

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 "fourth" document of the same title.

It's almost unimaginable to think about life in an oral society which comprises the bulk of human history. Imagine that the only real contact with reality would be sound, the human voice obviously included, as the primary means of giving meaning to the society in which you were living. Your memory would have to be sharp; probably little or no Alzheimer's disease under those circumstances. So much attention would be focused upon what you hear in the course of a given day making the perception of boundaries be very different. In a literal or visual society, the boundary is between the person reading and his or her inner life as opposed to other people and the environment. In an oral society, sound/voice would be taken in with little distinction between the person receiving it and the one giving it. Thus the perception of boundary is more fluid. You get this experience in diluted form when out in nature. Try extending this not for a few hours or days but as a permanent way of life. Although your eyes are attentive the surroundings, hearing is equally or if not more important as a means to protect yourself against predators. Hearing would also sustain you and your companions in that it gives continuity; any visual contents tend to blur except for human artifacts which by reason of no texts, as it were, would be quite miraculous.

For the past three days the moon—barely a sliver in the eastern sky—has been hanging there along with Jupiter and Venus. Distant celestial objects have a way of conveying silence unlike other natural objects by reason of their aloofness. It all the more awe-inspiring by reason of the cold (around 4 am, below freezing). At the same time they look down upon us mere mortals with a benevolence which isn't condescending; more like bidding us to come up to be with them which we will do upon death or so thought many ancient societies. Because November sees rapidly shrinking daylight, you have to make the most of it especially when the sun is shining (not terribly often). If outdoors, you have to head home four-ish because within thirty minutes the sun will be done. You may have to do this even a bit earlier when it's cloudy.

Today's Gospel (Lk 21.5-19) has Jesus foretelling the temple's destruction and his disciples asking for a sign (*semeion*) for it. From there Jesus shifts to people who'll come later claiming to be him as well as disastrous events including persecution. Concerning any answer follower of Christ will have to render, Jesus says 'Settle it therefore in your minds (*kardia*, better as 'heart') not to mediate beforehand how to answer' [vs. 14]. At the end of this excerpt or vs. 10 he says, 'By your endurance you will gain your lives' or psuche which is better rendered 'soul.' It seems that the ability not to anticipate giving a response to persecutors (which involves the heart) and enduring (which involves the soul) work together.

The Gospels during the last few weeks of the liturgical year are identical to those at the beginning of Advent. We have here a seamless transition from 'last things' to 'last things' with the latter introducing a whole new liturgical cycle. This isn't at all confusing or a blurring in the shift of cycles but both have the same identity only in a different frame of time. Such a process is different from our common understanding of progress where you move from one step to another with a continuous building up of resources and knowledge. I.e., we have a unique closed system whose very nature of boundedness is open to what's unbounded.

'And the angel who spoke with me came again and waked me as a man who is wakened out of his sleep' [Zech 4.1]. Here the preposition 'with' in Hebrew is *b-* or 'in.' Thus the angel speaking 'with' Zechariah is actually speaking 'in' him. This is not uncommon when the word of God comes to a prophet or someone he wants to communicate a message. This 'in speaking' is all the more striking in the context of waking Zechariah as from sleep or not being attentive to things divine.

The liturgical readings this week are from the Book of Revelation, apt for the end of the liturgical season! In Proverbs there's one of many subtle verses which in English blow right by you: 'Do not plan evil against your neighbor who dwells trustingly beside you' [3.29]. The word for neighbor in Hebrew is *reah* from a verbal root meaning 'to feed, pasture, attend.' The word for evil is *rahah* from a similar sounding verbal root. Thus

when reading the verse in Hebrew the parallel strikes you immediately, not just a play on words but something aiming at a deeper meaning you pick up in a spirit of *lectio divina*.

'Then when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up' [Dan 3.5]. The first thought that pops into your mind with 'bagpipe' is a man dressed in Scottish kilts belting out a tune on a bagpipe. Obviously not the case here. The word for 'bagpipe' is the Chaldean *sumponayah* (from the Greek *sumphonia*) which seems to be a double pipe attached to a bag. Surely a clash of cultures when we hear the English term.

A Syriac father, Abba Sisoës, said that we should comport ourselves as strangers on the earth...even more so, in one's place of residence. A fine thought but makes you wonder how it was practiced in the concrete.

A favorite verse which pertains to the handwriting on the wall: 'Then the king's color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together' [Dan 5.6]. Along with his enchanters and wise men King Belshazzar couldn't figure out the handwriting so the queen came up with a solution which was to summon Daniel. Transitory people like this play an important role as with the case of Naaman (cf. 2 Kg 5.1-5). There a little girl taken captive from Israel informed Naaman's wife about the prophet Elisha which set in motion a whole chain of events.

'One of themselves, a prophet of their own said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true...They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed' [Titus 1.12 & 16]. Now that's heavy-duty stuff.

Look at Hebrew even if you're not familiar with it because we've all seen Hebrew words and letters which seem utterly foreign to most of us. Apart from its exotic appearance, the letters seem to drip, hang or cascade downwards. That is to say, many Hebrew letters are rigid or straight lines at the top from which the rest of the forms drop. You get a sense that they are coming from a source both familiar and unfamiliar to us, again, even if you don't have a clue as to their meaning.

Hills in New England had been formed by glaciers retreating from the north towards the south; they hang in that direction and are generally long and gradual. However, the east and west sides drop off more sharply. Therefore an hour prior to sunset these hills stand out more than during summer but in a subtle fashion because they are illumined from the southwest. This gives them a kind of transcendental look if you're fortunate to be on top of one gazing at others. The distance between them is irrelevant, for the hills seem to dip into the landscape. They rise just enough to make their presence known in a manner as gradual as their whale-like shape. Then add the pseudo-hills or equally long and gradual shadows cast by the real hills. When you see not just one but several cascading towards the northeast or away from the low sun, you have a real treat. The spaces in between or little valleys (some can be quite deep) become very dark even though some light remains. If you look towards the south—for the hills run directly southward—the sun's angle emphasizes more the dark spaces in between as opposed to the hills themselves which kind of blend into with each other.

'The more solitary and retired I've become, the more I love the myths' (Aristotle). These words come after a life time of developing a philosophical system which sought to break away from the early Greek mythical way of explaining the world through natural phenomena. Although Aristotle succeeded brilliantly in laying the first foundations of science, he remained in a milieu where the old gods and mythic interpretations of the origins of the world remained in full force. Much like his Ionian predecessors, he was fully committed a philosophical, scientific approach which got Western Civilization going. Aristotle's observation towards the end of his life must have been fraught with a friction between a philosophical attitude and cultural dependence upon gods, a distinction that must have been quite raw at times. Despite being fully committed to philosophy, his wistful longing for myths shows the power they had over him.

'You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews' [Jn 4.22]. Words spoken by Jesus to the woman of Samaria at the well. Such a declaration has a tinge of arrogance about

it which pious minds get around by appealing to the person of Jesus Christ as incarnate Son of God who's doing the speaking. The verse is a straight-forward statement as to the Samaritans' worship done in ignorance in contrast to the advantage of Jewish worship with the added sub-sentence, 'salvation is from the Jews.' Thus the second half becomes qualified. Perhaps 'we worship what we know' can stand alone, so let's leave it that way momentarily in order to contrast the two halves. As for knowing God, traditionally it has two general approaches: apophatic and cataphatic. The former stresses unknowability and ignorance, that is, positively with regards to God. The latter is knowledge about God obtained through affirmation which is the more familiar of the two. Someone like St. Gregory of Nyssa is a celebrated proponent of the apophatic way along with many other Church Fathers in the Greek tradition. With this distinction in mind, we could slip the advantage over to the Samaritan woman. As for the words 'we worship'—or Jesus and his Jewish tradition—their worship centers around 'what we know.' I.e., it might be termed cataphatic. This little twist might be taken as a tacit, even subtle, acknowledgment by Jesus that the woman has the advantage or is at least on the right path. Jesus' favorable attitude towards his own tradition ('what we know'), however, is qualified by 'salvation is from the Jews.' That is, 'we worship what we know' would fail before the Samaritan's advantage over Jesus, so to speak, but is rescued since the reality of salvation is explicit. Regardless, both parties come out winners.

The Book of Ruth is always a pleasant read, pastoral in its tone. Then again, it's fine from the Hebrew language point of view because so many of the verbs are feminine in form, much more so than in other places. As for the Book of Ruth, refer to the first verse: 'a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab.' The proper noun Bethlehem means 'house of bread' (some Church Fathers love noting the translation, 'house of bread,' as a reference to the Eucharist). A bit later in vs. 6 we have, 'the Lord had visited his people and given them food.' The Hebrew for 'food' is *lechem*, alternately 'bread' as in *Beth-lechem*. Thus because of a famine Elimelech and his family left Bethlehem. Later Ruth returns (presumably to Bethlehem...better in vs. 7, 'to the land of Judah') because of this *lechem*...bread...given by the Lord.

An unusual aspect about the woods during winter is that when the weather is bright and sunny, the 'veins' on certain trees stand out with remarkable clarity. Once a cloud passes by overhead, this clarity is momentarily lost. So it seems that indirect sunlight is more revealing than direct.

It's interesting how a particular season...Advent...which deals with the coming of Christ can pick out various scriptural readings and order them according to the season's theme. While they have year-round application, someone somewhere perhaps hidden in some dark corner of the Vatican had the wisdom to arrange them so well. For example, today's Gospel (Mt 11.11-19) deals with John the Baptist, typical for Advent. Consider more specifically 'From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence,' one of those verses often quoted but not considered beyond face value. The time is very short: John-until now. 'Until now' means the present when Jesus is speaking these words. You wonder about the nature of this violence is in so short an interval, obviously a few short years. However, conventional time has little to do with what's going on. Perhaps here the 'kingdom of heaven' alludes back to 'the heavens were opened' [3.16] at Christ's baptism, their opening being a type of violence. The Greek reads *biazo* which connotes oppression as well as doing something vehemently. It's compounded by *harpazo* ('take by force') which connotes robbery. From what we know, was this kingdom of heaven subject to *biazo/harpazo* during the brief interval just mentioned? Or can it be an after-effect, so to speak, of the heavens having been rent at Christ's baptism?

Third Sunday of Advent or Gaudete Sunday, 'Rejoice Sunday,' because we're at the mid point of the expectation season. Compare with Laudete Sunday or the midway point of Lent, similar but more pertinent because Lent lacks the commercial noise of the current season. In many ways Gaudete is lost in such clamor. Today's Gospel (Mt 11.2-11) has an indirect dialogue between Jesus and John the Baptist. Indirect because John is in prison and asks Jesus through his disciples whether or not 'he is to come.' More specifically, John 'sent through his disciples.' In the Greek text this sending lacks an object which heightens the fact of John's confinement. Later on Jesus says to the crowds, 'No one is greater than John the Baptist, yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.' Such words were addressed after John's disciples 'went away' [vs. 7], so most likely John was completely unaware of them. Then again, maybe there was no need for John to hear them. Placing him in a lower position compared with the 'least' who is therefore 'greater' again may be situated within the context of John being locked up.

'Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem and preach against the sanctuaries; prophesy against the land of Israel' [Is 21.2]. Yet another example of a 'common' sentence which in English has unpleasant overtones. By unpleasant is meant a preachy approach couched in language we automatically tune out. The Hebrew text, however, is another thing. For example, take the verb 'to preach' which is rendered *nataph*. Its fundamental meaning is 'to drop,' 'to trickle.' The idea is that preaching is a kind of trickling down of God's word through the medium of a human being or one who is 'preaching.' For another use of this term, cf. Sg 4.11: 'Your lips distill nectar, my bride; honey and milk are under your tongue.'

It's intriguing to consider what might have been if there had been no persecution nor adoption of Christianity by the state. Instead, what would have happened if the Church adopted the model of the Greek *polis* or city-state? By then the *polis* had been long extinct, overtaken first by imperial designs in and outside Greece and later by Rome. Nevertheless, the *polis* remained the ideal model (as in Plato's **Republic**) as a place in which to inquire as to the nature of the soul. Such inquiry was intimately bound up with scientific inquiry and other disciplines with no compartmentalization among them. In the early Christian centuries Christian leaders adopted Platonism and later Aristotle (St. Thomas Aquinas). However, the former took roots much more deeply and quickly. The disadvantage is that they favored only those features of Platonism suited for the new religion to the detriment of others, hence the negative or even outmoded perceptions of this philosopher we have today. Again, what would have happened if Socrates were singled out early on? By that is meant his free inquiry and questioning of suppositions. It would have been a wise choice, but this approach is anathema to religion, any religion, which likes to keep strict tabs on its adherents.

There are a lot of what you could call 'little people' in the world. These are folks who lead exemplary yet quiet lives who never make the headlines nor are influential. However, they are faithful to the Church in unobtrusive ways and usually the first ones you approach when you have a problem. Something about their nature that is trusting and non-judgmental. Those whom I know are amongst the wisest around, however, their wisdom is rarely tapped. Should you ask one of them how they got into this situation, they'd be hard pressed for an answer. It seems all such little people have been shunted to the side for various reasons, usually by reason of a character defect or a physical impediment. Thus they've struggled mightily and remained out of sight for many years. The most important point is that in due time have come to view this neglect as their greatest assent. It's almost as though they woke up one morning and suddenly found themselves doing what they were born to do. Then when these little people die, you hear the usual laments of why we didn't recognize them.

In earlier centuries of the Church's history there had been efforts to draw upon the resources of Greek philosophy (the 'glory days,' if you will). On occasion a parallel would be drawn between the death of Christ and that of Socrates. One way to get a handle on this is by comparing their last words. Christ (according to Matthew 27.46): 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' That is, 'My God, my God why have you forsaken me?' Actually a bit later vs. 50 has 'And Jesus cried again with a loud voice' though the content of this voice remains unrecorded. Socrates: 'Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget' (Phaedo 118a). Asclepius was the god of medicine and healing whose symbol is a staff with a snake around it, today a symbol of physicians. With the former, Christ is hanging on the cross and utters a cry of abandonment. No need to say that the crucifixion for Christians is the instrument of redemption and is filled with bloody details in all four Gospels. With the latter—and it's less familiar to most folks—Socrates has just drunk the poison and bids Crito to make an offering to Asclepius. It seems that Socrates had in mind an offering on behalf of persons physically well yet morally and spiritually dead, beseeching Asclepius to heal them. This scene, while peopled with devotees of Socrates sad at his fate, there's a sense of both joy and irony in his last words. Contrasting Christ and Socrates in this way isn't to favor one or the other nor to diminish the theological content of the former; it's a way of showing how much the negative impact of suffering and injustice, so familiar with the crucifixion scene, can be depicted otherwise.

Now that we're into the fourth and final week of Advent with Christmas less than a month away, there's a sense of loss at leaving the Advent season since it speaks to the essence of religion which is waiting. Starting a week before Christmas the Church has the 'O' antiphons during the Magnificat at Vespers, the letter 'o' signifying increased desire for Christ to come. It sets the stage for the liturgy to proclaim Christ's birth which

creates the traditional paradox of yes, he was born, but we are to look forward to his second birth which is a spiritual one followed by the third viewed as his coming at the 'end of time.' Thus we're put in a somewhat awkward position when moving into the Christmas season, for there's a vague expectation that we're supposed to get lathered up while in truth the spirit of Advent is truer to our lived situation. On top of this is the commercialism and sentimentalism of Christmas which only adds fuel to the fire.

Chapters four through seven of Nehemiah recount the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Despite the anger of Sanballat, an enemy of the Jews, the builders took extraordinary precautions against potential attacks. These chapters are remarkable in that the Jews built the walls while simultaneously prepared for an invasion. For example, 'Those who carried burdens were laden in such a way that each with one hand labored on the work and with the other held his weapon' [4.17]. This combination of physical labor and watchfulness against attack can be taken as a model for readiness at all times; it's easily applied to the unity between being occupied with work and prayer.

Sunday of the Holy Family which this year falls the day after Christmas, not much of a gap! Then we're hit with St. John and Holy Innocents, all in rapid succession. Although you wish there were some space in between, the liturgy follows the regular calendar year which can sometimes jam feasts together. Further reflection shows that while in one year everything is crowded together and another they're spaced apart, the Church functions superficially on the calendar year but on a deeper level doesn't. Appreciating this distinction helps to see that the Church's real keeping of time is of a wholly different plane than the one most people are familiar with.

When you're hit by some meaningful text as often the case in *lectio divina*, you automatically stop your reading and pause there, held in abeyance for an indefinite period of time. This is a real mystery as often as *lectio*'s practitioners will testify. You can smack the label of prayer onto it, a restful silence, yet the experience is impossible to define. Maybe it has something to do with the structure of the human soul (a topic currently occupying my attention). I use 'structure' as opposed to 'nature' because the former suggests the way we're constituted as to the 'whatness' of our constitution. Truly a structure is present, not disorder, for the suspension of mental processes through *lectio divina* has been testified by many down the centuries. Gregory of Nyssa has a neat word for this, *akolouthia* (Greek). It means not just a structure by a sequence which follows a pre-determined path. He situates it in anything from a text's composition to physical growth and on to spiritual progress. One of Jean Danielou's last books (in French) goes by this title, a good read for anyone eager enough to pursue it.

'And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision' [1 Sam 3.1]. Some observations about this verse are in order:

-The Hebrew for 'rare' is *yaqar* which more specifically means 'precious, dear, magnificent.' It applies to the divine 'word' or *davar*; the adjective *yaqar* seems more appropriate for something visual as opposed to something heard, but this instance is a good instance to see the particular value *davar* represents.

-'Vision:' *chazon* or obviously something seen in contrast to the spoken nature of *davar*. Such vision wasn't 'frequent' or *parats*. This verbal root means 'to break asunder, scatter' and suggests violence as if the vision to Samuel was such an unusual event that it broke through...tore asunder...the silence of many years.

-The verse that follows reads, 'At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see.' Two references to Eli's eyesight which was becoming so dim that it prevented him from seeing clearly, not unlike the rarity of divine vision just noted. At the same time, vs. 3, another symbol of vision, is symbolic of hope: 'the lamp of God had not yet gone out.'

Epiphany...which follows literally on the heels of The Mother of God, January 1st, yet another instance where the Church jams together two feast days irrespective of temporal considerations simply because she operates on another plane and sees no conflict when such temporal conflicts happen. The Christmas season continues through the Presentation on February 2nd, a full month, of which secular society is virtually ignorant. Although we're still fresh in this Christmas season, the first liturgical gesture, as it were, many of us make even if it's

unspoken is to look on the calendar to see when Ash Wednesday comes on the scene. This year it arrives early, February 9th with Easter on March 27th. These two dates are not only signs of spring even if we're just two weeks into winter but are important in that they set the liturgical pattern of telling time (and space) for the coming year.

Today's Gospel (Mt 2.1-12) has the story of the wise men or Magi. Most manger scenes have them at the crib which is inaccurate according to the Gospel: 'and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother [vs. 11]. 'House' or *oikia* clearly refers to well, a house, not a stable. Thus there's a time gap between Christ's birth and arrival of the Magi. One of my favorite verses of this Gospel which strikes me each year is 'When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him' [vs. 3]. Obviously such troubling or *tarasso* (it means something disturbing, frightening...more vivid than the English) is because Herod is fearful of the new-born king's threat to his power. On the other hand, there's something appealing, almost child-like, by this verse which has the city of Jerusalem being frightened simultaneously. Most likely the entire city wasn't, just Herod's supporters, yet the presumed majority of folks not of like mind trembled along in an external show of support simply to preserve their heads.

Book Seven of Plato's **Republic** has the famous image of the cave dwellers who are captivated by the shadows on the wall as opposed to the sunlight outside the cave. Not only are they captivated but are enthralled by their own free will. Those who are showing the images to the captives are called puppeteers (*thaumatopoiros*): literally, 'maker of wonder(s)' which connotes an affinity with the nature of magicians. It isn't clear if the puppeteers have been the cave as long as if not longer than the permanent residents. You wonder if they go in and out of the cave, that is, have exposure to the sunlight or reality and return with a twisted notion of what they've seen out there. The puppeteers proceed to communicate this distortion to their captives. They are in a kind of in between land of reality and distorted images of it, quite unlike those *daimones* which had a positive impact on Socrates.

During cold winter mornings and evenings there's a mauve color to the atmosphere. 'Texture' might be a better term which is more a hands-on feel for it. The same applies to the tops of bare trees during the course of a day, especially cloudy weather, but it's more subtle and require closer attention.

In Iceland it's customary on New Year's Day to visit grave sites. Not only that, they camp out there for an extended period of time and eat the favorite food of the deceased. Don't forget. This is the darkest period of the year in the mid Atlantic. In the case at hand, it was a lady beloved by many, Guðrídur Ástrasdóttir. Guðrídur loved rice pudding (super-saturated with heavy cream), so the family and friends stuffed themselves with that meal...all under a makeshift tent by her grave...even though some found the pudding tough going. After all, it was made as she liked it, and they conformed to tradition. Actually, when some of her children were growing up, they found the name Guðrídur difficult to pronounce so they resorted to her nickname 'Duna.' This is a very common practice in Iceland; not so much for pronunciation purposes, but they use a short name ending in a vowel because it declines more easily. The relationship between the proper name and nickname isn't always with the latter being derivative, developed from history. Many Icelanders don't know the connection, just something accepted.

Baptism of the Lord followed by the re-introduction of Ordinary Time but only briefly until Ash Wednesday. This insertion of Ordinary Time, the first since Advent, is a bit awkward because as soon as this the last Christmas feast is over (technically speaking the Presentation on February 2 is the real end), we start to anticipate Lent. Often this anticipation contains some remote apprehension mostly as a left-over from the old days of heavy duty fasting and the way sin/guilt had been presented. While we've grown out of this, still residual memories remain, notably among folks old enough to recall the stricter observances of that time. We also tend to look beyond Lent into the Easter season which, in turn, puts us at the threshold of summer. Thus the liturgical year is not only relevant to the life of the Church but to the change of seasons.

Today's Gospel (Mt 3.3-17) finds Jesus at the shores of the Jordan River with John the Baptist. It's another instance of liturgical time compression: the birth of Christ and the thirty-odd years of which we know nothing about until the beginning of his ministry. Thus from the Epiphany to the Baptism we take a huge leap over

the bulk of Christ's life, almost as though it never existed. Again, no problem. We're left to fill in the gap (which is akin to filling in our own lives). Here Jesus responds to John's protestation about being baptized: "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness (*dikaiosune*). Then he consented" [vs. 15]. John instinctively knew what this righteousness consisted of. Apparently all four Gospels don't speak of it in the context of John's ministry, however, Jesus does mention it in Mt 21.32, 'For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him.' It seems that such *dikaiosune* is more than fulfillment of an obligation or a religious duty. After all vs. 15 just cited says 'all righteousness' which may refer to John acknowledging the divinity of Christ. Also the words, 'for thus it is fitting for us' are a participatory gesture where two people are equals in carrying through the act.

'When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest' [Lk 11.24]. Note the word 'waterless' which emphasizes the emptiness of desert areas. It's in contrast with the place from which he had been cast out, the 'house from which I came' [also, vs. 24]. In the parable no specific mention is made of this former place except some verses earlier regarding the dumb man, but that isn't certain. However, emphasis is put upon the unclean spirit's return which 'he finds swept and put in order' [vs. 25]. That implies he likes filth, being unclean or *akathartos* by nature. Compare such *akathartos* with the second characteristic of this fellow, 'put in order' or *kekosmemenos*. This word should be considered in light of the adjective *kosmios* (well-behaved, modest), the noun *kosmos* (world) and finally the verb *kosmeo* (to adorn, decorate, put in order). Very positive terms which play an important part in Plato's description of the soul, but here isn't the place to go into that. Getting back to the unclean spirit...impressed by the *kekosmemenos* of his former home, he summons 'seven other spirits more evil than himself' [vs. 26]. The adjective for these spirits is *poneros* which implies guilt and even filth worse than *akathartos*.

'Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways' [1 Sam 8.5]. Words by the elders of Israel to the prophet Samuel which set in motion a wholly new development in their history, that is, establishment of a kingly rule. It's always interesting to trace as far back as possible a small, isolated incident which begat something new and unexpected. A bit later the Lord said to Samuel, 'According to all the deeds which they have done to me...so they are also doing to you' [vs. 8]. Reference is to forsaking God and worshiping idols. Interesting how close is the identity between the Lord and Samuel.

Today's Gospel continues the general Christmas theme with the testimony of John the Baptist (Jn 1.19-34). Representatives from the religious authorities came out to inquire as to John's identity, and he gave the famous response of being a voice crying in the wilderness. It's interesting that amid what was most likely a tumult of people out there in the desert wondering about John that he recognized Jesus (vs. 29). No hint is given as to how John picked him out, just that he did. We get a hint of this recognition when Mary met Elizabeth while both were still pregnant: 'For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my (Elizabeth) womb leaped for joy' [Lk 1.44]. In other words, we're dealing with a recognition not explained by sense perception. It's more akin to a presence which you either have or don't have just like John picking out Jesus at the Jordan, one man among possibly hundreds milling about.

The figure of a bronze serpent in the desert is often applied to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Everyone who had been bitten by serpents was healed upon looking at this image. An interesting passage by Abba Isaiah has a nice twist to this image. Here the bronze serpent is 'rusty' or *shchtny* in Syriac instead of gold or silver. Such rust represents 'Christ according to the flesh' which is subject to deviation or *mzlyn*. If a person (now speaking of a Christian made in the divine image and likeness) neglects oneself, he or she becomes 'rusty' with sin and you continue in this sin, you assume the image of Satan. Then Abba Isaiah contrasts this rust with the brilliance of 'your Father in heaven.'

Today's Gospel (Mt 4.12-22) skips over Christ's temptation after his baptism, almost in deference to the First Sunday of Lent which is less than a month away. Jesus quotes Isaiah, 'The people who sat in darkness has seen a great light' [vs. 16]. This is striking in light of Plato's famous allegory of the cave in the **Republic**. There prisoners were sitting not so much in darkness but in a kind of shadow land. Regardless, the two images certainly speak of the human condition.

A sure sign of cold weather is when rhododendrons curl up in their attempt to conserve heat...not unlike people bundling up with a large winter coat.

Sts. Robert, Alberic and Stephen, founders of the Cistercian Order. These three men were Benedictine monks in France who wanted to follow the Rule of St. Benedict more rigorously. The word 'rigorously' must be taken in the context of around the year 1098 (the Order's actual foundation). One can only imagine what that means given the circumstances of the times! In addition to a desire for more rigor, an early account has them discussing about wanting to increase their devotion and austerity. This same account has the local inhabitants 'running away with fear' at their austerity. Again, we're talking about peasant folk just barely getting by; even the well-off were paupers compared to us today.

In **Anamnesis**, Voegelin speaks of 'metaxy' which comes from the Greek preposition (*metaxy*) for 'between.' This point is basic to a historian as Voegelin, for it well situates the sphere of human activity between his origins and end or the human and divine spheres. "Between-ness" is limited (Voegelin gives several quotes from Plato and Aristotle) as opposed to boundless, a concept the ancient Greeks loathed. More precisely, boundedness—not exactly a good way of putting it in English—is vital to an understanding of three archetypes, the good, the beautiful and the just. We hear a lot about infinity both in science (physics, astronomy) as well as in theology and tend to think of the absolute in that way. A closer consideration of 'between-ness' reveals that when you have a bounded system you're better able to function as a human being, that is, morally and spiritually. The problem is that we tend to think of such boundedness as restraining and confining, a misperception partly arising from our un-acquaintance with the good, the beautiful and the just.

Consider the familiar parable about the Pharisee and tax collector who prayed in the temple (Lk 18.9-14). The latter 'went down to his house justified rather than the other.' Essentially this fellow was put right with God compared with the Pharisee. Nevertheless, he was a tax collector or a person known to everyone in the community. Back home he retained the memory of his conversion which certainly must have affected his behavior; nothing is said about discarding his job, so we may assume he continued collecting taxes as before. At the same time this man had to live with memories before his conversion coupled with the reactions at his new behavior from those who know him. Surely his conversion must have made an impact, and he was subject to derogatory remarks, a hard thing to live with. This represents a little talked about aspect of the spiritual life, namely, comporting oneself after a conversion (not necessarily dramatic but substantial) in light of the past. Perhaps you can deal with your memories but the way people who knew you then and how they are reacting to you now can be a crippling experience. It can almost undo the conversion or render it worthless. That's the nice thing about parables: you can take the example of someone like the tax collector and expand it out into a real person even to the point of building a legend around it.

One of the sharpest censures leveled against Origen is his notion of *koros*, a Greek term meaning satiety. Applied to theology, he speculated that once Christ had redeemed the world everything would achieve this *koros*. Once attained, we'd start all over again *ad infinitum*. Some of this can be picked up in Origen's **De Principiis**. What's interesting is that he had in mind the Greek aversion for infinity, a fact which ties in with that ongoing discussion to which I alluded about the 'closed' Greek philosophic tradition and the 'open' Christian cosmology. The excerpt runs:

'But let us now return to the order of our proposed discussion, and behold the commencement of creation, so far as the understanding can behold the beginning of the creation of God. In that commencement, then, we are to suppose that God created so great a number of rational or intellectual creatures (or by whatever name they are to be called), which we have formerly termed understandings, as He foresaw would be sufficient. It is certain that He made them according to some definite number, predetermined by Himself: for it is not to be imagined, as some would have it, that creatures have not a limit, because where there is no limit there can neither be any comprehension nor any limitation. Now if this were the case, then certainly created things could neither be restrained nor administered by God. For, naturally, whatever is infinite will also be incomprehensible. Moreover, as Scripture says, 'God has arranged all things in number and measure;' and therefore number will be correctly applied to rational creatures or understandings, that they may be so numerous as to admit of being arranged, governed, and controlled by God. But measure will be appropriately

applied to a material body; and this measure, we are to believe, was created by God such as He knew would be sufficient for the adorning of the world. These, then, are the things which we are to believe were created by God in the beginning, i.e., before all things. And this, we think, is indicated even in that beginning which Moses has introduced in terms somewhat ambiguous, when he says, 'In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth.' For it is certain that the firmament is not spoken of, nor the dry land, but that heaven and earth from which this present heaven and earth which we now see afterwards borrowed their names.'

Feast of the Presentation, a touching feast...not a major one but a delight to contemplate. Actually we're little over a month from Christmas, and today signifies the end of that season which few people seem to realize. It and Ash Wednesday (only a week away this year) are the two feasts one associates with February. The Jewish rite of purification (cf. Lk 2.22-4) is based upon Lev 12.2-5, the purification of a woman after childbirth. Consider vs. 4: 'She shall not touch any hallowed thing nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purifying are complete.' The Hebrew verb for 'touch' is *nagah* which connotes the sense of approaching. This verse is ironic in Mary's case, for here she is with the newly born Christ whom she certainly must have 'touched' after his birth.

'Saul's uncle said to him and to his servant, 'Where did you go?'...But about the matter of the kingdom of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him anything' [1Sam 10.14 & 16]. An example of how a simple sentence, so bland in English, can speak a lot in the original Hebrew. Not that it speaks directly but gives us a glance from the corner of our eye, even if fleeting. The Hebrew word for 'uncle' is *dod* which also translates as 'love: 'Your love is better than wine' [Sg 1.2]. *Dod* is also the verbal root of the proper name David as in King David, and we all know the tense relationship between Saul and David. This use of *dod* as 'uncle' in the verse at hand, especially at the beginning of Saul's reign, kind of intimates the future. The words just quoted ('he did not tell him, that is his *dod*, anything') are interesting...almost as though Saul didn't want to discuss his future tumultuous relationship with David. Obviously this is reading into the text, but the Hebrew allows one to do such things.

In his **The Greeks and the Irrational** Dodd says we should look elsewhere for the decline of any bright spot in history (he's thinking of Pericles' Athens). Of course there are wars and dissension, but a closer look is in order. Upon attaining a stable period a nation enjoys freedom both collectively and individually. It runs fine for a few generations and then peters out. An almost subconscious reason is that people don't know how to handle their freedom, better, after the first generation has passed away, for the first generation realizes the pain it took to get where they did. Those who hadn't fought for freedom take it for granted and gradually become afflicted with boredom, of not knowing how to comport themselves. Something similar happens in the spiritual life. After all, the masters claim boredom (*acedia* is the technical term for it) is our arch-enemy. Let's say you've streamlined your day to have a certain amount of free time or you're living in an environment somewhat apart from the constraints of pressures most people face and take for granted. Just handling time, bald as that may sound, becomes the problem, one well-documented by such people as the Desert Fathers. Then again, history is replete with instances where structures and observances were heaped up. This didn't happen out of a desire to make life miserable but from painful experience where people got into trouble with their freedom. To maintain freedom—and not in the societal sense—requires perhaps the hardest discipline of them all which boils down to that stuff above about paying attention to your conditionings.

Ash Wednesday situates us in a wholly different liturgical time, quite a difference from yesterday's 'ordinary' time. As for today's Gospel (Mt 6.1-6, 16-18), note the number of 'secret' references:

- 'Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.'
- 'That your alms may be in secret.'
- 'Your Father who sees in secret.'
- 'Go into your room.'
- 'Pray to your Father who is in secret.'
- 'Your Father who sees in secret.'

One feature about Lent you don't hear much about is it as a time of exile. It'd be better to say a heightened sense of exile, for anyone sensitive to things spiritual realizes that life as we know it is deficient, that something

better lies in store for us...in heaven, popularly speaking. Maybe that's the sense behind St Benedict's **Rule** where he says that the life of a monk 'should be a perpetual Lent.' Once this season is over and we move into Eastertide, the liturgy is full with joyous Alleluia refrains and rightly so. Then again, our lives continue on the same as before; no bright lights, just the same as previously. Integrating all this is no mean task, in fact, it takes a lifetime and perhaps that isn't even enough.

'I repent that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me' [1 Sam 15.10]. Words of the Lord to the prophet Samuel concerning Saul who spared King Agag as well as having taken spoil after a battle. The Hebrew for 'repent' is *nacham* which alternately means 'to feel regret,' 'to sigh.' Later vs. 29 we have 'The Glory of Israel will not lie or repent (*nacham*), for he is not a man that he should repent.' In the first instance God is presented as not being subject to *nacham* whereas in the second, we have a distinction between God and the 'Glory of Israel' who can *nacham*. The Hebrew for 'glory' is not the usual *kavod* but *netsach* (rhymes with *nacham*, by the way). *Netsach* also means 'faithfulness,' 'perpetuity,' 'eternity.' For an example of the last two, cf. Ps 16.11: 'In your right hand are pleasures for evermore.' These observations take place in what's probably the most poignant account in the Bible if not all literature, the rejection of Saul as king over Israel. Granted, it's colored by those hostile to Saul or perhaps the kingship itself, for Samuel instituted it at the request of the Lord due to the people's hard-headedness at not accepted the Lord as king.

First Sunday of Lent. Today the season really kicks off. Despite the importance of Ash Wednesday as a day of inauguration, if you will, the First Sunday conveys in earnest the inauguration of a new season. Today's Gospel (Mt 4.1-11) deals with Christ's temptation, a major Lenten theme. Often when you hear familiar passages year after year you can be like the adder of the Psalm which 'turns a deaf ear,' especially when it comes to a well known phrase or sentence. The one in mind is vs. 4: 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' This is a quote from Dt 8.3 where the Lord speaks in the context of manna. First of all, the Gospel term for 'word' is not the familiar *logos* but the lesser known *rhema* which may be defined as 'discourse' because it can contain one or many words. *Logos*, on the other hand, suggests a single word. The Hebrew term in Deuteronomy isn't the equivalent to *logos* (which is *davar*)...in fact, the text lacks any use or equivalent to 'word. It reads, 'man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.' The Hebrew for 'proceeds' is *yatsa*' which you don't immediately associate with 'mouth.' By way of footnote, there's a noun with the same spelling as 'proceeds' or *motsa*', and it means 'a going out,' 'the place from which one goes out' and even 'gate.' Thus the plurality of *rhema* (more than one word) fits in with the equal plurality of *yatsa*'. Also *yatsa*'...despite its connection with God's mouth, doesn't necessarily mean that what he speaks is intelligible; it can be a sigh, groan or any non-intelligible utterance.

The manna (i.e., 'What is it?') in Deuteronomy must have looked like the dusting of snow which covered the ground this morning, chiefly because of the large flakes. In fact, most of it dissolved when the sun got higher even though it's a bit colder than normal.

The Bible has numerous accounts of encounters between the divine and human. Many of the former—in the guise of an angel or prophet—leave the person to whom they communicated a message with amazing speed. The best known is the angel Gabriel who departed Mary as soon as she gave her consent. Another one is the prophet Samuel who just anointed David to take the place of Saul: 'And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah' [1 Sam 16.15]. It's almost as though Samuel wanted to high-tail it out of there. Perhaps if Samuel hung around David would have pressed him for more information. However, that was up to David to figure out as with other similar instances.

The ancient subtitle title of Plato's **Republic** is 'On Justice' where a key point in his thought (368c) runs as follows: 'The investigation we're undertaking is not an easy one but requires keen eyesight. Therefore, since we aren't clever people, we should adopt the method of investigation that we'd use if, lacking keen eyesight, we were told to read small letters from a distance and then noticed that the same letters existed elsewhere in a larger size and on a larger surface. We'd consider it a godsend, I think, to be allowed to read the larger ones first and then to examine the smaller ones, to see whether they really are the same.' From then Socrates launches out to consider the justice of an individual person compared to that of a city. I.e., microcosm/macrocosm, which is the **Republic**'s theme. The last third of Book 1 & spilling over into the next

Book we have Socrates and Adeimantus discussing which myths about the gods to incorporate into the city's education, i.e, for upbringing of children.

Once in a while a quote will stay with you which seems to point to something essential in life. The one in mind comes from **Plato: An Introduction** by Paul Friedlander, p. 9: 'The more a person's life is concerned with the quest for the essential, the more likely he is to perceive a symbolic meaning in what is happening before his eyes.' A sentence like this passes through everyone's mind from time to time when pondering the scale of human history in which we as individuals are drops in a bucket. From that realization it can be a small (and quick) step to view one's life as meaningless, a cog in some cosmic machine. Then if you see, even if dimly, that your life is 'secondary' and primarily representative of a larger reality, such futility fades away. But to make that step is tricky and requires more discipline and focus than at first imagined.

Last Sunday we had the temptation of Christ or what's typical of the beginning of Lent. Today we have the transfiguration (Mt 17.1-9), the second major theme of this season. Both are stations, as it were, en route to Holy Week. The transfiguration has been a favorite theme of the Orthodox tradition which has always emphasized light in their theology and spirituality. As for the text, the concluding verses of chapter sixteen shed some light on what's to come in the transfiguration: 'For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father...There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.' Then we have a six day interval (17.1) after which Jesus is transfigured or changed into another form, taking the verb *metamorphoo* literally. For another use of this verb ('are being changed'), cf. 2 Cor 3.18: 'And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.' Later on in vs. 5 I was struck by the similar sound of *photeine* ('bright' with reference to cloud) and *phone* ('voice' with reference coming from the cloud)...almost an intimation of the similarity of vision and voice, sight and sound. As for *photeine* the adjective, it's related to *phos* or 'light: 'and his garments became white as light' [vs. 2].

A centaur is a mythical beast with the head, arms and torso of a man and the body and legs of a horse. It's an intriguing symbol for so many things, especially for conceiving the tension between what's rational and irrational within ourselves. Plato gives a somewhat analogous description of this dilemma in his **Phaedrus** (253d+); more accurately, he throws in a charioteer who drives a good and bad horse, trying to keep the two in harmony. Keeping with the centaur, it suggests that we (the head, arms and torso) must keep under control the body and legs which are representative of our lower nature. In other words, a discipline without which the latter would take over the former. While true, it stresses the need to 'do something' to ourselves as opposed to perceiving the unity which already exists. Making this distinction can open up a Pandora's box in that people who grasp the insight aren't aware of the attention required to sustain it over the long haul. Any discipline of the physical and intellectual order is easier by comparison. This makes you consider Gospel parable of seed falling on rocky soil which springs up but quickly withers. The centaur image might be extended to theology, more specifically, the unity between Christ's human and divine natures. Even though we might not entertain the notion of a centaur we tend to think of his divinity being the head, arms and torso with the body and legs being his humanity. And so a centaur represents an uneasy alliance at best which leaves us unsatisfied. At the same time we seem to lack the resources of getting beyond this image.

Third Sunday of Lent where the lengthy Gospel consists of the Samaritan woman's conversation with Jesus at the well [Jn 4.5-42]. However, let's focus only upon the geographical context, 'a city of Samaria called Sychar near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph' [vs. 5]. Sychar is Aramaic for Sichem which has an interesting side note concerning the patriarch Joseph: 'The bones of Joseph which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt were buried at Shechem, in the portion of ground which Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem' [Jos 24.32]. Note that when Jesus came to the well he didn't sit on its edge but 'beside it' [vs. 6], almost out of respect for Jacob. Anyway, Genesis the well which Jacob constructed is described in 29.2+ (note that this story occurs right after Jacob's dream at Bethel). This well is interesting in that a large stone was placed on top as protection, and it couldn't be moved unless all the shepherds gathered to roll it back. Along comes Jacob who by himself removed the boulder. Furthermore, Rachel came to this well with her father's sheep. Another story parallel to the Gospel one though not connected with Jacob's well is in Gen 24. Here we have Abraham sending his anonymous servant to fetch a wife for his son Isaac. He comes to a

'spring of water' [vs. 13] which could differ from an actual well. Anyway, the servant meets Rebekah and realizes that she will be the wife for Isaac. The point of recognition comes in vs. 21: 'The man gazed at (*sha'ah*) her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.' Not unlike the attitude of the Samaritan woman with Jesus. The Hebrew *sha'ah* is unusual being the only instance where it has this meaning. The alternate meaning is 'to be wasted, desolate' as in Is 6.11: 'until the cities be wasted.' In the Genesis context, such 'wasting' is intensified by the servant doing it in silence. Parallel this point of recognition with the Samaritan woman: 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet' [vs. 19]. The Greek verb is *theoreo* connotes observation, recognition, and is when the woman actually understands what is going on. I set down all this material in brief, staccato fashion, for it requires a lot of unraveling on the reader's part.

Fourth Sunday of Lent or Laetare Sunday...in other words, halfway through Lent which the Church intimates as a cause for rejoicing. As was the case last Sunday, today's Gospel (Jn 9.1-41) is quite long, s about the blind man whom Jesus cured on the Sabbath. The dialogue takes place around 'the pool of Siloam (which means Sent),' vs. 7. True to its name, Siloam is derived from the common Hebrew verb *shalach*. The only other references to Siloam is Lk 13.4: 'Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?' A footnote in the **RSV** says that Siloam is a section of Jerusalem, so the pool must have been located in that area. There's a reference in Isaiah to Shiloah which might be the same place as Siloam. Although I'm not sure, a verse there is relevant to the Gospel: 'Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently and melt in fear before Rezin and the son of Remaliah' [8.5]. The Hebrew for 'gently' is *lat*, the only use of this term in the Bible and implies wrapping around, muffling; it derives from a verbal root meaning 'to wrap round,' 'to muffle.'

An interesting point about this Gospel is vs. 17, 'So they (Pharisees) again said to the blind man, 'What do you say about him since he has opened your eyes?'' In other words, the Pharisees continued to call this man blind even though Jesus had just cured him...seems indicative of their greater blindness.

Fifth Sunday of Lent, next week being Palm Sunday. Now we're getting into high gear, liturgically speaking, with today's Gospel (Jn 11.1-45) about Lazarus being brought back to life which foreshadows Christ's resurrection. There are many elements at work here. John is at his best when he combines lofty theology and a concrete situation exemplified by the words, 'by this time there will be a stench' [vs. 39] (This is one of the rare times when the **New American Bible** translation excels, it's use of the verb 'stench'). We also have what later Church tradition liked to develop, albeit overboard, the busyness of Martha and the 'contemplative' Mary...the latter remained in the house while the former went out to meet Jesus. In a simple, straight-forward manner Martha confesses her belief in the resurrection (vs. 24) followed by Jesus saying that he himself is the resurrection and life. Despite Martha's long familiarity with Jesus, it seems she didn't grasp this aspect of his nature, another instance where the Gospels are down to earth in portraying not so much unbelief but thick-headedness. Thus friendship isn't always a guarantee as to real knowledge about a person. A bit later when Jesus approaches the tomb he is 'deeply moved' or in Greek, *embrimaomai* [vs. 38]. This verb can apply to the snorting of horses and suggests being moved with anger or indignation, somewhat different from our common perception of Jesus being grieved. Although the following takes place a few verses past today's Gospel, the Jews' response to Jesus raising Lazarus is one of fear of the Romans. 'They will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation' [vs. 48]. The Greek text reads (literally), 'the place and the nation.' Most likely the former, which somewhat resembles our way of saying 'THE place' is the temple which took precedence over everything else.

'Aren't these the reasons, Glaucon, that education in music and poetry is most important? First, because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace.' **Republic**, Book 3.401d. The Greek for 'permeate' here is *kataduo* which variously translates as to sink, to set (as the sun), to get into. A rich word which in this context can apply to rhythm and harmony being carried over into one's soul (*eis to entos tes psuches*) and settling there. I.e., their reality is like the setting sun which brings its presence over the horizon...'sinking' there, as it were. The interesting part about all this is that both rhythm and harmony enter one's psuche through hearing which had greater impact on people who lived in an oral culture.

St. Joseph. A bit out place spatially speaking the day before Palm Sunday but not liturgically which doesn't function on that plane. Mary the mother of Jesus was present at her son's crucifixion but no mention of Joseph in the least after the birth of Christ. Joseph is noted for his silence which doesn't preclude his presence throughout the life of his son. It's interesting to look at Jacob's blessing of Joseph along with his brothers in Gen 49.22-26. For what it's worth, consider a few observations about the NT Joseph about whom we have virtually no information and because of this, requires poetic expression as in Jacob's blessing:

-Fruitful bough: literally, 'fruitful son.'

-Branches: literally, 'daughters march through' (*tsahad*).

-Vs. 23: 'Archers fiercely attacked:' literally, 'shot arrows and multiplied.'

-Harassed (*satom*): in the sense of laying snares. 'It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil which we did to him' [50.15]. The Hebrew text has the untranslatable *bahal* (lord) which connotes possession (of arrows, Hebrew).

-Vs. 24: Unmoved (*yatan*): an unused root. 'You did dry up ever-flowing streams (literally, 'streams of strength', Ps 74.14).'

-Arms. In Hebrew, 'the arms of his hands.'

-Agile (*pazaz*): in the sense of leaping, bounding. 'King David leaping and dancing before the Lord' [2 Sam 6.16].

-Mighty One (*'avyr*): 'Therefore the Lord says, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel' [Is 1.24].

-Vs. 25: God Almighty: in Hebrew, *El Shaddai* as in 28.3. Note the frequent use of 'bless' and/or 'blessing' with respect to Joseph.

-Deep (*tehom*): 'And darkness was upon the face of the deep' [1.2].

-Crouches (*ravats*): as in vs. 14.

-Vs. 26: 'Of the eternal mountains.' The Hebrew text reads, 'of my progenitors to.'

-Bounties (*ta'awah*): in the sense of 'desire.' 'So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes' [3.6].

-Separate (*nazar*): implies the sense of being consecrated. 'And separate himself to the Lord for the days of his separation' [Num 6.12].

It's interesting to note that the Old Testament Joseph served the Egyptian Pharaoh. Compare with the New Testament Joseph who took refuge in Egypt which contrary to the Exodus experience, was often a place to escape tyranny from other lands. The ancients Greeks weren't familiar with the concept of dogma as we are today in the context of religion. This absence may appear peculiar to us, but it had advantages. First, religion for them was intimately connected with culture, the two not even being, well, two but one. Thus a philosophically or scientifically minded Greek could subscribe to the gods, make the requisite sacrifices and turn to his work without blinking an eye or seeing a contradiction between the two. Quite a difference even from the similarly ancient Christians faced with death if they didn't offer sacrifices to the gods or emperor. This ability to shift from one mode to another apparently contradictory one is admirable and may be applicable for us, albeit with caution. Right away we'd take this as a kind of double-mindedness, shifty and at worst, treacherous. Then again, this view results from the tendency to view religion through the prism of dogma. By the way, dogma in Greek also means 'opinion' as well as 'glory,' very interesting.

The Gospel incident of Thomas putting his hands into the nail marks of Jesus is the only such recorded incident. Take, for example, the road to Emmaus where the disciples recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread. The act of breaking would certainly draw attention the hands of the one doing it, but no such mention is made. Maybe it's intimated by Jesus suddenly vanishing.

Lucretius' **On the Nature of Things** is a handbook of Epicurean philosophy. Quite a difference between ancient materialism and today's, the latter being filled with despair due to an inability to philosophize about their position. It'd be interesting to pursue the Epicurean school in greater depth to see if any insights there may have positive application today. Certain their contemporaries the Stoics did, something to counterbalance that influence.

Philip Koch's **Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter** goes at some lengths to define solitude in light of related experiences: alienation, privacy and loneliness. While some of this digression is a bit boring and on the

technical side, it does have the advantage of defining solitude as the natural condition of a human being. Koch fills this out by using the word 'disengagement.' He does so positively and as a need for today's hectic world. At first disengagement sounds negative (and it can be) but seems akin to *apatheia*, a hard-to-define word which signifies freedom from passion. Everyone has solitude yet few seem to handle it properly, chiefly because of all the talk society bombards us with concerning social interaction.

As is usual, Eastertide has readings from the Acts of the Apostles which is an historical account of the early Church. Hearing the same material (it often overlaps) can be boring as opposed to the poetic style of readings prior to Easter Sunday.

'He (Zimri) did not leave him a single male of his kinsmen or his friends' [1 Kg 16.11]. The Hebrew word for 'male' is *shatan beqyr*, literally as 'pisses against the wall'

'No one whose thoughts are truly directed towards the things that are, Adeimantus, has the leisure (*scholē*) to look down at human affairs or to be filled with envy and hatred by competing with people.' **Republic**, 500b.

The Greek word *hulē* means 'matter' in the physical sense which is akin to primordial, unorganized stuff which needs organization. Originally it applied to wood or the forest as well as fuel for heating. Then there's the word *stoicheion*, rather ambiguous, which refers to rudiments, elements of knowledge as well as letters (the alphabet). St. Paul uses it negatively as in Gal 4.3: 'We were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe.' However, Heb 5.12 is different: 'You need some one to teach you again the first principles of God's word.' Both terms are worth exploring at some future date (with a whole bunch of other stuff!). In brief, it might be said that *ta stoicheia*...as letters of the alphabet...give order to *hulē* or raw matter. *Ta stoicheia* allow for interpretation of the physical world and everything within it, a kind of channel for obtaining wisdom.

After Pentecost, however, we get right back into Ordinary Time. The abrupt shift is softened by such feasts as the Trinity, Corpus Christi and Sacred Heart. Regardless, the shift has occurred, and we must adapt to it. I think everyone concurs that any talk about the Spirit is so vague and diffuse. One way of getting a better handle on the Spirit is consideration of three verse from John's Gospel:

- 'The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you' [14.26]. Here the phrase 'bring to remembrance' is *hupomimnesko*, literally 'remember under.'

- 'The Counselor...will bear witness to me' [15.26].

- 'He will guide you into all the truth' [16.13].

In this, the richest passage of the New Testament, you might expect to find the noun and/or verb *anamnesis*, recollection, but it isn't. Nevertheless, it can be assumed with regard to how the Holy Spirit will function after Pentecost within the Church by re-minding people of Christ's divinity and all the rest.

'It is the hour our souls possess with your full flood of holiness.' Words from the Church's 'little' office of Terce usually said around 10 am to commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It assumes greater meaning during this week's 'retreat' for the coming Sunday. For most people 10 am when Terce is recited is the least spiritual time of the day being in the thick of the day's work. Nevertheless, that's when the Holy Spirit decided to make his presence known.

There's both a fascination and mystery about borders whether they be one's own property, a state or town line. If you stand at such a border (let's say in a wooded area) geographically speaking you can't tell the difference between your property and the other person's. There might be a stonewall or some other demarcation, but that's about it. Nature didn't make borders, we did. At the same time you realize that you are standing on a piece of property that differs from someone else's. This is especially fascinating if the border is old as here in New England. Apart from these considerations, a border signifies a different presence which you feel when stepping onto that other property. Hang around a border in an isolated area to get the feel of it. No small wonder the ancients stationed gods here to act as protectors and watchmen. When it's quiet you can almost feel their presence or at least the spirit that gave rise to their existence.

'Therefore our days are lengthened to a truce for the amendment of the misdeeds of our present life.' From the Prologue of the **Rule** of St. Benedict. Two Latin words worth mentioning: *indutiae* for 'truce' and *relaxo* for 'are lengthened.' The idea of a truce or suspension of hostilities is intriguing with our relationship with God. Benedict puts this suspension in terms of a 'relaxation,' if you will, of our temporal duration in which we manifest a native tension towards God. In any truce you have two opposing armies. Either they've gone at it and need to back off some or one is weaker than the other and needs to negotiate a settlement hopefully in its favor. Hence an *indutiae* with regard to our lifespan doesn't mean we've made definitive peace with God. Perhaps it's more along the lines of that suspension which, in turn, intimates that hostilities can resume at any moment, and that we must be on guard against this.

Pentecost Sunday. 'And they were bewildered' [Acts 2.6]. response by Jews who were present at the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. The Greek verb for 'bewildered' is *sunecho* which suggests being hemmed in on all sides or held prisoner as in the following: 'I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished' [Lk 12.50]! The unity of speech, as it were, at Pentecost is often contrasted with the tower of Babel: 'Come, let us go down and there confuse their language that they may not understand one another's speech' [Gen 11.7]. The Hebrew verb for 'confuse' is *balal* (i.e., Babel) which suggests a pouring together, almost a polluting. *Balal* differs from the experience of *sunecho*'s 'constraint' at Pentecost, almost its opposite. The former demonstrates a scattering as happened to the people who erected the tower whereas the latter, a constraint were the devout Jews were compelled to witness the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

'And they carried the ark of God upon a new cart' [2 Sam 6.3]. The verb *rakav* for 'carried' does mean this but implies riding as on a horse. It makes sense with the ark upon a cart though the English gives the impression that the Israelites were effecting the action. A bit later when Uzzah reached out to steady the ark God killed: 'the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah' [vs. 7]. Two verses along David 'was angry' at the Lord for having done this. The noun as applied to God is derived from the verbal root as applied to David, so it seems we have an exchange of anger, of leveling the playing field, as it were.

The Greek word *aporia* means puzzlement or bewilderment. Socrates is the acknowledge master of *aporia*, and he want people to reach this state of mind. *Aporia* is far from negative though initially it looks that way to the uninitiated. After all, *aporia* is a de-nudement, a stripping bear of our opinions which we've held dear and are reluctant, even to the point of violence, to relinquish. Here isn't the place to expand upon it, simply to bring up the term which may be considered in light of religious faith. Obviously the two are different yet are similar in some fashion. Faith is a stripping of pre-conceived ideas and opinions, pretty much similar to Socratic *aporia*. It differs from *aporia* in that our souls seem to stretch forward to some invisible presence which we can never lay hold of yet one to which we repeatedly return because...well, it's satisfying, and this satisfaction can't be transmitted to another person expect by testimony. This is the act of faith. However, a problem can arise when we discuss faith because it degenerates into dogma which, unfortunately, is rigidly held. I.e., dogma is often associated with belief as opposed to faith, even though dogma is supposed to be a formal expression of faith. If in this situation you were to apply Socratic *aporia* you'd quickly run into trouble. The person with whom you're speaking in such a mindset would be reluctant to give up his or her beliefs even to the point of death. Thus the connection between *aporia* and faith is close yet different and requires further exploration. Better, it'd be fun to try it out on yourself and see where the two differ and converge.

'Today will be a one or two town shower day.' A colorful way a local meteorologist described today's weather and it indeed came true

In Proverbs (3.3, 6.21 & 7.3) we have three uses of the term 'bind' with respect to God and parents: 'Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them about your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.' 'Bind them (father's commandment & mother's teaching) upon your heart always; tie them about your neck.' 'Bind them (God's commandments) on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart.' All three use the Hebrew word *qashar* which can also refer to forming a conspiracy (cf. 1 Sam 22.8). The Proverbs references puts this *qashar* in physical terms...heart, neck and fingers, instruments by which we feel and get about in the world and with each other. The imagery is vivid and meant to tie a person, almost restrict him or her, to God.

In normal everyday life we don't have this sense of urgency, and it's quite another thing to put into practice. Nevertheless, when faced with difficulties or humiliations we somehow automatically go to this qashar and discover to our delight that it's the place where we ought to be. The question is, how to maintain such a qashar in circumstances which are quite ordinary and don't give rise to distress.

'I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.' The first verse of Ps 40. The Hebrew text for the first part of this verse reads, 'Waiting I waited.' The verb at hand is *qawah* which also means 'to be strong' and connotes a twisting as with regard to a rope. Why two 'waits?' Both refer to a passive, receptive sort of attitude. The first is a participle which pertains to the psalmist's continued activity which had been going on for an indefinite period of time and indicates his present state of relationship with God. The second (past tense) means that he had been waiting for an equally indefinite period which flows over into the continued one. Thus the two *qawahs* combined can indicate a fairly permanent state of attention. It makes God incline (*natah*), and the verse suggests this inclination comes from above to the psalmist down below.

Consider this interesting section in Plato's **Republic** where Socrates speaks of a craftsman being able to replicate everything... 'It isn't hard. You could do it quickly and in lots of places, especially if you were willing to carry a mirror with you, for that's the quickest way of all. With it you can quickly make the sun, the things in the heavens, the earth, yourself, the other animals, manufactured items, plants, and everything else mentioned just now' (596.d). This serves as a take-off point in the last book for Plato to put forth his preference for the essence of things as opposed to their imitation; very important to read carefully, for it's where he is most misunderstood.

Immaculate Heart of Mary. A very Western feast as with the one from yesterday, Sacred Heart. Given the way the liturgical time clock, as it were, has evolved, today represents the very end of the Lenten/Easter/Pentecostal season. Ash Wednesday was 115 days ago today. From there we moved to Easter, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, Sacred Heart and now the Immaculate Heart. No stragglers after today! Although this year's Gospel didn't include 'a sword shall pierce your (Mary) heart' which is often associated with today, we can compare it with Ash Wednesday's Gospel about fasting. That is to say, the injunctions to fast in secret where our heavenly Father sees (in secret). Between then and now...115 days...we've spelled out this interaction between secretness or hiddenness and manifestation. That's one third of the calendar year, the rest being Ordinary Time where the interaction is fleshed out or until Advent.

Today's Gospel (Mt 9.36-10.8) has Jesus summoning his disciples to care for the crowds (*ochlos*), not a very flattering term which would include us all. Still, they were the object of Jesus' pity (*splaghnizomai*, verb) which suggests one's bowels or inmost self: 'through the tender mercy of our God' [Lk 1.78], the noun being equivalent to the Hebrew *chesed*. The Gospel excerpt contains the last three verses of chapter 9 yet flows into chapter 10 which seems to be a different context, that is, after Jesus told his disciples to pray for laborers in the harvest. Chapter 10 names the twelve disciples though several are mentioned in chapter 4. A few verses earlier (9.37) Jesus addresses his disciples which seems a larger if not more generic group from which he specifies twelve. They are endowed with some rather dramatic powers which the text casually records, let alone the disciples' reaction which surely would dazzle anyone: cure the sick, raise the dead, etc. As important as these may be they are secondary to vs. 7, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' *Egguizo* is the verb which can mean 'to draw near,' 'to approach.' In other words, *egguizo* doesn't necessarily mean the kingdom of heaven is present in the sense as already existing here and now. Perhaps there's a connection between Jesus' *splaghnizomai*—*presence* within—and the more distant *egguizo* or better, the 'space' in between them which the disciples need to fill. Given the mission of Jesus to Israel, it's only natural to start there ('Go nowhere among the Gentiles,' 10.5) and later expand this 'space' to include them, a task left for after Pentecost and beyond.

'He drew me up from the desolate pit (literally, pit of tumult), out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure' [Ps 40.2]. Note the distinction between feet and steps. The Hebrew of the former is *regel* (singular) with the same meaning in English. The latter is *'ashur* (singular) which has a broader meaning. This term is one of those pivotal words that stays with you enabling other concepts to be unlocked. For example, elsewhere on this Home Page it was observed that the verbal root *'ashar* means 'to be

happy.' From it derives the relative pronoun '*asher* (who, which, that). Thus we can say that the idea of happiness leans towards the transitional side of reality as represented by the relative pronoun. Such pronouns lay in between the person or object and the action or place relative to it. A simple example: Here is Mary who is sitting on the chair. Attention isn't so much upon Mary nor upon the chair/sitting but upon the who-ness... which lays in between. And so happiness seems to have a very different meaning from ours, let alone the Greek *makarios* and Latin *beatus* (as in the Beatitudes). You can't quite put your hands on happiness. To be attentive to it you have to somehow shift your focus upon that which is transitional but not transitional in the sense of transitory, the action bridging two poles.

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel is Mt 10.26-33 where two renderings of the word 'house' are found: housetops (vs. 27) and household (vs. 36). The former deals with a proclaiming of 'what you hear whispered' which literally reads 'what you hear in (into) the ear,' this being done on housetops. The latter says that one's family members will become enemies, a space generally not open to other people or non-family members. The verse before this Sunday's Gospel reads, 'If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.' In other words, there's a shift from the devil (Beelzebul is one of his names, 'lord of dung') or better, his household to a human one. Perhaps this verse is a cautionary one for the words to come, especially vs. 36.

The Gospel begins with an twofold interplay of hiddenness/manifestation: on one hand 'covered' is a form of *kalupto* and 'revealed' or *apokalupto* (from which comes Apocalypse). On the other hand is 'hidden' or *kruptos* and 'known' or *gignosko*. The first pair suggests the removal of a veil intimating the presence of something there waiting to become manifest. The second pair intimates something not at all recognized which later becomes such. These two pairs may be viewed in light of a second in vs. 27: on one hand, telling in the 'dark' (*skotia*) vs. uttering in the 'light' (*phos*) and on the other hand, 'whispered' (as noted, 'in the ear') vs. 'proclaimed' (*kerusso*) on a high place, a housetop. The former relates to the sense of sight whereas the latter to that of hearing.

Jesus give priority to the 'soul' or *psuche* in vs. 28 with special warning as to the death of both body and soul in hell or Gehenna (the Greek). Traditionally, Gehenna lies beneath the earth, a place hidden from the living and a land of shadowy existence which can tie in with the above-mentioned interplay between hiddenness and manifestation. Death of the *psuche* is intimated by a failure of people to acknowledge (*homologeō*) Christ before men or the manifest realm which spills over into the unmanifest realm, 'before my Father who is in heaven.' Note the Greek, 'acknowledge in me before men' and 'I will acknowledge in him before my Father.' I.e., two 'ins' which can parallel that interplay between being hidden and being manifest.

The departure of King David from Jerusalem and his retinue (2 Sam 15-17) is among one of the best biblical accounts. It's pervaded by a lonesomeness by such instances as having left ten concubines to mind the king's household, pausing at the last house of Jerusalem, the passing of David's servants before him, Ittai and his 'little ones,' crossing the Kedron, ascending the Mount of Olives, weeping of the people with David, Ziba coming with bread and raisins for those fleeing and finally, Abishai who threw rocks at David while cursing him. In the midst of this drama we have Abiathar and Zadok who 'set down the ark of the God until the people had all passed out of the city' [15.24]. The Hebrew verb for 'set down' is *yatsaq* which more properly means a casting as of metal, a pouring out. It was as though God's presence in the ark was being poured out as the people were pouring out of Jerusalem. Note, however, that later David orders the priest Zadok to return the ark to Jerusalem, a symbol of hope or for better things to come.

The Greek verb *planao* is one of those key concepts which means 'to wander' and from which we derive 'planet' because these heavenly bodies wander across the sky. For Plato *planao* stands midway between being and not-being, favoring opinion as opposed to true knowledge. The problem is this in between-ness, for opinion can partake of just enough knowledge to be correct some of the time thereby imitating it. An example is from the Republic: 'Do you know how to deal with them? Or can you find a more appropriate place to put them than intermediate between being and not being? Surely, they can't be more than what is or not be more than what is not, for apparently nothing is darker than what is not or clearer than what is. We've no discovered, it seems that according to the many conventions of the majority of people about beauty and the

others, they are rolling around (*planao*) as intermediates between what is not and what purely is' (479d)

The following list of references from Plato's **Republic** pertain to the colorful Greek verb *polupragmoneo* which literally translates as 'to be busy about many things' and connotes stressfulness in acting this way. The verb connotes actions pertaining to someone who's a busybody meddling in what he or she shouldn't be doing:

- 'It may seem strange that while I go around and give this advice privately and interfere in private affairs, I do not venture to go to the assembly and there advise the city.' **Apology**, 31.c5

- 'But perhaps it would be better if you stated the answers yourself, rather than that I should busy myself on your behalf.' **Theatetus** 184 e4

- 'Are you a busybody and intemperate when you do this?' **Charmides** 161 d11

- 'Once in a while he inspects another soul...especially that of a philosopher who has minded his own affairs and hasn't been meddlesome in the course of his life.' **Gorgias** 526 c4

- 'Moreover, we've heard many people say and have often said ourselves that justice is doing one's own work and not meddling with what isn't one's own.' **Republic** 433 a8

- 'Or is it (wisdom of the guardians)...above all when each does his own work and doesn't meddle with what is other people's?' **Republic** 433 d5

- 'When someone attempts to enter the class of soldiers, or one of the unworthy soldiers tries to enter that of the judges and guardians...then I think you'll agree that these exchanges and all this sort of meddling bring the city to ruin' **Republic** 434 b7

- 'One who is just does not allow any part of himself to do the work of another part or allow the various classes within him to meddle with each other.' **Republic** 443 d2

- 'Surely it (injustice) must be a kind of civil war between the three parts, a meddling and doing of another's work, a rebellion by some part against the whole soul in order to rule it inappropriately.' **Republic** 444 b2

- 'We generally say that so far as the supreme deity and the universe are concerned, we ought not to bother our heads hunting up explanations, because that is an act of impiety' **Laws** 821 a3

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, today's Gospel being Mt 11.25-30. 'I thank you' (*exomologeō*) fundamentally means to confess in the sense of acknowledging though the **LXX** took it the verb as giving praise. 'Revealed' (*apokalupto*), a verb which immediately suggests the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse) yet on a more humble though real plane of uncovering a reality already present awaiting to be acknowledged. That's where the verb *exomologeō* might come in handy, an 'acknowledgment' of this hiddenness. 'Babes' (*nepios*) or alternately minors. The problem here is that *nepios* can be misinterpreted as a fairly ignorant person who misconstrues his ignorance...even to the point of boasting about it...with virtue. Adopting this stance easily and tragically glosses over the necessity to cultivate one's intellect as represented by the Greek terms *sophos* and *sunetos*, terms which shouldn't be taken out of context. 'Such was your gracious will.' The Greek text better reads as 'it was well-pleasing (*eudokia*) before (*emprosthen*) you.' The preposition suggests a being-in-front-of or in the place, as it were, where babes receive a divine revelation or uncovering. Contrast the 'wise' (*sophos*) and 'understanding' (*sunetos*) with the 'knowing' now presented: such knowing is an *epignosis* (noun) or literally, a 'knowing upon' which is probably the real distinction between divine knowing and the one represented by *sophos* and *sunetos*. From this point (vs. 28 onwards) the Gospel switches to the image of assuming Christ's yoke where a person will find rest (*anapausis*) which can be the equivalent of our idea of recreation. Note that such *anapausis* is for the *psuche* or soul.

There's an absolutely huge problem when it comes to approaching Plato, so huge that it's virtually insurmountable due to the way it has sunken into the collective consciousness of the Western world. The problem centers around a misinterpretation of the words 'form' and 'idea,' almost always considered as being outside normal experience. The people and stuff around us are secondary and participate in some kind of heavenly idea...a physical table participating in heavenly tableness. This is so familiar to anyone with a minimum of education that it doesn't have to be spelled out. As with the case of any important thinker, those who came after latched themselves on to a key concept or two and sought to interpret them which usually ended up in a distortion. Not that they had evil intent but were too eager in pushing their master's ideas forward (while they went along for the ride on his coattails). Then after these errors had sunken in society as a whole, along comes a person of a rarer breed who sees the problem and offers a solution, and we wonder

why it hadn't been thought of earlier. There comes to mind Eric Voegelin's remark, 'We have traced the Platonic insight to the point where it results in a general proposition that can be detached from its motivating experience' (**Order and History: Plato and Aristotle**, vol 3, p.70). At first sight nothing special, but we have a sentence that's quite loaded. Okay, so someone important like Plato has an insight that catches on. The 'proposition' impacts several generations, inspiring them in their philosophic inquiry. The layers of interpretation that have subsequently grown up and encrusted the original insight gradually supplant it until we're left with what amounts to an opinion, an educated guess clothed in language not dissimilar to that original insight. The end product is the same word to describe the original insight only now it has distanced itself from the impulse that gave rise to the word and hence the concept. Again... 'idea' in Plato represents a perfect table existing somewhere up there in which imperfect tables down here somehow participate. This notion supplants the creative impulse behind 'idea' (*eidos*) as figure or shape where things represented by it tend towards realization.

Read slowly. However, it's easier said than done. The basis of reading slowly lies in the early morning hours, a time most favorable for *lectio divina*. Although you might not realize it then, this special time has a way of spilling over into the rest of the day. It creates a true *anamnesis*, a recollection of that precious time early on in the day. Early morning hours are ideal for leisurely pondering a word or two or three, not much more, and just hanging around with it. The temptation to speed up is always present. You wonder why, especially after a fruitful hour or so. When you give in to the temptation you quickly discover that your understanding of the text is often less than if you deliberately plodded along. One such slow read at the moment is a verse lifted here and there from the Psalter, the Hebrew text. Reason: Hebrew has a unique way of making you go deep, of sinking down, to grasp lays of the text which otherwise are unavailable. For example... 'Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. 'Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust' [Ps 40.3-4]. A lot more words than I just recommended, but there are two patterns we can lift from the verses. First we have the 'many' who first 'will see' (*ra'ah*) and then '(will) fear' (*yare*'). Given the change of forms, both verbs look and sound alike, at first glance interchangeable: *yere'u/yiyra'u*. It is this group which 'puts their trust' (*batach*) in the Lord.' Next we have the 'man' (*geber*) who has the Lord as his 'trust' (*mivtach*), from the verbal root *batach* but here as a noun. *Geber* means more a man of strength as opposed to, well, any man. The strength implied here can mean that such a *geber* has confidence to equate the Lord with trust. Unlike the 'many,' he doesn't have to engage in the action of trust.

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Mt 13.1-23) deals with the various types of seeds sown, worthy of a whole text. Anyway, here's an outline of the various seeds; first the parable in vss. 3-8 followed by the parentheses which sum up Christ's explanation in vss. 18-23:

- birds devoured them: evil one snatches what's sown in one's heart.
- rocky ground where seeds sprang up and withered due to little or no root: one hears the word with joy but tribulation and persecutions makes him fall away.
- thorns choked the seeds: hears the word but world's care and riches choke it.
- good soil yields of a hundred-fold, sixty and thirty: hears and understands.

A note for the context of this Gospel, towards the end of Chapter 12, i.e., vs. 46, we have 'his mother and his brothers (who) stood outside.' The identification is simply a house (cf. 13.1). Regardless, we have a movement from its confines with the most immediate members of Jesus' group to the outside or to a boat. While the Gospel makes no specific mention of re-entering the same house (vs. 10), their inquiry for explanation of the parable possibly took place on the boat. If so, you wonder what the crowd onshore was thinking when it saw but could not hear the conversation. In other words, this situation is akin to the meaning of the Isaiah quote briefly discussed in the next paragraph (seeing but not hearing, etc.). Jesus put forth this parable which in the form we have is short and straightforward. Maybe Jesus spelled it out to the crowds in greater detail, something you'd expect because a lot of people had gathered round, so many that he had to take a boat and address them from offshore. Then again, we've heard the parable so often that it requires putting ourselves in the crowd to appreciate what Jesus was attempting to communicate. The disciples asked Jesus to explain the parable but before he did, he quoted Isaiah (6.9-10) about hearing without understanding and seeing without perceiving. Next Jesus calls his disciples blessed because they see and hear. Maybe true on a deeper level though not evident from their behavior both here and in other places throughout the Gospels. Jesus also

contrasts the crowd's inability to see and hear along with the disciples' ability to do so with prophets and righteous men. This category of people longed (*epithumeo*) to see and hear but did not...not because they resembled the crowd but lacked full revelation. They differed from the crowd and disciples by reason of that *epithumeo*, an intense desire which can have the connotation of sexual longing. For a reference, cf. Mt 15:28: 'Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully (*pros to epithumesai*) has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' Note the preposition *epi* (upon) prefaced to *thumeo*, a longing-upon, which intensifies the verb's meaning. So it appears that Jesus has supplanted this *epithumeo* but then again, the disciples whom he earlier called blessed lacked its fulfillment. *Epithumia* can extend to the Church (also blessed) in that it situates her members within that important middle ground between revelation and final attainment. In sum...vs. 23 speaks of the parable's intent: the seed sown on good soil. The Greek word for good is *kalos* which has a connotation of beauty and can symbolize the disposition of the person receiving it. As for the exact nature of the fruit this seeds will bear, nothing more is said except that it's fruit and will increase. Perhaps we have to center upon the nature of this 'good (*kalos*) soil' as a disposition towards the good (*to kalon*), a subject which would have considerable impact for later Hellenistic hearers.

An interesting quote from the **Phaedo**: 'Mind directs and is the cause of everything. I was delighted with this cause, and it seemed to me good, in a way, that Mind should be the cause of all' (97c). To us English readers very bland words, actually uninspiring, but look at the key Greek word for 'directs,' *diakosmeo*. Without a doubt, it sums up the life of Socrates perfectly, perhaps what was most characteristic of him and set the pattern for countless people to emulate him in later centuries. First, *kosmeo* means 'to set in order, to arrange.' From it we get *cosmos* or 'order' which often refers to the order of the universe. Implied is the notion of beauty, not just strict regimentation. Then the preposition *dia* (through) added to the verb at hand suggests that mind (*nous*: another loaded word implying perception with one's heart and soul) is ordering...beatifying...things in a lovely manner 'through'-out the entire system of things. Socrates also links *aitia* (cause) to the verb *diakosmeo*. Cause is a loaded term in any language, almost always abstract. Don't forget, however, that here in the **Phaedo** Socrates is speaking with intimate friends on the threshold of his death, so all three words are far from abstract. Such little tidbits as these go a long way. They also assist in getting better appreciation of how Christianity differs as well as is profoundly indebted to Plato.

A quote from Vespers of St. Benedict, 11 July: 'Knowingly unacquainted with the world's ways.' The juxtaposition of 'knowingly' and 'unacquainted' intimate a certain cunning on Benedict's part, one with which he wasn't born but acquired. The terms don't mean he withdrew completely from the world but just enough to make use of it. Here we have a real juggling act between living in the here-and-now physical world while spiritually having his home elsewhere. The tension is never resolved but always tending towards resolution. That's where the cunningness of someone who's learned to be duplicitous comes into play.

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the Gospel being Mt 13:24-30 where a man has planted good seed, but at night his enemy sows weeds or *zizania* (singular). This is a particular type of weed which resembles wheat in its early stages of growth therefore making it hard to distinguish between the two. That's why vs. 29 reads, 'Lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.' Only when both wheat and *zizania* have fully grown is it safe to harvest them. That means a lengthy period of time from the enemy's sowing at night until harvest. Surely there must have come a point (how early on it's hard to tell) when the *zizania* made their presence felt. Let's say you can tell the difference about a third through the growing season. Thus the man who sowed good seed had to wait patiently before bidding his servants (slaves in Greek) to burn the *zizania* and gather the wheat. This parable is reminiscent of a few others which teach us to treat as the same those who are good and those who are evil. The missing link, if you will but one which must provide, is that cultivating disinterest which goes against every human grain takes responsibility from us and puts it onto God where it belongs. Easy to say but quite another thing to practice. Vss. 37-43 explain what Jesus has just said. The sower is the Son of man, the field the world, the good seed the sons of the kingdom, the weeds the sons of the evil one, the enemy the devil, the harvest is the close of the age and the angels the reapers. Keep in mind that vs. 28 has 'servants' which in Greek are 'slaves.' Taking it further these slaves are the angels. Most likely the parable was confusing for the disciples in light of Jesus' quoting from 'the prophet' which in this case is Asaph to whom is attributed Ps 78:2, the passage cited in the Gospel. The citation reads, 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.' Compare with the

original, 'I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old.' 'Dark sayings' in Hebrew (*chydah*, singular) suggests something twisted (the original verbal root meaning), convoluted and thus involved as opposed to 'dark.' The **Septuagint** has *problema* (easy English derivation!) means something put before such as a fence or obstacle. The Hebrew for 'foundation of the world' is 'from the beginning (*qedem*), a bit misleading in English. The **Septuagint** is fairly similar with *aparche*. 'Close of the age' is interesting: 'close' is *sunteleia* or completion with the preposition *sun* (with) or literally, 'with completion.' Another reference is Mt 24.3, 'What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?'

A quote from a commentary on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel by Philonexus of Mabbog: 'When the word is associated with the voice and the voice with the word and the two have become one, neither the word cannot be understood without the voice nor the voice apart from the word. Each one is dependent upon the other for understanding and can't be taken alone. They are not considered as two separate acts, something which pertains to the unity between body and soul.'

We continue with more parables, great for the summer when many are on vacation since they tend to stay with you. So here we have the third multiple choice in a week, Mt 13.44-6 or 44.52. If we opt for the former two parables about the kingdom of heaven are very short, one and two verses respectively. Even the third one about the net cast into the sea is short, 'close of the age' [vs. 49]. It was found in last Sunday's Gospel, 'close' being *sunteleia* which intimates completion and fulfillment. The fourth (which doesn't seem exactly like a parable) is a quick statement about the scribe 'bringing out of his treasure what is new and what is old' [vs. 52]. Note that the word *thesauros* or 'treasure' is used in vs. 44, 'like a treasure hidden in a field.' Thus that man is the scribe purchases the field and uses it to bring forth produce.

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time and last day of July. Today's Gospel (Mt 14.13-21) gives a fairly terse account of Jesus feeding five thousand men 'besides women and children' [vs. 21]. This incident took place right after the beheading of John the Baptist: Jesus takes a boat to a lonely place which is symbolic of what may be called his detached relationship with John ever since his baptism. There's a contrast of sorts between 'lonely place' (*eremos topos*) and the 'great throng' (*polos ochlos*), the two being in one location. You wonder if these people also knew about the Baptist's fate.

In the **Theaetetus** Socrates compares himself with a midwife who assists at giving birth. Like them, he is barren of wisdom though assists in giving birth to it in other persons. It's an intriguing idea, well known, though scarcely put into practice. The chief reason seems to be that we want to be the mother giving birth, not the midwife, whose task comes to an abrupt end as soon as the child is born. Then the mother assumes her rightful role, gets all the glory along with her newborn, while the midwife fades away. For the midwife to hang around under such circumstances is awkward to say the least. Anyway, the Icelandic term for midwife is *ljósmóður* which literally translates as 'light mother.' In other words, this person is responsible for bringing a newborn into the light.

'From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force' [Mt 11.12]. Note the temporal distance of this verse, namely, 'from...until now.' It seems to be a relatively short period of time and before John's beheading. Thus the opportunity for the kingdom of heaven to suffer violence (*biazo*) is extremely short. No small wonder that such force must be used to gain it and gain it quickly.

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time with the Gospel being Mt 14.22-33, Jesus walking on the water. Note that this occurs during the fourth watch (vs. 25) or towards dawn, implying that the disciples had been storm-tossed for most of the night. The first reading (1 Kg 19.9-13) presents a tender meeting of the Lord and Elijah: 'What are you doing here, Elijah? I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts' (vs. 10). This begins the story with the word of the Lord speaking to Elijah as opposed to the Lord himself. Elijah's zeal ('very jealous') is equivalent to the natural violence he is about to witness, an intimation that such zeal isn't exactly what the Lord desires. Maybe that's why Elijah first encountered the divine word; his zeal had to be tempered before recognizing the Lord later on in that still, small voice. 'And the Lord passed by' (vs. 11) which caused a wind strong enough to 'rend the mountains' and break the rocks in pieces.' Compare with Moses' experience

on Mount Sinai: 'I will make all my goodness pass before you' [Ex 33.19]. Both verses have the Hebrew verb *havar* (to pass by). The first relates to the Lord himself whereas the second, his goodness...and this goodness the Lord 'causes to pass by.' That is, such passages is indirect, transferred to goodness (*tuḅ*), while the Lord, as it were, were some distance from the event. The Elijah event continues with several statements about the Lord not being present in the violent natural events. Then vs. 12 has 'after the fire a still small voice.' The first of two adjectives is *demamah*; from a verbal root with two different meanings, to be like and to be silent. Achieving likeness (especially when it comes to the divine one) requires stilling of one's thoughts after which our inbuilt divine image is allowed to gradually surface and make itself known. As for *demamah*, consider two other references which neatly tie into the theme at hand: 1) 'A form was before my eyes; there as silence, then I heard a voice' [Job 4.16] and 2) 'He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed' [Ps 107.29]. The second of the two adjectives is *daq* (small) derived from a verbal root meaning 'to be small' in the sense of something crushed as powder: 'But the multitude of your foes (strangers) shall be like small dust' [Is 29.5]. Compare this divine revelation with the Song of the Three Young Men (the Apocrypha). Here Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were cast into a red-hot furnace which, with the help of an angel, 'made the midst of the furnace like a moist whistling wind' [vs. 27] which stands in sharp contrast to the wind which tore rocks apart on Mount Horeb.

'And hearken to the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; yes, hear in heaven your dwelling place; and when you hear, forgive' [1 Kg 8.30]. words by King Solomon at the dedication of the temple. A few observations are in order here... 'pray toward ('*el*) this place,' not in it, which applies to both the king and people. Most likely the direction 'towards' refers to the 'inner sanctuary' [vss. 6 & 8] or *devyr* which only the high priest entered once a year. By way of side note, *devyr* comes from the verbal root *davar* (to speak) and may be interpreted as 'the place of speaking.' The verse at hand continues with Solomon knowingly addressing the Lord in heaven, 'your dwelling place.' The Hebrew has the preposition '*el* (to, towards) which literally reads 'to the place of your dwelling' followed by another '*el*, 'to heaven.' In other words, the people's prayer is directed 'toward this place' after which the Lord hears 'toward the place of (his) dwelling' and finally 'toward heaven.'

'Yet if they lay it to heart in the land to which they have been carried captive and repent and make supplication to you in the land of their captors' [1 Kg 8.47]. This forms part of King Solomon's prayer of dedication for the newly erected temple at Jerusalem. A few observations...1) 'lay it to heart:' the verb is *shuv*, 2) 'carried captive:' the verb is *shavah*, 3) 'repent:' the verb is *shuv* and 4) 'captors:' the noun is derived from *shavah*. Thus we have an interesting, compact relationship between two sets of verbs with different renderings. There seems to be an intimation the having been taken captive leads to repentance, for this is a fairly common theme among the prophets...even a necessary condition for Israel to regain her relationship with the Lord.

Philippians (3.20): 'Our citizenship exists in the heavens.' *Politeuma* = citizenship, a freighted term, which implies the city's (i.e., the *polis*) constitution, manner of life and all that goes with a sense of belonging to a compact unit of society. *Huparchei* = exists...more than existing but of being present, at one's disposal. If you want to get literal, 'beginning (*arche*) under (*hupo*),' or coming into being from a specific starting point. To conclude, this manner-of-life/specific-beginning does not have its origins upon earth but in heaven, a place other than the one with which we are familiar and to which we are tending. If you abide with this neat little exposition for a while, get acquainted with it, it reveals that everything we undergo here and now is transitory. We can get into difficult straits as some had done by ignoring those things we must deal with even to the point of denigrating them. This has been a characteristic of much of Christian history and spirituality popularly conceived but quite another in practice. For example, look at the saints. Most were intensely involved in things-of-the-earth, much more than earthly minded folks, yet were aware that their *politeuma* was not here but elsewhere. This Philippians verse has the potential of further expansion in light of the Greek idea of *polis* briefly cited. That is, more reflection is needed on that relationship between how to live in a transitory environment fraught with evil and the rest, and tie it into something not yet realized, one awaiting us after death.

Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Immediately there comes to mind Enoch 'who walked with God and he was

not, for God took him' [Gen 5.24]. 'Was not' is accurate for the Hebrew suggesting a complete transference from earth to heaven.

As for today's Gospel (Lk 1.39-56), it deals with the Annunciation and is applied to a feast we can't get our hands upon directly and can be subject to suspicion and therefore ridicule. Understandable, but there's a tacit invitation to look deeper into Mary's role as 'first fruits' or *aparche*. Appreciation of this feast can be tied in with the Greek verb *skirtao* and its special application to John the Baptist in his mother's womb, that is, he leaped there, a fact noted twice (vss. 41 & 44). In other words, John recognized Christ, also in Mary's womb, through an intermediary and even more so by her intermediate voice. Thus John was predisposed to be attentive to Jesus Christ which later became the hallmark of his mission. That's probably why John could point him out not having any clue as to his identity, a fact which baffled onlookers at the Jordan River. It connotes sheep bounding for joy as the following verse indicates, that is, the **Septuagint**: 'The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs' [Ps 114.4]. as for *skirtao*, there's an intimation of John the Baptist through Jacob and Esau (through foretelling negative events: 'The children struggled together within her' [Gen 25.22]).

A few days out from the Assumption and still that feast leaves a trail, a fact based upon the following: 'Your name is as oil poured out' [Sg 1.3]. This 'oil' reminds me of a Psalm verse pertinent to the Assumption: 'One day within your courts is a better than a thousand elsewhere.' In other words, such occasions are to be treasured more than anything else, worth the price of forsaking other activities that we may attune to them the better.

'I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength, like one forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave' [Ps 88.4-5]. A favorite verse, especially the words 'forsaken among the dead' which has a very different meaning in the original Hebrew whose transliteration is *bametyam chaphshy*. This reads 'in the dead loosed (or set free).' The verb *chaphats* pertains to anything spread out upon the ground, probably a body in the grave as the verse at hand recounts. However, *chaphats* means setting a slave free. Thus the words under consideration can suggest that a person who has died...and this applies to when still physically alive...is liberated from the concerns of this world and free to follow impulses coming from the other.

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Mt 16.13-20) recounts Peter's confession of faith after which Jesus said, 'for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven' [vs. 17]. I.e., two types of revelation (*apokalupsis*, the verbal root being used) are contrasted, human nature and the Father. Jesus then continues with the famous (some would say infamous as far as later interpretations go) words about Peter being the rock upon which he'll build his church. These words make more sense in light of the first verses which speak about John the Baptist, namely, the proper identification of Jesus ('or one of the prophets'). It comes pretty much in the middle of Matthew's Gospel and not long after John's beheading. John's earlier testimony at the River Jordan suggests a type of *apokalupsis*, for he was able to recognize Jesus coming to him. Thus John's *apokalupsis* stands midway between that of 'flesh and blood' and the Father vis-à-vis Peter's confession...and that puts Peter and John as an interesting contrast or better, complement.

'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions' [1 Kg 12.14]. words of King Jeroboam, son and immediate successor to Solomon. Apart from being a favorite verse because of its human intensity, it's reminiscent of Plato's **Meno** where he ponders whether or not virtue can be taught. In other words, Jeroboam was Solomon's son, and Solomon was renowned for his wisdom which according to the verse at hand, showed that his son was completely oblivious to this wisdom. 'I believe, Anytus, that there are many men here who are good at public affairs, and that there have been as many in the past, but have they been good teachers of their own virtue?' Socrates sets forth this conundrum regarding Themistocles whose son Cleophantus turned out to be a bonehead just like Jeroboam. According to Plato, those who possessed virtue did so because they had a 'true opinion' about it, fortunate as this was, yet fell short of knowledge in the sense of *episteme* where they couldn't give an account of their possession.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. 'You duped me, O Lord, and I was duped' [Jer 20.7]. From the first reading taken from the **New American Bible**.

Today's Gospel (Mt 16.21-7) has Jesus' invitation to take up one's cross to follow him. Vs. 21 has an interesting word, 'show' (*deiknumi*) which is more along the lines of pointing out as to sitting down with the disciples and explaining why he must go to Jerusalem. Once Jesus has done this Peter remonstrates with him and is called a 'stumbling block' (*skandalon*). Just last Sunday we had the Gospel where Jesus calls Peter a rock on which he will build his church. However, this Sunday we have Peter called the opposite of a rock, a *skandalon*, where this latter term can apply to a rock placed in the middle of a road to trip someone up. It suggests Peter's dual role of being both faithful and ready to deny Jesus at a moment's notice. Still further along (vs. 24) Jesus speaks of taking up one's cross to follow him. Here the invitation is begun with the word 'told,' different from 'show' in vs. 21. This talk about the cross seems that Jesus, along with every other subject of the Roman Empire, was all too familiar with that method of execution. Obviously the disciples hadn't a clue as to the cross being the way Jesus would die, but maybe he was trying to intimate it by that word 'show.' In other words, *deiknumi* is broader than 'telling' and may intimate showing by examples. Surely the disciples must have been familiar with the crucifixion of criminals outside Jerusalem to where they were headed. Jesus may have been prodding them to pay attention to this at they reach the city; then they might have an idea of what he was trying to communicate.

In his Commentary on St. John's Gospel Philonexus of Mabbog speaks about the relationship of the word to the larynx. That is to say, he uses this as an image of the Virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus Christ.

Often when we wake up in the morning there's a second—actually a fraction of a second—when we haven't yet let in the rush of thoughts so typical of our lives. These thoughts pounce upon us so quickly that we're barely aware of their presence which pretty much characterizes our waking state throughout the day. Chances are high that the fraction of a second followed deep sleep or our dream state which is very similar to the day one. In other words, both are characterized by the virtually uncontrollable stream of images passing before our minds without our willing it. From that point both sleeping and waking bear striking similarities. A good time to ask (even embarrassingly to ourselves) whether we are awake or asleep in life. Even if our day is busy we fall back upon remembrance of that briefest of times which intimates that real value is not conditioned by temporal duration. Here's a good example of what Plato means by *anamnesis* or recollection...a paradox of sorts, a memory straddling time and timelessness. The test of such an *anamnesis* is how it stalks us throughout the day, not unlike our conscience (or maybe it's part of conscience). Better put, we allow this experience of a fraction of a second to walk with us and invite it to hopefully return the next day...and the next.

More observations on Psalm 40.1 which reads in the RSV, 'I waited patiently for the Lord.' This verse has two forms of the same verb *qawah*: 'waiting, I waited.' That's how the literal translation goes which has two forms of the same action...on in this case, non-action. First is 'waiting' followed by 'I waited.' I.e., the first *qawah* is a continuous state of attention with regards to the Lord, an expectation of sorts. It's followed by a *qawah* that has been accomplished. At the same time its past action is brought into the present by the first *qawah* with an intent to go into the future. Both effect a divine response, 'he inclined to me.' Here the verb is *natah* which connotes a stretching-out, an extending, not necessarily an action down from above to below though that is included.

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Mt 20.1-16) is about the laborers in the vineyard... the 'Johnny-come-lately'...as a friend once said. The householder went out 'early in the morning' (*proi*) which can mean at dawn or just before dawn. Apparently the first group of laborers he encountered were waiting outside his house, having gotten word that he was hiring. Two other groups (the third and eleventh hours) were idle or *aryos* which can mean unemployed or just plain lazy. With the exception of the early-birds or those present *proi*, the others were in the market place, not lining up for work. In other words, they had to be sought out by the householder, not the other way around, which is a bit unusual. It seems the householder was quite anxious to get men into his vineyard, hence his diligence in seeking them. Most likely it was harvest time and the vineyard needed immediate attention. Although each group received the same wage right up to those hired at the eleventh hour, you can't blame this last group for they too said that no one had put them to work. Finally there's a whole lot of murmuring over the seemingly unjust equal payment and rightly so. The household concludes with (the original Greek), 'Is your eye evil because I am good' [vs. 15]? In other words,

each group complained about the eleventh hour one due to their idleness which stands in sharp contrast to householder's goodness. The very last verse—So the last will be first and the first last—bears resemblance to the incident about the rich young man (vss. 23-30), 'But many that are first will be last and the last first.'

In the **Phaedrus** is a passage that pretty much sums up a latent tension in Plato as well as in virtually all Western thought. It runs as follows: 'The prophetess of Delphi and the priestesses of Dodona are out of their minds when they perform that fine work of theirs for all of Greece, either for an individual person or for a whole city, but they accomplish little or nothing when they are in control of themselves' [244b]. The Greek verb for 'our of (their) minds' is *mainomai* which means being mad, enraged as at a Bacchic frenzy. From it derives mania, madness, frenzy, enthusiasm or divine inspiration. In brief, madness and divine inspiration are quite close...borderline...and difficult to pin down. The verb in the **Phaedrus** passage opposite to *mainomai/mania* is 'in control of themselves' or *sophronizo* from which is derived that almost archetypal Greek virtue, *sophrosune*: self-control, moderation, being temperate. So we have these two tendencies not just of Greek and/or Western culture but in every human being. While *sophrosune* is admirable, it can be taken as wishy-washy, lacking backbone. I guess each situation we encounter requires either employing mania or *sophrosune*. Maybe there's a middle ground between the two, a space without a word, discernable only by those who've plumbed the depths of both.

'Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead! And he (Elisha) turned around, and when he saw them he cursed them in the name of the Lord. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys' [2 Kg 2.23-4]. A footnote to this passage in the **RSV** reads, 'Mt 19.13-5, Mk 10.13-16 and Lk 18.15-18 provide a better guide to Biblical teaching on how to treat children.' Which is funnier, the passage itself or the comment on it?

A fine quote from Goethe, source unknown: 'Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: the moment one definitely commits oneself, then...a whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.'

Today's Gospel (Jn 1.47-41) has the testimony of the first disciples right at the beginning of John and thus after his baptism. 'The angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' [vs 51]. This verse is reminiscent of Jacob's dream—i.e., not a vision—'and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it' [Gen 28.12]. That is to say, the angels were using a ladder set up between heaven and earth. 'Ladder' or *sulam* is the only use of this Hebrew term in the Bible and derives from a verbal root meaning to lift up, elevate as well as to move to and fro. Although Jacob's dream ties into the person of Jesus as someone in between heaven and earth...his role as mediator...the Gospel quote is in the future. That is to say, the disciples will see this reality take place in the future although there's no later New Testament quote to back this up, let alone something that can tie in within the Book of Revelation.

Today's Gospel (Mt 21.33-43) has the parable of the man who planted a vineyard whose tenants killed their master's servants and finally his son. It seems naive, even stupid for the household to send his son after the servants were killed. This apparent naivete is expressed in vs. 37, 'They will respect my son.' The verb here is *entrepo* which also means to be ashamed. Of course, that wasn't the case both in the parable and later at Christ's crucifixion. The last two verses of this excerpt are allied to the parable but seem able to be taken independent of it. Then again, the 'stone' may be part of the fence protecting the vineyard. Here Jesus quotes Ps 118.22-3, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.' Apart from my little notation, I couldn't help but be struck that a passage as this one was used (along with others) as anti-Semitic fuel for the fire down the centuries.

One verse from the first reading at Mass earlier this week stuck out: 'For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God' [2 Cor 5.1]. It wouldn't be surprising if Paul had in mind the days when he supported himself making tents. Also this image also fits in well with Israelite history, the

days of wandering in the Sinai wilderness.

'Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples' [Lk 11.1]. This is within the context of the Our Father. However, there are no accounts of John the Baptist giving instructions about prayer except repentance in preparation for Christ. Most likely he gave such instructions to his disciples though they aren't recorded. Then again, such directions most likely centered around the Messiah's coming which in this instance was immanent.

'And Elisha sent a messenger to him (Naaman)' [2 Kg 5.10]. Simple words but indicative of an not infrequent method of communication in the Bible, that is, indirectly. Even before this an anonymous servant girl whom Naaman's army had captured told him about Elisha. Why not directly, Elisha to Naaman? Probably because he wouldn't believe him anyway and anticipated Naaman's direction to wash himself in the Jordan in order to be cured of leprosy. We get this by Naaman's rejection claiming that the waters of his native rivers were just as good. Seems the same dynamic is at work with Jesus Christ whom the Father sent: only a few took his words directly to heart, and most likely this would have been the same if God the Father came down from heaven. There is, however, an end to this rejection of the divine as recorded in the Book of Revelation which depicts a time when people can't escape God's presence even if they hide in caves and under rocks.

Today's Gospel (Mt 22.1-14) parallels last Sunday's about the householder whose hired hands maltreated his servants and then killed his son. By that I mean today we have the king who threw a marriage feast for his son. The persons invited didn't show up, rather, 'they would not come,' which intimates an intentional refusal. Not only that, 'they made light of it' (*ameleo* = disregard, reject). Furthermore, just like last week's Gospel some of these people killed the king's servants. Though the bride isn't mentioned at all, I wonder how she felt! Maybe out of distress and frustration the king ordered that both 'bad and good' be brought in to fill the wedding hall. Later the king discovered a man without a wedding garment. It seems this fellow had no bad intention, kind of showed up, because he was speechless (*phimoo* = put to silence; can refer to muzzling an ox). Because of this, the king had the hapless fellow thrown out which is interesting because both 'bad and good' were present at the wedding feast. In other words, these two groups had wedding garments, and the fellow caught off guard didn't. In a large assembly of people like this it must have been difficult to discern the two types, and the garmentless man must have stood out like a sore thumb. Thus having a wedding garment—regardless of whether you're good or bad—is the chief criterion for being invited. We can further qualify the 'good and bad' with the 'outer darkness,' so there is hope for all the guests present. However, this apparent blending of the two is resolved by 'many are called but few are chosen.'

One Hebrew verb with multiple meanings, more than other instances, is *paqad*. It fundamentally means to strike upon or against. From there *paqad* branches out into various forms such as to visit, to find wanting, to look after, to charge, to attack, to be lacking, to muster. I.e., the basic sense of *paqad* is that it leans toward the confrontational. In vs. 87 of Ps 119 we have the noun *piqudym* for 'precepts': 'They have almost made an end of me on earth; but I have not forsaken your precepts.' Here *piqudym* jumps out at you, almost making an assault. One's task is indirect...not to forsake...the precepts which in Hebrew is more vivid, not to abandon them. So if you have these *piqudym* as rather forceful ways of God making his presence felt, it's a consolation in so far as we can submit to this *paqad* action and let it sink in to better influence our lives. This process seems more difficult through the English text, hence the need to see what's really going on below the surface of rather bland terms.

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the Gospel being Mt 22.34-40 which is one of those passages known by everyone, namely, the primacy of love for God and one's neighbor. Jesus quotes directly from Dt 6.5: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...' He backs this up by applying the same love ('like it') to others. The word 'love' is the familiar *agape* which here is threefold: God, neighbor and the least appreciated, 'yourself' [vs. 39]. It's well known that a lot of people not have a positive estimation of themselves, so to apply *agape* here is really quite something worth pondering. Note that this threefold *agape* rests on the two commandments Jesus cited, rather, the law and prophets 'depend' upon them. The Greek verb here is *kremannumi*, literally, 'to hang.' So this hanging involves loving God and one's neighbor, but in many ways the most important *agape* sneaks in, *agape* of oneself.

'If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God' [Col 3.1]. What are 'the things' or *ta ano*? St. Paul doesn't specify except with the condition of having been raised with Christ. The location of *ta ano* is at the 'right hand of God' which is still vague. Of course, having been raised means for Paul being dead to the world and sin which seems to automatically transfer the person doing it to *ta ano* or better, to seeking them. Thus this pre-resurrection, if you will, isn't the fulness of this mystery. Apparently it situates you in a 'place' where seeking is easier than if you haven't died to the world and sin. At the same time, anyone who has spent time in silent prayer or contemplative knows what this is about. In a way it transcends hope. On the other hand, hope comes into play when we're not so disposed to such prayer...carrying us through to those times when we are.

Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Sunday after next is Christ the King followed by Advent, so judging by today's Gospel, the theme of 'end times' is heating up. Today's Gospel (Mt 25.1-13) is one of the richest parables, that of the ten wise and foolish maidens. Jan Ruysbroeck builds a whole series of comments around the single word 'Behold' of vs. 8, that is, the approach of the divine bridegroom. The text says that he 'was delayed,' *chronizo* being the verb with its obvious sense even in Greek of time. However, the verb means something more like 'delaying.' No indication is given, but perhaps it's meant to test the ten maidens. When the bridegroom does make an appearance, it's at midnight. The wise maidens tell the foolish ones to 'go to the dealers' to get oil which they did. Common sense says that no dealer would be open in the middle of the night, yet these five maidens went out as though it were daytime. Also the setting of this parable (midnight) is telling in that the daylight hours we are now experiencing are short...and getting shorter...so the impact is all the stronger.

In an interview the Dali Lama was asked how he handles being in such a brutal world and offered a simple response. The task set before us is awareness, making the mind peaceful, which doesn't sound like a heck of a lot. When you consider it further, it's the only way; kind of frustrating in that the Lama is stressing individual as opposed to corporate responsibility. It seems that if one person is aware, others will follow which is in accord with a subtle strain of Buddhist thought, namely, to watch our expectations which is concomitant with awareness. That can rub Westerners the wrong way who are action orientated.

'Slug of rain.' A phrase some local weatherman is fond of using, earthy and right to the point.

In a nutshell, any given liturgical year follows the life of Jesus Christ according to historical time (*chronos*) chiefly through the four Gospels. At the same time the liturgy isn't confined to this *chronos*-logical time. It freely inserts *kairoi* (plural of *kairos*) or those special events which partake of the divine and human. In other words, they straddle both spheres. A literal-minded person may find this disconcerting, but it's helpful to keep in mind that at its heart the liturgy represents a poetic view on life. Now string *chronoi* and *kairoi* together, and you have quite a unique mix. Situated at this unique juncture right after the First Sunday of Advent allows us to get at the essence of what the Church wishes to communicate. She doesn't say it outright, for that's up to each person to decipher but decipher not as a riddle but as a mystery which, in turn, is to be lived. Should we stay with *chronos*, we'd be putting more stock (for example) in New Year's Day or January First. It may be convenient for our daily lives but certainly is devoid of any symbolic meaning.

Second Sunday of Advent. We have the beginning of Mark's Gospel, the tersest of the four, which gets underway with a bang quoting Isaiah as an announcement of Christ's coming. You really have to pay close attention to Mark; almost writes in shorthand, stringing one incident after another. It's easy to see his appeal within a culture where many people didn't know how to read and if they did, they'd like their material in a simple, concise format.

In response to the Jews' questioning, John replies that he is a voice crying in the wilderness. Note how when put on the spot it's best to identify yourself with a role larger than your everyday self. This intimates the ability to live symbolically, the chief advantage being that it takes the focus off ourselves.