

28 April, Fifth Sunday of Easter

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed. Then they passed through Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attala; and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. And when they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples. Acts 14.21-27

About this time through the Easter season we're seeing it tattered around the edges, if you will. Not that Christ's resurrection has lost its meaning but we're starting to perceive that soon we'll need a shift in liturgical time. The same was felt during Lent; not so much during Advent because that season isn't as heavy as the other two. Besides, the other two go hand-in-hand, close to each other. Our longing for a shift in the liturgical way of telling time will increase during the remaining Sundays, especially with Ascension, which heralds the nine day gestation period for Pentecost.

Notice the frequency of "and" to show the continuity and activity of the apostles as they made their way around a whole series of cities, all rather quickly with a certain urgency in their feet. It occurs ten times as far as a connective function goes. Nothing is said of the time spent in each city, but a priority must have been training key persons in order to take over governance of the churches there. Not just that, but to maintain contact among all the communities. This continuity was easy to uphold, given the excellent Roman road system. Paul and those with him couldn't resist having stopped at smaller places along the way or speaking with any other persons they encountered although this isn't recorded.

While traveling, they must have had in mind Jesus' appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus where he explained the scriptures and broke bread with them. This memory served to encourage their travels in between towns. They used this travel time to re-create, if you will, the question Jesus posed originally: "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk" [Lk 24.17]? That talk was, of course, about Jesus' resurrection, but the discussions among all these cities fleshed it out by further reflection upon the words "he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" [vs. 27]. Walking was an ideal time and context for such matters, perhaps when Paul and others formulated their teaching, building upon the experience of passing from one place to another. Just as this had an accumulative effect, so it expanded their interpretation of the scriptures not with Jesus physically present as at Emmaus but with the Holy Spirit. Such was the force behind the words "and declared all that God had done with them." Here was that "door of faith" opened to the Gentiles which replicated, if you will, Christ having opened the disciples' eyes on the Emmaus road.

The last sentence in this excerpt from Acts (not included in today's reading but added to complete Chapter Fourteen) has Paul and his companions remaining "no little time with the disciples" which refers to those in Antioch. In other words, they came around full circle both by land and by sea. The verb for "remained" is *diatribo* which literally means to rub between, the verbal root *tribo* prefaced with the preposition *dia* (through) or to rub through. In other words, the contact between Paul, his companions and those in Antioch were of a close, intimate kind. Surely the same *diatribo* was experienced in all the cities and other unnamed places they had frequented recently. So if such "rubbing through" were present among all the contacts, it bode well for the future continuity of the churches in their composition of one Church.

5 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according

to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question....Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, with the following letter: "The brethren, both the apostles and the elders, to the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting. Since we have heard that some persons from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." Acts 15.1-2; 22-29

Today's excerpt begins with the first two verses of Chapter Fifteen as introducing the issue at hand and then skips forward considerably where it describes the choosing of representatives to accompany Paul and Barnabas to Antioch. The issue was circumcision which was the premier sign of being a Jew, here cited "according to the custom of Moses." *Ethos* also means habit, something that is familiar, and has its roots in Lev 12.3: "And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." Such a claim, legitimate as it was, compelled Paul and Barnabas to make their way to Jerusalem to settle the matter. For the new Christian religion (it was not considered a religion at this very early stage) to call into question a fundamental tenet of Judaism was a bold step. Either the Christians would accept circumcision or not, a deciding point on whether they would remain Jews or go their own way (as heretics).

The words "It seemed good" are used to send a delegation to Antioch. This seeming, if you will, was animated by the fairly recent descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Before deciding upon this course of action, those involved must have assembled not unlike the apostles in the upper room to re-create in a manner of speaking that gathering though no explicit is made of this. Virtually all later Christian assemblies were to follow this model. The delegation was to go with a letter countering the charges of the early Christians not practicing circumcision. Those who objected came from within the rank of the budding Christian community. They are considered as "troubled you with words" and "unsettling your minds." *Tarasso* is the verb used in the first phrase meaning to throw into disorder. *Anaskeuazo* is the verb in the second phrase meaning literally to pack up the baggage or to break camp, a vivid way of describing the apparent trouble caused by the new Christians. As for "minds," the noun is *psuche* or soul, one's very self. Thus *tarasso* and *anaskeuazo* intimate for the Jews the very antithesis of the Torah, circumcision being one of its commands.

Reference is made to the Holy Spirit with the words "it has seemed good," the verb *dokeo* as with "it seemed good" in the last paragraph which alludes again to the Spirit's influence in this matter not unlike Pentecost. What the delegation is to communicate to people at Antioch is relatively easy and general, namely, to refrain from offerings made to idols (etc.) and unchastity. "If you keep yourselves from these:" the verb *diatereo* means to maintain faithfully, the preposition *dia* (through) being suggestive of a careful, thorough keeping guard. That recommendation is intended to set the stage for more comprehensive teachings about Jesus Christ.

Finally, this excerpt concludes with "Farewell" or *rhonnumi*, to make or to be strong. Apparently this careful preparation paid off because once the letter was read (cf. vs. 31), the people at Antioch accepted it with joy. And so the action of the Holy Spirit begun at Pentecost carried through to the decision making of sending a delegation to Antioch and finally took the form of a letter to those living in that city.

9 May, Ascension

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he

was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1:1-11

Note the two modes of Jesus appearing to the disciples: "presented himself alive" and "appearing to them." The first has the verb *paristemi* which means literally to stand beside (*para-*), to present. The second has the verb *optanomai* or to let oneself be seen. *Paristemi* fleshes out, if you will, the appearance of Jesus immediately after his resurrection when "he stood among them" or literally "in the midst (*en meso*) of them." *Paristemi* refines this *en meso* by its conjunction with "many proofs" or *tekmar* which fundamentally means a fixed mark or boundary. Applied to Jesus as being seen by his disciples, this intimates that he made sure they believed that it was actually him and not someone or something else. We have no details as to how this interaction occurred nor how many times Jesus interacted with the eleven and other close associates. Still, it was confusing for them, and Jesus realized this all along. That meant a kind of higher proof...another witness...was required, the descent of the Holy Spirit, who not only descended upon the disciples but within them as opposed to Jesus being along side them or being seen by them. This is where the second verb (*optanomai*) pertains more to the actual seeing of Jesus.

The two verbs *paristemi* and *optanomai* are put at the service of discourse, of Jesus speaking about "the kingdom of God." Nothing is recorded about his use of scriptural passages to back this up as we find in the Gospels (and which the disciples rarely grasped). However, these conversations over forty days must have resembled a rabbi with his students in a yeshiva where they sat around a table from dawn to dusk discussing the Torah. In fact, the disciples may have brought a scroll of the Torah along with them which is not untypical for Jews when they assemble. Their discussion made the time between Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven fly by almost unnoticed. That's why the text doesn't speak of any delay or break between Jesus conversing with the disciples and his ascension, charging them "not to depart from Jerusalem." As for this Holy Spirit, certainly Jesus spoke about it during his ministry but like so many things, the disciples didn't grasp it at all. Yet they retained memory of what Jesus had spoken. So when the Spirit entered them on Pentecost, it refreshed those memories, making them alive and present in a manner unlike the simple recollection of past events we experience daily.

Note that Jesus plays a little trick, if you will. Here as before the disciples were eager about the restoration of Israel and continued to identify their master with a political figure. Knowing full well the stubbornness of this perception Jesus said that they will "receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." *Dunamis* is the word for "power" which means more capacity or faculty as well as strength. Although the disciples accepted this, they were disappointed, thinking that the Holy Spirit (whose nature still was unclear to them) would step in and endow them with some kind of political power which came directly from heaven.

The discourse between Jesus and his disciples has a note of continuity to it right from the beginning of Acts, a continuity that endured right up to Jesus' ascension. This is characteristic of rabbis and their students as noted above. They start their discourse passionately and continue until the rabbi leaves the room, an uninterrupted process which continues among the students. There will be an interruption, however, for nine days until Pentecost. However, that would not stop the disciples from gathering and discussing as students of the Torah all that had transpired in the past few weeks.

This continuity of focus may be seen in the words “while they gazing into heaven,” the verb being *atenizo* which consists of the root *tenio* (to stretch out) with alpha privative, negating that stretching-forth. Thus the sense of *atenizo* is to look without extension. Actually, the disciples have been doing that since the appearances of Jesus and their conversations with him, all in complete astonishment. *Atenizo* is directed “into (*eis*) heaven” and is used three times in two sentences. So if Jesus went *eis* heaven, he will return from there. The disciples left, having been rebuked mildly by an angel not to continue their *atenizo* but to return to Jerusalem and to elect someone to take the place of Judas thereby preparing themselves for the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Later on during their ministry the disciples will redirect their *atenizo* to one which will examine the scriptures for those passages referring to Jesus, especially the ones he mentioned as pertaining to him.

12 May, Seventh Sunday of Easter

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7.55-60

This is a fine passage in preparation for Pentecost Sunday one week from today as well as for the current “novena” in which we are situated now, having commenced on Ascension Thursday. It is one of the most unusual times of the liturgical cycle, a time to savor to the full: Jesus had ascended while the Holy Spirit has not been given, thereby leaving us orphans for nine days. Not quite that, of course, but a special occasion to reflect upon how the Blessed Trinity functions.

All three divine persons are removed from us (Father being in heaven throughout) yet not in the sense of being absent. That puts the opening words of today’s excerpt in a special context, “(Stephen) gazed into heaven” which parallels the disciples as they were “looking into heaven” at the ascension of Jesus. The verb *blepo* is for the latter and applies to the power of physical sight. It intimates that the disciples had not yet been infused by the Holy Spirit, something to come very shortly. So the verb *blepo* differs from the three other verbs pertinent to seeing mentioned below.

Hupoarcho is the verb for “being” which means literally to begin (*archo*; also as to rule) under (*hupo*-). Thus it reveals how Stephen was filled with the Spirit in a manner far more complete than our manner of comprehending it. It is as though the Holy Spirit formed the very foundation of his life...was under or *hupo*-it...to inspire him. This enabled Stephen to gaze into heaven, the verb being *atenizo* which means a stretching (*teino*) without extension, alpha privative being prefaced to the verb. That means, unlike the disciples at the ascension, he saw the *doxa* or “glory” of God immediately or without the limitations of space and time. However, Stephen able to do this after the descent of the Holy Spirit whereas the disciples had not yet received it.

Stephen saw Jesus standing at God’s right hand or *ek dexion* which reads literally from the right hand as though he were coming forth continually from the Father’s hand. So this standing of Jesus is not static as the verb implies, as though Jesus was doing this for all eternity.

Note the two verbs pertaining to vision: “saw the glory of God” and “I see the heavens opened,” that is, *eido* and *theoreo*. The former is a beholding or acknowledging more along the lines of having knowledge whereas the latter suggests gazing or observing, a more detached form of seeing. Both, it should be kept in mind, are situated within the context of *atenizo*, that gazing which is without extension. So while Stephen was recounting what amounts to a triple form of vision (*atenizo*, *eido* and *theoreo*) which had transfixed him, those

accusing him “stopped their ears” at this report and immediately proceeded to stone him. They did not wish to hear Stephen talking about his vision which means they were receiving it in a second-hand fashion, as it were. If their hearing was as open as Stephen’s seeing, the situation would have turned out very differently.

19 May, Pentecost Sunday

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." Acts 2:1-11

The verb for “had come” is *sumpleroo*, literally as to fill-with as it concerns the “day of Pentecost.” As practising Jews, the disciples were familiar with this feast but were little prepared for what was about to happen though once it did, echos of Jesus speaking about the Holy Spirit must have been in their ears. The preposition *sum* (or *sun*) as “with” is significant in light of the unity expressed in 1:13: “they went up to the upper room.” In other words, *sumpleroo* hearkens back to that assembly and confirms it, namely, when the disciples chose Matthias to take the place of Judas. That choice was necessary to fulfill the Spirit’s descent although at the time the disciples may not have been aware of it. Also it is indicative of the unity they and others had experienced both before and after the Pentecost event.

Epi to auto are the words for “in one place” or literally “upon it,” the preposition *epi* as “upon” being an anticipation, if you will, of the Holy Spirit who will descent *epi* them shortly. Thus both *sumpleroo* and *epi to auto* are important leads to a momentous event which is preceded by *aphno* or “suddenly” which connotes something that happens unawares. Note that the disciples in the upper room “were sitting.” That is, they had a premonition something was about to happen but had little clue as to how it would come about. First comes a rushing sound of wind or *pnoe* which is more like a blast that hits all at once, not gradually. During their association with Jesus for approximately three years the more immediate disciples heard him speak often of the Holy Spirit. They knew that the nature of this *Pneuma...Ruach...was* best represented by the intangible wind, pretty much nothing else, even though Jesus talked about the Spirit during the Last Supper discourse. All that, however, had been forgotten in light of subsequent events, and the disciples needed reminding of it. Although Acts doesn’t describe it, a good part of the Spirit’s work in the memories of the disciples was designed to rectify forgetfulness of what Jesus had communicated to them. That’s the hidden story of Pentecost, if you will and the foundation for future theological reflection.

So once the invisible wind had made its appearance discernable through sound, there followed a making visible of it by means of “tongues of fire.” While the wind/*Pneuma* is invisible as well as indivisible, this unity is shared, not broken, by fire being divided among the disciples. The verb here is *diamerizo* which means a distributing and consists of the verbal root *merizo* (to divide as to distribute, not to confuse) prefaced with the preposition *dia* or through, to distribute-through. Such was the visibility of the invisible resulting in all being “filled with the Holy Spirit.”

The next and final stage of the Pentecost event centers around language. Those in the immediate vicinity heard the disciples speak in their own language which means a correction of what happened at the tower of Babel when the single language experienced until then had been fractured. This fracturing did not take place by a divine fiat from above but from within the city itself: “Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language” [Gen 11:7]. In other words, the Lord himself effects this from within the city, neither from without

nor from above. While there, the Lord remains invisible though certainly they experience the effect of his work, the confusion of their one language. On the other hand, the rectification of this ill at Pentecost starts from above by a three-fold process: through invisible wind and then through visible fire and finally through invisible yet audible speech. Thus the *balah* (confusion) effected at Babel is undone by the *diamerizo* or dividing of the Holy Spirit. On the surface this Greek verb seems to be one of dividing...it is on one level...but is a dividing which effects unity.

An important after-thought to Pentecost, if you will. Today completes the Lenten-Easter-Pentecost "trilogy" which forms a significant part of the calendar year. Tomorrow Ordinary Time resumes after several months and now begins its march all the way to Advent. This shift is the most sudden in the liturgical season, more extensive than Christmas Day to St. Stephen's feast the next day, and is worth pondering. Actually the Church offers several other feasts—Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi and Sacred Heart—all designed, if you will, to mitigate this transition and enable us to enter the lengthy period of Ordinary Time. This easing-in has a view of bringing to that season what had begun all the way back on Ash Wednesday.

26 May 2013, Trinity Sunday

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 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, then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men. Prov 8.22-31

Vs. 22: The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.

Starting here and going through vs. 31 wisdom shifts direction, if you will, by speaking of her origins or with God before creation came into being. This is brought out by "at the beginning" or *re'shyth* noted last in 4.7. The verse at hand automatically makes one think of the *re'shyth* of Gen 1.1. That *re'shyth* is unspecified, if you will ('in the beginning') whereas the one at hand is with respect to the Lord's "work" or *derek* (cf. vs. 13) which specifically means a road or way and hence reads "at the beginning of his way." This *derek* enhances the difference between when wisdom was created and the beginning of creation in Genesis.

As for the verb "created," it is *qanah*, it is noted last in 4.7 and means to possess, to acquire. In other words, wisdom was already in existence but acquired by the Lord later on, "at the beginning of his *derek*" or way.

A contrast between "first" and "of old" or *qedem* and *me'az*, the latter literally meaning "from then" which refers to the beginning at hand in this verse with regard to "acts" or *miphhah*, the only use of this noun in the Bible. It derives from the verbal root *pahal* (to make, to fabricate). Thus the making of wisdom which took place at the beginning of his work was immediately prior to it.

This protracted interlude through vs. 31 is intended to set the stage for wisdom to address her sons in vs. 32, to make them listen to her through the remainder of Chapter Eight. One can only imagine Solomon sitting on the sidelines, as it were, the most eager listener to wisdom.

Vs. 23: Ages ago I was set up at the first before the beginning of the earth.

Three modes of time stretching back to before human life:

¹ These notes are lifted from the ones on Proverbs which can be found under the banner "Old Testament."

1) "Ages ago" or *hulam* prefaced with the preposition *min* or "from:" "from ages" "When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever" [19.25].

2) "At the first" or *r'osh* noted last in 1.21 and here also prefaced with the preposition *min* or "from the first (head)."

3) "Before the beginning" or *qedem* (cf. vs. 22) prefaced with *min* or "from the beginning" or literally as "from that which was before," *qedem* differing from *re'shyth* of vs. 22 as being more temporal whereas the latter, a noun, is suggestive almost as a place-where. In the verse at hand, *qedem* is associated with *'erets* or "earth" (cf. 3.19). This earth is more localized than the Lord's "work" of vs. 22 and the beginning of Genesis.

Nasak is the verb "set up," the only instance in Proverbs and refers to pouring out as a libation or the anointing of a king. "For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep and has closed your eyes, the prophets" [Is 29.10]. Because *nasak* is fluid, the idea in Proverbs is that wisdom "was set up" with regard to the just mentioned three time frames but continues to be set up...poured forth.

Vs. 24: When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.

Chul is the verb from "brought forth" as in the next verse, a way to emphasize the birth of wisdom prior to creation. "The north wind brings forth rain; and a backbiting tongue, angry looks" [25.23].

Tehom and *mahyan* are the nouns for "depths" and "springs," noted earlier in 3.20 and 5.16 respectively. The former are mentioned prior to creation in Gn .12 and the latter for the first time with regard to Noah's flood (cf. Gn 7.11). In the verse at hand *mahyan* are "abounding" or *kavad* with water, that is, heavy with water (cf. 7.23). Because the flood associated with Noah take place after creation, the *mahyan* are manifestations within creation of the *tehom* which caused the earth to become flooded.

Vs. 25: Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth;

The verb *chul* is used again, this time with regard to both mountains and hills. *Chul* with regard to wisdom is contrasted with these two which "had been shaped" or *tavah*, the only use of this verb in Proverbs which means to seal as well as to be plunged. "Now that your feet are sunk in the mire, they turn away from you" [Jer 38.22]. One gets the impression that the mountains and hills were sunk deeply, if you will, within the earth, an image of an incredibly long period of time.

Vs. 26: before he has made the earth with its fields or the first of the dust of the world.

Had-lo': "before" or literally "still not" or "not yet" which differs from *qedem* of vs. 23, "before." While both refer to wisdom's pre-existence to creation, the former intimates a kind of distance between God thinking about creation and their coming into being whereas the latter intimates a time just prior to their coming into being.

Hasah is the verb for "made" noted last in 6.3 and of all the verbs between vss.22 and 31 is the only one pertaining to actual making. The other verbs apply to creation as already fashioned, of being arranged in one way or another.

Chuts is translated here as "with its fields" which the RSV says is "uncertain" and can be rendered something as "nor the fields." *Chuts* is noted last in 7.12.

R'osh is the noun for "first" as in vs. 23 and suggests the beginning or first principle of something. In the verse at hand, *r'osh* pertains to "dust" or *haphar*, the only mention of this noun in Proverbs. "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground" [Gn 2.7].

Tevel pertains more to the inhabited world compared with *'erets* ('earth,' cf. vs. 23) which often refers to a country belonging to a particular group of people. Is 14.21 contains both: "Lest they (sons of evildoers) rise and possess the earth and fill the face of the world with cities."

Vs. 27: When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,

Kun is the verb for "established" and used with respect to the "heavens" (*shamaym*) noted last in 3.19 and reminiscent of Gn 1.7-8 which there is also called "firmament" or *raqyah* meaning that which is spread out. And so wisdom is not unlike the *Ruach* of God "hovering over the face of the waters" [Gn 1.2]. The verse at hand doesn't intimate that wisdom had a hand in creation but was an observer of all that was transpiring.

Chaqaq is the verb for "drew" noted last in 8.15 as "decree" and here is with regard to a "circle" or *chug*, one of three biblical references and refers to the vault of the sky as well as the horizon. "Thick clouds enwrap him so that he does not see, and he walks on the vault of heaven" [Job 22.14] (the other reference is Is 40.22).

The drawing at hand is done "on the face of the deep" or *tehom* (cf. vs. 24) which means that wisdom was present when the Lord brought order from the chaos of *tehom*, again hearkening back to the first verses of Genesis.

Vs. 28: when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep,

'Amats is the verb for "made firm" and suggests that the skies required being strong enough so as not to dissipate. "She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong" [31.17]. In the verse at hand, *'amats* concerns the "skies" or *shachaq* more specifically, clouds as noted last in 3.20.

At the other extreme of creation, if you will, are the "fountains" or *hayin* which also means eye and found last in 7.2 but not mentioned there. Note the difference from *mahyan* ('springs') in vs. 24, but both are from the same verbal root. In the verse at hand, *hayin* are associated with *tehom* (cf. vs. 27). They are "established" or *kun* as with the heavens in the previous verse.

Vs. 29: when he assigned to the sea its limit so that the waters might no transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

Sum is the verb for "assigned" and means more a placing or setting, almost on a pre-arranged site or spot. It has the preposition *b-* ('in') prefaced to it reading literally "in setting." The other Proverbs reference is 30.26: "The badgers are a people not mighty, yet they make their homes in the rocks." In the verse at hand, this setting is with regard to the "limit" or *choq* which means an appointed time or portion. "Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful (*choq*) for me" [30.8].

Choq serves to prevent the waters of the deep mentioned in the last verse from transgressing or *havar*, that is to go over or go past (cf. 7.8) the Lord's "command" or *peh* mentioned last in vs. 3 and fundamentally means mouth. Thus the *choq* at hand is not allow primeval waters to pass over the Lord's mouth, putting it literally but awkwardly.

Chaqaq is the verb for "marked out" noted last in vs. 27 as "established." In the verse at hand, *chaqaq* is used with regard to *mosadoth* (feminine plural), the only use of this noun in Proverbs. In virtually all the other references *mosadoth* refers to basic elements of creation such as the earth: "All the foundations of the earth are shaken" [Ps 82.5].

Vs. 30: then I was beside him like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always.

Etsel or “then” was noted last in 7.12 which in the verse at hand refers to the various uses of “when” (*b-*) prior to creation. However, nothing in those verses is said of wisdom being a “master workman” or *’amon*, the only biblical use of this term which derives from the verbal root *’aman* (to believe, to trust) and is not unlike the noun *’emun* found in 13.17 (and 14.5, 20.6): “A bad messenger plunges men into trouble, but a faithful envoy brings healing.” In the verse at hand, the word “like” is not used; wisdom is the *’amon*.

Shahshuhym is the noun (masculine plural) for “delight” which is found in the next verse and derives from the verbal root *shahah* (to stroke, to delight). “Your testimonies are my delight, they are my counselors” [Ps 119.24].

“Daily” is expressed by *yom yom* or literally “day day.” It is used with “delighting” or *sachaq* fundamentally meaning to laugh and noted last in 1.26. The Hebrew text lacks both “his” and “rejoicing.”

“Always” is expressed by “in all times” or *heth* noted last in 6.14.

Vs. 31: rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men.

With this verse wisdom completes her statement begun in vs. 22 as a special companion of the Lord, and his name has not been mentioned specifically since that verse.

Sachaq is the verb for “rejoicing” used in the previous verse and stated again for emphasis with regard to wisdom “laughing” or enjoying herself as an *’aman* (cf. vs. 30). It is used with regard to the Lord’s “world” or *tevel* (cf. vs. 26) which here is joined with “world” or *’erets* (cf. vs. 26).

Compare *sachaq* with *shahshuhym* (‘delighting’) as used in the previous verse as well which refers to the “sons of men” (*’adam*). While wisdom may so delight in men, there is no reference here as to men rejoicing in wisdom.

Corpus Christi, 2 June

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" Gen 24.18-20²

Vs. 18: Melchizedek *brought out* (*yatsa’*) bread and wine as offerings; he as a king left his native dwelling place to meet Abram which can be taken as assuming a subordinate position.

-Priest (*kohen*): the first mention of this office in the Bible. Although Melchizedek was associated with Canaan and not the yet-to-be established priesthood in Israel, nevertheless the verse says he was a priest of “God the Most High.” He may be compared with Jethro, the priest of Midian, to whom Moses had fled for refuge (cf. Ex 2.15-3.1). It with Jethro’s flocks that Moses had his vision of God and the revelation of the divine name.

-Although he was not specifically a priest, the diviner Balaam acknowledges the sovereignty of Israel’s God: “The oracle of him who hears the words of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty” [Num 24.16].

-Chapter Seven of Hebrews discusses at great length the role of Melchizedek as foreshadowing the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Also: “You are priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” [Ps 110.4].

Vs 19: The previous verse states that Melchizedek is a “priest of God the Most High.” In the verse at hand, he addresses Abram as blessed by “God Most High” and adds “maker of heaven and earth.” I.e., Melchizedek

⁰ This excerpt is lifted from another document on the Lectio home page. Also, see "Expansions on the Book of Genesis" for further information. These two documents should offer sufficient information.

submits his divine priesthood to Abram.

-Vs. 20: *delivered* (*magan*): the object being Abram's enemies. The only other reference of this verb is Prov 4.9: "She will place on your head a fair garland; she will *bestow* on you a beautiful crown." From this verbal root comes the noun "shield."

9 June, Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; and his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. And she said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" And he said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her bosom, and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, hast thou brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this child's soul come into him again." And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and delivered him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son lives." And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth." (1Kg 17.17-24)

This Sunday has a certain significance in that it's the first one belonging to Ordinary Time, the last one being 10th February, a full four months ago. It gives reason to pause and reflect about the Church's greatest feast days starting with Lent and working its way through Easter and Pentecost to the Sundays following up on that last solemnity.

Davar or "word" in the sense of expression translates here as "this" in "And after this." Use of *davar* conveys a fuller sense for anyone listening to the text...the word...such as the earlier account of Elijah providing food for the widow and her household. The story at hand thus is a second *davar* which is connected closely to the first.

The "illness" or *chalah* derives from a verbal root meaning to polish, to smooth, so the idea is that illness smooths a person down gradually. With this in mind, you could also read into *chalah* a kind of purification process. The way by which this illness is conveyed literally is "and his illness was made firm exceedingly," the verb being *chazaq* with the adverb *me'od*. Adding to the drama, the finality of the situation with a widow involved, we have "there was no breath left in him, *neshamah* being the noun for "breath." It differs from the more familiar *ruach* (spirit) and seems more akin in idea to the Greek *psuche*, animating principle. "And man became a living being" [Gen 2.7].

After such a dramatic presentation—keeping in mind that the widow had just escaped starvation—rightly she can say "What have you against me?" She perceived this second of two disasters as being brought on by Elijah but frames it in a way to which we moderns are unaccustomed: "to bring my sin to remembrance." *Havon* means "sin" which often means guilt incurred as a result of sinning. So the idea of *havon* as memory and the actual use of a verb ('to remembrance') intimates that something has been weighing on this widow's conscience and may be related to her son. However, that is not the concern of Elijah whether or not it had been true.

In fact, Elijah is just as indignant towards the Lord as the widow had been and puts his case in strong words: "by slaying her son." As Elijah proceeded to cure the child surely he was determined to undo what apparently the Lord had done. In the meanwhile, the widow remained downstairs listening in as carefully as she could. Surely if she had heard Elijah's complaint, she would have cheered him on.

The Lord had backed himself into a corner and had no choice but to relent to Elijah's request. "The Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah" reads literally "the Lord listened in (*b-*) the voice of Elijah." In other words, his listening became as fully present in him as the boy's soul was about to be in his body. Instead of

neshamah for “soul” the text has *nephesh* which refers to the vital principle of life. “Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” [Gen 9.4]. As for the entry of this *nephesh* into the child, the text reads literally “and returned the soul of the child on his midst,” *qerev* as “midst” and applies to the very center of something.

Just as the text at hand began with *davar*, so it ends with *davar* but the noun here reads as “word” (of the Lord). The widow has come to realize that the divine *davar* lives within the human mouth of Elijah waiting there to reveal itself whenever required. The next chapter begins immediately and opens with mention of this *davar* as coming from outside Elijah to within him: “After many days the word of the Lord came to Elijah.” So while the widow perceives the divine *davar* in Elijah’s mouth it is not necessarily confined there.

16 June, Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Nathan said to David, "You are the man. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul; and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'

2 Samuel 12.7-10

No question, one of the most damning passages in the Bible, *'atah ha'ysh* ('you are the man'). Such was Nathan’s response to the indignation shown by David about the man who had killed the lamb belonging to the poor man. We can become jaded by hearing certain stories repeated over and over, but this one grabs our attention like few others. Nathan the prophet is the person with sufficient courage and access to David to speak like this, having been in his confidence since the beginning of Chapter Seven though nothing more is known about him. Nathan relates to David as Samuel had to Saul. As for his background and the like, we have no information. What’s important about Nathan is that he is identified clearly as a prophet compared with Samuel. Although Samuel did fulfill this role, it wasn’t quite clear yet, for he had been a judge over Israel, its de facto leader, and was succeeded by a wholly different form of government, kingship. Now Nathan moves into that new slot and fits in quite well.

In typical prophetic style, Nathan begins with “Thus says (*amar*; the common verb to speak) the Lord” which means he is function as a mouthpiece for God, only communicating what David needs to hear while being careful not add his own commentary, if you will. The simple words “I would add to you as much more” were the more difficult for David to hear. He doesn’t show surprise, astonishment nor shame that Nathan had privy knowledge of his behavior. Saul behaved quite differently, and David must have been aware of it, given his numerous encounters with the man. However, David’s response—and that amounted to a conversion—rested on a profound sadness and disappointment at having let down the Lord through these words.

Nathan continues with a question, the only one in this excerpt, “Why have you despised the word of the Lord?” That is, why have you despised the *davar* of the Lord? As noted in last Sunday’s entry, *davar* is far more than a word. It’s an expression, a divine presence to the person addressed requiring a response.

Although David gets off relatively lightly, he is hit with the dreadful prospect that strife will remain in his house...his descendants...forever, a fact that proved true. Surely Nathan was conscious of his predecessor Samuel when saying this, let alone being with David to encourage him to build a temple for the Lord. More specifically, he had in mind Samuel’s harsh response to the people when they demanded a king. Just recently Israel went through the trauma of Saul’s descent into madness or the like plus his violent death. Although it appears that David will be spared the same fate, what about his successors? That was an open question for David. Shortly events would spin almost out of control with the sword indeed arising from within his own household.

23 June, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. Zechariah 12.10-11

Shaphak is the verb for “will pour out” and connotes effusiveness as applied to *ruach* or “spirit.” Thus this spirit...wind...is composed of two elements and bestowed more like water than the blowing of wind. The direct recipients of this *shaphak* will be both the house of David (i.e., the kingly line as a whole) and those living in Jerusalem who are directly in contact with the kingship. They have to be on the lookout, careful to detect the effusiveness of the *ruach*, which doesn’t necessarily mean it will be a loud noise. In fact, it will be more along the lines of what Elijah perceived on Mount Horeb: “and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice” [1Kg 19.12]. This comparison is appropriate because in the verse at hand *ruach* has two qualities: “compassion” and “supplication” or *chen* and *techinah*. *Chen* means favor, grace or goodwill and *techinah*, prayer, a cry for mercy.

Both *chen* and *techinah* will be confined, if you will, within the walls of Jerusalem as opposed to outside it, rolling around there so as to permeate its inhabitants. These two divine qualities will make the people sensitive to “look on” or *navat* the one in their midst whom they “have pierced” (*daqar* connotes a running-through or slaying such as a by a sword or spear). The verb *navat* is more a beholding or regarding, a deeper and more extended form of perception than simply looking. It could not happen without that *ruach* consisting of compassion and supplication, the two elements that make the house of David and inhabitants of Jerusalem sensitive to what they had done. Apparently the people were unaware of the scope of their crime and required a reminder. The identity of the pierced man has obvious parallels to Jn 19.37 where it is quoted with respect to Jesus who had just expired on the cross: “They shall look on him whom they have pierced.” Like the situation described in Zechariah, both the piercing and the looking at Cavalry take place after the person in question has been slain. However, the character in Zechariah is not identified, waiting, if you will, all those centuries for him to be revealed as Jesus Christ.

The only specific information we have about this unknown person is that he is an only son and first-born, and chances are he is of royal lineage. Such an identification can be found a similar one regarding Jesus Christ in Jn 1.14: “We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.”

Hadadrimmon is a fertility god who died and was mourned. It can be compared to another god in Ezk 8.14: “there at women weeping for Tammuz.” Although Jerusalem contains the temple of the Lord, this reference to a fertility god indicates its fairly wide cult, wide enough to evoke a comparison.

Chapter Thirteen of Zechariah begins on an uplifting note after this terrible tragedy by saying that within Jerusalem (and that is the focus of the excerpt at hand) “there shall be a fountain opened...to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.” Although it’s not specified, this cleansing seems to refer to the evil the house of David and inhabitants of Jerusalem had committed by slaying that mysterious person in their midst. In other words, he will be transformed into a fountain intended for cleansing, not for drinking.

30 June, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" And he returned from following him, and took the yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah, and ministered to him. 1 Kings 19.16; 19-21

This incident quickly follows upon the call of Elisha, the successor to Elijah who just had a revelation from the Lord on Mount Carmel which changed his life irrevocably. The revelation at hand is noted for its undramatic effect, that “still small voice” [vs. 12] which occurred after considerably more dramatic events as an earthquake. Thus Elijah was to see everything that occurred afterwards in that light. The two adjectives are *demamah* and *daq*. The former derives from a verbal root meaning to be astonished and the latter implies thinness or something minute as a dust particle. To pay attention to a voice (from the Lord) speaking in this fashion requires the greatest attention and sensitivity to what’s going on, especially after Elijah had experienced several violent manifestations in nature. Despite the drama involved, it seemed that Elijah had a hint beforehand that the Lord would not communicate to him through these means.

Being so armed with the ability to listen in a manner unknown to other persons, Elijah could go ahead and confidently make controversial decisions that would affect whole nations. The first is prefaced with the words, “the Lord said” [vs. 15]...and that saying is *demamah* and *daq*...to anoint Hazael as king over Damascus. Elijah did so without hesitation, even though Hazael represented one of Israel’s sworn enemies. Without missing a beat, Elijah leaves Hazael and similarly anoints Jehu as king of Israel. Thus he has set up two antagonists on a national stage which must have roiled most people who lacked his sensitivity to things divine. Surely their response must have weighed heavily upon Elijah although we have no record of this.

More important in the long run, Elijah is bidden to anoint Elisha as his successor. Obviously Elijah had no idea of this man’s character but again proceeded with complete confidence in that divine voice as *demamah* and *daq* to chose him. Quickly Elijah got insight into Elisha. That is to say, he butchered his oxen and gave the meat to his people, a gesture done right on the spot and without hesitation. That’s what Elijah was looking for. The text says that “they ate” meaning Elijah, his family and associates sat down to an unexpected meal along with Elijah. Elisha must have had some explaining to do, of how to introduce this stranger. The same applies to Elijah, giving an explanation of why he called Elisha. Regardless of the good intent, it must have been difficult for Elisha to leave his family on sudden notice.

Now that Elijah has chosen his successor, he had to initiate him into the ways of prophecy (‘to be a prophet in your place’). That seems to be what’s involved by the words “and ministered to him,” the verb being *sharath* which connotes serving along the lines of divine worship or as a priest. “When the priests enter the holy place, they shall not go out of it into the outer court without laying there the garments in which they minister, for these are holy” [Ezk 42.14]. As for the prophetic ministry of Elisha, he doesn’t come into his own until later in Second Kings or after the ascension of Elijah into heaven.

7 July, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory." For thus says the Lord: "Behold, I will extend prosperity to her like a river, and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall suck, you shall be carried upon her hip, and dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and it shall be known that the hand of the Lord is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies. Is 66.10-14

These verses come towards the end of the Book of Isaiah which speak of a joyfulness as expressed in the present awaiting fulfilment in the future. In other words, it has yet to be determined. In a certain sense, this passage is reminiscent of the “new Jerusalem” of Revelation (21.2), that city being mentioned at the end of the book. Note that it is found only two other times there, less than you’d imagine. While Isaiah’s account focuses more upon how a mother (Jerusalem) treats her infant, Revelation has no such images with regard to the Jerusalem from above. As for the text at hand, it’s exceptionally dense and rich, almost too much to expound here, though an outline is presented chiefly through the more important Hebrew words. All in all, a fine excerpt for the rather long haul of Ordinary Time.

As for the two types of joy, there seems to be little or no distinction between them as expressed in the two different verbs in vs. 10, *samach* and *sus*. The latter is found in vs. 14 and has yet to take place. However, when it comes to the expression of such joy, in actuality there is no temporal distinction. *Samach* often refers to joy expressed on one's countenance as in Prov 13.9: "The light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out." *Sus* (the noun 'joy' derives from this same verbal root) applies to a more vigorous expression as leaping up and down as in Ps 119.14: "In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches." In the verse at hand, *samach* is associated with being glad or *gyl*, literally to dance in a circle. "I may rejoice in your deliverance" [Ps 9.14].

Next the Isaiah excerpt moves on to two types of drinking. First comes the image of sucking (*yanaq*) as an infant at the breasts of Jerusalem which are consoling or *tanchumym*, a noun with two other biblical references, Ps 94.19 and Jer 16.7. The verbal root—again, so important in Hebrew, often with multiple meanings—is *nacham* which means to pant after, to lament as well as to comfort. This verb occurs later in vs. 13 with respect to the comfort only a mother can bestow upon her child. As for the breasts, their exact nature pertinent to Jerusalem isn't spelled out but intimates the temple located in it. Perhaps lack of mention of the temple means that it and the city of Jerusalem are one and the same in Isaiah's vision. "And of Zion it shall be said, 'This one and that one were born in her'" [Ps 87.5].

The second image of drinking is *matsats* which is not unlike *yanaq* but connotes sweetness to the taste, this being the only biblical reference. Here such sucking with delight pertains not just to Jerusalem's glory but her abundance of it, *zyz*. This noun has two other references (Pss 50.11 and 80.13), both of which refer to a wild beast, the alternate meaning.

The river which the Lord will extend is one of *shalom* or prosperity, this word commonly known as peace and again is reminiscent of the one ('river of life') associated with the new Jerusalem, Rev 22.1. Isaiah continues with maternal imagery, that is, when he speaks of a young child or infant who will be dandled upon the knees of that city, *shahah* being the verb which means to take delight. "Their heart is grass like fat, but I delight in your law" [Ps 119.70].

Perhaps of all images with regard to joy either in Isaiah or elsewhere in the Bible the one of bones flourishing is the most vivid, totally within you, for it's equivalent to your skeleton...your very internal structure...vibrating or shaking with delight much like the way grass blows this way and that in the wind. The verb at hand is *parach* meaning to break out or to burst forth. "They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God." This verse (13) from Ps 92 is a fitting close to what Isaiah is attempting to communicate almost at the end of his book, "house of the Lord" referring not just to Jerusalem but the temple in her midst.

14 July, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

If you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it. Dt 30.10-14

This text can be broken down into several ways, criss-crossing several words. For example, note the parallel between the two pairs "commands and statutes" and "heart and soul" or *mitsvah* and *chuqah* and *lev* and *nephesh*. We could, for example, take *mitsvah* as belonging to *lev* and *chuqah* belonging to *nephesh*. The first pertains to something that has been ordered and the second, that which has been established with emphasis upon a specific time. *Lev* as heart is the seat of life and *nephesh* as breath or the principle by which the body lives. Both pairs are contingent upon obeying (*shamah*, to hear) "the voice (*qol*) of the Lord." In other words, the divine voice informs the first pair, that which serves to guide a person's life or heart and soul. All this is

contingent upon turning to the Lord, *shuv* being applicable more to a return of one's former life or condition. As for the *mitsvah* and *chuqah*, they are in the "book of the Law" or Torah. And so there exists an intimate relationship between hearing and the Torah. Even reading the Torah is a kind of hearing which parallels the exercise of *lectio divina*. Such reading-hearing effects that *shuv* or return to the Lord.

Mitsvah is singled out further in the text as one that, in a sense, is coyly put as "not too hard" nor "far off." While such words come immediately after speaking about the heart and soul—indeed they are close at hand—they have to be added for emphasis. Nevertheless, the *mitsvah* is at some distance, if you will, from both faculties, lingering in their vicinity. That is why it's necessary to engage in reading Torah. Two rhetorical questions are posed about going after the divine *mitsvah*, as though it were so far off, this for emphasis.

In contrast to the spacial distance one may be tempted to attribute to the *mitsvah*, we have the adjective *qarov* (near) coupled with the adverb *me'od* or "very" in the sense of being excessive. But instead of the divine voice (*qol*) we have the "word" or *davar*. Presumably it's divine though not explicit as such. In other words, God utters his *davar* which is a more concrete manifestation of his *qol*, and that is to be found in the Torah where it's written down for all to see...and to hear. At this juncture both seeing and hearing through the medium of the Torah, while distinct in their own right, for one entity.

To conclude this excerpt, the divine *davar* moves from God into a person's mouth and heart. The mouth replicates the *davar*, if you will as coming from one's heart (*lev*). Note that this is to be implemented, "so that you can do it," do the *davar*.

21 July, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth and said, "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree while I fetch a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes." And Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds, and milk, and the calf which he had prepared and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." The Lord said, "I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Genesis 18.1-13

"And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day" [vs. 1]. This simple word ('and' or *v*) prefaced to the verb *ra'ah* (to see) was noted earlier as an indication of continuous action and here has special meaning for Abraham. It serves to tie in a "seeing" by the Lord, one of a number thus far, with that which the future patriarch has become very familiar. That is to say, his private thoughts, akin to "here-we-are-again-with-another-divine-promise-not-fulfilled," caught him at a place where he had built an altar to the Lord: "and he came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre which are at Hebron" [13.18]. Perhaps by returning to the altar Abraham might renew one of his earlier contacts with the Lord and see what would happen. So here was Abraham sitting at the entrance to his tent staring at the altar with all the earlier memories of divine encounters passing through his mind. Sarah isn't mentioned but was within the tent; undoubtedly she had similar thoughts of past events and was not pregnant despite a divine promise. The two didn't wish to talk with each other, let alone be in each other's presence, hence the separation. Abraham might have quarreled with his wife about all this so decided that the heat outside the tent was better than the heat inside which their argument had produced. Between his building of the altar and the present Abraham had moved about Canaan, sticking pretty close to Mamre; he was almost a hundred years old and not in a position to move about as freely as before. As with earlier appearances, the Lord had to make himself known—seen

⁰This excerpt is taken from "Expansions on the Book of Genesis" on this home page; under the category Old Testament.

(*ra'ah*)—quite clearly due to Abraham's failing eyesight. As for the "door," the Hebrew *petach* refers to an entrance and not necessarily a physical door, something not associated with a tent.

"Heat of the day" applies to the time between noon and four in the afternoon, a time when desert dwellers seek refuge from the sun. During these mid-afternoon hours mirages appear on the horizon, so Abraham may have thought the Lord appearing to him was such a mirage. The earlier divine appearances at this point must have appeared equivalent to a mirage both to Abraham and Sarah simply because they weren't fulfilled. They were too elderly to return to Haran and were stuck in this foreign land of Canaan and worst of all, without an heir. In order to make sure Abraham didn't mistake the appearance for a mirage, the Lord came in the form of three men who "stood in front of him" [vs. 2]. One would have been taken as a mirage and two as seeing double but three was an unmistakable physical presence. First of all, Abraham "lifted up his eyes"...he lifted up his now ancient eyes, barely able to see, a difficulty compounded by the sun shimmering all around him at the hottest time of day. While making this gesture, Abraham "looked" which is the verb *ra'ah* as used in vs. 1, "appeared." Immediately afterwards comes "behold" or *hineh* which had been noted earlier as applicable to a sudden astonishment. *Hineh* serves to introduce the three visitors who stood "in front of him," the preposition being *hal* or better, "upon him." *Hal* gives the impression that Abraham was pressed down and had to raise his eyes (literally) to see them on top of him. Vs. 2 continues with a second sentence: "Abraham ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth." What was Abraham thinking when he ran? His first thought was to distinguish reality from a mirage, and the running suggests that he favored the first. It was unusual to see people out and about during this time with the sun directly overhead. Bowing to the ground was a customary greeting and in this particular instance, with the shimmering heat and Abraham's dim vision, acknowledgment that the visitors were no mirage. *Shachah* is the verb at hand and often used for worship of God: "they bowed their heads and worshiped" [Ex 4.31].

Vs. 3 follows as part of the previous verse with "My lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant." Abraham uses the singular *'adony* for "lord" despite three men being present. Some Christian commentators say that this applies to the one Lord and three persons of the Trinity but chances are it's due, as noted above, to the time of day when mirages and reality can be confused with reality. While face down on the ground Abraham bids him...them...not to pass by but to stay. In addition to *shachah* as a sign of respect, it might reveal some fear and doubt concerning the three men. Who would be walking in the desert at the hottest time of day? Were they up to no good? Secretly Abraham was wishing the men would pass him by and go somewhere else, but desert hospitality compelled him to act otherwise. To play it safe, Abraham bids his unexpected visitors "to rest under the tree." Sarah was alone inside the tent, and he didn't want her to be exposed to these suspicious men in case they posed a threat. While Abraham busied himself getting some refreshment, he had one ear cocked to the tree in an attempt to listen in on their conversation but to no avail. They remained silent as where they came from and to where they were going; Abraham complied with their silence and let it go at that. As for his invitation to take some rest, the verb is *sahad* which connotes a propping up or upholding. "You have given me the shield of your salvation and your right hand supported me" [Ps 18.35]. The image fits well, for it's easy to imagine the three visitors under the tree leaning on their traveling staffs.

Vs. 5 continues with Abraham saying tongue-in-cheek "and after that you may pass on." In other words, I will take care of you during this the hottest time of day but will be delighted when you leave both me and my wife Sarah. To his relief they said, "Do as you have said." In other words, "prepare us some refreshment after which we will be on our way." That's why Abraham went to such great lengths at having Sarah and a servant prepare a meal despite the intense heat: cakes, a tender calf, curds and milk. To do this was no mean feat on sudden notice which meant the three men had to wait in the tree's shade a good part of the afternoon. During that time Abraham kept himself busy—not so much that because others were doing the work—with a feigned busyness so as to avoid contact with his visitors as much as possible. We don't hear about Hagar nor her son Ishmael at this point, but both must have been in the vicinity. Hagar could have approached the mysterious visitors and asked if they knew that angel who intervened on her behalf (cf. 16.7). Perhaps it was one of them. Surely one was responsible but wished to keep this secret from Abraham lest he find out and make life miserable for her. As for the hasty preparation of food, it concludes with "he (Abraham) stood by them under the tree while they ate" [vs. 8]. Abraham was hovering over the three men with one eye on the clock, if you

will, hoping they would eat quickly and be on their way. By this time it must have been evening, for to arrange the preparations was no meat feat despite the help. Abraham was hoping the men would get on the road and not stay the night which would have made it more inconvenient for him and his wife.

After the rush of preparing food the men came out with the dreaded words: "Where is your wife" [vs. 9]? During this time Sarah was inside the tent listening in on the conversation with an occasional furtive glance outside the covering. She was trapped in the tent for some time, really, and was eager to escape and get an ear about what was going on. Even though Abraham went inside the tent (vs. 6), it was very quick, just ample time to tell her what to do. Of course, Abraham was in a bind; the men saw him go inside the tent but didn't realize Sarah was present. Now he was afraid they would enter and do her harm, the time being close to sunset. So after an interval which must have seen a very long time, Abraham was surprised at what happened next. Three men came to visit him but now the text reads (vs. 9), "The Lord said." Here we have a repetition as in vss. 2-3 (three men and the address 'My lord') only now instead of the shimmering heat which Abraham's failing eyesight could have confused with a mirage, the present form of address remains basically the same. Abraham uses the singular address for three men because it was close to dark meaning that all the time these visitors were under the tree. They were disguised in the shade, for shade and intense desert sunlight can confuse one's vision. Throughout the duration Abraham didn't know if he had been serving one or three men. Essentially the same confusion would happen later with his son Isaac when he confused Jacob and Esau, 27.22.

As for this singular lord, he said that he will return in the spring "and Sarah your wife shall have a son" [vs. 10]. The Hebrew for "spring" is *heth chayah*, literally "time of life" or the time when life returns to the earth after the passage of winter and its rains. For Sarah, this phrase intimates more than the coming spring season but the time of birth for her future son so often promised to Abraham by the Lord. This time it was different, a definite time when Sarah will give birth, which was nine months away. However, to the aged Sarah it was long and full of doubt as she "was listening at the tent door behind him" or behind her husband. That means the tent was close to the tree under which the three visitors had rested and took their meal. "So Sarah laughed to herself" [vs. 12]. The verb is *tsachaq* and reflects the same attitude of Abraham in 17.17: "Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed." However, it intimates the name of his future son, Isaac. "To her self" is *beqirbah*, literally, "in her midst" or deep within herself. Immediately Sarah adds "shall I have pleasure (*hednah*)?" This is the only form in the Bible yet is related to the proper name Eden, *Heden*.

Permit a little interjection here. Between the 22nd and 29th we celebrate three related feasts, Mary Magdalene, Joachim and Anne and Martha. All three fit in here just right during this season of relation or vacation. They had direct contact with the Lord but in a manner different from others in the Gospels, including the disciples. They related to Jesus one-on-one, as it were, as a friend from whom nothing special was expected. Jesus could let his guard down among them and not bother focusing upon his mission of redemption which can get quite serious. These were people who met him on the same level and whom he could have recourse when things got rough or when he felt like giving up. All in all, their memory should be cherished as very special in their ordinariness.

28 July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Then the Lord said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know." So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham still stood before the Lord. Then Abraham drew near, and said, "Wilt you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." Abraham answered, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." Again he spoke to him, and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak.

Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." He said, "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. Genesis 18.20-3²4

Vs. 20 continues with the singular Lord speaking within the context of the plural men (vs. 16) and changes tone quite abruptly (it continues into vs. 21): "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave." This is what the Lord wishes to get off his chest to Abraham, not discussing his descendants, that old and familiar topic which could turn him off because he heard it repeatedly. By bringing up the wickedness of these two cities—and surely Abraham heard about it, even as early as his uneasy encounter with the king of Sodom (14.17)—the Lord wished to bring them before Abraham as a vivid reminder of how his descendants should not comport themselves. This outcry (*zehaqah*) is suggestive of sorrow or the cry for aid, not specifically one demanding retribution. "I cried with a loud and bitter cry" [Est 4.1]. Note that *zehaqah* is not from the cities themselves but against them though the Hebrew lacks a preposition. Since Abraham had been dwelling in Canaan about ten years, he too must have joined in on this *zehaqah*, again having encountered the king of Sodom. As for the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, it is unspecified but apparently was well known. Given the location of both cities close to the lowest place on earth, the *zehaqah* funneled up and spread throughout the surrounding area, reverberating against the mountains. It was not unlike the "smoke of the land that went up like the smoke of a furnace" [19.28] that was to occur shortly. The sin is "very grave," the verb *kavad* (to be heavy) being used. And so the cry which funnels up and spreads around returns down to Sodom and Gomorrah, thereby compounding the sin. Hence, everyone had a tacit knowledge of what was going on down there at the lowest point of the earth's surface, a fitting image of the underworld.

"I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know" [vs. 21]. Anyplace in Canaan relative to Sodom and Gomorrah is down, that is, near the Dead or Salt Sea. So despite the *zehaqah* which had penetrated every corner of the territory, the Lord wants to find out for himself. It's akin to 11.5 when the Lord decided to check out the city in the land of Shinar: "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built." That city fared much better than the impending fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. At least the inhabitants weren't destroyed, just their language having been confused, something they could remedy.

Vs. 22 shifts back to the plural or "men" who headed down to Sodom while "Abraham still stood before the Lord." By now it was past twilight and fully dark with only the stars to guide them. The distance wasn't great, and the three men wanted to reach the outskirts of Sodom before dawn in order to reconnoiter the place before entering. At least most people would be sleeping, so they would make a discreet arrival. Besides, sinning is often associated with the cover of darkness, and the majority of people would be stone-drunk, not up until much later in the morning. While the three set off Abraham remained before the Lord even though the same Lord had left for Sodom. Abraham was preparing himself for to intercede for the cities which begins in the next verse and continues to the end of the chapter. He must have been privy to the sin of the two cities both from his visitors as well as persistent rumors. Though his nephew Lot had separated himself some time earlier (cf. Chapter Fourteen), surely they remained in touch. That's why Abraham is persistent for divine mercy toward Sodom and Gomorrah: not just because of Lot and his family but for the people there about whose lives he had greater acquaintance.

"Then Abraham drew near" [vs. 23], the verb being *nagash* which also can refer to the bringing forth of an offering. "Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel" [Am 5.25]? In the case at hand, this *nagash* occurred as Abraham "stood before the Lord." At first glance you'd think this *nagash* was sufficient but such is not the case. That means Abraham had to move—if not physically then spiritually—to get at another side of the Lord, if you will, one where he would beseech him for Sodom and Gomorrah. At ninety-nine years of age, he had nothing to lose, so why not? Abraham had the advantage of

2As with last Sunday's excerpt, this one is taken from "Expansions on the Book of Genesis" posted under Old Testament on this home page.

dealing with the Lord since his arrival in Canaan, including his diversion into Egypt. Thus he was familiar with how often the Lord puts people off in order to test them, almost to the point of taunting them. “Will you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?” Before Abraham posed this question he side-stepped the niceties of obeisance and came right out with showing his confidence and familiarity with the Lord. *Saphah* is the verb which suggests a scraping together as well as putting into a heap. “He shall descend into battle and perish” [1Sam 26.10]. By the way, the Bible has approximately forty-seven different verbs for “to destroy.” As intimated earlier, Abraham got this information about Sodom and Gomorrah through contacts with Lot; thus he did not succumb to the common temptation to blot out the cities, knowing that there had to be at least one righteous (*tsadyq*) person within them (tragically, that turned out different).

Abraham now commences his process of bargaining with the Lord over the *tsadyqim* or righteous ones commencing with fifty and ending with ten in vs. 32. Fifty seems a low enough number to start off with: twenty-five for Sodom and twenty-five for Gomorrah. While the text is concerned with the outcry against two cities (cf. vs. 20), throughout the bargaining process one city is mentioned and that isn’t specified until vs. 26 as Sodom. Surely Abraham must have had in mind those *tsadyqim* who were subject to the tyrannical rule of their king as intimated in 14.17-24 when he came in contact with the man himself. Note the position of these supposed *tsadyqim*: first as “within the city” and followed by those “who are in it” [vs. 24]. The first position is *betok* and the second, *qerev*. The former refers to in the middle (not necessarily the geographic center) of something or of persons whereas the latter to in the midst as in the sense of at the heart of something or someone. Thus the fifty *tsadyqim* are in the middle and heart of Sodom (again, Gomorrah not mentioned). Should they be missing, the city has no reason to exist. As for their presence—and this applies to Abraham starting out with fifty *tsadyqim* and ending with ten—the number is less important than the two-fold position. All shouldn’t be thought of as gathered together under one roof but scattered throughout the city unbeknownst to each other. In vs. 24 Sodom is described as a “place” or *maqom* which as noted earlier, is an inhabited area and can extend beyond the city proper to what we’d call today suburbs. As Abraham starts his bargaining process, this larger expanse of territory seems smaller than first glance, i.e., Sodom and satellite areas, and thus a larger population mass.

“Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked. Far be that from you! Shall not the judge of the earth do right” [vs. 25]? Abraham is putting words into the Lord’s mouth, even to the point of a rebuke. *Chalylah* is the interrogative used here (‘far be it from you’) and *davar* is the noun for “thing,” a word whose verbal root is to speak. Thus that which is done and exists out there had been spoken, and that implies a source...a speaker...if you will. In this sentence Abraham is reminding the Lord that he is judge of all the earth, presupposing that he will have mercy or better, “do right” or *misphpat* (judgment). To his surprise, the Lord responds immediately: “I will spare the whole city for their (the fifty) sake” [vs. 26]. These fifty are to be found *betok* or in the middle, not necessarily *qerev* or in the city’s heart (cf. vs. 24). As in vs. 24, the Lord says that he would spare the city if fifty men were found *qerev* it, the verb there as here being *nasa’* which means “to raise” and was found in 13.6: “the land was not able to bear them.”

And so Abraham discovers that the Lord will “raise” Sodom (again, no mention of Gomorrah) for fifty *tsadyqim*, righteous men. Instead of proceeding downward in number, Abraham must have wished he had started with a higher number...perhaps a hundred or even more. Nevertheless, he is stuck with this reduced number, so the only way he can proceed is by diminution, not increase. With regard to Sodom, the Lord says the “whole place” (*maqom* again) which includes surrounding areas. How to continue now? Abraham figures that a decrease by five *tsadyqim* is adequate; any more would be outright presumption. *Ya’al* is the verb for “take upon” which Abraham uses when speaking with the Lord. It applies to that which comes first and to be willing. “Because it has pleased the Lord” [1Sam 12.22]. Thus *ya’al* is a deferential word, allowing the person addressed to make up his or her mind. The respect implied is enhanced by Abraham calling himself “dust and ashes.” That may be true, but he remains quite presumptuous of divine compassion. Such deference is a lead into asking the Lord if he’ll spare the city if forty-five *tsadyqim* are “there,” *betok* not being used. Abraham speaks not directly of sparing Sodom but of the Lord not destroying it, *shachath* being the verb first noted in 6.11: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight.” Use of *shachath* was a clever ploy on Abraham’s part because it reminded the Lord of that incident just before the flood. If Abraham persuaded the Lord not to repeat this worldwide flood, generations after him would consider him their greatest hero. Neither the Lord nor Abraham

wish to pursue this, so the Lord allows him to continue his bargaining, now at forty *tsadyqim* [vs. 29]. The pace of bargaining picks up now, Abraham being anxious at how things turn out, at what number the Lord will relent. The downward process is interrupted by introduction of the words “I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord,” that is, another use of *ya'al* which reveals Abraham’s tongue-in-cheek deference. It’s that way because while sincere, he is desirous to get the bargaining over with and find out exactly how merciful is the Lord. The Lord, of course, knew this from the beginning yet plays along because of the exceptional situation of Sodom and Gomorrah.

As an introduction to Abraham’s final bargaining with the Lord—he stops at ten *tsadyqim*, figuring that number is more than enough—he bids him not to be angry. The amazing thing about the entire process beginning with vs. 23 is that we don’t pick up even the slightest trace of divine anger. Abraham instinctively knows that he has pushed it as far as he dares, so he relents. That’s why vs. 33 says “And the Lord went his way.” The Hebrew reads literally, “went the Lord as finished to speak to Abraham.” So the entire fate of Sodom and Gomorrah seems up in the air, unresolved. While Abraham started off with fifty *tsadyqim* and went to ten, all the while his mysterious visitors “set out from there” [vs. 16], that is, they set out to Sodom. This advance which begins with twilight and continues into the night hours is the back-drop to Abraham’s bargaining with the Lord. This last verse of Chapter Eighteen, a prelude to the fearful destruction of two cities, ends with “and Abraham returned to his place.” That place or *maqom* was not distance from where he had gone and is to be read in the context of vs. 23, “Then Abraham drew near.” Thus Abraham retreats, if you will, not to a physical *maqom* but to one characterized by his aloneness with Sarah by the tent under the oaks of Mamre. Does he communicate any of this to Sarah? Perhaps not for fear of being made a fool. Sarah had embarrassed herself earlier when she laughed at the prospect of giving birth at an advanced age, so why bother to make things worse? Oh that we had been privy to the conversation both had in their tent that night!

4 August, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?"... (So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun) because sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and strain with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation; even in the night his mind does not rest. This also is vanity. Ecclesiastes 1.2; 2.21-23

-Vanity (*hevel*): the theme of Ecclesiastes which occurs five times in this verse alone. This noun comes from a verbal root meaning “to breathe,” “to exhale” and commonly suggests anything transitory. Not only that, it’s invisible just as one’s breath or the wind. At the same time it has an impact which is felt indirectly.

The following two references give another sense of *hevel*: 1) Job 7.16: “Let me alone, for my days are a breath.” 2) Is 30.7: “For Egypt’s help is worthless and empty.” Compare the outward breathing of *hevel* with *ruach* (breath, spirit) which is close in meaning. However, the latter seems to imply breathing from the nostrils as opposed to the mouth and alternately can mean “to smell.” This fuller sense of *ruach* is perhaps why it was chosen to be representative of divine action, the Holy Spirit.

“All” or everything both in nature and in human affairs which sets the stage for a distinction between these things and that which endures as symbolized in vs. 4 by “the earth remains forever.”

Skill (*kishron*): only found in Ecclesiastes; as well as 4.4 & 5.11 (as ‘goods’). This word derives from a verbal root meaning “to be right.”

“For it.” The Hebrew text has the preposition *b-*, literally, in.

“Great evil (*raha*):” cf. vs. 17 for the adjective (*rah*): “because what is done under the sun was grievous to me.” “But I cannot flee to the hills lest the disaster overtake me and I die” [Gen 19.19].

nVs. 20 is added in parentheses because it helps to make sense of the following verse.

“What has a man.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “What is to a man.” “Strain” (*rahyon*) is found in vs. 11, “all was vanity and a striving after wind.”

“Full of pain (*makovym*):” the Hebrew text lacks “full of.” “Man is also chastened with pain upon his bed and with continual strife in his bones” [Job 33.19].

Work (*hinyn*): first found in 1.13, “It is an unhappy business that God has given to the sons of men;” also cf. vs. 26.

Vexation (*kahas*): cf. 1.18, “For in much wisdom is much vexation.”

Rest (*shakav*): alternately, “to lie down.” “But before they lay down, the men of the city” [Gen 19.4].

Mind (*lev*): often noted as “heart.”

The concluding verse is reminiscent of Job 7.4, “When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I arise?’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until the dawn.”

11 August, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

That night was made known beforehand to our fathers, so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the oaths in which they trusted. The deliverance of the righteous and the destruction of their enemies were expected by thy people. For by the same means by which you did punish our enemies you did call us to thyself and glorify us. For in secret the holy children of good men offered sacrifices, and with one accord agreed to the divine law, that the saints would share alike the same things, both blessings and dangers; and already they were singing the praises of the fathers. Wisdom 18.6-9

The reference, of course, is to the first Passover in Egypt recounted in Exodus 12. The words “that night” which begin this excerpt grab out attention right away because they evoke memory of Israel’s most important event in her history, one that would forever define her, as it is celebrated yearly just as for the very first time. Actually the passage of time is irrelevant. One can imagine succeeding generations pondering those two words “that night” in anticipation of their celebration of Passover.

Wisdom interjects a personal element to the summary of that event by way of making brief comments. According to Exodus, only Moses and Aaron were privy to the significance of the Passover, not “our fathers.” However, use of the verb *progignosko* (“made known beforehand”) intimates that along with these two men, “our fathers” shared in Passover’s meaning, that this phrase refers first to contemporaries of Moses and then to those who handed over the tradition in later generations.

Asphalos is the adverb for “sure” used with the verb *eido*, to know in the sense of to perceive or to behold compared with (*pro*)*gignosko*, to learn or to distinguish.

Epeuthumeo means “trusted” and consists of the root *thumos*, seat of strong feelings and passion with the preposition *epi* (upon) prefaced to the verb. Thus the idea is to have strong feelings-upon.

Prosdechomai is the verb for “expected” with the root *dechomai* (to receive, to await) prefaced with the preposition *pros* or towards thus intimating an awaiting beforehand or eager anticipation.

Wisdom brings out an interesting observation, of paralleling the destruction of the Egyptian forces with salvation (*soteria*) of the Israelites, both by the “same means” (*touto*). The idea is that while the Lord was engaged in smiting “all the first-born” [Ex 12.29], the Israelites, present behind the safety of their lintels painted with the blood of sacrificed lambs, were in the process of being rescued. In other words, both were accomplished simultaneously. Sheltered by this blood “in secret” the Israelites made sacrificial offerings which in effect was the eating of the Paschal lamb. *Krupto* for “in secret” suggests almost an invisible wall set up

between the households of the Israelites and the Egyptians outside.

Homonoia means “one accord” or having one *nomos* which means law but more suggestive of custom, that which arises spontaneously and grows organically from a given people. This is borne out by the verb *diatithemi* which literally means to place through (*dia-*) and implies something done with great preparation and foresight. Here the object in mind is the divine “law” or *nomos* as in *homonoia*.

Wisdom applies the adjective *hagios* for “saints,” referring not so much that all Israelites celebrating the Passover for the first time but those who would do so later on with greater understanding. The verb *metalambano* (literally as to receive with, *meta-*) translates as “would share” with respect to blessings and dangers. Such receiving-with is effected simultaneously with “singing” or *proanamelpo* which consists of the root *melpo* (to sing as well as to dance as in a chorus) prefaced with two prepositions, *pro* and *ana* (before and up or upon). Thus *proanamelpo* suggests an anticipation of the Passover as handed down by their fathers, mentioned twice, and thus probably referring to how succeeding generations had interpreted the first Passover.

15 August, Assumption

And David assembled all Israel at Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the Lord to its place, which he had prepared for it. And David gathered together the sons of Aaron and the Levites...And the Levites carried the ark of God upon their shoulders with the poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord. David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brethren as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy...And they brought the ark of God, and set it inside the tent which David had pitched for it; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. 1 Chr 15:3-4, 15-16; 16:1-2

This passage is broken up into three different sections and deals with David at long last bringing the ark of the Lord to the yet-to-be constructed temple in Jerusalem. Because of this the ark had to reside in a familiar tent. Permanency would come later. It was David’s decision to make the break with the portable ark to a permanent dwelling, revolutionary for Israel. Most likely the inspiration was political first and religious second, for to have the seat of government located in one place would promise greater control and stability. Chances are some people didn’t concur, but they had to go along with this new order. Perhaps they even longed for the days when Saul was king and even further, all the way back to Samuel or before Israel had a king. That prophet moved from place to place as a judge, in some ways reflecting the movability of the Lord’s ark but as the more secular arm of the law even if it were permeated with the divine one.

David “assembled” Israel, the entire nation, the verb *qahal* being used which often applies to a gathering for religious purposes as is the case at hand. Then again, David’s political motivation was not far behind. One gets the impression that every man, woman and child in Israel took part in this sacred pilgrimage presumably from Kiriath-jearim noted in 1Sam 7.1, the place where it resided since its return by the Philistines. Surely memory of that event was in the mind of some who had lived through it, a national tragedy which had a role in precipitating Israel’s eventual demand for a king.

David himself “prepared” a place for the ark (*kun*), a verb which implies establishing and ties in nicely with the actual word for *maqom* (‘place’). En route from (supposedly) Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem were the sons of Aaron and Levites who bore the ark. They did this in a twofold manner: as Moses had “commanded” (*tsavah*) and in accord with the “word” (*davar*) of the Lord, the former flowing from the former. Reference is to Num 7.9: “But to the sons of Kohath he gave none because they were charged with the care of the holy things which had to be carried on the shoulder.” In other words, Moses was not to be involved with any wagons involved with bearing offerings.

And so descendants of these sons of Kohath fulfilled in literal fashion the Lord’s injunction to Moses. David himself prepared the tent to receive the ark, and everyone knew that no longer the tent would be symbolic of the Lord roaming with the tribes of Israel. That imagery of dwelling will make a dramatic shift, one that is

permanent, by the temple's construction. In other words, the tent image shifts to a *maqom* image, "place" as home. The whole of Israel which accompanied David and those bearing the ark knew this would be the last journey of the ark. They intuited that a major change in their perceptions of worship would take place even if the usual sacrifices and accompanying prayers will remain identical. That also had ramifications for the ever threatening Philistines. Once Israel's God is established as their gods had been for generations, they knew it would be much harder to dislodge the Israelites from their midst.

18 August, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Then the princes said to the king, "Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm." King Zedekiah said, "Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you." So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mire, and Jeremiah sank in the mire. When Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern—the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate—Ebed-melech went from the king's house and said to the king, "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they did to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern; and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city." Then the king commanded Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian, "Take three men with you from here, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies." Jeremiah 38.4-6 & 8-10

The context of this excerpt is the besieging of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and eventual capture prophesied by Jeremiah which was on the verge of coming true. While things were getting increasingly desperate, the princes huddled in Jerusalem demanded of their king that Jeremiah be put to death for this calamity. They had support from everyone else who desperately were seeking a scapegoat. Note how the princes draw a parallel between what Jeremiah is speaking (*davar*) and the weakening of the soldiers' hands, *rapha'* being the verb which means to droop or let down. Presumably if Jeremiah kept quiet these hands would be strong...lifted up...and would be capable of repulsing the Babylonians. Continuing this image of "hands," King Zedekiah says that Jeremiah is in the hands of the princes who are, if you will, still strong to deal with this troublesome prophet.

Presumably Jeremiah did not have the welfare of Jerusalem in mind, *shalom* being the word in contrast to *rahah* or evil. To be accused of disavowing *shalom* was one of the worst offences a person could commit, tantamount to treason, for it had both political and religious overtones.

At least Jeremiah was let down into the cistern by ropes and was not cast into it which would have made the princes directly responsible. Yet it was traumatic as Jeremiah slowly lost sight of the light above and the walls started to close in upon him. The closer he got to the bottom, the more the damp stench from down below became stronger. Besides, all sorts of creep-crawlers were lurking there. Perhaps the princes wanted to avoid a quick death for Jeremiah more out of fear of their king as well as any prophecy against them. Even if they devised a plan to make Jeremiah's death look like an accident, chances are that King Zedekiah wouldn't buy it.

As often happens in key or crucial instances in the Bible, an anonymous or little known person steps in and changes everything. Such was the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, himself most likely a captive, who may have had a passing acquaintance with Jeremiah. At least this man appreciated Jeremiah's prophecy against Jerusalem, that it would come true, and persuaded King Zedekiah to rescue Jeremiah. Since he was a eunuch and associated with the king's wife and consorts, he could have persuaded her to look into the matter. The Ethiopian eunuch uses the same word above (*rahah*) when he confronts King Zedekiah, that Jeremiah is not guilty of it. And so a foreigner is responsible for the ultimate survival of the king's household. What happens to this man by the name of Ebed-melech is unknown. Perhaps he continued service the king or even joined the retinue of Jeremiah who certainly must have had followers. Then at a later date Ebed-melech could have brought word of this incident to Ethiopia where it developed into a tradition.

25 August, Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

"For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as an offering to the Lord, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, just as the Israelites bring their cereal offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the Lord. Isaiah 66.18-21

These words come toward the very end of Isaiah and speak of the return of Israel. They can be compared to the conclusion of the Book of Revelation, forming a prototype of the material presented there. In the opening verse the verb "know" is lacking and has only "I" as pertaining to the Lord. This suggests that the Lord is directly associated with Israel's works and thoughts, an intimacy difficult to imagine, the latter being *machashavah* which often pertains to evil machinations as in Gen 6.5: "and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Furthermore, the Lord is coming...present tense as tied in with the direct association just noted...to "gather" not just Israel but all other nations, the verb being *qavats* as to collect and often used with the gathering of exiles.

On one hand the Lord is coming to gather every nation on earth (presumably to Jerusalem) whereas on the other hand, these nations are about to come and see the Lord's "glory" or *kavod*. Thus the nations have not yet taken the step to approach the Lord but are ready to do so. While waiting to do this, the Lord will give a "sign" (*'oth*) for them to discover. We don't have a clear indication of this sign nor do the peoples, *'oth* implying something visible for all to behold. However, the Lord leaves a clue, namely, that this sign is literally "in" (*b-*) the people. That means they will have to turn their attention away from what is visible to what is not so manifest in order to discover it. In other words, some persons among the nations will bear this *'oth* which has yet to be pointed out, and they consist of the "survivors" or *pelytah*.

It seems that before all these people of the earth come to see the Lord's glory in Jerusalem, the Lord will pick out "survivors" who have escaped. This group, presumably quite small from the mass of humanity, has undergone an unspecified type of trial and purification which the rest of humanity doesn't know about. In other words, they will not be going to Jerusalem with everyone else but in the other direction, to "the nations," some of which are mentioned. You could say that such people already have recognized they bear that *'oth* or sign in the last paragraph and have no need to embark upon their journey forward. Instead, they are to go back and speak of God's *kavod* "among the nations" or in (*b-*) them. We could say that the *'oth* they have realized as being *b-* or in them is a reflection of divine glory *b-* or in the nations. Once the nations realize that, God's fame and glory will be recognized fully.

The "brethren" or those from the nations will form a "offering" or *minchah*, a term which often pertains to a sacrifice. This revelation of the brethren residing among the nations more or less hidden from sight means that they will form the sacrifice to be performed later which "all nations and tongues" shall witness. That's why the Lord speaks of all modes of transpiration, to get them all to Jerusalem as quickly as possible. Not only will those who have remained tucked away from sight among the *goyim* become a sacrificial offering, but some will become priests and Levites, those responsible for making these offerings.

1 September, Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

My son, perform your tasks in meekness; then you will be loved by those whom God accepts. The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself; so you will find favor in the sight of the Lord. For great is the might of the Lord; he is glorified by the humble. Seek not what is too difficult for you, nor investigate what is beyond your power. The affliction of the proud has no healing, for a plant of wickedness has taken root in him. The mind of the intelligent man will ponder a parable, and an attentive ear is the wise man's desire.

Sirach 3.17-18⁶ 20 & 28-29

,A footnote in the RSV says that "other authorities add as verse 19, 'Many are lofty and renowned, but to the meek he

Any text written in Greek contains numerous prepositions either free-standing or prefaced to verbs or nouns, sometimes two together. This gives for an especially rich sense of the text virtually impossible to translate. In the Sirach excerpt at hand, we find numerous such examples.

Diexago is the verb for “perform” which consists of the root *ago* (to lead, to carry) prefaced with two prepositions, *dia* and *ex* (through and from). Thus we have a sense of a leading which is first “through” and then “from” with regard to one’s “tasks” or *ergon* which also means business or the task at hand. And so this through-from activity, if you will, is to be effected in “meekness” or *praos*. Implied is that people will be observing this double action which will cause them to show you love, *agapao* (the verb from which derives *agape*). These people don’t have *agape* on their own but are motivated by God or those whom he “accepts” or *dektos* (adjective as acceptable).

So while these people hold out the prospect of *agape* (the verb is in the future tense), there’s the need to “humble” oneself (*tapeinos*, adjective) which hopefully will lead to God showing you “favor,” *charis* (also means grace). Although it isn’t very explicit, the text holds out the possibility that this positive relationship with God and one’s fellows will come to pass. In other words, there’s an element of doubt or probability. So instead of detracting from the text or one’s expectations, the sense of adventure, if you will, is enhanced. Thus the element of inevitable predictability is knocked out in favor of some doubt. This makes the rest of the excerpt more understandable.

Chalepos means “difficult” and connotes an element of harshness. Since the element of probability is involved as just noted, this cautionary advice fits in just fine. Two words with regard to searching are used here: 1) *exetasso* is the verb for “seek” which has the preposition *ex* (from) prefaced to the root suggesting a seeking-from or a more thorough search than usual. 2) *dianoemai* or “investigate” which consists of the verbal root for mind (*nous*) prefaced with the preposition *dia* (through), i.e., to investigate-through. The author has in mind cautioning his son (that can be the listener as well) against pride which suffer from a certain “affliction” or *epagogo* which means a bringing (*ago* again as with *diexago* above) upon (*epi*). This pride is so powerful and dangerous that it’s likened to a plant of “wickedness,” *poneria* meaning a bad state or condition which is totally worthless.

In contrast to this extreme of *poneiria* we have a man who is “intelligent” or *sunetos* which also means wise. It is comprised of the verbal root *tithemi* (to set, to place) prefaced with the preposition *sun* or with, that is, one who has the ability to place-with things or to set them together for assessment. Such a person has not so much a “mind” but a *kardia* which more specifically means heart.

Finally, this man has the “desire” or *epithumia* (*thumos* or passion which is *epi* or upon, the preposition signifying intensity) for an ear which is “attentive,” *akroatos* meaning one which is inclined to hearing.

8 September, Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

For what man can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern what the Lord wills? For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail, for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind. We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labor; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy Spirit from on high? And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and men were taught what pleases you and were saved by wisdom. Wisdom 9.13-18

This passage begins with two rhetorical questions as to the human inability of being privy to things divine. We have the “counsel” and “will” of God, *boule* and *thelo*, the former suggestive of what God plans and the latter its implementation. Both are beyond human learning and discernment. *Gignosko* and *enthumeomai* are the verbs which more accurately refer to the desire to know or to figure things out and literally, a laying-to (the preposition *en* or in prefaced to the verb) one’s heart or *thumos* which is considered the seat of emotions. In

reveals his secrets.” Thus this verse is left out.

other words, Solomon is speaking of the human attempt to bring God to the human level through the intellect and emotions, an impossible feat. Perhaps Solomon had in mind the glory of the Lord which filled the newly constructed temple, that is, with a cloud of concealment (cf. 1Kg 8.11).

The two verbs just mentioned are supplemented, if you will, with “reasoning” and “designs” or *logismos* and *epinoia*. The former pertains to all sorts of reasoning, especially trying to figure things out, whereas the latter to the power of thought and inventiveness. Both are burdensome with respect to a “mind” or *nous* which is “thoughtful” or *poluphrontidos*. This adjective is prefaced with another adjective, *polus* (much, many) to the noun *phrontis* which means thought in the sense of care and attention, and *phrontis* is in contrast to the already mentioned *enthumeomai*, *logismos* and *epinoia*. In other words, this capacity can be overlooked in favor of the human tendency to usurp to itself anything belonging to the divine sphere or should that fail, deny its existence out of anger of being frustrated. So while the passage at hand goes on at some length concerning the folly of humans to know and even control God, Solomon is urging, albeit quietly and indirectly, that we keep our attention fixed upon this faculty of *phrontis*. It seems to be the stepping-stone to “wisdom” or *sophia* and hence the descent of the *Pneuma* (Spirit).

The effect upon our faculty of *phrontis* by *sophia* and *Pneuma* results in a setting aright of our earthly ways, the verb being *diorthoo* which literally means a making straight-through, the preposition *dia* (through) being used as a preface.

In sum, the several faculties as noted with regard to the human ability and desire to attain God with the aim of displacing him are disciplined and purified as a result of this setting aright, pleasing God and being saved by Wisdom.

15 September, Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshiped. And he said, "If now I have found favor in thy sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray thee, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thy inheritance." And he said, "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord; for it is a terrible thing that I will do with you. "Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. (Vs. 12: Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither you go, lest it become a snare in the midst of you). You shall tear down their altars, and break their pillars, and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God). Exodus 32.7-11 & 13.14

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down; for your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves’ [vs. 7]. One gets the impression that Moses made himself quite at home in the cloud; finally the Lord bade him to return to his people “whom you brought up,” not the Lord, as though he were shifting responsibility away from himself onto Moses. Surely Moses must have been affronted by this statement but realized something was up, and it wasn’t good. It turned out that they “have corrupted themselves,” *shachat* also meaning to act wickedly. “When a man strikes the eye of his slave, male or female, and destroys it, he shall let the slave go free for the eye’s sake” [21.26].

Vs. 8 continues seamlessly with “they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them” and continues with the fact that Israel had made a molten calf which they worshiped. In other words, the Lord lets Aaron off the hook, at least his direct involvement. Rightly does the Lord observe how quickly Israel abandoned him, *derek* being the “way” which is more than a passage through the desert but the revelation on Sinai. The second half of vs. 8 has the Lord quoting Israel, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up

out of the land of Egypt!" That's why in the previous verse the Lord said to Moses, "your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt." So Moses has to leave the security of the cloud on Mount Sinai and deal with this near mutiny.

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people and behold, it is a stiff-necked people' [vs. 9]. "I have seen" suggests that after spending some time with Moses concerning the ark, the Israelites grabbed his attention rather suddenly. In fact, he seems shocked at this sudden apostasy put as "stiff-necked" or *qasheh*, an adjective meaning hard as well as heavy. The Lord repeats this in Dt 9.6: "for you are a stubborn people."

"Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation" [vs. 10]. The words "now let me alone" come from the Lord who is both hurt and angered, a mood which can have ominous consequences. The verb here is *nuach* last noted in 23.12 with respect to resting on "day seven" after six days of work. Instead of this use of *nuach*, the Lord wishes to be left alone that he may vent his "wrath" or *'aph* which fundamentally means nostrils. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses" [4.14]. *Charah* is the verb for "may burn hot" as also found in 4.14...so hot that they will be cooked for eating ('consume'). In this verse the Lord is making a distinction between the Israelites and Moses ('of you I will make a great nation'). That means all the Israelites will be exterminated leaving Moses alone with his wife and son, Zipporah and Gershom, going back to the days when he had been in the same area of Sinai at the service of Jethro. Surely the Lord had this in mind, that Moses would not have to migrate, just stay where he was at the foot of Mount Sinai. After all, it was the place he besought Pharaoh to go in order to make sacrifice. Perhaps the Lord might even invite him to return to the cloud along with his family.

"Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel your servants to whom you swore by your own self." This first half of vs. 13 contains the argument on Moses' part which won over the Lord, even more so than the fear of being mocked by the Egyptians. Such an appeal goes all the way back to before the Israelites had migrated to Egypt, of mentioning the three patriarchs with whom the Lord had dealt. Note that Moses slyly uses the name Israel instead of Jacob; while both are interchangeable, the latter was more commonly used in Exodus. In this way Moses would be mentioning the patriarch and the people in one breath. As for swearing (*shavah*) "by your own self," the Hebrew reads simply *bak* or "in you." Vs. 13 continues with the promise the Lord himself had made in Gn 22.17: "I will indeed multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. As for this plea by Moses, its location should not be forgotten, the desert or an in-between-land, neither Egypt nor Canaan but in a place where anything can happen. With all that in mind, "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people" [vs. 14]. As for the verb "thought," it is the familiar *davar* used throughout Exodus which means to speak. So Moses succeeded in "silencing" the Lord for the very first time, far more significant than any miracle or deed done thus far or that he will ever do. In fact, to silence the divine *davar* by presenting a formidable, cogent argument is Moses' victory and the real secret, if you will, that the Book of Exodus contains.

22 September, Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end, saying, "When will the new moon be over that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances, that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and sell the refuse of the wheat?" The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds." Amos 8.4-7

Two types of unfortunates are given here, the "needy" and the "poor" or *'evyon* and *hany*. The former pertains to those who are oppressed or wretched whereas the latter is pretty much the same but with the added dimension of having special reverence toward God. Because both categories are helpless, they are subject to abuse without anyone taking notice of their fate. Those who maltreat them are on the constant look out for the Sabbath to be concluded that they may return to their business. That means they dreaded its weekly appearance which came too quickly. In addition to this, they had to contend with the more or less monthly appearance of the new moon. With that in mind, their time for oppressing the poor is limited, hence their real reason for getting rid of them. Actually the exact reasons for this vile conduct aren't given, just that they do it.

And so the words of Lev 19.35-6 must have haunted them: “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah and a just hin.”

Ge'on is the noun for “pride” which generally has a different meaning than the English translation. It refers to divine majesty as in Ex 15.7: “In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries.” For a specific reference to the patriarch Jacob, cf. Ps 47.4: “He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves.” In other words, *ge'on* doesn't pertain to Jacob in and by himself but to the Lord. One more familiar parallel is 1Sam 15.29: “The glory of Israel will not lie or repent; for he is not a man that he should repent.”

Instead of the more familiar *kavod* (that intimates heaviness), we have *netsach* which connotes a certain brightness as well as perfection as completion. At the same time, those causing problems for the need and poor are reminded of the patriarch Jacob, of what he had gone through which, if they were open enough, could make them reflect upon him. After all, Jacob was in some ways less than a savory character.

29 September, Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come!...Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory and stretch themselves upon their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David invent for themselves instruments of music; who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! Therefore they shall now be the first of those to go into exile and the revelry of those who stretch themselves shall pass away. Amos 6.1 & 4-7

This is the second reading in a row from Amos about evildoers who could care less for their fellow man. Both excerpts can be taken as a remote preparation for Advent which isn't terribly distant. A significant amount of time has passed since the conclusion of the Lenten-Easter-Pentecost cycle, and not long from now we'll be requiring a renewal of spirit. And so the warnings provided by both excerpts come at a time when the last liturgical cycle has disappeared over the horizon behind us, if you will, while the new one of Lent-Christmas-Epiphany lays still not visible over the horizon in front of us. This sense of being in between two grand liturgical cycles is heightened by where we are now, towards the end of summer and return to full time work and school.

In this second excerpt from Amos we have a stinging indictment for those who feel secure behind the walls of Zion or Jerusalem. Although the text omits vs. 2-3, they are helpful to understand the current situation. They refer to two cities in Syria, Calneh and Hamath as well as Gath of the Philistines who are more powerful and well-off than Jerusalem yet are pretty much in the same situation. However, they may be excused since they do not have the same relationship Israel has with the Lord. Though not mentioned in the text, those so “at ease” in Zion must have cast many furtive glances at those people who were not burdened by the divine Torah and could carry on as they wished.

Amos speaks of the “ruin of Joseph,” *shever* being the noun which refers more to a breaking down or breaking into pieces. “And its (Israel) breaking is like that of a potter's vessel which is smashed so ruthlessly” [Is 30.14]. In the passage at hand, such *shever* is all the more poignant insofar as it refers to the patriarch Joseph. He was responsible for rescuing Egypt during a famine and for giving refuge to his brothers and his father, Jacob. Their descendants remained in that country for some four hundred years and had flourished, after which they returned to Israel. So for that heritage resting upon the foresight of Joseph to be broken is a supreme tragedy. Also Israel should keep in mind that Joseph had saved Egypt from famine. If he had saved the superpower of that age, neglecting his memory would signal doom for Israel.

As the last verse says, the inhabitants of Zion are destined for exile, the nature and time of which isn't spelled out, given more as indefinite threat but with the intent to repent and avert another displacement. This can be taken as an indirect warning to learn from history, of past exiles and what had resulted from them. Apparently this is rarely remembered prior to each exile in Israel's history.

6 October, Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

(In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets); but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high... For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will. Hebrews 1.2-3 & 2.2-4

Since the reading begins with vs. 2, the first verse which begins Hebrews is added in parentheses for clarity. The following is excerpted from Notations On Hebrews, also on this home page.

Vs. 2: but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

A continuation of vs. 1; “but” is lacking in the Greek text. Note the preposition *epi* (upon) which also has the sense of “through” which follows from the earlier preposition *en*. It is as if to say this divine “inness” flows outward to the period of time the author has in mind. Such “inness” proper to the prophets may be said to be transferred to the “inness” of the Son, *en huio*, thereby coming to fulfillment. There is a definite connection between the Son and “last days” (*eschatos*), this adjective being closely associated with the immanent expectation of Jesus Christ. “He was destined before the foundation of the world but as made manifest at the end of the times for your sake” [1 Pt 1.20].

It is interesting that in Hebrews the (plural) term “day” is used, i.e., a twenty-four hour period as opposed to a week, month or year which intimates that time is short and therefore can be measured in a more manageable framework.

For another use of *eschatos*, cf. Acts 2.17 with regard to Pentecost, citing the prophet Joel: “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” Note the use of *eschatos* here as pertaining to the Holy Spirit in distinction to the Son in Hebrews.

Verse one has “God spoke” whereas vs. 2 has “he has spoken,” the latter use of *laleo* being more definitive or specific, that is, with regard to the Son. This speaking is done literally “to us” (dative case without preposition) “in the Son.” Such is the word order of this verse.

Kleronomos: heir, which may be seen in light of “fathers” and “prophets,” the obvious successor and inheritor to these two groups. “And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” [Rom 8.17]. The third noun has the preposition *sug/sun* (with) prefixed to it. In Hebrews the heir has “all things” which can include people as well as objects.

The uniqueness of this divine heir is shown by the fact that through (*dia*) him God created the world or *aion* (plural). In distinction to *kosmos*, this term is related to ages or long yet limited stretches of time, so the Son-as-heir receives not just persons and object but successions of time or ages. For another use, cf. Rom 12.2: “Do not be conformed to this world.”

Vs. 3: He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

This is obviously the same “he” as the Son and heir of the previous verse, so it is interesting to keep in mind these two characteristics transferred to the verse at hand. The verb “to reflect” is lacking in the Greek which has the present participle *hon*, (being); it is connected with the noun *apaugasma*, radiance, in the sense of a reflected brightness. This is the only New Testament use of the word and suggests Jn 12.45: “And he who sees me sees him who sent me.” Here John uses the verb *thereo* from which is derived the noun *theoria*. I.e., such *theoria* is a kind of participation in the nature of *apaugasma*.

Connected with *apaugasma* is God's glory or *doxa*, the Greek term for the Hebrew *kavod* as associated with Moses' vision: "The glory of God settled on Mount Sinai" Ex 24.16]. *Kavod* derives from a verbal root meaning "to be heavy" and implies that the divine presence "dropped" from heaven to earth by reason of its weight.

Very stamp or *charakter*: used with the verb *phero*, to bear, almost in the sense of transporting something. This noun refers to a mark or figure which either had been stamped or burned, that is, having become made permanent and visible to all. For a use in the LXX, cf. Lev 13.28: "For it is the scar of the burn."

Charakter is used in conjunction with *hupostasis* (nature), the substantial quality of a person. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" [Heb 11.1]. Thus *charakter* is a kind of deep impression of this divine nature which is borne (*phero*) or carried about from place to place, almost as though it had mobility.

As noted, the verb *phero* is used with reference to a "static" divine nature. In the same sentence it applies to the universe (*ta panta*), literally "the all." Here is a shift from imagery of brightness to that of speech which is less discernable in the sense of it being available for perception: *rhema* (word) and *dunamis* (power). The former means anything uttered by the living voice or a sound which has a definite meaning (also from the human voice). It differs from *lego* (from which comes *logos*) in the sense of being the subject of speech. Christ is presented as the *Logos* of God, not the *Rhema* of God. "So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" [Rom 10.17]. In the verse at hand, *dunamis* naturally flows from *rhema* and supports "the all" which keeps in line with its Stoic application. "For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power" [1 Cor 4.20].

The second sentence of 1.3 is a shift from the cosmic role of the Son/heir to the human sphere, more specifically, to that of purification or *katharismos*, as if the two principles of the first sentence (the visibility of "glory" and the sound of "word") came to bear as one force upon the newly introduced subject of purification. "And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord" [Lk 2.22]. *Katharismos* with respect to sins almost appears as secondary to the primary sitting down at God's right hand or *en dexia*, "in the right hand."

The phrase on high (*en hupselous*, plural) contains a second "in" as if to emphasize that Christ was thoroughly situated above the sphere of human activity despite having made purification. Most likely purification here pertains to his suffering and death. Cf. Ps 110.1 (of which Hebrews in many ways is a commentary): "The Lord said to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'" The Greek text of the LXX has instead of the preposition *en*, *ek* (out, from), as if to show the derivative nature of this sitting. The Hebrew text has the preposition *l*-prefixed to "right hand," showing direction-towards-which.

Compare *megalosune* (majesty) with Heb 8.1: "We have such a high priest, one who is seated at (*en*) the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven."

Chapter Two

Vs. 2: For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution.

This verse is a prelude to the question of the next verse.

Logos: message which to the sensitive reader suggests Jesus Christ as *Logos*...Word...as expression of the Father: "the very stamp of his nature" [1.3].

Two pertinent references with regard to angels: "You received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it" [Acts 7.53]. "And it (the offspring promised) was ordained by angels through an intermediary" [Gal 3.19]. The divine Law or Torah was handed to Israel through Moses as mentioned in Deuteronomy and as given on Mount Sinai.

In the verse at hand, the *logos* can be taken as fulfilment of Torah, that is, as being valid (*bebaios*) or trustworthy. "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants" [Rom 4.16]. This verse may be perceived as taking *logos* and associate it with grace (*charis*) to establish the new order as distinct from Judaism.

Transgression (*parabasis*): literally, a "going over" or besides (*para*), suggesting parallel action or one imitating the other to a certain degree without participating in its reality. "Why then the Law? It was added

because of transgressions" [Gal 3.19], because of "goings over." Such attempts are not so much at being at directly odds with the divine Torah but of paralleling it, as it were, by perverse practices as idolatry.

Disobedience (*parakoe*): a second *para* word, here a "hearing aside" or beside. which can be one of over-hearing or an unwilling to hear. "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church" [Mt 18.17]. Note this refusal is with reference to an entity larger than an individual, the church or *ekklesia*.

Just retribution (*misthapodosia*): a term composed of *misthos* and *apodidomai*; here it means the sense of payment of wages or recompense, reward as well as punishment. Cf. Heb 10.35 & 11.26. This term is applied to the transgression and disobedience or those forms of activity "running beside (*para*)" what God had ordained and proclaimed through the manifestation of Jesus Christ.

Vs. 3: how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him.

The answer to a rhetorical question posed in vs. 3. It is interesting to consider the verb escape (*ekpheugo*) as the natural consequence of those two *para* words noted in the last section: transgression and disobedience. Here the notion of flight results by neglecting (*ameleo*) salvation; not so much rejecting it but by being unmindful of its reality. Salvation or *soteria* is equivalent to the person of Jesus Christ or the content of that "message declared by angels." Again, it may be seen in light of the parallel realities of *para-basis* and *para-koe*.

The salvation at hand is *telikautos*, such (a) great, an adjective usually referring to bulk or duration.

In the second sentence of vs. 3 note the connection between declaring (*laleo*: the common term for speaking or talking) and at first (*archen labousa*), literally, "having received a beginning (to be spoken)." Here the noun *arche* is used which designates the first principle or origin of all things and is freighted with divine meaning. Such divine origins is all the more prominent by the Lord (*Kurios*); in the verse at hand the preposition *dia* (through) is used.

The time signified by "at first" is not specified but reference to "us" as applied to those who heard Jesus can mean those churches founded by the apostles. Note the emphasis upon hearing which attests (*bebaioo*) to salvation. This verb connotes fastness and stability. "And they went forth and preached everywhere while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it" [Mk 16.20].

Vs. 4: while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will.

At the same time the previous verse has the Lord declaring salvation, the verse at hand has the concurrent reality of God bearing witness or *sunepimartureo*. This verb contains two prepositions as prefixes: *sun* (with) and *epi* (upon) which give extra force to the root *martureo*. I.e., God not only bears witness but does so "with" and "upon" at the same time or from the two directions of horizontal and vertical. "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" [Rom 8.16].

This *sun + epi-martureo* is effected by four means which may be outlined as follows. Keep in mind this dual prepositional relationship with all four and that they are related to the Holy Spirit:

- 1) signs (*semeion*): pointing to a reality beyond the sign itself. "Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers" [1 Cor 14.22].
- 2) wonder (*teras*): in the sense of a prodigy or something unusual. In the New Testament this word is found in the plural and joined with *semeion*. "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe" [Jn 4.48].
- 3) miracle (*dunamis*): more properly, "strength," and concerned with the result of a given event. "And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed" [Acts 8.13]. Note that *dunamis* is not used in the New Testament as pertaining to Christ's miracles.
- 4) In the Greek text "gift" is not used; distributed (*merismos*) or "division" seems more attune to the Holy Spirit's nature as at Pentecost: "tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them" [Acts 2.3]. The verb here is *diamerizo*: a "dividing through (*dia*)."

All four are in accord with God's will or *thelesis*, the only use of this term in the New Testament,

thelema being the more common word.

13 October, Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him; and he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But he said, "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will receive none." And he urged him to take it, but he refused. Then Naaman said, "If not, I pray you, let there be given to your servant two mules' burden of earth; for henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the Lord. 2Kings 5.14-17

Although this excerpt is midway through the dramatic cure of the arch-enemy of Israel, Naaman, or the commander of the king of Syria's forces, it has the advantage of dropping us off in the thick of the narrative. The preliminaries have taken place, that is, the king had sent Naaman to Israel. Interestingly, the decision by this, the most powerful man in the world at the time (Naaman being second), was done at the suggestion of an anonymous Israelite girl who had been taken captive. Despite her age, she was thoroughly familiar with the healing powers of Elisha. Thus a major event turned upon the intervention of someone who is completely anonymous and who passes off the scene as soon as she had appeared.

It turned out that Naaman came to Elisha which is equivalent to the most important and reviled military leader entering enemy territory. Perhaps the slave girl had more to say about Elisha which had gone unrecorded, hence this unprecedented visit which someone uninformed could interpret as a prelude to an invasion.

Another intervention not unlike the anonymous slave girl brought Naaman to his senses after Elisha told him to bathe in the Jordan River instead of coming off with a dramatic cure in front of a crowd. These people are Namaan's servants who said "If the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?" Perhaps they also had in mind that if Naaman left Israel in a rage of anger, it could be interpreted as an invasion which was not the intent of the Syrian king. So a whole bunch of thoughts and emotions came flooding into Naaman's mind as he was about to ride off with his flesh decaying from leprosy.

Originally Naaman had a present for Elisha which he didn't give during their first inauspicious contact. However, Namaan insisted that Elisha take it once he had been cured. We can imagine that the anonymous slave girl and the equally anonymous attendants of Namaan were standing on the banks of the Jordan as Naaman took his first steps into the water with some hesitation and even thoughts of potential revenge not only against Elisha but Israel as a whole. At least he would have a pretense to ask his master for permission to turn his visit into what the Israelites feared most, an invasion. Apparently Namaan had the forces to do it, for "company" (vs. 15) can mean an army as well as an encampment.

As for the excerpt itself, it centers more upon the give and take of a gift from Namaan and Elisha. Namaan comes to the conclusion that "there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" which suggests that he believed in multiple gods, obviously not uncommon for the time. Although Namaan acknowledges this, he retains belief in his own god (Rimmon) but only to save face when he enters the temple of that god with the king of Syria. Namaan asks for "two mules' burden of earth" or '*adamah*. That would form sufficient base, if you will, to stand upon when he offers sacrifice either in the temple or Rimmon or near it. Compare '*adamah* (the actual soil) with '*erets* or "earth" as in his remarks, "no God in all the '*erets*." Thus '*adamah* and '*erets* are one and the same, the latter being an extension in the land of Syria the presence of Israel and therefore of the Lord. We don't have any information how this worked out in future years or after the death of Namaan. Perhaps some Syrians did carry on the tradition of holding this '*adamah* as sacred, a tiny but significant memorial within their own '*erets*. As for the anonymous slave girl, she could have returned to Syria and in later years been responsible for maintaining this bit of '*adamah* in her land of exile.

20 October, Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Then came Amalek and fought with Israel at Rephidim. And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat upon it, and Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword (14-16: And the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord is my banner, saying, "A hand upon the banner of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.") Exodus 17.8-13

Although this excerpt ends at vs. 13, vs. 14 through 16 are added to make it complete. The text at hand comes from *Expansion on the Book of Exodus*, also on this homepage.

Amalek can be taken as an individual or tribe first recorded in Gen 14.7. While Moses resided with Jethro in Midian after he slew the Egyptian, he must have had some contact with these desert nomads who understandably resented the presence of such a multitude of people encroaching upon their territory with its limited resources. It turned out that Rephidim was a place more trying than lack of water. However, once word got out—how could such a miracle of water springing from a rock be kept quiet?—Amalek quickly drew near to this abundant source of water which had appeared miraculously. Not only did that tribe come but others must have attempted to take advantage of such a boon.

In vs. 9 Moses for the first time addresses Joshua, his eventual successor, someone who had not been mentioned before though he must have played some role when Moses had dealt with Pharaoh. Moses bade Joshua to pick men to fight with Amalek. "Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." Obviously Moses had seen Amalek approaching far off which gave him, Joshua and the elders time to prepare. They had to do this quickly, for since they had left Egypt in such haste, chances are they brought as little as possible, let alone weapons with which to do battle. Joshua had faith in Moses, that is, when he bore that rod (*mateh*) which had just struck the *tsur* to produce water and even more important, the one which Moses used to divide the Red Sea (cf. 14.16). Most likely that the hill (*givhah*) forms part of that *tsur* or rock upon which the Lord had stood. That's why Moses spontaneously said to Joshua that he was going there, not leading men into battle, something Joshua understood from his earlier experience with him. Better to be close to the Lord which would insure victory in battle. How could Moses not succeed? He would be on top of the *tsur* which he had struck with his rod, the same rod which hopefully will smite Amalek. Accompanying Moses was his brother Aaron and Hur, the first mention of this man whose identity isn't clear but apparently one of the elders of Israel. "Behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a cause, let him go to them."

"Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed" [vs. 11]. The issue is one of prevailing, *gavar* fundamentally meaning to be strong or to confirm. "When our transgressions prevail over us, you forgive them" [Ps 65.3]. Nothing is said about the *mateh* or rod, but presumably it was in Moses' hand because one hand is mentioned. Since it was an issue of becoming tired of holding one hand (with the *mateh*), this could not continue for long, so both Aaron and Hur made Moses sit down on a rock (*even*: a stone of any kind) after which they held up both of Moses' hands, that is, one with the *mateh* and the other without. "So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun" [vs. 12]. The adjective "steady" is a noun in Hebrew (*emunah*) which means faithfulness ('amen' is derived from it). "A God of truth and without iniquity" [Dt 32.4]. No time is given as to when this battle with Amalek began, just that it lasted until sunset. That means Moses, along with Aaron and Hur as his support, had his hands (and rod) extended in "faithfulness" for the bulk of the day, especially during the afternoon heat. "And Joshua mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword" [vs. 13]. Here a distinction is made between Amalek (the leader or king) and his people, not noted earlier. The verb for "mowed down" is *chalash* which means to prostrate, to vanquish and to waste away. Two other references are found in the Bible (Job 14.10 and Is 14.12), the latter being cited here: "How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!" Obviously the Israelites engaged in battle had attention upon their foe whereas Joshua made an agreement with Moses to

occasionally glance up on the rock to see if Moses' hand and rod were extended. Once Joshua saw Aaron and Hur supporting him, he knew victory was assured.

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven’ [vs. 14]. This is the first mention of “book” in Exodus, *sepher* meaning that which is inscribed and most likely applies to a scroll of parchment or papyrus which was very common in Egypt made from the reeds of the Reed (*suph*) or Red Sea. Even in their hasty departure from Egypt the Israelites must have grabbed some papyrus, knowing that it would be valuable later on for keeping records, this material not being available in the desert. *Sepher* is noted later with respect to the covenant: “Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people” [24.7]. The victory over Amalek in a book/scroll is the first recorded event; the more significant one of the Passover and crossing of the Red Sea are not put down in a *sepher*. They were too important to be entrusted to papyrus; verbal transmission would ensure their remembrance for future generations. Although such transmission can distort or alter elements of the original, the two major events were etched so firmly and vividly in the minds and spirits of those involved that the details would be preserved accurately. Also song was an important vehicle of transmission, hence Moses' song which comprises the bulk of Chapter Fifteen.

The *sepher* recording victory by Joshua over Amalek at the hand of Moses (literally) is a “memorial” or *zikaron* as in 12.14: “This day (Passover) shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord.” In this instance nothing is said about recording the Passover, just that it will be remembered...*zakar*...which as noted there, comes a noun derived from this verbal root (same spelling) meaning a “male” or the agent through whom the memorial of his parents and relatives even further back are continued into the present. Thus a *zikaron* is a living embodiment passed on within a community of people (for another reference, see 13.9 which assumes the form of a sign on one's hand and a memorial between one's eyes). Once the *zikaron* concerning Joshua's military victory has been inscribed, Moses is to recite it in his ears, to *sum* it or to place it. Thus the image is one of Moses taking what has been written down, lifting it from the scroll and physically placing it in the ears of Joshua, a new form of *zikaron*. That which is placed there is a promise by the Lord that he will *machah* or wipe away the *zakar* of Amalek. “That he would blot out the name of Israel” [2Kg 14.27]. As for *zeker*, it is of the same verbal root as *zakar* as that which is held in memory, a more common form of remembrance among people who lacked physical records. “For in death there is no remembrance of you” [Ps 6.5]. So while the *zikaron* of Joshua's victory is placed by Moses in his ears (and to be told to future generations), the *zeker* of Amalek will be wiped away. “From under heaven” stresses this *mahah*, that heaven as the Lord's dwelling place will not see it again.

“And Moses built an altar and called the name of it The Lord is my banner” [vs. 15]. Here is the first mention of “altar” (*mizbeach*; from *zavach*, to slay for sacrificial purposes) in Exodus. While in Egypt, repeatedly Moses had requested permission from Pharaoh to offer sacrifice or *zavach* in the desert, so the concept was not something new. Later the Passover is termed a *zavach* as in 12.27 (‘sacrifice of the Lord's Passover’). However, nothing is said in both instances of a *mizbeach* or altar on which the sacrifice is to be performed. With this in mind, Moses accessed the collective memory of Israel prior to its four hundred year sojourn in Egypt, all the back to the patriarchs. The form of this *mizbeach* at Rephidim is not given, presumably of stones which were abundant in the desert. Moses names it “The Lord is my banner” or *nes* which means a flag or standard as used in battle, the battle with Amalek. Most likely Moses had in mind this *nes* being his *mateh* or rod, the two being not dissimilar. “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole” [Num 21.8].

Vs. 16 continues with Moses exclaiming “A hand upon the banner of the Lord!” That is to say, a hand on the *nes* of the Lord which can imply a hand on the *mateh* of the Lord, the same hand that Aaron and Hur helped Moses keep steady in faithfulness (*emunah*) while Joshua slew Amalek and his people. While this was an important victory, Moses is aware that it will continue, for in vs. 16 he says “The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” This seems to contradict the *machah* or wiping away of Amalek's *zakar*, his memory. While that may be true for the victory at hand, the desert tribe by his name remained, rather was dispersed, throughout such a vast area that it would continue to war against Israel as long as they were in the Sinai Peninsula and areas about it. Such conflict would continue after Israel left this area and became established, for King Saul waged war against Amalek in Chapter Fifteen of First Samuel but spared its

king (Agag) and allowed the people to take booty instead of destroying it, a form of sacrifice (cf. 15.21). Perhaps if Saul had seen that *nes* or banner erected by Moses, he would have acted differently. Samuel, who had anointed Saul against the Lord's wishes, was keenly aware of this *nes*, hence his conflict with Saul. Thus even within Israel the war against Amalek continued (i.e., 'from generation to generation') in the person of these two antagonists and the institution of the monarchy, a direct spin-off of Saul's disobedience.

27 October, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Do not offer him a bribe, for he will not accept it; and do not trust to an unrighteous sacrifice; for the Lord is the judge, and with him is no partiality. He will not show partiality in the case of a poor man; and he will listen to the prayer of one who is wronged. He will not ignore the supplication of the fatherless, nor the widow when she pours out her story...(Do not the tears of the widow run down her cheek as she cries out against him who has caused them to fall?)...He whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted, and his prayer will reach to the clouds. The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and he will not be consoled until it reaches the Lord; he will not desist until the Most High visits him, and does justice for the righteous, and executes judgment. And the Lord will not delay, neither will he be patient with them, till he crushes the loins of the unmerciful and repays vengeance on the nations; till he takes away the multitude of the insolent, and breaks the scepters of the unrighteous; (till he repays the man according to his deeds, and the works of men according to their devices; till he judges the case of his people and makes them rejoice in his mercy. Mercy is as welcome when he afflicts them as clouds of rain in the time of drought.) Sirach 35.12-14 & 16-18

Please note: vss. 15, 19 & 20 are added (in parentheses) though strictly speaking are not in the excerpt for today's reading. However, they are added to flesh out the text in order to conclude Chapter 35. For a better appreciation of the elements contained here, it's best to read the excerpt in the broader context of the chapter which means with acceptable sacrifices. Since sacrifices produce smoke and an acceptable odor, both ascend naturally into heaven. Thus the general idea of this excerpt, as well as the rest of 35, takes place with this ascending motion in mind. It, of course, is done with the intent to effect the opposite or having the Lord come down to assist the person who makes the offering.

The LXX text situates this passage within the context of Chapter 32.

"No partiality" is rendered literally as "no respect of persons," *doxa* being fundamentally an opinion, judgment and even glory. "Person" is singular, not plural.

The text distinguishes between one who is "poor" (*ptochos*) and one who is "humble" (*tapeinos*). The former usually applies to physical circumstances and is involuntary whereas the latter pertains to some one who has exerted himself to reach that state. However, one who is *tapeinos* can be *ptochos*. The prayer (*proseuche*: usually done in public or in a liturgical context) proper to a humble person seems to have greater value over one who is poor, *tapeinos* suggestive of a personal qualitative change whereas *ptochos* not so.

The verb *dierchomai* is used for "pierced" and is not as vivid; it means more a going-through (*dia*). Compare this with the verb *suneggizo*, "reaches" (the Lord) or more literally, comes near-with (*sug-* or *sun-*).

Parakaleo is the verb for "consoled" and basically means to call or to send for, the preposition *para* suggestive of being summoned to one's side or to be close by and remain there. This happens only upon the attainment of *suneggizo* or coming near-with the Lord.

Then the *proseuche* or prayer changes, if you will, into the poor man himself being answered by the Lord indicative by the words "he will not desist" or will not cease his plea now face to face with the Lord. This presence makes the Lord spring into action (*braduno* is the verb for 'will [not] delay' meaning will not be slow), for the rest of the excerpt shows the various means he will deal with unjust persons.

Finally, there is the second mention of "clouds" which the Lord brings upon people in times of drought, the first being symbolic, if you will, of where the Lord himself lives in heaven above. The rain produced from the clouds is "mercy" or *eleos* which is *horaiois* ('welcome') or literally at the right season (*hora*).

1 November, All Saints

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them for ever. Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his elect, and he watches over his holy ones. Wisdom 3:1-9

This passage from the Wisdom of Salomon is from the Apocrypha (Septuagint).

The “souls” (*psuche*) of those who are “righteous” (*dikaïos*) here are deceased though their being in God’s hand implies that they had enjoyed this unique position prior to physical death. However, the nature of this state isn’t spelled out here. Actually when reading this passage we don’t have a clear idea of whether such souls are alive or dead, for to ask such a question doesn’t pertain in the case at hand, making the passage all the more arresting. “Seemed (*dokeo*) to have died” and “destruction” (*poreia* or passage along with the noun *suntrimma*, fundamentally as a fracture) makes this question all the more nebulous. Still, to the “foolish” or *aphron*, their physical death was as real as it comes, this word meaning without sense or without the capacity of *phronis* (prudence, wisdom; highly prized among ancient Greeks and transmitted to the Romans).

The souls at hand had endured torture and ridicule which is the meaning of *basanos* (‘torment’). But those persons not having the capacity of *phronis*, in essence an untranslatable word, could not discern the hand of God both containing and sheltering such persons. That means an invisible form of protection was hovering over them which made them indifferent to anything the *aphron* could throw at them. It would be useless to explain the nature of this protection to the *aphron*, for they lacked the capacity to comprehend it. However, such persons did retain a basic mode of perception signified by the verb *logizomai* which here is rendered as “was thought.” It more precisely means to calculate or to reckon, a capacity even immoral persons have. In fact, they may have it more in abundance than people as the “souls” at hand.

“Punished” and “immortality” form a unlikely unity. *Kolazo* suggests keeping within bounds and *athanasia* literally means no death. However, while physically alive “in the hand of God” those protected did not have *athanasia* in its fulness but “hope” (*elpis*) of it.

Another feature of these souls in the divine hand’s protection is that they are endowed with *phronis* compared to those onlookers who are *aphron*. That means they could see their affliction as discipline. Hence the verb *paideuo* (‘having been disciplined’) which applies to the rearing of a child until he reaches maturity. Such rearing just doesn’t belong to the physical order but to the inculcation of moral values and formal education. *Paideusis* results in receiving “ a great good,” the verb being *euergeteuo* or to do good service and extend kindness.

Two verbs which are completely beyond the comprehension of those who are *aphron* or who lack prudence and wisdom: “tested” and “tried” or *dokimzo* (to approve or to admit) and *prosdechomai* (to receive hospitably, to admit). Actually the image of God’s hand operative both in physical life and afterwards in what appears as death has shown this trying or proving.

The “visitation” or *episkope* (literally, a watching over or upon, *epi-*) of the righteous souls is not spelled out clearly but left for the reader to discern, that is, provided he has *phronis* and is not like those who are *aphron*. It appears closely related to the “hand of God” and a return from death to life with the intent to participate in governing nations. Note that such visitation is linked with a particular “time” or *kairos*, the famous New

Testament word which pertains to a specific occasion. Again, those who are *aphron* cannot fathom a *kairos* event from one which takes place within *chronos*, linear time. To them, both are one and the same. This visitation is marked by the righteous souls as having been tested by fire. And like the three young men (Prayer of Azariah, Apocrypha; inserted within Daniel 3.23-24), they will be immune to being consumed by fire though tested by it. That's why they will "run like sparks" and do so among stubble, another way of expressing those who are *aphron*. Stubble, of course, intimates highly combustible material.

While the just souls are reigning over nations, those under them will have the opportunity to see this rule as being an extension of the "hand of God." That's why they will have the capacity to "understand" truth (*suneimi*, literally as to be with, *sun-*) the truth. And so this passage concludes with intimation of the divine hand which originally watched over righteous souls and now extends to those under their rule, that is, they "will abide" (*prosmeno*: more as remaining in the direction towards-which, *pros-*) with the Lord in *agape*. Such acceptance is suggested as not pertaining to every person under the rule of the righteous souls but only to those who are considered "elect" with whom *charis* and *eleos* ('grace and mercy') are present. Implied and therefore not mentioned are those who are *aphron* and who are better left this way for the reader to perceive after having pondered this passage from Wisdom. Note that "watches over" is not in the Greek text.

3 November, Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Because the whole world before you is like a speck that tips the scales, and like a drop of morning dew that falls upon the ground. But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook men's sins, that they may repent. For you love all things that exist, and have loathing for none of the things which you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it. How would anything have endured if you had not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord who love the living. For your immortal spirit is in all things. Therefore you correct little by little those who trespass, and remind and warn them of the things wherein they sin, that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord. Wisdom 11.22-12.2

This passage from the Wisdom of Salomon is from the Apocrypha (Septuagint).

The recent celebration of All Saints and All Souls, signals, if you will, the rapid approach to the end of the liturgical year by the end of this month. Hence November, traditionally honored as "month of the dead," is helpful as signalling a new birth with the first Sunday of Advent. Although the passage from Wisdom has a different liturgical context from another passage of Wisdom pertaining to yesterday's entry (All Saints), one can't help but compare the two excerpts.

Reference is to *kosmos* ('world') which here, influenced by Hellenic thought, intimates the entire visible universe as a decoration, a thing adorned with beauty. Still, it is insignificant, being compared to both a spark and drop of water. Despite this paradox of beauty vs. insignificance (but only by smallness), a greater one exists, namely, the Lord's mercy or *eleieis* (adjective, 'merciful'). Such mercy is shown not just to the *kosmos* as a speck of sand or a drop of water but to those persons clinging to its surface, if you will, an example of human finitude which is more striking in the light of modern astronomy. The chief difference is that while the ancients had an awareness of the *kosmos* as huge but limited, nevertheless they beheld it as something beautiful, not cold and indifferent where mankind counted for nothing. Despite Wisdom calling man a speck and drop, it's quite a different view a modern astronomer would reach.

Not the contrast between "overlook" and "repent," *parorao* and *metanoia*. The first is a verb, the root *horao* prefaced with the preposition *para* (beside), literally as to look beside in the sense of askance. And this is done, for example, by winking. The second is a noun with inferences of the New Testament concept of repentance and is used with the preposition *eis* (into), literally as "into repentance."

There is another contrast between the verb *agapao* and *bdelussomai* ('love' and 'have loathing'). The first clearly evokes the New Testament teaching on *agape* and the latter means to feel nausea and connotes being

on the verge of vomiting. In sum, these two words which are completely unlike each other are thrown together with respect to persons clinging to that speck of dust or drop of water.

The three verbs “endured,” “willed” and “preserved” are similar (*meno, thelo* and *diatero*), the third intimating a watching-through, the preposition *dia* being prefaced to the verbal root.

Compare the use of *agapao* (‘love’) just used a few verses ago with another verb for love as it pertains here to “the living,” *philopsucho*. The latter is quite vivid, difficult to translate adequately, consisting of *philia* or love as friendship with *psuche* or soul, animating principle.

God’s “spirit” or *pneuma* (also as breath) is “immortal,” *aphthartos* or imperishable and present in everything although it is not specified but presumably within living beings or better, persons. This *pneuma* acts as a guiding principle which corrects or *elecho*, a verb connoting accusation as well as refutation. In other words, *elecho* involves having a dialogue between this *pneuma* and a person (The noun *elenchos* is derived from this verb and is Socrates’ preferred method of conducting a dialogue). In such an exchange the person refuted is not so much corrected but lovingly shown the truth and invited to pursue it. Note that in the passage at hand this correcting takes place “little by little” or *kat’ oligon*, literally as “according to a little” which is suggestive of an ongoing process. From it flows the act of being reminded and warned or *hupomimnesko* and *noutheteo*. The former literally means a reminding from under (*hupo-*) which is consistent with the divine spirit present within a person. The *pneuma* is hidden and located beneath a person, if you will, which on occasion comes up into his memory to activate it. The latter is a putting in one’s mind (*nous* or *noos*) in order to effect correction.

The result of this reminding-under and putting-in-mind is twofold: to set one free from wickedness and to put trust in the Lord, *apallasso* and *pisteuo*. The former applies to getting rid of something, or having it depart whereas the latter is used with the preposition *eis*, literally as “into the Lord,” full presence “into” or an ongoing process of growth in awareness of the *pneuma* in all persons spoken of earlier.

10 November, Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and cords, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our fathers."...And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws." After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing. When he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. And when he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!" 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14

Verses three through eight are not included. If you wish to read one of the goriest accounts of torture, biblical or otherwise, check out those verses. The verb *sunbaino* helps soften this vivid description, “it happened.” Also *sunbaino* as used here is a warning sign to prepare ourselves for something very unpleasant about to transpire.

Anagkazo means “being compelled” which here refers to the king vis-a-vis the seven brothers and their mother. It must have consisted of blandishments and offers to betray their own people to avoid being inflicted with fiendish torments. We don’t have mention of the father who perhaps had inspired his sons and wife before having undergone similar trials much earlier or had been slain in battle. Note that the king himself is associated with this *anagkazo* which means he took a personal interest in them. The issue here was for the

family to violate the Torah by eating pork, i.e., that which was “unlawful” or *athemitos*. In and by itself Jews must have considered this ban a relatively minor one, for there was plenty of other food to choose from. What made eating pork so horrendous was the desire by a non-Jew to impose it meaning the eater would become like him.

One of the brothers put this wholly unnecessary event in perspective by the succinct remark, “What do you intend...and learn from us?” This brother, along with the six others and their mother, concurred but knew this objection would fall on deaf ears. Perhaps they intended it for those standing nearby knowing full well that a scribe was taking down the proceedings. Later this record leaked out and was spread around in order to encourage other Jews.

The noun for (last) “gasp” is *pnoe* which generally means a sharp breath or blast of air, very appropriate after the torments omitted in vs. 3-8. This *pnoe* does consist of several verses where the brother calls the king a “wretch” or *alastor* which means more a destroying angel or literally, one who wanders. It is in sharp contrast to the Lord who will impart a “renewal” of life or as the text says literally, “shall raise us up into (*eis*) everlasting life.” Thus the pagan *alastor* (and/or king) is contrasted with the Lord.

The third brother—note that all seven plus their mother are anonymous—bravely and spontaneously offers his limbs to the torturers, that is, in the hope to receive them. Here the verb for “receive” is *komizo* which means to take care of, to carry away so as to preserve. When and where he and the others received this insight is not given, but while the seven and their mother were free, they must have presented themselves as exceptional teachers and example for others. In fact, he and his other brothers did provide an example for the king and those with him, for they marveled at his “spirit” or *psuche* which more specifically means soul.

The fourth brother fleshes out, if you will, what the third had expressed with regard to obtaining his limbs at a future unspecified date. He cherished the hope of being raised again, the verb for the former being *prosdokao* which consists of the root *dechomai* (to receive) prefaced with the preposition *pros*. And that preposition signifies something quite dynamic, direction towards—which that never comes to a rest. The object here is “hope” or *elpis* which for the brother at hand was a constant, animating factor.

Note that this brother speaks of being “raised again” or *anistemi*. That means his current life about to be terminated has been raised already, if you could put it like so. True insofar as he and his brothers and mother had perceived their existing lives in terms of having been raised already though with the expectation that it will occur “again” which is signified by the preposition *ana* prefaced to *histemi*.

So with this confident and lucid statement of faith, the fourth brother exclaims to the king that he will not partake of any “resurrection to life” or *anastasis eis zoen*, *anastasis* being of the verbal root *anistemi* noted in the last paragraph.

17 November, Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

For behold, the day comes, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall. Malachi 3:19-20

This concise excerpt is comprised of the first two verses of Chapter Four in the Hebrew text. It is the first one that actually intimates the end of the liturgical year and the dawn of a new one. The drama, however, is completely missing for those who have maintained their fidelity to God. They will make the switch from the end of one year to the next without much ado, symbolic of passing from this life into the next. However, those who have done evil will fare differently, and this group is what lends a certain drama to these readings.

Tanur is the noun for “oven” usually in the sense of a furnace compared with the cozy image of a household

stove even though sometimes it's used for that purpose. "The day" (*hayom*) is more akin to a *kairos* event, a special occasion which here isn't spelled out but presumed to be known by everyone. *Hayom* will appear first by a perception of heat from a distance, if you will, which signals the arrival of this *tanur*. It will be "burning" or *bahar* which means to consume as well as to become brutish. So when the *tanur* makes its appearance—its size isn't specified but presumed to be huge—will devour everything on the surface ('branch') as well as under it ('root').

It seems that the *tanur* at hand will appear as such to everyone, at least by the feel of its heat, but upon closer inspection, will turn out to be a sun for those who fear (*yare'* connotes having respect) the Lord's name. So during their lives, people had invoked the divine name which acclimatized them to the divine presence. Now that name turns into a sun of "righteousness" or *tsedaqah* reflecting, as it were, the *tsedaqah* people fearing the Lord's name had been exercising all along.

The verb for "rising" is *zarach*, more in the sense that the sun will scatter its rays. And rising suggests the east or sunrise where the sun is perceived in the pre-dawn hours and advances towards the west once it gets above the horizon. So if everyone could use the pre-dawn as a intimation of the oven's fiery arrival, there would be no fear of it. Such is not the case which is why "oven" is distinguished from "sun."

Marpe' is the word for "healing derived from the verbal root *rapha'* and connotes the giving of comfort. Note the location of this *marpe'*, in the wings of the sun. That is to say, the healing is not out there in the open for all to see. Also the nature of this healing is left unspecified. Exposure to it, however, makes one as a calf being set free from the confinements of its stall. This takes place at dawn's first light and is characterized by a "leaping" or *push* which also means to be proud as a horseman showing off his skill. Thus we could say a parallel exists between this *push* and the sun's *zarach* or scattering, two verbs indicative of intense activity.

24 November, Christ the King

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you that led out and brought in Israel; and the Lord said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'" So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. 2 Samuel 5:1-3

This passage begins with the connective *w-* which here translates as "then" but fundamentally means "and." It begins virtually every scriptural verse in the Old Testament with slight variations and therefore imparts a sense of fast-paced action, of one event following upon the other, as well as a close connection between them.

The assembly of tribes takes place after the murder of Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, and David's punishment of those who slew him. The point is that despite this tragedy, the era of King Saul and his descendants is put firmly in the past, thereby enabling this coming together of Israel's twelve tribes to share allegiance to David as their legitimate king. Everyone seems to have realized this which is why the coming together at Hebron was done willingly and joyfully. For some years rumors had been circulating that the prophet Samuel had anointed David secretly. No one had precise knowledge about this but weren't surprised. The second anointing was a public acknowledgment of a private event, of legitimizing Samuel's action.

The words "bone and flesh" are reminiscent of the first man's exclamation of the woman formed from his rib: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" [Gen 2.23]. The Israelites present themselves before David in a similar sudden and total fashion, a marriage of sorts, between the two. However, David must have kept in mind Samuel's words from some years ago when Israel asked for a king to "govern us like all the nations" [1Sam 8.6]. They were tired of the behavior of his two sons as priests which mirrored the behavior Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. On top of this was the tragedy of Saul himself who later persecuted David. So all these events must have come crowding in upon David at Hebron, a sober reminder of the recent past.

The people seem to have forgotten...collectively and deliberately so...their demand for a king. It was one of those situations that started off with a legitimate complaint against Samuel's two sons followed by the Lord's displeasure, yet recognition that Israel's history was bound to take this specific course of events. Note the voice of the Israelites as one man as they remind David that the Lord promised that he would be shepherd of his people as well as prince. However, there seems to be no specific reference to this which David knew but did not contest. It would be futile to do so as well as risking the loss of loyalty of this "bone and flesh."

Although Samuel has anointed David as king, it was only "in the midst of his brothers" [1Sam 16.13], unknown to everyone else. From that point on, especially through the bitter contestation with Saul, David knew he was king while a legitimately anointed king was actually in power. In other words, two kings in one kingdom. It was a difficult time, to be sure, and all the while Saul must have known it. Now the elders, not a prophet-like successor to Samuel, anoint David, which makes the choice more representative of the people. However, they were careful enough to make a covenant before this anointing, the details of which are not given. It must have included the right of a king Samuel had laid down earlier, rather harsh condition, but more importantly that David would be a fair and just king with the possibility of being reminded if and when he might stray.

Once these formalities were concluded, David proceeds to capture Jerusalem, the remaining Canaanite town, a fact not mentioned in this excerpt. All along he had that in mind to do this as a means of consolidating his power and transferring the ark of the Lord there to a temple he would soon erect.

+ The End +