sea. While listeners to this parable may praise the mustard seed and recall Jesus' other references to it, the real glory goes to the mulberry tree. After all, it obeyed its tiny cousin by uprooting itself and walking over to the ocean in which it set its roots. This change of environment from one friendly to one hostile is the real lesson.

10 October, Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

On the surface, today's Gospel (Lk 17.11-19) has a "typical" air about it, just right for Ordinary Time, insofar as it is one of many recorded healings. Then again, there's nothing typical about what Jesus had done, especially since a fairly large number of people are involved, ten lepers. It should be noted that this excerpt follows upon the heels of last Sunday's Gospel when the Apostles bade Jesus

to increase their faith. Chances are the lepers got wind of this and decided to see for themselves...not just an increase of faith but a cure of a most deadly disease.

“On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.” Such is the opening verse which takes place on a border between two distinct areas: Samaria, which was hostile to the Jews and the source of one of Jesus’ greatest parables (the Good Samaritan) and Galilee, the native land of Jesus and the place where he had chosen his first disciples. The words *dia mesou* are for “between” which read literally “through the middle.” That suggests that Jesus was passing “through the middle” of these two very different territories, being fully present to each. Furthermore, this *dia mesou* occurred while Jesus was en route to Jerusalem for the Passover...not just the Jewish Passover but the new Passover he was going to inaugurate. The preposition *eis* (into) is used with respect to Jerusalem, i.e., “into Jerusalem”...into that city “through the middle” of Samaria and Galilee. Taking this approach, one gets the impression Jesus was walking on something akin to a knife edge, carefully balancing himself not to fall to either side but to keep focused upon going “into Jerusalem.”

“And as he entered a village:” the same preposition *eis* is used here, “into a village,” which is intensified by the verb *eiserchomai* where *eis* is used as a prefix for the verb “to enter.” We don’t know on which side of the *dia mesou* is this village located. Perhaps it was unique among villages in that it was right smack *dia mesou*, on that knife edge, neither Samaritan nor Galilean. Let’s say it was one or the other before Jesus arrived. However, once he entered (the ‘double’ *eis* of the free-standing preposition and the one prefaced to the verb), the village inhabitants willingly accommodated themselves to Jesus. That would make it very easy for the ten lepers to approach him. However, these lepers “stood at a distance” which means they could be either on the Samaritan side or the Galilean one. Jesus didn’t bid them to come closer; not only was he sensitive to how people felt about such unclean castaways but just as important, not to take sides...Samaria nor Galilee.

After healing the ten lepers from a distance, Jesus tells them to “show themselves to the priests.” That would give proof of their healing as well signal an official reinstatement within the communities from which they had been banished. Since the priests were in Jerusalem, we can assume the lepers followed that knife edge road *dia mesou*...right down the middle...until they came to Jerusalem.

This incident says that one of the ten lepers, a Samaritan, returned to Jesus “giving him thanks.” Jesus expresses some disappointment at not having been thanked by all ten lepers by asking “where are the nine?” Presumably they stayed in Jerusalem for the Passover, loudly proclaiming their healing. This makes one wonder how they responded and if they were present when Jesus did reach the city. Did they take up palm branches and shout out Hosanna? Were they around when Jesus was publically condemned to death and crucified? Did they sympathize with him or even join in his condemnation? Finally, they heard about Jesus’ resurrection and what followed...were they a part of that larger group or just forgot the whole thing?

As for the one leper who was a Samaritan, he turned out to be the one truly healed because he returned to thank Jesus. That’s why Jesus concludes with “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

17 October, Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The parable in today's Gospel (Lk 18.1-8) is preceded by Jesus' words to his disciples (who were last referred to in 17.22) "that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." Between that mention and the parable at hand there intervenes the parable about the coming of the Son of man in the context of Noah and the flood. It is only after that digression that Jesus bids the disciples first to pray followed by not to lose heart. The verb for "pray" is the common New Testament, *proseuchomai*, where the preposition *pros* is prefaced to *euchomai* which implies the making of a vow. *Pros* as in the direction toward-which intimates a specific direction to the type of prayer Jesus wishes for his disciples. "Loose heart" is *egkakeo* which also translates as to grow weary; from this verbal root is derived the adjective *kakos*, evil, so we could say that Jesus does not wish the disciples to fall into evil, let alone give way to its influence.

It's good that Jesus spoke thus before telling the parable at hand, for to his listeners it seemed to come out of the clear blue and not something you'd expect from a teacher of some repute. It's about a judge "who neither feared God nor regarded man." That description seems to counter Jesus' exhortation to pray and not loose heart, for anyone would lose heart at the introduction of this undesirable character. *Entrepo* is the verb for "to regard" which literally means to turn in, *en* being prefaced to the verbal root. So in a sense this judge was single-minded which put him in a peculiar situation. The widow who badgered him realized this and saw in him an opportunity to obtain her request despite other people counseling her to stay away. "Vindicate me against my adversary." No polite introduction as would be expected, just a forthright request. *Ekdikeo* means to exact vengeance for a crime and *antidikos*, the opponent; both have the same root which applies to justice. Jesus doesn't mention the issue here, just the widow's boldness of speech.

"For a while he refused" which literally reads "He did not come upon time (*chronos*)." Almost immediately the judge reflects upon his lack of respect for God and man which has a certain admirable quality by reason of his honesty. However, he speaks about this lack of respect to himself only, not out loud, for that would be too embarrassing. The judge doesn't have a change of heart...for that would detract from the parable...but wishes to get rid of the widow. First he acknowledges the woman's persistence with the words "she will wear me out" or *parecho* (literally, to hold beside, to produce as one's own) used with the noun *kepos* (a striking). In other words, the widow will go right up to me and hit me as indicated by the verb *hupopiazō* ("She will wear me out by her continual coming"). *Hupopiazō* literally means to strike one under the eye, to give a black eye. All in all, the judge knew of this woman's feisty reputation and wanted to be rid of her as quickly as possible.

And so Jesus says "Hear what the unrighteous judge says." The judge utters less than flattering words for someone in his position which is in line with his reputation for being corrupt as well known. Is that the kind of prayer and not losing of heart Jesus wishes? While admiration certainly goes to the persistent and courageous widow, we're encouraged to pay attention not to her but the judge. The underlying notion seems to be of getting the matter at hand over with to proceed with something else, ones which is more important. And that matter is the coming of the Son of man with which Jesus concludes the parable. He leaves reception of this Son of man open-ended with

the words, “will he find faith on earth?” The response from the corrupt judge, as well as the widow, is not given, but their respective attitudes have a lot to bear upon how each will respond.

24 October, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today’s Gospel (Lk 18.9-14) comes upon the heels of last week’s parable about the unjust judge and his reluctant hearing of a feisty widow. It seems that Jesus likes using rather unsavory characters to talk about prayer, the two at hand being a Pharisee and tax collector, each despicable in his own right. So instead of mollifying his listeners with a conventional story, Jesus continues to upset them but only with the intent to make them think deeply.

Both the Pharisee and tax collector “went up into the temple to pray,” the verb *anabaino* suggesting a going up in the broader context of a pilgrimage, for example, to the temple at Passover or another major feast. The former character was more feared because he was an archetype of religiosity often depicted as lacking true religious understanding and the latter, an agent of the hated Romans who occupied Israel. And so these two men set out, each from their respective homes, to make the ascent to Jerusalem. Part and parcel of their pilgrimage were the Psalms of Ascent (Pss 120-134), short but to the point so as not to tire those reciting...singing...them while making the upward trek. Rightly is this parable seen as the two men within the temple, the Pharisee boasting of his generosity and the tax collector humbling himself. However, each man must have had the same basic attitude beforehand which was manifest during their ascent to Jerusalem. We can assume that the Pharisee had an extensive retinue and even brought along his own herd of animals for sacrifice within the temple, an impressive sight. The tax collector traveled pretty much incognito, perhaps at night, so he wouldn’t be recognized and therefore reviled. Alone and unaided, he faced the threat of death.

“I tell you, this man (tax collector) went down to his house justified rather than the other (Pharisee).” Note the important words “went down” which happens, obviously, after both had ascended to Jerusalem. As for the return of the each man, we have no details as to what happened to them yet Jesus wishes our attention to be drawn there. Given how Pharisees are depicted in the Gospels, chances are the one at hand returned home the same way as he had ascended, fully justified in his own eyes. As for the tax collector, his acknowledgment of being a sinner allowed him to return home safely and in full view of people who must have been struck by his changed demeanor. It can be assumed that he did not remain a tax collector but abandoned that job hateful in the sight of his fellow Jews. Such was Jesus’ observation of the two whom he must have encountered during one of his own ascents to Jerusalem as well as his return home. Jesus knew that one of these ascents would be his last, a fact that enhanced his awareness of how his fellow pilgrims comported themselves.

Did the Pharisee and tax collector ever meet later in life? If they did, the former who condoned Jesus’ condemnation to death would have remembered the latter’s repentant demeanor within the temple. Every time their paths crossed, even momentarily, the Pharisee was angered so much that he sought to kill the tax collector just as much as he did when condemning Jesus.

31 October, Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

“He entered Jericho and was passing through.” Such is the first verse of today’s Gospel (Lk 19.1-10) which has Jesus first entering Jericho and then leaving it. Apparently Jesus has no intention of stopping at this city well below sea level and close to what is now known as the Dead Sea. This introductory verse is significant in that it presents Jesus passing through a town on an important trade route and at the very bottom as well as the start of his ascent to Jerusalem (cf. vs. 11, ‘he was near to Jerusalem’). As the Gospel recounts later, this was his last trip to the holy city, so it had special significance as he made his way for the Passover and thus his death. No small wonder that Jesus did not wish to stop at Jericho but move on as quickly as possible to consummate his mission.

In last Sunday’s Gospel the Pharisee and tax collector were in the temple. After their respective prayers were said, each left with the latter having “went down to his house justified” (18.14). Nothing is said about the Pharisee, leaving his fate up to our imagination. Let’s say that Jesus met the tax collector as he made his way up to Jerusalem though in the earlier passage no specific time as Passover is given. Perhaps both the tax collector lived in Jericho or not far from it and returned to the holy city in order to celebrate the feast. Then again, the tax collector could have been Zacchaeus, for that was his profession...not only that but the chief one. “He was small of stature,” *belikia* being the noun here which alternately means the span of life and age, especially the prime of life. Due to this *belikia*—and let’s say his smallness of height plus implying Zacchaeus knew full well his span of life was short—he ran ahead of the crowd. That is to say, he ran ahead of the crowd which got wind of Jesus’ approach to their city. They wanted to see him passing through, urging him to stay but knew ahead of time that Jesus and his band of disciples had their minds set on going directly to Jerusalem. This knowledge is quite possible, given the close-knit society of the time where word quickly got out as to everyone’s plans; Jesus, being well known, thus was unable to hide his intent.

Zacchaeus climbed up into a sycamore tree “for he was to pass that way.” In other words, this tree was located either within Jericho or just outside the well-traveled road used by pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem. Chances are that Zacchaeus wasn’t alone in the sycamore tree which could have accommodated quite a few spectators. However, Zacchaeus stood out by reason of his stature, a small man on a large branch overhanging the road. “Make haste and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” The verb for “to stay” is *meno* which suggests remaining. That could be for the night or for a meal, but probably the latter since Jesus wanted to move on and perhaps camp out on the road closer to his final destination. It keeps in line with vs. 1, “and was passing through.” So of all the people of Jericho pressing in, Jesus chose this chief tax collector, one of the most despicable inhabitants of the city. Keeping in mind the parable of last Sunday, Jesus wanted to get first-hand word of Zacchaeus’ experience of repentance in the temple. Given Jesus’ proclivity for searching out lost souls, he was especially interested in the Pharisee, whether that man had a similar conversion or not. Because apparently this wasn’t the case, the suspicion Jesus had about the religious establishment in Jerusalem was confirmed, that it was determined to kill him.

After Zacchaeus joyfully told Jesus about how he restored what he had taken from the poor...and that implies unfair taxes, given his profession...we can assume that he accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem. En route both sang the Psalms of Ascent also noted in last week’s Gospel, and that Zacchaeus formed part of the Palm Sunday procession into Jerusalem. Chances are that he became associated with the disciples of Jesus after his death and resurrection, eventually returning home to

Jericho.

1 November All Saints

Today's Gospel (Mt 5.1-12) appropriately contains the essence of holiness expressed by the Beatitudes. While each is different, they work together as a harmony. For example, a person may be inclined to one beatitude over the others but over time, will acquire the characteristics of these other beatitudes. They come at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, that is, shortly after he had been baptized by John and having chosen his first disciples. And so the beatitudes are both an introduction to what will follow as well as a summary of what had gone before.

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying." Such are the opening words of the Gospel. These crowds are the result of Jesus having gone "about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues...and healing every disease" [4.23]. In other words, Jesus was renowned early on as to his teaching and healing abilities, so having crowds this early in his ministry is a sign of his popularity. As of yet Jesus hadn't wearied of so many following him; it was something new for him, so might as well make the most of the situation. Thus Jesus ascended a mountain to make himself more visible to the people.

"And he opened his mouth and taught them." This opening of Jesus' mouth can be taken as a way of catching the attention of one's listeners, a brief moment in time indicative more of the presence of the speaker than his words. Immediately afterwards comes the teaching, i.e., "he taught them" where no distinction seems to be made between the crowd and the disciples. So right away an order is established which will be followed throughout much of Jesus' career. At this early stage there seems to be no distinction between the ability of both crowds and disciples; the disciples haven't yet been winnowed out sufficiently, if you will, from the larger audience. By having them sit in front of him and being the first to receive the opening of his mouth, Jesus imparts to his twelve the essence of his teaching through the beatitudes. So instead of separating them from the crowd or those for whom Jesus actually came, he unites both but in an order that makes no distinction of favor but created in order to reach as many people as possible.

As for the beatitudes, while they have a special place in Jesus' teaching, by no means are they isolated from other things he has said. For example, this teaching which took place on a mountain with the disciples in front and the crowd behind continues uninterrupted through 7.28 at which point the "crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority." And to think all that Jesus uttered from 5.3 through 7.28 began with that ever so instantaneous "and he opened his mouth."

7 November, Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 20.27-38) is an example of a faulty argument on the part of the Jewish authorities of the day centered around a question designed to trip up Jesus. That is to say, some Sadducees are tagging along or behind Jesus and pose him a question about the resurrection...and if it is true, which resurrected person will be married to whom. The Sadducees are applying one category (marriage) to another (resurrection) as though both belonged to the same level; they are attempting to have both see eye-to-eye, an impossible endeavor. To complicate the matter further, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection, so they were on the hunt for anyone who may be

teaching contrary to their position. Thus they were itching to challenge Jesus. Perhaps the Sadducees got wind of how he refuted others from the religious establishment and wanted to try him from their way of thinking, that at last they might get him on this point. As for the resurrection, the one of Jesus himself wasn't far in the future, though he had to attain it through suffering and dying at the hands of religious authorities not unlike the Sadducees. This proximity to his resurrection thus makes Jesus all the more worthy listening to when he describes in some detail what that state is like.

Instead of answering the Sadducees directly, something they would like him to do in order to trick him up, Jesus moves the discourse from a confusion of categories, if you will. This confusion is a mistaken alignment of "eyes," if you will, where the eye of one point of view does not coincide with the point of view of the other eye. Jesus attempts to rectify this mis-aligned vision by bringing up the notion of *aion*, a Greek word which applies to a definite space and time, for example, the extension of one's life. The contrast consists in a difference between "sons of this *aion*" who engage in marriage and "those who are accounted worthy to attain to that *aion*" which Jesus identifies with the resurrection. Jesus seems to identify the Sadducees with the "sons of this *aion*" since they brought up the question of marriage in context of the resurrection. On the other hand, Jesus speaks of a second group as those who are "accounted worthy" or *kataxioo*. As to the nature of how this is done, Jesus doesn't spell it out but leaves it to our imagination. It's tricky business unless one pays close attention to the text: one can fall into the trap of the Sadducees denying the resurrection or to put it more accurately, deny the resurrection because one feels himself to be unworthy of it. That makes the words "accounted worthy" all the more difficult to swallow, for no one is deemed such. The way Jesus approaches the matter is fairly typical of how he deals with life-and-death issues, not straight on but indirectly, leaving room for some margin or error. Instead of worrying about whether one can or cannot make the grade, Jesus injects a certain amount of adventure where the outcome isn't certain. So instead of depressing his listeners, Jesus wants to do away with a dogmatic approach to such important issues and place responsibility upon the person involved. Such was not the case of the Sadducees, let alone Pharisees.

One way of appreciating the mysterious yet problematic words "are accounted worthy" is whether or not Jesus' words about being "equal to angels" (*isaggelos*) strikes home or not. To be *isaggelos* is to be lifted from the realm of *aion* and to enter another sphere, "sons of the resurrection." It's something people can't grasp on the natural level yet have a capacity to live such by reason of having been made in the divine image and likeness. The issue of marriage doesn't apply here and hence the issue of propagation. If one remains caught up in the value of *aion*, one's period of life, then one can't appreciate how its value, important as it may be, fades away with the prospect of being like the angels who exist not in any type of *aion* but outside space and time.

14 November, Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Gospel (Lk 21.5-19) prepares us for the conclusion of one liturgical year and as well as the next, an event that will come on the scene in several weeks with the First Sunday of Advent. This transition is marked by a series of dire images intended to arouse attention so as not to miss the significance of the warning which otherwise could go by unnoticed. To pick up on this warning requires a mode of perception quite different than passing from one calendar year to another. That transition implies a rather sharp break with the past and anticipation of the future. Behind this perception is that constantly we're evolving or moving ahead...to what no one really knows.

However, that perception of time's passage doesn't apply here. As for the foreboding images presented to us now, they are similar to the ones in the first few Sundays of Advent.

“And as some spoke of the temple.” So begins the Gospel with those accompanying Jesus as they marveled at the temple's adornment and to whom Jesus responds harshly: “there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” Jesus had just entered Jerusalem for the last time and by week's end was destined to be handed over and crucified. Obviously those speaking about the temple hadn't a clue about this and were astonished at Jesus' sudden and dire words. “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign?” *Semeion* is the word for “sign” which applies to an omen or a pointer concerning future events. So instead of elaborating upon what appears to be the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, Jesus shifts the attention of those around him to “take heed that you are not led astray.” This must have been confusing, for they were expecting more about the temple. To Jesus, being on the watch was more important, namely, not to *planao* or not to wander about. While this injunction is not as forceful as the one about not going astray, it has longer lasting effects. To make matters worse, many will come in Jesus' name claiming that they speak for him. Such must have been the case with some who spoke about him after his resurrection and mis-interpreted his mission as well as that event in light of the recent crucifixion. Clearly they weren't among the “devout men” [Acts 2.5] present at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples. Because they did not partake of the Spirit, such persons will say “the time (*kairos*) is at hand” without the slightest clue as to what they are talking about.

In addition to these misguided people Jesus speaks on a grander scale, that of worldwide strife and natural disasters. Despite the sensationalism of such events, they play a secondary role, forming the larger context of vs. 12 when followers of Jesus will be delivered to secular authorities. Instead of using *kairos* to describe that we have “This will be a time for you to bear testimony” [vs. 13]. The verb *apobaino* reads here as “will turn out for you” or the situation will arise to be a *marturion* or witness. The preposition *eis* (into) is used with *marturion* indicating the close identity of the person and his or her personal witness, i.e., “into witness.” As for how to handle being a *marturion*, Jesus doesn't spell it out. Instead, he avoids it and wants his listeners to do the same: “Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer.” This sentence can be broken down as follows: “settle it in your minds” or place in your hearts. *Promelatao* is the verb for “meditate” which means to practice or rehearse in your mind what you will say later according to a pre-recorded script. And “answer” is *apologeomai*, to defend oneself by explaining how and why one is bearing *marturion*. Those who claim to speak for Jesus in vs. 8 are familiar with this technique and wish others to have it. Such a technique is a sign...a *semeion* along the lines of the temple's overthrow in vs. 6...which will have the same dire result.

“For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.” This, however, won't take place within the temple but within the upper room of Pentecost. For Jesus to speak of the Holy Spirit here would be too much for his listeners, so he omits it. He concludes this section with a contradiction. Despite people handing over people who subscribe to Jesus' teaching, “not a hair of your head will perish.” Their *hupomone* (endurance) or literally, standing-under, will be the key to such people possessing not so much their physical lives but their souls, *psuche* being the word used here in vs. 19.

21 November, Christ the King

Today's Gospel (Lk 23.35-43) presents us with Jesus hanging on the cross while the people and soldiers were mocking him, for example, "Let him save himself." From one point of view this is impossible because Jesus or Yeshuah is salvation personified so he had no need to save himself. A bit later one of the two crucified criminals (*kakourgos*, literally, evil-doer) repeated the words of Jesus' mockers, "Save yourself and us." However, the other criminal rebuked him, saying that both were under the same sentence and were receiving the "due reward" of their deeds. This man proceeded to say that "This man has done nothing wrong." The adjective here is *atopos*, literally, "not-place" or something like out of place. In other words, what Jesus had done throughout his lifetime and even on the cross was in place or in order.

Chances are the repentant criminal earlier had heard Jesus himself preaching or may have had personal contact, even as late as sharing the same prison cell the night before. Perhaps the other criminal was in the same cell too yet refused to acknowledge Jesus' role as Yeshuah. And so right up to the very end of his life Jesus was engaged in bestowing salvation upon as many people as possible. One wonders what happened to the body of the repentant criminal. Was he placed in a tomb not far from that of Jesus? Did he rise on the same day, albeit in a hidden way? Or was his body venerated as a kind of relic, the first person to enter paradise as Jesus had promised him?

And so this Gospel depicts Jesus at his lowest and highest point simultaneously, a fine way to sum up the liturgical year that is about to come to a close. It offers a time to look back all the way to the previous seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and time after Pentecost until this very moment and see that Jesus never had been *a-topos* or out-of-place. Even though the theme of today's Gospel belongs to the Triduum or lies on the threshold of the Easter season associated with spring and hence the rebirth of creation, it is a fitting way to conclude the year. That is, we are at the conclusion of a year which is characterized as being *topos* (noun) or having all the proper elements *in place* to effect salvation.

28 November, First Sunday of Advent

NB: During this new liturgical year the first readings will be commented upon. Reason: the last time the Gospel for this year was in 2007, so it would be repetitive to make notations. Because these readings (especially from the Old Testament) may not be as familiar as the Gospels, *the first reading will be posted in italics* for each entry. As with all biblical citations in this document, the **Revised Standard Edition** of the Bible is used. This shift to commenting upon the first readings will continue indefinitely; it may last (for example) through Advent after which the Gospel will be commented upon. A note will be posted as to this if and when it happens.

Is 2.1-5: *The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.*

A procedure different from the notations on the Gospel will be followed, at least to begin with, and that will consist of a brief outline of each verse.

Vs. 1: Word (*davar*): alternately as speech as in “Hear the word of the Lord,” a phrase frequently used by Isaiah and most other prophets. In the verse at hand, the divine *davar* is seen (*chazab*) in the sense of beholding. Vision (*chazon*) in 1.1 is derived from it and which Isaiah sees whereas in the verse at hand, *davar* is the object of *chazab* or beholding.

Vs. 2: This verse continues into the next one and concludes there.

-It shall come to pass. The Hebrew text reads, ‘It will be.’

-‘Latter (*acharyth*) days.’ ‘Your latter days will be very great’ [Job 8.7].

-‘Mountain of the Lord:’ this phrase occurs two other times, the next verse and 30.29. In the verse at hand, ‘house of the Lord’ is associated with it.

-Shall be established (*kun*): connotes a sense of directing. ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me’ [Ps 51.10]. The next reference is 9.7, ‘to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness.’

-‘Highest of the mountains.’ The Hebrew text reads, ‘in the head of the mountains.’

-Shall flow (*nabar*): alternately, ‘to shine:’ ‘They shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord’ [Jer 31.12].

-Nations (*goy*): last noted in 1.4, ‘sinful nation.’

Vs. 3: Let us go up (*halab*): frequent references in Isaiah such as 37.14, ‘and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord.’

-Jacob: here in conjunction with ‘house of the God.’ Other similar references are: 2.5, 6; 10.20; 14.1 (twice); 29.22; 48.1; 58.1.

-May teach (*yarab*): fundamentally means to cast or shoot anything and as applied to teaching or that which needs to be pointed out. The next reference is 9.15, ‘The prophet who teaches is the tail.’

-Ways (*derek*, singular): prefixed with the preposition *min* (*m-*) or from. The next reference is 8.12, ‘not to walk in the way of this people.’

-Paths (*orach*, singular): fundamentally as ‘to wander.’ The next reference is 3.12, ‘confuse the course of your paths.’

-Law (*Torah*): last noted in 1.10 as ‘teaching.’ *Torah* is derived from the verbal root *yarab* as noted in the verse at hand.

-‘Word (*davar*) of the Lord:’ last noted in 2.1 which Isaiah saw. The preposition *min* (*m-*) is prefaced to *davar*. Compare this sense with the same preposition prefaced to *derek*.

Vs. 4: Judge (*shaphat*): last noted in 1.26 as participle, ‘judges.’

-‘Between.’ A similar sentiment with the verb *shaphat* in 5.3, ‘Judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard.’

-Nations (*goy*, singular): last noted in vs. 2 and used twice more in the verse at hand.

-Shall decide (*yakach*): last noted in 1.18, ‘let us reason together.’ The next use of *yakach* with the meaning in the verse at hand is 11.3, ‘what his eyes see or decide.’

-Beat (*katah*): connotes breaking as well as hammering. The next use of this verb is 24.12, ‘the gate is smitten with destruction.’

-Swords (*cherev*, singular): used twice in the verse at hand and as in 1.20 but not noted there, ‘you shall be devoured by the sword.’

-Plowshares (*’eth*, singular): the same word (particle) as ‘of’ often used before a noun as the object of a verb. ‘Beat your plowshares into swords’ [Jl 3.10]. The verb *katat* is used here as in the verse at hand.

-Spears (*chanyth*, singular): also as in Jl 3.10 just noted.

-Pruning hooks (*mazmerah*, singular): from a verbal root meaning ‘to pluck,’ ‘to prune,’ ‘to sing.’ It is also noted in Jl 3.10. The other reference is 18.5, ‘he will cut off the shoots with pruning hooks.’

-Learn (*lamad*): last noted in 1.17 with respect ‘to do good.’

Vs. 5: ‘House of Jacob:’ cf. vs. 3, ‘house of the God of Jacob.’

-Walk (*halak*): the common verb as used in vs. 3, ‘that we may walk in his paths.’

-Light (*’or*): the next reference of this frequently used noun in Isaiah is 5.20, ‘who put darkness for light and light for darkness.’

5 December, Second Sunday of Advent

Is 11.1-10: *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious.*

Vs. 1: Shoot (*choter*): the only other use of this term is Prov 14.3, ‘The talk of a fool is a rod for his back (Hebrew: ‘a rode of pride’).

-‘Stump (*gezah*) of Jesse:’ the other reference is 40.24: ‘Scarcely are they plant ed, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth.’ The only other use of this term in the Bible is Job 14.8, ‘Though its root grow old in the earth and its stump die in the ground.’

-Branch (*netser*): the next reference is 14.19: ‘but you are cast out away from your sepulcher like a loathed untimely birth (a loathed branch).’ ‘In those times a branch from her roots shall arise in his place’ [Dan 11.7].

-Shall grow (*parah*): the next reference is 17.6, ‘four or five (berries) on the branches of a fruit tree.’ ‘Be fruitful and multiply’ [Gen 8.17].

Vs. 2: ‘Spirit (*ruach*; mentioned four times in this verse) of the Lord.’ In the verse at hand, the divine *ruach* ‘shall rest (*nuach*) upon him (note similar sound of the two words).’ ‘Him’ refers to the ‘shoot’ and ‘branch’ of vs. 1, so this person had a dual nature.

-This divine *ruach* consists of the five following, all of which have been noted earlier: 1) wisdom (*chakmah*): next reference is 28.29, 2) understanding (*bynah*): next reference is 27.11, 3) counsel (*betsab*): next reference is 14.26, 4) might (*gevoral*): next reference is 28.6, 5) knowledge (*dabath*): next reference is 32.4.

-‘Fear (*yire’ath*) of the Lord:’ not noted as being immediately connected with the divine *ruach*. This same phrase as mentioned in vs. 3 and 33.6 after that one.

Vs. 3: Delight (*ruach*): a verb which fundamentally means ‘to smell,’ ‘to blow’ from which ‘spirit’ is derived as used in this verse. ‘And the Lord smelled a sweet savor’ [Gen 8.21].

-Decide (*yakach*): first noted in 2.4: ‘He shall judge between the nations and shall decide for many peoples.’

Vs. 4: Poor (*dal*): last noted in 10.2: ‘to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right.’

-Equity (*mysbor*): the only use of this term in Isaiah with this meaning. For another use of this term see 40.4: ‘The uneven ground shall become level.’

-‘Meek (*hanam*, singular adjective) of the earth:’ the next reference is 29.19: ‘The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord.’ This word also means ‘poor,’ ‘afflicted.’ ‘He does not forget the cry of the afflicted’ [Ps 9.12].

-Smite (*nakah*): first noted in 1.5: ‘Why will you still be smitten, that you continue to rebel?’ The object of this verb is ‘earth.’ Compare with ‘meek of the earth’ in this same verse.

-‘Rod (*shevet*) of his mouth:’ first noted in 9.4: ‘For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.’

-‘Breath (*ruach*) of his lips:’ the same word for ‘spirit’ as noted in vs. 2.

Vs. 5: Girdle (*ezor*, used twice): cf. 5.27 as ‘waistcloth:’ ‘not a waistcloth is loose, not a sandal thong broken.’

-Loins (*chalats*): first noted in 5.27 as ‘waistcloth.’ From a verbal root meaning ‘to be prepared,’ to gird oneself?

Vs. 6: Three pairs of opposites: 1) wolf (*ze’ev*): the other reference is 65.25: ‘The wolf and the lamb shall feed together.’ This animal associates with lamb (*keves*) first noted in 1.11: ‘I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of he-goats.’ Both are to dwell (*gar*) together which fundamentally means ‘to sojourn’ as opposed to a permanent dwelling. ‘Is this your exultant city whose origin is from days of old, whose feet carried her to settle afar’ [23.7]? 2) leopard (*namer*): the only reference in Isaiah. ‘The mountains of the leopards’ [Sg 4.8]. This animal associates with the kid (*gedy*), the only reference in Isaiah. ‘Go to the flock and fetch me two good kids’ [Gen 27.9]. Both are to lie down (*ravats*), a verb which suggests gathering four legs under the animal’s body. It is next found in vs. 7. 3) calf (*bevel*): the other reference is 27.10: ‘there the calf grazes, there he lies down and strips its branches.’ This animal associates with both the lion (*kepyr*) first noted in 5.29: ‘their roaring is like a lion, like young lions they roar,’ fatling (*meriy*), the other reference found in 1.11 as ‘fed beasts.’

-‘Little child (*nahar*):’ first noted in 3.4: ‘And I will make boys their princes, and babes shall rule over them.’ This term can refer to both newborns and young children.

Vs. 7: Two additional pairs of animals with opposite characteristics: 1) cow (*parah*): the only

reference in Isaiah. This animal associates with the bear (*dov*), the other reference being 59.11: ‘We all growl like bears, we moan and moan like doves.’ Both are to feed (*rabab*), the next reference being 14.30: ‘And the first-born of the poor will feed, and the needy lie down in safety.’ The alternate meaning of this verb is ‘to delight in.’ 2) lion (*aryeh*): the next reference is 15.9: ‘a lion for those of Moab who escape.’ Compare this term with *kepyr* in the previous verse which refers to a young lion. Although not compared with another animal, this lion eats straw ‘like the ox (*baqar*) first noted in 7.21 as ‘young cow.’

Vs. 8: Suckling child (*yoneq*, participle): the verb is found in 60.16: ‘You shall suck the milk of nations, you shall suck the breast of kings.’

-Shall play (*shabah*): alternately as ‘to delight,’ ‘to be blinded.’ For the latter, cf. 6.10 as ‘shut’ with respect to eyes: ‘Make the heart of this people fat and their ears heavy and shut their ears.’

-Asp (*paten*): the only reference in Isaiah. ‘The cruel venom of asps’ [Dt 32.33].

-Weaned child (*gamal*, participle): for another sense, cf. 3.9, ‘For they have brought evil upon themselves.’

-Adder (*tsephony*): the other reference is 59.5: ‘They hatch adders’ eggs, their weave the spider’s web.’ Another related term is *tsephab* in 14.29: ‘for from the serpent’s root will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying serpent.’

Vs. 9: ‘Shall not hurt (*rabab*):’ the only use of this term with this meaning in Isaiah. This verb has multiple nuances and is first noted in 8.9 as ‘broken:’ ‘Be broken, you peoples, and be dismayed.’

-Destroy (*shachat*): first noted in 1.4 as ‘deal corruptly.’ Sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who deal corruptly!

-‘Knowledge (*dehab*) of the Lord:’ the other reference is 28.9: ‘Whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message?’ This noun is a variation of *dabath* last noted in 11.2: ‘the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.’ It is akin to ‘water covering (*kasab*) the sea’ (first noted in 6.2).

Vs. 10: ‘Root (*shoresb*) of Jesse:’ compare with 11.1, ‘stump of Jesse.’ *Shoresb* is found there as well.

-Ensign (*nes*): cf. 5.26 as ‘signal:’ ‘He will raise a signal for a nation afar off and whistle for it from the ends of the earth.’

-‘Him shall the nations seek (*darash*).’ The Hebrew text literally reads, ‘to him...’ *Darash* is first noted in 1.17: ‘learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.’

-‘Dwelling (*menuchal*) will be glorious (*kevod*).’ The first reference to the latter is 3.8: ‘because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence.’ This is the only reference in Isaiah with this meaning. ‘This is rest; give rest to the weary’ [28.12].

12 December, Third Sunday of Advent

Is 35.1-6 & 10: *The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come*

with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Vs. 1: Shall be glad (*sus*): this verb is next found in 61.10: 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord.'

-Wilderness/dry land: *midbar/tsyah*. The former is first noted in 14.17 as 'desert' and the latter is next noted in 41.18; from a verbal root meaning to be dry: 'I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water.'

-Desert (*haravah*): cf. 33.9, this word connoting a plain: 'Sharon is like a desert.'

-Blossom (*parach*): first noted in 17.11 as 'make blossom' and is found in the next verse.

-Crocus (*chavatselth*): the other use of this noun is Sg 2.1, 'I am the rose of Sharon.'

Vs. 2: Rejoice with joy. The verb *gyl* is first noted in 9.3: "You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;" the noun *gylab* (derived from *gyl*) is found one other time in the Bible, 65.18, 'But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.'

-Singing (*ranan*, infinitive): first noted in 12.6 as 'sing for joy.'

-Glory/majesty: *kevod/hadar*. Both nouns are used twice in the verse at hand. The latter is first noted in 2.10, 'Enter into the rock and hide in the dust from before the terror of the Lord.'

Carmel/Sharon. The other references in Isaiah to both proper nouns are found in 33.9, 'Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves.'

Vs. 3: Strengthen (*chazaq*): first noted in 27.5 as 'lay hold of,' Or let them lay hold of my protection.'

-'Weak (*raphah*) hands:' the verbal root is noted in 13.7, 'will be feeble:' 'Therefore all hand will be feeble, and every man's heart will melt, and they will be dismayed.'

-'Feeble (*kashal*, participle) knees:' first noted in 3.8 as 'has stumbled:' 'For Jerusalem has stumbled, and Judah has fallen.'

-Make firm (*amats*): the next reference for this verb is 41.10: I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.'

Vs. 4: 'Fearful (*mabar*) heart:' first noted in 5.19 as 'make haste' which is the fundamental meaning of this verb: 'Let him make haste, let him speed his work that we may see it.'

-Be strong (*chazaq*): cf. vs. 3 above.

-With vengeance (*naqam*): verb first noted in 1.24: 'I will vent my wrath on my enemies and avenge myself on my foes.'

-'Recompense (*gemul*) of God:' first found in 3.11: 'for what his hands have done shall be done to him.'

-Save (*yashab*): first noted in 25.9, Lo, this is our god; we have waited for him, that he might save us.'

Vs. 5: Shall be opened (*paqad*): this multi-faceted verb is first noted in 10.12: 'When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride.'

-Blind (*biuer*): first noted in 29.18, 'and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.'

-Deaf (*cheresh*): first noted in 29.18: 'In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book.'

-Unstopped (*patach*): first noted in 14.17: 'Who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home?'

Vs. 6: Lame man (*piseach*): first noted in 33.23: 'Then prey and spoil in abundance will be divided; even the lame will take the prey.'

- Leap (*dalag*): the only use of this verb in Isaiah. ‘Leaping upon the mountains’ [Sg 2.8].
- Hart (*’ayal*): the only use of this noun in Isaiah. ‘My beloved...is like a young stag’ [Sg 2.9].
- ‘Tongue of the dumb (*’ilem*): the other use of this adjective is 56.10: they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark.’
- Sing for joy (*ranan*): last noted in vs. 2.
- Shall break forth (*baqab*): first noted in 7.6 with the alternate meaning, ‘conquer:’ ‘Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves.’
- Wilderness/desert: *midbar/haravah*. Cf. vs. 1 for these two terms.
- Streams (*nachal*, singular): first noted in 7.19 with the alternate meaning, ‘ravines.’
- Vs. 10:** ‘Ransomed (*padah*) of the Lord:’ first noted in 1.27: ‘Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.’
- Singing (*rinah*): first noted in 14.7: ‘The whole earth is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing.’
- ‘Everlasting joy (*simchah*, twice...’gladness)’: first noted in 9.3: ‘You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy.’
- Shall obtain (*nasag*): the other use of this verb is found in 51.11: ‘they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall fee away.’
- Joy (*sason*): first noted in 12.3: ‘With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.’
- Sorrow/sighing: *yagon/’anachab*. The other use of the former in Isaiah is 51.11: ‘they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall fee away.’ The latter is first noted in 21.2, ‘all the sighing she has caused I bring to and end.’
- Shall flee away (*nus*): first noted in 30.16: ‘A thousand shall fee at the threat of one, at the threat of five you shall flee.’

19 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

Is 7.10.14: *Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.*

Vs. 10: ‘Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz.’ A common way of putting this literally in Hebrew is, ‘increased to speak.’

Vs. 11: Sign (*’oth*): next reference is vs. 14. ‘This shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you.’ Also, ‘But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you’ [Ex 3.12].

-Deep (*hamaq*): i.e., as Sheol. The other reference is 29.15. ‘Your thoughts are very deep’ [Ps 92.5]!

-High (*gavah*): i.e., as heaven or *mahal* (above). This is an adverb prefaced by the preposition *l-* (to, towards), the only reference in Isaiah. As for *gavah*, it next occurs in 55.9, ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’

Vs. 12: Put to the test (*nasab*): i.e., tempt the Lord, the only reference in Isaiah. ‘God did tempt Abraham’ [Gen 22.1].

Vs. 13: To weary (*la’ab*): first used in 1.14, ‘they (festivals) have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.’ In the verse at hand it is used with respect to men and God.

Vs. 14: The sign from God consists of a young woman (*balmah*; the only reference in Isaiah) which alternately means ‘virgin.’ ‘Therefore the maidens love you’ [Sg 1.3].

-Conceive (*barah*): the next reference is 8.3, 'And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son.' 'Into the chamber of her that conceived me' [Sg 3.4].

-Immanuel or 'God with us.' The other reference is 8.8, 'and its outspread wings (the river Euphrates) will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.'

25 December, Christmas (Vigil Mass)

Is 62.1-5: *For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*

Vs. 1: Will (not) keep silent (*chashab*): last noted in 57.11 as 'held my peace.'

-Will (not) rest (*shaqat*): last noted in 57.20, 'But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest.'

-Vindication (*tsedeq*): last found in 61.3 as 'righteousness' and used in the next verse. 'That they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.'

-Brightness (*nogah*): last noted in 60.19, 'The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night.'

-Salvation (*yeshuah*): last noted in 60.18, 'you shall call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.'

-'Burning torch (*lapyd*):' the only use of this noun in Isaiah. 'His eyes as lamps of fire' [Dan 10.6].

Vs. 2: Shall give (*naqav*): the other use of this verb in Isaiah is 36.6 as 'will pierce:' 'Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it.'

Vs. 3: 'Crown of beauty (*tiph'arah*): last noted in 28.5, 'In that day the Lord of hosts will be a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of his people.'

-'Royal diadem (*tsanoph*):' the only use of this noun in the Bible.

Vs. 4: Shall (not) be termed: the common verb 'to speak' (*'amar*, twice) is used.

-Forsaken (*Haʿzuvah*): from the verb *hazav* last noted in 58.2, 'Yet they seek me daily...and did not forsake the ordinance of their God.'

-Desolate (*Shemamah*): from the verb *shamam* last noted in 61.4 as 'devastations' (participle), 'They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations.'

-My delight (*Chephetsy*): from the verb *chaphats* used in this verse and last noted in 58.2, 'They ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God.'

-Married (*Beulah*): from the verb *babal* used in this verse and last noted in vs. 5 and 54.1, 'For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord.'

Vs. 5: Young man (*bachur*): last noted in 23.4, 'I have neither reared young men nor brought up virgins.'

-Virgin (*betulah*): last noted in 47.1, 'Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon.'

-Bridegroom/bride: *chatan/kalah*. Both nouns are last noted in 61.10, 'As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.'

-Rejoices (*sus*, twice): last noted in 61.10, 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God.'

-Over you. The Hebrew text literally reads, 'on you.'

26 December, Holy Family

Sirach 3.2-6 & 12-14: *For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother; O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him. For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you.* NB: The Book of Sirach is taken from the Apocrypha and is written in Greek.

The Lord himself shows honor (*timao*) to the father and confirmation (*stereo*) of right (*kerisis*) to the mother. The former is a verb related to *time*, that which is paid in token, a sign of one's worth. The latter is a noun meaning judgment, a trait normally associated with the role of a father; the verb *stereo* suggests making strong and unmoved. The child reflects the honor originally imparted by the Lord, *timao* being the same verb which intimates an exchange of the divine and human relative to one's father. Showing *time* is an atonement for sins, the verb being *exilaskomai* (to propitiate). The preposition *ex* (from) prefaced to the verb intimates a thorough removal of sin. As for the mother, she resembles a person who lays up treasure (*apothesaurizo*), this verb applicable to hoarding wealth.

Vs. 6 shifts the bestowal of honor (*timao*) from God to the child honoring the father which becomes a means by which the child's prayer will be heard (*eisakouo*), literally as hear-into. With regard to the mother, obedience to the Lord will refresh her, *anapauo*, a verb suggestive of desisting or the giving of relief.

Vs. 14 speaks of kindness to a father, *eleemosune* also applying to pity. It will be credited to the child of the father, *prosanoikodomemai*. This unwieldy verb comprises the root *oikeo* (to inhabit) with two prepositions, *pros* (in the direction toward-which) and *ana* (upon). Putting this notion of credit or recognition of a kind act as by the child in literal fashion we get recognition that will dwell with him in his direction (*pros*) and continue to increase (*ana*).

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Although this ends the year 2010, the reflections on the Gospel for Sundays and major feasts continue under a new heading for the year 2011. Inserting excerpts from the prophet Isaiah during the Advent season was an experiment. The reason: this was the first time since these reflections were posted in 2007 that the three year liturgical cycle had run its course. However, it is unlikely that this will happen in the foreseeable future. Entries for the year 2011 (and hopefully beyond) will differ from earlier postings though taking them into consideration. For that reason, perhaps their focus will be more specific, dealing with (for example) a particular word, phrase or the like.