

As with the other documents (i.e., 'Miscellaneous'), this one consists of various notations taken over the years, mostly in a liturgical context as it relates to the practice of *lectio divina*. However, the exact time frame is uncertain. They are posted for what they are worth. The same applies to the "fifth" document of the same title.

"Therefore, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her" [Hosea 2.14]. "Allure" or *patah*: also implies to seduce, be foolish, simple as in being ignorant. "Wilderness" or *midbar*; compare with "speak" or the common verb *davar*. The former is derived from this verbal root, as though the desert and (divine) speaking were closely allied.

July 27, 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Gospel (Jn 6.1-15) is about Jesus feeding the multitude or 5,000 and situated within the larger context of Jesus as the bread of life. A little appreciated part of this Gospel, but one which allows it to unfold: "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish" [vs. 9]. If this kid weren't around with a paltry amount of food, the miracle couldn't have taken place. This is reminiscent about the anonymous man who encountered Joseph (Gen 37.15-17) in the field and told him where to seek his brothers. Also consider the first reading for today's Gospel, (2 Kg 4.42-4), "A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing the man of God bread of the first fruits" which, like the anonymous "lad" in the Gospel, allowed Elisha to perform a miracle. Shortly afterwards we have another, the anonymous "little maid" (5.2) who said in the next verse, "Would that my lord (Naaman) were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." Perhaps there are other such anonymous persons in the Bible, all of whom are central in that the story couldn't continue without their intervention. By necessity they are nameless and pass off the scene as soon as what they have or what they have to say has been stated.

An interesting quote from Edith Hamilton's **The Greek Way**, written in that "old-school" way of doing classics and which itself retains a classic aura: "Elsewhere, when the desire to find liberation has arisen, it has very often led men to asceticism and its excesses, to exaggerated cults bent on punishing the body for corrupting the soul. This did not happen in Greece. It could not happen to a people whom knew better than any other that liberty depends on self-restraint, who knew that freedom is freedom only when controlled and limited" (p. 214).

Three times each day the Angelus is commemorated: approximately 8am, noon and 7pm. Part of the formula is "And the Word became flesh...and dwelt among us." "Dwelt" in Greek literally means "has pitched his tent" which signifies a nomadic background. With this notion of tent-pitching in mind spread out in the course of a given day, when the Angelus is celebrated we can reflect upon how well did we "pitch our tent" since the last Angelus. More specifically, the Angelus can invite us not to be rooted in our existence, only provisionally or enough to get through to the next tent-pitching. Then we pack up and move on.

July 29, Martha Mary & Lazarus, one of those rare interlude feasts, that of Mary Magdalene just a week earlier with same applicable to Joachim and Ann. These folks weren't after Jesus for something nor were involved in his mission. They were friends in the truest sense and thus allowed him to be with them minus such serious talks as we find among the disciples. No small wonder that these good folks appeal to persons with a contemplative bend.

August 10, 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the year. Today's Gospel (Jn 6.41-51) continues with the "bread of life" theme we saw during the past few Sundays. Note the several types of movement outlined as follows: "I am the bread which came down (*katabaino*) from heaven," "No one can come (*erchomai...pros*) to me unless the Father who sent me draws (*elko*) him," "I will raise him up (*anistemi*) at the last day." First is a descent followed by a coming-towards followed by a drawing and concluded with a raising up, all quite dynamic. Thrown into this mix is a quote from the prophet Isaiah (54.13), "And they shall all be taught by God." The Hebrew verb is *lamad*, often used in reference to the Torah and implies discipleship. Such *lamad* is complicated, if you will, by Christ's further words, "Everyone who has heard and learned (*manthano*) from the Father comes to me." This Greek verb is equivalent to the Hebrew *lamad* and is preceded by a hearing. And so such hearing/learning comes from the Father and is a prerequisite for anyone to perceive Christ as having come down. Not only this but

the Father has having drawn this person. The Gospel concludes by Christ referring to manna in the desert, a foreshadowing of him as bread from heaven. Although Christ says that only he has “seen the Father,” for us humans eating...the process of ingesting food (bread) is more important than vision.

August 15, Assumption. Today is one of those feast days you really don't know what it's about but somehow grasp it intuitively. Perhaps complicating matters is that the Assumption is a modern feast day. Christ's birth and resurrection deal with a divine person “coming down” from “up there” and at the end, returning to “up there.” That's putting it somewhat crudely. The Assumption concerns a human being who started out “down here” and somehow ends “up there” which is contrary to the laws of gravity. Still, where the Virgin Mary goes is our native land which is what some much of the Christian tradition is about. Different ages have different expressions about our *politeuma*...our native land...is about. However, they all agree that it is our point of origin and destination.

August 17, 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the year. Chapter six of John's Gospel consists of 71 verses, so we continue along with the “bread of life theme” as we did for the past several Sundays (and possibly for the next few; haven't looked ahead). As noted above, Jesus speaking about himself and his relationship with his Father is full of dynamic verbs: come down, draw, raise up, sent. These terms made you wonder about the concept of grace; the term itself isn't that common in the Gospels although it's sprinkled throughout Paul's epistles. Catholics are prone to think of grace in admittedly gross terms, as an amount of divine stuff meted out according to our merits. Grace has become something of a commodity neither fully divine nor full human...not unlike an emanation but certainly having a defined temporal limit. Such a conception doesn't jibe with this Gospel's powerful imagery or those dynamic verbs just noted. This is especially true when it comes to eating and drinking as we all know from daily experience, imagery Jesus applies to himself.

Vs. 54: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” There seems to be a distinction here between “eternal life” (contingent upon eating and drinking Christ) and the “last day” when we will be raised up. Almost as though such raising-up is secondary or part of a larger drama. Then we hearken back to vs. 44 where a person can't approach Jesus unless the Father draws him, that is, to eat Christ's flesh and drink his blood. Throughout are words related to the intake of food and drink, not sight, except for vs. 46 (“Not that anyone has seen the Father”). I.e., chapter 6 in its entirety has little to say about vision, spiritual or otherwise, which flies in the face of our common perceptions. We usually envision divine reality in terms of sight (“beatific vision”), but that seems to be a later add-on, not entirely unlike the concept of grace as divine stuff meted out. One question this long chapter presents is how can it positively affect our current notions about the spiritual life as vision, not to mention grace? Do the dynamic terms of drawn, send, raise up and so forth fit into this? Seems that Christian spirituality needs some re-tooling here, of getting back to corporeality as a means of situating us in direct, unmediated contact with that which is invisible. Even this term (invisible) which is almost always applied to spirituality intimates that we think of divine reality in ideas centered upon sight, usually considered the most noble of the five senses. In brief, the familiar statement of God to Moses, “No man can see God and live” can be switched to “a man can eat God and live.”

24 August, 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. Yet again we continue with John's Gospel, chapter six (60-9), which brings us to the end of this lengthy “bread of life” theme over the past several Sundays. An interesting observation from the disciples' reaction (“hard saying”): “Jesus knowing in himself (*en heauto*)” with regards to their murmuring. Such grumbling usually takes places within the privacy of one's mind as with the disciples and parallels the *en heauto* of Jesus on a different level. Next Jesus speaks of his ascending but one “where he was before (*proteron*).” Most likely the disciples didn't have a clue regarding this “before-ness” which is just as radical as people eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood. Towards the end of this Gospel Jesus again brings in the Father's role of allowing people to approach (pros is the preposition) him. Compare pros with *ek* (from) the Father, two opposite directions, so to speak.

Often in the liturgy of the dead we hear something like “Grant them eternal rest, O Lord.” Rest is an image we associate with death. It makes you wonder that people weren't at rest when they were alive. Then again, the majority of folks wouldn't want to look forward to an eternity of rest; activity is more like it.

From time to time you come across people “in the world” living contemplative lives. They are few, to be sure, but on the other hand, are more numerous than you’d think. Problem is how to sniff them out. One common feature: they all love solitude and make it their home. An apparent contradiction is that they cherish friendship but friendship in the sense of *koinonia*. So if such people exist, how do you contact them? Do you call them up or drop them an email? At first glance this may seem the way to go, but you have to “know” them beforehand, an apparent contradiction. Since they prefer solitude, you have to forego your desire to make such contacts and cultivate a sense of solitude which, as ancient Christian tradition says, is one of the best teachers around. If you cultivate it for a period of time and remain faithful, somehow and somehow things open up, all unbeknownst to you. Then you are primed to hit up like-minded people, for they literally drop from the sky. Another characteristic of these hidden folk is that they have some handicap, physical or otherwise, which takes them out of the mainstream of society. They have to cope with it, a daunting task for the rest of us, yet have turned their deficits into assets. In other words, these afflictions allow them both time and space for solitude which they’re forced to cultivate.

“I can express adequately only the thought which I love to express. All the faculties in repose but the one you are using, the whole energy concentrated in that. But ever so little distracted, your thoughts so little confused, your engagements so few, your attention so free, your existence so mundane, that in all places and in all hours you can hear the sound of crickets in those seasons when they are to be heard. It is a mark of serenity and health of mind when a person hears this sound much.” Thoreau’s *Journal*, July 7, 1851. Interesting to keep in mind with the constant sound of crickets we enjoy late August and which will continue until the first frost, i.e., in decreasing intensity. However, right now they’re at their peak. Often we’ll find an inspiring passage from an author. Then if we happen to meet this person, we can be disillusioned because he or she doesn’t live up to our expectations. I’m sure good authors are fully aware of this, that they are in a different Muse-inspired state of mind when jotting down their thoughts.

22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time. After quite a few weeks the Sunday Gospel takes a different turn, Mk 7.1-8, 14-15, 21-3. A few observations are in order:

-vs. 4: “They (Pharisees) do not eat unless they purify themselves (or ‘purify it’). The verb here is *baptizo*, “to baptize,” which fundamentally means “to dip” in the sense of thoroughly immersing in water. For another use of this verb in a similar context, cf. Mt 23.25: “For you cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plat that the outside also may be clean.”

-vs. 5: “Why do your disciples not live (literally, ‘walk’) according to the tradition of the elders?”

-vss. 6 & 7, a quote from Is 29.13. “This people honors me with their lips.” The Hebrew verb *nagash* means “to approach, draw near.” The Isaiah quote which continues in vs. 7 is not found in the Hebrew text but the **Septuagint** (Greek translation).

-vs. 8: “You leave the commandment of God and hold fast the tradition of men.” Note the singular “commandment” which, in light of the Isaiah quote, can imply the first of the Ten Commandments or giving worship to God. There’s a contrast between the two verbs, “leave” and “hold fast.” Then again, such leaving/holding can be viewed in light Is 29.13, “honors me” and “heart is far from me.”

-vs. 23: “All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.” The verb here is *koinoo* (also in vs. 20) which implies making common...not so much corrupting a man through the evils listed in vs. 21 but by a more thorough, overall result which may be called a debasement of one’s entire life.

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Gospel (Mk 7.31-7) deals with a healing of a deaf man who also had a speech impediment. What’s interesting about this passage is that “he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it” [vs. 36]. This is one of several incidents where there seems to be a tension between the desire on Jesus’ part to make himself known and not to. This theme runs throughout the Gospels. One on hand he must reveal himself (this is the theme of his baptism by John the Baptist, start of his public ministry) and somehow balance this revelation when confronted with unreal expectations by people. Then again, we could take this healing as a subtle ploy by Jesus. He astutely gets the healed man to proclaim him as well as other people to spread the news. It helps Jesus out in a way, by saving him energy.

Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Today's Gospel from St. John has an interesting verse (3.13): "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man." Here Jesus speaks about his ascent in the past tense (*katabas*). Obviously he descended from heaven at his birth and later ascends at his Ascension. In the verse at hand, Jesus seems to be speaking of this future ascent as though it had already taken place. Tradition situates this Gospel passage (today's first reading, for example) within the story of the bronze serpent, Num 21.9: "So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live." Here there's a direct correlation between remedy and vision. The Hebrew verb *navat* connotes a beholding as well as respect compared with a mere looking. Compare this *navat* with Jn 3.15, "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." That is to say, *navat* is transformed into belief; nothing specific is said here about a person "looking at" Jesus being lifted up (vs. 14) or referring to his crucifixion.

"Those who assertively begin to remake their lives in terms of their highest principles will find the world a surprisingly pliant medium." From an article (Theological Emergence of New England Transcendentalism) in **Transient & Permanent**, edited by Charles Capper, p. 66.

"So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" [Mt 10.16]...in reference to the disciples being sent out to proclaim the Good News. This advice is a preface to Christ's warning about persecution in the following verses. *Phronimos* is the Greek term for "wise" which suggests being mindful of one's interests. It's also found later on in 24.45, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time?" The association of "serpent" with "wise" can possibly be traced back to the Garden of Eden as well as the serpent being associated with craftiness and divinization; a kind of mixture of ambiguous elements. Christ contrasts this characteristic; better, he puts it together with the injunction of being "innocent" or *akeraios* as doves. *Akeraios* derives from the verb meaning "to mix;" the alpha privative can thus imply "being unmixed," the symbol of which is a dove. "That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation" [Phl 2.15].

In **The Art of Happiness** John Cowper Powys offers two approaches. The first is called an "ichthian (i.e., fish) act." By it we muster all the strength we can and leap out of the water (our daily, gray lives), remain suspended in air for a brief moment and then return to the water. Seems to be a way Powys expresses transcendence. The second act he calls "decarnation" (as opposed to incarnation). Powys says it's probably more suitable for the bulk of people. In a depressing or tight situation we abstract from the elements involved and imaginatively reduce them to their basic components. The result is a porousness or gossamer-like character to what had previously burdened us. Emphasis is upon the boundless power of our imaginative faculty. Powys mentions the ancient division of reality of earth, air, fire and water. We refer to these basics each time we catch ourselves in depression or anxious about a situation. The two approaches are the same; depends upon each person's temperament. The interesting thing about Powys here is that he claims it invariably works, that it yields hope even if at first it may be dim. Any insight into transcendence is helpful, for it can apply, perhaps with modifications, to the usual methods of Christian prayer.

"We know that while we are at home (*endemountes*) in the body we are away from (*ekdemoumen*) the Lord...We would rather be away from (*ekdemesai ek*) the body and at home (*endemesai pros*) with the Lord" [2 Cor 5.6 & 8]. Four uses of the same verbal root as noted. Note the use of prepositions both prefixed to the verbs and used in conjunction with them. They boil down to three: *en*, *ek* and *pros*. The last is interesting in that besides being used with a verb prefixed with *en*, it suggests something like in-the-direction-of or towards. Another well-known example, the opening words of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with (*pros*) God." We could almost say not quite there but in the process of getting there. With regards to the two verses under discussion, the verb *endemeo* (to be at home) is first applied to the body or corporeal existence. Then *endemeo* is used with respect to the Lord (with the added bonus of *pros*).

28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Mark 10.2-16) deals with the Pharisees asking Jesus about divorce. He quotes the Genesis verses about God having created man and woman. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." More detailed information may be obtained from Notes on the Book of Genesis on this home page. The Greek has

*proskollaomai*, literally, “to glue upon.” Note the use of *pros* prefixed to the verb which harkens back to the last entry of *pros* as -in-the-direction-of or towards. The Genesis account has the man leaving his parents and “gluing with” his wife, not the other way around. The Gospel continues with what seems to be an incident unrelated to this, namely, Jesus blessing little children. Perhaps it could be taken as a continuation of sorts from the incident dealing with marriage or the fruits of marriage.

“God said to Moses, ‘I am who am.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I am has sent me to you’” [Ex 3.14]. The famous revelation of the Lord which in Hebrew reads, *‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh*. Note that the Lord commands Moses to say that “I am has sent me to you.” That is to say, Moses is to tell the Israelites that *‘ehyeh* is the one dispatching him. In this command the second half of the “name” is missing, *‘asher ‘ehyeh*. As tradition has it, the divine name *YHWH* is treated as a verbal form derived from “to be” and is put in the first person. What’s interesting is that the relative pronoun “who” or *‘asher* (along with the second *‘ehyeh*) is not to be communicated to the people though it is implied in the divine name. This lack of a relative pronoun is significant in that like all pronouns, it signifies a transition...a movement...and is thus difficult to grasp. So here we have a singular *‘asher* in between one *‘ehyeh* and another *‘ehyeh*. Perhaps the use of the same relative pronoun which opens the Psalter can shed light here: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.” *Ashry* = “blessed” and *‘asher* = “who.” The notion of blessedness seems related to something in a state of transition, of passing from one state to another. It’s almost as though this verse is saying that blessedness is bound up with continuous movement. To pleasantly complicate matters, *‘ashry* is immediately followed by “the man” or *ha’ysh*. I.e., the both rhyme together with the third word of this verse, *‘asher*. Thus we have: *‘ashry h’aysh ‘asher* or “Happy is the man who.” In conclusion we might say that the singular *‘ehyeh* of the divine revelation is reserved for the Israelites only whereas the *‘asher ‘ehyeh* is for Moses; at least that’s one spin on it.

28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (October 12). A complex Gospel (Mk 10.17-31) with numerous elements tied in concerning riches and the kingdom of God. Some key verses are outlined as follows:

- vs. 17: “setting out (*ekporeuomenou*) on his journey (*eis hodon*), a man ran up (*prosdramon*).” Note the prepositions: *ek-* (from), *eis* (into), *pros-* (towards).
- vs. 19: Jesus quotes several of the Ten Commandments (Dt 5.16-20) which stress the “do not” aspect of keeping the divine law; the only one quoted which lacks this negativity is “honor your father and mother.”
- vs. 20: the man claims to have kept these “negative” commandments.
- vs. 21: “Jesus looking upon (*emblepsas*) him.” The first of three “lookings,” the second being vs. 23 and the third, vs. 27, which is the same verb as vs. 21.
- “(Jesus) loved (i.e., had *agape* for)” the man.
- “You lack (*huserai*) one thing; go (*hupage*):” almost a play on words here. It is as though such a going will make up for the lack.
- “Sell what you have...and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” First comes the heavenly treasure after which there is a following of Jesus. It seems that such following implies not having these treasures.
- vs. 22: “he had great possessions (*ktemata*).” Compare such *ktemata* with “treasure in heaven” of the previous verse.
- vs. 23: “Jesus looked around” (*periblepsamenos*).
- “riches (*chremata*):” compare with *ktemata* in previous verse and “treasure in heaven” of vs. 21.
- vs. 24: “disciples” is used here who show their amazement at the man whom Jesus just addressed and went away. Such amazement is stressed indirectly with regard to the disciples actually having left their possessions and family to follow Jesus. It is almost a reflection upon what they might have done otherwise or could do otherwise. Cf. Peter’s remarks in vs. 28 with regards to this abandonment of worldly goods.
- “How hard (*duskolon*) it is to enter the kingdom of God.” Compare the adjective *duskolon* with the adverb *duskolos* of the previous, “how hard it will be.”
- vs. 25: The image of a camel entering (*dielthein*) a needle’s eye is compared with a rich man’s difficulty entering (*eiselthein*) God’s kingdom. Note the two prepositions prefixed to the verbs: *dia-* and *eis-* or “through” and “into.” The latter is emphasized by another preposition, *eis*.
- vs. 26: “and they said to him” reads in Greek, “and they said to themselves.”
- vs. 27: “Jesus looked at (*emblepsas*) them.”

-“With (*para*) men it is impossible, but not with (*para*) God; for all things are possible with (*para*) God.” Note three uses of the preposition *para* which alternately means “besides” or “from.” It is richer or subtler in meaning and connotes a certain presence or being-with.

-vs. 31: “But many that are first (*protoi*) will be last (*eschatoi*), and the last (*eschatoi*) first (*protoi*).” Possible reference to special favor of the Jews vis-a-vis the Gentiles. One example of the “first” is the man who left Jesus despite keeping the divine commandments; the “last” are the disciples who aren’t necessarily mentioned as keeping these commandments but of their having left their possessions and families.

Today’s Gospel (Lk 14.15-24) begins with “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” It ends with “none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.” I.e., the drama is enclosed within these two verses. The invited guests had legitimate excuses—bought a field, bought oxen and married a wife. In anger the master bids his servant to bring in the poor, maimed, blind and lame to take their place and “still there is room.” To make up for this “room” (*topos*) the master again bids his servants to get people from the “highways and hedges (*phragmos*).” The latter word can mean “fence” as in Mt 21.33: “There was a householder who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it.” The impression is that after having partially filled the house with crippled people, the master wants to complete the number of people more or less in hiding or wanderers. Thus these two uninvited groups “taste the banquet” which is equivalent to “eating bread” of the initial verse.

“If men rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of the Lord your God” [1 Sam 25.29]. Words addressed by Abigail to David. The Hebrew for “bundle” is *tseror*; it especially applies to a purse of money as in Gen 42.35: “As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man’s bundle of money was in his sack.” Another use is Sg 1.13: “My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts.” “Bundle of the living” has a parallel to “book of life” as in Is 4.3: “Everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem.” Nevertheless, bundle has something charming about it, very realistic. It suggests a small capacity or something precious that has been singled out from a lot of fairly worthless or at best, uninteresting stuff. It evokes a sense of transcendence, of being snatched up or rescued and put in a safe place: “In the covert of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you hold them safe under your shelter from the strife of tongues” [Ps 31.20]. All this is reminiscent of St. John who “at once was in the Spirit” [Rev 4.2]. Similarly, St. Paul’s experience: “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body, I did not know, God knows” [2 Cor 12.2].

Dedication of St. John Lateran, Rome; Gospel: Jn 2.13.22. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The verb *luo* is used for “destroy” which fundamentally means “to loosen,” “set free...” almost a kind of dissolving. It’s in response to the Jews’ request for a sign. Usually a sign (*semeion*) is something stable or existing out there for all to behold. We could take this “destroy”/loosening as a sign difficult to perceive, for it’s in the process of going from visibility to invisibility. The obvious reference Jesus makes is his death on the cross inferred in vss. 21-2.

Vs. 22 makes a close association between Jesus’ resurrection and their memory: “his disciples remembered that he had said this.” Then such a recollective process is tied in with “the scripture and the word (*logos*) which Jesus had spoken.”

The first reading for the day is Ezekiel 47.12, 8-9 & 12 or the sacred river flowing from the south side of the temple. Perhaps a parallel can be drawn between the “loosening” of Jesus’ death and that of the water. Such water makes stagnant water “fresh” [vs. 9]: from the Hebrew verbal root *rapha*, “to heal.” More basically, this verb means “to relax” which suggests that healing is a process of relaxation, of becoming at ease with the release of tension....in other words, a “loosening” (*luo*).

Although Emily Dickinson was a contemporary of the Transcendentalists—Thoreau, Emerson, Fuller—she lived on the edge of their sphere of influence. Part of this might be attributable to a different tradition proper to the Connecticut River Valley (locally known as the Pioneer Valley). It runs parallel to yet differs from that of Boston. Emily is situated just far enough outside this sphere yet conveniently located at its western rim. Apart

from this, there seems to be just as much interest in her life as before. Strange how people similar to her...those who've withdrawn from society...have more abiding influence than "active" people. There's something fascinating about a person who just sits there in one place over an extended period of time while the rest of us are constantly moving about. One only has to think of Thomas Merton who pretty much lived on the periphery of his community. Why do these people with all their hang-ups and neuroses have such a continuing appeal? Part of the answer seems to center around our preoccupation with human relationships, their intensity, and people tend to ferret out those who've withdrawn from the rat race.

"They set out places to contemplate the promised land." Introductory words (second stanza) from a hymn sung at Vespers for monks, a poetic expression applicable not only to monks but to anyone who's intent upon seeking God, especially with a measure of solitude. Once you've gotten such a "place," you prefer it to all others, for it somehow has an affinity with the "promised land." Hard if not impossible to describe, but the expression is really neat.

Every once in a while a Gospel reading will strike you because of its unusual nature. Today is a prime example, Luke 18.1-8, the unjust judge, which goes against the grain of how we usually take the Gospel message. It begins with Jesus asking his audience to persevere in prayer and "not lose heart." The verb is *egkakeo*, rarely used, and seems tied in with the noun *kakia*, "evil." I.e., not to become evil by way of neglect. The judge had no fear of God nor respect for man and was pestered by a widow to get justice for herself. The widow is persistent in light of this corrupt judge who, despite his disregard for God and man, has a certain fear of her. However, it's a selfish concern: "she will wear me out by her continual coming." Then Jesus says that God will vindicate his elect, that is, answer them speedily, just to shut them up like the widow. An interesting slant on the nature of God and prayer, of how we can put him on the defensive.

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time. This Sunday is the last "ordinary" one of the year, next week being Christ the King followed by Advent. Even before today you could feel the liturgical year growing old and in need of renewal which lies just over the horizon. Today's Gospel (Mk 13.24-31) appropriately touches upon this theme. "And then he will send out the angels and gather (*episunago*) his elect." Note two prepositions prefixed to the verb: *epi* (upon) and *sun* (with), an intensification of this gathering process. We could translate the verb as something akin to "gathering together those to those who are already gathered." I.e., an addition to an assembly which has been summoned, of bringing home those who were absent. Almost as though the angels (doing the *episunago*) are to get the elect and bring them to their company. The elect or those about to be gathered are drawn from "the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." *Akros* is the word for "ends" or the extreme point of anything. It is applied to both earth and heaven or the horizon points where they meet, the place where the "four winds" originate...from the traditional four corners of the earth. We could say that these two "ends" (which have always been joined) separate or loosen, thereby giving birth to a new reality that emerges from them. Clearly much of this Gospel's theme spills over into Revelation such as "The sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place" [6.14]. The verb *apochorizomai* is used for "remove" signifying a separation.

Presentation of the Virgin Mary. "And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside (*exo*) they sent to him and called him" [Mk 3.31]. "Outside" probably refers to a house in which Jesus was sitting. The next verse follows with "And a crowd was sitting about him." I.e., the crowd was inside (the house). Usually in the Gospels being "outside" applies to the crowd with Jesus' intimates being inside, but the situation is reversed here. Those who were sitting about Jesus (inside) are called "my brother and sister and mother" [vs. 35], an interesting observation in light of his real mother and brothers located "outside."

Certainly a good theme to keep in mind during these days preceding the liturgical year's renewal (Advent) is Jesus' reference to Noah (Mt 24.36-44). We can go back a bit or before Noah actually built the ark and see what prompted God to have him do it. The key verse is "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continuously" [Gen 6.5]. A loaded verse, to be sure. A parallel to these words may be found in vs. 3: "My spirit shall not abide in man forever." Vs. 5 has a play on words, three of which are similar sounding: saw (*yare*^), great (*rabah*) and wickedness (*rahath*)...almost as if to intensify human evil. This intensification is carried over by the phrase "in

the earth" (*'erets*) which may imply contrasting this term with the frequently noted *'adamah*.

Sunday of Christ the King. The first reading (Dan 7.13-14). "I saw in the night visions." An intriguing statement which parallels the beginning of this chapter (vs. 2), "I saw in my vision by night." Just these statements alone convey a deep sense of mystery and wonder. Because Daniel had such visions at night, they remained concealed from the sight of everyone else. Compare with the Gospel which takes place right out in the open, that is, Jesus before Pilate (Jn 18.33-37). Although it was broad daylight with throngs of hostile people about him, it was a night deeper and darker than any of Daniel's. "But my kingship is not from the world" [vs. 36]. The Greek text lacks "world" and has instead the adverb *enteuthen* which alternately means "here," "from this side." The latter definition conveys a deeper meaning and not readily perceptible to common view. Certainly the situation in which Jesus uttered it was much more than any common imaginable.

An example of imagination (*yetser*): in the sense of a thought. "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you" [Is 26.3]. This term connotes something fabricated; idol is another meaning of *yetser*: "What profit is an idol when its make has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies" [Hab 2.18]?

In the verse at hand, *yetser* is bound up with two other faculties:

1) thoughts (*machshavah*): alternately, "counsel," "purpose." "The thoughts of the righteous are just; the counsels of the wicked are treacherous" [Prov 12.5].

2) heart (*lev*): the seat of life and center of sense, affections and emotions. Note the sequence in vs. 5: imagination, thoughts and heart. The first two are more intellectual whereas the last pertains more fully to that which constitutes a human being.

Sometimes the English adverb "continually" in Hebrew reads literally "all the day" which intimates the celebration of the Sabbath during the first evening.

There's a human quality we admire which may fall under the term "poise." It includes a certain equilibrium and composure as well as gravity (as in the famous Roman virtue, *gravitas*). Indeed, anyone who has practiced the Christian life of prayer over an extended period of time embodies poise. The neat thing about poise is its direct association with spirituality in the sense that you usually don't hear the term bantered around. Certainly you don't find the word in earlier Christian texts, but the reality is there. In On Humility (**Rule** of St. Benedict) there's a list of twelve degrees concerning this virtue. At the end, Benedict makes a comment about humility which follows as "Having therefore ascended all these degrees of humility, the monk will presently arrive at that love of God, which being perfect, casts out fear [1 Jn 4:18]. In virtue of this love all things which at first he observed not without fear, he will now begin to keep without any effort, and as it were, naturally by force of habit, no longer from the fear of hell, but from the love of Christ, from the very habit of good and the pleasure in virtue." The key words related to poise are "naturally by force of habit" which reads in Latin as *naturaliter ex consuetudine*. More specifically, the inclusive term *consuetudo* embraces familiarity, social intercourse and usage (in the sense of something natural and not artificial). It's interesting to compare *consuetudo* with "the monk will presently arrive." The Latin has *mox* for "presently" which connotes something akin to soon afterwards...not immediately but pretty close to it. I.e., first comes *mox* followed by *consuetudo*, both of which depend upon Benedict's insights into the virtue of humility.

This week between Christ the King and the First Sunday of Advent is a kind of octave of the "last days." We've been reading at Mass from Daniel; the Gospels deal with Christ's coming and being prepared for it as well as the various signs. Then you hit upon Advent proper which automatically goes to the beginning of things yet is marked by similar "last day" exhortations. Kind of interesting, the way the end and beginning flow into each other seamlessly.

Today's Gospel (Lk 21.25-8; 36-8) is truly a "last day" excerpt, for the next chapter introduces the Last Supper. While the Gospel employs images of natural elements being shaken up, it's interesting to look at the human response, a similar shaking up. Here are several phrases which capture this:

- "Distress (*sunoche*) of nations." Literally, a holding-together and thus by implication, a narrowing

down or constriction.

-“In perplexity.” *Aporia*...the only time this term is used in the New Testament. *Aporia* is a key concept with Socrates. In fact, it defines his whole approach to induce ignorance among those people with whom he is speaking. Such ignorance is of the positive kind, that we really don't know (but think we do) much about the world and our surroundings. Such *aporia* leads to knowledge-as-recollection or anamnesis.

-“Men fainting” (with fear and foreboding). *Apopsucho*...another one-time occurrence of a word in the New Testament, this one being quite descriptive. Literally it means “from-to breathe out” or the *psuche* to expire.

In contrast to these troublesome things Christ puts it positively:

-“Look up.” *Anakupto*...in the sense of lifting one's whole body up. “And immediately she was made straight, and she praised God” [Lk 13.11].

-“Raise your heads.” *Epaïro*...akin to *anakupto*. “Lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest” [Jn 4.35].

The reason for these two “raisings” are because “redemption is drawing near.” Not that it is present but approaching. *Apolutrosis* is the term for redemption. The verb *luo* is at the heart of its meaning, that is, “to loosen.” Such loosening is heightened by the preposition *apo*, “from,” and signified a more thorough process of dissolving. Such dissolving was already noted in terms of the sun, moon, stars and so forth having signs as well as the response by people to them.

This Gospel excerpt passes over the parable of the fig tree (Lk 29.35) with the exhortation, “Watch at all times;” the verb is *agrupno* implies being wakeful as opposed to being listless. “Times:” *kairos* is used and signifies something more akin to “occasions.” The “escape” Jesus wants his listeners to have concerning the events to happen is akin to the remarks above concerning *luo* or “loosening.” Perhaps such “loosening/escape” is intimated by Jesus in vs. 37 where he taught by day in the temple and at night went the “mount called Olivet.”

The local paper recently had a nice article about Advent as a time of waiting. What really stood out was the writer's observation, “Only Zen masters are the ones left who know how to wait.”

December 7. The Gospel (Lk 3.1-6) for the Second Sunday of Advent has the familiar quote from Is 40.3-5 (actually the bulk of it comprises this excerpt). Three quick observations concerning this passage:

-“Voice crying” or *qol qore'*; two different words related to speaking which rhyme here, intentionally so. It begins with vs. 3, “A voice cries.” Such a voice is anonymous as with vs. 6 directed to Jeremiah which similarly reads, “A voice says, ‘Cry!’”

-“Desert” or *midbar*. This noun is derived from the verbal root *davar*, “to speak.” Almost could call the desert a “place of speaking” which ties in neatly with John the Baptist who resided there.

-“Prepare” or *panah* which connotes turning or removing. Joined with “way of the Lord,” such preparing can be taken as both a turning in the sense of *metanoia* and a removing of obstacles from this “way.”

December 8. Immaculate Conception. A familiar Gospel (Lk 1.26-38) which will later tie in with Christmas. One observation concerning vs. 35: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.” There are three uses of the preposition *eπi* (upon): 1 & 2 “will come upon you.” Here the verb has the prefix *eπi* followed by the same preposition “upon you.” 3) “Will overshadow you.” *Eπi* is prefixed to the verb. Such overshadowing or “*eπi*-ing” is interesting in that it implies constant presence of the Spirit yet at the same time constant distance much like a cloud overhanging a person. This cloud creates a certain atmosphere which sets Mary apart from other people. It is reminiscent of Ex 10.23, “But all the people of Israel had light where they dwelt.”

Virtually everyone you talk with remarks that Advent is their favorite time of the year, liturgically speaking. There's always fascination with a beginning whether a new (liturgical) year, way of life or even something recently purchased. Then time passes and the experience, person or object matures and finally passes out of existence, requiring renewal. Obviously this leads us back to beginnings. Perfectly valid, for it enables us to

get out of any ruts and move on. At the same time we don't hear much about what lies beyond this concept of a beginning. After all, it's only the seashore compared with the open ocean even though you wonder if there's anything further beyond this starting point. For example, take a discipline such as mathematics which moves on to highly complex theories yet has its roots in the usual courses of grammar and high schools. The atmosphere of advanced mathematics (as with any other disciplines) is quite rarified, open only to a handful of people. Now as for highly educated or talented people, they can be stuck with the beginnings of religion or spirituality, a fact having ramifications elsewhere in their lives and social contacts. Of all human endeavors, spirituality is the least understood, underestimated and unappreciated. For this reason, more than anything else it harps on the notion of beginning. When you bring spirituality up, the majority of people of all ranks hearken back to the elemental formation they had as kids and leave it at that. However, spirituality is perhaps the only open-ended human pursuit or one which lacks no end.

Today's Gospel (Mt 21.28-32) deals with two sons and their father who bid them to work in his vineyard. Upon being asked, the first said outrightly, "I will not (go)." Shortly afterwards he repented or *metamelomai*. This verb differs from the common one we associated with repentance, *metanoia*. It connotes a sense of regret and doesn't seem as thorough as *metanoia*. Despite this, this son's outright refusal to obey his father and his equally outright change of mind gets right to the point as we often see in both the Old and New Testaments.

These day around December 21 are very special, Druid-like. It's important to watch with as much care as can be mustered the sun's passage from dawn to dusk, the two extreme points of the southwestern horizon. Not only that, but to watch the sun's path during the day upon familiar sights and objects. Everything is very long, shadow-wise, that is. Store it up in your mind and do the same on the longest day of the year, June 21. This gesture gives you a sense of having reached two turning points, a descent and an ascent, which the Church took over and applied to the birth of John the Baptist in June with that of Christ on Christmas.

St. John Chrysostom has a pertinent observation concerning the birth of John the Baptist, herald of Christ. Lk 1.57-66 is the only account of his birth; more precisely, there's a meeting of sorts between John and Jesus in the wombs of their respective mothers (1.44). After John's birth he "grew and became strong in spirit and was in the wilderness until the day of his manifestation to Israel" [1.80]. That's all we have of the considerable time span between infancy and manhood, and the same can be applied to Jesus himself. These long temporal gaps are interesting to keep in mind. It's almost as though they didn't exist or better, existed in a subservient fashion to very brief interactions or events. Despite the obvious divine favor towards John, you can't but help wonder what he did all those years in the desert. Then Jn 1.29 has him suddenly recognize Jesus. Surely there's an unappreciated correlation between the lengthy desert years and this acknowledgment.

As to John's "manifestation," the Greek term is *apodeixis* which connotes a demonstration or proof as in 2 Cor 2.4, "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

Fourth Sunday of Advent and shortest day of the year. Today's Gospel has the familiar meeting between Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary. "For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy" [Lk 1.44]. Mary's greeting "came into (*eis*)" Mary's ears, a fuller penetration demonstrated through this pronoun. "Leaped" or *skirtao*, which pertains to the movement of an unborn child. We find the same verb with a different meaning in the **Septuagint** of Gen 25.22 pertaining to the unborn Jacob and Esau: "The children struggled together within her." Also note Ps 114.4: "The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs."

"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" [Is 1.18]. "Scarlet" is interesting in that it also means "worm" due to the color as in Ex 16.20, "Some left part of it until the morning, and it bred worms and became foul." Apart from this, the Isaiah quote speaks of the color of sins as opposed to their essence. I.e., the color changes but not necessarily their substance.

"At the beginning of your supplications a word went forth, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly beloved" [Dan 9.23]. Words to Daniel from the "man Gabriel" [vs. 21]. The Hebrew for 'greatly beloved' is *chamudoth*, noun for 'desires.' This is a favorite theme of the Cistercian Fathers which they translate as "man

of desires” and neatly sums up the spirit of their Order. The verbal root *chamad* implies more...pleasant, precious, comely as well as something coveted. “I sat down under his shadow with great delight” [Sg 2.3] or better, “I delighted and sat down.”

St Stephen, Martyr. Quite interesting how the Church has put this feast right after Christ's birth. The reasons are well known, that is, to indicate the role of martyrdom or witness. Today's feast comes shortly after the Church's birth at Pentecost, so from this vantage point it makes sense to follow immediately the physical birth of Jesus Christ. Stephen's vision of “Jesus standing at the right hand of God” [Acts 8.55] is reminiscent of Jacob's dream of the ladder reaching from earth to heaven: “And behold, the Lord stood above it” [Gen 28.13]. The Lord's words to Jacob concern his descendants spreading to the four corners of the earth, a kind of prelude to the Church's expansion right after Stephen is stoned to death. At his execution Saul or the soon-to-be St. Paul is present (vs. 59). He too had a vision not unlike Stephen: “suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him” [Acts 9.3]. Although it's unrecorded, Paul must have mused on the parallel between his experience and that of Stephen.

St. John the Evangelist. The second feast (St. Stephen being the first) after Christmas which makes a quantitative leap from Christ's birth to the Church's beginnings or birth. The Gospel for today Gospel has John's resurrection account which seems out of place so close to Christmas. Then again the Evangelists as well as later Church writers weren't concerned about temporal succession as much as we are today. Nevertheless, it leaves those mysterious years from the last mention of Jesus as 12 years old until his appearance at the Jordan River to be baptized...i.e., some 18-20 years later. Certainly much speculation has and is being done about that unknown period. One interesting slant...what did the Holy Family do with the gold given them by the Magi?

Presumably Pope Paul VI changed the name of the current feast on January 1<sup>st</sup> from that of the Circumcision to the Mother of God. Perhaps at the time he and others felt the Circumcision was a bit too gross, but the readings for today's feast lose the significance of the Christmas Octave. Reason is that on the eighth day Jewish male babies were circumcised. More importantly, they were given their name on that day. It's interesting to keep in mind that from the child's birth—obviously thinking of Jesus Christ—he remained nameless for a full week's time. Parallel this with the six days of creation where God named each one.

Epiphany Sunday. In many countries this feast is just as important than Christmas or the physical birth of Jesus Christ and can be taken as the first step of spiritualization of this historical person. The tendency to see more into the person of Jesus than his physicality characterized quite a lot of Christianity right from the beginning. Although the Gospel accounts are the earliest in our possession, they are almost superceded by St. Paul's epistles where we get a completely different picture of Jesus Christ. If someone from another planet landed on earth and heard the Church's liturgy, good chance the first observation this creature would make is that Paul is the founder of Christianity.

Of all the year's holidays, New Year's Day bites the dust almost at once. Maybe the relative proximity to Christmas has something to do with it. Furthermore, snow and ice begin to lose their charm. At the same time we've just left behind the shortest day of the season (December 21) and have begun the uphill climb to brighter days. The Church's liturgical calendar, especially the Cistercian one, perhaps is at its best in January. Of all months, this one is chock-a-block full with feasts...not simply those of more general celebration but 'lesser' ones such as Sts. Gregory of Nyssa, Sts. Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, Sts. Placid and Maur, Sts. Robert, Alberic and Stephen (founders of the Cistercian Order), St. Anthony (founder of monasticism) plus others which I can't think of right now. It's a veritable feast if you take the time to look more closely.

In a few days time (this coming Sunday) we have the Baptism of the Lord. Temporally speaking, there's a huge leap from the previous Sunday or Epiphany when Christ was a child. Scripture compresses time and doesn't give a second thought about it. This tendency was common in the ancient world when dealing with major events and persons and is foreign to us historically minded moderns. Maybe that's why we tend to project all sorts of ideas into lengthy, unrecorded time periods which cover such things as Christ's youth and early manhood. Also the Baptism brings to a close Christmas Season proper; as far as society goes, it ended

Christmas day. Still the Church lingers on with it until February 2, the Presentation.

Baptist of the Lord. The final 'installment' of the Christmas season, this one taking place at the beginning of Christ's ministry. It's yet another example of how the early Church perceived the meaning of Jesus, having passed over the bulk of his life. On the other hand, we moderns would want to know as much as possible of this time. Chapter Two of Luke's Gospel closed with the parents of Jesus having lost him when he was 12 years old. Then we have the largest quantitative leap from that incident to the baptism. Something similar happens with regard to St. Paul. Rarely if ever does he speak of the historical Jesus Christ whom never he had met except the road to Damascus incident. As for Luke's Gospel, after the baptism we have Jesus' genealogy (3.23-8) beginning with his father and going back to 'the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.'

As for the descent of the Holy Spirit, it came in 'bodily form (*somatiko eidei*) as a dove' [Acts 3.22]. Compare with 'Tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit' [2.3-4].

'And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed' [Gen 2.8]. Note the play on words in the Hebrew text: 'put' (*yasam*) and 'there' (*sham*), the two being virtually one. This verse intimates that the 'man' who was fashioned at an earlier part kind of remained on the divine shelf awaiting the formation of Eden. Once this garden had been established, he was plunked down in it. Just another neat way the Bible has of expressing things which aren't to be taken literally. However, a closer read of the text shows much, much more than whether the text is allegorical, a fable or meant to be taken verbatim or as absolute truth.

Since we've just past the Baptism of the Lord last Sunday, we are now back in Ordinary Time which indeed is ordinary. Our lives seem to revert back to their normal old selves different, for example, from Christmas or other special times. During them the ordinariness of life is lifted up and transformed, almost wishing that we didn't have to return 'back there.' Yet back there we invariably go. Nevertheless, enough exposure to the overwhelmingly large segment of Ordinary Time (despite it being broken up several times throughout a year) points to the fact that we aren't permanent dwellers on the earth.

A common denominator to spirituality is one of distress. If you look at Scripture so much of it revolves around the innate poverty of our human condition and the need for some kind of outside, non-human intervention. Should this be how we really are the question is how to cultivate it, make it constant in our lives. This doesn't mean walking about in a doom and gloom mode, far from it. Such a posture is alien and admittedly one which many attribute to religious people. In brief, distress is the *way-par excellence*—where God meets us. The two are virtually inseparable. A lot of stuff has been written on distress yet the connection...even identification...with God doesn't seem to have been sufficiently explored. Most language is posited in either devotional or psychological images which doesn't quite hit the mark.

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Jn 2.1-11) traditionally follows Christ's baptism, a kind of final feast related to the Christmas season. Although we're in Ordinary Time, the Presentation on 2 February brings it to a formal close. 'My hour has not yet come' [vs. 4]. This is the first of several such references in John, the others being 7.30, 8.20, 12.23 & 27 which refer to Christ's death. The quote at hand takes place right at the beginning of John and just after Jesus had chosen his twelve disciples. It's interesting that the last third of chapter one has this choosing of the disciples who are present with Jesus at the wedding (2.2) or 'on the third day' [2.1]. In other words, these men were invited almost immediately after their call.

You don't hear much about the doctrine of Purgatory nowadays, something that faded away after the Second Vatican Council. At the same time if you're serious about practicing the Christian contemplative life, you realize that there's a constant struggle...indeed battle...between the evil in yourself and the divine image in which you were made. You go along practicing the virtues well and living in accord with the Church's teachings. After some time you realize the distance between yourself and God, that it can never be bridged. This is an obvious point but can become glossed over so much that the distinction no longer exists. Then again, doing the virtuous thing with God in mind makes God even further away than you imagined. Such a

paradox of divine closeness/distance is typical of the spiritual life but something else when you have to deal with it. One of the first thoughts that pop into your mind is the continuous need for cleansing or purging which Purgatory traditionally represented. Although you can't 'prove' it, you feel that such cleansing doesn't stop in this physical life but continues after death. In sum, you can't grasp this simply yet glaring reality unless you take up the struggle; the usual points of reference in society can't comprehend this. It doesn't create discouragement nor despair; just coming to grips with things-as-they-are.

Recently a scholar noted how little time there is to do so much work, a common complaint among people who enjoy their work which is certainly better than being bored. Since there really is a lot of stuff out there waiting to be done and our life span is so short, you can be overwhelmed at the prospect of doing anything at all. For example, a kind of paralysis hits you when walking into a bookstore. All those fine books waiting to be read which we know in reality we'll never get to. And so this scholar recommended that following your nose is the best approach. That is to say, do what you're doing and be consistent about it. This apparently narrow band of work is fulfilling in and by itself though from the outside it appears restricting. If you persevere with it, you will find that it soon mysteriously expands outwards. You then find yourself part and parcel of the whole human enterprise of research. The expression 'just do it'—so banal at first glance—then makes sense.

'Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote (*katav*) upon a scroll (*migilath-sepher*) at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words (*dever*, singular) of the Lord which he had spoken (*davar*) of him' [Jer 36.4]. This relatively simple sentence contains three words which pertain to writing:

- 1) *katav*: literally means 'to cut' and is often used with reference to making or cutting a covenant.
- 2) *migilath-sepher*: literally 'scroll writing.' *Sepher* means 'to inscribe' as upon a tablet.
- 3) *dever*: the common term for 'word' which is derived from *davar* ('to speak).

A bit later in chapter 36 is a striking image, one that stays with you due to the sinister atmosphere it contains: 'It was the ninth month, and the king was sitting in the winter house and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him. As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a penknife and throw them into the fire in the brazier until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier' [Jer 36.22-3].

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel is a mix of the opening words of Luke plus 4.14-21. Several points to note, the first three being from chapter one:

- Eyewitnesses (*autoptes*, singular): the only use of this term in the New Testament.
- Ministers (*huperetes*, singular): literally an under-rower or one who serves with his hands.
- Truth (*asphaleia*): literally, that which is firm and stable...not shaken.

The next part of today's Gospel is from chapter fourteen where Christ comes to the synagogue at Nazareth and situates himself within the context of Is 61-2, about the Spirit of the Lord being upon him, etc. After having identified himself with the contents of this passage, Jesus sat down 'and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.' The word for 'fixed' is *atenizo* which also means 'to stare.' Compare with Stephen as he was being stoned, 'But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God' [Acts 7.55]. 'Gazed' is similarly *atenizo*.

Such attentiveness is also found in today's first reading from Nehemiah 8.3: 'And he (Ezra) read from it...and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.' The verb 'were attentive' is lacking in the Hebrew text which literally reads 'to the book of the law' or to the Torah.

Often lesser known passages or verses from Scripture stand out more in the long run, chiefly due to their unusual character. One such verse comes from Psalm 88, a rather desperate sounding prayer for healing in sickness. The words in mind are vs. 5 (RSV): 'Like one forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave.' Although various Bibles say this passage is 'obscure' in meaning, the Greek and Latin texts have taken over the first part as 'set free among the dead' (*bametyim chaphshy*). Like so many Hebrew verbs, *chaphats* has several meanings, chief among which is a sense of being loosed, prostrate or infirm. This sense jumps out at you from the Hebrew text, an intriguing and even humorous sense to an otherwise forlorn psalm.

A text on prayer in Syriac by Isaac of Nineveh has a neat little section...actually a lot of them...where he uses the word 'conversation' applied to God. The Syriac word is *soad* or *sooda* which alternately translates as 'rug' or 'cushion.' This keeps in line with the Oriental practice of sitting on the floor in a relaxed fashion. Thus the imagery is much richer and reminiscent of Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper.

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel continues after last week's, i.e., Lk 4.21-30, or when Jesus applied the words of Isaiah to himself. Jesus then speaks about a prophet not being welcome in his own country and to back this up, recalls the story of Elijah and the widow of Sidon as well as Naaman the Syrian. Both were foreigners—the latter wasn't especially a savory character—who were cared for by God when Israel neglected him. It's a theme that occurs not infrequently in both the Old and New Testaments; always interesting to see these occasional 'knots' or bends that appear, often to unsettle people. The Gospel concludes with the intriguing remark, 'But passing through (*dierchomai*) the midst of them he went away.' The impression can be something like Jesus having become invisible, but most likely the crowd was so taken up in their anger that it allowed him an easy escape. For another use of this verb, cf. Lk 5.15: 'But so much the more the report went abroad concerning him.'

February 2, Presentation. Three mentions of the word 'Spirit' or *Pneuma* in today's Gospel (Luke, chapter 2) with reference to Simeon: 'and the Holy Spirit was upon him,' 'it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit,' 'inspired by the Spirit.' Another interesting point with regard to Simeon is that 'he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.' I.e., two types of seeing. A bit later (pertaining to Mary) we have 'and a sword will pierce through your own soul also.' The word for 'sword' is *rhomphaia*, of the large, two-handed variety or a Thracian javelin as opposed to a short Roman sword. Most likely this pertains to Mary's presence at Calvary. There in John's Gospel one of the soldiers pierces Christ's side with a spear or lance (*logche*) which more specifically refers to the iron tip of such a weapon.

If you really want to get at the heart of Socrates, go to those oblique references concerning his practice of coming to a halt anywhere he pleases and just being there. For example, take the **Symposium** (175b): "No, no," he said. "Leave him alone. It's none of his habits: every now and then he just goes off like that and stands motionless, wherever he happens to be. I'm sure he'll come in very soon, so don't disturb him; let him be."

The interesting thing about scriptural readings as you hear them in the liturgy or read in public is that they are condensed and give the outline of a spiritual message. Such is the nature of such texts, for they are left up to the hearer to decipher and realize. That's why you need both discussion and explanation, yet the way a lot of modern folks perceive the latter is through the means of devotion. This connotes a kind of surface grazing of the text where other material is somehow added on either sanctioned by the Church or not. So why do so many people feel themselves caught in between that proverbial rock and a hard place?—the rock of scriptural texts and the hard place of devotion? Something is lacking somewhere and needs more exploration. Perhaps the Latin term *habitus* may shed a bit of light, for it means a conditioned way of viewing reality and of doing things in a prescribed fashion. *Habitus* does this indirectly in that it points more (in the case at hand) to the concise nature of the scriptural texts and the devotional approach to them.

Ash Wednesday. Yesterday (Mardi Gras) you could feel the church entering a new space and time not unlike a ship moving from one body of water to another, imperceptible yet real. This is not unlike the word 'season' which is used liturgically for this one plus the other major seasons of Advent, Christmas and Easter. 'Season' is an appropriate term which connotes something more pervasive...along the lines of a scent and taste (seasoning). You really can't grasp a season and say 'This is what it is.' You just smell and taste it in its entirety. Also on Ash Wednesday you get a sense that the Church collectively has died when each person has received his or her ashes. This too is a 'season' which sets the tone of the day.

February 29, Leap Year and First Sunday of Lent. Today traditionally begins the actual Lenten season with the temptation of Christ, Lk 4.1-13. There are two interesting verses where the devil seems to control Jesus. 'And showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.' The Greek for 'moment' is *stigma* which alternately means a sting or mark branded upon the body: 'For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus' [Gal 6.17]. The second verse of interest pertains to this verse as well as two others where the devil seems to be

guiding Jesus or leading him around: 'And the devil took him up,' 'and he too him to Jerusalem' and 'he set him on the pinnacle of the temple.' These incidents have greater power in the narrative by the Gospel's closing verse, 'he departed from him until an opportune time.' That is to say, the *kairos* (used here) is an occasion made all the more dramatic by the way the devil was guiding Jesus about in order to tempt him.

'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you' [Mt 7.7]. Sometimes a verse from the Gospel (i.e., today's) strikes you as did this one. Jesus doesn't say what will be given, found nor opened, hence the 'it.' Same applies to the person supposedly being petitioned, that is, God. All verbs are passive except 'you will find.' Perhaps the act of seeking is the most active of the verbs here which results in you, the person doing the seeking, actually engaged in the finding. Even this active gesture has no specific object.

'You are people peculiarly his own' [Dt 26.18]. Thus reads the **New American Bible's** translation for today's first reading at Mass. The **RSV** has, 'people for his own possession' which sounds more in tune with the original sense. 'Peculiarly' has a note of oddness about it, not quite in synch with the text. The Hebrew word is *segulah* (a noun) which connotes property in the sense of wealth. For another reference, cf. Ex 19.5: 'You shall be my own possession among all peoples.'

Second Sunday of Lent. Typically, this Sunday has a Gospel on the Transfiguration (Lk 9.28-36) designed to encourage those starting out on the Lenten pilgrimage. This time around it was prefaced, as it were, by the first reading which recounts a covenant God makes with Abraham (Gen 15.7-21). First note the 'deep sleep' (*tardemah*) which fell upon Abraham, the same word used in Gen 2.21: 'So the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.' Cf. remarks there regarding the verbal root *radam* (to sleep or to snore heavily). Both verses use the verb *naphal* (to fall). In both cases the **LXX** has for *tardemah* the Greek word *ekstasis* which can translate as 'ecstasy.' Compare *tardemah* with the disciples (vs. 32), 'Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep (*bebaremenoï hupno*).'

Also with regards to Abraham, 'a dread and great darkness fell upon him.' *Chashekh* is the word for darkness, usually in the negative sense as in Is 8.22: 'And they will look to the earth but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish.' In the verse at hand, this term can apply to God's presence as in Dt 5.23: 'And when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness.'

The Syriac text of Gregory Barhebraeus deals with counsels for monks and hermits. One of the disciples asked the master, 'How do you feel about the night?', quite modern and to the point in its tone. The master replied, 'It gives joy when appearing but pain when leaving.' A little later on someone else observes about sleep: 'When you are in doubt about death, don't go to sleep. When uncertain about the resurrection don't wake up. As you sleep, so you will die, and as you wake up after sleep, so you will rise up after your death.'

A Syriac commentary on the Book of Genesis starts off with an observation of that book's opening words, 'Here is what 'in the beginning' signifies; that by which heaven and earth came into existence is by a small breath.' The word for 'breath' here is *hopha* which can mean a puff of air, usually small. Interesting to consider the emergence of the natural world by such a small though vital step compared with the violent Big Bang of contemporary physics.

'They went each to his own house.' Concluding words of today's Gospel (Jn 8.53) after a confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. Such simple yet poignant words intimate frustration yet a desire to get back at Jesus sometime in the future...not entirely unlike the Devil, 'And when the Devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time' [Lk 4.13].

Palm Sunday. The Greek word for palm is *phoinix* from which is derived the mythical bird, phoenix, possibly because of the long, slender leaves which resemble a bird's feathers. There comes to mind something more like an emu or ostrich, a large creature which looks rather formidable and threatening. Because a phoenix died in the fire once every 500 years and thus came to birth, it's interesting to see how this image applies to today's

feast. 'They took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him crying, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' [Jn 12.13]! Perhaps the association of *phoinix*/phoenix one week before the Resurrection has some significance by way of foretelling this event.

Third Sunday of Easter. Today's Gospel (Jn 21.1-19) has Jesus meeting the disciples on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias. Note two ways of presenting his 'revelation':

1) 'After this Jesus revealed himself' [vs. 1].

2) 'This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples' [vs. 14]. Both use the verb *phaneroo* in the sense of manifestation and not to be confused with *apokalupsis* or 'revelation' as in the Book of Revelation which implies more an uncovering. Vs. 1 has Jesus revealing himself whereas vs. 14 puts it in the passive mode, 'was revealed.'

The Hebrew verb *galah* fundamentally means 'to be naked,' 'to reveal.' Its alternate meaning is 'to be carried away' as in exile; the noun 'exile' is derived from *galah*. This is interesting in that when the Israelites had been sent into exile, God spoke to them in ways that would never have been possible otherwise. For example, the prophet Ezekiel.

'Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints' [116.15]. The Hebrew word is *yaqar* which connotes a sense of being dear as well as splendid. *Yaqar* fundamentally means 'to be heavy' and thus bears a certain kinship with *kavad*, the verbal root of *kavod* or 'glory.'

This brief excerpt from Cuthbet's **Life of Bede the Venerable** gives an intimation when speaking to a young monk on his death bed: 'It seemed to us, however, that he knew very well that his end was near, and so he spent the whole night giving thanks to God...I have a few treasures in my private chest, some pepper, napkins and a little incense. Run quickly and bring the priests of our monastery, and I will distribute among them these little presents that God has given me...Hold my head in your hands, for I really enjoy sitting opposite the holy place where I used to pray; I can call upon my Father as I sit here. And so Bede, as he lay upon the floor of his cell sang, 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.'

Pentecost Sunday or the completion of the Lenten-Easter cycle—forty days plus fifty day. Now we move into Ordinary Time, liturgically speaking. This phrase is indicative that what we have just undergone was 'not ordinary' but of a different order than our normal perceptions of time (I might add 'space'). The Gospel at Vigils or the first hour of the Divine Office had the brief Gospel reading of Jn 7.37-39: 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water' [vs. 38]. This is a quote hearkening back to 4.14 and has two sources: 1) Is 58.11, 'And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire with good things and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters fail not.' 2) Prov 18.4, 'The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream.' Even though it would be interesting to look at these words in some detail, suffice it to say for now that all these verses concern the Holy Spirit as being within a person. Now consider the real context for today's Mass, Acts of the Apostles. It recounts the external descent of the Spirit upon the Apostles, for although they had accompanied Jesus and witnessed many Spirit-related events and discourses by him, something was lacking. Finally 'they were all filled with the Holy Spirit' [2.4]...in other words, filled internally from an external source. It seems that even though people had received the Holy Spirit in various forms, an outer form was required in order to give body (the Church) to the Spirit's true manifestation. This is born out by the Gospel at Vigils, 'For as yet the Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified.'

'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil' [Gen 3.5]. Words by the serpent to the woman concerning the tree in the midst of the garden. The Hebrew for 'God' is *Elohyim* which literally means the plural yet can apply to the singular. The **Septuagint** (Greek translation) has *Theos* for 'God' and *theoi* or the plural, 'gods.' With this in mind, perhaps the serpent had in mind something like the woman (and through her, the man) setting herself up as a god(s) in imitation of the singular God...a polytheistic stance as opposed to a monotheistic one.

Today's Gospel (Mt 8.5-13) recounts the centurion approaching Jesus to heal his servant (*pais*). The term

fundamentally means 'child' but can have this alternate meaning; *doulos* is the more common term for 'servant' and lacks a sense of endearment. Given our understanding of ancient times and the lowly condition of this class, it's all the more unusual that the centurion goes out of his way. Perhaps the servant was of particular value to him, hence the solicitude. However, something deeper may be at work here than first imagined. We have a dialogue about Jesus offering to come to the centurion's house to which the latter states his unworthiness. Perhaps the real point of the story is when the centurion recounts his command over soldiers. He can stay to them with impunity, 'come,' 'go' and 'do this.' Upon hearing such words, Jesus marvels at the child-like unconscious manner by which the centurion tells Jesus how he comports himself with regards to those under his command. Certainly a different approach compared with so many others who enjoy lording their authority over subordinates. Such a child-like expression may be this Gospel excerpt's real intent. Jesus' marveling parallels the centurion's detachment which doesn't take human authority that seriously, or just serious enough to produce the required results.

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Lk 9.51-62) speak of Jesus' resoluteness in ascending to Jerusalem in order 'to be received up' [vs. 51]. These words are a noun in Greek (*analempsis*), literally, 'taking up,' 'ascension'...the only use of this term in the New Testament and most likely referring to Jesus' impending death. The bulk of the text is full of upward movement (towards Jerusalem), with some rather harsh instances: the Samaritans who didn't receive Jesus, the disciples wanting to rain down fire upon them, Jesus rebuking the disciples and the man who approached him en route who wanted to bid his family farewell first but was rejected. The Gospel finally concludes with Jesus saying that 'no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God' [vs. 62]. That is to say, not fit for the *analempsis*. Not untypically for Jews, Jesus and his followers probably recited or sang the 'Songs of Ascents' or those Psalms (120-134) as they got closer to their goal. This double-edged meaning of *analempsis* is reminiscent of a reading during yesterday's Vespers (first for Sunday, 2 Cor 12.1-10). Clearly it's different but has connotations of violence in both, physically as well as spiritually. That reading was Paul's account of having been 'caught up (*harpazo*) into the third heaven.' The term means being taken away by violent force. For a startling demonstration, cf. Acts 23.10: '...the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks.' The interesting point about the Vesper reading is that Paul speaks of himself as 'a man,' 'this man.' I.e., both phrases intimate a distinction between such a 'man' and Paul while clearly referring to the same person. Paul speaks of this experience as having happened 'fourteen years ago' [vs. 2]; despite the time lapse and all the tumult he had undergone, his *harpazo* was clearer than all other events. It seems that once a person experiences a *harpazo*, there comes to clear realization that the 'man' who had undergone it is distinguished...not separated...from the person giving an account about it. Not entirely unlike the distinction between body and soul, with the latter being subjected to this *harpazo*.

The Syriac author Sahdona has an interesting sentence after the model of Hebrews 11 which speaks of exemplars of faith) where he speaks of the 'souls of the perfect who do not suffer from space nor time.' These exemplars are Abraham, Lot, Joseph and Moses whom Sahdona presents as immune to their surroundings.

'The Lord the God of hosts, the Lord is his name' [Hos 12.5]. A regularly occurring sentence in the Bible, nothing special at first sight. The Hebrew word *zeker* means 'name,' a rare use, which usually translates as 'memorial' and derived from a verbal root meaning 'to remember.' Another derivative is 'male' (*zakar*) implying that a male descendant continues the memory of one's family and heritage. It seems the only other two uses of *zeker*-as-name are Ps 30.4 ('Give thanks to his holy name') and 97.12 ('and give thanks to his holy name'). With *zakar*-as-male in mind, that is, the sense of transmission of one's lineage and memory, we could say that giving thanks to God's 'name' applies to the heritage we've received as well as awareness of the responsibility for passing it on to future generations.

To loll: to sit, lie or stand in a lazy, relaxed way. Such is the dictionary definition. The fine (almost lost) art of lolling can be applied to contemplation because it suggests an inner attitude or both relaxation and attentiveness. When you think of lolling, there doesn't come to mind a disciplined way of doing prayer but a more inclusive attention to your surroundings.

Plato's **Phaedo** gets to the heart of Socrates, how he deals with death, just like the passion narratives of the Gospels get to the heart of Jesus. On the other hand, the **Phaedrus** touches upon the soul. Although this topic runs throughout the **Dialogues**, here it gets more specific treatment. Despite all the eloquence, the soul remains a vague concept, deliberately so. One Greek word in the **Phaedo** that stands out as an adjective is the verb *kosmeo* and its derivatives. The same applies to Gregory of Nyssa as in his Song Commentary. *Kosmeo* (from which cosmetics and cosmos are derived) applies to an order or proper disposing as well as embellishment. There comes to mind the idea of preening, pretty much like a cat which never tires of setting in order and embellishing her coat of fur.

Awareness of our physicality comes about when we undergo suspension of mental processes, one way of describing contemplative prayer. It includes appreciating how being caught up in emotions (which spring directly from them) impacts the quality of life. Arms, legs, lungs and the heart continue without our interference. They are so basic that we remain unaware of their actions. At the same time we have an intuition that they have to 'come from somewhere' or rest upon some kind of support just over the horizon, invisible to our awareness. What appears at first as a dualism isn't really a dualism in the traditional meaning of the word. Rather, bodily limbs and organs—actually this is what we'd call 'life'—are both so primitive and sophisticated that they give rise to two equally primitive and sophisticated modes of reflecting upon them. Roughly this could be put as hedonism and using our physical nature as an analogy for something else...invariably something 'higher.' The perception of physicality, rather, in all its vegetative, unreflective glory takes place prior to going down either road. By reason of its immediacy, physicality seems the most closely aligned 'stuff' there is to its invisible transcendent base. Since this base always lies outside our grasp, the best way to proximate it is by allying ourselves with our physicality. To the untrained eye this is worse than either the split between hedonism and that which is noble.

Appreciation of our physicality lies in the fact that it's an immediate perception minus thoughts and emotions. The attention required for this is so easy that it turns out to be the most demanding enterprise around. We could term this attention as 'real religion' in the literal sense of *re-ligo*, of binding-back-to-the-source, a uniting of physical reality with its opposite or source. The two (which are quite opposite to an uninitiated eye) turn out to be in harmony. They've always been in harmony or until our thoughts and emotions step in to become mediators. Of course, life today demands such mediation, but it's so pervasive. Maybe a simplification of how we live is helpful; even a withdrawal or retirement from some of its demands is necessary. Here is an opportunity for real 'religious' work as just defined.

St. Mary Magdalene. This is one of those delightful feasts the Church presents due to its rarity. That is to say, most liturgical commemorations are serious with a tinge of duty and suffering hovering in the background. Today we recall a person whom we know as in love with Jesus Christ and not noted for anything extraordinary: no written works nor accomplishments. The same can be said of Sts. Joachim and Ann (26<sup>th</sup>) and Martha (29<sup>th</sup>). Interesting how the second half of July crowds these folks in, kind of in tune with the idea of vacation time. Today you can relax with Mary Magdalene and not gear yourself up to imitate some heroic deed. A prime indicator is the first reading from the Song of Songs where the bride goes around the city in search of her beloved. The bride does find her spouse 'scarcely had I passed them' [3.4]. Compare with the Gospel when Mary encounters the two angels about Jesus (cf. Jn 20.13). The next verse has Jesus present, almost as though he had crept up behind her and the two angels while they were conversing.

Summer is vacation time, 'vacation' being derived from the Latin verb *vacare*, 'to be empty, to be free from.' In some ways another Latin word (*otium*) is better which means 'leisure, repose.' It's fuller and connotes being disposed to go after pursuits which you normally don't have time for. *Otium* doesn't have that modern connotation of rest from work which in our society can be just as hectic as work. *Otium* gives space for pursuing what might come under the heading of the 'higher things' in life, those which lie at the root of culture and religion. In fact, during the medieval period *otium* applied to monastic *lectio divina* or the slow, meditative reading of scripture. It's quite distinct from study as we commonly know it in that combination of otium/lectio begin on the discursive level and pass to a repose in God's presence. This is quite an art form, discipline with which we aren't familiar, and may be characterized as a mode of life which the Church fostered right from the beginning and has been gaining interest in modern times.

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. The first reading (Gen 18.22-33) has Abraham interceding with the Lord over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. He skillfully brings the Lord down to spare the cities for ten righteous persons. At the end of this unparalleled bargaining session 'the Lord went his way...and Abraham returned to his place.' That is to say, the Lord returned to heaven ('I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me,' vs. 21) and Abraham to his tent by the oaks of Mamre (vs. 1). The second reading (Lk 11.1-13) recounts a similar situation though not as dramatic with the fate of two cities on the line. After Jesus gives the essence of the Our Father, he speaks of a man who importunes a friend to give him three loaves of bread. The time is night: 'my children are with me in bed' [vs. 7]. Obviously the man was aware of the fact. Three loaves is a minor request which makes rousing his friend all the more brazen if not out of place. Vs. 8 has for 'importunity' the Greek *anaidia* or shameless persistence which is the only instance of this word in the New Testament. *Anaidia* doesn't apply strictly to Abraham despite the fact that he was dealing with the Lord, yet it can be inserted backwards, so to speak, from the Gospel text. All this in light as to the Our Father which as already noted immediately precedes the parable.

Sts. Joachim and Ann, a feast day not unlike last Thursday, Mary Magdalene, as well as this coming Thursday, Martha. These parents of the Virgin Mary are living links to the Old Testament heritage. It's unknown whether they had met Jesus or at least knew of him as a baby or young man. Regardless, they (like Mary Magdalene and Martha) stand at the threshold of the two Testaments and aren't noted for any 'virtuous' activity we normally associate with saints which the Church commemorates. They were all friends of Jesus, just being with him, and were unlike the Apostles who were entrusted with a mission. Such relatively rare feast days are times when we can relax and be in the presence of such folks without worrying about anything else.

First day of August and 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Lk 12.13-21) concerns the rich man who built larger barns to hold his grain, but that night God demanded an account of his soul. 'So is he who lays up for himself and is not rich toward God' [vs. 21]. The verb 'lay up' or *thesaurizo* connotes putting away in a treasury. It doesn't mean that you've achieved a given amount of wealth at once but are in the process of attaining your goal. 'Rich' or *ploutos* is the fruit of such careful work. In the verse at hand, *ploutos* is intended to concern God. The preposition *eis* or 'into' suggests a fuller richness, as though a person were to be rich 'into' God.'

Today is also the dedication, actually consecration, of a nearby monastic church. It has twelve lighted candles on the four walls, quite impressive in that they are lit only on this day. It's quite rare for a church to be consecrated and involves a lengthy, rare ceremony performed by the bishop. So rare that you have to dig for the rituals and other related rites. Such a spot is unique to that location alone, nowhere else. You could say it's so localized that even the ground or property outside the church's perimeters aren't included. The atmosphere borders on the magical, especially during First Vespers when two large scrolls of the Latin and Greek alphabets are laid out crosswise in the transept. This supposedly harkens back to Roman times when landowners would mark their property by letters from the alphabet. During that part of the consecration ceremony the crossed alphabets were sprinkled with ashes. Using his crozier, the bishop traced out each letter.

Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Clearly an unusual feast which on one level you haven't a clue about yet on another intuit its essence. The Preface in today's Mass sums it up by saying Mary is a model and prototype of the Church. We've heard that before on different occasions; today Mary is assumed into heaven in corporeal form. The word 'assume' is interesting because it isn't connected with resurrection. Same applies to ascension as with Jesus Christ at the beginning of Acts. Obviously the two biblical models on which the Assumption rests are Enoch ('Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him,' Gen 5.24) and Elijah ('Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven,' 2 Kg 2.11).

Those scholars who base their work in a living faith often spend their countless hours in self-forgetfulness where they don't measure life quantitatively. It's something we all want yet are clueless as to its acquisition. They spend incredible effort into preparing and mastering the particulars which looks fruitless to an outsider. Still, these folks have found a magical doorway into transcendence. On one level each field of interest is

radically different from the other, yet on another level (the one that really counts), they are one and the same. Pondering this called forth an image of a globe...round, hard and slippery. Not entirely like each of our lives which seems meaningless and wasted. Then you either see or hear a musician or athlete (unfortunately the most common examples) and wish you could emulate him or her. 'Unfortunately' because that person often re-enforces our mediocrity rather than lifts us from it. So if we're stuck with such an impenetrable globe, how do we find the right place to drill, so to speak? Maybe appreciating one's innate talents is a starter though not necessarily so. A big part is to examine the person's (i.e., whom you admire) passion and to see if that intense desire can translate into your own life. This hook-up of talent and passion is a delicate thing and requires a long apprenticeship. Not only that, it requires being on your own to verify if you have that passion and can continue with it minus external support. The fruit of such effort is also observable after you've come out of your time of self-forgetfulness. You are within yet above the world while not looking down on people whom you might deem 'less fortunate.'

When looking on a map, New England, clearly is an appendage to the United States, hanging around up there in the northeast section all by its lonesome. Then again, if you've lived there for some time, the United States is an appendage to New England. After all, it's the only section with a distinct name as opposed to a generic direction (Northwest, South, etc) and the most European part of the country.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Clearly his Latin is the best there is, hands down. His unctuous style is incomparable, reminiscent of Cicero; any translation does him ill and subjects him to misunderstanding. A highlight of this Latin style may be found in Bernard's Song Commentary (#83) where he speaks of the natural bond between a man and a woman which 'is stronger even than nature's firm bond between parents and children.' Later in this sermon Bernard compares several types of love after which he comes off with the (bland English) statement, 'Love is a great reality, but there are degrees to it. The bride stands at the highest.' This last sentence in Latin is *sponsa in summo stat.*

Is contemplative prayer in and by itself—obviously important—in a position to revitalize culture, more specifically, those who do it? For the past 2,000 years Europe was a repository for culture which is obviously slipping...and the United States isn't far behind. The strange combination of tolerance/intolerance we have today points to some kind of lack which everyone laments but poses few solutions. Perhaps a new climate for intellectual growth is called for. The results may be small, but here smallness doesn't matter; quality is the issue. One track to follow is Plato, better, the example of Socrates. More specifically, in the years before he got into national politics, John Quincy Adams squirreled himself away in his attic in order to read the **Dialogues**. This reading, in turn, inspired him to form a new type of democratic government (perhaps in part from the **Republic**). It seems that at every crisis point in history sensitive people turned to the **Dialogues** from which they drew inspiration pertinent to their times.

Today's Gospel (Lk 13.22-30) is a parable about the narrow door, of entering the kingdom of God. 'Strive' in Hebrew (vs. 24) in Greek is *agonizomai* from which we get 'agonize'; the verb pertains more to competing in an athletic contest which puts the 'few' and the 'many' trying to pass through this door in better context. The next verse mentions the householder who 'has risen up,' the implication being that such striving takes place at night while he is asleep. Vs. 30 has 'you yourselves thrust out.' Here the verb is *exballo* with the preposition *ex-* (out) prefixed to it; this verb also has the preposition *echo* (outside). Thus with *ex-* and *echo* we get a real sense of rejection, of not being allowed into the kingdom of God. Keeping in mind the image of a foot race with *agonizomai*, winners and losers, the concluding verse of this passage makes more sense: 'Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.'

Psalm 18 (which begins with 'I love you, O Lord, my strength') has vigorous kind of liveliness. The psalmist cries out to God for deliverance from death, and God responds immediately. Much of the language is couched in storm-related imagery, quite vivid, and in the second half we see psalmist victorious in battle. In addition to the vigorous nature of this psalm, it is an extended supplication due to the author's dire need (it pertains to death as vss. 4 & 5 recount). A lot of other psalms and biblical passages present examples of dire need which leads to the consideration that all genuine prayer has the immediacy of distress at its core. Most of us know this from concrete experience. Life has this strange juxtaposition of good times...maybe it's better to call them

bland which borders on the normal...and bad times. The latter aren't so frequent, but their intensity, albeit brief, remains fixed in our memories. In retrospect most people would concede privately that these stressful times were the best of their lives when they felt fully in tune with what's going on and how it ties in with ultimate reality.

A quick note as to the injunction 'pray always'...the Greek adverb is *diapantos* which literally translates 'through all.' It conveys not so much continuousness in the temporal sense but insight as to everyday events which consume so much of our time. Without a doubt, the demands of modern life are too pressing and demanding of our attention. However, we could look at *diapantos* in a general, pervasive fashion without watering it down. That's why it is good to punctuate your day with prayer breaks whether this be the Office or sitting quietly with two bookends of deeper and longer prayer at the beginning and end of the day. Contemporary experience requires that we look at *diapantos* as a kind of oscillation. We move from more focused times of prayer and awareness of God to stuff which gobbles up our attention. Oscillation is more conducive way to handle this dilemma without getting hung up on times when, for example, you drift away from God's presence. This is bound to happen, so why not accept it and come up with a better model, if you will, to depict it?

St. Bartholomew. Today's Gospel has Jesus calling his twelve disciples at the beginning of John and concludes with, 'You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man' [1.51]. This is a clear reference to Gen 28.12, 'And he (Jacob) dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.' Thus Christ is equivalent to this ladder or in Hebrew, *sulam*...from the verbal root *sala*, 'to lift up,' 'to exalt.' This is the only use of the term in the Bible. Also derived from *sala* is 'basket' from the slender branches and twigs used to make such an item. Some say that this image can refer to those ziggurats or stepped pyramids. Note that in the Gospel verse at hand, action is in the future: 'you will see.' Perhaps reference is to the crucifixion. Regardless, it's kind of interesting to perceive Jesus as this 'ladder' which John states at the beginning of his Gospel and to keep this image in mind throughout.

One feature of August's weather is the heavy dew early in the morning. It's probably from a clash of cool nights and warm days, very telling, especially the occasional drip-drip-drip you hear on roofs. Not entirely unlike the Song of Songs, 'My locks are heavy with the dew of the night.' It's also a great time to step out in the pre-dawn hours and observe the sky. You could almost say that once you do this, the day is done...nothing more to accomplish except the necessities that arise and require attention. Perhaps the appeal of autumn—and this time of mid August is an anticipation of it—is that somehow you 'participate' in the season more than others. In the summer you're fighting the heat and bugs; in the winter, the cold and snow. Autumn is just right, even more so than the spring which can also be a combo of bugs and warm weather. Also in place of birds singing are the sounds of crows which very much belong to the autumnal-winter season.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Lk 14.1-14) has the famous 'everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted' [vs. 13]. The excerpt begins with 'they were watching him,' the Greek verb being *paratereo* as found in Gal 4.10: 'You observe days and months and seasons and years.' I.e., people were watching to trip-up Jesus, not in the positive sense. Later in the passage at hand Jesus 'marked how they chose the places of honor' [vs. 7]. The Greek verb here is *epecho*, 'to keep close watch.' Thus *paratereo* and *epecho* are similar in meaning with two different contexts. The former has the preposition *para* prefixed to the verb indicating a sense of being besides, close at hand, as those who were with Jesus. The latter has the preposition *epi* prefixed to the verb signifying being on or upon something. *Epecho* is used to describe Jesus having an occasion to tell a parable, that is, about not seeking a place of honor at a banquet. We could say that Jesus was '*epi*...upon...the situation' or more attentive than his detractors in order to teach a valuable lesson.

In his **Journal** Thoreau says somewhere (sitting on the shore of Lake Cochituate, Framingham), 'Oh, to live and to die in New England!' Also, 'Go out before sunrise and don't come home until after sunset.'

'For it is a difficult combat which is proposed to the mind living in retirement.' A terse, right-to-the-point

remark by Sadhona (Syriac text) in one of his letters to solitaries. Sometimes a brief remark like this sums it all up when referring to spiritual combat a solitary...actually anyone...faces when getting real with the spiritual life.

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time & Labor Day weekend. Today's Gospel (Lk 14.25-35) has the second instance of Jesus bidding anyone who wishes to follow him to take up his cross. In the excerpt at hand, we have the common verb *erchomai* (vs. 27) which may be compared with the 'great multitudes (who) accompanied (*sunporeuomai*)' Jesus. It connotes a sense of traveling, accompaniment. In the first excerpt (9.23) the verb *akoloutho* is used which conveys a more 'technical' type of following and an ordering of one's life according to a certain standard. There Jesus says one must 'lose' his life, the verb being *apollumai*, quite forceful, meaning to destroy one's life. The word for 'life' here is *psuche*, often translated as 'soul.' Compare with 'hate' (*miseo*) one's *psuche* as well as other blood relatives who aren't mentioned in Luke's first reference to the cross.

'And he (the king of Nineveh) made proclamation and published through Nineveh' [Jonah 3.7]. The verb 'make proclamation' in Hebrew is *taham* which more basically means 'to taste.' It also connotes judgement, discernment, as though the faculty of taste were operative in one's mind.

Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Today's Gospel has Matthew's genealogy which begins with the patriarch Abraham and moves forward in time. Somewhere (perhaps in his homilies on the Virgin) St. Bernard marvelously sums up the flavor of today by quoting Song 2.8, 'Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.' In other words, the 'mountains' and 'hills' are the succeeding generations until the birth of Christ...a wonderful way of viewing the significance of today's celebration.

Sometime while listening to the Gospel a word or phrase may grab your attention which suggests something further. For example, 'And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah' [Mt 1.7]. As we know from the biblical account, King David had Uriah placed in the forefront of battle in order that the enemy might kill him, a sneaky way of deflecting responsibility for his death. Then David took Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, as his own and who later begot Solomon. Surely Solomon must have known the story. Despite having been chosen by David to succeed him, must have felt a grudge which went unrecorded. Probably this grudge was augmented by the prophet Nathan's rebuke against his father. It is these unrecorded bits and pieces you get from such a bald statement as Mt 1.7; surely the same applies to virtually all the other generations in that genealogical account.

Today's Gospel (Lk 16.1-15) is one of those that get your attention in a different way because it deals with a crafty, even immoral person, that is to say, a master about to fire his steward because he had been wasting his goods. Actually, the master's approach isn't as harsh as other parables. The steward's first concern was that of a person about to be laid-off, not uncommon: 'What shall I do?...I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg' [vs. 3]. He therefore scaled down the debts owed by others to his master in the hope that later they will help him. Still, a sneaky thing to do without the master knowing it, yet the master praised him for his shrewdness or *adikia* [vs. 8], a term which better connotes unrighteousness. Then Jesus urges his listeners 'to make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon' [vs. 9]. Here's the more fundamental meaning of *adikia*. The purpose of this self-centered approach? 'So that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations' [vs. 9], that is, those whom you've relieved of debts. Interesting how the third person plural is used with such a term. Other parables speak of repaying good with evil, so the parable at hand implies we have to take a chance that people will remember us. Habitation in Greek translates more accurately as 'tent.'

In Plato's **Theatetus** Socrates describes his role in life as a midwife. 'The difference is that I attend men and not women, and that I watch over the labor of their souls, not of their bodies...For one thing which I have in common with the ordinary midwives is that I myself and barren of wisdom. The common reproach against me is that I am always asking questions of other people but never express my own views about anything because there is no wisdom in me' [150c].

An example of a 'bland' verse from Scripture which has much more meaning in the original (Hebrew): 'Surely

the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets' [Amos 3.7]. The Hebrew for 'secret' is *sod* which means friendly, confidential speech as well as council. Intimacy is part and parcel of this noun, and the Greek *koinonia* may be a reflection of it; however, *sod* is richer. Also 'does nothing' literally reads 'does no word,' as though for God doing and speaking are one and the same. Finally, the word for 'revealing' is *galah*. A noun derived from it is 'exile,' as though the true nature of those thus banished becomes revealed under such circumstances.

The (biblical) Hebrew language has many verbs for 'to hide' as from the following list with a scriptural quote for each which is prefaced by a brief nuance of meaning:

- Chava*: 'And the man and his wife hid themselves' [Gen 3.8].
- Chavah* (related to the one just above): 'To hide themselves in the open country' [2 Kg 7.12]. Both *chava* and *chavah* don't seem to have a special alternate meaning.
- Chaphas*: to disguise oneself. 'But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves' [Prov 28.12].
- Taman*: to hide in the sense of to bury. 'And Jacob hid them under the oak which was near' [Gen 35.4].
- Kachad*: to cover over in the sense of denying. 'We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent' [Gen 47.18].
- Kanaph*: to cover over; 'wing' is derived from this verb. 'Yet your teacher will not hide himself anymore' [Is 30.20].
- Kasah*: to cover over. 'The Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do'' [Gen 18.17]?
- Mastar*: to take refuge. 'From whom men hide their faces he was despised' [Is 53.3].
- Nus*: to take to flight. 'In the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites' [Judg 6.11].
- Saphan*: to preserve, to cover as with rafters. 'And he saw a portion assigned by the law-giver there preserved (hidden)' [Dt 33.21].
- Satar*: to veil over. 'And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God' [Ex 3.6].
- Halam*: to hide in the sense of covering over. 'The thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly' [Lev 4.13].
- Hamam*: to shut, close. 'Wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you' [Ezk 28.3].
- Tsaphan*: to lay up in store, to be laid up. 'When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes' [Ex 2.3].

Today's Gospel (Lk 16.19-31) is of the rich man and Lazarus. Vs. 19 gives a good portrait of the former, 'feasted sumptuously every day.' The adverb in Greek is *lampros* which implies shining, as though his food were so rich that it shone like precious metal. Interesting to contrast *lampros* (as shining) with the rich man in Hades, land of shadows. Later in Hades Abraham addresses him with 'remember' [vs. 25], that is, his former opulent life style. In the present life remembering as *anamnesis* is crucial for moral living, but in Hades it doesn't do any good; remembering there is a form of torment as opposed to recognizing one's true nature. Finally, a great chasm (can also mean a pit as opposed to something long and canyon-like) exists between Abraham and Hades, vs. 26. Width isn't as important as depth, for the two sides can be close yet infinitely apart as signified by the alternate meaning of pit for *chasma*. Nevertheless, there is considerable distance because the rich man 'saw Abraham far off' [vs. 23]. At the same time this distance doesn't prevent Abraham and the rich man from exchanging words and from the rich man seeing Lazarus tucked away in Abraham's bosom. The spiritual distance implied by *chasma* between the two men is pre-figured by the gate of vs. 20, i.e., the gate where Lazarus lay with the rich man inside his house feasting away. It's almost as if that distance was suddenly revealed by the *chasma* in Hades. At the Gospel's end the rich man begs Abraham to warn his five brothers of their impending fate...to close that physical *chasma* while there's still time. Then Abraham responds that the *chasma* can be closed by listening to Moses and the prophets.

'They shall wander from sea to sea and from north to east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it' [Amos 8.12]. The Hebrew verb for 'run to and fro' transliterates as *shut*. It has the sense of whipping or lashing. Several other uses are worth mentioning:

- 1) 'Your rowers have brought you out into the high seas' [Ezk 27.26]: 'rowers.'
- 2) 'Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase' [Dan 12.4]. Here such running is connected with the increase of knowledge.

3) 'The Lord said to Satan, 'Whence have you come?' Satan answered the Lord, 'From going to and fro on the earth and from walking up and down on it' [Job 1.7]. This is the most vivid use of the verb *shut*; also, there's a parallel between shut and the proper name Satan...i.e., *shut*/Satan, as though Satan's activity is done in a rush as he attempts to deceive people.

'The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure; and he who has little business may become wise' (Sirach 38.24). Three Greek words worth nothing: 'opportunity' is *eukairia*, literally a 'good (well) time' in the sense of *kairos*. 'Leisure' is *schole* from which we derive 'school,' 'scholastic.' 'Wisdom' is of course *sophia*.

Sometimes...better, often...a word as in Greek grabs your attention and gets you 'out of the English mode' into a realm where things are expressed very differently. The example at hand is *daimon*, ambiguous for us moderns. It's neither good nor bad but probably a bit of both, a hard to define mixture we don't like discussing. A *daimon* can come and go, influencing a person suddenly and just as suddenly, depart. Quite a bit of ancient philosophizing centered around these daimons, and they were able to deal with them in ready fashion. Socrates is noted for consulting his own *daimon* and always followed its advice. With the advent of Christianity, the daimons changed into demons. Seems the ancient world with its stress on plurality had been scoured out of the new Christian cosmology. This development is little documented and more reaching than, for example, the Reformation. Once the transition from *daimon* into demon occurred spirituality became filled with all sorts of spirits clearly divided into good and evil, i.e., the latter being demons. In modern times these demons became uncontrollable forces issuing up from the subconscious. Despite the discovery, we haven't learned to handle them.

'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kind, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them' [Is 11.6]. A well-know quote, to be sure. The Hebrew verb *gur* for 'shall dwell,' for it seems out of place; fundamentally it means to tarry, to sojourn in the sense of being a stranger or exile. It doesn't necessarily mean sitting down together, i.e., the wolf and lamb, but that they will continue their own respective activities in a place that isn't their own. Another sense is that two opposing forces don't have to be jammed together but can retain their opposition.

'The Lord your God...will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love' [Zeph 3.17]. Another little gem which has a different meaning in the Hebrew text. It reads, 'he will be silent' or *charash*. This verb fundamentally means 'to cut into,' 'to inscribe,' 'to plow.' It seems the idea of an object becoming blunt or dull is a type of silencing, of becoming silent.

In **The Discovery of the Mind** by Bruno Snell deals with the origins of European culture through Greek sources, notably Homer, lyric poetry and the dramatists (doesn't get as far as Plato). Obviously the book is scholarly in tone though well written, one of those classic books from the early 1950s. He stresses the ability of *thaumazein* or to wonder. When that falls off, a dynamic period of culture comes to an end. Another takes its place only when *thaumazein* comes into play, albeit in a different form. He points it out through statuary which the Romans took over and later, the Renaissance.

There's something mysterious about an open field...not just any field...but one surrounded by trees and/or corn; i.e., a field that's enclosed. You're on the look-out to spot something or someone pop out of the woods, but invariably it doesn't. Still, this doesn't detract from the mystery of an open yet secluded place.

'Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples' [Lk 11.1]. The Gospel doesn't seem to have anything about John the Baptist teaching people to pray except 'preaching a baptism of repentance' [3.3] if we stay with Luke's Gospel. Same applies to John's account which is more specific as to the Baptist recognizing Jesus. However, right after Jesus had been baptized he 'was praying (and) the heavens was opened [Lk.3.22]. Thus prayer and the opening of heaven are linked. This and other places in the Gospels don't tell directly how (if even) John the Baptist taught about prayer, yet his eagerness in anticipating Jesus must have naturally overflowed to any disciples in his company. It'd be impossible to repress the enthusiasm so obvious in the Gospels. Returning to Luke, right after the request to be taught like John's disciples, Jesus gives the essence of

the Our Father followed by a parable. This parable might cast some light on the supposed connection between John and Jesus regarding prayer in that a man wakes his friend in the middle of the night for some bread. Better, this guy has a friend who arrived (apparently at night) on a journey. Maybe there's a certain connection between this night-arrival and Jesus' appearance to John at the Jordan which the parable intimates.

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Lk 17.11-19) deals with the ten lepers, one of whom was a Samaritan and the only one who returned to thank Jesus. What's striking is the notion of distance. 'He was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance [vs. 12, porrothen],' an obvious response given their contagious condition. En route to showing themselves to the priest, that is, from their already being porrothen to going this further distance these men were healed. The nine who went their way implies a further distancing between them and Jesus compared to the Samaritan who returned to thank Jesus. Even the word 'Samaritan' implies distance, that is, from the Jews.

There's a difference between wind at night and wind during the day, especially during autumn and winter. Day wind is blustery and is put into its place by visual perceptions which diminishes its impact or our awareness of it. Night wind is another animal; pervasive and a bit threatening as though the wind had taken over the entire landscape. After all, visual perceptions are at a minimum which makes the wind's sound a bit on the primitive side.

In the parable of the talents (Mt 25.14-30) we have three servants to whom the master entrusted talents, yet the text doesn't specify any instructions as what to do with them. The third servant who hid his single talent and returned it to the master got thrown out as a result of his indolence (to his credit, he didn't squander it). What ticked off the master was this servant saying to him, 'I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you did not winnow' [vs. 24]. In other words, the servant told-it-like-it-is to the master's face. In the next verse the master blasts back at him what can be taken as a surprise that one of his subordinates knew about his ruthlessness. Not only that, but the servant was bold enough to say it to his face. It's almost as though the servant caught his master off guard, something which really riled him, hence 'cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness' [vs. 30].

One of Thoreau's heroes whom he mentions in his **Journal**, perhaps his greatest, is a farmer named George Minott. For example, 'Minott adorns whatever part of nature he touches; whichever way he walks he transfigures the earth for me' [November 6, 1857]. Actually, there's an abundance of references to this man throughout the **Journal**, this being a quick sample. We all have our George Minotts. They are usually common folk with uncanny wisdom and simplicity of life. They don't make a splash but are ever present and an inspiration. We can imagine Thoreau talking with this fellow on many an occasion. Most likely he didn't associate with Minott on the same level as Channing or Emerson, but he was constantly out there in the field ready to either inspire by example or by down-to-earth Yankee wisdom.

'But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you' [Lk 11.41]. A verse from today's Gospel, a bit unusual, for we normally consider almsgiving as an external activity, not for what's 'within' or in Greek, *ta enonta*. This verse is within the context of Jesus addressing the Pharisees, their zeal for cleaning the outside of cups and dishes while neglecting 'the inside' or *to esothern*. While the verse at hand may certainly be taken as looking out for those less fortunate, maybe alms for *ta enonta* can refer to care for one's soul or *psuche*.

Contrary to ancient opinion, a comet is a reminder of connections between heaven and earth. They are also like those daimons of which Socrates speaks in the **Symposium** (2023-03a): 'They (spirits in between god and mortal) who shuttle back and forth between the two, conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods; while to men they bring commands from the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices. Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all. Through them all divination passes, through them the art of priests in sacrifice and ritual, in enchantment, prophecy and sorcery. Gods do not mix with men; they mingle and converse with us through spirits instead, whether we are awake or asleep. He who is wise in any of these ways is a man of the spirit.'

We may posit for the sake of discussion an 'open' and 'closed' world view. That is to say, the former may be called the modern one influenced by such ideas of infinity whether on the micro or macroscopic realms. Indeed, science plays an important role here; also ideas about God—infinite, unbounded, almighty—and the rest are thrown into the mix. When you get these two rolling around in your head, you have problems, to be sure. They may not be evident on the surface but are so underneath. The latter world view ('closed') was put forth by the ancient Greeks who abhorred infinity which they equated with chaos. This outlook seems limited, even constricted but deserves further consideration. In **Anamnesis** Eric Voegelin quotes Aristotle (*Metaphysics*) who sums up this 'closed' world view in fine terms: 'The wherefor is an end (*telos*), and an end of the sort that is not for the sake of something else but for the sake of which other things are. Hence, if there is a last term of this sort (*eschaton*), the process will not be infinite (*apeiron*); and if there is not, there will be no wherefor. But those who assume an infinite regress fail to notice that they remove the nature of the good (*ten tou agathou physin*). For nobody would try to do anything if he were not going to arrive at a limit. Rationality (*nous*), at least, is incompatible with such an infinite series; for the reasonable man (*nous echon*) always acts for the sake of something, and this end (*telos*) serves as a limit (*peras*).'

A book by Hans Vaihinger has the intriguing title **As If** which was written during the early part of the last century and proposes a strikingly modern way of viewing the world. He gives concrete examples such as 'I feel as if I'm on top of the world.' This and similar statements point to more than wishful thinking. They have the possibility of opening up many avenues in daily life, of transforming how we comport ourselves. In light of the threefold way people look at the world—mythic, theology and philosophy—perhaps we could add the 'as if' approach. Actually somewhere in his book Vaihinger goes into that. The danger to anyone uninformed might be to be blasé, to ascribe as-if to the three approaches which denies their content. A read of **As If** is appropriate in light of that 'open' as opposed to a 'closed' world view. Maybe you could try as-if in one and then the other. It could be called an exercise in fantasy but then again, may offer a richer field or ground from which new insights emerge.

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Two great readings, the first from Exodus 17:12 when Israel was battling Amalek. 'And Aaron and Hur held up his (Moses) hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.' You can't help but wonder what Aaron and Hur were saying to each other or certainly to themselves, 'Will this trick really work, especially when Moses' hands grew weak and the enemy prevailed?!' The second reading (Lk 18:1-8) is another favorite, the unjust judge who 'neither feared God nor regarded man.' He passes a just judgement for a widow who bugged him continually (the case isn't stated) mostly out of fear which seems contrary to 'nor regarded man.' She certainly must have been a formidable character, for the judge admits 'she will wear me out.' The Greek verb for her is *hupopiazō*, alternately as 'to treat with severity.' It's also found ('to pummel') in 1 Cor 9:27, 'But I pommel my body and subdue it, least after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.' *Hupopiazō* is reminiscent of when King David fled Jerusalem just before his son Absalom arrived. 'As Shimei came he uttered curse after curse and threw stones at (i.e., pummeled) David' [2 Sam 16:6]. Instead of killing him, David told his servants to let Shimei alone and continue his cursing which he did. By way of footnote, the **New American Version** reads for one of David's servants, 'Shall I go over and lop off his head?'

The definition of the word 'trivial': from the Latin meaning 'three roads.' The sense seems to be that the intersection of two roads is important, for you have to take one or the other. If a third is added to the mix, you have some confusion. One of the three has to be relegated to insignificance, hence it becoming 'trivial.'

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time...and about a month out from the beginning of Advent. Today's Gospel has the familiar contrast between the self-righteous Pharisee and tax collector, Lk 18:9-15. 'The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself [vs. 11]. The Greek text may read literally, 'stood to (*pros*) himself (and) prayed these.' Compare with the parable's hero 'standing far off (*makrothen*), would not even lift up his eyes to heaven' [vs.13]. The very different meaning of both prepositions speaks volumes of what Jesus is trying to communicate here. *Pros* signifies direction towards—which whereas *makrothen* simply conveys a sense of physical distance. The use of *pros* intimates the Pharisee's self-absorption in his righteousness, that it was 'towards' himself and not God.

Hasidic Jews are very interesting in that they live an intense religious life right in the heart of the world. They are married, have households and generally work in large metropolitan areas. At the same time they retain their own identity, an amazing feat when you consider the circumstances in which they function. On the other hand, Catholics—if they wish to pursue a disciplined religious life—have it in their tradition to withdraw from society. Preferably, they enter religious orders or monasteries. This flight from the world started not long after persecutions ceased in the Roman Empire and has continued to the present day in one form or another.

Today's Gospel (Lk 19.1-10) has the chief tax collector Zacchaeus up on the sycamore tree waiting to get a glimpse of Jesus as he passed by. The text is charming in its own right, very direct with a touch of humor with Zacchaeus perched up in his tree. It's message can be summed up by the last verse, 'The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.' The Greek *zeteo* is a common verb which sums up Christ's mission (followed by saving the lost). Biblical concordances contain few references applied to Jesus doing this. The vast majority (apart from common usages) pertain to people seeking him. The 'lost'—the verb is *apollumi* with implications of destruction—is surely one of those things not fully understood and subject to all sorts of (mis-) interpretations. However, Jesus used it addressing Zacchaeus (also vs. 9, 'Salvation has come to this house'), so in general 'lost' applies to anyone who has engaged in immoral or irreligious behavior.

Today's Gospel (Lk 15.1-10) has two parables back-to-back: the famous 99 lost sheep and the woman who sweeps her house to find a lost coin. In the first, the sheep seems to have gone astray by itself despite 'If he has lost one of them.' Not untypical when it comes to sheep. The second example is clear about the woman having lost her coin, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I have lost.' 'I' and not anyone else.

'You must walk like a camel which is said to be the only beast which ruminates when it walks.' Gotta love these droll entries, this one from Thoreau's **Journal** entry for early November 1850.

Today's Gospel (Lk 20.27-40) speaks of the lack of marriage after the resurrection. The words 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage' are reminiscent of Lk 17.27 in reference to the days before the flood, 'They ate, they drank, they married, there were given in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.' In the Gospel at hand, Jesus continues by saying that those who don't marry 'are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.' Interesting how marriage is implied as vaguely associated with death, for a bit later Jesus cites Moses: 'Now he is not God of the dead (married!) but of the living.' This passage doesn't negate marriage nor is it a manifesto by those who practice virginity against marriage. Actually, nowadays both sides are in trouble: broken marriages and sexual abuse by those who aren't married.