

13 May, Seventh Sunday of Easter

11) *And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.* 12) *While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled.* 13) *But now I am coming to you; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.* 14) *I have given them your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.* 15) *I do not pray that thou should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one.* 16) *They are not of the world even as I am not of the world.* 17) *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.* 18) *As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.* 19) *And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth.* John 17.11-19

The following is taken from **St. John's Gospel 14-17** posted elsewhere on this homepage.

Vs. 11: And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name which you have given me, that they may be one even as we are one.

Now: compare with the last two references which denote immediacy, vss. 5 & 7.

In (*en*, twice) the world (*kosmos*, twice): compare with vs. 6, "the men whom you gave me out (*ek*) of the world." In the verse at hand has two contrasting uses of in: Christ not being present and the disciples being present (in the world).

Am coming (*erchomai*): present tense to indicate a continued passage here coupled with "to (*pros*) you" or in the direction-towards-which. Compare *erchomai* with 14.28, "I go away, and I will come to you."

Holy (*hagios*) Father: compare with Holy Spirit.

Keep (*tereo*): last noted in vs. 6 with respect to "your (Father) word." The place-where of this keeping is "your name." Here *onoma* is separate, as it were, from the Father.

One (*hen*): with reference to the disciples though *hen* is lacking in the Greek text with reference to "we."

Vs. 12: While I was with them I kept them in your name which you have given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled.

With (*meta*) them: synonymous with kept (*tereo*; cf. previous verse) and in (*en*) the Father's name.

Here the name (*onoma*) is more specific, as having been given to Christ by the Father.

Have guarded (*phulasso*): to keep an eye upon a person as to his or her safety; can apply to someone in prison. "If anyone hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him" [12.47]. Compare *phulasso* (guarding a person or something in one's custody)

with the often mentioned *tereo* which is more specific with regard to who or what is in one's possession.

None is lost: the Greek text literally reads, "no one from (*ex*) them."

Is lost (*apollumi*): "and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up at the last day" [6.39].

Son of perdition (*apoleia*): the only reference in St. John's Gospel and derived from *apollumi*. More specifically this verb applies to destruction and ruin. "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction" [Mt 7.13].

May be fulfilled (*pleroo*): first noted in 15.11 with respect to "your joy" whereas here it refers to scripture. The references are: Ps 41.9, "Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me." Also Ps 109.4, "In return for my love they accuse me, even as I make prayer for them." The **RSV** also gives vss. 5, 7 & 8 as references.

Vs. 13: But now I am coming to you; and these things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

Am coming (*erchomai*): compare with vs. 11 or with reference to the "world." Also the preposition *pros* (to, towards-which) is used.

In (*en*, twice) the world (*kosmos*): the place where Christ is speaking (present tense). Compare this *en* with the *pros* or direction at hand.

Joy (*chara*): compare with 16.24, "that your joy may be full (*pleroo*)." The same verb is used in the verse at hand; the difference is that the latter has "in (*en*) themselves."

Vs. 14: I have given them your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world even as I am not of the world.

Your word (*logos*): here with respect to the Father; compare with 14.23 where it applies to Christ, "If a man loves me he will keep my word."

Has hated (*miseo*): as in 15.18, both with respect to the world (*kosmos*, three times).

Of (*ek*, from) the world: two uses of the same expresses, "they" and "I."

Vs. 15: I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one.

Pray (*erotao*): as in 14.16 in the sense of asking or requesting, "And I will pray the Father."

Should take (*airo*): first noted in 15.2, "Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away."

Out of (*ek*) the world (*kosmos*): last noted in vs. 6 where "from" is used.

Should keep (*tereo*): last noted in vs. 12, here with respect to keeping from (*ek*) the evil one (*poneros*, evil). This is the only use of *poneros* in St. John's Gospel. "and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one" [1 Jn 2.14].

Vs. 16: They are not of the world even as I am not of the world.

Of (*ek*, from): same preposition applies to both the disciples and to Christ.

Vs. 17: Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

Sanctify (*hagiazō*): next found in vs. 19 and addressed to the Father who is holy (*hagios*) as noted in vs. 7.

Truth (*aletheia*, twice): with the definite article. Compare with 14.6, "I am the way and the truth and the life," also with a definite article.

Word (*logos*): note its identity with the substantive "truth" where here applies to the Father.

Vs. 18: As you did send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Did send (*apostello*, twice): cf. vss. 3 & 8 with reference to the Father doing the action which here is transferred to Christ doing the action.

Into (*eis*, twice) the world: i.e., full presence within.

Vs. 19: And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth.

For their sake (*huper*): cf. 15.14, "for his friends."

Consecrate (*hagiazō*, twice): cf. vs. 17 as sanctify. The second as referring to the disciples depends up the first (Christ).

In (*en*) truth (*aletheia*): compare with vs. 17.

20 May, Pentecost

Please note: this solemnity has several options for the Gospel, the one at hand being chosen from among these options.

19) On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20) When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21) Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." 22) And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23) If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." John 20.19-23

The time frame is the evening of the Sabbath day or when the Sabbath has come to a conclusion. Note the parallel between the time of twilight and shut doors, reflective of the disciples being afraid of the Jews. For them the coming night will be the longest of their lives since they must deal with Jesus' recent death and how to get along without him. Chances are already they were entertaining thoughts about getting back to their own jobs.

Some may have considered the three years they had roamed around the countryside as wasted. Getting back to normal would be no easy task. In fact, they may even be considered criminals and hunted down which makes them wonder if they could return home.

This closed-in atmosphere is exactly what Jesus wants in order to make his appearance when he stood literally “into the middle (*eis to meson*) of them,” this phrase being noted in the excerpt above for the Third Sunday of Easter. From this *mesos* or midst comes Jesus’ words of peace (*eirene*), enough to roll back the coming darkness and unbolt the locked doors.

Without missing a beat or before any disciple could respond, Jesus shows them the wounds in his hands and side. Note that he doesn’t mention his feet. Almost in a casual, matter-of-fact way the text says that the disciples were glad, *chairo*. Upon further reflection, this somewhat bland, muted response is appropriate because they were both astounded and shameful at having deserted their master in his time of need. Chances are the disciples were in a kind of trance and had to be snapped out of it which is why Jesus repeats his greeting of peace.

Before any response Jesus gets down to the matter at hand, namely, that he’s sending them not just out to proclaim what had happened (which they’ll do anyway). Instead, Jesus reminds the disciples that the Father had sent (*pempo*) him. Actually he spoke of it several times a few days ago during the Last Supper. This *pempo* which is a sending forth will be transformed into *apostello*, a sending from which the word *apostolos* or apostle derives. Perhaps unknown to them but very real is that those who listen to them will recognize this distinction and see it as a genuine one where the disciples...apostles...mirror the relationship between Father and Son. In other words, they’re teaching about the this divine, filial relationship without being aware of it. As for the Holy Spirit, this will come later with Pentecost. Right now focus is upon the mission given to the disciples.

As for the Holy Spirit, Jesus now breathes it upon them. However, this receiving is more specified compared with that of Pentecost insofar as it pertains to the forgiving and retaining of sins. In other words, it’s part and parcel of their mission. It’s wise for Jesus to insert this right now, given the recent desertion and some could say betrayal on their behalf. From this point on the disciples will have forty days to sort this all out and prepare for something they know is related to this breathing-upon but can’t quite grasp what it means.

27 May, Trinity Sunday

16) Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17) And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18) And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20) teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Matthew 28.16-20

Mention of the eleven disciples is interesting insofar as it intimates the missing twelfth member, Judas, whose memory must have weighed heavily upon them. In fact, Judas' betrayal was just a few short days ago and had initiated the whole series of events leading to the death of Jesus. As for the mountain, there doesn't seem to be a specific place that's mentioned, possibly one of the several where Jesus had taught. One likely candidate would be the one where he had been transfigured which fits in nicely with these concluding verses of Matthew's Gospel. However, even that mountain in 17.1 isn't identified.

Vs. 17 says that the eleven saw Jesus and worshiped him, this presuming a rather steep climb up the mountain. Perhaps as they got closer to the summit they saw a lone figure standing there, waiting. Compare with the mountain of 17.1 just noted; there Jesus "led them up" whereas here they go on their own. As for Peter, James and John who had witnessed Jesus transfigured, they knew this was a very different situation and had an inkling that this would be their last encounter with their master.

Note the contrast between worshiping and doubting, *proskuneo* and *distazo*; the former also means to make obeisance, fall on one's knees and the latter, to be hesitant. The names of those disciples who fell into either one or the other are omitted in discreet fashion. Same applies to which side outweighed the other. At the same time nothing is said as to resolving this situation which Jesus sees but is concerned about. He is in a hurry, a hurry to return to his Father and make sure the disciples are set firmly on their mission. Any doubts would be taken care of later among the band of disciples. Actually this hurried-ness is part of the larger plan, to get the ball rolling minus the presence of Jesus humanly speaking. If Jesus were to continue on as before the resurrection (this is what the disciples thought he'd do), he would be rejected by many and have to suffer yet again, this bring no resolution. Something different...spiritual, not corporeal...has to be interjected.

Exousia connotes permission which Jesus doesn't have on his own although he doesn't inform the disciples as to where he received it. By now they've had sufficient exposure to Jesus talking about his Father, so presumably that's what he means now. As for such *exousia*, it's amplified by the adjective "all" as well as two locations, heaven and earth. Such *exousia* is put in terms of the following three:

1) Making disciples or *matheteuo* which refers more specifically to the following of precepts and instruction, that is, in imitation of what the disciples had experienced with Jesus. Note that it applies not so much to individual persons but to nations, whole groups of peoples which to the disciples means the lands of the Roman Empire as well as those skirting it.

2) Baptizing these nations. The only reference to such a practice is that of John the Baptist which Jesus takes into consideration. For that reason he adds immediately such baptism is to be in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit or more literally, “into (*eis*) the name of (etc.).” Obviously this is very confusing, actually beyond the disciples’ comprehension. However, that would be taken care of shortly at Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit.

3) Teaching or *didasko* implies explaining and isn’t as personal as *matheteuo* of #1. Here it spills over into the following: first *tereo* or keeping constant guard followed by *entello* or a stricter attention to details. Implied is that the disciples had collective knowledge of this from their three years with Jesus. Only later when they collaborated and interacted with other contemporaries were they able to come up with a more comprehensive outlay of teaching.

The final words of Matthew’s Gospel imply that the making of disciples, baptizing, teaching and observing will continue in a manner parallel yet different from Jesus’ physical presence with the them. As to Jesus being “with you,” this requires considerable sorting out which the disciples were incapable of at the moment, again, another problem to be resolved at Pentecost by the Holy Spirit. Jesus being with them has an open-ended yet definite time frame, “close of the age” or *sunteleia* which implies completion with regard to *aion* which is rather ambiguous meaning age, world, order and even eternity. Related to *sunteleia* clarifies it a bit, however, insofar as the four-fold commission just delineated has been effected again not so much with regard to individuals but nations. Note that nothing is said of Jesus ascending into heaven from this mountain top. Emphasis is more on Jesus being with the disciples. Nevertheless, they were faced with the climb down and then to await Pentecost.

3 June, Corpus Christi

12) And on the first day of Unleavened Bread when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" 13) And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, 14) and wherever he enters, say to the householder, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?' 15) And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." 16) And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover...22) And as they were eating, he took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to

them and said, "Take; this is my body." 23) And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. 24) And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Mark 14.12-16 & 22-26

Mark points out the association of unleavened bread and lamb with Passover as applying to Jesus at the Last Supper. This situates the disciples squarely within something new about to unfold of which they at present have only a dime awareness. The passage opens with Jesus and the disciples most likely immediately outside Jerusalem or having just entered its gates as they are discussing a place to observe the Passover. It was very difficult to find an appropriate place, Jerusalem thronging with pilgrims for this, the greatest of all feasts. Because of the teeming throng, a man carrying a water jar (possibly on his head) would stand out all the more, so it was a good way to pick him out.

The noun teacher (*didaskalos*) is used, a word the man might recognize by reason of Jesus' earlier entrance into the city, word of him by that title having gotten around quickly. Without missing a beat, this man brought the two disciples to a guest room or *kataluma* which generally applies to a lodging, the rarest of commodities during Passover. This encounter with the unknown man plays a pivotal role without whom there'd be no *kataluma* and passes off the scene just as quickly as he comes upon it. Perhaps later on he became a disciple after word got out as to what had transpired there. One such minor yet pivotal figure comes to mind along this line: the little girl taken captive who persuaded Naaman to seek Elijah's help.

Once seated for the Passover meal, Jesus blessed, broke and gave (unleavened) bread to each disciple. The way it's presented is rather sudden and unexpected; one may say it goes against observance of the Passover which Jesus knows, of course, who is about to change its significance. As for the bread, Jesus calls it his body (*soma*). As for the wine, he calls it his blood (*haima*) but only after they drank it. However, Jesus adds that it's blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, the verb being *ekchunno* which also means to shed. Obviously a Passover celebration pertains to Jews who are observing it. So when the disciples heard "for many," it must have taken them by surprise, this applicable to non-Jews.

Jesus elaborates some more on this notion of blood (as opposed to his body) saying that a prohibition of sorts is in order. That is to say, he won't drink it until that day—and *kairos* as special event transcending space and time almost could be inserted as "that day"—when he drinks it new. And this newness is specified as in the kingdom of God. The disciples certainly heard Jesus using this phrase many times during his preaching yet persisted in taking it as some future reign. It must have bothered them as it did now for lack of clarity.

Such ignorance sets up the pressing need for enlightenment which will come, that being at Pentecost.

8 June, Sacred Heart of Jesus

31) *Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. 32) So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him; 33) but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34) But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. 35) He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe. 36) For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, "Not a bone of him shall be broken." 37) And again another scripture says, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced." John 19.31-37*

Paraskeue is the noun for Preparation or day before Passover, the true *Paraskeue* just having been accomplished...prepared. The adjective *megalos* describes the sabbath at hand literally as “great.”

Since there was no need to make sure Jesus was dead...again, already he was “prepared”...his body could be removed before sunset of the impending “great” day.

John was present at the crucifixion and gives the details, some of which we have here. Nevertheless deliberately he remains anonymous, as though he were too overcome by the event even to insert his name. It’s also indicative of his desire for what he recorded to be as objective as possible, he knowing full well that the event at hand was more than monumental. The verb *martureo* means to bear witness or testimony which is re-enforced by saying it’s true and with full knowledge of telling the truth, *alethinos* and *alethe*. This emphasis upon truth is deliberate, that whoever reads John’s testimony may have faith in it.

The death of Jesus is one of many instances and at this stage, one of the last, examples of him fulfilling the scriptures, *pleroo* suggesting the bringing to completion. Reference here is threefold: Ex 12.46, Num 9.12 and Ps 34.20, all quoted in full as follows:

“In one house shall it be eaten; you shall not carry forth any of the flesh outside the house; and you shall not break a bone of it.” The one house may be taken as the house of Israel, *beyth* often meaning a family unit regardless of size with emphasis on personal relations and responsibility. Note that any remainder of the sacrificed lamb is to remain

inside this *beyth*...inside Israel, if you will. Breaking any bone of the sacrifice suggests that this *beyth*, in turn, will be broken, the two therefore being annulled.

“They shall leave none of it until the morning nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute for the Passover they shall keep it.” In other words, the lamb sacrificed for Passover cannot remain until dawn, for this is the night during which the Lord passed through Egypt to slay the first-born. Should, for example, some be left until break of day, the Lord just might return and slay the first-born of the Israelites. Another way of presenting this relationship between the mystery of night and dawn is Jacob wrestling with the unknown man who exclaimed “Let me go, for the day is breaking” [Gen 32.26]. Jacob refuses until that man agrees to bless him.

“He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.” The third and final reference to wholeness in the sense of no broken bones referring to the “righteous” or *tsadyq* in vs. 19. To say that someone is *tsadyq* implies being faithful to the divine *Torah*. The verb *shamar* is used for “keeps” meaning to post a guard.

And so with reference to these three verses centered around the Passover John invites his readers to consider them anew...to read them in the spirit of *lectio divina*, if it may be put that way.

10 June, Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

20) (Then he went home;) And the crowd came together again so that they could not even eat. 21) And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, "He is beside himself." 22) And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." 23) And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? 24) If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25) And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26) And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand but is coming to an end. 27) But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his good, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house. 28) "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29) but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" – 30) for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit." 31) And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him. 32) And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you." 33) And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" 34) And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! 35) Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister and mother." Mark 3.20-35

This is the first Ordinary Time entry since 11 February, almost four months to the day. It means we're entering the longest period of time in the liturgical calendar lasting to the threshold of Advent which, weather-wise, is wholly different from what we have now, early spring. Also there's a certain relief at having come off a lengthy series of readings pertaining to the Lenten-Easter-Pentecost cycle...getting back to parables, etc., which pertain to everyday life.

“Then he went home” is inserted before vs. 20, that being part of the previous verse. It occurs right after Jesus had chosen the twelve apostles. As for the crowd gathering, it ties in with the previous verse or the actual choosing of these apostles. Note the word “again” meaning that this crowd had gathered around Jesus earlier or in reference to vs. 7, etc. The rather generic word “family” is used or *hoi par' autou*, literally as those beside him or in his vicinity. They were alarmed at the inability of Jesus so hemmed in that he couldn't even eat, this prompting them to make a rescue mission. Among the crowd were some scribes from Jerusalem, obviously keeping watch on Jesus who in their eyes might be stirring up trouble.

This commotion caused by the thronging crowd gave occasion for the scribes to claim that Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul, a pagan god identified with Satan which means “lord of the flies.” One such reference is 1Kg 1.2: “Go, inquire of Baal-zebub (slightly different spelling), the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness.” And so for the scribes Jesus has authority to cast out demons by their prince. As for the example of King Ahaziah inquiring of Baal-zebub, it's associated with the prophet Elijah who rebukes him for having reliance upon a false god which is directly responsible for his inability to recover. Although the scribes were familiar with this story, they failed to read further or to take into consideration the role of Elijah and thus failed more dramatically to realize who Jesus was.

Jesus doesn't let the scribes off easily. He puts to them a rhetorical question about Satan casting out himself, that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. He gives the example of a strong man who must be bound before being able to plunder his house.

Another example in what seems to be a different situation follows where Jesus is accused of having an unclean spirit which to the scribes means that he is allied with Beelzebul, lord of the flies. The context is forgiveness of sins with the exception of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit or literally “in (*eis*) the Holy Spirit.” So in the end we have a sharp contrast between Beelzebul and the Holy Spirit.

Moving along to another incident—probably is the case, given Mark's propensity for fast-paced action—Jesus' mother and brothers were outside a house or even synagogue when he was notified of their presence. His response: that those present in the house were his mother

and brothers, expanding this familial relationship to anyone who does the will of God. Also it may tie in with the notion of “house (*beryth*) of Israel” mentioned in the last entry. Obviously these words reached Jesus’ family outside, upon whom was dawning an awareness that they are in a kind of secondary position compared with those inside. This tempered their initial response of moving in and seizing Jesus: “He is beside himself,” words of the crowd earlier which may have sorely tempted his relatives to think they just might be true.

17 June, Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

26) *And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground*
27) *and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not*
how. 28) *The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.*
29) *But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come."* 30) *And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable shall we use for*
it? 31) *It is like a grain of mustard seed which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of*
all the seeds on earth; 32) *yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs*
and puts forth large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." 33) *With*
many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it; 34) *he did not speak to*
them without a parable but privately to his own disciples he explained everything. Mark 4.26-34

Here Jesus speaks of the kingdom or *basileia* of heaven, this word usually applied to a hereditary monarchy as opposed to a *turannis* or one which is despotic. The Roman rule in place at the time was considered by many as belonging to the latter. Thus when people hear *basileia* associated with heaven, it’s wholly different from daily experience, especially when it comes to taxes. As for *basileia*, Jesus uses it twice: for the scattering of seed and a mustard seed. For the first, everything hinges on the all-important *hos* or “as if” which introduces this parable. That is to say, Jesus has in mind something with which his listeners are familiar with and raises it to a different level, the scattering of seed. Even though people engage in this *hos* gesture automatically and without reflection, they haven’t a clue as to how the seed opens up within the ground to produce grain or whatever. In fact, nobody cares. They’re focused on the end result, food, which means sustenance and grain for selling and therefore making a living. And practically speaking, that means just scraping by.

In vs 30 Jesus speaks of a second comparison with regard to the *basileia* of heaven. Note that this second time he uses the first person plural with the verb *homoioo*, to be like, this being, as it were, supplemental to the just mentioned *basileia* and *hos*, “as if.” Also he uses the word parable which is familiar to everyone. The first person plural can suggest the putting forth of a rhetorical question and of identifying with the listeners. In other words,

Jesus isn't engaging in an academic discussion but trying to help real people in real situations.

Jesus uses the example of one of the smallest, most familiar seed around, that of the mustard. As for the plant at hand, vs 31 says it is sown, not grown wild which means people cultivated it. This important point ('sown upon the ground' as opposed to a wild mustard plant) sets the stage for the following brief observations. Perhaps such cultivated mustard trees were used to create spices to sell to people who were more well off. And so cultivating them along with cash crops, if you will, became a vital source of additional income. Over time such plants evolved to such a degree that they were large enough for birds to make nests. This brings to mind what Jesus says "In my Father's house are man rooms" [Jn 14.2].

Jesus continues to use other parables when speaking but doesn't when with his disciples, that is, "privately" or *kat' idian*. Literally it reads "according to oneself," this phrase followed by the adjective *idios* or pertaining to oneself. As for the verb "explained," it's *epiluo* which literally comes across as to loosen upon (*epi-*). The disciples had been primed more to receive such direct teaching by reason of having been with Jesus over an extended period of time. Yet there were barely no different from Jesus' regular listeners. This is displayed most flagrantly when they desert him and fail to recognize his often repeated words reading something like "failed to understand the scriptures."

24 June, Nativity of John the Baptist (falls on a Sunday this year)

5) In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6) And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. 7) But they had no child because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. 8) Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, 9) according to the custom of the priesthood, it fell to him by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10) And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. 11) And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12) And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. 13) But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14) And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth; 15) for he will be great before the Lord, and he shall drink no wine nor strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. 16) And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, 17) and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared." Luke 1.5-17 (Vigil Mass)

“In the days of” have a way of drawing in the reader (or listener) into a story about to unfold which here takes place in the reign of King Herod. They dispose our minds, if you will, by putting us in a different frame of mind to receive something important about to unfold.

To say that both Zechariah and Elizabeth are righteous or *dikaios* before the Lord means they as a married couple are prepared in the best possible way for the birth of their son, John the Baptist, who in turn will be *dikaios*. *Amemptos* or blameless is pretty much equivalent to being *dikaios* with regard not just to the externals of religious observance but incorporating them in their lives. The practice of casting lots to chose a priest to offer incense in the temple implies something pretty much hit-or-miss. That is to say, a priest might not be chosen for a very long time; the reverse is true as well. Thus it might become a contest of sorts among the priests.

As for the hour of incense, it isn't specified as to the morning or evening. However, “whole multitude” could suggest the more convenient hour of evening and perhaps a day that's more solemn than the daily liturgical practice. As for the angel at the altar, in vs 19 he is identified as Gabriel who similarly stands in God's presence, the two essentially one and the same. It seems that only Zechariah could see this angel which caused him to be troubled, *tarasso* suggesting to be upset or uneasy. Zechariah tried his best to conceal this, being aware more than ever of the “whole multitude” which had attention fixed upon him.

Even though the angel addresses Zechariah for what turns out to be the longest dialogue between an angel and a human being, people started to wonder why the delay. The joy and gladness or *chara* and *agalliasis* (the latter a more demonstrative type of the former) offsets Zechariah's *tarasso*. The same applies to the name of the child to be born, John meaning something along the lines of “the Lord is gracious.”

Being a priest implies familiarity with the scriptures which means that Zechariah immediately thinks of a comparable event or the angel who announced Samson's birth. Once Gabriel has identified himself, he thinks, could that have been him as well? Will John grow up like Samson and later fall victim to the scheming of a woman which will bring about his early death? It turned out to be not that far from the mark. The relief for Zechariah consisted in the fact that his son to be born will, in addition to being filled with the Holy Spirit, be not unlike the prophet Elijah. In the end he was taken up into heaven on a fiery chariot.

So after the angel who identifies himself as Gabriel in vs 18, he continues speaking with Zechariah for some length before he can resume his priestly duties. On top of his mind was how to break this news to his wife Elizabeth. However, he trusted in her being *dikaios* and

amemptos which hopefully would make her receptive. After all, she was about to face a pregnancy in old age just like Sarah: “Is anything too hard (literally, wonderful) for the Lord” [Gn 18.14]? Once she had been informed, Zechariah would ponder the life and deeds of Elijah in an attempt to see any future parallels between him and his son to be born some nine months later. As time went on, Zechariah realized that John, like Elijah, is preparing the people, *kataskeuazo* (vs 17) meaning to equip, to prepare for the purpose of something. As in the case of Elijah after having been snatched into heaven, Elisha assumes his role which means that Zechariah has to examine his life just as closely as Elisha as well as to learn more about the relationship between the two prophets.

1 July, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

21) *And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him; and he was beside the sea. 22) Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and seeing him, he fell at his feet 23) and besought him, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her so that she may be made well, and live." 24) And he went with him. And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him.* Mark 5.21-24

Ochlos is the noun for crowd which also means a throng or mob made all the more dramatic by the adjective *polus*, much or many and the preposition *epi* (upon) prefaced to “him,” literally as “upon him.” We get a picture of this as people pressing-upon Jesus, not allowing him to move...pinning him down, if you will. It must have been the same multitude on the other side of the lake, they rushing around or taking boats to get to where Jesus was headed well before him. Always people were watching Jesus who had virtually no private place to escape.

The commotion got the attention of Jairus from a nearby synagogue who at once fell at Jesus’ feet. Due to his stature in the community, the *ochlos* immediately cleared a path for him to Jesus. *Parakaleo* is the verb for “besought,” literally as to call beside (*para-*). The adverb *eschatos* (‘at the point of death’) means utmost, at the end. Immediately Jesus agrees to come to see Jairus’ daughter with the *ochlos*, of course, following behind. Once again, the character of this multitude is described in vivid terms, “thronged about him,” *sunthlibo* or to press with (*sun-*), compress. En route Jesus and Jairus must have glanced at this remarkable sight behind them, wondering how they would deal with it so they don’t barge into the house.

Although this Gospel doesn’t include it, there follows the incident of a woman with a flow of blood, she being part of the *ochlos*. Then there follows more vivid descriptions of this *ochlos* with Jesus and the woman being caught in the middle. Nothing is said of Jairus who must have been present and somewhat impatient at this woman having interrupted their

walk. However, quickly he changed his mind when Jesus cured her, for it portended well for his daughter.

Jesus, of course, heals Jairus' daughter. However, it must have been a chaotic scene with the *ochlos* pressing around on all sides of the house waiting for the result to be announced. In the confusion the woman cured of her flow of blood was pretty much lost, she being a no-body compared with Jairus. However, she had no need to tag along behind the multitude, knowing full well what would happen to the little girl.

8 July, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1) He went away from there and came to his own country; and his disciples followed him. 2) And on the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished saying, "Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! 3) Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. 4) And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and among his own kin and in his own house." 5) And he could do no mighty work there except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. 6) And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching. Mark 6.1-6

The words "he went away from there" are easier said than done. After having crossed the lake—having been beset by a thronging multitude—having cured the woman—having accompanied Jairus with the same crowd pressing against the house to see if Jesus would cure the little girl, it was no easy task for Jesus to make his getaway. Chances are he did it late at night, avoiding people who just might be on the look out. Jesus at last arrives home with the words "and his disciples followed him" suggesting they kept behind Jesus at a discreet distance as to allow him some privacy after what had just happened.

On the sabbath Jesus teaches (*didasko*) in the synagogue, most likely the same one he had attended in his youth and therefore was familiar with those in attendance...in other words, his neighbors. Nothing is said of how he got permission to teach in the synagogue. Perhaps he was pressured more out of curiosity so that people could trip him up. People were curious to see if he was the genuine article or not. Because society was closely knit in rural areas, everyone had full knowledge of Jesus' upbringing by Mary and Joseph. Nothing is said whether they were in synagogue. However, we can assume they were present. After all, their names are mentioned a bit later but somewhat disparagingly. Nothing is said of what Jesus taught, that left to the imagination of the reader. Jesus must discoursed on those scriptural passages that had bearing upon him, this typical of his other teaching. However, it was far too much for those in attendance to accept.

In light of this familiarity and Jesus' newly acquired fame, he expected not to be received by his fellow villagers. Therefore any teaching as to how scripture might refer to him would be greeted with out right skepticism and hostility. Jesus could see that the people in front of him whom he knew while growing up were far different from the throng that recently had admired him. Those present in the synagogue, of course, got wind of enthusiastic reports from the crowds which made them all the more hostile. Jesus could feel the tension rising and must have considered an escape route. At this juncture the disciples would be invaluable, bodyguards, if you will.

Predictably, people hurled several questions bordering upon insults. The prospect of this getting violent is encapsulated by the words "they took offense" at Jesus, *skandalizo* which literally means cause to stumble. Such stumbling is reflected in the way the people shouted out questions and remarks about Jesus, as if they couldn't get them out quickly enough from their mouths. While the *ochlos* or throng mentioned in the previous excerpt was basically friendly, those in the synagogue were not...they turned out to be the real *ochlos* in the sense of bordering upon being a hostile mob.

At the same time the people couldn't deny that Jesus had performed wonders, "mighty works" being the phrase or *dunamis* as in vs 5 which Jesus couldn't do under such hostile conditions. Here and there Jesus was able to heal people, but to those onlooking, it simply didn't register. The only thing for Jesus left to do was to marvel at the unbelief of those who knew him which turned out to be a real ignorance of him.

15 July, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1) And he called to him the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8) He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9) but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. 10) And he said to them, "Where you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11) And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them." 12) So they went out and preached that men should repent. 13) And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them. Mark 6.7-13

After the unsettling experience recounted in Jesus' home synagogue, he went about teaching in other villages, sad but relieved to be out of there. Nothing is said about having contacted his parents which he must have done on the fly so as to protect them. Still, they faced even greater hostility from their neighbors which must have bothered Jesus.

By now his message had spread which meant that he couldn't continue doing it all alone. Therefore Jesus decided to send out his disciples in pairs, giving them authority or *exousia* over unclean spirits. Nothing is said of how this *exousia* is transmitted, either verbally or by some gesture as the laying on of hands. In other words, this *exousia* seems to be the work of the Holy Spirit which isn't mentioned but can be implied.

So as not to be encumbered, Jesus instructs the six pairs of disciples to travel lightly. After all, they were in familiar territory and didn't have to bring much; the distance between destinations was relatively short. Besides, it was not uncommon for people to receive visitors generously. Apparently it was up to each group to pick out places they were going, having consulted beforehand so as not to cause any overlapping. Jesus bids these men about to set out on their first solo mission to enter a house and remain there as long as possible, being polite and circumspect as possible. By now most villagers knew of Jesus, so many were eager to receive his followers and learn of their master's teaching.

The possibility existed that some people wouldn't receive the disciples. Perhaps they got wind of Jesus' rejection in his home synagogue and decided to do the same. If rejected, Jesus told them to make a rather dramatic gesture, that is, shake off dust from on their feet, this being a testimony or *marturion* (also as witness) against them. As for dust in a semi-arid land, to have it blown back into one's home must have been a real insult. Such was the fate awaiting those who received the disciples eagerly but once they heard their message, wanted no more. Here, of course, the disciples had to be careful to make sure they didn't jump the gun but that the rejection came squarely from their hosts.

As for the message to be proclaimed by the six pairs of disciples, it consists of repentance, the verb *metanoeo*, to have a change of heart. Those for whom it was intended are virtually all peasants eking out a meager living and following the precepts of Judaism. So for some strangers to show up at the door and speak of repentance could be taken as a slap in their faces. Chances are that part of the mission was less than successful. As for the other part...casting out demons and healing people...that was a different story.

22 July, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

30) The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.

31) And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32) And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. 33) Now many saw them going and knew them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34) As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. Mark 6.30-34

This excerpt opens with the disciples returning from their mission, the account of which ends with vs 13 of last week's Gospel. In between we have an interlude of sorts dealing with King Herod who got wind of the disciples' mission which hinted what Jesus was up to...no good in his eyes. In his ignorance and arrogance Herod decides to behead John the Baptist, having made a loose connection between him, Jesus and the disciples of both. Trying to sort out how all were connected was not so much confusing but a clear and present threat to his earthly power.

So when Jesus' disciples returned, they must have heard of John's beheading, fearing that they might meet the same fate. Perhaps that's why Jesus bids them to come with him to a lonely place and rest. *Eremos* usually applies to a deserted area not suited for cultivation and thus a place to be avoided. Also it could apply to where demons abide. The disciples wouldn't dream of going to such a place on their own unless Jesus were with them. The verb *anapauomai* means to cease from doing something as well as to rest.

Then the text makes a jump to a whole bunch of people who seem to have discovered this getaway, for always they had spies keeping tabs on Jesus' whereabouts. These weren't spies in the negative sense but were on the look-out in their desire to be in constant touch with him. So much for *anapauomai*, having no leisure or *eukaireo* which is the verbal root for *kairos*, a special time or opportunity prefaced with *eu-*, an adverbial form applicable to wellness or wholeness.

This inability to find a quiet place led Jesus to get into a boat with his disciples and make for another place described as *eremos* as well. No luck. Everyone followed the band, knowing by now those haunts Jesus favored. In fact, they were so eager to see him that they reached the deserted place before Jesus got on shore. Surely by now the disciples were both exhausted and frustrated. Even if they decided to stay in the middle of the lake, this would invite people to come out in boats which would be quite dangerous in that some boats just may collide and sink.

Through all this Jesus remains unperturbed. After all, his disciples just returned from a semi-successful mission: successful as far as casting out demons and curing but less so when it came to preaching. At least that can be inferred. He had to set an example of how to deal with people. Some of those in the throng or *ochlos* (as in the use above as crowd) must have encountered the disciples on their recent mission which means the disciples had to keep a stiff upper lip so as not to cause any scandal. Now was an ideal time for Jesus to show a shepherd's compassion, the verb being *splagchnizo* or to reveal what's inside you...your guts...and thus your deepest feelings. Jesus manifested this deep-seated concern through teaching, *didasko* being a very direct and concrete way of speaking which isn't recorded. As is the case so many times, it's left to the reader to imagine what it was. It would be

surprising that in addition to teaching the crowds Jesus wished to teach his disciples. They had returned from their first mission and most likely needed more training in order to communicate more adequately Jesus' message of repentance (*metanoeo*) as noted in vs 12.

29 July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1) After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. 2) And a multitude followed him because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. 3) Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples. 4) Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. 5) Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?" 6) This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. 7) Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." 8) One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9) "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" 10) Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11) Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12) And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over that nothing may be lost." 13) So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. 14) When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!" 15) Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. John 6.1-15

Ever since the Thirteenth Sunday we've had a series of straight-forward Gospel excerpts from Mark. Now we switch gears over to John where Jesus is about to feed a multitude. The reason? At this stage several weeks past the grand Lenten-Easter-Pentecost cycle as we launch out into the lengthy season called Ordinary Time we can use reflections on the Eucharist which sustains the church on a daily basis. In other words, today's Gospel which continues through the next few Sundays is helpful as a means to sustain our journey through Ordinary Time until late November, the beginning of a new liturgical season, that is, Advent.

This excerpt is bookmarked, if you will, on one hand by Jesus going to the other side of the Sea of Galilee or after having condemned those Jews who challenged him. On the other hand, Jesus withdraws to the mountain by himself. The latter has "again" which seems to refer to the same mountain in vs 3. And so sandwiched in between these two withdrawals Jesus performs the multiplication of bread accompanied as he is so often with that seemingly ever present *ochlos*. As noted in other places this means a mob or throng, not a

mere group of hangers-on. Here the reason for so many pressing in on Jesus is attributed to signs or *semeion*, that which is applicable to the portending of a remarkable event.

Apparently the *ochlos* respected the mountain to which Jesus withdrew along with his disciples, knowing it was off limits to them, a kind of Mount Sinai where they could only approach the base. Interestingly it was Passover, Jerusalem being the epicenter for this most holy event. You'd think the people would be in attendance there but instead are with Jesus. Surely this fact didn't escape attention of the authorities, both Jewish and Roman. To them it was as though Jesus were holding a kind of anti-Passover away from Jerusalem.

After some give and take by way of testing his disciples, Jesus singles out a child with some barley loaves and two fishes, the basis of a miracle that would feed the *ochlos*. Note that nothing is said about Jesus actually multiplying the loaves and fishes, nor are we privy to its actual multiplication. What we do know, however, is that he gives thanks or *eucharisteo*, this act in and by itself sufficient to feed the *ochlos*. And so the hidden lesson is that an act of thanksgiving suffices to magnify what is present beyond all expectations.

Vs 14 again mentions *semeion*, the first instance as applicable to people who were diseased. It is reason for them to proclaim Jesus as the prophet who came to them, this not being identified out-rightly but perhaps one of several, chief among whom are Moses, Elijah or Elias. Given the circumstances of the multiplication of bread and fishes, chances are they had in mind Moses who fed the Israelites in the desert with manna and the lesser known quail.

5 August, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

24) *So when the people saw that Jesus was not there nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum seeking Jesus.* 25) *When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"* 26) *Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.* 27) *Do not labor for the food which perishes but for the food which endures to eternal life which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal."* 28) *Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"* 29) *Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."* 30) *So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?"* 31) *Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"* 32) *Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.* 33) *For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."* 34) *They said to him, "Lord, give us this*

bread always." 35) Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. John 6.24-35

By now all sorts of people had been following Jesus and knew his haunts, etc. When not finding him, instinctively they set out for Capernaum asking with some amazement as to when he had arrived at that place. That set them up for a rebuke of sorts. The people were more interested in food, not signs, that Jesus may supply them indefinitely. Yet for most everyone having a steady supply of food was a real problem, for harvest was critical for sustaining people for the coming year. A bad harvest can portend starvation and well as breed disease.

Some of the people must have quietly mocked Jesus when he told them not to work for food which perishes, *broxis* meaning meat as well as corrosion, a further hint as to what Jesus is attempting to communicate. Surely his words about providing *broxis* literally "into eternal life" was well beyond comprehension. Nevertheless, the people asked what they had to do for doing the works of God, the verb *ergazomai* and the noun derived from it, *ergon*. They were fascinating at the prospect of being freed from the vagaries of yearly harvests.

Jesus shifts the idea of doing bound up with these two words to another plane, believing him whom God had sent. Then the people fall back on their usual crutch, asking for a sign or *semeion*...then they will believe.

Despite the general illiteracy of the population, most people were well versed in stories and traditions of their religion. So when Jesus started speaking about how God provided manna in the wilderness, that was very familiar to them. Obviously Moses was part of this story, and the people concurred with Jesus that it was not he but God who provided the manna. While manna is mentioned often in the circumstances of this story, often the furnishing of quails is omitted, so that can be inferred as well. So when Jesus speaks of bread coming down from heaven, he implies these quails as well. As for manna (and quails), it's a shift from the double meaning of *broxis*, meat or food and corrosion, that which is perishable.

Obviously when hearing such attractive words as the Father providing bread from heaven the people wanted to have it on a permanent basis. After all, they were living as their forefathers in an alien land. At least they had been on a journey to a land promised by the Lord whereas now the Romans made their descendants as strangers, a cruel trick, if you will.

After such an appealing promise, Jesus throws in what will now be a source of discontent for many. He is the bread of life, this not an analogy but Jesus = bread = life. Anyone coming to him won't suffer hunger nor thirst. The people did experience this concretely, but

how was it going to work? That will be the question on top of everyone's mind as Jesus continues with his lengthy discourse.

12 August, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

41) *The Jews then murmured at him because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven."* 42) *They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"* 43) *Jesus answered them, "Do not murmur among yourselves.* 44) *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.* 45) *It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.* 46) *Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.* 47) *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.* 48) *I am the bread of life.* 49) *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.* 50) *This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die.* 51) *I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."* John 6. 41-51

Vss 35-40 are lacking between last week's excerpt and today's Gospel. There Jesus speaks of himself as the bread of life, doing the Father's will plus raising from the dead anyone believing in him. Naturally this gives rise to their murmuring which is well put by the verb *gogguzo*. *Gogguzo* quickly turns to scorn, the people saying in essence that by reason of his lineage he's no better than they. Objectively speaking they had a valid point.

Jesus tells the people to refrain from their *gogguzo* and begins expounding upon how he is the bread of life. Surely the people put him in an awkward position which didn't make him deviate at all from his message. The essential point is that the Father draws a person to Jesus, *helkuo* being the verb. Once so drawn, this person will be with Jesus whom he will raise at the last day. Everyone had an idea of what this meant, that is, judgment day.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 54.13 which reads in full as "All your sons shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of your sons." The Hebrew *lamad* connotes being chastised or disciplined as well as not just studying the Torah as in the synagogues but lovingly pouring over it. This results in prosperity or *shalom*, a familiar word which means not just peace but wholeness. Right after this Jesus puts himself in that situation, for anyone who has heard him has learned...*lamad*...from the Father and thus comes to him.

A real sore point for the people must have been when Jesus indirectly claims to have seen the Father, for Jewish tradition going way back to Mount Sinai and hence the context of manna from heaven, says that no one can see God and live. On top of this Jesus says that

those to whom manna (and quails) had been given, died. Were his listeners no better off under the current Roman occupation as noted earlier? Weren't they as good as dead? So within this larger context the invitation of Jesus to eat the bread from heaven...himself...was bound to cause controversy, for he identifies it with his flesh. Yet for this attentive to his message it offered a way out. They were listening to God just as their fathers in the Sinai desert listened to him.

Jesus continues with this theme in next week's Gospel. However, while coming off with highly provocative as well as attractive words, he leaves it at that. No explanation as to what he had said is laid out. In the mind of each person there remained the fundamental problem of how a person speaking all this—Jesus-as-bread—would be able to transform himself into something that could be consumed.

15 August, Assumption

39) In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, 40) and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41) And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42) and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43) And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44) For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. 45) And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." 46) And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47) and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48) for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; 49) for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50) And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. 51) He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, 52) he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; 53) he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. 54) He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55) as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever." 56) And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home. Luke 1.39-56

The phrase "in those days" serves to get the reader's attention just after Mary consented to the angel Gabriel's message. It begins at this point and extends to the three months Mary stayed with her cousin. As for this all-important intervention by Gabriel, there's little or no gap between it and Mary hastening off to visit her pregnant cousin, *meta spoude* or "with haste" or with speed and earnestness. The words "hill country" are especially formidable, given Mary's condition though chances are it wasn't as bad for her since she was newly

pregnant. Better to make this hilly journey as soon as possible than to wait further along into her pregnancy.

Note the almost simultaneous connection between the following four: the verb *aspazo* for Mary greeting Elizabeth, Elizabeth's hearing this *aspasmos* (from the verbal root), John's *skirtao* or leaping, bounding like a lamb and Elizabeth being filled with the Holy *Pneuma*. No small wonder Elizabeth let out a "loud cry" or *anaphoneo* with *krauge*, the latter also as a shriek or scream. Elizabeth adds spontaneously—which could be added as a fifth element—that Mary is blessed among women, *eulogeo*. The connection between all five is borne out by Elizabeth saying that when Mary's greeting reached her ears, John bounded (like a lamb) within her. As for the dialogue thus far, note the rather forceful words being exchanged, far from a quiet interaction between two pregnant women.

Elizabeth added that a fulfillment or *teleiosis* of what the Lord had spoken to Mary even though she was unaware of Gabriel's visit. It was John who by his *skirtazo* had communicated that to his mother, not Mary.

The remaining part of this except comprises what the Church celebrates as the Magnificat during Vespers, evening prayer, an appropriate time of the day to commemorate the event. Two paragraphs above the almost fierce nature of words exchanged between two pregnant women is noted. This continues for the remaining verses beginning with *megaluno* and *agalliao*, to magnify or rejoice and to exalt, strengthen. The first is associated with the *psuche* (soul) and the second with the *pneuma* (spirit). The reason for both is that the Lord has regarded the lowliness of Mary, *epiblepo* literally as to look upon (*epi-*). Such looking-upon is cause for future generations to call Mary blessed, *makarizo*.

Note that God's mercy is literally "into (*eis*) generation and generation." This doesn't suggest any static nor disconnected presence, for it's contingent upon these generations fearing the Lord.

Another strong word is Mary calling the Lord mighty or *dunatos* also as able-bodied as a warrior. His name is holy or *hagios*, sacred or set apart.

Fearing (*phobeo*) the Lord brings his mercy, yet another strong term which moves to others such as showing strength (*kratos* also as power) and scattering the proud. The second hits home where it matters, in the *dianoia* (literally as through the mind) which belongs to the *kardia* or heart.

The next consists in putting down those who are mighty and situated upon their thrones, clear reference to governing powers. Simultaneous with this is the exalting of those who are lowly, *tapeinos* corresponding with the *tapeinosis* or low estate of Mary beginning her song.

Those who are rich the Lord sends away, *exapostello* (*ex-* and *apo-* or out of and from) as empty, *kenos* also as vain.

The verb *antilambano* or to help means to lay hold of in order to support, this based upon remembrance of the Lord's past mercy, that is, extending all the way back to Abraham.

The Magnificat concludes with Mary staying with Elizabeth about three months, sufficiently long enough with Jesus growing inside her before making the trek through the hill country or the way she had come. If she waited longer, chances are she could lose her son due to the treacherous journey. As for what the two women discussed during this time is left to the imagination. However, we can be certain that the leaping of John...his *skirtazo*...joined in on the conversation and responded by a like *skirtazo* from Jesus. And so their conversation was interrupted many times, albeit pleasantly so.

19 August, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

51) I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." 52) The Jews then disputed among themselves saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53) So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; 54) he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55) For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. 56) He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57) As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. 58) This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever." John 6.51-58

This is the next-to-last installment, if you will, on the bread-of-life discourse. Jesus makes no bones about identifying himself with the manna (and the unmentioned quails) sent to feed the Israelites in the Sinai desert. Those listening to him constantly are hearkening back to that miraculous incident and comparing the manna kept enshrined in the Jerusalem temple with Jesus himself. If that manna is there and Jesus is here, what then is actually going on?

Even when some questioned as to how Jesus can give himself for food, he persists which is why he says "truly, truly."

As for eating and drinking Jesus—the Eucharistic elements clearly not revealed at the time—it holds out the promises of eternal life. Automatically going on in people's minds is how

this can be; therefore Jesus can be taken as speaking symbolically which in one way is true but in a deeper sense is not.

The promise of Jesus abiding with those who eat and drink him is tricky, to be sure. Does a person really want this even though so many have been following him around? Jesus' words are straight-forward and unambiguous, so there's little comment to be of them. In sum we're presented with a situation we either accept or reject.

26 August, Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

60) *Many of his disciples when they heard it said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?"*
61) *But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it said to them, "Do you take offense at this?"* 62) *Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?*
63) *It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.* 64) *But there are some of you that do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him.* 65) *And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."* 66) *After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him.* 67) *Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"* 68) *Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; 69) and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God."* John 6.60-69

The conclusion of a long discourse on Jesus as bread of life and the vivid way he presents this. The response not so much from those listening but from those closest to him? "Hard saying" or a *logos* (word-as-expression) which is *skleros*, dry, rough or harsh which no one, they claim, can bear listening to it. Jesus was well prepared for this response put as murmuring or *gogguzo* as applied to the crowd in vs. 41. He asks rhetorically what was clear on the disciples' faces, that they are offended, *skanadizo* meaning to trip up or to stumble.

Without waiting for a response, Jesus throws out an even crazier scenario, of seeing him ascend to where he was before, that is, before coming to earth. In the context of this Gospel, that would infer the bread of heaven returning to its source, heaven.

The *Pneuma* gives life, *zoopoieo* whereas the *flex* or *sarx* doesn't, *opheleo* meaning to be useless, of no profit. However, like this *Pneuma*, Jesus's words are life giving, *rhema* being used here, that which has been uttered, compared with *logos* more as expression. Then almost prosaically Jesus adds that he's addressing some who don't believe which probably turns out to be the bulk of his listeners. This applies to his disciples as well, for he knew of Judas who would betray him.

Jesus repeats what he had said in vs. 44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” That means those listening to him speak of himself in terms of bread from heaven, etc, and accept it later realize this doesn’t come from their own initiative but from the Father. It seems that the *Pneuma* which gives life is the agent of drawing here, that is, from Jesus to his Father.

Towards the end of this discourse we discover a distinction between disciples and the twelve who, despite misgivings, hung on because they had been exposed to Jesus’ words earlier and thus had been prepared to a certain degree. Peter speaks for the twelve by saying they have nowhere else to go, his words having a certain desperation about them yet coupled with hope. That is to say, there’s no option. Instead of congratulating Peter on this insight (and to some degree he was expecting such recognition), Jesus says that one of the twelve he had chosen was a devil (*diabolos*). Although the concluding verse of Chapter Six says that this *diabolos*...this one who casts through or *dia*...is Judas, Jesus doesn’t let on. Obviously these are unsettling words which must have made each disciple eye his fellow all the more closely. After such a striking discourse as they had been through, they didn’t dare as Jesus but hoped he would point out who it is...the sooner the better.

2 September, Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

1) Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, 2) they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. 3) (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; 4) and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.) 5) And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders but eat with hands defiled?" 6) And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; 7) in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' 8) You leave the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men"...14) And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you and understand: 15) there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him"...21) For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, 22) coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. 23) All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man." Mark 7.1-8, 14-15 & 21-23

Chances are the Pharisees and scribes knew about Jesus’ disciples not observing the tradition of their elders or the law as far as washing hands before eating. Armed with this

knowledge, they went out to catch them in the act. In other words, they had spies in the field keeping watch and ready to pass on information. Although such accusations have been very familiar to us over the years, when you stop to consider the context, it was quite a radical departure from tradition or *paradosis*, literally as that which is given beside (*para-*) in the sense as to accompany. So at the heart of the officials' inquiry and desire to trap Jesus is a deeper desire to see how and where he gets the authority to sidestep centuries of tradition. If they can discover it, perhaps they just might usurp this authority which is what the whole thing is about. It all boils down to jealousy.

Jesus found here an opportunity to strike at the motivation of these religious leaders who were more interested in maintaining their own preserve. He calls them hypocrites, citing the prophet Isaiah (29.13), a footnote in the RSV saying that it's from the Septuagint. As for the Hebrew text, it runs in full as: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote." Then this text continues in the next verse which puts it into perspective: "Therefore, behold, I will again do marvelous things with this people, wonderful and marvelous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish." In other words, we have a condemnation of religious leaders while favoring the common people. Surely the Pharisees and scribes were aware of this second verse from Isaiah.

Having sided with the people as just indicated, in vs. 14 (vss. 8-13 are omitted in the Gospel citation for this Sunday), he addresses them with a warning not as harsh as to the elders but sufficient to keep them on guard. He wished to prevent them from thinking of themselves as singled out for special favor. If they took this route, they'd be no better off. Since the people too were followers of the law and tradition, they had to be reminded that what comes from a person's mouth causes defilement, *koinoo* literally as to make common. The sense of this verb is the opposite of that which is holy.

As for this *koinoo*, Jesus spells it out with regard to the heart or *kardia*, listing a whole bunch of undesirable traits, fourteen in all.

9 September, Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

31) Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis. 32) And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. 33) And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; 34) and looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35) And his ears were opened, his tongue was released and he spoke plainly. 36) And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed

it. 37) And they were astonished beyond measure saying, "He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak." Mark 7.31-37

This excerpt begins with the conjunctive *kai* usually translated as “and” but here as “then” showing the close connection between the previous Gospel and the one at hand. As for this *kai*, note that it begins every verse here.

Nothing is said about Jesus as he made his way through the three areas; almost certainly he attracted great crowds and had to take evasive measures to avoid them. If too many followed, his recent experience with the religious authorities described above might put the people in conflict, something Jesus wished to avoid at all costs.

The people begged Jesus to cure the man brought to him, the verb being *parakaleo* (root of Paraclete) literally as to beseech beside, *para-*. As for the man involved, Mark records that Jesus took him aside instead of curing him in front of everyone. It seems that this cure would involve greater focus, allowing Jesus to look up to heaven and utter the Aramaic “be opened.” This *Ephphata* applies not only to the man’s ears but tongue so that he was able to speak plainly, the adverb *orthos* also as rightly and coherently. *Orthos* can contrast with what the man tried to utter before his cure, a series of grunts and groans which may have frightened those familiar with him, as though he had been possessed with a demon.

The opening of this man’s ears and tongue contrasts with Jesus bidding the people to be quiet about the miracle. Nothing is said of the man himself, but having been released from such a prison, he was quick to join everyone else as they went out and spread the story. Who could blame him? The people’s assessment of Jesus can be summed up by the adverb *kalos* translated here as “well” but fundamentally means beautifully, a fuller description of what Jesus had just accomplished.

16 September, Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

27) And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" 28) And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets." 29) And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." 30) And he charged them to tell no one about him. 31) And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. 32) And he said this plainly. And Peter took him and began to rebuke him. 33) But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God but of men." 34) And he called to him the multitude with his disciples and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross

and follow me. 35) For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. Mark 8.27-35

As noted in the except above, note here the high frequency of the conjunctive *kai* translated as “and,” something typical of Mark’s fast-paced narrative.

For some time now Jesus wished to test his disciples as to his identity. Ever since their calling they had questions and doubts, but for some reason this were superseded by a desire to see what would happen not so much to Jesus but to themselves. In other words, they were desirous of gaining power in the kingdom he had been talking about. It was natural for the disciples to think of Jesus in terms of holy men familiar to them: John the Baptist (recently martyred), Elijah or any of the other prophets. Then Jesus singles out Peter to ask the question as to his identity. Right away Peter calls Jesus the *Christos* or anointed one. Jesus acknowledged this with a command not just to Peter but to the others not to make it known. This must have come as a surprise to the disciples, they naturally feeling that Peter was privy to something they weren’t.

Then Jesus informs his disciples that like the suffering servant of Isaiah, he is to suffer grievously at the hands of the elders after which he will rise from the dead. Mark adds that Jesus states this plainly or with *parresia* which implies fearlessness of speaking without fearing recrimination. Obviously Peter didn’t pick up on the Isaiah implication and straightaway began to rebuke Jesus, the verb being *epitimaō*. The preposition *epi-* or upon is indicative of the sharpness of this reprimand. Such *epitimaō* is a direct response to Peter’s *epitimaō*, throwing the responsibility for such words back at him.

Clearly this incident put the disciples in their place, knowing that like Peter, they would be subject to severe reproach for rebuking their master. Jesus calls Peter Satan, a strong a curse as he could muster which must have astounded everyone. In order to defuse this tense situation but not to mitigate his message, Jesus decides to summon the multitude and put them on notice as well, the disciples obviously included. They’ve been tagging Jesus all along but if are serious, they are to deny themselves. He uses the familiar Roman method of execution, the cross, which must have struck fear in many, causing more than a few to drift away.

Finally Jesus equates himself with the gospel, the two working hand in hand. So if the crowd is to continue following Jesus from place to place, they too must be bears of this gospel, the *euaggelion* or good news.

23 September, Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

30) They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he would not have any one know it; 31) for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise." 32) But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to ask him. 33) And they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" 34) But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest. 35) And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 36) And he took a child and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37) "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me." Mark 9.30-37

The role of the conjunctive *kai* or "and" continues to do its part in moving Mark's narrative along. Now Jesus passes through Galilee more or less incognito. The reason is given in vs. 31, that Jesus felt time was short before his passion and death and therefore wanted to drive this home to his disciples (*didasko*, to teach) who seem not to have grasped that it's an essential part of his mission. In Mark's gospel we have this statement, also found in the other three, yet often fail to consider the details of Jesus' teaching about all this. He must have repeated the same thing over and over again yet still the disciples didn't understand (*agnoeo*) the saying. This is rendered by the noun *rhema* or that which has been uttered, compared with *logos* more as expression. In sum, such ignorance caused them to be silent chiefly out of fear to ask. Each disciple was looking at his fellows, waiting if any had the courage to pose the question but none did.

As Jesus and his disciples were walking, they allowed him to go ahead of them a bit, out of ear shot, so they could share what was on top of their minds, who's Number One among them. Jesus was aware of this tactic, they having employed it before, yet this time they were caught. The verb *dialogizomai* means to discuss, the preposition *dia-* as through and suggestive of considerable argumentation. While engaged in it, the disciples forgot their original tactic of withdrawing a bit from Jesus who naturally was drawn to question what they were talking about.

Not unsurprisingly, the disciples were discussing who was the greatest among them, not the more important fact of what Jesus had been teaching. This came as a huge surprise...disappointment, really...to Jesus after speaking about his last days followed by his resurrection. Then upon further reflection, it didn't because it was so typical of the human condition.

To remedy this, Jesus stopped and sat down, telling them that the greatest among them is to be servant of them all, *diakonos* being used, more as an attendant without the servile implications of *doulos*, a slave. To drive home this point, Jesus took a child who happened

to be nearby, perhaps belonging to one of many people tagging along, and uses him as an example. In other words, Jesus identifies himself with this child. Surely the child retained memory of this event. Would he later become a follower? Going one step further, receiving this child/Jesus points to receiving not him but the one who had sent him. Nice words, obviously, but still they didn't register. In the next verse John reflects this obstinacy of the human condition not to hear by complaining about a man not of their company who was casting out demons.

30 September, Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

38) John said to him, "Teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him because he was not following us." 39) But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. 40) For he that is not against us is for us. 41) For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ, will by no means lose his reward. 42) "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. 43) And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45) And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 47) And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell 48) where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. Mark 9.38-48

As noted toward the end of the last excerpt, Jesus' words about discipleship blew right over the disciples. John is more concerned about those not belonging to their small group who seem endowed with a share in divine power. There's something comforting about this obstinacy in that it had occurred in the Sinai wilderness with regard to Joshua complaining about some who were prophesying in the camp. In other words, between then and now, nothing has changed as far as the human heart is concerned. Like Jesus, Moses was indifferent; rather, he was delighted that the divine wasn't limited to himself or those associated with him. Moses put his finger right on the situation, that is, he called out Joshua as being jealous. Immediately afterwards Moses returned to the camp leaving Joshua to stew in his own juices. If the disciples of Jesus examined this more closely, they would see that Joshua would succeed Moses as leader, but he had learned his lesson the hard way.

Jesus brings John's complaint which was rooted in jealousy to a new level. He speaks of the necessity to be aware of anyone...and he means anyone...who offers the disciples a cup of water in his own name. In other words, people whom the disciples might consider as totally

alien yet recognize Jesus must be accepted. Failure to do so results in sin, the extreme example of a millstone being hung around a person and then cast into the sea.

Just as radical as the above mentioned example is the need to be on guard against sin. What it produces is so dire that it's better to cut off a hand, foot or eye than to be caught in such a condition. Although this sin isn't specified with the prospect of being cast into hell, the disciples couldn't help but associate it with John's complaint. After all, he got this whole discourse rolling.

Although Jesus speaks in extreme terms, chances are it didn't register except in passing. He knew this, of course, yet could see further than the disciples' limited vision. That implies the need for the Holy Spirit to teach them which is what happened at Pentecost. Once endowed with this Spirit, the disciples make constant reference to how Jesus spoke of his coming death and resurrection and as having fulfilled the scriptures. Implied here is a full, public acknowledgment of their own ignorance which they used to teach as well as to encourage. Perhaps this is the most appealing aspect of the disciples as they went about their missionary activity. The Reason? It's genuine, down to earth and something everyone can identify with. If the disciples engaged in building up Jesus with the intent of building up themselves, everyone would catch on and see them as charlatans.

7 October, Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

1) And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again; and again, as his custom was, he taught them. 2) And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" 3) He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" 4) They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to put her away." 5) But Jesus said to them, "For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6) But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." Mark 10.2-16

Since this is the beginning of a new chapter, vs. 1 is added for consistency.

"And he left there" or Capernaum (cf. 9.33) just after Jesus had given some vivid words about hell or Gehenna (cf 9.46), the reception of which isn't spelled out but left to our imagination. Nevertheless, crowds or *ochlos* (also it means a throng or mob) continued to follow Jesus who saw the need to teach them, something he was very used to doing by now. Again, an instance left to our imagination as to what he had said. However, those who heard his recent harsh teaching about Gehenna wanted more, so perhaps Jesus expanded on what he meant.

Pharisees may have been part of the *ochlos* although they stayed a discreet distance behind Jesus so as not to be noticed. They had their eyes peeled for anything Jesus might say or teach contrary to the Law or Torah. On this occasion they asked about divorce which Jesus may have touched upon earlier. To their question Jesus shot back with another, that is, what did Moses have to say of the matter? Rightly the Pharisees echoed Moses in this subject having in mind Dt 24.1: “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house” (etc.).

All this sound well and fine. However, Jesus gets to the heart of what Moses had prescribed, making allowances for “your hardness of heart” or *sklerokardia*. This word is comprised of two others: the root *kardia* or heart to which is prefaced the adjective *skleros*, hard in the sense of being harsh and unforgiving.

This *sklerokardia* is contrary to what God had decreed way back in Genesis, namely, that he had created “them male and female” [1.27]. Note that Jesus speaks of the two sexes which is appropriate in the context at hand, that is, relative to the Pharisees’ question. He omitted words just before these in the same verse, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.” Note the same thing said twice, almost for emphasis. The singular man is followed by the plural male and female...one person and two sexes. In other words, God stresses a person being made in his image with sexual distinctions coming second. Note only that, vs 27 says “in his own image” which stresses even further the importance of what this means relative to male and female.

14 October, Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

17) And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18) And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19) You know the commandments: `Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" 20) And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth." 21) And Jesus looking upon him loved him and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22) At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions. 23) And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" 24) And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25) It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26) And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" 27) Jesus

looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." 28) Peter began to say to him, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you." 29) Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel 30) who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life. Mark 10.17-30

This Gospel starts off with the conjunctive *kai* or “and,” so typical of Mark, and begins six more verses within this passage. The man who approaches Jesus must have been watching him intently for some time, wanting to grab hold of him before “setting out on his journey.” By kneeling he showed both respect and a certain desperation as he called Jesus “good” or *agathos*. Even before the man asked about gaining eternal life Jesus could see through him. While he was sincere and prompted Jesus to quote six of the Ten Commandments, Jesus sought an opportunity to cut to the quick. After all, he wanted to get going and continue his preaching.

Immediately the man responded with a sincerity that made Jesus pause, that is, he had kept the commandments from childhood. However, something was lacking, that quest for eternal life which he must have heard Jesus speak of either directly or indirectly. So here was his last opportunity. Jesus was always on the move and probably wouldn’t come his way again. Also Jesus was being pressed by many people and had little time for a one-on-one conversation.

Jesus looked at the man and loved him (*agapao*) after which he got right to the point. The man lacked “one thing,” *hustereo*, to come short of. As just noted, Jesus recognized this lack but had to see how it played out. This “one thing,” may be compared with Jesus’ enigmatic words to Martha concerning her sister Mary, “one thing is needful” [Lk 10.42]. As for the man speaking with Jesus, to obtain this “one thing” which can be taken as eternal life, he had to sell all his possessions and give to the poor what he got from them. Then he is to follow Jesus. Jesus was waiting there, ready to set out with or without him, and couldn’t wait much longer.

While the man was inquiring about eternal life, Jesus shifts to speaking of “treasure in heaven.” As soon as the man realized what was required “his countenance fell.” The verb is *stugnazo* which means that at once a gloom came upon his face. Without continuing the conversation, the man departed full of sorrow, *lupeo* also as to be in distress or grieved. The reason, of course, was his possession of many things. Keeping in mind the “one thing” with respect to Mary, another parallel may be drawn through Jesus’ words to her, “you are anxious and troubled about many things” [Lk 10.42]. Thus both the man and Martha handled concern about their possessions in different ways: both were chastened but the man left while Martha remained with Jesus.

Given Jesus' sensitivity to the man, chances are he waited until he got some distance away. Then he addressed his disciples who were listening intently to this conversation, each one putting himself in the man's position. In response to the original question of eternal life, Jesus exclaimed that's virtually impossible (*duskolos*: also as hard to please, unpleasant) for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Here the Gospel excerpt gives three phrases, all the same but with different nuances: eternal life, treasure in heaven and finally, the kingdom of God. No small wonder that the twelve were amazed at Jesus' words even though they had left their own possessions and more importantly, their families. Although they had made the break and followed Jesus, the situation at hand filled them with some doubt, even hesitation. In the near future or after Jesus had been crucified the apostles scattered which must have reminded them painfully of the man who decided against following their master.

Jesus uses the adverb *duskolos* a second time with regard to entering God's kingdom, that is, the image of a camel going through the eye of a needle...a large animal passing through the smallest of all openings. This caused not just astonishment among the disciples but in a way which was exceedingly so. The verb is *exeplessomai* with the adverb *perissos* or in abundance. Compare with *thameo* of vs. 24, to be terrified. Thus the disciples were hit with a double whammy, if you will. No wonder they exclaimed aloud, each one trying to make his voice heard about the others, "Who can be saved?" To this question Jesus looked at them (the third instance of his looking in the passage at hand), saying that it isn't possible with men (*adunatos*) but possible (*dunatos*) with God. The verbal root for these two adjective means the capacity to effect something and thus intimates the promise of hope.

Jesus expands a bit on what he had said to the man asking about eternal life. A person who has left family as well as possessions for him as well as for the Gospel will get back far more than all these along with persecution. Then he throws in as a reminder the man's original quest for eternal life. As for that man who had departed, perhaps he reconsidered. Later after having heard of Jesus death and resurrection, he took the plunge and became a follower. If so, he and the disciples must have plenty of interesting conversations.

21 October, Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

35) James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36) And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" 37) And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38) But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the

baptism with which I am baptized?" 39) And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40) but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." 41) And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42) And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles Lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 43) But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44) and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45) For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."
Mark 10.35-45

Between the last Gospel and the current one we find Jesus en route to Jerusalem when he informs his disciples that he is about to die and rise from the dead. He does this in a straight-forward manner that naturally caused dismay. After all, the twelve just heard words about leaving family and possessions to follow him. What good would come of this abandonment when the person advocating such abandonment would soon be dead? As for rising from the dead, right now that sounded pretty far out. However, it must have kept the disciples sufficiently interested so as not to walk away.

Even though Jesus spoke plainly of what was to happen to him—and it was to happen soon—James and John approached him. It was easier for them to do this since they were brothers and could share their concerns more intimately with each other before taking this risk. They ask without any trace of modesty that he do whatever they request of him. Jesus agrees to hear them out, that is, their request to reign with him in his glory. As for this glory, they had in mind their earlier experience with the transfiguration that happened not long ago. And so James and John were caught in between something glorious they had witnessed and Jesus talking about his impending death. Yet despite this, they had the hope that somehow Jesus would resolve this conundrum and establish some kind of earthy reign.

Jesus shoots back...appropriately so...that James and John are ignorant of what they are proposing and questions them as to drinking from the same cup he's about to do along with sharing the same type of baptism. As for baptism, this may have confused James and John, equating it with one they were familiar with, the beginning of Jesus' ministry at the hands of John. Was a second one in store as when at the first baptism the heavens will open up and a dove rest on Jesus?

Jesus confirms that James and John will drink from the same cup as he does and have the same baptism. Clearly it wasn't what they were expecting. Then Jesus says enigmatically that any share in his governance isn't his to grant. Instead of referring to the Father directly Jesus says that "it has been prepared" or *etoimazo* suggesting that it stands ready for implementation. The perfect passive intimates someone or something has done the

preparation, and it's up to the disciples to discern what this means. In the near future or at Pentecost all this doubt and confusion would be worked out. After that even James and John must have laughed at themselves for having been so foolish yet grateful for having moved well beyond that.

The other disciples got wind of James and John were up to and naturally became indignant, *agankteo*...down-right angry is more like it. Jesus saw this as an ideal teaching moment and referred to those who exercise authority, intimating both the Jewish rulers and more so, the Romans. Such is not to be the case with regard to the disciples, literally "in you." Jesus proceeds to reverse this accepted norm by saying that anyone who wishes to be great must become a servant or *diakonos*. The disciples might swallow that, but then he throws out that such a person also must become a *doulos* or a slave.

In light of Jesus' impending death, he concludes with two verbs from which the just mentioned nouns are derived, *diakoneo* and *douloo* as applicable to himself or what he's doing right now. That is to say, he is to give his life (*psuche*, also as soul) as a ransom for many, *lutron* meaning the price paid for release. To the disciples this suggests that Jesus will be taken captive and someone...most likely they...will have to pay the ransom money.

28 October, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

46) And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. 47) And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48) And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49) And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man saying to him, "Take heart; rise, he is calling you." 50) And throwing off his mantle he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51) And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Master, let me receive my sight." 52) And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way. Mark 10.46-52

Today's Gospel commences with the words "And they came to Jericho," a major stop en route to Jerusalem and at this time crowded with pilgrims for Passover. As soon as Jesus and his band arrive at Jericho, they depart, for vs. 46 says "and as he was leaving." Then again, perhaps they didn't intend to stay there, just long enough to resupply for the ascent to Jerusalem. Since Passover was approaching, plenty of pilgrims must have accompanied Jesus. That means the man who asked about eternal life back in vs. 17 was not the only person to have questioned him. He could have been representative of quite a few others

who posed the same question. The interaction with so many pilgrims must have increased once Jesus reached Jericho. Many of the inhabitants could have come out to meet him and used the opportunity to inquire what he thought about the famous incident of Joshua and the fall of that town. Jesus certainly knew more than anyone else and wanted to keep quite about it, hence part of the reason why he breezed right through the city. Also that town may have been out of supplies due to the usual large throng of people.

Just outside Jericho blind Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was drawing near. The giveaway seems to have been the “great multitude” or *ochlos* accompanying him, this term also meaning a throng bordering upon a mob. Bartimaeus had plied his craft long enough to distinguish between the various types of pilgrims. What got his attention were people like the man noted in the last paragraph, those who approached Jesus for some cure or favor. Bartimaeus heard about Jesus from earlier reports during his long years of sitting by the roadside, so his curiosity was aroused. Those who rebuked (cf. vs. 48) his loud cries weren’t so much desirous to shut him up as to keep him away from their own pressing in upon Jesus. Bartimaeus could have been with other beggars or not far from them. If he were allowed to approach Jesus, so thought some from the *ochlos*, he’d bring along a whole bunch of similar undesirables. It was easy to thrust away people deprived of sight since they couldn’t defend themselves well.

Jesus stopped not so much because of the loud entries of Bartimaeus but because he wanted to make a point among those who were accompanying him up to Jerusalem for the Passover. Now here was someone who couldn’t make the ascent, sitting by the road in complete blindness. Once Jesus cured Bartimaeus, he said “Go your way.” That is to say, go home or do not come with me to Jerusalem. His cure came took quickly before the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus for him to comprehend their meaning. Nevertheless, Bartimaeus seemed not to have heeded Jesus’ words, for “he followed him on the way,” that is, the way up to Jerusalem. *Hupago* is the verb for “go (your own) way” which fundamentally means to lead or to bring under whereas “he followed him on the way” uses the noun *hodos*. As for Bartimaeus, he must have followed...*hupago*...at some distance on the *hodos* so as not to rouse the attention of Jesus nor of his disciples. We don’t hear from Bartimaeus from this point onward but can only intimate what the momentous events about to transpire must have meant to him. With his newly restored sense of sight, Bartimaeus saw things that were not revealed to others and perhaps became an especially effective disciple in the following years, returning to Jericho as an evangelist.

1 November, All Saints

1) Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. 2) And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: 3) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for

theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4) Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5) Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 6) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7) Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. 8) Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9) Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10) Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11) Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12) Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5.1-12

The beatitudes may be outlined as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rejoice (*chairo*: to be happy). Be glad (*agalliaomai*: in the extreme sense). Reward (*misthos*: payment for work, wages). Persecuted (cf. vs. 11 just above). Prophets: cf. Mt 23.37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you!"

2 November, All Souls

37) *All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out.*
38) *For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me;*
39) *and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up at the last day.* 40) *For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.* John 6.37-40

This excerpt comes on the heels of Jesus speaking of himself as the bread of life. Just as there when he extended an invitation for all to eat and drink his flesh and blood, so here he welcomes all whom the Father gives him. The preposition *pros*, indicative of direction towards-which, is used twice as "to me." Notice the two comings: one with regard to the Father and the other with regard to Jesus. To the first belongs "all" while to the other belongs an individual person.

In vs. 38 Jesus comes from heaven on his own, not being forced by the Father or anyone else. This coming isn't a physical descent as coming down a ladder or the like. It's through the normal process of child birth as the infancy narratives recount. No one except the Virgin Mary perceives it fully; no one else could bear the manifestation of the divine just as those at Mount Sinai couldn't stand the divine revelation.

Note the three uses of will or *thelma*: Jesus not doing his own, Jesus doing the one who sent him and not losing all that the Father has given Jesus. Compare this third giving with the one of vs. 37, that is, as already with the Father and given to Jesus. So while this giving has taken place it has to wait a while, if you will, before Jesus raises it up at "the last day." This can have a number of meanings, but taking into account Jesus' divinity, he embodies such a day. Reference to day is far greater than a twenty-four hour cycle; it suggests a continuous presence. "And its (the heavenly Jerusalem) gate shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there" [Rev 21.25].

As for seeing the Son in vs 40, it can apply to the shuttling of those between the Father and the Son of vs. 37, fourth mention of *thelma*. Such seeing is conditioned up believing the Son which leads to eternal life, this eternity not unlike the Revelation quote in the last paragraph as applied to the heavenly Jerusalem. Despite the great value of eternal life, one more thing is required to bring it to completion. That is, Jesus will raise such a person at "the last day," second appearance of this phrase.

4 November, Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

28) And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" 29) Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; 30) and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' 31) The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32) And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other but he; 33) and to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34) And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to ask him any question. Mark 12.28-34

Today's Gospel jumps ahead from when Jesus left Jericho to Jerusalem to now when he had entered that city or after his triumphal entry on Palm Sunday. Thus the present context is the temple where the scribes are disputing with each other. The verb is *suzeteo* meaning more accurately to seek (*zeteo*) together (*suz-* or *sum-*). What's helpful about this verb is that it

counters a popular misunderstanding of Jewish scribes and others like them. Often a negative, even sinister picture is built up about these officials, of how always they are snipping the heels of Jesus waiting to trip him up. Though true in many instances, the “disputing,” so typical of scribal activity, is just another negative sign of how they operate. Such is not the case in reality. Religious disputing in the sense of *suzeteo* is essential to the practice of Judaism and something Jesus must have relished.

So in the context at hand, one scribe who had been engaged in this *suzeteo* with Jesus asked “Which commandment is the first of all?” Obviously everyone knew the answer which was not a trap for Jesus. It was meant as a lead-in for further discussion or *suzeteo* on the Torah. The adjective “first” must have rung a bell among the participants because like first in the first day of creation, and so forth, it meant the discussion would unfurl in a manner designed to offer further insights.

Jesus responds to the question by citing from Deuteronomy as to first loving God and then one’s neighbor, the verb *agapao* (*agape*) being used in both occasions. The scribe speaking with Jesus...*suzeteo* with him...acknowledges this which brought the discussion to an end, for “after that no one dared to ask him any question.” In other words, Jesus brought the *suzeteo* to a rapid close. That moment must have been quite awkward for the scribes because they were accustomed to “dispute” for hours on end. The abrupt conclusion doesn’t mean Jesus got the better of them (he did in many ways) but left them to continue their *suzeteo* which is what he would wish them to do. When Jesus told the scribe that he wasn’t far from the kingdom of God, that must have offered a new point of depart for discussion among his peers which went unrecorded. And so it’s helpful for us is to intuit this being acted out among the scribes in a positive fashion while Jesus walked away but remained in the temple teaching as Mark’s account continues. It should be noted, however, that shortly after Jesus cautions about the scribes “who like to go about in long robes” or in the garb associated with professional religious disputers. While true, given the long tradition of *suzeteo* in Judaism this observation doesn’t apply to all scribes.

11 November, Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

38) And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes who like to go about in long robes and to have salutations in the market places 39) and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, 40) who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." 41) And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42) And a poor widow came and put in two copper coins which make a penny. 43) And he called his disciples to him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who

are contributing to the treasury. 44) For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living." Mark 12.38-44

Five verses in this excerpt begin with *kai* or “and,” typical of Mark’s fast-paced narrative as if he wants to rush through with his account of Jesus Christ’s life and ministry. One way to take this is that he wants to get down to the business of catechizing. In other words, Mark has a sense of urgency, that so little time is left to do all this before Christ comes again.

Blepo is the verb for “beware” which fundamentally means to see, to have the power of sight. As pertaining to the scribes, it refers to their enjoyment of putting on a show as to their appearance. Those whom Jesus are addressing are quite poor and easily can be impressed by people in authority, especially religious authority. Thus this beware-ness...this *blepo*-ness...is more difficult to convey than at first glance. *Blepo* or seeing is directed to what seems to be a not uncommon practice of the scribes to take the houses of widows, that is, their very shelter. *Katethio* is a vivid word meaning to eat up, almost animal-like. Words such as these can rouse the people to anger and take action, but should they go that route, immediately they would be crushed. So the problem is how to live with such injustice...one of many in their lives...this leading to the rest of what Jesus has to say.

It doesn’t come out until vs. 41 that Jesus is by the treasury where he happens to notice a widow (perhaps one whose home the scribes had devoured) who put in a mere offering compared with wealthy people unloading their coins for all to behold. She was in line, most likely shunned as much as possible by the same scribes who recognized her as recently having maltreated her. However, this didn’t deter the widow. She may have had more money than the text suggests, wishing to make a show of the scribes, something only Jesus could have known but didn’t disclose.

While this excerpt begins with Jesus teaching those in the treasury area, vs. 43 has him summon his disciples, not the just mentioned audience, to take notice of what the widow had just done. Everyone had noticed the widow in contrast to the scribes, but Jesus chose the twelve to show the greater significance of her gesture and for them, in turn, to pass on the lesson to those they encounter. Nothing is said of what she did afterwards or whether Jesus sought to help her out, widows at the time being pretty much discarded. We can assume that Judas was among the twelve. One can only imagine what went through his mind, given his betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. He must have recalled this incident shortly after handing over Jesus, being haunted by its memory ever since he witnessed it.

18 November, Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

24) "But in those days after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25) and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26) And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27) And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. 28) "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29) So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30) Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place. 31) Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 32) "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father. Mark 13.24-32

Three verses beginning with Mark's famous use of *kai* or "and" as noted above; "but" and "so" also may fall into this category of enabling the text to move along swiftly. Such swiftness takes on special significance here because we're at the end of the liturgical year and on the threshold of a new one beginning with Advent.

Shortly before his own arrest and death Jesus speaks not so much of the tribulation but of the days after it, the word being *thipsis* also as trouble, distress, hard times. This had been described in the verses preceding this chapter. If such a momentous event had taken place, the days after it will be the result as pertaining to the desolating sacrilege noted in vs. 14. Instead of an event occurring upon earth as is the case with this desolation most likely in reference to the temple, Jesus speaks of the sun darkening, stars falling and powers of heaven being shaken. *Dunamis* means power (the capacity to effect something) and here refers to other heavenly bodies such as the moon. In other words, all light will be removed or that which perhaps is taken for granted the most. The RSV notes the following prophecies with regard to this event: Is 13.10, Ezk 32.7-8 and Jl 2.10. Thus most people are familiar with them.

In this total darkness people will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory, *dunamis* and *doxa*, an event that is so obvious given the darkened environment. During this coming or just before, Jesus will have his angels gather his elect, *episunago*, which has the verbal root *ago* prefaced with two prepositions, *epi* and *sun* or upon and with, indicative of a thorough search, almost a ransacking, of the entire earth for them. What will happen then is left to the imagination of Jesus' audience, they most likely being familiar with the prophecies as just noted.

Jesus uses the example of a fig tree about to put forth its leaves, a sign of the approaching summer or when the figs are ripe and ready for picking. Such is a sign of his nearness, *eggus*

also being at hand. It will be at the city gates, ready to enter, the city, and this can intimate Jerusalem and more specifically, the temple.

Vss. 30 and 31 have three occurrences of the verb *parerchomai* which is prefaced with the preposition *para* prefaced to them. In other words, three mentions of passing away: this generation (with the negative), heaven and earth and Jesus' own words or *logos*.

25 November, Christ the King

33) Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34) Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord or did others say it to you about me?" 35) Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?" 36) Jesus answered, "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world." 37) Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice." John 18.33-37

This famous dialogue, so easy to visualize, shows the complete misunderstanding by Pilate as to the nature of Jesus' kingship or *basileia*. Not being of this world or literally not "from this world" or *kosmos*, can be understood as being worldly or as we'd call it, secular compared with that which is holy. Jesus more or less says the same thing, that his kingship is not from the world or literally "hence" in the sense of from that source (*enteuthen*).

Despite this clear response, Pilate's mind remains muddled, for he still thinks of Jesus as a king in the conventional manner, hence a potential personal rival. Note the three occurrences of the preposition *eis* or "into:" "for this," "for this" and "into the world." Two uses of *eis touto* or "for this" stress the reason why Jesus had been born. The three lead up to Jesus witnessing to the truth, the verb *martureo* from which the noun martyr is derived. Future martyrs must have recalled this incident, setting the tone for their own giving witness.

Everyone of the truth who hears Jesus' voice, his *phone* which implies his word or *logos*. Note the present tense compared with the past suggesting that what Jesus is uttering before Pilate has validity across the limits of space and time.

Although vs. 38 isn't included in this excerpt, it's worth inserting, Pilate's famous (or better, infamous) question "What is truth?" He is present with Jesus where the just noted present tense of the verb *akouo* is used, yet predictably he fails to listen. In this way he is

the same of many throughout Israel's history who failed, symptomatic not just of the Jews but of everyone else.

Pilate's "What is truth?" is an apt conclusion to the liturgical year and echoes well into the next one which begins with Advent. The Gospel passage for that season's first Sunday is Lk 21.25-28, ironically dealing with "the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." Such was the theme of last's Sunday's Gospel where the beginning of one liturgical year parallels the end of the one before it. How to discern the difference as well as separation therefore is one of the key issues of this transition between two seasons...i.e., "What is truth?" What is the truth about the reality underpinning this mysterious transit from Ordinary Time to Advent?

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