

10 April, Third Sunday of Easter

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped. Revelation 5.11-14

“Then” or *kai* is a conjunctive showing the connection between John having just seen the four living creatures along with the twenty-four elders singing a song in vss. 9-10.

Obviously John both heard and saw this which despite its shortness, stands outside the limits of space and time. Next he looked and heard, the two being one and the same with regard to the throne which was the silent center of praise, the “voice” or *phone* of many angels. Such angels are “around” the throne, *kuklos*, presumably in concentric circles: first the living creatures followed by the elders; last come countless numbers of angels.

Vs. 12 says that this *phone* is “loud” or *megalos*, more precisely large or great. It utters a song not unlike the one just mentioned, the two alternating for all eternity. It's as though each side were attempting to outdo the other, taking delight in the process. The purpose of this heavenly assembly is praise of Christ as Lamb which parallels that in vss. 9-10. Christ is called *axios* or “worthy” as in vs. 12 as he receives seven offerings: power, wealth, wisdom, light, honor, glory and blessing. Note the number seven of these offerings which has sacred connotations.

Vs. 13 continues this seven-fold theme of praise by those in heaven and on earth. Note the use of prepositions: “in (*en*) heaven” and “on (*epi*) earth.” The latter has two further divisions of lesser importance, if you will: “under the earth” and “in the sea.”

Vs. 14 specifies the (twenty-four) elders as worshipping (*proskuneo*) which is bound up with the Hebrew “Amen,” a term frequently used at the conclusion of prayers. It is as though these elders were bringing to completion all the praise that had preceded.

After this spectacle John moves on in Chapter Six to the opening of the first six seals. It begins with the conjunctive *kai* or “now” which as noted at the beginning of this excerpt, shows the close connection between events taking place concurrently in eternity.

17 April, Fourth Sunday of Easter

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands...I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Revelation 7.9, 14-17

This excerpt is lifted from *Notations on the Book of Revelation*, also on the *Lectio Divina Homepage*.

Vs. 9: After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands.

Another use of “after this,” “look” and “behold” which connotes temporal extension of John’s vision which took place outside the confines of space and time. Cf. back to 1.10: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.”

Ochlos or crowd as in Mt 15.33: “Where are we to get bread enough in the desert to feed so great a crowd?” In the verse at hand, such a multitude is beyond counting; three general categories of human society are enumerated: tribe, people and tongue. Note emphasis upon tribe (*phule*), the basic division of Israel as recounted in vss. 5-8. Compare with Acts 2.5: “Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.” The next few verses recounts the wide variety of foreigners at Jerusalem who observed the disciples as they spoke after having been filled with the Holy Spirit. The “great multitude” of vs. 9 can be taken as those who were made disciples and baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28.19).

The redeemed are depicted as before the throne, an inverse image of the tower of Babel: “because the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” [Gen 11.9]. Also note the distinction in vs. 9 between throne and Lamb.

“White robes” or stole as in 6.11; here *periballo* is used for clothed, more specifically, to be cast about in the color white as though these people were permeated by it. In addition to these garments, they hold palm branches or *phoinix* in their hands. “So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel’” [Jn 12.13]! Note that this fabulous bird, the phoenix, is the same term, perhaps due to the branches’ resemblance to plumage. This mythical bird died in the fire after which it rose, a symbol which can be applied to Jesus Christ in this triumphal procession into Jerusalem.

IVs. 14: I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “these are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

In vs. 13 one of the twenty-four elders asks if John knows the identity and source of those persons first mentioned in vs. 9. Most likely this elder acts as an interpreter for much of John’s vision and continues to speak through vs. 17, the conclusion of chapter seven. John defers to the elder who begins to give the source, the *pothen* (whence, vs. 13 and *ek*, from, vs. 14), which is the “great tribulation” (*thlipsis*): “For then there will be great tribulation such as not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be” [Mt 24.21]. This verse has its precedent in Dan 12.1 in conjunction with “Michael, the great prince.” Those who destined to be delivered from this cataclysm are “written in the book,” that is, they are rolled up, so to speak, much like the scrolls of Revelation. Cf. vs. 4: “but you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end.” Such rolling up of the scroll/book makes knowledge grow: “Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase.”

Those clothed in white have come out (*ek*) of the great *thlipsis*, the location where they had washed their robes (*pluno*). This is a special type of washing: whiteness derives from redness, of blood, and is akin to baptism: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized” [Mk 10.38]?

Vs. 15: Therefore are they before the throne of God and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence.

The place of arrival after having experienced the “great tribulation” for those in white robes is “before (*enopion*) the throne of God” as in vs. 9. It is these people as opposed to the angelic hosts that gets John’s attention and makes him inquire (vs. 14) about them. To serve (*latreuo*) as in Mt 4.10 (taken from Dt 6.13): “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” Thus *latreuo* connotes worship in a priestly sense as in a temple (*naos*, better, ‘sanctuary’) as vs. 15 point out. Compare with Lk 2.37: “She (the

prophetess Anna) did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.” Here the word *hieron* is used which means the precincts compared with the inner sanctuary inferred by *naos*. Anna also engages in *latreuo*.

To shelter or *skenoo*: literally, “to live in a tent,” that is, God will “tent” those before the throne. Cf. Jn 1.14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” or pitched his tent among us. The Greek has *en* for among, “in us.” With this incarnational verse in mind, the verse under discussion can imply that God will make Christ the tent. Note that vs. 15 has “upon (*epi*) the throne” and “upon (*epi*) them” (in the Greek). “Tenting” involves presence.

Vs. 16: They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

Skenoo involves physical satisfaction of hunger and thirst as well as protection against the sun’s rays. Cf. Sg 2.3 for an expression of this sentiment: “With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” The verse at hand is a quote from Is 49.10 which continues further with “for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them,” reminiscent of the words of Ps 23. The Hebrew verb *racham* (to pity) is an expression of tender pity and mercy.

Vs. 17: For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Several times Revelation mentions the throne upon (*epi*) which God is sitting. Here Christ the Lamb is situated in its midst (*ana meson*), which can also mean between which if taken literally could imply several thrones. It is as though the Lamb were somehow interpenetrating God *epi* with regards to the throne; it is also as though he were seating on God’s lap or even between God and the throne itself. Nevertheless, this image reveals the intimate connection between God the Father and Jesus Christ.

It is from this “midst-ness” that the Lamb will function as shepherd (*poimaino*, verb). Note use of future tense for the rest of this verse; action is yet to be completed. “And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd” [Ezk 34.23]. There also comes to mind the classic image of Christ as Good Shepherd: “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” [Jn 10.11]. The Hebrew noun for this is *roheh*, a rich word from which is also derived *raheyah*, love, as found in nine places in the Song of Songs, for instance, 2.10, “Rise up, my love, my fair one.”

Implied in vs. 17 is that the sheep are thirsty, not hungry, which is why the shepherd will lead his flock not just to water but to “springs (*pege*) of living water.” I.e., a spring indicates that point at which water wells up from beneath the ground and is the source of water...where one could say that it is most alive (*zoes*). Compare such water with that of Ps 23.2: “He leads me beside still waters.” The Hebrew reads “waters of quietness;” *menuchah*, from the verbal root *nuach*, which is related to the verb *na’ah*: “Like cattle that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest” [Is 63.14].

Tears (*dakruon*) hearkens back to that “great tribulation” of vs. 14. This part of the verse at hand is lifted from Is 25.8: “He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord will wipe away tears from all faces.” Also cf. Rev 21.4 for the same verse.

24 April, Fifth Sunday of Easter

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21.1-5

This excerpt is lifted from *Notations on the Book of Revelation*, also on the [Lectio Divina Homepage](#).

Vs. 1: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

A new chapter beginning with *kai* (and, then) which in this context signifies the immediate arrival of the new heaven and earth after the final judgment, for the two spring from the same source. John does not call the previous earth and heaven “old” but more dramatically, that they have passed away, *aperchomai*. Isaiah predict this in two places: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind” [Is 65.17]. “For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain” [Is 66.22]. The first verse says that former things (*hari’shonoth*, i.e., those which came first) will not be remembered; the Hebrew for “come into mind” literally reads “go up on heart” as though they were about to leap up and take possession of this

faculty. The second verse equates the duration of new heavens and earth with Israel's descendants and name.

Almost as if to verify his vision upon seeing the new heaven and earth, John says that the first heaven and earth have passed out of existence. He singles out the sea as no longer existing and only beholds land. Perhaps this is because the ocean was identified with the primeval chaos of Genesis from which creation emerged at God's command. "But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" [2 Pt 3.13].

Vs. 2: And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Jerusalem is identified as being new which is in harmony with the previous verse's new heavens and earth. Compare with 3.12: "And I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven and my own new name." In both instances the present active participle is used for coming down (*katabaino*) to indicate the continuous act of descent. It assumes this direction because the new Jerusalem's source is heaven (*ek*, from). "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city" [Heb 11.16].

The city resembles a bride (*numphe*): "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride" [Sg 4.8]. These words were uttered by the bridegroom which in the context of the verse at hand is the collective nature of the church to which she continuously descends.

Etoimazo: to prepare, possibly by the twenty-four elders, four living creatures and various types of angels described in Revelation. Jerusalem's preparation implies that she had already existed as opposed to having been created. This preparation done before the descent is effected in a special way, adorned or *kosmeo* (cf. 21.19) which implies putting in order with regard to physical appearance. "In that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband' and no longer will you call me, 'My Ba'al'" [Hos 2.16].

Vs. 3: And I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them.

The voice which speaks through vs. 4 is unidentified as in 4.5: "From the throne issue flashes of lightning and voices and peals of thunder." Compare its source, from (*ek*) the throne, with the *ek* of the new Jerusalem with regard to heaven in vs. 2.

The first word is behold or *idou* in order to get the attention of those gazing at the new Jerusalem's descent. The dwelling (*skene*) literally means tent as used in 15.5: "and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened." Vs. 3 fulfills Jn 1.14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt (*skenoo*) among us." The former has the preposition *meta* (with in the sense of being alongside) and the latter has the preposition *en* (in).

The second sentence has the verb *skenoo* as just noted; the future tense is used again with the preposition *meta*, which is in according with the continuous *katabaino* of the new Jerusalem in vs. 2. The third *meta* is also in conjunction with another verb in the future tense, "God will be with them."

This third sentence of vs. 3 is taken from Ezk 37.27: "My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." The next verse speaks of the nations (*goym*) who recognize this fact which puts the first verse in proper context; i.e., God's dwelling with Israel is not for Israel alone. The Hebrew *mishkan* can also mean tent in the sense of *skene*.

Vs. 4: He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

A continuation of words from that "great voice" of vs. 3. The first part of this verse was also cited in 7.17 and is taken from Is 25.8; see that section for notes. The second part inserts the annihilation of death (*thanatos*) in between tears and mourning which more or less connotes the same thing. Death is presented as not having extension into the future. The third part deals with expressions of grief as noted in Is 35.10: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and signing shall flee away." Note the verb "flee away" which is reminiscent of 20.11, the flight of heaven and earth before the great white throne.

Protos: former things or those things which existed before the new Jerusalem's descent from heaven. *Aperchomai* (to pass away) is found in 21.1 regarding the disappearance of the first heaven and earth.

Vs. 5: And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Now the speaker is the one sitting upon the throne as distinguished from the "great voice" coming from the throne who also utters *idou* (behold) as a way of getting attention. "All

things” is not specified, but it comes after the new heaven, new earth and new Jerusalem. “God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne” [Ps 47.8]. For this newness, cf. 2 Cor 5.17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” Old here equals *archaios* in the sense of being original; compare with *protos* (first) in 21.1. The former implies something more established and the latter, something first in a given order. Thus for anything *archaios* to pass away (with regard to Christ) is significant in that an old, deeply rooted mode of behavior has been transformed.

To authenticate the newness of what the person sitting on the throne expresses through his *idou*, he bids John to write it down as a the record, so to speak. Such words (*logos*) come from the divine *Logos* (as in 7.10) and are therefore genuine.

1 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb...And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. Revelation 21.10-14 & 22-23

This excerpt is lifted from *Notations on the Book of Revelation*, also on the *Lectio Divina* Homepage.

Vs. 10: And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

“In the Spirit (*Pneuma*)” is the same as in 1.10 when John began to have his vision on “the Lord’s day” or Sunday. Note that the angel carries John away, not the Spirit acting directly as was the case with prophets such as Ezekiel: “Then the Spirit lifted me up” [Ezk 3.12]. Vs. 10 has John brought to (*epi*, upon) lofty mountain which by reason of its height, offered a vantage point to view the heavenly Jerusalem’s descent. This parallels Ezk 40.2: “And he brought me in the visions of God (like John’s vision) into the land of Israel and set me down upon a very high mountain on which was a structure like a city opposite me.” Mount Zion is sometimes called a lofty mountain by reason of its religious significance.

“His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, in the far north, the city of the great King” [Ps 48.2]. Perhaps John was on Zion from which he could behold the spectacle.

Katabaino: to descend, here used as a present active participle to indicate Jerusalem’s continuous descent as in vs. 2. Not only is Jerusalem descending, it comes from (*ek*) God, again, as in vs. 2. This descent may be paralleled with that of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost “which filled all the house where they were sitting” [Acts 2.2].

Verses 11 through 21 describe the heavenly Jerusalem which may be outlined just below. Note the theme of “brightness” as conveyed through the imagery pertaining to precious stones. Also, the city may be taken as a fulfillment and perfection the garden of Eden. Eden had no boundaries as does the heavenly Jerusalem even though Genesis presents God as having made physical creation. The only real point of physical identity regarding Eden is that it is “in the east” [Gen 2.8], that is, it is identified with the sun’s rising. This notion is also conveyed in 3.24 when he drives out the man (not the woman); he stations the cherubim “at the east of the garden of Eden,” that is, at sunrise.

-Vs. 11: glory (*doxa*) of God with a radiance (*phoster*). “That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” [Phil 2.15]. This type of moral shining is a reflection of divine glory or *kavod* which had descended on Mount Sinai. “The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai” [Ex 24.16]. The verb *shakan* implies taking up residence. The heavenly Jerusalem’s radiance resembled a “rare (*timios*; superlative case used in Greek text) jewel” or a jasper (*iaspis*), a term referring any opaque stone. “And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian” [4.3]. Thus Jerusalem is implied as having its true source in the divine throne. *Krustallizo* (to be clear): “And before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass like crystal” [4.6]. Here may be situated the heavenly Jerusalem not so much as upon the divine throne but before it on this glass sea.

-Vs. 12: The number twelve dominates this verse: gates, angels, tribes of Israel. Mention of gate is significant, for it can mean an entrance or an exit. For the negative meaning (as well as pertaining to heavenly beings), cf. Gen 3.24: “He placed the cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.” On (*epi*) each gate was written names of Israel’s twelve tribes. For another reference to the importance of writing which implies foreknowledge, cf. 5.1 which pertains to the scroll in possession of the one seated on the throne. Also, cf. Ex 28.21: “There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel; they shall be like signets, each engraved with its name for the twelve tribes.” Christ called himself a door for the sheep through which one must enter (cf. Jn 10.7). The term used there is *thura* as commonly used in a house.

Vs. 12 uses *pulon* for gate as in Lk 16.20: “At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores.” This term connotes a gatehouse or tower and thus has the sense of guardianship.

-Vs. 13: Each of the cardinal points has three gates: north, south, east and west. This verse is built upon Ezk 48.30-5. Vs. 35 (and hence the Book of Ezekiel) closes with, “And the name of the city henceforth shall be, The Lord is there.”

-Vs. 14: The city has twelve foundations (*themelios*) with regards to its walls. Such a compact groundwork suggests clear delineation of the heavenly Jerusalem as opposed to that which is outside. This distinction between what is holy and what is not sheds light on Christ being crucified outside Jerusalem. “So they took Jesus, and he went out” [Jn 19.27]. For *themelios* used spiritually: “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” [Eph 2.20]. With this verse in mind, the heavenly Jerusalem’s foundations rest upon Christ-as-cornerstone (a term not used in Revelation, just foundation). Also, if we keep in mind that the heavenly Jerusalem is in the process of continuous descend, its bottom part or foundations would be the first part visible. Similarly, the apostles-as-foundations are the “first things visible” with regard to the Church’s tradition in the sense of being forerunners of the faith. When the Spirit descends on them at Pentecost, it “fits into” the pre-existing foundation of the apostles. Perhaps that is what the verb “sitting” implies, as sitting in the house (cf. Acts 1.2).

2Vs. 22: And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

A transformation from a temple (*naos*) to the city as a whole. “He who conquers I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.” This verse foresees the fulfillment in the one at hand where the victorious person becomes part of the temple structure, a pillar, which is set upon the foundations mentioned above. Note the act of writing which corresponds to the twelve tribes of Israel which had their names inscribed on the twelve gates.

This verse equates temple/heavenly Jerusalem both with God as *Pantokrator* and the Lamb, Jesus Christ. In 1.8 the *Pantokrator* is also the Alpha and Omega (beginning and end) “who is and who was and who is to come.” Parallel this coming with the *katabaino* of the heavenly Jerusalem; it is though such coming were present within the *katabaino*.

Vs. 23: And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

No need of sun nor moon implies the abolition of the circadian cycle, of chronological time (cf. 22.5). “Then the moon will be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders he will manifest his glory” [Is 24.23]. *Kavod/doxa* as revealing features of God have been noted several times, especially with regards to Mount Sinai. Vs. 23 equates *doxa* with light (*photizo*); the Greek text uses a verb to indicate the active illumination of the heavenly Jerusalem by divine *doxa*. For another use of this verb, cf. 18.1: “and the earth was made bright with his splendor,” here referring to “another angel” who announces the fall of Babylon/Rome.

Doxa and *photizo* pertain to a general, all-pervasive divine illumination. Vs. 23 adds a specific focus to this light, the Lamb-as-lamp (*luchnos*). “If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright as when a lamp with its rays gives you light” [Lk 11.36]. For a similar reference: “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” [Jn 8.12]. Note the identity here of light with world and life, a parallel to the *doxa/luchnos* of vs. 23.

5 May The Ascension

For Christ has entered not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him....Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 9.24-28, 10.19-23

This excerpt is lifted from *Notations on the Book of Hebrews*, also on the [Lectio Divina Homepage](#).

After several verses related to sacrifices in and by themselves, the author of Hebrews comes back to the notion of a sanctuary which was last mentioned in vs. 8. Here the term is *hagia* as in vs. 12 (holy place) which there was noted as being in the plural, “the holy things.” Vs. 24 presents Christ first as having entered (*eiserchomai*) this sanctuary. Note the preposition *eis* (into) prefixed to the verb which is used with *cheiropoiotos* (made with hands). “...circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands” [Eph 2.11].

Copy (*antitupos*): this copy has been fabricated by hands (*cheiro-poiotos*); the English term was used in vs. 23 for *hupodeigma*. As the literal meaning of *antitupos* suggests, it signifies a striking against (*anti*) and therefore has a dynamic connotation; it is as though the *antitupos* was determined to be set apart from and different from what it had been compared to at an earlier time. “Baptism, which corresponds to this (in reference to Noah), now saves you” [1 Pt 3.21]. This is the only other New Testament reference here used as a verb in English where the sacrament of baptism stands “against” the flood when Noah was rescued. By way of note, compare *huodeigma* with “copy:” *hupo* (under) + *deiknumi* (to show, point out); it lacks a more assertive force as in *antitupos*.

True one (*alethinos*): an adjective used with the definite article literally meaning “of true things;” compare the plural with *ta hagia* (sanctuary, as in 8.2).

Christ has entered (*eiserchomai*, as just noted) into (*eis*) heaven (*ouranos*); note the use of *autos* (itself) which further sets apart this “hand-less” made sanctuary from those associated with the Jewish dispensation. This double *eis*, if you will, results in Christ appearing (*emphanizo*) or putting himself in the presence of someone or something. “I will love him and manifest myself to him” [Jn 14.21]. In the verse at hand, *emphanizo* is with respect to God’s presence (*prosopon*), literally, “face;” not just the divine presence but “on our behalf” (*huper*). “And for their sake I consecrate myself” [Jn 17.19].

“Nor:” the other half of this verse’s significance is in vs. 26 which is introduced by “but.”

The offering (*prosphero*, verb) presented in vs. 25 is in the context of the Jewish archiereus who makes sacrifice repeatedly (*pollakis*) which parallels yearly (*kat’ eniauton*). Implied in this verse is that sacrifice is subject to becoming routine without any end in sight; emphasis is upon a cyclic nature of time. This repeated nature of time is further signified by the high priest having blood which is not his, i.e., it is from the sacrifices that have been offered.

Eiserchomai (to enter) is coupled with *eis* with respect to the Holy Place or *Ta Hagia* (cf. 9.2).

In vs. 26 we have further stress upon time's cyclic nature with regard to (animal) sacrifices by another use of the word repeatedly (*pollakis*). The suffering of Christ as high priest would have to correspond to this endless perception of time "from the foundation (*katabole*) of the world." Cf. 4.3 for another use of *katabole*: "although his works were finished from the foundation of the world," words which contrasts with the divine rest regarding Israel.

Appeared (*phaneroo*): connotes a public manifestation; compare with *emphanizo* of vs. 24. For another use of the verb at hand, cf. 9.8: "that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened." The appearance of vs. 26 is *apax* (once for all, as in 6.4 & 9.7), that is, definitively. Such conclusiveness is conveyed by "at the end (*sunteleia*) of the age:" sun (with) *telos* (end). This noun corresponds to the sense of the verb *teleioo* of 5.9: "and being made perfect." With regard to *sunteleia*, completion is conveyed by the preposition *epi* (at): also it is "upon"—as fulling situated-upon—this termination of age or *aion*. *Aion* is found in 1.2 as "world;" it manifests a given period of time or epoch which in the context of vs. 26 is the seemingly endless cycle of time. At the end of this given *aion* Christ as high priest puts away (*athetesis*, noun) sin, the only other New Testament use being 7.18 which there has a legal connotation: "on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness." With the legality of *athetesis* in mind, Christ's sacrifice (*thusia*) of himself is implied as being both within and transcending the Torah.

The "and" beginning vs. 27 introduces the first half of the author's intent and is balanced off by "so" which begins vs. 28 and completes Chapter Nine.

Appointed (*apokeimai*): the present tense suggests that the subject under discussion (death) is continuously in effect as in Col 1.5: "because of the hope laid up for you in heaven." Note the two uses of the preposition *apo* (by means of, about, etc.) prefixed to *apokeimai* and *apothnesko* (to die, in the sense of being at death's door).

The preposition *meta* (after) signifies the finality of death as with *apax*, only here it sets the stage for the more or less immediate presence of divine judgment (*krisis*). "Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it not I alone that judge, but I and he who sent me" [Jn 8.16].

Once or *apax* as used in vs. 28 indicates the finality of Christ's offering (*anaphero*) of himself; cf. 7.27 for the verb: "he did this once for all when he offered up himself." In this verse an adverb similar to *apax* is used, *ephax* (once for all, literally, "upon" or *epi* all"). Compare *anaphero* with *prosphero* of vs. 25: the former involves something related to above or *ana*; the latter, with respect to towards or in-the-direction-of (*pros*). I.e., we have a "vertical" and "horizontal" offering.

Appear (*orao*): has the fundamental meaning of seeing, perceiving; compare with the two verbs noted above, *hupodeiknumi* and *phaneroo*. “And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense” [Lk 1.11]. In the verse at hand, Christ will appear a second time (deuteron); cf. vs. 7: “but into the second only the high priest goes,” this word meaning second in the sense of succession. The first appearance could apply to Christ’s birth in the flesh; understanding of the second appearance can be expanded through the Book of Revelation. “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him” [Rev 1.7].

Choris: without; in vs. 28 it is used in the sense of “not to deal with sin,” i.e., not to be burdened further by sin (that is, with regard to one’s own person). The first coming of Christ was in order to abolish sin: “sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” [Rom 8.3].

In place of sin, the author of Hebrews presents Christ engaged in the act of saving (*soteria*); the Greek text has a noun with the preposition *eis*: “into salvation.” This “into salvation” is in reference to those persons eagerly awaiting Christ (*apekdechomai*). “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” [Rom 8.19].

Confidence (*parresia*) mentioned in vs. 19 is a newly found trust reveals that the “brethren” have obtained a full comprehension of the difference between the cyclic nature of Levitical sacrifices and the unique one of Jesus Christ (“blood of Jesus”). *Parresia* connotes frankness and boldness of speech technically belonging to citizens of a Greek city-state. Cf. 3.6: “And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope.” In the verse at hand, *parresia* pertains to entering (*eis ten eisodon*) the sanctuary (*hagios*), the blood of Jesus acting as a kind of door. Note the two uses of the preposition *eis* (into) signifying full and permanent entry as well as abiding there. “Sanctuary” is in the plural, literally, “of holy (things).” For a similar use, cf. 9.8: “...that the way into the sanctuary is not yet opened as long as the outer tent is still standing.”

“By (*en*) the blood of Jesus:” the preposition *en* as in which parallels *eis* just noted...“in the blood of Jesus.” Here blood is not unlike a vehicle (something in which we are present) which brings us *eis*...into...the “holy things.”

Vs. 20 continues from the previous verse which carries over the force of “therefore” to a completion of the sentence.

Opened (*egkainizo*): as in 9.18 which has another sense of this verb: “Hence even the first covenant was not ratified without blood.” The verb literally means “to make something

new” (*kainos*). The notion of *kainos* in *egkainizo* is amplified by the adjective new or *prospatos*, the only New Testament use of this word which literally means something freshly slaughtered. For a LXX verse: “And there is nothing new under the sun” [Ecc 1.9]. The notion of a recently butchered animal (for sacrifice?) is re-enforced by the adjective living (*zao*). Both *zao* and *prospatos* are used to describe way or *hodos*, a term which Jesus Christ used as applying to himself: “I am the way, the truth and the life (i.e., the *zao*)” [Jn 14.6].

Curtain (*katapetasma*): here equals Christ’s flesh or *sarx*, a term often referring to human nature. Both words connote a certain thickness or density as opposed to the spirit which is accentuated by the preposition through (*dia*), that is, with regard to Christ’s *sarx*. Two other verses containing *katapetasma*: 6.19 (“a sure hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain”) & 9.3 (“Behind the second curtain stood a tent”). “The curtain of the temple was torn in two” [Mk 15.38], that is, by means of Christ’s body which had been crucified and “newly slaughtered” (*prospatos*).

“Great (*megos*) priest” of vs. 21 is equivalent to high priest or *archiereus* as in 7.1. He is situated over (*epi*, upon) God’s house (*oikos*). “Just as Moses was faithful in God’s house” [3.2]. Note the difference: Christ is *epi* this house whereas Moses is in (*en*) it.

Draw near (*proserchomai*) in vs. 22 is as in 4.16 (“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace”). Both are exhortations, the verse at hand allowing this *proserchomai* as result of Christ being over (*epi*) God’s house. Also cf. 7.25: “He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him.”

The preposition *meta* (with) is associated with this act of drawing near and has three parts:

1) “true (*alethinos*) heart:” this is specified further, namely, “in full assurance (*plerophoria*) of faith.” Cf. 6.11: “the full assurance of hope until the end.”

2) sprinkled clean (*rhantizo*): cf. 9.19 & 21 in reference to Moses making purification with regard to liturgical matters, whereas here sprinkling pertains to conscience (*suneidesis*), in making it free from evil. Cf. 9.9: “gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper” or the knowing-together (*sun*) of the worshiper.

3) “pure (*katharos*) water:” for washing (*louo*) the body. “He who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not all of you” [Jn 13.10]. Although water is mentioned, it is within the context of sprinkling which was done with blood.

This transference of ritual purification to the human person with respect to God traces much of its influence from God purifying the house of Israel in Ezk 36. For example, cf. vs. 25: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.” The purpose: “I will put my spirit within you” [vs. 27] or the *ruach* of God *qerev* Israel; cf. 8.10 which treats this word within the context of this Ezekiel passage.

Vs. 23 has the first of two “lets,” the second introducing vs. 24 which forms part of the verse at hand.

Hold fast (*katecho*): as in 3.14: “For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end.” This verb has the preposition *kata* (according to) which suggests holding in accord with a given order which is the “confession (*homologia*) of our hope.” Cf. 3.1: “Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.” Here the *kata-echo* is based upon hope (*elpis*): “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for.”

Unwavering (*aklinos*): used to describe hope which literally means “not inclining,” the only New Testament occurrence. This constancy is reminiscent of I Sam 6.4: “And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went; they turned neither to the right nor to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.”

Promised (*epaggellomai*): which is equivalent to God being faithful (*pistos*). Cf. 6.13 for this verb: “For when God made a promise to Abraham.” It pertains to making an announcement and is related to *epaggelia* (promise and hence the Gospel).

8 May, 7 Sunday of Easter

"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay everyone for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and every one who loves and practices falsehood. "I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star." The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let him who hears say, "Come." And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price. I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which

are described in this book. He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! Revelation 22.12-17 & 20

This excerpt is lifted from *Notations on the Book of Revelation*, also on the Lectio Divina Homepage. Vss. 18 & 19 aren't included in the church's selection but are included for the sake of continuity.

Vs. 12: "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay everyone for what he has done.

Jesus Christ suddenly interrupts the angel speaking with John, the purpose of *idou* (behold). The first part of vs. 12 is a restatement of vs. 7 with emphasis on *tachu*, soon. His coming is for two purposes: *misthos* (recompense) and *apodidomi* (to repay). "Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first" [Mt 20.8]. This reversal which puts the last first and *visa versa* is appropriate here at the end of Revelation. Both purposes of Christ's coming are in accord with a person's actions (*ergon*).

Vs. 13 is identical to 1.8 and 21.6 where Christ identifies himself with the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

Vs. 14: Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have their right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

Another reference to blessedness (*makarios*), this time regarding those persons who wash their robes (stole) as in 7.9: "a great multitude...standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes." The source of cleansing is found in 7.14: "the blood of the Lamb." The persons referred to in vs. 14 are not necessarily the ones here because they are already in heaven. Most likely persons who wash their robes are subjects to the "kings of the earth" (21.24).

Exousia: right which also connotes authority as in 2.26: "I will give him power over the nations." To exercise *exousia* in the verse at hand means approaching the cherubim at the entrance to the garden of Eden (cf. Gen 3.23), that is, reversing the "driving out" action and entering the "city by the gates." Note that the Bible starts off with a garden and concludes with a city. Vs. 14 has two uses of the preposition *eis* (into): the first by itself and the other prefixed to the verb *eiserchomai* (to enter) which can be taken as a guarantee for entry.

Vs. 15: Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

These people who are basically put in the category of dogs may be taken as not having washed their robes and are outside (*exo*) the city. “Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh” [Phil 3.2]. For reference to such individuals, cf. 21.7-8. They are not entirely unlike those whom Jesus drove from the temple: “He drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple” [Jn 2.15] because just like the heavenly Jerusalem, “you shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade” [vs. 16].

Vs. 16: “I Jesus have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.”

Mention of the personal angel of Jesus possibly refers to the one of vs. 8. For direct angelic assistance to Jesus, cf. Lk 22.43: “And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.” The churches most likely are the seven churches with which an angel is associated.

Martureo: witness which here is used as a verb and refers not only the message to each of the seven churches but everything contained in the Book of Revelation. Since *biblion* or scroll (book) has been mentioned often, perhaps such witnessing implies all the contents which has been rolled up in them.

Rhiza: root as in Is 11.1: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” Also cf. 5.5.

Genos: offspring. “They shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord and their children with them” [Is 65.23]. By attributing to himself both the source (root) and what comes from it (offspring), Jesus is saying in another way what he claimed with regard to being Alpha and Omega, beginning and end.

Proinos: morning star (cf. 2.28 for notes). Jesus as *proinos* resembles the words of Ps 19.4-6: “In them he has set a tent for the sun which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and there is nothing hid from its heat.”

Vs. 17: The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let him who hears say, “Come.” And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price.

The bride represents the Church (cf. 21.9) who here is with the Spirit (*Pneuma*) as though they formed a chorus addressing the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Three instances of the verb *erchomai*, to come: twice used as a straight-forward yearning and the other as an exhortation. The “come” by Spirit and bride are echoed back to them by persons who have heard them speak. This is not unlike the sentiments of Sg 2.8: “The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.”

The person who is thirsty forms a third category and is bidden to come to the water of life (cf. 21.6). The person who desires may be included here or form another category. The important word here is *dorean*, without price, as it is in 21.6.

Vs. 18: I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.

Martureo: to warn as the angel who gives witness (cf. vs. 16) for the churches. Adding to the *biblion* is considered evil because it is a book of prophecy. Most likely these words are a continuation of Jesus speaking (cf. vs. 16).

Epitithemi: to add, here in the sense of putting something extra on that which is already complete. Compare with the conclusion of John’s Gospel: “But there are many other things which Jesus did; were everyone of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” [21.25]. In the verse at hand, adding to the *biblion* of Revelation desecrates the *biblion* of chapter 5 which only the Lamb could open (and presumably to add words). Should anyone attempt this, the seven plagues associated with seven angels as described in chapter 8 will bring affliction.

Vs. 19: and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city which are described in this book.

Aphaireo: to take away. For a positive sense of this verb: “Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me to take away my reproach among men” [Lk 1.25].

Aphaireo counters *epitithemi* of the previous verse, thus implying that all the letters lying in between Christ as Alpha and Christ as Omega, as it were, cannot be altered. Again, keep in mind that it is Jesus Christ the *Logos* who is speaking (*logoi*, words).

Vs. 20: He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

15 May, Pentecost

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Ba'bel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem was a hundred years old, he became the father of Arpachshad two years after the flood; and Shem lived after the birth of Arpachshad five hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Genesis 11.1-9

Today has several readings, so the one at hand is take from the Vigil of Pentecost, the except being from *Expansions on the Book of Genesis* also posted on the Lectio Divina Homepage.

“Now the whole earth had one language and few words,” a verse which applies to approximately three generations stemming from the three sons of Noah. What could have been that first language? As for the garden of Eden, there was no need for a language since the first man and woman required no words to communicate with each other due to the immediate presence of the Lord. What we have as far as anything recorded derive from Moses, the author of Genesis, who put words into their mouths. We have to look for a first language originating outside the garden of Eden with the banishment of the man and his need to communicate with his two sons, Cain and Abel. Adam was in between two worlds: the one of no language and the one of language. That is to say, he had to speak with Cain and Abel yet not with his wife who, as noted in 3.23, did not suffer banishment from the garden. From time to time Adam met her at the gate of Eden, that is, close to the fiery revolving sword, not so much to utter words with her but to enjoy to some degree that communion which had been lost and hopefully could be transmitted to his two sons. Certainly that was a fervent wish on the woman’s part. As for Adam’s two sons Cain and Abel born outside the garden of Eden, they lacked this non-verbal ability to communicate and were reduced to just the basics of a rudimentary language. So that primitive tongue was marked by nostalgia for the days of uninterrupted communion the first man and woman enjoyed with God within Eden. Despite its tragic loss, a trace of it remained, the

reason why the first verse of Chapter Eleven says that one language existed with few words. It was, of course, handed down to the inhabitants of the City of Enoch (cf. 4.17) and later survived the flood through the medium of eight speakers, those who were on the ark. This single language which sprang into existence after the man's expulsion from the garden in Eden and later survived the flood became the true unifying element among a disparate population. If it could survive those two calamities, people of the day felt reasonably confident they could continue communicating among each other with ease. However, that was soon not to be the case. The word for "language" is *saphah* which seems to apply more to the lips and speech. "Their libations of blood I will not pour out nor take their names upon my lips" [Ps 16.4]. As for "few words," the adjective '*achad* (one)' is used, the same as "one" in this same verse. Use of '*achad*' in both instances stresses unity of speech as opposed to primitive language carried over from pre-flood days. All the history from the pre-flood days to the present state of affairs was easy to pass on to future generations, a task that soon was to become significantly more complicated.

"And as men migrated from the east." Up until now the three chief strands of post-flood generations were concentrated in a fairly small area. The verb for "migrated" is *nasah* has a more forceful connotation meaning to pull up, pluck out and suggests a somewhat violent, sudden displacement from this location. "So when the people set out from their tents" [Jos 3.14]. "Men"—and the generic term is implied as in the Hebrew "they"—engaged in this *nasah* "from the east." No specific place is given, not even a reason for wanting to migrate, except the cardinal direction of east intimates an attachment with the garden of Eden. After all, the first man left the garden at that direction (cf. 3.24) and later Cain "dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (4.16). And so this general movement away from the east represents a movement away from Eden, a movement which can never be left behind permanently and always sought. Finally the flood came which wiped out all familiar places, so a new sense of belonging had to be cultivated. As noted elsewhere, the garden of Eden was the only place not affected by the worldwide flood. Yet in the post-flood world it remained so high above the rest of the earth that people weren't able to access it. However, they knew of its existence even if it were shrouded with clouds out of sight from prying human eyes. Thus the garden of Eden continued in the re-colonized world as a point of reference and devolved into so-called "high places" where gods were worshiped. The first post-flood generations were drawn naturally to the base of this highest of all peaks because it had been untouched by the waters from above and from below. Still, there came a time when the population increased sufficiently that the descendants of Noah's three sons had to break out and go elsewhere.

The place to which the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japeth came turned out to be "a plain in the land of Shinar." Vs. 2 says that they "found" (*matsa'*) this place, intimating that they stumbled upon it with the intent of not remaining but of going elsewhere...and

that elsewhere is not mentioned. The word for “plain” is *biqhah* which also translates as “valley:” “The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land...of fountains and springs, flowing both in valley and hills.” *Biqhah* suggests that which is cleaved, and anything cut in half like this can be either a plain or a valley...or both together with one half being one and the other half, another. Regardless whether Shinar was a valley or plain, it is a geographical location and had been mentioned in 10.10: “the beginning of his (Nimrod) kingdom was Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.” Thus Shinar is associated with the descendants of Ham and then Nimrod, “a mighty hunter before the Lord” [10.9]. By settling in Shinar, the descendants of Ham hoped to recapture some of Nimrod’s “before-ness” with the Lord, far more valuable than any geographical locale. At the same time, Shinar, by reason of its openness, had a fine view of the towering mountain on top of which was located the garden of Eden untouched by the flood.

Obviously it was natural for these new settlers to emulate the mountain of Eden, an unfulfilled nostalgia which reached across all generations and remains to the present day. If they couldn’t ascend the mountain on which it was located, they hoped to copy what was beyond their reach. The people thought this plain of Shinar offered the ideal location and environment to at last undertake the enormous task of copying what was always in their view. As for such a herculean effort, no time is wasted between the settlement of Shinar and the construction of a city and tower. Two words stand out in vs. 3 (‘And they said, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly’) which occurs immediately after vs. 2. They “come” which means let’s gather together for a project even though we are scattered. At least we have “one language and few words,” an advantage which will enable us to accomplish our project in short order. The second word is “thoroughly” which in Hebrew comes off literally as “let us burn with fire to fire,” *saraph* being the verb at hand and implying baking. “And Joshua burned Ai” [Jos 8.28]. And so the sense here is of baking slowly and thoroughly in order to make the bricks as strong as possible to withstand the height of the tower under consideration. If Noah could have built such a might ark, surely his descendants could construct a tower. Only one essential ingredient was missing: Noah built the ark according to the Lord’s directive whereas the inhabitants of Shinar erected the tower on their own initiative minus divine guidance.

After uttering these collective words which revealed their impulse, vs. 3 adds that the builders had “brick for stone and bitumen for mortar.” The same word is used for both “bitumen” and “mortar” with a slight variation: *chemar* and *chomer*, the verbal root being *chamar*, to boil up, be red. They were used with the bricks that had been “baked thoroughly” thereby ensuring a strong, stable structure. They differed in quality from those bricks later used by the Israelites to build store-cities for the Egyptians (cf. Ex 14); the Israelites deliberately made them of shoddy construction ensuring that the buildings

once erected would, in turn, be quite unstable. They might look great and last a while but eventually would crumble. After the inhabitants of Shinar got their materials ready they uttered their desire to “build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens.” The story at hand is remembered best for the tower, not the city, which was just as important. Presumably the inhabitants, newly arrived on the plain in Shinar, were dwelling in tents and had yet not laid out a city, let alone construct one. Due to the tower’s importance to rival and perhaps surpass the garden of Eden, it took priority over building the city; people could continue living in tents until that was completed. Nevertheless, some elements of the city must have been put in place with the tower smack in the middle. Its centrality should be confused with the position of the tree “in the midst of the garden (of Eden),” 3.3. There the word *betok* can refer to that which is among other things or within a certain place as opposed to the center. This mis-identification was a yet another sign of arrogance, of presuming to have knowledge of the garden of Eden and wishing to emulate it. As for the tower or *migdal* (that word suggests fortifications), its top (*r’osh* or head) was intended to reach the heavens; the Hebrew text is more graphic, “in the heavens” (*shamym*) revealing the haughty confidence of the builders. They weren’t content with reaching the heavens but to place their tower in them and therefore appropriate the heavens, the first created thing by God. In fact, their efforts reads like a mockery of 1.1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The purpose of constructing the tower? That the people who settled in the plain of Shinar decided to “make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” At first glance this sounds reasonable because the people had a tenuous grip on the land after their recent migration from the east. The presumption of reaching “in the heavens” noted just above is based in the fact that the people didn’t realize the value of their “one language and few words” (vs. 1), that this unity was sufficient to sustain them in their newly settled territory. If they assumed the onerous task of making a name, surely others would recognize it. As for these supposed others, if they weren’t in the general vicinity of the plain of Shinar, the tower’s great height was bound to catch their attention. This making of a name as embodied in the tower, so the people presumed, would prevent their being scattered, *puts* being the verb which implies being broken into pieces: “And let your enemies be scattered” [Num 10.35]. *Puts* conveys the notion of scattering not unlike *naphats* of 9.19: “and from these (Noah’s sons) the whole earth was peopled.” The builders of the tower had in mind this sudden and alarming scattering from the newly landed ark, hence they wished to prevent their dispersal from getting out of hand before distance would destroy that one language and few words. That’s why they stressed “upon the face of the whole earth:” not just the area close to the ark’s landing site but the entire globe. So instead of attempting to gain control over the new territory laid out before them, they should have copied their descendants’ father, Noah, that is, his walking with God. That would have precluded building a lofty structure “in the heavens,” and God would

have obliged gladly. Noah was the man the people of Shinar should have held up as an example, not his sons, who were simply transmitters of the human race from the pre-to-post flood worlds. To follow their example would get them nowhere as they soon will discover.

“And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built” [vs. 5]. This is the first of two descents, the second being described in vs. 7. What does this coming down (*yarad*) consist of? Did anyone witness it? Chances are the descent took place on the city’s outskirts away from prying eyes. Actually, this is the first time the Lord appeared on earth since having walked with Noah in the pre-flood days, 6.9. It must have been strange for him experiencing a new yet at the same time old place as he compared the post with the pre-flood earth. Nothing is explicit about this walking, let alone his manner of descent and later, his ascent. Curiosity got the best of the Lord, so he wanted to see what was going on in the plain of Shinar. If he didn’t disguise himself, the sight of divine splendor would have dazzled people. The Lord must have pondered the dramatic words of Ps 19.9ff (‘He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet’) and realized that approach clearly was out of the question. And so the Lord had to assume a disguise to prevent his recognition which involved somehow contracting himself to fit within the confines of space and time. That’s tough enough, let alone the disguise itself. The one he settled upon was as an ordinary man, the best way to go incognito among the people. Some of the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japheth might have been able to pick him out from among the crowd, having recalled that their ancestor Noah walked with God, and were familiar with his disguise. If they did, they kept quiet; even if they had pointed him out, the people wouldn’t believe them.

When the Lord came upon the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, they hid themselves. Here in the city of Shinar there wasn’t any need to express shame while the Lord was among the people because they were pre-occupied with wild celebrations and congratulating themselves for such an accomplishment (as for the name Babel, that doesn’t happen until vs. 9). Note the words upon which this festivity rests, namely, “had built,” as referring to both city and tower. Just as Moses came down from Mt. Sinai (cf. Ex 32.7ff) at the Lord’s request and heard the “sound of singing” (Ex 32.18), something similar must have gotten the Lord’s attention which compelled him to descend to the city of Shinar. Even though he had been walking freely about the people there—certainly not as he had done with Noah and Enoch earlier—it was easy to hide right out in the open because people were more concerned about celebrating. Such dissolute behavior amazed the Lord as everyone about him celebrated in “one language and few words.” Unfortunately Shinar turned out to be a precursor of Sodom and Gomorrah. So at long last the people who migrated from the east to the plain of Shinar founded not just a city but a tower which emulated the mountain on which the garden of Eden was located. The only thing it lacked

was the cherubim and flaming, revolving sword (cf. 3.24). The people conveniently left them out of their plan so nothing would block their ascent to their new tower and prevent them from glorying in their achievement. With all this commotion about him, the Lord decided to do something and do it quickly else the people would come to ruin. So why not hit them where they were most vulnerable? The target? Their common language with few words. Easily we could read into the Lord's mind something like Jesus said in a parable, "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it" [Lk 14.28]? The people who did erect their tower failed to follow any divine plan as Noah had done when building the ark.

"And behold, they are one people, and they have all one language" [vs. 6]. *Hen* ('behold;' similar to *hineh* as in 6.12) is a sign of astonishment which reveals the Lord's state of mind when he came down to the city. Of course, he was aware of what was transpiring from his perch in heaven yet couldn't get a first-hand view—one from that of a human being—unless he descended and walked incognito among the people. As noted above, the people did have one language, the first thing that struck the Lord, and that was vital for ease of communication. Unfortunately, much of this language was used in either shouting or profanity, given the timing of the Lord's arrival. Note that the Lord himself says these words starting with *hen* and continuing for the rest of vs. 6. He was stating the obvious which got people's attention immediately. That intimates he was a stranger, one who didn't share their language, and had to do something as quickly as possible. Was he a spy sent to report on their city and tower? We don't have any reaction simply because by now the Lord knew his disguise was wearing thin and couldn't keep it up much longer.

Vs. 6 continues with "this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them." The word expressing the Lord's astonishment (*hen* or behold) now comes to a observation based upon reason, not emotion. The verb *chalal* is used for the noun "beginning" which had been commented upon earlier, essentially conveying the idea of to perforate, pierce through. Thus *chalal* is a perforation or an opening which, in turn, signals the start of an event. It's different from *re'shyth* as in 1.1 ('In the beginning'), the first of any kind. *Chalal* is appropriate because it intimates an opening—let's say a small one—not unlike a nozzle behind which tremendous water pressure has been building up, so with its release, there's no telling how powerful it will be and what manifestation it'll assume. *Batsar* is the verb for the English "impossible" which can be rendered as to restrain as well as to cut off. It's the opposite to *chalal*, that is, that there will be no means of cutting off this *chalal* once it is unleashed. The Hebrew thus reads "now nothing will be cut off from them all which they propose to do." As for the verb "propose," it's *zamam* which suggests laying in wait, to plot. "As they plot to take my life" [Ps 31.13]. While out and about in the city, the Lord got wind of this *zamam*, that what the people were celebrating was the start of future, even grander projects. If they could

construct such a city and erect such a tower which was as high as the mountain on which lay the garden of Eden, there was no limit what they could accomplish. The next tower would pierce the heavens which is really why the Lord had decided to come down and check things out. Use of the verb *zamam* is telling: because it applies more to scheming as opposed to planning, truly what the Lord heard in the streets was alarming. After all, the one language and few words the people enjoyed enabled information and therefore their building plans to be processed much more quickly without writing them down but passing them from mouth to mouth.

Vs. 7 restates the Lord's descent in vs. 5: "Come, let us go down (*yarad*) and there confuse their language." *Havah* is an adverb of exhortation ('come') as used in vs. 4 when the inhabitants of the city rallied themselves together for building both the city and the tower. Here is a second descent by the Lord, the first one being in vs. 5. He saw how raucous was the celebration over completion of their impressive works, this being the first city built since the one constructed by Cain and named after his son, Enoch (cf. 4.17). The Lord didn't come down to that city since it wasn't raised imitation of the garden of Eden on the mountaintop and posed no threat of usurpation. He wanted to compare the both cities, the former having no tower. As for the first person plural ('Come, let us go down'), two suggestions: a spontaneous desire on the Lord's part to check things out. The Lord is not so much uttering these words aloud as pondering them, so there's no one around to hear what he intends. Then again, it could refer to Moses, author of the Book of Genesis. The Lord wished Moses to come in order to make an accurate report of his findings.

Vs. 7 continues with "and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." The Lord determined this course of action during his first *yarad* (descent) when he saw the people's wild celebration. He was struck especially by the unity of language which, as noted above, was a key factor enabling the people to complete the city and tower in record time. The verb for "confuse" is *balal* which means to mix or mingle, pour and doesn't necessarily have a bad connotation. For example, the Book of Leviticus has it a number of times with reference to flour mingled with oil: "fine flour, mingled with oil" [2.4]. So if the people who came from the east had this "one language and few words," what did this mingling consist of? It was a jumbling of the existing language which at this stage remained one yet instead of a "few words," the Lord mingled them up to such an extent that the people couldn't understand each other. It was a reverse Pentecost. Instead of the Lord descending this second time in the guise of a human being, he assumed the form of a wind...a *ruach*...which blew reversely, if you will, compared with the Holy Spirit who blew upon the disciples of Jesus Christ in the upper room. As for the resulting confusion or mingling, the Hebrew of vs. 7 reads literally, "(each) man could not hear the speech (*saphah* as in vs. 1) of his neighbor." And so hearing became just as

confused as speaking, another indicator of how necessary it was for Pentecost many years later to reverse this curse.

“So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city” [vs. 8]. *Puts* is the verb for “scatter abroad” used in vs. 4, the fear of being broken into pieces (the fundamental sense of *puts*) and the rationale behind constructing both the city and tower to emulate the garden of Eden. The Lord effected this scattering by the breathe of his mouth, his *ruach*, blowing them like so many leaves over the earth from the plain of Shinar. Vs. 8 concludes with “they left off building the city,” *chadal* being the verb which means just this, they ceased their work. When the Lord first descended under the guise of a man, both the city and tower were complete; more work remained with finishing and the city, even entertaining thoughts to go beyond the limits originally laid down. Nothing is said of the tower. It remained there for many years afterwards as a reminder to the former inhabitants’ hubris. The structure was so lofty that no matter where the people were scattered they could see it looming in the horizon as a reminder of their vain efforts. While looking back at it, everyone were unable to express their frustration; although they retained the one language, many words had been injected into it instead of the original few.

The city on the plain in the land of Shinar—no specific name had been given to it yet most likely went by Shinar—was called Babel “because there the Lord confused (*balal*) the language of all the earth.” Perhaps the tower had another name before this, tower of Shinar. Now it stood as a perpetual reminder of *balal* until the day of Pentecost. Vs. 10 to the end of Chapter Eleven recounts the descendants of Shem, the son whom Noah had blessed in 10.26, and ends with the birth of Abram. These intervening generations, having been scattered from the city of Shinar-turned-Babel, were in some ways worse off than the generations noted in Chapter Ten. At least they had that one language and few words. The more the succeeding generations increased, the greater became their confusion of that one language, confused so much that in time other languages sprang from it. Finally there came a day when a descendant...Abram...arose, the first person to attempt ending this continuous scattering. First he had to remove himself from the land in which it had happened, rather, he needed to be removed by the Lord himself, hence Chapter Twelve begins with Abram leaving his native land.

22 May, 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. Proverbs 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 *miphhal*, 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) “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 not 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.

29 May, Corpus Christi

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!"
Genesis 14.18-20

This excerpt is taken from *Expansions on the Book of Genesis* also posted on this home page.

“The king of Sodom went out to meet him (Abram) at the Valley of Shaveh.” The name of this king isn’t given, perhaps out of embarrassment, because “the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord” [13.13]. Still, the king was eager to find about this renowned foreigner, Abram, and taken Lot back under his wing (cf. 13.12). It must have been difficult negotiating with such a person whose city, along with Gomorrah, soon would be obliterated. Then again, Abram wondered if his expedition to rescue his nephew had been worth the risk since Lot was returning to a place known for its way of life. Perhaps Abram had in mind a temporary truce with this king of Sodom...entrust Lot to his protection and rescue him at a later time. That’s what happened, at least in essence, through the mysterious visitors to Abram who moved on to Sodom. As for the Valley of Shaveh or the King’s Valley, that is mentioned in 2Kg 18.18 where David’s son, Absalom, erected a pillar or a memorial in his name.

There is a redeeming aspect to this rescue of Lot and handing him over to the king of Sodom through the medium of Melchizedek, king of Salem who “brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God the Most High” [vs. 18]. As his very name intimates (‘righteousness is my king’), Melchizedek is very different from the anonymous king of Sodom, being a priest (*kohen*) besides. This is the first mention of “priest” in the Bible, and Melchizedek is an archetype of priests that will follow in his footsteps. Not only was Melchizedek a priest but was one of “God the Most High (*helyon*).” He received this honor from the Lord which was included in the land of Canaan set aside for Abram. If the Lord can make Canaan as Abram’s future inheritance, it’s just as easy for him to insert only one king who held righteousness in high regard and who would recognized Abram as the future inheritor. Thus Melchizedek is similar to Enoch and Noah before him, two men singled out for having walked with God while the multitude among which they had lived hadn’t a clue as to what was going on. The Epistle to the Hebrews puts this divine walking in terms not dissimilar to that theme: “He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life” [7.3]. By comparison, the king of Sodom brought no offering to Abram; he could have been a priest but certainly not of God Most High, given the already tarnished reputation of his city. Salem refers to *shalom* or peace and refers to the future Jerusalem where Melchizedek reigned. Surely from that high vantage point he and his subjects were able to witness the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that was to come. The offerings of Melchizedek (bread and wine) are modest but significant insofar as they are representative of that the fruit of that land Abram was to inherit, especially Salem which later would become so important.

In vss. 19-20 the king/priest Melchizedek blessed (*barak*; cf. 9.1 where God blesses Noah and his sons) Abram and does so by “God Most High, maker of heaven and earth.” This short by significant *barak* has the preposition *l-* prefaced to “God.” That is to say, it reads literally “to God,” that Abram is “to” him, a direct relationship with God, the first divine relationship acknowledged by a person. Despite the summons to leave his native Haran, take the journey into Canaan and then unexpectedly flee into Egypt and back to Canaan, Abram received no confirmation from a fellow human being about this mission. That means Abram had to live by the initial divine summons even though it was re-confirmed while in Canaan. How does

Abram share this...or can he? Is there anyone among his family who can comprehend his actions such as erecting an altar? And so Abram is not unlike his predecessor Noah who pretty much kept to himself. The person closest to him is his nephew Lot though he emerges more as an opportunist or hanger-on to Abram than anything else. Even his first rescue just recounted and his more dramatic one from Sodom later on isn't especially flattering.

Returning to the blessing of vs. 19, we have for "maker" (of heaven and earth) the verb *qanah* which more fundamentally means to acquire, to purchase, as noted earlier with reference to the proper name Cain. In the verse at hand, *qanah* implies that God had acquired heaven and earth meaning that it pre-existed or was just as eternal as he and thus sharing in some type of divine life. It's a sentiment not entirely unlike the Spirit hovering over the waters in the opening verses of Genesis discussed in that context. We can expect someone like Melchizedek and his predecessors to have an idea like this, quite in line with a proper understanding of the biblical divinity for a person; he and they had lived in relative isolation yet kept the primeval understanding of God alive throughout so many generations. While Melchizedek lacks genealogy (cf. Heb 7.3 already cited), definitely he is a descendant from one of Noah's three sons and had maintained some semblance of the Lord with whom Noah had walked. That means his descendants going back that far managed to keep alive a spark of divine awareness. Just the fact that human relations with God became so problematic due to the increase of sin and corruption is a sad commentary on the state of affairs in which Abram found himself. At the same time this narrow focus upon a single individual here and there within Genesis is exciting, the reason why it captures our attention.

The second half of Melchizedek's blessing is a reminder to Abram not to glory in his recent triumph of having rescued Lot but to attribute it to the Lord: "Blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" *Magan* is the verb for "deliver" which occurs two other times in the Bible, Prov 4.9 and Hos 11.8; from it is derived the noun "shield." In the context at hand Melchizedek wishes Abram to acknowledge that God had acted as his shield...perhaps not so much to destroy his enemies but to protect him from them which accounts for the lack of details concerning how Abram got Lot (i.e., by not slaying his captors). That would tie in nicely with Abram's earlier division of his forces into two parties, a division that took place deliberately at night or in secret. In sum, Abram would snatch Lot away under cover of darkness with his captors being unaware of what had transpired.

Abram's meeting with Melchizedek took place with the intent of handing over Lot to the jurisdiction of the king of Sodom in whose territory he had resided (cf. 13.12). Once Abram gave him a tenth of his possessions—and this was no mean sum chiefly consisting of animals and perhaps slaves—Melchizedek was overstepped by the king who was observing closely the blessing just pronounced. He intervenes with "Give me the persons but take the goods for yourself" [vs. 21]. Melchizedek is forced out of the picture by the king who demanded Abram's possessions or *rekush* noted in vs. 12: "they also took Lot...and his goods and departed." As for the word "persons," the Hebrew has *nephesh* or literally, "soul" which pertains to breath, a fact noted earlier in this document. And so we see a distinction here, one not found in vs. 12, between *rekush* and persons. This king wanted human beings, not *rekush*, to bring back to

Sodom for reasons all too easily associated with the name of the city. Since he had the power to do what he wanted and Melchizedek was unable to counter him, the situation became tense very quickly. Melchizedek didn't want to do the king's bidding, trying his best to prevent the handover of these persons...*nephesh*...into his possession. Because *nephesh* implies the very essence of a person, the king wanted to put his intended prey totally under his control and his alone. By saying to Abram that the Lord "has delivered your enemies into your hand," he was hoping that Abram would get the hint, that one of these enemies was the king of Sodom, a man never to be trusted.

So here we have Melchizedek and the king of Sodom, two diametrically opposed characters, coming out to meet Abram, each with a different purpose. Melchizedek takes the initiative by pronouncing his blessing, thereby hoping to work in Abram's favor. Although his words sounded noble in comparison with the king, his offerings of bread and wine must have looked pathetic to such an ignominious character. Both the blessing and offering didn't work because the king of Sodom had his mind set on taking *nephesh*, not *rekush*. Then we have Lot who remains silent awaiting the fate that will be meted out to him shortly. Vss. 22-23 break the tension of this short but tense situation, a struggle between Abram and a less than desirable representative of the land he had entered and was destined to inherit. Abram says to the king of Sodom with confidence, most likely emboldened by his recent expedition to rescue his nephew, Lot, "I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, maker of heaven and earth." The verb for "sworn" is *rum* which fundamentally means to exalt, lift up, and here pertains to the lifting up of Abram's hands in worship. "I have lifted up my voice and cried" [39.15]. That is to say, Abram lifts up his hands to the "acquirer (*qanah*) of heaven and earth," this word being used by Melchizedek in his blessing.

3 June, Sacred Heart

For thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and upon the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on fat pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice." Ezekiel 34.11-16

This excerpt contains four instances of the Lord seeking his sheep introduced by *hineh* or "behold" which is designed to get the people's attention. Presumably those listening are the ones who've been scattered everywhere outside the bounds of Israel. The verbs are *darash* and

baqar: one instance of the former and three of the latter. The first implies a beating or treading as by the shepherd setting out upon having discovered that his sheep were lost or perhaps stolen. The others suggest a cleaving or plowing from which the noun for animals with cloven hoofs is derived, the idea being that when looking for food these animals cleave the ground, something akin to pawing.

There comes to mind two examples of Jesus as Good Shepherd, the adjective *kalos* being used as in Jn 10.11 which pertains to that which is beautiful as well as noble and honorable. While the chapter containing this example deals with the quality of the shepherd and his relationship with his flock, it doesn't speak of him looking for any sheep which have become lost. That is found in the parable of the lost sheep (Mt 18.12+) where the shepherd "goes in search of" the one while the ninety-nine remain safe, the verb being *zeteo* implying to find out by thinking or reason. In other words, the shepherd is familiar with the place where this one sheep had strayed and heads directly for it.

While nothing is said of this place, in the end it's incidental to his finding the sheep and bringing it back home. The text at hand doesn't speak of a place but of a day, one of "clouds and thick darkness" or *hanan* and *haraphei*, the latter a more intense form of the former. In the positive sense *haraphei* is used for the place where God dwells: "And the people stood afar off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was" [Ex 20.21]. Such a day isn't limited to a twenty-four hour cycle but something along the lines of a *kairos* even, a specific time which can be an instant or much longer.

Note that the Lord rescues not all the sheep but some which had strayed among both people and nations which most likely infers having been taken captive as opposed to moving there on their own volition. On the other hand, the parable of the lost sheep deals with one sheep which had wandered off, *planao* suggestive of straying little by little until one is completely lost. With Ezekiel, the Lord returns his people not just to their native land of Israel but to its mountain heights where there will be pasture. In other words, being on such heights hopefully will keep the sheep safe from any invaders as well and act as a natural barrier to prevent wandering off.

So once the indefinite number of sheep have been established on the mountain heights, it seems the Lord will go out again. This time he seeks the lost, strayed, crippled, and weak. The difference here compared with the Shepherd who is *kalos* or beautiful is that the Lord will watch over with the same care those who are fat and strong. Their nourishment will differ from the weak by being fed "justice" or *mishpat* which also means justice or the judgment handed down by a judge.

5 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, have you 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.' First Kings 17.17-24

This is the first Sunday of Ordinary Time we've had since 7 February, a time to pause and consider what had transpired since then as well as the movement from the dead of winter to almost the beginning of summer. This Ordinary Time (the shorter one being from after Christmas to Ash Wednesday) will continue to the threshold of Advent late November, another radial transition of seasons. In the meantime, the church doesn't stand idle but uses this interval time of almost seven months to present various aspects of the mystery of Christ, sandwiched in between, if you will, Lent-Easter-Pentecost and Advent-Christmas.

Just before this incident the same anonymous widow and her son had received a multiplication of oil and meal to get them through a desperate famine. Immediately after the encouraging words of vs. 16 ('The jar of meal was not spent, neither did the cruse of oil fail') the widow's son had died which obviously made her question what seemed to be cruel fate. The illness isn't specified, but it left the child with no "breath" or *neshamah* which connotes panting compared with *ruach* (often used for spirit) or breathing or the movement of air. It seems as though Elijah had remained in the vicinity after the first miracle because the widow addresses him or more accurately, rebukes him: "What have you against me?" She puts this in the context of "sin" or *havon* which also means guilt contracted as well as something depraved, not the more common *chatah*, sin as literally missing-the-mark. More specifically, the widow speaks of the remembrance of this *havon*. Such sin isn't revealed, making us left to wonder what it might be, and thoughts go naturally to the widow either having caused her husband's death but lacked sufficient proof she had done it or even was a prostitute.

Without further ado, Elijah asks the widow for her son. He doesn't respond to her question, perhaps embarrassed by it. This rebuke of sorts makes him take matters into his own hands immediately by bringing the boy to the second floor which earlier the widow had arranged a guest room of sorts. Elijah didn't say a word to the widow as he walked up the stairs which made both all the more anxious. He had to perform a miracle at once to get out of this situation else the widow just might kill herself as she had threatened earlier during the famine.

Now alone from prying eyes and ears (Elijah took precautions that the widow neither saw nor was listening in), he pretty much echoes to the Lord her complaint of the child's death, that is, right after the multiplication of oil and meal. His prostration on the child three times was a

kind of prostration one would make in such desperate situation. The Lord must revive this boy now or never. Elijah bids that the child's "soul" or *nephesh* return to him, this word being similar to *neshamah* noted above.

At once the Lord heard Elijah's triple desperate cry for help rendered literally as 'heard in the voice of Elijah,' the preposition *b-* prefaced to "voice" suggestive of immediacy or almost absolute unity between this voice and a response to it. Elijah didn't bother to thank the Lord for this miracle, perhaps indignant that the child had died after having survived the recent famine. Elijah was more concerned with returning the boy to his mother who remained downstairs anxiously awaiting word. He wanted to rush down immediately but paused a bit to make sure the boy indeed had come back to life. Pretty much like Elijah the widow didn't respond by giving thanks to the Lord but acknowledged with gratitude him being "a man of God" as well as the *davar* ('word' as expression) of the Lord in his mouth as consisting of "truth," *'emeth* also applicable to faithfulness or fidelity.

We have no word of what had happened next, let alone the boy responding to all this. However, Elijah and the widow must have shared some residual anxiety, if you will, this being the second miracle in a row and fearful that another tragedy might be around the corner when divine intervention just might not be at hand.

12 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.' Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Second Samuel 12.7-10 & 13

The tone of this excerpt is so direct and lacking embellishment it has to come from an eyewitness. Although the text mentions no one other than Nathan and David, most likely a scribe was present whose task was to record conversations involving the king no matter how personal or intimate they happened to be.

The famous words "You are the man" refer to the story Nathan recounted to David about a rich man who took a lamb from a poor man and prepared it for a visitor. The words of vs. 3

which aren't recorded in this excerpt are especially touching: "It grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and like in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him." This must have struck David right to the heart as it pertained to his conniving the death of Uriah to take his wife and make her his own. If this weren't bad enough, later in his reign his now wife Bathsheba never could get Nathan's story and accusation out of her mind, haunting her and her husband for the rest of their lives.

Nathan begins solemnly with "Thus says the Lord" which right away put David on the spot, for such words intimate that he knew what was to follow and was forced to listen, squirming all the while. Nathan proceeds with an account of the Lord having chosen David as king to replace Saul. Of course David must have thought of himself as no better than his predecessor, if not worse, and had to face up to this fact. Then Nathan asks more or less rhetorically, "Why have you despised the word of the Lord?" Even the sound of this verb is harsh, *bazah* as it related to *davar* or word as expression. Nathan's words imply that David had been attuned to this *davar* even when he first caught sight of Bathsheba in vs. 2. Right there and then he knew he had the opportunity to stick to the *davar*, but his lust precluded that. From that point on events snowballed to the murder of Uriah and what followed. Throughout it all the *davar*, which earlier had been a support and comfort for David, now weighted upon him heavily. It must have been like that of the first man once he had been expelled from the garden.

In place of being faithful to the Lord's *davar*, Nathan says that David had done "evil" or *rah* in his sight. Now the same *rah* will plague David's house or the children born from his illicit union with Bathsheba. At some stage shortly after this prophecy David had to break the news to Bathsheba who by now had conceived a child. It's not unlikely this prompted her to go into a deep depression as she awaited an agonizingly long period of time until the child's birth, even if were a month or so. Actually it wouldn't be surprising if Bathsheba's depression and profound embarrassment contributed to the child's death which seemed to have happened shortly after birth. This child has no name, and to have no name means pretty much not to exist, this being a summation of the tragedy just described.

As for the second mention of evil or *rah*, David's intercourse with Bathsheba which Nathan said was done "secretly" or literally "in secret" (*seter*), the future prospect of someone laying not just with Bathsheba but with multiple wives out in the open was a terrifying embarrassment. That is to say, this will happen "before all Israel and before the sun" or the exact opposite of *seter*. The person involved presumably is Absalom though Solomon is noted later in his reign as no model of sexual propriety.

David neither rebuked nor denied what Nathan had said. To the prophet's surprise, he admitted his sin straightaway which made Nathan say that the Lord has "put (it) away." *havar* being the verb which essentially means to pass over. In this context *havar* has a positive and negative meaning. Positive in that David is forgiven, but true to what Nathan had prophesied, the king's sin will not allow the sword "depart from your house." In other words, David's sin will *havar*...cross over...to his descendants which it had done immediately with the death of the child conceived with Bathsheba.

19 June, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn, each family by itself; the family of the house of David by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shime-ites by itself and their wives by themselves; and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves. "On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. Zechariah 12.11-12 & 13.1

Vs. 14 is included though not officially part of this excerpt.

“On that day” isn't necessarily one of twenty-four hours but a special occasion where duration is secondary, indicative of when the Lord will intervene in human affairs. The context is the inhabitants of Jerusalem mourning over “one whom they have pierced” (vs. 10), that “one” not being specified. However, it doesn't end with this but is a prelude, if you will, to chapter thirteen which also begins with “on that day” along with chapter fourteen with “behold, a day.” In sum, it seems as though Zechariah wishes to draw attention to a period of time when the Lord will intervene as a result of human misbehavior or sin. Thus a sense of expectation permeates these chapters.

This excerpt begins with mention of “mourning” or *misphe*d which derives from a verbal root meaning to beat the breast as in lamentation compared with that for Hadadrimmon, a fertility god mourned seasonally. Also it could refer to Megiddo where the people mourned the death of King Josiah (cf. 2Chron 35.20-7). Regardless, the death of this person who had renovated the temple by the inhabitants of Jerusalem had made such a great impact upon them that he was revered as a god. A reference to the passage at hand in the **RSV** says that this person will come back to life in the spring, but still that isn't enough. The cycle of season to season has to be broken or transcended which may be why the last three chapters of Zechariah is strong on emphasizing “that day.”

Those who will mourn or beat their breasts (again, the verbal root of *misphe*d, *saphad*) are described as doing it “by themselves.” The word is *levad* (also as alone) which occurs a remarkable eleven times in a short period of time. The picture we obtain is that each group is hit by a common tragedy and respond to it by isolating themselves instead of doing it together.

After having gone through the eleven *levad* or “by themselves,” we have a second instance of “on that day” which provides relief not so much from this mourning but from the isolation of all concerned. The final verse (the first of the next chapter) speaks of a fountain which for both King David's house and those dwelling in Jerusalem, this being indicated by the preposition *l-* which reads literally “to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” followed by

another *l* or prefaced to “sin and uncleanness.” The verb “to cleanse” isn’t in the Hebrew text. In other words, this preposition intimates direct and thorough intervention by the Lord to alleviate the people from guilt over having slain the unmentioned “only child” [vs. 10] whom they have slain.

26 June, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; 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 him who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing, with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle upon him. 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

Vss. 15-18 are added for clarification though this reading omits them.

This passage comes on the heels of Elijah on Mount Horeb where he encountered the Lord in a “still small voice [vs. 12]. Therefore what flows from that encounter is recounted here. The two words comprising that phrase are the noun *demamih* and the adjective *daq*. The former has two other biblical references, Job 4.16 and Ps 107.20, the second as “He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.” *Demamih* applies to silence as well as to tranquility. The latter applies to something that has been reduced to being very fine, dust for example. The phrase reads literally “voice of thin stillness.” There are two opposites here, a voice which we associate with sound and communication and its opposite which not only consists of stillness but one that is very fine consisting of dust-like particles, almost impossible to detect, laying just beyond our normal capacity of hearing.

So when the Lord bids Elijah to go to Damascus, he's telling him to go into the heart of Israel's most hated enemy. Being exposed to a voice which is both *demamih* and *daq* is the means for equipping a person for such a bold move. Not only is Elijah to enter enemy territory, but he is to anoint Hazael as king of it. And to make matters worse, Elijah is to anoint Jehu as king over Israel. Both had to be open to Elijah for anointing them, else they wouldn't accept. Once these two nations who despised each other have received their respective leaders, the prophet is to anoint Elisha in his place. While in the company of this prophetic successor Elijah couldn't but help share his recent experience, of what was in store for Elisha who would have to deal with the consequences of the newly established two kings.

The Lord knew Elijah would carry out his wishes. What validated such an ironical mission, if you will, was the Lord saying that he will leave seven thousand people who haven't worshiped Baal. That was enough motivation, for shortly before the still small voice on Mount Horeb, Elijah had engaged in an earth shaking contest on Mount Carmel where he won out against the prophets of Baal. Many of those must have witnessed their recent dramatic contest and took heart. Despite this, worship of this local divinity persisted and had to be eradicated.

Elijah knew he found the right successor when Elisha unhesitatingly left his parents and "ministered" to him, *sharath* meaning to wait upon as a servant as well as the duties performed by a priest. Such ministering was more than care for bodily needs and so forth. It was a time of initiation into the ways of prophecy, of Elijah sharing how to cope with extreme paradoxes such as his recent two anointings of Hazael and Jehu, let alone his contest on Mount Carmel. People in both Syria and Israel obviously knew about the events, and many must have considered Elijah a traitor worthy of being put to death. Was he trying to play one against another and allow another superpower such as Egypt intervene? In other words, was Elijah more than a traitor, an agent sowing discord? Such questions made either side wonder why Elijah was allowed to anoint their king in the first place. Although the text says that the Lord commanded it, we have no evidence that people went along with it. The same must have gone through the minds of both rulers. This double cross, if you will, would throw suspicion upon Elisha, so he had to be primed for the job. Hopefully the divine voice which revealed itself to Elijah as *demamih* and *daq* or in stillness and as being fine as dust would be essential for informing the future prophecies of Elisha.

3 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. Isaiah 66.10.14

The following is lifted from *Expansions on the Book of Isaiah* posted on this home page.

66-Vs. 10: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her;

Samach (cf. 56.7) and *gyl* (cf. 65.19) or “rejoice and be glad,” the latter with the preposition *b-* prefaced to “her” or literally, “in her.” Both have as their object those who “love” Jerusalem, *’ahav* (cf. 61.8).

Sus (cf. 65.19) and *masus* (cf. 65.18) or “rejoice and joy.” This command is aimed toward those who are mourning over Jerusalem, *’aval* (cf. 61.3).

66-Vs. 11: that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory."

Those whom the Lord begins to address in the previous verse here are likened not to children but even younger, babes at the breast. *Savah* is the verb for “be satisfied” (cf. 58.11) which comes from Jerusalem’s “consoling” breasts or *tanchumym*, a noun which is rendered literally as “breasts of consolation.” It has two other biblical references, Ps 94.19 and Jer 16.7, the former being cited here: “When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.”

Matsats or “drink deeply” is the only occurrence in the Bible and suggests milking out. It is to be done “with delight” or *hanag* (cf. 58.14), a verb which implies neighing like a horse.

Jerusalem’s “glory” or *kavod* (cf. 62.2) is not unlike her two breasts just mentioned. From them or more accurately, from their “abundance” or *zyz* those mentioned in vs. 10 are to drink deeply. *Zyz* pertains to anything moving or an abundance and has two other biblical references, Ps 50.11 and Ps 80.13, the former being cited here: “and all that moves in the field is mine.”

66-Vs. 12: 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.

This is the last “Thus says the Lord” in the Book of Isaiah, so it requires close attention. Furthermore, it’s followed by *hineh* (cf. 65.17) or “behold.”

Natah (cf. 55.3) and *shalom* (60.20) or “extend and prosperity,” use the image of a river. Similar to this example is that of a stream which is “overflowing” or *shataph* noted last in 43.2 as consuming with regard to wealth coming from nations or those subject to Israel.

The last three verbs pertain to a babe, the third being “dandled” or *shahah* (cf. 29.9).

66-Vs. 13: As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Nacham (cf. 61.2) is the verb for “comforts,” hwew in the motherly sense and is applicable to the Lord as well as Jerusalem. In other words, *nacham* suggests that the people are not there yet, possibly in exile, a fact which hasn’t come to the fore until now.

66-Vs. 14: 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.

Rejoicing follows upon seeing or *sus* (cf. vs. 10) upon *yare* (cf. 64.3). Such rejoicing is more specified, if you will, by the people's bones flourishing or *parach* (cf. 45.8) which connotes sprouting. Such will be indicators of the Lord's presence with his servants and "indignation" against his foes, *zaham* (cf. 30.27).

10 July, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground; for the Lord will again take delight in prospering you as he took delight in your fathers 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?'" Deuteronomy 30.9-14

The Lord promises two things followed by the conditional "if," that is to say, *yatar* and *sus* or "make abundantly prosperous" and "will again take delight." The former means to go beyond an accepted measure and the latter is used with another verb *shuv* reading literally "will return to rejoice." This twofold blessing applies to anything the Israelites might do which has a precedent, namely, concerning their fathers. If the Lord took delight (*sus*) in them, he will do the same with the present generation, awareness of this *sus* being the connecting point in their tradition or better, the very essence of memory. And memory of the past is essential for orientation in the present.

Note the two uses of the preposition *hal*: "on you" and "on your fathers," the union between past divine *sus* and present divine *sus*. As for the all-important "if"—and some who heard these words were less than pleased—it depends upon listening to the Lord's voice or literally "in his voice." Such an intense form of listening or attention is already available for the people, namely, through the commandments and statutes contained within the Torah. The verb *shamar* means "to keep," often associated with Torah and is more a guarding such as on a city wall by a watchman.

Immediately after this "if" comes another one which pertains to turning to the Lord, *shuv* being used in vs. 9 with respect to *sus*. Such turning implies that Israel had been in a state apart from the Lord, not necessarily physical exile, and needs to restore it. This *shuv* can't be half-hearted but involve their entire heart and soul. If these two weren't mentioned, the people would feel that they could get away with an external *shuv*, not an inward one, this dampening the prospect of prosperity which which this passage begins.

Obviously the Lord is aware of Israel's reluctance which leads him to say that his "commandment" or *mitsvah* (mentioned in vs. 8 as well) has three qualities: neither "hard nor far off," two verbs being *pala'* and *rachaq*, the former also meaning to distinguish as well as to be wonderful. The third quality is that there's no need for anyone to ascend into heaven to bring down this divine *mitsvah*. While this might sound comforting, to many it is exactly the opposite in that the opportunity for being faithful to God is close by. In other words, there's no need to make excuses saying it's too difficult to implement. If it were so, the Israelites would feel relieved of their obligations towards the Lord. With regard to ascending into heaven and crossing the sea, emphasis is upon hearing, the equivalent to obeying "the voice of the Lord" in vs. 10.