

15 March, Fourth Sunday of Lent

All the leading priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets till the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, till there was no remedy...And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up.'" Second Chronicles 36.14-16 & 19-23

This lengthy passage deals with the last king in Jerusalem, Zedekiah (cf. vs. 11), who “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” Unfortunately the harsh condemnation which resulted from having “stiffened his neck and hardened his heart” [vs. 13] spilled over to the priests and people. In sum, the entire nation had become so hardened that a drastic solution was called for. Nevertheless, the Lord was familiar with such a collective hardening, that is, going back to Israel's wandering in the desert of Sinai. “Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness” [Ps 96.8 referring to Ex 17.1-7]. So in the passage at hand, everyone had become “exceedingly unfaithful” rendered such by the verb *mahal* which connotes treachery along with the noun (same spelling) derived from it. Also the verb *ravah* (to become great or to increase) is used for further emphasis. Apparently the “abominations” or *tohevah* belonging to the *goyim* or “nations” were in the form of unclean sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple. *Goyim* can be a derogatory term as here compared with Israel though Israel had proven no better than these *goyim*, if not worse. The idea of polluting and hallowing are mutually excluding, *tame'* and *qadash* (that is, to be holy or to make holy).

The word “persistently” stands out among the account of such continuous abuse and is rendered by the verb *shakam* which means to rise early. The idea is that the Lord was tireless in rising before sunrise each day in order to send messengers or prophets to the people. He did this out of compassion or *chamal* which connotes sparing from wrath. First comes the people and then the Lord's “dwelling place” or *mahon* which has a familiarity about it compared with a temple though the two are the same.

Despite the Lord's persistent concern through his messengers, the people abused them. The

words used here are quite strong: mock, despise and scoff or *lahav*, *boz* and *tahah*. The first also means to jest, the second implies condemnation and the third stammering. All three are directed to the prophets who are the same as his messengers, this term being a more precise function of their mission.

The passage at hand now skips a few verses (17 & 18) which speak of the king of the Chaldeans (Nebuchadnezzar) who not only slew Israel's young men but did so within the "house of their sanctuary" or the place which was *qadash*, holy. Nebuchadnezzar had no compassion, *chamal* being used which contrasts with the divine *chamal* noted above. Nevertheless, he brought to Babylon exiles or survivors who served him until King Cyrus came along. We don't know how many survived, let alone lived after what must have been a forced march from Jerusalem to Babylon, but the number must have been few. Their exile in Babylon lasted some seventy years or pretty close to two generations, given the shorter life span of the time.

Although this part of Second Chronicles recounts the wickedness of the rulers who had misled the people, the ultimate disgrace is the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. That wiped out their identity in a thorough manner with no apparent recovery. To the survivors exile seemed almost an after-thought compared to that horror. They're not singled out as special as in beginning of the Book of Daniel but simply those who managed to escape the slaughter which most likely meant they had gone into hiding.

Once Persia took power from the Chaldeans and Cyrus became king, the Lord intervened through the prophet Jeremiah, that is, referring to Jer 25.11-2 which recounts the downfall of the king of Babylon. Then the text at hand has the interesting though delightful words, "until the land had enjoy its sabbaths." Apparently this refers to Israel or those who had been left there as a remnant and kept alive the tradition of the sabbath rest. So while those who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and were led away for service in Babylon until the rise of King Cyrus, for seventy years or so the sabbath rest was being observed by way preparation for the Israelites to return. This, of course, was minus the temple but the people adjusted to its loss. It is these people, most likely few in number, who held together the identity of the nation until the exiles could return, if at all. Thus we have two groups of Israelites: those who managed to remain at home under difficult conditions and those who went into exile. How the two interacted upon being reunited can only be imagined. It must have had mixed feelings: those who remained faithful to keeping the sabbath and those who most likely had forgotten it while in Babylon.

Jeremiah steps in a second time with regard to the "word (*davar*) of the Lord" coming to King Cyrus. We have no precise information how that came about, presumably by way of conversation between the two men, but the Lord "stirred up" the king, *hur* meaning to awake as well as to enliven. It is used with respect to the "spirit" or *ruach* of Cyrus, this noun also meaning breath or wind. The effect of this *hur* upon Cyrus' *ruach* is evident in two ways: he made a proclamation and put in writing his desire to build or rebuild the Jerusalem temple. To prepare for this the king both had heralds go throughout his kingdom to announce publicly this decree as well as to have it posted everywhere for those who could read. Now it was

simply a matter for any Israelite to leave Persia and return home. However, for some Israel was known only second hand by stories from their parents. Perhaps not all wished to leave the comfort of their established lives for a place that had been ravaged. The Book of Ezra which follows Second Chronicles goes into the details of this return.

22 March, Fifth Sunday of Lent

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jeremiah 31.31-34

This excerpt starts off with the familiar *hineh* or "behold," a term which is used often to get one's attention for something important about to happen or be said. The more specific context of *hineh* concerns days which are coming, the time and nature of which are not specified. Despite this, the word suggests a consummation if not in full, then in part or in mystery. Note that the Lord speaks not of a day (singular) but of days (plural). The passage of time is secondary; while being so absorbed in the giving of a new covenant, the people will not be conscious of its passage or duration. Even its anticipation foretells this suspension of time and therefore of space. People didn't think of it in this rather abstract way but could somehow feel it to be true.

During this undetermined period of time the Lord will make a "new covenant," the verb *karath* ('make') more literally meaning "cut." It has 32.40 in mind: "I will make with them an everlasting covenant that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts that they may not turn from me."

Note the difference between the two "cuttings" or *karath*: the covenant with Israel's fathers or most likely those who experienced the Exodus and wandering in the Sinai desert vs. the one which is new and still in the future ('I will make'). The former has the two endearing images:

1) Taking Israel by the hand, that is, across the Red Sea which reflects the song of praise in Ex 15.1-18. The verb here is *chazaq* which is a rather forceful and sudden grabbing by the hand. However, the people broke this covenant...un-cut it, if it you will...when Aaron fashioned a golden calf (cf. 32.1-6). This required making a second covenant. In both the first and second covenant Mount Sinai plays a central role as the place the Lord had communed with Moses and gave him the Law or Torah.

2) The Lord as "husband" to Israel or *bahal*, a verb which also can mean a lord or master.

Surely Israel never had forgotten the dramatic departure from Egypt and all that ensued, the reason why it is recorded in the Book of Exodus. The excerpt at hand reveals a sensitivity on the Lord's part in that he doesn't bring to mind the rebellious attitude of Israel before entering Canaan. The people were painfully aware of it, of course, and each generation since the Exodus took care that next one would never forget the past. In light of this, the people must have been especially relieved to hear the words "after those days" which stands in contrast to "the days are coming" which opened this excerpt. The former includes not just the more specific time of rejecting the first covenant and the real possibility of doing the same with the second; rather, "the days are coming" can represent forgetfulness of the past when the Lord "will remember their sin no more."

So while the Law or Torah had been given on Sinai to Moses, in the excerpt at hand the Lord will take a twofold action concerning this same Torah:

- 1) He will "put" or *natan* (the common verb for to give) it "within" his people or *qerev* which suggests putting the Torah within their bowels.
- 2) He will "write" or *kataw* the same Torah upon their "hearts" (*lev*). Note that the first action or *qerev* has the preposition *b-* or literally "in their midst" whereas the second action has the preposition *hal-* or literally "upon their hearts." In other words, first "in" followed by "upon."

The result of this twofold operation: the Lord "will be their God" which will preclude teaching about him, the verb being *lamad* which implies both training and chastising as had been the case with the first covenant...cutting...in the Sinai wilderness. Now each Israelite will "know" or *yadah* the Lord, this verb implying intimate knowledge. Part and parcel of this *yadah* is the Lord both forgiving (*salach*) and not remembering (*zakar*) the people's sin. The text speaks of a singular sin or *chata'th* concerning the people, not multiple ones, which is more damning of their past depravity stemming from rejection of the Torah. *Salach* connotes a lifting up or a removal. *Zakar* is the verbal root for "male" which suggests that the children born of a father are the embodiment of his memory, and that is to be carried into the future indefinitely.

29 March, Palm Sunday

And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village opposite you and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever sat; untie it and bring it. If any one says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" And they went away and found a colt tied at the door out in the open street; and they untied it. And those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said; and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it. And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried

out, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!" And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Mark 11.1-10

According to the liturgical calendar, this Gospel reading takes place first by reason of today's feast, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Vs. 11 is added to complete the text.

Note that eight verses begins with the conjunctive *kai* or "and" which serves to move the action along at a brisk pace, quite common in the Hebrew Bible, as well as to show that everything is connected. Mark is known for use of "immediately" or *euthus* which ties in nicely with the frequency of the conjunctive *kai*. It seems he wishes to rush through the life of Jesus almost getting the facts out there about him and focus upon his passion which takes up a large section of his short Gospel. Not that he wishes to blow by what Jesus had said and done but considers that secondary or leading up to his passion and death.

The opening verse has the preposition *eis* or "into Jerusalem" along with "into Bethphage and Bethany." From there Jesus, his disciples and other accompanying them swiftly made their way to the two villages and then "into" Jerusalem, barely pausing on the way. The preposition *eis* is also found as "into the village" as well as prefaced to the verb *eisporeuomai*, "enter."

The words "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" are lifted from Ps 118.25-26 and run as follows: "Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord." As vs. 27 indicates, these joyous words precede the sacrificial offering being brought into the temple: "Bind the festal procession with branches up to the horns of the altar!" Looking back upon this incident, Mark and the disciples rummaged through the scriptures to see any hints prefiguring what and how Jesus had done. Because the Psalms are central to Jewish worship, that is the first place they would look, a very natural thing to do.

With regard to Hosanna, the Hebrew '*ana*' is a form of exclamation such as "ah" or "would that" followed by the sacred name for the Lord (*YHWH*), after which comes the verb *yashah* or to save, set free or give aid. Obviously it's the verbal root for the proper name Jesus. That allusion must have triggered something within the disciples as they scoured the Psalter which might tie in with Jesus as the one who saves Israel. Actually the verb *yashah* and its derivatives are found 134 times and is listed under the document "Psalter Verses Containing the Hebrew Verbal Root Yashah" under the category Old Testament on this homepage. Anyone with sensitivity to Jesus couldn't help but note the associations in the Psalter and the man. '*Ana*' is used a second time in the same verse, again with the proper name *YHWH* in between it and the verb "give success" or *tsalach* which connotes prosperity.

Immediately after this cry for joy as well as help comes recognition that someone divinely appointed has come on the scene though we have no clue as to his identity. The

mysteriousness of his presence in the psalm makes it easier for the disciples to associate him with Jesus. The people have gathered in the Lord's house, another way of saying his temple in Jerusalem, from which they bless him. The text of Mark adds to this excerpt from Ps 118 that David's kingdom...not specifically his king...is coming. And so Jesus, following the lead of the psalm, first entered Jerusalem and then the temple. The verb here is *eiserchomai* followed by two uses of the preposition *eis* or into Jerusalem and the temple.

We have no information what Jesus did next except having looked at everyone around him. These words are significant in light of what is to happen shortly and are left for the reader's imagination as to what Jesus was thinking, for he uttered no words. Then almost at once he left for Bethany (cf. vs. 11) which is mentioned at the beginning of this excerpt. Thus Mark's account ends with the swift return of Jesus after his triumphal journey which is keeping in line with the swiftness of his account as noted above. From there Jesus returns to the temple and clears it of those who were "buying and selling there" [vs. 15]. On this second trip to the temple nothing is said as to how Jesus was received, possibly traveling incognito so as not to be recognized until he got to the temple itself.

5 April, Easter Sunday

NB: Vss. 35 & 36 included though not in the official excerpt of this passage.

And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." Acts 10.34; 37-43

The scene of this address is Caesarea where Cornelius had been bidden by a "man in shining clothes" [vs. 30] to have Peter speak with a gathering of "kinsmen and close friends" [vs. 24]. In other words, it is a gathering of sincere, welcoming people which should make Peter feel comfortable. The passage at hand begins with the conjunctive *kai* ('and') which, as noted in the Palm Sunday entry, reveals swiftness and connectedness of action. It is as though the mysterious man appeared to Cornelius after which immediately Peter came on the scene. Perhaps Cornelius thought Peter was that man but never let on his thoughts about it. Peter himself didn't know about the existence of this mysterious man but wasn't surprised to hear about him. He had no interest inquiring about his identity or any such information. All that

mattered was to get the message of the Gospel proclaimed to as many people as possible.

“And Peter opened his mouth.” Similar words are found in Mt 5.2 where Jesus begins to speak about the beatitudes. Everyone was assembled around the apostle ready to listen to what he was about to say, knowing full well that he had been associated with Jesus Christ. Therefore he had pertinent information about a rumor that Jesus had risen from the dead. Some may have known how Peter betrayed Jesus which made the opening of his mouth all the more dramatic, filling his listeners with great suspense. Perhaps they were expecting him to explain his actions in a human sort of way, but no. The tone of Peter's speech is far from it. Objectively speaking it sounds impersonal but is not the case. Certainly he isn't preachy. Behind his matter-of-fact, confident approach is the primacy of a message and transformation by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which his audience must have heard about. This is borne out after Peter speaks, for “the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message” [vs. 44].

Peter's transformation is revealed in his first word, “perceive” or *katalambano* which literally means a taking (*lambano*) or better, a seizing in accord with (*kata-*) something such as an idea or plan. At Pentecost the Spirit descended upon the disciples, and people from various lands heard them speaking in their own tongues. It had made such an impression upon the disciples that no small wonder Peter blurts out “God has no partiality” or *prosopolemptes*. This noun means literally “acceptor or faces” or persons and contains the just mentioned verbal root *lambano*.

Peter continues by recognizing the familiarity which his audience has with the new Christian movement, “You know the word,” which here is *logos* and can be tied in with Jesus Christ as the *Logos*. Such *logos* about the *Logos* originated in Galilee after John baptized Jesus and then grew in voice or loudness, if you will, by Jesus' healing activity. Peter continues with a brief summary of Jesus' central mission which culminates in his resurrection. He is careful to include himself as a witness to this event not out of boastfulness nor for having a special prerogative but in order to make sure his listeners would know the manner by which the resurrection would be preached. That would be through the agency of the church. Surely once Peter had finished some asked him personal questions about the resurrection and how the other disciples reacted to it. That may have taken place but is secondary to the intent of the passage at hand. Peter simply brushed off these questions which were irrelevant to the urgency of getting the Gospel proclaimed.

After having enjoyed his visit at Cornelius' house and once his listeners received the Holy Spirit after the pattern of Pentecost, Peter has them baptized. While that is less dramatic than this mini-Pentecost, it is more important and lasting. Chapter Ten concludes with “Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.” Most likely Peter sensed his hosts wanted details about Jesus' resurrection to satisfy curiosity. Instead, he must have focused upon the significance of their recent baptism, of how it tied in with John the Baptist's prefigurement, and that it was the most essential component of what it meant to be a Christian. Once that was established, the people in the house could form the nucleus of a new community or church at Caesarea. From this church would flow “forgiveness of sins through his name.”

12 April, Second Sunday of Easter

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Acts 4.32-35

Plethos is the noun for “company” which fundamentally applies to a multitude, so used here at the beginning of the church right after Pentecost suggests not so much that there were many members but can be taken to imply it has the seed for quick advancement to include a wide variety of people.

“Heart and soul” or *kardia* and *psuche* as applicable to the *plethos* or multitude, if you will. Provided this twofold reality is present and cultivated, the church will grow. The manifestation of this unity is represented by the literal reading, “all things to them were in common (*koinos*).”

The adjective *megalos* ('great') is used twice: with respect to the apostles' “power” and “grace,” that is, *dunamis* and *charis*. The former refers to power, facility or capacity and the latter to favor and even thankfulness. Thus both have a wider meaning than commonly understood and work together, especially with regard to giving “testimony” to Jesus' resurrection, *marturion*, which literally means witness.

We don't have details as to how the disciples actually laid out their *marturion*. They had to do it concretely because if not, it would be of no value. Their approach can take a twofold path: first the disciples had been in the company of Jesus after his resurrection. Anyone could tell if they were faking it which wasn't the case here even if some doubted their words. Because society was tightly knit and everyone knew everything that was going on, most people got wind of how the disciples abandoned Jesus when he was arrested. Obviously this is shameful and to speak with boldness about the same Jesus shortly afterward was unheard of. The two are so contrary to each other that they could not coexist. One had to give way to the other which is clear by how the disciples were no comportsing themselves.

The second appeal refers to the disciples' audience as primarily Jews, many of whom had knowledge of their tradition. Therefore the disciples went through scripture, verse by verse, book by book, as they searched out prefigurements, if you will, of Jesus' resurrection. This wasn't something they fabricated which, like their personal *marturion*, would have fallen flat among a wider audience.

From the unity of *kardia* and *psuche* among the early church after Pentecost there was no

poverty or lack of resources. Although it's well known that the early Christians shared possessions among each other and helped the poor, it's amazing how rapidly and spontaneously this occurred. To relinquish possessions in a society which lacked ideas of social welfare is the most remarkable *marturion* to that unity of *kardia* and *psuche*.

19 April, Third Sunday of Easter

The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you and killed the Author of life whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. (and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old). Acts 3.13-19

Vss. 20-21 form one sentence and are included in parentheses in order to complete the full sentence begun in vs. 19.

The opening verse says it all, is quoted often in various forms throughout the Bible, and requires closer examination in order to get at the identity of this God with whom Peter claims Jesus Christ has a particular relationship. In other words, we have the three major patriarchs whose story unfolds within the Book of Genesis. All three were wanderers or on the move not in an alien land but within the promised land of Canaan. Despite divine promises of inheritance, never did they manage to settle down. To top this off, their descendants in the person of Israel came into Egypt at the invitation of Joseph. Thus all the wanderings and strange contacts with the Lord in Canaan must have seemed as naught to these dwellers in Egypt. In other words, what was it for? Could this God be trusted? Were the gods of Egypt more agreeable? The text, both Genesis and Exodus, is silent on the matter, but the suggestion is latent.

So between the lives of these three patriarchs and the Israelites in Egypt some four hundred years has passed. Apparently their memory had been kept alive, for the Lord himself speaks of them when conversing with Moses for the first time: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" [Ex 3.6]. In light of the apparent failure of these three patriarchs, a divinity identifying himself with them was partly consoling. Surely the collective memory of Israel had in mind the Lord's abandonment of the settlement project in Canaan and normally would be hesitant to do it again. That's what happened eventually, so the Israelites can't take full blame for their distrust of God and his chosen leader, Moses. Such an attitude was bound to affect their relation with the Lord, their wrestling with religious

conversion, at various stages in their history and all the rest.

As for the patriarchs, “God” is added to each of the three pretty much for emphasis although shortly the Lord will shift his approach and define himself through verbal means, if you will, “I am who am” [vs. 14]. Coupled with Israel's inherent distrust of this God who abandoned the enterprise begun by their three renowned patriarchs and this strange revelation, it's a genuine miracle that the Israelites consented to follow Moses not just from Egypt but for forty years in the Sinai wilderness. Surely when growing up and engaged in his ministry Jesus himself must have pondered this to see if there was any parallel. One conclusion he came to pretty early on is that all are characterized by experiencing a certain distance from God, even abandonment. That therefore would be part of his life as well.

The distance between God and Israel's patriarchs has to be bridged in a way that is more effective than in the past. This is hinted at in terms of glorification, that is, God “glorified his servant Jesus,” *doxazo* being the verb which also means to have an opinion (*doxa*). Glorification is put in terms of direct responsibility to the people whom Peter is addressing. He wishes to make a connection between past experiences associated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the people alive right now which is consistent with Israel's give-and-take relationship with the Lord down the centuries. So when they heard themselves as being responsible for killing the “author of life,” it was nothing new, really. Peter alludes to this by referring to the prophets who foretold “that his Christ should suffer.” It happened before and would happen again if not Jesus Christ had revealed himself.

And so as in the past, so is in the present where the offer or repentance or *metanoia* is offered only here it is bound up with “times of refreshing.” The first word is the familiar *kairos* which pertains more to an event, an eruption of the holy into the human sphere. Note, however, that *kairos* is plural whereas usually it's the singular. The second word is *anapsuche* which translates literally as *psuche* (soul) prefaced with the preposition *ana* or up, upwards. Thus *anapsuche* can imply a lifting up...an exalting...of the *psuche* to a realm normally unfamiliar to it which is “from the presence of the Lord,” *prosopon* also meaning a person.

St. Peter had begun this address when going with John to the temple and having encountered a man who had been born lame. Vs. 20 (it forms part of the previous verse) with reference to the prophets as he had done in vs. 18. This is intended to bring full round the “God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob” which begins the excerpt at hand.

26 April, Fourth Sunday of Easter

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders but which has become the head of the corner. And there is salvation in no one else, for there

is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4.8-12

The small word *tote* or "then" is pivotal in that it reveals a shift in the account concerning Peter who is in the company of John. Both had just been arrested for having healed a man and preaching about Jesus Christ, the word *pleroo* or "filled" intimating the recent descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Thus *tote* signifies the continued working of the Holy Spirit or more accurately, a crucial test when it assists Peter in a difficult situation right after Pentecost. More precisely, when Peter was speaking with the religious authorities, he was conscious of himself as human being as well as being *pleroo* with regard to the Spirit's utterance. There was no question of how to reconcile the two; they just worked together in harmony.

Peter comes right out and says that the religious leaders had been responsible for putting Jesus to death, this a very recent occurrence muddled all the more because of some rumor that he was alive. This inability to get a handle on Jesus was what troubled them. When questioning Peter as well as the other disciples they couldn't help but be aware of their transformation. Just about everyone was familiar, albeit in passing fashion, of their association with Jesus and how they had deserted him in his greatest hour of need. Putting all this together seemed an impossible task. If these associates of Jesus could be reconciled with what they had done as shown in public fashion by their new attitude, they were bound to attract followers.

Peter claims Jesus to be "the head of the corner" or the *kephale*, pretty much a keystone in between two forces working towards each other yet being held apart. He quotes from Ps 118.22: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner." The psalm says nothing of a particular building project, if you will, but possibly has in mind the temple at Jerusalem. Stonemasons were busy sorting out the proper stones for each part, paying special attention to those that would be essential in bearing immense pressure. They must have gone through many stones which for one reason or another didn't fit. With this image in mind, Jesus had been rejected by the temple builders which happened to work out just fine. He himself was the new temple and hence required not being assessed nor determined by anyone else.

3 May, Fifth Sunday of Easter

And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists, but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit it was multiplied. Acts 9.26-31

If you read behind the opening words of this excerpt you can get a glimpse into Saul's character. That is to say, he was feeling quite guilty after his conversion yet didn't lose his zeal manifested by his attempt to associate with the disciples, *kollaomai* fundamentally meaning to glue. In other words, Saul tried to stick himself to them rashly and somewhat desperately in an overwhelming desire to prove himself and to disavow his previous life. He knew how to single out the leaders...disciples...since as a recent persecutor of Christians, easily they were identifiable. This also took some courage on his part because of his savage reputation. Nevertheless, Saul came away from his experience on the Damascus road fully aware that he had been made a disciple, by not means a small claim and one that astounded Jesus' closest followers who now were leaders of the fledgling church. To say that "all were afraid of him" indeed is an understatement. We have no record of what relatives of those whom Saul put death had to say, but they must have been incredulous as well as unforgiving.

Note that it was Barnabas, not one of the original disciples hearkening back to the days with Jesus, who took Saul under his wing. He, not Saul, recounted the Damascus road conversion, which to the disciples sounded familiar because it resembled a Pentecost experience. If they with their failings or abandonment of Jesus in his hour of need could be forgiven, why not Saul? However, unlike them, he was educated and had been in a position of power. Thus they were confronted with a double threat, if you will.

Barnabas also mentions (actually twice) how Saul had preached "boldly," the verb being *parresiazomai* from which the noun *parresia* is derived. This word is difficult to translate and originally refers to the right and privilege the citizen of a Greek city state has to express himself. Apparently Saul had gone out on his own without consultation or guidance, still eager...too much at this early stage perhaps...to prove himself. The immediate response? People sought to kill him on the spot. This reveals not so much the Good News but the manner in which Saul presented it. He could have gone at it a bit more slowly and easily, but that wasn't his style revealed here early on and to continue throughout the rest of his life.

The leaders of the early church quickly got wind of Saul's *parresia*. While impressed and convinced that he was the genuine article, instinctively they knew he would be a difficult case to handle in the future. Even Peter knew from the very beginning Saul would be a thorn in his side. Not even Peter as leader had the smarts to debate with the Hellenists.

This passage concludes on an upbeat note, namely, that the church was at peace, was "built up," walked in divine fear and in the "comfort of the Holy Spirit." *Oikdomeo* literally means to build a house and *parakesis* means help or encouragement not unlike the similar word Paraclete as applied to the Holy Spirit. While true, everyone knew they were in for an interesting few years of development with Saul among them and eventually leading the charge on behalf of the new faith.

10 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.

But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man"...And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him...While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. Acts 10.25-6, 34-5 & 44-8

Note that the Easter Sunday excerpt is from Acts 10.34; 37-43 and has some overlapping with regard to the following passage, that is, Peter and the centurion Cornelius.

This passage takes place shortly after Peter had his vision of a "great sheet" [vs. 11] from heaven containing all kinds of animals. Cornelius was a "centurion, an upright and God-fearing man" [vs. 22] who was directed by an angel to invite Peter to his house, and upon Peter's entry, "fell down at his feet and worshiped him." This was understandable because Cornelius had been "directed" [vs. 22] by an angel to invite Peter, the verb being *chrematizo* which fundamentally means to transact business or to give a response to an oracle. In other words, Cornelius was giving to Peter the same reverence as he had to this angel. Although Peter mildly rebuked Cornelius, this highly respected centurion knew that his guest was a man, not an angel. Both men must have laughed gently over this confusion, fully knowing their human condition which didn't preclude them from getting on straightaway with far more important matters.

The next few verses has Peter saying that it's unlawful for a Jew to associate with non-Jews though God had revealed to him this essentially posed no problem. Surely Cornelius was aware of this as well. At the same time Peter knew Cornelius was "well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation" [vs. 22], no small compliment from a nation occupied by a foreign power regarding an officer of that regime.

Now it was time for what everyone was waiting for. Peter "opened his mouth" signifying that the formalities of people greeting each other had been taken care off, and it was time to get out as quickly and as convincingly the good news of the Gospel. There must have been a few moments of silent, eager expectation before Peter spoke and when this body of "close friends" gathered around a table, for example, awaiting what this special guest was about to say. Nothing is said as to their identity. Chances are they were both Jew and Gentile, given this man's sterling reputation who even before the Spirit's intervention was able to pave the way for reconciling the two. This must have had much to do with Peter feeling comfortable about speaking of his newly found discovered that "God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean." Obviously he had in mind the clean and unclean animals of his recent vision but didn't let on to that among his guests.

Those in Cornelius' house had known about Peter and his association with Jesus, especially the

recent rumors about Jesus' rising from the dead and the Jewish authorities strong resistance with regard to those who subscribed to it. In essence, everyone wanted to know whether or not this rumor was true or false as well as how Peter, having betrayed Jesus, got to become leader of the fledgling church. Then, of course, another rumor was making its rounds, of the Holy Spirit having descending at Pentecost. If this weren't enough, everyone was riveted by the story of the newly converted Saul who had reeked such ravage on the first Christians. Such is what the gathering expected from the opening of Peter's mouth, and rightly they deserved clarification of all these confusing events.

As noted in the Easter entry Peter comes to realize that "God has no partiality" or *prosopolemptes*. This noun means literally "acceptor or faces" or persons and contains the just mentioned verbal root *lambano*.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of Peter at Cornelius' house is a Jew associating freely with Gentiles. There had occurred a mini-Pentecost while Peter continued to open his mouth, that is, while he "was still saying this" [vs. 44], that is, about Jesus as ordained by God. Note that the Spirit "fell" upon all who heard the "word" or *logos*, the *logos* about the *Logos*. The verb is *epiipto* which may be compared with the actual Pentecost event where the Spirit "filled all the house" [2.2], the verb being *pleroo*. Couple this with tongues of fire "resting on each one of them" [vs. 3], the verb being *kathiemi*. Both are more gentle than the more sudden *epiipto*, showing the difference between the two events.

The remarkable event of a Jew among Gentiles dealing with God who shows no partiality to either concludes with those in Cornelius' house to be baptized. However, the people who had invited Peter were not going to let him off easily. "they asked him to remain for some days" which means he continued to open his mouth and speak about Jesus. Most likely Peter got quite personal about his personal experience, especially his betrayal. That hit home like nothing else among his listeners, making him all the more appealing to them.

17 May, Seventh Sunday of Easter

In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty) and said, "Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry...For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it'; and 'His office let another take.' So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "Lord, you who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside, to go to his own place." And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the

eleven apostles. Acts 1.15-17; 20-26

The phrase “in those days” refer to the relatively short interval between Jesus' ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Thinking of such “days” in the temporal sense is secondary; more importantly they represent an interval when Peter and the disciples knew of the Spirit's descent but weren't certain when this would occur. More precisely, “in those days” takes into close consideration the assembly of the small band of disciples “in the room where they were staying” [vs. 13]. Surely Peter had in mind the intimate sharing which transpired there when he speaks to the “brethren.”

In the last entry we have Peter opening his mouth with everyone sitting around him in eager expectation of what he was about to say. Here Peter stands up first and then begins to speak ('said'). This standing up is similar but more authoritative. In sum, both the opening of mouth and standing up as belonging to Peter can be linked to his primacy among the apostles and thus the early church. As for the standing up, it is “among” the brethren” or *en meso* or perhaps better as in their midst as in the center of a circle, some 120 people set equally around him.

While Jesus was among his disciples frequently we ran across words like “that the scriptures may be fulfilled.” In the case at hand we have the first post-resurrection reference, all the more remarkable because it takes place before Pentecost when Peter and the disciples received full knowledge of the relationship of the scriptures concerning Jesus. The reference is Ps 41.9: “Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” Obviously the disciples had much explaining to do with regard to Judas' betrayal which set the whole arrest and death of Jesus in motion.

The excerpt at hand lacks vss. 1-18 about the death of Judas and continues with Peter citing two other passages strung together or Ps 69.25 and 109.8 (the Hebrew texts are given here): “May their camp be a desolation, let no one dwell in their tents.” “May his days be few; may another seize his goods!” Peter knew that a scriptural basis had to be put forth to explain the role of Judas and that another disciple had to be chosen to restore the sacred number twelve to the group, twelve being representative of the tribes of Israel. This had to be done as quickly as possible after Jesus' ascension to prepare for the coming descent of the Holy Spirit. Peter knew it was going to happen though not sure as to the details. His first task as leader was to ensure the completion of the apostolic group. It may be thought that the Spirit should have a hand in the choice of this twelfth disciple. While a valid consideration, his coming needed the full complement of disciples on which to descend, otherwise something would be missing.

The chief qualification of being a disciple was to have been with Jesus who “went in and out among us” [vs. 21], a way of showing how he had action with his chosen band. Such words can be taken as Jesus at one time being with the band and at other times apart from it. Note that Peter stipulates the new candidate had to have been with Jesus since the day he was baptized, that is, since the beginning when he had called his disciples. This implies that while Jesus had chosen the twelve by name there must have been a number of associates, if you will, who

similarly followed Jesus throughout his career. However, Jesus did not go in and out among them as he had done with the twelve. Such associates, if you will, may have been with the group for such and such a time; they left for one reason or another and similarly returned. In other words, their situation precluded full-time discipleship. Besides, Jesus chose only twelve for this role despite the many able candidates.

Furthermore, the elected person must be “a witness to his resurrection” which means he was present on one or more occasion when Jesus had manifested himself to the twelve. The two (no mention of them is made in the Gospels) are Matthias and Barsabbas. After some prayer, the former was chosen. We don't know how Barsabbas felt about this...admittedly disappointed and even jealous...but the issue here is to get the choice over as quickly as possible to hasten, if you will, what everyone knew was coming even if they weren't quite sure what it was. As for the enrollment, the verb *sugkakupsephizo* literally means to be chosen by a vote which consisted of a pebble representing one's choice. This word suggests some kind of ceremony which was the first as well as the last ever performed and most likely consisted of scriptural readings as from the Psalms. Since Peter had quoted verses from two Psalms about Judas, it was easy for him to mentally search for any relative to the happy event at hand.

By way of conclusion, the way Peter as well as others and the authors of the Gospels pick out Old Testament verses seems as if they did it spontaneously. This may be difficult for us moderns to accept, but the ancients relied upon their faculty of memory far more than us meaning they had the ability to pick out such passages even if they weren't educated. Besides, the disciples were observant Jews who, despite their obscurity, still received training in the Torah while young.

24 May, Pentecost

The obvious choice for today would be the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost from Acts. However, the church's liturgical calendar gives Genesis 11.1-9 as an excerpt for the Vigil Mass, and that is included here as excerpted from another text on Genesis posted on this same home page.

The purpose of constructing the tower of Babel? That the people who settled in the plain of Shinar decided to “make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” At first glance this sounds reasonable because the people had a tenuous grip on the land after their recent migration from the east. The presumption of reaching “in the heavens” noted just above is based in the fact that the people didn't realize the value of their “one language and few words” (vs. 1), that this unity was sufficient to sustain them in their newly settled territory. If they assumed the onerous task of making a name, surely others would recognize it. As for these supposed others, if they weren't in the general vicinity of the plain of Shinar, the tower's great height was bound to catch their attention. This making of a name as embodied in the tower, so the people presumed, would prevent their being scattered, *puts* being the verb which implies being broken into pieces: “And let your enemies be scattered” [Num 10.35]. *Puts* conveys the notion of scattering not unlike *naphats* of 9.19: “and

from these (Noah's sons) the whole earth was peopled." The builders of the tower had in mind this sudden and alarming scattering from the newly landed ark, hence they wished to prevent their dispersal from getting out of hand before distance would destroy that one language and few words. That's why we have the words "upon the face of the whole earth:" not just the area close to the ark's landing site but the entire globe. So instead of attempting to gain control over the new territory laid out before them, they should have copied their descendants' father, Noah, that is, his walking with God. That would have precluded building a lofty structure "in the heavens," and God would have obliged gladly. Noah was the man the people of Shinar should have held up as an example, not his sons, who were simply transmitters of the human race from the pre-to-post flood worlds. To follow their example would get them nowhere as they soon will discover.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city" [vs. 8]. *Puts* is the verb for "scatter abroad" used in vs. 4, the fear of being broken into pieces (the fundamental sense of *puts*) and the rationale behind constructing both the city and tower to emulate the garden of Eden. The Lord effected this scattering by the breathe of his mouth, his *ruach*, blowing them like so many leaves over the earth from the

plain of Shinar. Vs. 8 concludes with “they left off building the city,” *chadal* being the verb which means just this, they ceased their work. When the Lord first descended under the guise of a man, both the city and tower were complete; more work remained with finishing and the city, even entertaining thoughts to go beyond the limits originally laid down. Nothing is said of the tower. It remained there for many years afterward as a reminder to the former inhabitants’ hubris. The structure was so lofty that no matter where the people were scattered they could see it looming in the horizon as a reminder of their vain efforts. While looking back at it, everyone were unable to express their frustration; although they retained the one language, many words had been injected into it instead of the original few.

31 May, Trinity Sunday

For ask now of the days that are past which were before you since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation by trials, by signs, by wonders and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and by great terrors according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?...know therefore this day and lay it to your heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments which I command you this day that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God gives you forever.
Deuteronomy 4:32-34 & 39-40

This passage contains a certain simplicity and joy on God's part as he addresses his people, daring them to be bold enough to ask for their hearts' desire. After all, they are wandering around in the Sinai wilderness after having escaped oppression in Egypt. The people are to ask (*sha'al*) of him in two ways:

1) With regard to “days that are past” or days that are *ri'shon*, more literally as days that are first. In other words, the people are urged to hearken back to the Book of Genesis which goes by the Hebrew word *re'shyth* or beginning. Genesis opens with this very word or *bere'shyth*, “in the beginning.” Note the importance of the preposition *b-* ('in') which situates the reader of the book right with God in his creative action which will transpire over the course of six days followed by one of rest. Such are the days of the past made present here and now. A parallel text worth consulting is Chapter Eight of Proverbs, especially vss. 22-36 or to the end. There wisdom speaks as a prophetess or a “master workman” [vs. 30], *'amon* being the word which means a little child and derived from the verbal root *'aman* from which comes the noun “faith.” Although the Genesis text doesn't document it, we could say that Wisdom had been present with God during the six days of creation. If Wisdom can do this, so can the readers of *Bere'shyth*.

2) To ask “from one end of heaven to the other” which, if taken literally, means all across the “firmament” or *raqyah* of Gn 1.7. This literally means that which is spread out not

unlike a sheet in which are situated the sun, moon and stars. The *raqyah* is a dome covering the earth all around, so this asking which the Lord bids is not unlike giving voice within a giant chamber where the sound echos all around the earth. This image is appropriate for the people here in the desert where at night the *raqyah* stands out with special clarity. No reply is expected in the conventional sense. After asking aloud, the response comes back from all the created entities in the *raqyah*. It is not unlike the stars' response to the Lord in Bar 3.34: "the stars shone in their watches and were glad; he called them, and they said, 'Here we are!'"

The rest of the passage at hand deals with the Lord recounting his care in the Sinai wilderness and rescue from the Egyptians. So following the two-fold *sha'al* above, the people are to "know therefore this day," *yadah* being the verb which pertains to intimate, even sexual knowledge. Such *yadah* is specified as belonging to the day when the Lord is speaking, that is, right now and thus lacks extension in space and time but is present eternally. The people are to "lay" this *yadah* to (*'el-*) their hearts or *shuv* which connote a sense of returning. *Shuv* thus intimates that the people have forgotten the Lord's intervention on their behalf and have to return to memory of it which is located within their hearts. That's why the passage concludes with the Lord having concern for future generations. And so the two-fold *yadah* and *shuv* relate to the people being aware of the Lord both above in heaven and below on the earth. In other words, this is the *raqyah* where they are told to ask concerning days that are past and from one end of the heaven to the other. Such asking and the Lord being above and below form one reality, if you will.

The Lord speaks of "this day" a second time which also involves a keeping of his commandments which he imparts at that very time. The verb *shamar* for keeping involves maintaining watch as found in the Torah as noted frequently in lengthy Psalm 119. The *shamar* is to have a specific place, the "land" or *'adamah* which the Lord is going to give Israel. In other words, Israel has not yet entered Canaan which here goes by a word pertaining to the ground itself or better, arable land compared with the desert environment in which the people are wandering.

The notes concerning this excerpt dealt briefly with the people hearkening back to the Book of Genesis or more literally, the "Book of in the Beginning" which also speaks of the firmament, *raqyah*. The two types of asking in that context take on a more formal or more durable reality as the Lord's statutes and commandments which are to be passed on to future generations on that (arable) land or *'adamah* compared with the desert.

7 June, Corpus Christi

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and half

of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."
Exodus 24.3-8

The following is taken from *Expansions on the Book of Exodus* posted on this home page.

"Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do'" [vs. 3]. We don't know whether Aaron, his two sons and seventy elders were privy to what the Lord had communicated to Moses, but the time on the summit seems to have been very brief. The same applies to the length of time the Lord spoke with Moses which should not be measured according to the passage of conventional time. The whole event could have lasted a few seconds or even less, shorter being more likely than longer. Actually it turned out a bit later that Moses did not communicate much to the people; instead, he constructed an altar and made an offering. As for the people's spontaneous response, it must have been on the spur of the moment without much reflection of what they were willing to do. One can imagine the people thronging about at the base of Sinai and enveloping Moses, Aaron, his sons and the elders, pressing them all with interminable questions.

"And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. And he rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel" [vs. 4]. As just noted, not much as far as written directions or commands had been imparted to Moses on his recent ascent. That would come later when he ascended a second time and received detailed instructions as to divine worship. Nevertheless, Moses had to unpack what he was imparted to him in a virtual instance and put it down upon a scroll. While in his tent, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and some of the seventy elders must have stood guard about it so he could accomplish this in peace without the people rushing upon him. This standing guard must have continued throughout the night until the people gave up and retired to their tents which is why Moses "rose early in the morning" or well before they returned. Although Moses had been instructed to build an altar (*mizbeach*) in 20.24, nothing is said of its actual construction, just that such an altar should be erected. The only *mizbeach* we know for sure that Moses had built is in 17.15: "And Moses built an altar and called the name of it the Lord is my banner." There it was noted that this *mizbeach* could have been more as a monument.

In addition to the *mizbeach*, Moses set up twelve pillars or *matsevah*, this term first found in 13.21: "And the Lord went before them by day in a *matsevah* of cloud...by night in a *matsevah* of fire to give them light." Actually vs. 4 has "tribes" (*shevet*) for the first time in Exodus. Jacob's twelve sons had come into Egypt at Joseph's invitation (plus that of Pharaoh) and dwelt their four centuries. Apparently they retained their tribal identity in a foreign land over an extended period of time, no mean feat, which Moses now wishes to bring to Israel's attention in the desert at the foot of Mount Sinai. Israel had been assembled together as a unit for some time since the Red Sea miracle and used their tribal division as a form of identity. This

identity was a communal reminder of their presence long ago in Canaan as well as a reminder that Israel would re-enter Canaan according to this twelve-fold division. How Moses arranged the twelve pillars is not mentioned, but given the nature of that number, it could have been a square with four pillars on each side with the altar in the center.

“And he sent young men of the people of Israel who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord” [vs. 5]. Here we have a continuation of that recent revelation on Sinai which Moses wrote down but does not refer to, if you will, as following an instruction manual. Moses just speaks out what needs to be done and it is effected. The means of selecting these young men (*nahar*) is not given, but the seventy elders-judges must have played a role in determining that they came from worthwhile families. After all, these men were close to the people and had intimate acquaintance with their affairs. *Shelem* is the noun for “peace offerings” last noted in 20.24 (NB: there mention is made of an altar to be built compared with the one that actually was built in 17.15, so the altar under consideration is that one comprised of earth, 20.24).

“And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and half of the blood he threw against the altar” [vs. 6]. The noun for “basins” is *agan* which refers to a trough for washing or a cup; two other biblical references exist, one of which is Sg 7.2: “Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine.” *Zaraq* is the verb for “threw” which more properly means to scatter or sprinkle and thus has sacrificial overtones. For another use, see 9.8: “Take handfuls of ashes from the kiln and let Moses throw them toward heaven in the sight of Pharaoh.”

“Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient’” [vs. 7]. This is the second reference to “book” (*sepher*) in Exodus, the first being what seems to be a different one: “Write this as a memorial in a book and receive it in the ears of Joshua, that I will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.” The *sepher* under consideration applies to the “covenant” or *beryth* as in 6.4 though no identity between the two has been encountered. Perhaps they refer to the words Moses wrote down upon return from Mount Sinai in vs. 4, and the *sepher* obviously is a scroll, not a tablet. They could include the instructions imparted to Moses in Chapters Twenty and Twenty-One. Given the six hundred thousand men, not including women and children, Moses could not have read to them all. That’s where the seventy elders stepped into assist, for they had been on top of Sinai and despite not drawing near to the Lord (cf. vs. 2), were close enough to be eye witnesses. As had been the case when Moses communicated the words and ordinances a short time ago (cf. vs. 3), the people readily consented perhaps more out of enthusiasm than expressing genuine fealty. As for the verb “will be obedient,” it is *shamah* or hear...the people will hear what the Lord had spoken through Moses.

“And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people and said, ‘Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words’” [vs. 8]. Here we have a second instance of *zaraq* (to sprinkle), the first being in vs. 6. *Zaraq* serves to identify the people with the altar, the two being one. Moses deliberately uses the word

“behold” or *hineh* (noted above several times) as a way of getting the people’s attention. Because of Israel’s huge population mentioned in the last paragraph, most could not see this but had to relay upon those towards the front in order to receive the information. Perhaps others got blood from Moses and similarly sprinkled those further back. So in the verse at hand, blood from oxen (cf. vs. 5) is identified with the *beryth* (covenant) and the words Moses has communicated to the people.

14 June, Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thus says the Lord God: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out; I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain; on the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bring forth boughs and bear fruit and become a noble cedar; and under it will dwell all kinds of beasts; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord bring low the high tree and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it. Ezekiel 17.22-24

Today is the first Sunday in Ordinary Time since 15 February, almost exactly four months to the day. That means we have come through the Lenten-Easter-Pentecost-post-Pentecost cycle, the most important part of the liturgical year or one third of the calendar year. Ordinary Time flows both to and from this multi-phase cycle which we commence (or re-commence) to day. From the end of that period to the beginning of Advent or the new liturgical year we have some five and a half months of Ordinary Time. From the post-Christmas season to Ash Wednesday or the beginning of that multi-phase cycle we have approximately two months, depending. In other words, this part of Ordinary Time is the longer of the two. This is mentioned here in order to reflect upon the two modes of time in which we function as well as alternate, liturgical and secular time or circular and linear time. Of course, when you speak of time that involves space...liturgical (sacred) space and secular time.

The allegory of the cedar parallels the imagery found in 31.1-9.

Chapter Seventeen has two instances of “the word of the Lord” with the passage at hand beginning in similar fashion, “thus says the Lord,” all referring to Ezekiel. This passage concludes accordingly, “I the Lord have spoken.” In light of this, the divine *davar* or Word, equivalent to the Greek *logos*, suggests expression. The Lord feels the need to repeat phrases similar to these throughout much of his prophecy not for his own benefit but that the people's attention does not stray from him. If that happens, memory of the past is forgotten with amazing rapidity, and the Bible provides numerous instances where it had happened. And so there is a direct correspondence between *davar* and memory, the two working hand-in-hand as indicated by the word “came” as it did to Ezekiel. In sum, the task is to sustain this coming not just for Ezekiel but for the people whom he is addressing.

As soon as the word “cedar” is mentioned thoughts about Lebanon come to mind although that

isn't mentioned here though most likely implied. It was King Hiram of Tyre who furnished cedars for Solomon's construction of the temple at Jerusalem (cf. Chapter Five of Second Kings). "Set (it) out" is the common verb *natan* meaning to give and here applies to a setting down or placing.

Although the mountains of Lebanon are higher than anything within Israel's borders, nevertheless the "mountain height" belonging to the latter is higher, spiritually speaking. Here the text refers to Israel as a nation, not just the temple at Jerusalem which certainly is included. Once the sprig has been taken from one of these Lebanon cedars, it will provide food and shelter for "all kinds of beasts," an image reminiscent of Chapter Twenty-Two of Revelation concerning the tree of life. Reference to the "trees of the field" can be taken as other nations which will acknowledge Israel.

21 June, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind..(Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?) Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst forth from the womb; when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band and prescribed bounds for it and set bars and doors and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?" Job 38.1, 8-11

The reading for today does not include vss. 2-7 but are included in parentheses by reason of getting a better grasp of the text and its context.

These verses come towards the end of the book and contain God's response to Job. However, chapters 32 through 37 contain discourses by one of his friends, Elihu, which means Job is out of the picture for some time. As for Job, he completes his public statements at the end of Chapter Thirty-One where we have "The words of Job are ended." The Lord had appeared in a "whirlwind" or *seharah* although there is no mention of this phenomenon at either the end of Job's words or those of Elihu. Elijah the prophet was taken up in such a *seharah*: "And as they still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" [2Kg 2.11].

Compare the words of 1Kg 19.11 when Elijah did not perceive the Lord in a similar circumstance: "but the Lord was not in the wind." Instead, he was in a "still small voice" [vs. 12]. Nevertheless, in both instances the Lord speaks by any means possible. In the passage at hand, God descends in a *seharah* and doesn't take up Job but uses this dramatic whirling phenomenon not unlike a tornado to speak with Job. Actually the violent, contracted whirling itself was the means of communication which Job was able to decipher and make sense.

The verses not included in the reading contain four questions impossible for Job or anyone else to ask. Since they come after Elihu's discourses, chances are the Lord has in mind him and his friends more than Job himself, rebuking them for their long-winded speeches and exhortations.

The final verses consist of one long sentence with regard to the boundaries of both the sea and clouds which acted as its garment. In addition to this generic type of garment we have the confining swaddling band. This can intimate that the Lord was responding to everything said by Job and his friends not even as the talk of a child but the babbling of an infant not being able to speak. In other words, what they uttered was a whole series of grunts and groans, nothing consistent, when it comes to things divine.

So here we have Job whom the Lord addresses directly with his friends looking on as they listen to the whirlwind and decipher its loud, whirring sound. Later on at the conclusion of the Lord's response we have Job's answer: "Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" [42.6]. Although the Lord restored Job to favor—not just that but "twice as much" [vs. 10]—surely it must have not been as the same with his family and possessions which had been wiped out utterly.

28 June, Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Do not invite death by the error of your life nor bring on destruction by the works of your hands; because God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal...for God created man for incorruption and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it. Wisdom 1.13.15 & 2.23-24

The first verse isn't included in the excerpt but added since vs. 2 begins as part of that verse.

This passage begins with the cautionary *me zeloute* or literally, "do not be jealous" with regard to allowing death into one's life through the committing of an "error" or or *plane* which translates as wandering. This verb also connotes being eager and here obviously applies to what is not wholesome. *Plane* or wandering effects death which most likely refers to being over curious resulting in "destruction," *olethros* being a word for death which is mentioned here (*thanatos*). Yet another word for death is *apoleia* which implies loss in which God takes no "delight," *terpo* used with the preposition *epi* or upon...literally, "upon death."

Note the two verbs *poieo* and *ktizo*, the former suggestive of making or creating and the latter of founding or establishing. *Poieo*: "did not make death" and *ktizo*: "created all things.

Genesis as "generative forces" applies to the act of coming into being which here are wholesome, *soterios* or saving, delivering. They belong to the "world," *kosmos* suggestive of a decoration or ornament, that which is set in proper order. Within this *kosmos* is no "poison,"

a *pharmakon* which is a drug or healing remedy lacking the capacity to be destructive or *olethros*, the same word in vs. 12 as “destruction.” If this were to come about, then Hades or the underworld would be upon or *epi* the world (cf. *epi* as 'upon death' above) instead of below, its proper place.

In the text at hand, 1.15 begins with “For righteousness (*dikaiosune*) is immortal” or *athanatos*, literally as no-death and leads into man being created for “incorruption” or no-corruption (*aphtharsia*), two words with alpha privative.

The pair *ktizo* and *poieo* or creating and making are found a second time: “God created man” and “made him in the image (*eikon*) of his own eternity.” The Greek text lacks “eternity” but reads literally as “own peculiar nature” or *idiotes*. Despite this, the text says that the devil did not enter the world but his “envy” or *phthonos* which here seems to have almost an entity of its own. The verb *eiserchomai* is used for “entered” along with the preposition *eis* or into, literally “entered into.”

Meris means “party” or part, portion and refers to those persons who have come under the influence of the devil's envy. In other words, they “experience” it, the verb being *peirazo* suggestive of making a proof or a trial.