

## Liturgical Reflections 2012

This series of yearly liturgical reflections does not follow the regular calendar but the liturgical one of the Church even though the text at hand comes under the heading of the year 2012. This is done more for convenience and ease of reference. The Church's new liturgical year almost always commences toward the end of November or little over a month prior to the new calendar year. Instead of the more familiar linear or day-to-day method of telling time, the Church functions on a level above yet within it, often unfamiliar to many people. The various mini-cycles (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and so forth) are situated within the grander yearly cycle which we are about to commence. Being aware of both the primary cycle and the several within it, of how each of these cycles flow into each other, makes for interesting living and constant discovery of something new.

Please note: since *Reflections* had begun in 2007, I have commented upon Sunday Gospels with other major feasts thrown in. And so by now or some six years later, the three year cycle of readings has run its course twice. Thus the same Gospels have been covered but with a different take on them. This process will continue indefinitely. A time may come when emphasis will shift from the Gospels to the first and second readings, but that will be determined later. Besides, repetition of the same liturgical readings makes one focus on particulars within a given Gospel. One of the most common features of attentiveness to liturgical time is that it allows you, even for a brief moment, to know what it is to live beyond the confines of this world. You grasp a small passage, run with it for a while, and then it's gone...not to disappear but to be recaptured and deepened the next cycle. That is not characteristic of conventional time where the past is past, once and for all.

### 27 November 2011, First Sunday of Advent

Today's Gospel (Mk 13.33-37) begins with "Take heed, watch, for you do not know when the time will come." As had been noted in other *Reflections*, a blind person who has attended Mass for the past few months of Ordinary Time would be unable to see the change of liturgical vestments (from green to purple). The only resource at his disposal is listening to the various liturgical readings during Mass and the Office. Thus deprived of sight he would not have any clue that today begins a new year for the Church. That is to say, the injunction of vs. 33 follows in line without the slightest disjunction or discontinuity from the message of the past few Sundays which concluded that particular liturgical year. For example, Luke had parables pertaining to the ten bridesmaids and a man who went on a journey. The latter parallels the man who likewise leaves home and puts his servants in charge of everything. These close similarities reveals the almost imperceptible dividing line separating from one liturgical year to another, quite unlike passage from one secular year to another which people tend to celebrate loudly. The shift from one calendar year to another would never take this approach, emphasizing instead the disjunction between the two years. Christ telling us to take heed and to be watchful can apply to being more aware of that dividing line, passage over which heralds a new cycle of spiritual insight relative to daily life. Expectations may indeed be attributed to both forms of time. Those proper to the passage of linear time consist of expectations that the new year will be more favorable than the past or that prosperity will continue. As for the latter, it proclaims that time will cease, precluded by a specific *kairos*. Liturgical time is not linear but cyclical not unlike ancient methods of marking time. The crucial difference is that while inherently cyclical, the liturgical year builds upon previous cycles while inserted within the passage of time and the flow of normal events.

As for that “time” of today’s Gospel, the opening verse uses the well-known noun *kairos*, difficult to translate accurately, which pertains to an event outside the ordinary flow of events. So when Christ speaks of us not knowing the *kairos*, he means we do not know when the event will unfold, let alone what it is in itself. A particular aspect of that event is spelled out in the verse (32) preceding today’s Gospel: “But of that day or that hour (*hora*) no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father.” Instead of *kairos* we have *hora* which normally refers to one part of what we moderns know as the twenty-four hour cycle. Instead of pointing to ignorance or defective knowledge on his part, this verse suggests that integral to Jesus’ life is taking heed and being watchful, *blepo* and *agrupneo*. It is our lack of taking heed and of being watchful that raises the question as to Christ’s supposed inferiority to the Father. This ignorance is his way of perceiving things which he desires to communicate. To be in this state is sufficient for him. Let the Father know the day or hour, no problem. And so when the particular *hora* arrives (as it will with respect to his coming death), he will move into it in seamless fashion as fulfilling his Father’s will. The same applies to the angels whom he had mentioned. They have no clue as to the *hora* at hand but are fully present to the overall *kairos* or event to take place, this regardless of the length of time. So while Jesus may know the *kairos* or the actual fulfilment of his coming in glory whereas we do not, he does not know “that day” and “that *hora*” of the *kairos* at hand. The same applies to us, two instances of ignorance concerning the two aspects of time (loosely put). Besides, a *kairos* event may contain more than one *hora*, something of which Jesus was very much familiar.

As for the two types of time, we might take *hora* as a more specific part of *kairos*. So when Christ speaks of *hora*, he is more specific as to the two injunctions, “take heed and watch” or *blepo* and *agrupneo*, the common verb to see and to be awake. First comes the general seeing or paying attention followed immediately by being awake, a form of attention akin to a seed that will blossom suddenly within familiar space and time. At first you’d think the verbs would be reversed, watch and see. However, because *blepo* is something we do every day, that common yet important faculty is to become focused or narrowed down to the more attentive form of *agrupneo*. To have *agrupneo* first followed by *blepo* would reverse the situation and go counter to the way we go about our lives.

#### **4 December, Second Sunday of Advent**

The new liturgical year began with an exhortation in the Gospel of First Advent of Sunday by Jesus to “take heed and watch” as to the Son of man’s coming, an event laying in the indefinite future and one about which we have no clue as to when and where it will happen. That exhortation is important in Mark because it takes place just prior to the Last Supper or at the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Now in this, the second Sunday of the new liturgical year (it lacks enumeration as with a new secular year implying that it operates on a wholly different level), we have the beginning of Mark’s Gospel (1.1–8) which is noted for its terseness and brevity. Just the fact that a new liturgical year commenced with the end of this Gospel and the second week of the same year starts with its beginning is indicative of a radical difference in determining time...not by the passage of events but by the recurrence of opportunities for deepening of our faith.

“The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Such is the opening verse with the noun *arche* which is a more comprehensive type of beginning than our common understanding. *Arche* implies the first

principles of that which will be unfolded as with Genesis' "In the beginning." In other words, the seeds of what will unfold, as well as its end, are contained within this word. In Christian terms, *arche* contains the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus as well as the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. The same notion of fulness may be applied to "Son of God" where Jesus Christ is a kind of *arche* for his Father, a summing up and making visible of all that he is. This is not evident for first-time readers or listeners of the Gospel but only comes to light at the end...and that end has a mysterious, luminous quality that makes you want to return to the *arche* and start all over again. Indeed the new liturgical year capitalized upon that urge which is where we find ourselves right now.

Right away Mark says "as it is written in Isaiah" and proceeds to give two verses which come not from him but the prophet Malachi (The RSV has a footnote saying that other mss. read 'in the prophets'), and Malachi is the last of the Old Testament books as we have it today. So here is another link with the conclusion or culmination of Hebrew prophecy as it feeds into the present or the role of John the Baptist. John is vital by reason of his in-between status which suggests he is neither fully of the Old Testament nor fully of the New (actually it hadn't started yet), John is found—and appropriately so—in the desert. Despite its isolation, people flocked there to partake of his in-between status, if you will, even though they were unaware of it. Perhaps some did grasp what was going on, albeit not in the complete sense, but perhaps got a deeper insight when John says "After me comes he who is mightier than I." That is, John does not reveal this person's name nor identity but intimates that those who have been receptive to his message will be receptive to that mysterious person whose coming seems at hand.

## **8 December, Immaculate Conception**

Instead of the usual notations, today's entry consists of an outline of sorts based upon 1Cor 15.22-3 which contrasts the first man (Adam) and Jesus Christ as "first fruits." Mary had been born or better, conceived, into the second half of the pattern described below and is a kind of prototype of it. The word "outline" is used deliberately since what is given here requires considerable unpacking which can be done at a later time: "For as (*hosper*) in Adam all die, so also (*outos*) in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." Note the two words *hosper* and *outos*, "for as" and "so also," the latter dependent upon the former. That means the latter (divine) must follow the same order as the first (human) but not in the sense of remaining on the first order's level. So in addition to following *hosper* or following the death of all persons in Adam, this following is lifted to *hosper* or "so also" in Christ. That order is laid out here to follow, again starting with *hosper* and being transformed into *outos* or from Adam to Christ.

What, then, is the *hosper* or "for as" proper to Adam? The details are found in Gen 3.8 which is outlined as follows. Though more time could be spent on examining the sense of the Hebrew text, this is avoided in order to get at the heart of the matter, even if briefly:

- sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.
- the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees.
- the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"

- I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.
- the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit of the tree, and I ate.

The consequences of what was just outlined beginning with hiding and ending with accusing the Lord end in vss. 17–19 with special reference to the ground from which he had been taken, that this ground (Adam and ground in Hebrew are similar) will become hostile to the first man.

Such is the detailed outline proper to Adam in accord with that word *hosper* (for as). Christ pays close attention to it, if you will, when offering a new *tagma* or order: Christ as *aparche* (first fruits) and at his *parousia* (coming; better, being about, *para-*) literally, those of Christ. Thus a temporal gap seems to lie between *aparche* and *parousia*. This gap is not a deficiency but allows time to perceive the two orders at work: first that of Adam's transgression and secondly, the remedy to this transgression offered in the person of Jesus Christ.

### 11 December, Third Sunday of Advent

Today's Gospel (Jn 1.6–8, 19–28) is appropriate for Advent, situating Christ as *Logos* who was in the beginning or *arche*. The familiar *Logos* is word in the sense of expression, in other words, an ongoing manifestation which in Christian terms is a revelation. *Arche* is more than a beginning, a first principle in Greek philosophy, which implies an end in the sense of completion or *telos*. It fits in well with Jesus Christ as the Alpha and Omega. Use of the past tense ('was the word') suggests a relationship of *Logos* and *arche*, of continuous expression and beginning that has been active prior to our awareness of it. In other words, it is not visible within space and time...not in the sense that the *arche* has been left behind but has moved from eternity into the present. Since we are in the Advent season, this time of year is modeled after such a pattern. Advent begins the Church's liturgical year—is its *arche*—which doesn't stop at Christmas but moves into a whole series of different liturgical times...*logoi*, if you will, or expressions of Jesus Christ. It continues throughout the year (Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Ordinary Time) until we reach yet again the First Sunday of Advent. Each one of these sub-cycles reveals something of the mystery of Christ and is not cut off from other aspects, but all flow seamlessly throughout a given liturgical year. In this way Christ "leaves" *arche* and moves forward.

While Christ as *Logos* "was" in *arche*, similarly he "was" (past tense again) with God which in Greek reads *pros ton theon*. That means he "left" that *pros* (direction toward—which and intimates continuous movement) with respect to his Father as bound up with *arche* for being present among the human race as a man only to take it up again, if you will, after his resurrection and ascension. Thus from the incarnation to the ascension (or better, Pentecost when a third Person of the Trinity was revealed) Christ was manifesting this *pros ton theon* to people. So when vs. 2 says that "all things were made through him," in actuality they were made for this *pros*-relationship with the Father. Only the revelation of another divine Person could present that reality.

"There was a man sent from God whose name was John." This statement comes on the heels of the primary relationship of Jesus with his Father, to say that John "was not the light" but its witness. This is developed in vss. 19–28 of today's Gospel when people consider John Elijah or a prophet. At this early stage of revelation St. John had to make a clear distinction between the Baptist and Jesus so as not to confuse the two in the eyes of the people.

Of course, John himself was adamant about this claiming to be a “voice crying in the wilderness” or one not with the special relationship signified by *pros ton theon*, that being reserved for the Son only.

### **18 December, Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Today’s Gospel (Lk 1.26–38) has the familiar story of the angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary, that is to say, announcing that she will conceive and give birth to a son. Such is the only appearance of Gabriel in the New Testament, having appeared to Daniel twice; other than that we have no knowledge of him. The first reference is Dan 8.16 when Gabriel appeared under the guise of a man, not an angel, and said in vs. 17, “Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end.” The Hebrew word for vision is *chazon*, also understood as a divine revelation or oracle which here refers to the end or *qets*, an extremity or event of a prophecy, the latter applicable here. A second time Gabriel appears to Daniel also under the guise of a man in 9.21: “While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice.” Being a devout Jewess, Mary must have known something about Daniel, being drawn instinctively to incidents when angels and other divine beings intervened on Israel’s behalf. Somehow she knew it would apply to her—she could never share it with anyone—but was as of yet ignorant as to the details. As for the time of Gabriel’s appearance to Mary, chances are it followed the lead of the second Daniel quote, namely, during the evening or when sacrifice was being made in the temple. Perhaps Mary was in local temple at Nazareth for this sacrifice which would have made the appearance of Gabriel that much more significant.

Despite being called “favored one” (*kecharitomene* or one who has received grace or *charis* which is derived from *charitoo*; *charis* is used in vs. 30 as favor) by Gabriel, Mary had a two-fold reaction which may be considered as one and the same. First she “was greatly troubled” or *diatarasso* followed by consideration (‘and considered’) or *dialogizomai*. The reason why these two verbs are singled out is the preposition *dia* (through) prefaced to them which suggests a certain thoroughness of her being troubled and her considering of it. As for the first verb (*tarasso*), it is a troubling-through and for the second (*logizomai*), a considering-through; both are directed to the angel Gabriel’s greeting or *aspasmos*.

Once Gabriel has set forth the mission of the yet-to-be-born Jesus, Mary doesn’t seem phased or bothered by it. On top of her mind was how she was to become pregnant (‘I have no husband’). After Gabriel says that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her, Mary consents automatically, again, almost in a matter-of-fact way, and moves on with her life. She knew that what had just happened between her and the angel Gabriel had precedence with the prophet Daniel. If Gabriel could so strengthen that man of God, why not me, so she reasoned rightly.

The encounter with Gabriel ends just as abruptly as it began: “And the angel departed from her.” Again in her matter-of-fact way, Mary left the temple where the evening sacrifice was being performed and returned home but not for long. Soon she was off to visit her cousin Elisabeth.

### **25 December, Christmas** (NB: this year Christmas falls on a Sunday)

Today’s Gospel (Mt 1.1–25; Midnight Mass) is the beginning of St. Matthew’s account: “The book of the

genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Matthew is the only evangelist to apply *biblos* (often interpreted as a scroll) to his account. Mark exclusively uses *euaggelios* (good news), Luke the more involved *akribos kathexes grapsai* which runs something as “to write an account in an order fashion” and finally John nothing...that is, he doesn’t give a title to his account. However, John stresses *arche* (beginning) in which was the *Logos* (Word). Thus the message of each evangelist may be perceived in terms of how he defines his work: a scroll, something written in an orderly way, a Gospel or good news and finally that which lies in the beginning, the Word of God.

Three things are evident in the *biblos* of Matthew, that it, like a scroll, is to be unrolled. At the very beginning we find Jesus first identified as son of David, King of Jerusalem, followed by being accounted as a descendant of Abraham. A considerable amount of time exists between these two, the former given first though second chronologically. Jesus thus may be considered as spanning two general parts of Israel’s history, that is, from Abraham’s entry into Canaan to the establishment of the kingship under Saul. It’s important not to forget that the Lord was not in favor of it. “Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you (Samuel); for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” [1Sam 8.7]. From the very inception of the kingship the Lord was displeased for it shows a weakening of the relationship with him which had been consistent since the days of Abraham. That means the covenant established on Mt. Sinai was weakened as well. Nevertheless, the Lord acquiesces to the people. Despite the ups and downs from Saul to the present or the subjection of Israel to Rome when Jesus came on the scene, attributing this lineage to him is done with the hope of restoring it to the same level as when Israel had been ruled by prophets and judges. As for Joseph’s royal heritage, chances are he was not regarded as an important person by reason of this pedigree. He seems to have had absolutely no connection with the ruling class despite it being under Roman rule. Perhaps he was one of the few of that lineage who was sensitive to the Lord’s displeasure at the people choosing a king, not at all glorying in it, and in this way was closer to God than any royal strain in his blood.

Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus stemming from Abraham and works forward to that of Joseph “the husband of Mary.” Though Matthew was aware that Jesus’ descendants existed well before Abraham, that is, stemming all the way back to Adam, those generations were deemed not so much unimportant but as a prelude for Abraham’s call. As Genesis presents his story, it had plenty of setbacks and exiles as into Egypt. Even the settlement of Canaan was partial and later was given up by one of Jacob’s sons, Joseph, when the Israelites migrated into Egypt. Thus the whole enterprise was left in abeyance for over four hundred years and had to be begun anew, totally. And so what started out as a promise ended in disappointment only for this disappointment to gain new life.

Despite the historical rootedness of Jesus within Israel’s history, the background as given just above shows the tenuousness of any such enterprise. Jesus inserted himself into that reality in order not to eliminate it but to raise it to a new level which begins with “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way” or the way Matthew is about to describe.

An addendum...tomorrow is the feast of St. Stephen, the Church’s first martyr. That means between today and tomorrow some thirty plus years of Jesus’ life is passed over, literally overnight by normal measurement of time.

The contrast is so sharp, almost jarring, but done so deliberately in order to get right down to the most basic fact about the Church as witness. Stephen may have known Jesus or if not, his disciples, and was familiar with the recent event of Pentecost. He also was very familiar with Israel's history as demonstrated by his speech before those who "could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke" [Acts 6.10]. And so Stephen, not unlike John the Baptist at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, testifies to Israel's history as an anticipation of "the coming of the Righteous One" [Acts 7.52] and does so at the end of Jesus' ministry.

## **1 January, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**

Although today begins a new calendar year, it is of a different order than the Church's way of keeping time, namely, the First Sunday of Advent which began the new liturgical cycle at the end of November. Actually the two terms "cycle" and "year"—the former applicable to the Church and the latter to the world—are revealing in themselves. "Cycle" implies a return or a recovering of First Things not with the intent of repeating them ad infinitum but of lifting them to a new level and so on forever. "Year" evokes the passage of linear time which had a definite beginning and moves to a supposed definite end; in brief, progress. The two aren't opposed to each other though the cleavage perceived between sacred and profane in the modern world makes it feel this way.

If the Church complied with the secular way of keeping time quickly she would lose her identity. In many ways this ability to stand apart from yet within time is her greatest advantage. Also it invigorates Gospel passages familiar to this season, as well as other seasons, with new insights. Then the particular feast day (as today) passes, temporally speaking. Quickly it gets absorbed with other events coming down the line but never is lost. Somehow what had been gained is stored away almost subconsciously and taken out for re-examination the next year and so forth down the line. All in all this is a process freighted with considerable mystery, an inability to fathom.

As for today's Gospel (Lk 2,16-21), it can be commemorated by marking the completion of those eight days set aside for Jesus after his circumcision. Even this period of time, based upon "year" as briefly described above, is not what Luke has in mind. These days are representative of the seven days of creation followed by the one of divine rest. In Genesis such days are not listed as "on the first day" (etc.) but "on day one" (etc.). Placing the noun first after which comes the modifying numerical adjective changes the perception of time quite radically and is more suited for liturgical commemoration. With regard to the practice of circumcision, it can be traced to Abraham in Gen 17.9-14: "So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant." And for the period of eight days after the succession of day one, etc., the command found in Lev 12.3 is carried out, rather on day eight: "And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." The exact span of eight days doesn't seem to be explicit but most likely is founded upon the six days of creation plus the seventh on which the Lord rested followed by the first day of a new week. So in a sense this new week sums up the six days plus the one of divine rest, combines both and comes up with a new beginning.

Eight days ago Jesus had been born yet remained nameless, that is, by his parents. However, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that her son is to be named Jesus (cf. 1.31). Everyone knew this yet refrained, according to custom, to formally bestow it. So in many ways it was a tense week for all involved. As for Gabriel, later in vs. 21 his name isn't mentioned almost as though that were unimportant. Without devaluing the significance of a name, this

intimates that Jesus' message was important.

## **8 January, Epiphany**

Today's Gospel (Mt 2.1–12) begins with "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem." It seems that the wise men or *magoi* (traditionally associated as from Babylon, men who knew how to interpret dreams and signs) arrived in Jerusalem right at the time of Jesus' birth. The term *idou* or "behold" suggests surprise which here pertains to a coincidence of these two events. This surprise is spelled out later when Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled upon hearing the reason for these wise men coming from so far away (cf. vs. 3). The question put by these mysterious visitors ('Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?') reveals some naivete, that they were not aware of Herod's paranoia about losing his kingdom, especially in light of him being responsible to the Roman rulers. If Herod were to lose his kingdom, it'd be a relatively minor affair, but with that part of the world being under Roman rule, it could have wider political ramifications.

Not only did the wise men know about the birth of Jesus but Herod's own chief priests and scribes who responded in rather matter-of-fact manner as to the location, "In Bethlehem of Judea." Perhaps these religious figures divined his birth beforehand but were afraid to make it known to Herod. In fact, there seems to be no conflict between them and the *magoi*, sharing the same revelation. In fact, the two groups may have discussed it at some length away from the ears of King Herod. While the former had followed a star to Jerusalem, the Jewish religious figures had no need for such guidance. Already they were present in Jerusalem. Though they knew that Bethlehem was the place where Jesus had been born, they do not seem to have gone there, again, out of fear of King Herod. Chances are that they warned the *magoi* in a dream not to return to Herod (cf. vs. 12) but to head home by a route other than the one they had come. The communication between the two could have remained in tact over time, and even some of these Jewish priests and scribes migrated to Babylon to join the *magoi* to avoid persecution by Herod. If such were the case, they would have been warned in a dream to flee there just like Joseph did to flee to Egypt.

As for the treasures (*thesauros*) or boxes for carrying valuables which the *magoi* presented to Mary, we have no record of what happened to them. Perhaps Joseph sold the gold, frankincense and myrrh to provide for passage into Egypt and a means of support there until the death of Herod. If there was enough left over, some of this could have been used for Mary and Joseph to re-establish themselves back in Bethlehem.

## **15 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

This Sunday marks a resumption of Ordinary Time, the last such Sunday having been in late November during the previous liturgical cycle, and extends to 22 February (Ash Wednesday) with the commencement of Lent. It is a somewhat awkward time after the Advent–Christmas season and prior to that of Lent–Easter, a kind of in-between time and space, coupled with the second half of winter and beginnings of springs. However, in a sense the Christmas season continues until the Feast of the Presentation on 2 February which narrows down the connection between Advent–Christmas and Lent–Easter even further.



Today's Gospel (Jn 1.35–42) is not far removed from the theme of Advent, the coming of the Lord, by focusing upon the mission of John the Baptist, so it's a good recapitulation of that season. The years between Jesus' birth and his appearance at the Jordan comprise the bulk of his life, John included. They go unrecorded but were of vital importance for each man to begin his respective public ministry. Certainly Jesus had heard of John baptizing in the Jordan well before he went there, of how people claimed him to be Elijah or one of the prophets (cf. 1.21). That claim had reached far and wide and must have contributed to prompting Jesus to meet him, especially his talk about being a "voice of one crying in the wilderness" [1.23]. The time John had spent in the wilderness is not given. Because it was a time set aside for preparation, Jesus respected this and did not go out to visit him even though he must have known about the reason why his cousin was living apart. Then again, John may have had some disciples or at least contacts who could have communicated between John and Jesus.

The contact between the two men is fairly abrupt, almost severe, and right to the point. This is not unlike the contact between angels and those to whom they revealed messages such as Gabriel to Mary (i.e., the Annunciation). Despite the brevity of these contacts, they are highly concentrated and by their essence could not be prolonged. Both parties seem to recognize this important fact. Reflection upon the nature of such contacts can lead to the conclusion that a gulf exists between the human and divine and for the most part, that both go their separate ways. True to a certain extent but remedied later at Pentecost by the descent of the Holy Spirit.

As for the relationship with John, Jesus is baptized, but Chapter One quickly moves on to Jesus choosing his disciples and therefore establishing a ministry different from that of John. Thus John is a fine example of how to comport oneself after one of these brief but loaded encounters. He continues his work but knows full well that it is coming to a conclusion. At the same time he was observing Jesus as he consolidated his disciples and commenced his own ministry. It was an important lesson John had to impart to his disciples, that is, not to continue with him but to follow Jesus. Once this was established, clearly the death of John was not far away.

## **22 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Today's Gospel (Mk 1.14–20) follows on the heels of John the Baptist's arrest, the reason for which is not given here in Mark's account. However, it sets the stage for Jesus to begin his ministry in Galilee "preaching the gospel of God." The word for "gospel" is *euaggelion* which was noted in the first verse of Mark: "the beginning of the *euaggelion*" where it is associated with the person of Jesus Christ compared with vs. 14, "of God." I.e., we have the good news of Jesus Christ and the good news of God which intimates a close connection between the two even at this early stage of reflection upon divine revelation.

This *euaggelion* contains the first recorded words of Jesus in Mark: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." It's presumed here that the people of Galilee had an inkling of what *euaggelion* means, most likely from the influence of John the Baptist. Since both were so intimately connected, it was easy for people to confuse the two, especially early on in Jesus' ministry. So when Jesus said "The time (*kairos*) is fulfilled (*pleroo*)," something deeper than time in the conventional sense is meant. *Kairos* means an event or special occasion, often unrepeatable, which is true with the ministry of John the Baptist, something Jesus could say

with greater facility after his arrest. Within a *kairos* a person loses perception of space and the passage of conventional time, a genuine participation in eternity. The authorities must have known the relationship between the two men but Jesus was still relatively unknown to be considered a source of trouble. In the same breath as speaking of this *kairos* relative to John, Jesus says “and the kingdom of God is at hand (*eggizo*).” More specifically, *eggizo* applies to making an approach or drawing near...not that it has come but is within sight or better, within earshot since the word of God needs to be proclaimed, not seen, a fact of greater importance to the Jewish mind than seeing it (i.e., in the person of Jesus).

So if a person recognizes John’s *kairos* as having been fulfilled and that God’s kingdom is approaching, what does he do next? Repent or *metanoeo* which applies to a changing of mind or literally putting one’s mind (*nous*) after (*meta*) or after one’s normal (and even abnormal) way of behaving. However, this call to repentance seems very much like the Baptist’s “prepare the way of the Lord” [vs. 3]. Jesus can’t work out this possibility of confusing Jesus with the just-arrested John. For this he requires assistance which is why right away he chooses the first of his disciples: Simon, Andrew, James and John. They may have listened to the Baptist or at least were familiar with his message. If other people these men had approached Jesus asking to follow him, Jesus would not have accepted them. Jesus needs to pick out those whom he knows will appreciate the Baptist’s role and at least at this early stage know his role differs considerably from that of Jesus. Once this is clarified some more, Jesus can focus more on healing and forgiving of sins while his disciples teach people the difference between the two mens’ mission.

### **29 January, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Today’s Gospel (Mk 1.21–28) takes place after Jesus chose his first (but not all) disciples, Simon, Andrew, James and John. “And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught.” In this short sentence with the adverb *euthus* (immediately) for which Mark is famous we have four instances of the preposition *eis* (into) showing a movement from outside to inside: *eis-poreuomai*, *eis* (Capernaum) (entered into Capernaum), *eis-erchomai* (entered into the sabbath; the critical text puts that verb in parentheses) and *eis* the synagogue. Thus *euthus*, in conjunction with *eis*, serves to heighten the sense of urgency and quickness of Jesus’ actions.

No details are given about the teaching *eis* the synagogue, but it must have been based on vs. 14: “repent and believe in the gospel.” In other words, the theme of *metanoia* begun by John the Baptist was taken up by Jesus after the former’s arrest. Apparently this teaching within the sacred confines of a synagogue (compared with outdoors as in John’s case as well as Jesus in Galilee) was conducive for greater interaction and reflection. The people were able to draw close to Jesus, part of the reason why they were astonished or *ekplesso*, a strong verb which means to strike or to drive a person out of his senses. This *ek-plesso* (literally, from-strike) is at Jesus’ teaching or more literally, *epi* (upon) his teaching which depicts the great amazement that had taken place. What is even more astonishing is that Jesus taught not as the scribes but as one who had authority or *exousia* which here means that belonging to a rabbi. Though the scribes engaged in teaching, theirs was based upon the received scriptures traditionally authored by Moses plus the prophets and wisdom books. Jesus taught without reference to these...not that he neglected nor rejected them but spoke in a fashion not unlike the divine author of these texts himself.

Within the synagogue was “a man with an unclean spirit” or a man with a *pneuma* which was *akathartos*, the nature of which was challenging the authority of Jesus, of how he taught without reference, if you will, to the (scriptural) tradition. In contrast to this authority, the man was unable to keep silence and required a rebuke after which the unclean spirit came out of him in convulsions. *Phoneo* is the verb which means to make sounds, to cry aloud. The nature of this *phoneo* isn’t spelled out but could be in the form of uttering scripture after the manner of the scribes’ interpretation. Thus he was able to enter the synagogue like anyone else and even may have been a fairly prominent individual. After all, he knew Jesus to be “the Holy One of God” and therefore endowed with that non-scribal *exousia* or divine authority.

Once the unclean spirit exited the man...in contrast to the above-mentioned fourfold *eis* or into of the first paragraph...the people within the synagogue expressed amazement or *thambeo* which is similar to *ekplesso* (astonished) but not as strong a verb. And so the Gospel excerpt closes with a second use of *euthus* (immediately): “at once his fame spread everywhere throughout the surround region of Galilee.” That is to say, this *euthus* leads to another *euthus* in vs. 29: “And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.” Jesus leaves the synagogue with his “new teaching” and hands it over, as it were, to the disciples who are to build upon and expand it.

## **5 February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Two more Sundays of Ordinary Time are left until the beginning of the Lenten–Easter–Pentecost cycle which takes up a good part of the year followed by a resumption of Ordinary Time on 17 June or some five months hence. And so the few Sundays of Ordinary Time (ordinary in the sense of following an *ordo*, an order or regular manner) which began after the Advent–Christmas season are generally short, just enough to introduce us to the normal or regular pattern of Gospel incidents minus any specific liturgical slant to them. Only Ordinary Time can be split up as now and the weeks after Pentecost; by their very nature, other times do not permit this. Thus the period from now until Ash Wednesday is an opportunity to take into consideration how these various times relate to each other.

The Gospel for today (Mk 1.29–39) witnesses the beginnings of Jesus’ healing ministry, the very first healing having taken place in the synagogue with regard to the unclean spirit as mentioned in last week’s excerpt. As noted there, that incident has broader meaning than a healing and gives reason for people to exclaim “With authority he commands even the unclean spirits.”

“And immediately (the famous *euthus* of Mark, the only one in this excerpt) he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew.” Jesus had just met the two (James and John are mentioned as well) and summoned them to follow him. Nothing is said about what happened between then (vs. 16 & vs. 19) and now. It was here that Jesus performed another cure, this one more intimate, of Simon’s mother-in-law whose name is not given. And so on the same day he did two cures, one public and the other among several of his newly called disciples.

“That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.” In other words, this

occurred the same day Jesus was in the synagogue as well as in Simon's house. Note the time of day, evening or just prior to sunset. The people wanted to get those possessed by demons to Jesus before nightfall because that is the time when they have the potential of doing the most harm. As for those who were sick, the adverb *kakos* is used which in adjective form means evil or wicked. Not only such persons were brought but "the whole city was gathered together about the door," a scene not unlike but different from Gen 19.4: "But before they lay down, the men of the city (Sodom)...all the people to the last man, surrounded the house." Yet the association between the wickedness of Sodom and those with clean spirits do have a certain parallel. The people (of Capernaum, presumably) witnessed many cures, especially of demons whom "he would not permit to speak because they knew him." By now the time must have been close to full darkness, so for demons to know Jesus means that they recognized him in this, their native or natural environment of darkness. Since some light did remain, giving for an ability not to see clearly and to confuse reality with shadows, the scene must have been quite frightening for the people, those cured and for Jesus' disciples.

After such a chaotic introduction to his ministry, no small wonder that Jesus "rose and went out to a lonely place," this occurring "a great while before day." That means Jesus had little or no time to sleep after having cured so many people of demons. Despite the night hours, Simon and those with him say "Everyone is searching for you." That is, they continued their search for Jesus throughout the night. Jesus moved on to the next village not to avoid these people but to continue his healing and preaching. Such preaching must have continued the theme of repentance or *metanoia* begun by John (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time above).

## **12 February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Today's Gospel (Mk 1.40-45) which concludes Chapter One deals with a leper who came to Jesus in order to be healed. This early on in his ministry word got out about Jesus' ability to heal people (cf. vs. 34). What sets apart this man is that he has a certain indifference or detachment about his affliction: "If you will, you can make me clean." Even if the request was refused, chances are this leper would still follow Jesus. Although the affliction of leprosy moved Jesus with pity (*splagchnizomai*: the noun *splagchnon* means one's inmost self, heart and more accurately, bowels), he was more touched by the man's detachment. Certainly the leper wished to be cured but was more interested in getting close to Jesus.

Once cleansed, Jesus "sternly charged him," the verb being *embrimaomai* which I means rebuke strongly after which he sends him away immediately (*euthus* again for which Mark is famous). It seems that the shift from *splagchnizomai* to *embrimaomai* was so sudden...*euthus*...that the cured man hardly had a chance to realize what was going on. Jesus was caught in a bind, if you will, of wishing to cure people and maintaining his privacy, a tension found throughout all the Gospels. Showing his respect for religious authorities, Jesus tells the man to show himself to the priest and make an offering in accord with the command of Moses. That command is found in Leviticus 14.1-32 which in the original form is quite lengthy and begins with the priest exiting the camp to meet the cured leper. Then a series of offerings are made followed by eventual reintegration into society. Jesus says that acting in accord with the law of Moses is a "proof for them" or a *marturion* which better translates as witness. Surely the priest to whom the leper comes is curious about the healing and is eager to find out its source or the person who effected it. Such an indirect contact between Jesus and the priest (i.e., the Mosaic law) is a way to

avoid attribution of the cure and to ascribe it to God. Once the priest knew this man was indeed cured of leprosy, he might have left his duties and followed Jesus, this being an early instance in Mark of the unity between the law of Moses and the new ministry of Jesus.

We have no indication whether or not the cured leper followed Jesus though can assume he obeyed. He could have returned with that priest in hand. However, against Jesus' wish, the man "began to talk freely about it and to spread the news." The verb *diaphemizo* means to spread around or more literally, through (*dia-*). It was a natural response for one just healed of such a terrible affliction which seems to take Jesus by surprise. This publication of Jesus' ability heal leprosy made him no longer able to "openly enter a town" but forced him to be "out in the country." The text has literally "desert places" meaning areas devoid of people. Still, people approached Jesus from all around. Once they did we have no record of how Jesus nor the disciples he had chosen thus far handled the situation. Most likely Jesus had to reassess how he went about his ministry relying on the new disciples for information about the people from whom they had just been chosen.

### **19 February, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Today is the last Sunday in Ordinary Time until 17 June which given the nature of mid February, seems ages away. Not only do we experience a new passage of time about to unfold starting on Ash Wednesday, but the change from winter to spring to the threshold of summer makes the transition more dramatic. As had been noted above, the last few Sundays of Ordinary Time prior to Advent create a certain weariness with the passage of that particular mod of time which anticipates that something new is over the horizon. And while a new year had begun recently, some of this weariness carries over to the Sundays of Ordinary Time after Christmas to before Lent. They form a link between two grand cycles (Advent-Christmas and Lent-Easter-Pentecost) which enables us to make a transition, helped along by the movement from cold to warmth or from shorter to longer days.

Today's Gospel (Mk 2.1-12) begins with "It was reported that he (Jesus) was at home," the verb being *akouo* (to hear, to listen). The source of this hearing goes unmentioned but reveals how quickly news in small, tightly-knit communities spreads. We have no description of the home (*oikos*) of Jesus, of who else may have lived there, perhaps Mary and Joseph who had moved to Capernaum. "And he was preaching the word (*logos*) to them." The verb *laleo* is translated by "preaching" which means a normal form of communicating, of speaking with people. Here is the first mention of *logos* as applicable to Jesus' message and bespeaks his own person as divine *Logos*. The text does not say whether Jesus was in or outside his house, possibly starting from outside and then going in accompanied by his disciples.

While the *Logos* was engaged in *logos* (i.e., the Word engaged in preaching the word), some people managed to get on top of the house's roof and lower down a paralytic. Even to approach the house was a major task, four men bearing a litter and making their way through crowds of people while at the same time keeping the paralytic steady on the stretcher: "there was no longer room for them, not even about the door." Obviously this breaking through a roof caused commotion, yet Jesus is undisturbed, having noted the faith of these four men which seems distinct from faith belonging to the paralytic.

“Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts.” Their sitting may have been in the house itself or just outside; one gets the impression that the scribes were invited inside, “sitting” suggestive of this. *Dialogizomai* is the verb for “questioning” which literally means a reckoning or calculating (*logizomai*) through (*dia*, the preposition prefaced to this verb) their hearts. Also this questioning was in common and seems to have been done in silent unison. Finally one scribe says “Why does this man speak thus?” In other words, why does Jesus preach, the same word *laleo* as in vs. 2? To their claim of blasphemy, Jesus first perceives (*epignosko*) in his spirit (*pneuma*) this calculating-through or this *dialogizomai* which, of course, is done without anyone knowing about it. The preposition *epi* (upon) prefaced to the verb *gnosko* intimates a knowing-upon...getting a view of things as from on top a hill. From there Jesus could look “down” and see the machinations going on with the minds of the scribes which were done without anyone else knowing about them. We don’t have any response from the scribes within the confines of Jesus’ house, just that everyone else exclaimed “We never saw anything like this!” The scribes, too, never saw the likes of what had happened. Chances are they sulked away in the excitement so as not to stand out.

## **26 February, First Sunday of Lent**

There’s a certain relief at the coming of Lent which technically began Ash Wednesday but doesn’t officially “kick off” until to day. Relief in that the anticipation that has been growing the past few weeks is resolved, that Lent, apart from its obvious religious meaning, is essential for ushering in the spring and therefore the summer.

Today’s Gospel (Mk 1.12–15) consisting of four verses couldn’t be simpler, beginning with Mark’s famous *euthus* or immediately with respect to Jesus leaving John the Baptist at the Jordan and heading into the hill country for forty days. The terseness signified by *euthus* is intensified by the vividness of the verb *ekballo* (drove out) or more precisely, the preposition *ek* (from) prefaced to *ballo* (to cast). The exact nature of this *ex-ballo* isn’t specified but left to the imagination of the reader. We get the sense that even as Jesus was being baptized by John, the devil was present there among the crowd, just waiting impatiently for it to finish. His cue was the Father’s voice: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Perhaps the devil wouldn’t be on Jesus’ case if it were matter of him getting baptized alone. It was this voice from heaven that really pushed him over the edge, a higher authority which confirmed Jesus being favored. One wonders if John or the other people with him were aware of some other presence among them, one they couldn’t quite put their hand on. This presence was felt but never manifested itself, for it was the Spirit (*Pneuma*) which whisked Jesus off before anyone knew what had happened.

From the Jordan River to the nearby mountains requires an upward journey which makes this *exballo* all the more strenuous. Jesus is not recorded as having uttered anything, perhaps more centered on the words from heaven just addressed to him; he was too taken up discussing it with the *Pneuma* still driving him on. This interaction between two other divine persons would be food enough to sustain him for the next forty days, forty being symbolic of a religiously determined time.

Once the *Pneuma* reached a sufficiently isolated spot within the wilderness, he left Jesus where he “was tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts.” The nature of Jesus’ temptations aren’t given, again a fine ploy unlike in Matthew’s account, because it allows the reader freedom to speculate about the nature of these temptations.

Something intimated is often better than something stated clearly. This temptation seems to have been interrupted by being with the wild beasts...perhaps they came to the aid of Jesus and protected him. In addition to that, “the angels ministered to him,” *diakoneo* being the verb which applies to serving one’s needs. Yet again, this *diakoneo* isn’t spelled out but suggested for the reader’s imagination to fill in.

#### **4 March, Second Sunday of Lent**

Today’s Gospel (Mt 9.2–10) concerns the transfiguration which is traditional for the Second Sunday of Lent and begins with “And after six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John.” Note the period of time (six days) which intimates what Jesus had spoken earlier, “There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God has come with power.” Surely the disciples must have pondered these words among themselves but did not let on to Jesus what they had discussed. Chances are that Jesus maintained a certain neutrality or distance from these discussions but certainly was aware of their content. Perhaps one or more disciple came to him in private for consultation with the intent of keeping it quiet from his fellows. Then when Jesus chose Peter, James and John to ascend the mountain—no indication is given to them as to why he decided upon this—they must have considered themselves not just as those “who not taste death” but even more special than that. The other nine felt they were among that elite group as well.

As for the mountain, Jesus took them “apart by themselves” (*kat’ idian monous*), a gesture the three interpreted as confirmation of their special role, even more exalted than their fellow disciples. This attitude is reflected in Peter’s words, “Lord, it is well that we are here.” So when Jesus was transfigured, Peter, James and John automatically hearkened back six days to his words about seeing the kingdom of God in power. No reason to think otherwise from their point of view it was being fulfilled, but the cloud which overshadowed them cast them into fear. This experience they did not expect along with the unknown voice because it did not allow them to see the kingdom of God according to their personal interpretations. Once this experience on the mountain had come to a close, the three “now longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only” which echos a certain disappointment and something they had to live with. How to communicate this to their fellow disciples must have taken up most of their conversation during the descent from the mountain. Certainly what had transpired made Peter, James and John re-examine Jesus’ words about those he uttered six days earlier, that is, about not tasting death and seeing God’s kingdom. It looked like they would experience death after all. In addition to this, they must have entertained severe doubts about the role of Jesus yet kept it to themselves.

#### **11 March, Third Sunday of Lent**

On this the Third Sunday of Lent the Church shifts to excerpts from the Gospel of John which is the richest of the four, theologically speaking, and continues with it for the remainder of the season.

Today’s Gospel (Jn 2.13–25) deals with Jesus driving out moneychangers from the Jerusalem temple and begins with “The Passover of the Jews was at hand.” Surely Jesus intuited that after two more of these yearly celebrations he would be going to Jerusalem for the last time, that is, for his own Pass-over. *Eggus* or “at hand” or “near” which in this instance represents a day or two before Passover when the temple was thronging with vendors selling

animals for sacrifice and other related items. This angered Jesus, causing him to exclaim “You shall not make my Father’s house a house of trade,” *emporía* being the word for any type of commerce or business.

Jesus’ anger caused the disciples to remember the verse from Ps 69.9, “For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me,” the first half of this verse being quoted in the Gospel. *Qin’ath* is the Hebrew noun for “zeal” in the Psalm verse that triggered the disciples’ memory which also means envy or anger, usually a negative sentiment. This incident reveals that a close relationship exists between the disciples’ faculty of memory which is rooted within the Torah and Psalter, central to liturgical and private worship. That is to say, any word or action by Jesus automatically can trigger an association between him and Scripture. There must have been many other instances that went unrecorded, but the close connection between the Hebrew scriptures and Jesus lies behind the words concluding John’s Gospel (21.25), “there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” This growing awareness of Jesus fulfilling Scripture gradually takes over the collective memory of all the disciples and is transmitted to the budding Church. Most likely the disciples did not share with Jesus the association of Ps 69.9 with his actions though it formed a tacit agreement of sorts. It would occur in greater frequency later in John’s Gospel but as just mentioned, must have covered more than what is recorded.

As for the second part of ps 69.9 (‘insults of those who insult you fall on me’), they weren’t verbal nor perhaps even intended but technically legal and for the sake of profit. While this second half of the verse isn’t cited in John, it is implied and shows that the disciples were able to draw a parallel between Jesus and the Lord to whom the temple had been erected and whose Passover was about to be celebrated. As for these moneychangers, let’s say that Jesus succeeded in driving them out for good. However, they would return next Passover and then the one afterwards and take great delight in seeing Jesus being dragged off to death.

### **18 March, Fourth Sunday of Lent**

In today’s Gospel (Jn 3.14–21) Jesus compares his coming crucifixion (though no one knows that yet) with Moses who “lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.” The incident at hand refers to when the “Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people so that many people of Israel died” [Num 21.6]. To counter this affliction, at the Lord’s command Moses “made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole” [vs. 9], *nes* being the Hebrew for “pole” which also means a standard, a banner or any sign that acts as a warning, not so much an instrument of execution as the cross. And so *nes* has military connotations, a manner of rallying troops. “He will raise a signal for a nation afar and whistle for it from the ends of the earth” [Is 5.26].

What brought about the incident of fiery serpents attacking the people in the Book of Numbers is that they complained as to why Moses had brought them out of Egypt, that they would perish in the wilderness without food and water. Jesus had this complaint in mind while making the comparison especially after his dialogue with Nicodemus who questioned Jesus’ words, “You must be born anew.”

Anyone listening to Jesus could make the comparison with the *nes* fabricated by Moses as a hidden message that Jesus would act as a military commander. This *nes* would form a rallying point around which his followers would



gather prior to making an attack on the Roman occupation of Israel. But the difference is that like the fiery serpent, Jesus himself is placed upon the *nes*. As with the serpent on the *nes*, Moses set it up for those who had been bitten to gaze upon it and thereby live. The difference between this *nes* and the one Jesus had in mind is that in the latter faith plays a role ('whoever believes in him may have eternal life') whereas concerning the one of Moses, nothing is said about having faith in looking. Similarly we have no information as to how many people actually did this, nor is there any injunction for them to do so. All we know is that the Israelites left that area and continued their journey with numerous references as to their places of settlement as they made their way to Canaan.

It appears that the lesson of both the Gospel at hand and the reference to the fiery serpent centers around gazing and healing, both of which are left up to each individual person. Such healing which comes about through gazing would be accomplished on Calvary: "They shall look on him who they have pierced," this being a fulfillment of Zech 12.10. Not surprisingly, Nicodemus, who questioned Jesus about being born again which prefaces the comparison with fiery serpent on the *nes*, assists in burying Jesus. While in the process of burying him, surely Nicodemus must have pondered the incident in the desert, realizing that it had just been fulfilled along with the Zechariah verse. Chances are that he shared this with Mary and the others present and may have continued the discussion with John, the beloved disciple, between that time and the resurrection that soon followed, let along the descent of the Holy Spirit some fifty days afterwards. Then and only then could Nicodemus play a role in expounding the meaning of the *nes* of Moses as applied to the cross of Jesus Christ.

### **25 March, Fifth Sunday of Lent**

Today's Gospel (Jn 12.20–33) deals with the conclusion of Christ's public ministry, important because shortly afterwards he gathers with his disciples for the Last Supper. Interestingly, those persons with whom he last spoke were Greeks, neither Jews nor Jewish religious authorities which is more significant. Finally, Jesus "departed and hid himself from them" [vs. 36]. Perhaps Jesus felt more comfortable with these non-Jews who lacked a religious and political agenda and were more open as to what Jesus really had to say. When he concluded, we have no record of what these Greeks from Bethsaida in Galilee thought. Surely they were captivated by his words and given the Passover, may have stayed in Jerusalem and therefore witnessed Jesus' crucifixion. It wouldn't be surprising that some became earlier disciples after Pentecost.

While speaking with the Greeks, Jesus asks his Father to glorify his name to which "a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'" The crowd standing by thought it was thunder whereas others thought an angel had spoken to Jesus. This crowd could have gathered spontaneously around Jesus to see what he had to say to these Greeks...foreigners...which is not unusual, part of the throng in Jerusalem for the Passover. It was hostile to Jesus or at least, skeptical, for later they ask "How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up?" The Greeks must have been indignant on both occasions but had no choice to accept being silenced, else their lives may have been threatened.

So these Greeks, in their desire to have a rational give-and-take conversation with Jesus, were silenced. A bit later after this Gospel excerpt John includes words from Isaiah [6.9–10], "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their

heart, lest they should see with their eyes and perceive with their heart and turn for me to heal them.” The Hebrew runs, much fuller, as: “Hear and hear but do not understand; see and see but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people fat and their ears heavy and shut their eyes lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understanding with their hearts and turn and be healed.” So it if it weren’t for the Greeks from Bethsaida at the very end of Jesus’ public ministry, this verse from Isaiah would not have been quoted. Yes, the Jews (better, the religious authorities) had closed their ears and eyes to Jesus long ago, a fact that may have prompted the curiosity of these Greeks. They reckoned that if someone who had turned off these people with their arrogant preconceptions, he must be an interesting person to speak with.

And so Jesus concludes his ministry on what appears to be a depressing note, even a defeat. If it weren’t from the Isaiah excerpt as to spiritual blindness and deafness set against the background of Greek and therefore pagan openness to Jesus, his ministry would be considered a failure. At the same time his Jewish disciples were in the vicinity, exposed to this so-called pagan intrusion into what they considered a specifically Jewish religious matter. Despite their weaknesses and limitations, they deserve credit for at least sticking it out to the Last Supper.

## **1 April, Palm Sunday**

Today’s Gospel (Mk 11.1–10) belongs to the procession into church.

“And when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives.” This approach to Jerusalem takes place after Jesus had healed the blind man in Chapter Ten, that is, in Jericho. So from Jericho to Jerusalem Jesus and his disciples had to make an ascent in preparation for the Passover. During this arduous ascent on foot, most likely with many other pilgrims, the band either recited or sang the Psalms of Ascent, that is, Psalms 120 through 134, which are relatively brief and appropriately designed for those en route. After each psalm the pilgrims could pause, reflect and turn their attention to the journey ahead after which they would begin another psalm until they reached Jerusalem’s gates. So the ascent must have been filled with joyous song, even cacophony, with each group singing a given psalm from the others.

Psalm 134 is the shortest consisting of two exclamatory sentences: “Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord! Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the Lord!” It was appropriate for completion of the pilgrimage, exhorting people to raise their hands before the temple or even when it came into sight prior to participation in the Passover celebration. As for the entry on today, Palm Sunday, Jesus requests a colt on which to ride and therefore enter Jerusalem, this last stage not being on foot as had been the case since having left Jericho. Surely Jesus and his disciples did the same. While the twelve were unaware of what would happen shortly, Jesus knew this was the next-to-last time he would stand outside Jerusalem, the last being on the cross at Golgotha outside the city gates. It would not be surprising that while on the cross he recalled those Psalms of Ascent knowing that in a short time he would make his final ascent to the Father.

Those who greeted Jesus shouted the words of Ps 118.26 which reads in the original, “Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.” Most likely later or after Pentecost the disciples realized the significance of these words, for vs. 27 follows with “Bind the festal procession with branches up to the

horns of the altar.” That is, bind the sacrificial victim (Jesus Christ) for the Passover.

The verses immediately following today’s Gospel excerpt have Jesus going into the temple where he “looked round at everything” and left immediately because it was late in the day. What his impression was from such intent gazing is not recorded but perhaps he had in mind vs. 27 of Ps 118 just quoted. Jesus then left for nearby Bethany, having remained in Jerusalem for a very brief period of time, an indication of his impression of the temple and the frantic Passover preparations taking place there. At this stage it was sufficient for him to have made the ascent from Jericho and to have sung the Psalms of Ascent.

## 8 April, Easter Sunday

Today’s Gospel (Jn 20.1–9) concludes with “For as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” This is the last time John records an association of Jesus with biblical revelation, as fulfilling the scripture. The reference at hand is Ps 16.8–11 which is worth quoting in full: “I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure. For you did not give me up to Sheol or let your godly one see the pit. You did show me the path of life; in your presence there is fulness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Although the disciples, like any devout Jews of the time, were familiar with the Psalter, most likely it never entered their minds to draw an association between this verse and Jesus, let alone any other verses dealing with the more direct presence of God among men. That would have to wait until after Pentecost when they were graced by the Holy Spirit to understand Jesus’ relationship with the scriptures.

So given the fact that Ps 16.8–11 is the last biblical citation in John’s Gospel with regard to the mission of Jesus, it is laid out more fully here. At first glance the notations may not seem to have direct bearing upon the Gospel. However, consider the Hebrew in and by itself which forms the foundation for a “post-Pentecost” application of these verses to Jesus. If these verses are read carefully and slowly in the spirit of *lectio divina*, a truer understanding of the Resurrection emerges, truer than any attempts at a physical recording or reconstruction of the event:

“I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” The keeping of the Lord or *shawah* is a making equal or similar; the second meaning of this verb is to fear. “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him” [Is 40.25]? The notion of resemblance is suggestive of a person being made in God’s *eikon*, image. Note that such *shawah* is constant, *tameyd*, almost in the sense of an ontological identification of the psalmist with God. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two realities is maintained: before me, *lenegdy*, signifying place-in-front-of or not identical with. This word is prefixed by the letter *L*, literally, to; translation would be to before me. This implies Moses’ words, “I pray you, show me your glory” [Ex 33.18], not your face which would be identical with God’s own self.

“Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” In many cultures the right has always been symbolic of good as opposed to the left hand. The word for right hand is *yamyn*; note that God is at the psalmist’s *yamyn*, not the other way around. This word is also used for south, for when one’s right hand is towards this direction, the

face is towards the east or sunrise. With this in mind Ex 33.18 ('I pray you, show me your glory') can be understood in terms of Moses facing God towards the south while Moses' face is towards the east, sunrise. This position results in constancy, in not being moved, *mut*; use of the future tense suggests continuance of that keeping or *shawah* noted above.

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure." Two aspects of the psalmist's condition which rejoice, heart (*lev*) and soul (*kavod*). The latter more accurately means liver which was considered the heaviest of the internal organs, *kavod* being the verbal root with this meaning. "My heart is poured out on the ground" [Lam 2.11], more specifically, that which is most interior is made exterior as a result of sadness. This rejoicing or *gyl* comes from the verbal root suggestive of a round dance.

"My body also dwells secure." The safety of the entire body rests upon the *lev* and *kavod* finding joy in God. The verbal root for body, *basar*, means to bring good tidings: "Get up on a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings" [Is 40.9]. The association of these two words is suggestive of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ...his assuming of a human body...with the Good News of the Gospel. The words "dwells secure" literally read "dwells to trust" or the constant abiding or *shakan* in the direction towards (*l-*) this trust, *labetach*.

"For you did not give me up to Sheol or let your godly one see the Pit". Give up or *hazav* connotes the finality of abandonment, an apt verb with regards to Sheol, the abode of the dead which the psalmist's soul or *naphash* escapes. This verse is quoted in Acts 2.27 by Peter on the day of Pentecost. The psalmist identifies himself with being a godly one or *chasyd*, from the root *chasad* or one who is the object of God's tender love. The pit or *shachat* implies corruption: "But you have held back my life from the pit of destruction" [Is 38.17]. This text literally reads, "But you have in love to my soul," *chashaq* rhyming with *shachat* or pit. "To see" this pit is equivalent to actual presence in it.

"You show me the path of life; in your presence there is fulness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures for evermore. Because Sheol infers a downward direction, the path or '*orach* leads in the opposite or upward direction. Consider this verse in light of two ascensions, that of Enoch and Elijah: "Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him" [Gen 5.24]. Note the words he was not, '*eynenu*, signifying a thorough "noughting" or disappearance from the earthly sphere. The second ascension reads, "And as they [Elijah and Elisha] 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" [2 Kg 2.11]. This latter example is an upward movement effected indirectly by God through the medium of a chariot of horses; the former is by God himself. The '*orach* or path is a more poetic word as compared with the more prosaic *derek*. Here its "upward" direction as noted in the last paragraph is associated with life, *chayeym*. It is God who shows this '*orach* to the psalmist, more accurately, causes to make known, the verbal root being *yadah*. I.e., we have here an indirect discovery on part of the psalmist of the path, not a clear manifestation.

"In your presence there is fulness of joy." The Hebrew verb is *savah*, to fill, which bears resemblance to another verb, *shavah*, to swear an oath and from which is derived the number seven. Note that joy, *samach*, is in the

plural, *simachoth*, implying an indeterminate number. *'eth-panevka*, before you or in your presence, face, source of joys.

“In your right hand are pleasures for evermore.” Such pleasures or *nehimoth*, from *naham*, derive from the right hand as in vs. 8, “because he is at my right hand.” The word forever, *netsach*, derives from *natsach*, splendor, glory.

By way of addendum, the other biblical (Old Testament) connections in the Gospel of John with Jesus' role are: 2.22, 5.39, 7.38 & 42, 10.35, 13.18, 17.12, 19.24 & 28 & 36 & 37.

### **15 April, Second Sunday of Easter**

The Gospel excerpt [Jn 20.19–31] for this Sunday centers around Thomas' unbelief which occurs after Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene when she said to the disciples “I have seen the Lord.” No response is given; perhaps they were still too confounded by recent events either to believe or reject Mary's claim. She was not present when Jesus appeared to the disciples nor did she have a need to be there. Though not a disciple and hence not responsible for handing down Jesus' teachings, Mary received far more and was content with it. Clearly she understood the words “which are not written in this book” even if any other book had existed. For this reason she is given the title Apostle to the Apostles. Usually such is the case in matters spiritual: official representatives or the Church have less understanding and comprehension than those who have no special office or role. They require someone with no authority but of great personal faith and understanding to move them.

The Gospel concludes with “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.” *Semeion* is the noun for “sign” which more often than not has religious significance, including the giving of a signal. The nature of these signs is not stated while “this book” suggests a distinction between it and more than one or other books which may have contained these signs. However, John put down the most important ones; any others would have been repetitions or copies with no real import regarding Jesus' resurrection. Not only that, such other books certainly would have lacked situating Jesus squarely within the Old Testament context or where the frequent refrain “that scripture may be fulfilled” would have no place, a sign of their ultimate in-authenticity. Thus from the point of view of *lectio divina*, these signs would have been useless. As for the signs, Jesus did them “in the presence of the disciples,” *enopion* meaning face-to-face with them and excluding other people. Such exclusion is not a way of keeping the resurrection secret or trying to cover up Jesus' death. Even if he had appeared in the midst of Jerusalem, most would not have believed it was true. In fact, something of the sort did happen a few days earlier: “and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised” [Mt 27.52].

Wisely John adds in the next verse (wisely in that he wishes to divert curious attention from these other signs), “but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” Note the intimate relationship between believing (participle) and “may have” with respect to eternal life...not just that but “in his name.” That name is identified with the “Son of God” meaning that believing, an active or continuous trust, has a place to dwell, if you will, which is eternal as well as life.

## 22 April, Third Sunday of Easter

Today's Gospel (Lk 24.35–48) begins with a report concerning the road to Emmaus incident: "Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread." This telling is for the eleven disciples in Jerusalem (cf. vs. 33), no one else. Those who had just encountered Jesus are not identified...certainly not disciples...but close associates as vs. 13 intimates. They come on the scene shortly after Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary, the mother of James and the other women who informed the disciples about the risen Jesus. Thus we have a whole group of people to whom Jesus revealed himself, people not Christ's immediate disciples. Right from the beginning two groups are in play: the "official" representatives of what would become the church and those who had responded positively to the resurrection.

Note the one verb which is in the passive: *egnosthe*, while "had happened on the road" reads as *ta en te hodo* ('those in the road,' no verb). The passive *gignosko* (to know) suggests some kind of agent independent of the men who encountered Jesus; it is almost as though something larger than he and they is involved, that knowledge of Jesus was communicated indirectly by another agent but nevertheless in a real fashion. That which pertained to *ta en te hodo* refers to the conversation with Jesus whereas the *gignosko* or knowing him was when "he took the bread and blessed, and broke it" [vs. 30]. Although the Last Supper was so recent, we have no indication that men other than the disciples were present, and during such a short interval the disciples were to wrapped up in themselves to communicate that experience to others. Hence, the wayfarers were sensitive to Jesus revealing himself in conversation and this passive communication of his presence through the breaking of bread. Perhaps they had been present when Jesus fed the multitude and spoke of himself as the bread that came down from heaven, so it was fairly easy for them to make the connection.

"As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them and said 'Peace to you.'" One gets the impression that Jesus had been eavesdropping on all this and was waiting for the right opportunity to intervene. "As they were saying this" or that *ta en te hodo* and *egnosthe*, both together, which were not interrupted but taken to a new level signified by Jesus being *en meso auton*, "in the midst of them." So after Jesus had bade them peace and said that he was not a spirit (*pneuma*) but a flesh and blood person, he asked the disciples for something to eat. Thus the second appearance takes place within the context of a meal.

## 29 April, Fourth Sunday of Easter

This is the first Sunday of the Easter season not to have a Gospel directly related to the Resurrection. Not that such a lack intimates paucity of evidence (in a certain sense this is true) but more profoundly, signals that we are moving away from the Resurrection to its fulfilment beginning with the Ascension and shortly followed by Pentecost, the direction of our orientation from now on. And so today's text (Jn 10.11–18) about the good shepherd can be pondered with this in mind. Furthermore, with greater distance from the earthly life of Jesus and prior to the descent of the Holy Spirit, we, like the disciples, can appreciate better those frequent parallels Christ made between himself and biblical references. This does not mean prophecies as fulfilling hidden, secret information but as fleshing-out what the Old Testament heralded (as for those texts, the ones proper to John's Gospel may be found at the end of the entry for Easter Sunday, 8 April) but of apprehending Christ's divinity. Since in the long run no one

knows what divinity actually is, it is more a combination of Christ's humanity with that which haven't the slightest clue or divinity, a term that can be bantered about, strange to say, with little comprehension of what it means.

Christ calls himself the "good shepherd," *kalos* used instead of *agathos*, which applies more to that which is beautiful, of partaking in an aspect of that which is eternal and not subject to corruption. The bond between this "beautiful" shepherd and his flock is one of knowledge (*gignosko*), and the reference to this is "I know my own and my own know me." While it may be argued that the *gignosko* proper to both is one of knowing the location of food and shelter, here is one characterized by mutual familiarity, something you don't see between two different species. Those who have known Jesus thus far, apart from his family and close relatives including John the Baptist, are his disciples. Even better, the band of women who accompanied Jesus throughout his ministry remained faithful when everyone else had abandoned him. For them the *gignosko* just mentioned certainly applies but even better, the deeper *gignosko* of "as the Father knows me and I know the Father."

As for Jesus laying down his life, it is not simply that, a selfless laying down, but is done because of the "power (*exousia*) to take it again." *Exousia* more specifically pertains to authority, of being in charge to do whatever one wishes. Jesus views such *exousia* as a "charge" or *entole* from his Father, the latter being an injunction or command: "this *entole* I have received from my Father." The preposition *para* means "from" or better, beside, alongside of and thus is indicative of being present to in an equal fashion. Only a charge or *entole* "beside" the Father can be shared with the Son, hence its importance to mention in the Gospel. One gets the picture that the Father hands over—beside (*para*) to his Son on an equal plane this *entole*. The Son is not to be viewed as below the Son as a subject is to his master, *para* precluding all such subordinate imagery.

## 6 May, Fifth Sunday of Easter

In three weeks Pentecost Sunday comes around meaning that attention now has shifted more noticeably toward that event, a fact noted in the last entry. At this juncture we are moving "away" from the crucifixion and resurrection in preparation for an event that will reveal the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, even though Jesus had mentioned him in the Gospels, but no one seems to have grasped what he meant. "Away" is put in quotation marks to indicate that both are certainly not forgotten but soon will be assumed into a new light which will become a permanent feature of the church about to be born. While today's Gospel (Jn 15.1-8) does not mention this new Person—the end of Chapter Fifteen does as Counselor—we can take Christ's words as aiming in that direction. That's why Christ employs the image of him as vine and the Father as vine dresser.

Along with this image Jesus stresses the notion of abiding in him, *meno* being suggestive of permanence, of not moving about. So from today until just prior to Pentecost focus upon this *meno* is crucial for reception of the Holy Spirit in imitation of the disciples as they were "sitting" or *kathizo* [Acts 2.2]. Such sitting is a requirement, if you will, for the Spirit "resting on each one of them" (*kathizo* again). Hand-in-hand with this multi-faceted image of being put without moving is the one of being filled (*pleroo*) by the Holy Spirit. Without such immobility the revelation of this third Person could never come about. For example, if the disciples in the room were moving about in restless fashion—and this could have been the case when Jesus appeared to the "eleven gathered together" [Lk 24.33]—there would be no descent of the Spirit and hence no *pleroo*.

As for the Gospel at hand, the verb *meno* as abiding occurs twice in vs. 7: “If you *meno* in me and my words *meno* in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.” First comes the *meno* of a person in Christ followed by the *meno* of his words, the two working together as one. Since the words (*rhema*) refers to a word that is spoken and means “an utterance” applicable, for example to Scripture which the Holy Spirit brings to our attention compared with a *logos* which often is applied to Jesus Christ as expression of the Father. And so by using the term *rhema* John is showing that such utterances by Jesus point to the Holy Spirit who at Pentecost is revealed “as tongues of fire” enabling the disciples to spontaneously speak in languages previously unknown to them.

In sum, today’s Gospel can be taken as a pointer in the direction of the Holy Spirit’s descent where the *rhema* of Christ reflect back upon him as *Logos* of the Father thereby offering the fundamentals of understanding the Trinity. Christ remains a visible mediator between the fully invisible Father and partly visible Holy Spirit.

### 13 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

As noted in the last two entries for Easter, we are drawing closer to Pentecost as well as Christ’s Ascension into heaven, so today’s Gospel (Jn 15.9–17) should be pondered with a greater sense of urgency as it pertains to these two upcoming events. Because this excerpt, like the chapters centered around John’s account of the Last Supper discourse, is so rich, one aspect is singled out here, namely, “You are my friends [*philos*] if you do what I command you” [vs. 14]. References to friendship are quite infrequent in the Bible; actually the idea is unthinkable between God and man. Perhaps the best foundation for any friendship with the divine hearkens back to Ex 33.11: “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”

Certainly the Book of Exodus is full of references of the Lord speaking (the common verb *davar*) but now adds the special dimension of “face to face” or *panym ‘el-panym*. That means the *davar*, so often associated with imparting commands, directions and counseling, shifts to one of friendship with emphasis on the faculty of vision, one-to-one contact. It might be better to say the Lord leaves aside the familiar form of *davar* and takes up another which is familial, the contents of which between him and Moses remains undisclosed and rightly so. The location of such intimate *davar* was in the tent outside the camp within full view of the Israelites. They must have seen Moses go out there and return, waiting all the while to see what would happen, even if he would come out alive. Also they must have longed to eavesdrop but fortunately could not which gave rise to all sorts of speculation as to what had transpired between the Lord and Moses. It wouldn’t be surprising that these intimate conversations had a lot to do with later development of Jewish theology.

While the Exodus verse echos that of John’s Gospel, both may be said to echo a “higher” relationship between bride and bridegroom in the Song of Songs, for example, 5.16: “This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” *Reh* is used here for “friend” and derives from the verbal root *rahah* (to pasture, to tend) and connotes a continuous contact which includes more than speaking...a being together under all circumstances as well as a constant nourishing. Something similar is found in Ps 23:1: “The Lord is my shepherd (*reh*), I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures.” As for the basis of the friendship Jesus offers, it rests upon hearing, not so much seeing: “all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” [vs. 15]. The preposition “from” is *para* which suggests a being-beside or about. One invited to be placed *para* the Father, like Jesus, to



experience this hearing which given his infinite nature, makes the hearing infinite. Things would be vastly complicated in Jesus mentioned the other senses such as sight, touch, smell and taste. Hearing is the faculty (rather ability) that is most reliable as far as replication goes, hence the one Jesus stresses.

Establishing all these connections with the Old Testament is vital, for they put Christ's command in better perspective or make it more palatable: "This I command you, to love one another" [vs. 17]. The verb is *agapao* from which is derived *agape*.

## 20 May, Seventh Sunday of Easter

Today's Gospel (Jn 17.11-19) intensifies our approximation to Ascension and Pentecost in that it has Jesus praying directly to his Father not simply speaking of him or the Holy Spirit, wonderful and necessary as it is. Interestingly this Gospel as well as those Gospels from John after Easter all take place less than twenty-four hours of Jesus' death, that is to say, they occur before his Resurrection. And so they can be read from this vantage point of the Easter-come-Pentecost season which although obvious, sometimes is lost sight of.

Vs. 11 is interesting in that it situates where Jesus is as well as his disciples: "And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world." Even though Jesus is not *en to kosmo*, he is "coming to you" as vs. 11 continues. And the preposition for "to" is *pros* which is more direction towards—which, a direct way of putting the relationship between Jesus and his Father. So if Jesus is not in the world and coming *pros* the Father, "where" exactly is he situated, if we can be put it this way? There must have been a time when Jesus made this transition from being in the world to being outside it. If you want to be theologically precise, that would extend all the way back to his incarnation of which John gives no details, beginning with Jesus as *Logos*.

Keeping in line with the Gospel, intimations of the transition may be traced to 13.1: "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father." Note the crucial words "before the Passover." Does this extend back to a week earlier when he visited Martha, Mary and Lazarus (cf. 12.1+) as well as speaking to the crowds as to his public ministry? All this, of course, is included but not brought into play until the actual Passover which begins the twilight before. So if we wish to press further—and without becoming technical about it—and ponder what "before the feast of the Passover" means, that refers to the hours shortly prior to first twilight. Those are the hours when people were bringing the Passover lamb out in public in preparation for it to be slaughtered. Better put, the time is "between the two evenings" as Ex 12.6 reads literally. So if Passover consists of "two evenings," that gives Jesus the freedom to say that he is "no more *en to kosmo* but coming *pros* the Father" as stated in the last paragraph.

In vs. 12 Jesus says that "while I was with them, I kept them (*tereo*) in your name," and in vs. 13 continues with "but now I am coming to (*pros*) you" or no longer is he going to keep them in the Father's name. *Tereo* is akin to the Hebrew *shamar*—the same meaning—which frequently applies to the keeping of the divine Torah. Such *shamar* is now transferred to Jesus being the active agent, not the other way around where we're used to having the person doing the *shamar* as it relates to things divine. Thus to understand what Jesus means by *tereo* in light of *shamar* and Torah is of vital important to understand what this means relative to the Father. Vs. 13 with Jesus coming *pros* the

Father at first glance seems like abandonment of this *shamar* but is not. It takes up *shamar* and situates it in a brand new light, of revelation of the Father or more specifically, of the Son who had done *shamar* on earth and who will do something completely new through this coming *pros* his Father.

No small wonder that Jesus continues in vs. 13 with “that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” Note “may have” (*echosin*) which means not now which may have confused his followers. However, that *echosin* as fulfillment (*pleroo*) occurs at Pentecost with the revelation of the Third Person, the Holy Spirit.

### **17 May, Ascension Thursday**

Today’s Gospel (Mk 16.15–20) represents the conclusion of Mark’s terse account of the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus. It is so terse that sometimes the reader can take this as an excuse to pass over events without pausing to see their connection. However, this is intentional. Mark is offering a concise pattern that can be unpacked only having read his entire account as a single unit. Also the other three Gospels can be read “against” Mark’s...despite the far deeper theological insights they contain, all return to the basics of the account at hand.

Just before “he was taken up into heaven” Jesus gives the most general command of them all to his disciples: “go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.” Nothing is said about the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. That Mark leaves up to his fellow evangelists to flesh out. Regardless, it should be noted that today commences a nine day retreat of sorts, the original novena commemorating both Christ’s Ascension and the Holy Spirit’s descent.

Mark makes two distinctions: *kosmos* and *ktisis*, world and creation. *Kosmos* originally means order, good behavior and decoration, so it has a positive sense though sometimes in the Gospels takes on a somewhat negative tone. Here Mark seems to employ *kosmos* according to the former, as that which is potentially receptive to hearing the *euggelion* or Gospel. The same potential reception applies to *ktisis* or creation which is situated within the *kosmos*. And so when the disciples hear Jesus speaking of this twofold commission, their first task is to be present within the *kosmos* and then preach to *ktisis*. The pattern for entry into (*eis*) the *kosmos* is Jesus’ entry into (*eis*) heaven and sitting at the Father’s right hand, a fact that became clearer after Pentecost. It is to the disciples’ credit that despite not comprehending much of what Jesus had communicated to them over the years, they were open to the Spirit’s inspiration. This role of memory vis-a-vis the third Person of the Trinity is thus worth pondering over more fully.

Equivalent to the *kosmos* is *pantachou* or everywhere, and this everywhere is where the disciples will find *ktisis*. Within this *kosmos/pantachou* Mark says the Lord worked with them, the verb being *sunergo*. Such working-with the disciples at the Father’s right hand enables the disciples’ preaching to take hold within *ktisis*, and that is confirmed (*bebaioo*: connotes strengthening and enabling) by signs which attended them. Here the verb is *epakoloutheo* or a close following (*akoloutheo*) upon (*epi*) these signs. This intimate presence enables the disciples to reach out further within the *kosmos*.

Despite what appears to us as a loose, unorganized manner of proclaiming the Gospel about Jesus Mark’s account

does represent the potential of branching out and becoming consolidated, thereby setting the stage for the first step of evangelization in the Acts of the Apostles.

## **27 May, Pentecost Sunday**

Today marks fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus and nine days after his Ascension, so it has a double meaning. One of the biggest surprises to an observer of the liturgical year is the day after Pentecost Sunday. After such an exalted feast which closes an equally exalted period since Easter, the Church immediately falls back upon Ordinary Time. The contrast is so dramatic that despite the drama of today's feast, the contrast between it and tomorrow never ceases to amaze one. Because of such a sharp contrast, it takes a considerably longer period to sort this all out. That's why we have such feasts as Corpus Christi and Trinity Sunday. Not to heal such a deep cleavage as this would be unwise.

Today's Gospel (Jn 15.26-7 & 16.12-15) has two verses from Chapter Fifteen followed by four from Chapter Sixteen. As for the first two verses of the former, Jesus speaks of the Counselor or *Parakletos*. This is technically a legal assistant or advocate which, in turn, implies Jesus is speaking of someone about to become present for future litigation, not a good sign, really. We have the first mention of the Spirit as *Parakletos* so it must have confused the disciples within the context of celebrating the Passover. This third divine person of whom the disciples heard Jesus mention in other contexts, albeit fleetingly, sets their minds on expecting someone in bodily form who would take over Jesus' mission and carry it forward. Jesus assuages the concern by his disciples by saying that the *Parakletos* will be a *marturion* or witness to Jesus just as they share in this *marturion*, also a legal term. A bit later in 16.8-11 the legal role of the *Parakletos* is borne out in greater detail, but still his identity and time of coming is left unanswered.

Perhaps because of this confusion present in the minds of the disciples...present but not articulated...that Jesus calls the *Parakletos* the Spirit of truth. The role presented here is a person who "does not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak." That is to say, the *Pneuma* of truth is passive or totally receptive to hearing, and that hearing is not specified but presumed to be from either the Father, Jesus or both. Perhaps there came to the disciples that this *Parakletos/Pneuma* might be an angel whose duty is to report what he has heard from God after which he leaves as so many biblical accounts reveal, all familiar to the disciples.

This hearing role of the *Pneuma* is clarified so the disciples don't take this person as an angel: "he will take what is mine and declare it to you." Such taking is *ek tou emou* (from me) which is that which the disciples had experienced of Jesus to date but in an ignorant, fleeting manner. Like an angel, the *Pneuma* will declare this *ek tou mou* or *anaggello* which means to carry back a report. To the present disposition of the disciples all this sounds angel-like, but some fifty days later it will be clarified on Pentecost. Any fleeting presence of an angel will be dispelled by the fact that the *Pneuma* will rest on each one of them" [Acts 2.3], not just come and depart immediately. This permanence is ratified by the disciples' ability to speak languages other than their own, for one does not speak a language at one instant and drops it the next. The ability to speak is a permanent feature of what it means to be a human being.

### 3 June, Trinity Sunday

Today's Gospel (Mt 28.16–20) consists of the concluding verses of Matthew and is a brief summary of both Jesus' mission and that of the disciples which soon will spring into action. The essence of this summary is in the command to baptize "all nations" or *ethnos*, that is, non-Jews and to be "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." At this juncture the disciples certainly knew of Jesus and his frequent references to the Father but had little inkling of the Holy Spirit or *Pneuma*. Throwing in a third person certainly complicates matters. So in order to carry out this baptism the disciples had to know more about these three divine persons. In Matthew's Gospel the last reference to baptism was John the Baptist, nothing at all in between, so the disciples naturally concluded that any baptism would follow the model of John. They must have thought of their early contact with John but knew now that any baptism Jesus had in mind would be different, that is, connected with him as well as the Father and Spirit.

So at the threshold of Jesus' ascension which Matthew doesn't record the disciples are left hanging as what to do. Their mission was of a very general kind open to all sorts of interpretation but again, the only reference point being the baptism of John. What made matters worse was that they weren't present at Jesus' baptism, not even having been called. However, they had knowledge of it as well as that Jesus went into the desert for forty days and nights in between his baptism and when he first summoned them. To a certain extent this period of withdrawal from public view represented where the disciples found themselves right now. However, it would be a mercifully short waiting period until Pentecost. No record exists of what the disciples had thought or discussed among each other then, but by all accounts it must have been very interesting. Again, the only referent point at their disposal was John's baptism.

In addition to Jesus' command to baptize all nations or all non-Jews, he bids them "to observe all that I have commanded you." That means the disciples would have to sit down and recall each and every instance when Jesus actually commanded them, something quite difficult to do unaided on their own. So after the Holy Spirit's descent had been manifested to various people by their ability to understand the disciples, a more important offshoot was the ability for the twelve to get all the facts about Jesus' life straight. Perhaps never have the disciples felt more orphaned as they did right now, this on the heels of the trauma of Jesus' crucifixion. That's why the disciples must have had recourse to the temptations Jesus experienced in the desert after his baptism; at least memory of that time might have offered some consolation.

To make matters worse, if you will, Jesus concludes by saying "I am with you always, to the close of the age." What form this "with you" takes must have baffled the disciples. The only clue is that it has a span of time, the close or *sunteleia* of the age (*aión*). *Aión* refers to a definite period of time, usually extended, and to the disciples that could mean many things. This period of time does have a conclusion or *sunteleia*. That is to say, a consummation which again was not clear to the disciples at this juncture. This word consists of the preposition *sun* (with) prefaced to the root *telos* (end), literally an end-with where *sun* intensifies the sense of end-ness. The disciples must have had in mind Jesus' words in 13.39: "the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels." Thus to them *sunteleia* appears right around the corner. Even if Jesus hung around longer and explained such things as *sunteleia* his followers wouldn't grasp a word he said. In other words, all this ambiguity requires an

illumination that must come from within, hence the significance of Pentecost.

## **10 June, Corpus Christi**

Today's Gospel (Mk 14.12-16; 22-26) is an account of the Last Supper which begins with an anonymous man in Jerusalem without whom the succeeding events never would have taken place: "A man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him." This man will "show you a large upper room furnished and ready" for the Passover. We have no clue as to the identity of this man who first led the disciples to the upper room and apparently had known the other man who had prepared it beforehand. Perhaps he may have had an assistant or two who remained equally anonymous. Since there was a mighty throng of pilgrims in Jerusalem, such a place must have been sought after eagerly, even rented out well in advance, so those involved had to keep this upper room a carefully guarded secret. Actually we have definite knowledge that two men were involved: in addition to the man with the water jar there is the householder who either owned or rented out the place. All this took place in the afternoon before Passover evening, for "when it was evening he came with the twelve." By this time all the pilgrims had gathered in their respective places for the solemn event.

Such anonymous persons make their appearances from time to time at key points in a given biblical narrative. For example, a man found Joseph "wandering in the field and asked him, 'What are you seeking'" [Gen 37:15]? This man knew the whereabouts of Joseph's brothers, that is, in Dothan, to which Joseph went and came across them. He must have known them, even casually, and perhaps wondered about the whereabouts of Joseph. However, the brothers sold him into slavery which ultimately turned out not just to their favor but to the entire country of Egypt. So we could say that this man in the wilderness was instrumental in a key point of salvation history.

Another example, albeit of lesser importance but still significant, is Naaman, commander of the army of Syria. He had captured a "little maid from the land of Israel" [2Kg 5.2] who knew how to cure his leprosy "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria!" Eventually Naaman set out to meet Elisha who bade him to wash seven times in the Jordan, thus curing him. So knowledge of Elisha by an unknown little girl saved the mightiest general of the ancient world.

Now the anonymous man (and his possible associates) who prepared the upper room passed off the scene as soon as Jesus and his disciples arrived. Chances are they knew what was about to transpire: the Last Supper followed by Jesus' betrayal, trial and crucifixion. They even could have known, however dimly, that something more was involved and were in the vicinity, if you will, of the place where the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles. This room may have been the same as the Last Supper one though it is not clear. If it was, the disciples knew from recent experience that it was appropriate and contacted that anonymous renter. In addition to the disciples, this man and the one who carried the water jar had been in an ideal situation to know the significance of Jesus' celebration of the Passover and what became known as the Eucharist.

## **17 June, Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**

This is the first Sunday of Ordinary Time since 19 February, a wholly different marking of time not just liturgically

but a passage from winter to the threshold of summer. The transition to a time which forms the bulk of the liturgical year is revealed most dramatically the day after Pentecost itself. The only other parallel is the feast of St. Stephen the day after Christmas. However, that second set of days is very short and connected by the notion of martyrdom, of giving witness, as well as the Holy Innocents two days after St. Stephen. Such a juxtaposition of two sets of two different realities offers an opportunity to reveal something that can be overlooked either by familiarity with the liturgical year or just by not paying attention. Of course, the Lord transcends space and time, but we do not and are left to ponder the ways by which the Church teaches us about him. The second contrast which concerns us here comes after a four month interval of Lent, East and Pentecost. To leave us hanging, as it were, immediately after Pentecost, would be the equivalent of “leaving us as orphans,” something which Jesus did not wish for his disciples. So in order to ease us back into Ordinary Time, the church offers two more Sundays stringing out, if you will, the season from which we had just emerged, Trinity Sunday and Corpus Christi. From there we can make a more graceful exit, better equipped to absorb all that had transpired since mid February. Such is the task for all the remaining Sundays in Ordinary Time, a time of approximately five months which will pass quickly, to be sure. Finally it will be in a need of renewal come the beginning of winter with Advent.

As for this week’s Gospel (Mk 4.26–34), Jesus is seeking to bring home to his listeners the best way possible to describe the kingdom of heaven which he last mentioned in 4.1: “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables.” In that instance Jesus is addressing not the people but his disciples, so today we have the second public mention of “kingdom of heaven.” The first is found in 1.15 shortly after John the Baptist was arrested: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Although those listening to Jesus talk about a kingdom must have been a relatively small handful of listeners, word of his message got out and spread rapidly, people were forming all sorts of ideas about what he meant by a kingdom. This power of oral transmission...not necessarily gossip or rumor...often is overlooked or under-appreciated among pre-technical peoples. Chances are they took it as political which forced Jesus to make very clear what he was presented as recounted in today’s Gospel excerpt.

As for the kingdom of God likened to a mustard seed, once it grows “the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” In other words, growth of the tree may be said to be personal but the results of its growth are communal. This comparison can’t but help make one consider Jn 14.2: “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” In other words, the mustard tree which sprang from “the smallest of all the seeds on earth” is analogous to the house of the Father containing an indefinite number of rooms or *mones*. This term refers most often to a room at an inn; it derives from the verb *meno* (to abide, to remain). Thus one gets the idea of the Father’s house (*oikos*) as a huge structure contain a multitude of rooms where people come in and out and get to know each other, not unlike a lodging place. Thus if both comparisons are taken individually or together, they are far as possible from political statements of a kingdom Jesus is promoting.

## **24 June, St. John the Baptist**

Today’s feast takes precedence over the celebration of Sunday in Ordinary Time which shows the importance of

John the Baptist. What makes this feast even more interesting is that six months later it stands at the opposite end of the birth of Jesus. In this way John's words are fulfilled, "He must increase, but I must decrease" [Jn 3.30]. Thus Jesus and John form antipodes, if you will, for both the physical and liturgical ways of telling time. Everything from the birth of Jesus to that of John follows the ascent of the sun which seems contrary to what John said of himself, that is, it is an "increase" from Jesus to John. However, John takes up this "ascent" and transforms it so that it will return from his birth to that of Jesus. John allows Jesus to flow first to him and then from him. And so we have the physical image of the sun's ascent and descent as secondary to the primacy of Jesus and role of John the Baptist.

Our current position to the longest day of the year gives us the unique opportunity of becoming aware of the first half of the year, notably the Lenten-Easter cycle which we concluded a few weeks ago. Prior to this we advanced through the time after Christmas or what traditionally is called the hidden years of Jesus' life of thirty years prior to his three years of ministry. Now the span from today "downward" to Christmas or more precisely, to Advent, focuses upon the significance and teachings of that three year ministry. While certainly short, the lengthy period of preparation was necessary to lend meaning to these three years.

As for today's Gospel (Lk 1.57-66), Elisabeth was noted by both "neighbors and kinsfolk" as one whom "the Lord had shown great mercy." Both categories of people were on much more intimate terms in ancient societies than nowadays as can be observed from their designations, *perioikos* and *suggenis*: those who dwell around (*peri-*) and those who dwell with (*sug-*). Then we have the verb "rejoiced" with Elisabeth, *sugchairo* or to rejoice with (*sug-*). In other words, both forms of relationships are virtually indistinguishable from each other and thus unite in rejoicing with Elisabeth. This close connection between relatives and non-relatives is borne out further with "And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea." The result? "All who heard them laid them up in their hearts." The Greek reads literally "and placed all those hearing in the heart of theirs," the singular *kardia* belonging to the plurality of possessors. Thus these people foreshadowed, if you will, Mary's reaction to the shepherds: "But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart."

As for the mercy shown by God to Elisabeth, *eleos* is the Greek term for the Hebrew verbal root *chanan* of the same attribute. It, in turn, formed the essence of John's name. *Chanan* means to be inclined favorably, to be gracious, and is more acceptable for a name than the well-known *chesed*. To name someone after this difficult-to-define divine quality would be inappropriate, of appropriated too much of the divinity to a human being. Thus *chanan* is quite acceptable.

Apparently both Elizabeth and Zechariah had settled upon a name for their son based upon divine *chanan*, that is, John. Each in their own ways had an intimation that John was the object of *chanan*, most likely stemming all the way back to the leaping of both infants in their mothers' wombs. The inability of Zechariah to speak goes back to his encounter with the angel Gabriel: "And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their time." In other words, Zechariah, although being a holy person, did not share the same faith as Mary to whom the same angel is about to appear. That means he is to remain silent from the inception of John (and Jesus) to their respective births some nine months later.

## 1 July, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's fairly long Gospel (Mk 5.21-43) begins with the daughter of Jairus and is interrupted by the woman with a flow of blood after which Jesus enters Jairus' house and cures his daughter. The request this man made to Jesus is interesting: "so that she may be made well and live," the two verbs being *sozo* and *zao*. First comes *sozo* which fundamentally means to save, to rescue followed by *zao*, to live. In the case at hand, both are similar for the girl who "is at the point of death," a phrase which reads literally as "has extremely" or *eschatos echei*, the adverb signifying being at the end (of life).

Jairus must have met Jesus at the shore when he arrived amidst "a great crowd," *ochlos* implying a group of people somewhat like a mob. Surely Jesus saw this gathering *ochlos* well out on the lake; in addition to those on shore, chances are that a flotilla of small boats had accompanied him. Jairus was a prominent individual, head of the local synagogue, so he must have heard about Jesus in greater detail from his previous visits to other synagogues. Apparently the reports were favorable else Jairus would not have gone out to meet Jesus and ask him to cure his daughter's desperate illness. Thus Jairus accompanied Jesus to his house, probably not far away from the lakeside. It was at this point that the same *ochlos* followed Jesus and "thronged about him," the verb being *sunthilbo* which consists of the verbal root *thilbo* (to press, squeeze) prefaced with the preposition *sun* (with) and thus intensifies the sense of being crushed in from all sides. It was from the midst of this *ochlos* that the woman with the flow of blood emerged. In other circumstances she may have been shunned as unclean, but the situation at hand clearly was different.

So while Jesus was attempting to make his way forward, he stopped to cure this woman which must have made Jairus feel even more impatient at both Jesus and the woman, given that his daughter was *eschatos* at death, if you will. Jairus must have known her and even may have tried to assist her in her need. However, every day now must have been agonizing for him during what apparently was a short walk from the shore to the house, all the while being squeezed in by the thronging crowd.

Given the close-knit nature of society of the time, everyone knew about the daughter of Jairus because he was head of the local synagogue. That made it all the more enticing for the people to know the result of Jesus' visit to her. However, he leaves them hanging: "he strictly charged them that no one should know this." Of course everyone assumed that Jesus had cured Jairus' daughter, so despite them, Jesus was not concerned as having wrought the cure but that the girl's health had been restored. This miracle must have had a lasting impact upon Jairus later when the religious leaders sought to kill Jesus. We hear nothing about him after this incident but can assume that he as local synagogue leader did not consent to their machinations and even may have joined the disciples' band. His daughter, too, could have joined once she got older and became an important influence within the fledgling band of followers. In addition, the woman who had been cured of her flow of blood may have become a follower of Jesus. In this way, all three were bound together by their mutual healing contact with Jesus and were helpful at filling in details of their story to the disciples.

## 8 July, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time



Today's Gospel (Mk 6.1-6) begins with "He went away from there and came to his own country." That is, Jesus left "the country of the Gerasenes" [5.1] where he had just cured the daughter of Jaius, including the woman with a flow of blood. Mark thought it important to add in this opening verse, "his disciples followed him." Of course, they had followed him earlier, but what stands out here is that they continue to do so in territory familiar to Jesus. Perhaps they felt a bit awkward at being with Jesus when he was among people who had known him all their lives. The disciples were strangers here and did not feel at ease which means that Jesus had to introduce them. Although a bit later the locals express sarcasm towards Jesus, the same must have been directed to the disciples who took it equally hard.

Instead of saying that Jesus headed directly for home, right away Mark says that on the Sabbath Jesus "began to teach in the synagogue." Chances are that Jaius, head of his synagogue, had sent ahead a favorable recommendation which apparently was not received well. After all, many had known Jesus and his family which didn't impress them in the least. Despite this, nothing bad seemed to have been drudged up about Jesus nor his family, just that his teaching and miracles didn't fit him with his common lineage. The people may even have felt some alarm at the attention being drawn to their area by reason of Jesus' increasing popularity. If it continued, the Romans might take a closer look and send in troops.

And so the locals expressed their astonishment, the verb being *ekplesso* or literally, to strike out of, to drive away from. Jesus' teaching provoked this strong response though we have no details as to the content of this teaching. At the same time the people acknowledged grudgingly that Jesus was endowed with special gifts, especially when they exclaimed "What mighty works are wrought by his hands!" However, it could be a slight against Jesus, for immediately they exclaim, "Is not this the carpenter?" In other words, the people are making a comparison between what they know of him...his former occupation...and his current occupation, if you will, healing and teaching.

As for summing up the people's response to Jesus' arrival in their midst, vs. 3 reads "And they took offense at him." The verb is *skandalizo* which literally means to stumble. They weren't the only one's to be tripped up but the disciples of Jesus who, as noted above, must have been struck at the hostility shown their master which carried over to them.

### **15 July, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Today's Gospel (Mk 6.7-13) continues on the heels of last week's entry with the connective "and," indicative of the fast-paced character of Mark. It begins with the sentence, "And he called to him the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." That means six pairs of men, on the surface not an impressive missionary endeavor, even at this relatively early stage when the disciples barely knew Jesus. As for the authority or *exousia*, we have no details of how Jesus imparted it, but it pertained to "unclean spirits." He could have breathed this *exousia* upon the twelve much as later he breathed upon them the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20.22), the incident at hand being a preparation for the permanent mission of the church.

The first example of an unclean spirit comes immediately after Jesus had summoned the disciples: “And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit [1.23]. The second example is the Gerasene demoniac (cf. 5.1–20) which goes into considerable detail. Surely the disciples kept that dramatic encounter in mind as a way of exercising their *exousia* so they would know how to comport themselves. Since they were broken up into six pairs, each went their separate ways, but they must have put some planning into their mission. Most likely they were tempted to consult Jesus, but he preferred to leave them decide. It was good practice for later when they went to preach the Gospel after Pentecost under the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Another benefit of this pairing of the twelve was that it gave opportunity for the each man to know each other better which was re-enforced upon their return when they had the additional opportunity of sharing their experiences of having exercised Jesus’ *exousia*. Then again, Jesus must have stayed apart from this sharing, preferring that the disciples work all this out on their own.

“So they went out and preached that men should repent,” the verb *metanoeo* being the root for *metanoia* or a change of heart. This is a mission distinct from the one of healing yet one running parallel to it. Surely the disciples had in mind the vivid image of John the Baptist. So other than a relatively vague commission, we have nothing more but can intimate it must have been a time of improvisation for the disciples. How long they were out and about is not recorded. Chances are that each of the six groups didn’t return the same time, but given the relatively small area in which they moved about, word spread quickly among the people and thus each group must have been able to keep track of each other, more or less. The amazingly rapid way news traveled at the time is part of the reason inferred in the words of vs. 14 just after this Gospel excerpt, “King Herod heard of it; for Jesus’ name had become known.” Besides, this report reaching to the king implies that what the disciples had done was effective. Even more than any miracles wrought, their message of repentance stuck in the common report about them. And that report quickly reached the ears of King Herod who equated this message with that of John the Baptist whom recently he had murdered. So what started out as a seemingly small, obscure mission, reached all the way to King Herod’s ears which must have been disconcerting for the disciples as well as Jesus.

As for what Jesus was doing while the disciples were on their mission, nothing is said. He must have taken this as an opportunity to stand back and wait, all the while hoping that the *exousia* he had entrusted them would bear fruit. Most likely he refrained from teaching and curing, this period of waiting being of equal importance as any manifest work. Just as report quickly had reached King Herod, it wouldn’t be surprising that word got back to Jesus as to how each of the six pairs was faring.

## **22 July, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Today’s Gospel (Mk 6.30–34), short as it is, skips the important episode of the death of John the Baptist at the hands of King Herod. And so we have an interlude of sorts between that horrific event and the feeding of the five thousand. As noted in last week’s entry, King Herod got wind of the disciples’ first solo mission: “King Herod heard of it; for Jesus’ name had become known.” Surely the twelve must have heard about it prior to their return to Jesus and wondered if they would ever see him again or worse, Herod might do the same to Jesus as he had done to John. All this goes to show how quickly news traveled at the time.

“The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.” So commences the Gospel. Surely Jesus was anxious to get first-hand news as to what had happened but as the last paragraph intimated, news traveled more quickly than we give credit. That means he must have been fairly well abreast of his disciples’ activities, of how that *exousia* or authority over unclean spirits in vs. 7 was working. Such *exousia* wasn’t applied anonymously, if you will. Real people in real circumstances were involved. That means some of those who had been cured might have tagged along with the disciples and formed a larger, informal group. These people must have hovered in the background for the remainder of Jesus’ ministry and were part of those assembled with the disciples at Pentecost during which they received the fulness of the Holy Spirit. Since they had experienced first hand the *exousia* of Jesus, they were in a better position than most new Christians to proclaim the Gospel. So once the six pairs had returned and shared their respective stories, Jesus said “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.” In other words, we have no account as to the success or failure of the first mission, let alone Jesus’ response. Jesus had chosen a “lonely place” or *eremos topos*, *eremos* not because it was the most conducive place to relax but due to its isolation. However, people quickly discovered it, for “many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.” Even there the disciples couldn’t continue to share their mission with Jesus; in light of the next miracle, they were kept very busy so had to put it off to a later time. *Eukairia* is the noun for leisure which comprises the noun *kairos*, a specific time or event prefaced by *eu* (good, well)...an opportune time. This interruption must have been painful for all involved despite the greatness of the miracle that was to follow shortly.

In the long run, the feeding of so many people must have inspired the twelve disciples in light of their recent mission. They received further insight as to their master’s powers and were eager to see if they could do something similar on their own, that is, when Jesus would send them out on their next solo mission. Of course, this anticipation was tainted by the recent beheading of John the Baptist. Since King Herod himself had gotten wind of the six pairs of disciples, surely he had spies in the vicinity right now, perhaps among the five thousand, who would report back any suspicious behavior.

## **29 July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Chapter Six of John’s Gospel is seventy-one verses long with today’s excerpt (Jn 6.1–15) being a prelude, if you will, to the heart of the matter, Jesus as bread of life. Note that it occurs when “the Passover, the feast of the Jews was at hand.” *Eggus* is the adverb for “at hand” meaning near, proximate. This is John’s second mention of Passover, the first one in Chapter Two where Jesus does go to Jerusalem and casts out moneylenders from the temple. That may have given him reason to celebrate the next Passover in the countryside away from those he chastised and who were out for revenge. The third and final Passover comes later or in Jerusalem, the one where Jesus institutes the Eucharist. Thus we have Jesus sandwiched in, if you will, between two Passovers, the one at hand being in the countryside. Nothing is said throughout as to its actual celebration or if it ever were celebrated formally. However, the chapter at hand is essential for grasping the meaning of the new Passover to be instituted next year, a kind of catechesis for it. Jesus deliberately chose not to do this in Jerusalem because the confusion there would detract from the heart of his message. Some place quiet and apart is ideal for such important matters.

As for the five thousand he feeds, those people opted not to go to the holiest celebration of the year but be with

Jesus. Even though some may have fallen away, it is to their general credit that they had deprived themselves. Surely the religious and civil (Roman) authorities in Jerusalem were aware of such a great multitude in the countryside not partaking of this holiest of holidays, and it was understandable for them to be suspicious. They must have accosted late stragglers to the city and questioned them in great deal as to what had transpired out there.

As soon as Jesus landed by ship on “the other side of the Sea of Galilee,” he “went up on the mountain,” most likely to avoid those following him both by land and what must have been a small flotilla of boats on the lake. On that unspecified mountain Jesus “sat down with his disciples.” The summit of a mountain is a generally small area, so it was easy to ward off people attempting to ascend the mountain while retaining some privacy. Although no record of a discussion exists, Jesus must have forewarned his disciples of his impending discourse of him being the bread of life. Despite their fairly defensible position, they couldn’t keep at bay the people who kept coming, so his remarks must have been shorted than intended.

Jesus turned to Philip and asked him a tongue-in-cheek question: “How are we to buy bread so that these people may eat?” Immediately after John inserts “This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.” As expected, Philip fell for the trap; the same applies to Andrew who bursts in a bit later. Instead of either arguing or explaining, Jesus has them bid the people to relax on the grass of the mountain. No other sight was like it, totally covered with people from the summit down to the base and perhaps beyond to the Sea of Galilee. As noted in the first paragraph, such a sight did not go by unnoticed and was reported quickly to Jerusalem. Once Jesus had multiplied the fish and bread, the people covering the mountain exclaimed, “This is indeed is the prophet who is to come into the world!” Because the people were not celebrating Passover *per se*, now any doubt as to the source of divine power and presence was dispelled. Who needed the Passover now?

Despite the great success of having fed so many people, later in Chapter Six some people, including Jesus’ disciples, were upset at his apparently cannibalistic remarks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Their disgust must have been aggravated by reason of having missed celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem. Then there was the difficult task of explaining to relatives, friends and authorities why they decided against this to follow Jesus. Chances are that some of those more intimate to Jesus up to this point may have been more instrumental than reported as to assisting in the eventual betrayal and eventual arrest of Jesus.