

Miscellaneous Notes Pertaining to Lectio Divina (two of two)

Three references with regards to God's presence, each with a rather provocative image. Each starts out with an easily graspable and physical object which then expands ad infinitum:

- "The two tables of the testimony in his (Moses) hands, tables that were written on both sides" [Ex 32.15].

- "And the four (living creatures) had the same likeness, their construction being as it were a wheel within a wheel" [Ezk 1.16].

- "And before the throne there is as it were a sea of glass like crystal" [Rev 4.6].

In his Rule, St. Benedict speaks of stability (*stabilitas*) which refers to a monk abiding in his monastery from the day of his profession until the day of his death. *Stabilitas* also has a military connotation, that is, a constant state of readiness for action.

Proverbs 31.10-31 sings the praises of a good wife whose watchfulness extends to her household. Two mentions of "night" occur here:

- "She rises while it yet night and provides food for her household" [vs. 15].

- "Her lamp does not go out at night" [vs. 18].

Mt 25.14-30, parable of the talents. Each servant is given a talent (5, 2, 1) to make them increase. A talent equaled more than fifteen year's wages for a laborer, so it seems ironic for the master to say "You have been faithful over a little" [vs. 23]! The first two servants double their talents while the third hides it and later returns it. These first two resemble Mary who says "My soul magnifies the Lord" [Lk 1.46], that is, their souls continually double.

Chiastic structure: events being picked up and recapitulated in reverse order. An example is *phante* or "manger" as from which animals eat. "Manger" is thus a deeper cleft in the rock of a cave. At the end of Luke's Gospel Christ is put in the "rock-hewn tomb" [23.53]. Thus at the beginning and end of Luke's Gospel Christ first as a baby, then as a dead man is wrapped round and laid in a rock-crevice. Such is the sign the shepherds are given, an anticipation of Christ's Passion.

The temporal interval between Christ's birth and his baptism is some thirty years and is celebrated after the Epiphany about a week earlier. The "space" between these two feasts is the greatest or longest (temporal) span between any two given feasts yet just about the shortest, again temporally speaking.

Compare the parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15) with that of the Pharisee and Publican (Lk 18). Both take place within the Father's home or temple. The prodigal can turn into his brother (Pharisee) who never left home, the two being an example of one person. Once reconciled to the Father, the prodigal looks on others like his brother as other prodigals. This is where he is akin to the Pharisee in the temple (home). It's the prodigal's challenge to remain like the publican "who would not lift so much his eyes to heaven" once he is transformed into the son who never left home. The challenge, it seems, is to remain at home, in the house: "but Mary sat in the house" [Jn 11.20]. She went out, unlike her sister Martha, only when "the Master calls for you" [vs. 28]. The prodigal-publican has thus changed into Mary and sees his brother the Pharisee as Martha. Here's where she must not judge him, otherwise he will revert to his former role of brother-Pharisee.

When Joseph died, he ordered his brothers to bring his bones out of Egypt when the Lord visits his people (cf. Gen 50.25). This happened at the Exodus, 13.19. In vs. 21 the Lord precedes the Israelites

in a column of cloud and fire. It seems as if a condition for such a divine manifestation is the transferal of Joseph's bones from Egypt in an *'aron* (coffin, ark), the same word for the holy ark in which the Law's two tablets were kept. It is more specifically called "ark of the testimony" [25.22].

Para References from the New Testament

Some ago I made a fairly complete list of all words from the Greek New Testament with the preposition *para*, whether this word was by itself or prefixed to a noun or verb. One day while looking through some old notebooks I came across this list and decided that it would be worth posting, hence this document. The preposition *para* is found in three cases: genitive (from the side of, from beside), dative (beside, alongside of, by) and accusative (to the side of, beside, except).

A quick glance at the following verses are revealing in that they point to the presence of another person or God; the references from St. John's Gospel are noteworthy in that they help communicate the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It seems that *para* conveys the notion where a person or thing is at both maximum tension and relaxation as if action were on the throes of coming into existence. *Para* also suggests presence without necessarily absorption; it is as though the person invited to be "*para*" another person or God created a space or interval between him or her and the one to whom is being related.

Mt 1.20: Do not fear to take (*paralabein*) Mary as your wife.

Mt 1.24: he took (*parelaben*) his wife.

Mt 24.27: so will be the coming (*parousia*) of the Son of Man.

Mt 24.40: one is taken (*paralambanetai*) and one is left.

Mt 24.37: As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming (*parousia*) of the Son of Man.

Lk 1.19: I am Gabriel, who stands (*parestekos*) in the presence of God.

Lk 2.22: They brought him up to Jerusalem to present him (*parastesai*) to the Lord.

Lk 1.30: you have found favor with (*para*) God.

Lk 1.37: For with (*para*) God nothing will be impossible.

Lk 1.45: a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from (*para*) the Lord.

Lk 2.52: Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with (*para*) God and man.

Lk 6.19: for power came forth from (*para*) him and healed them all.

Lk 7.38: and standing behind him at (*para*) his feet.

Lk 8.35: sitting at (*para*) the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.

Lk 8.41: and falling at (*para*) Jesus' feet.

Lk 9.47: he took a child and put him by (*para*) his side.

Lk 10.22: All things have been delivered (*paredothe*) to me by my Father.

Lk 10.39: Mary, who sat (*parakathestheisa*) at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.

Lk 11.16: while others, to test (*para*) him, sought from him a sign from heaven.

Lk 11.37: a Pharisee asked him to dine with (*para*) him.

Lk 12.37: and he will come (*parelthon*) and serve them.

Lk 12.48: Every one to (*para*) whom much is given, of him (*para*) much will be required.

Lk 19.7: He has gone into to be the guest of a man who is a (*para*) sinner.

Lk 23.43: Today you will be with me in Paradise (*Paradeiso*).

Jn 1.6: There was a man sent from (*para*) God whose name was John.

Jn 1.11: He came to his own home, and his own people received (*parelabon*) him not.

Jn 1.14: And the Word...dwelt among (*para*) us.

Jn 6.45: And they shall all be taught by (*para*) God.

Jn 6.46: Not that anyone has see the Father except him who is from (*para*) God.

Jn 14.3: I will come and will take (*paralempsomai*) you to myself.
 Jn 15.15: For all that I have heard from (*para*) my Father I have made known to you.
 Jn 15.26: But when the Counselor (*Parakletos*) comes whom I shall send to you from (*para*) the Father.
 Jn 16.27: and have believed that I came from (*para*) the Father.
 Jn 17.5: Glorify me in (*para*) your own presence with the glory which I had with (*para*) you before the world was made.
 Jn 17.7: Now they know that everything that you have given me is from (*para*) you.
 Jn 17.8: and know in truth that I came from (*para*) you.
 Lk 17.16: and he fell on his face at (*para*) Jesus' feet.
 Lk 18.27: What is impossible with (*para*) men is possible with (*para*) God.
 Acts 2.33: having received from (*para*) the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit.
 Acts 10.33: Now we are all here present (*parasmen*) in the sight of God.
 Rom 11.11: Through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous (*parazeloo*).
 Col 2.2: That their hearts may be encouraged (*paraklethosin*).
 Col 2.6: As you received (*parelabete*) Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him.
 1 Ths 4.1: that as you learned (*parelabete*) from us.
 2 Ths 2.1: Now concerning (*para*) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 2 Ths 3.6: and not in accord with the tradition (*paradosin*) which you have received (*parelabete*) from us.
 Heb 11.9: By faith he sojourned (*parokesen*) in the land of promise.
 Jms 1.5: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask (*para*) God.
 Jms 1.7: will receive anything from (*para*) the Lord.
 Jms 1.17: with whom (*para*) there is no variation or shadow due to change.
 Jms 1.25: he who looks (*parakupsas*) into the perfect law.
 Jms 1.27: Religion that is pure and undefiled from (*para*) God.
 1 Pt 2.4: rejected by men but in God's sight (*para*) chosen and precious.
 1 Pt 4.19: and entrust (*partithesthosan*) their souls to a faithful Creator.
 2 Pt 1.17: When he received honor and glory from (*para*) God the Father.

Psalm 68 is one Christian tradition had used in reference to the Ascension of Jesus Christ. The verse that hit me while going through this text: "Blessed be the Lord who daily bears us up; God is our salvation" [vs. 19]. Nice the way "daily" reads in Hebrew, *yom yom* or "day day!" The verb *hamas* (to bear burdens) connotes a slave carrying a heavy load, so it suggests duress. Also note that "salvation" in Hebrew is *yeshuah*, the proper name for "Jesus." Applied to the ascended Christ, in his natural dwelling place he continues to function as an indentured servant, and one always under the gun at that.

Two passages speaking of different realities:

-Phl 3.20: "but our commonwealth is in heaven." *Politeuma* is the term for this citizenship; the verb *huparcho* (to be) suggests the beginning of something.

-Col 2.8: "according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ." *Stoicheia* for "elemental spirits" or the first principle from which a series arises, here with respect to the kosmos or universe, its physical composition. In brief, *politeuma* implies a transformation of *stoicheia* as a type of "beginning" proper to heavenly citizenship.

A contrast between two scriptural excerpts. Pardon the abundance of Greek terms, but the text makes infinitely better sense with them:

Wisdom 6.12-16 (description of Wisdom)

-vs. 12: glorious (*lampra*), never fades (*amarantos*), easily (*eucheros*) seen by those who love (*agapao*)

her, found (*eurisketai*) by those seeking (*zetounton*) her.

-vs. 13: hastens (*phthanei*) to make herself known (*prognosthenai*) to those who desire (*epithumountas*) her.

-vs. 14: he who rises early (*orthrisas*) to seek her (*ep'autan*) will have no difficulty (*kopiasei*), for he will find her (*euresai*) sitting at his gates (*paredron*).

-vs. 15: to fix one's thoughts (*periautes*) on her (*enthumethenai*) is perfect understanding (*phronteseos teleiotes*) and he who is vigilant (*agrupnesas*) on her (*di'auten*) shall quickly be without care (*amerimnos*).

-vs. 16: because she goes about (*perierchetai*) seeking (*zetousa*) those worthy (*axious*) of her, and she graciously appears (*phantazetai eumenos*) to them in their paths, and meets them (*hupanta*) in every thought (*epinoia*).

Matthew 25.1-13 (parable of the wise and foolish maidens) may be outlined as follows:

-vs. 1: to meet (*eis hupautesin*) the bridegroom.

-vs. 2: five of them were foolish (*morai*) and five were wise (*phronimoi*).

-vs. 5: while the bridegroom was delayed (*chronizontos*), they all slumbered (*eenustaxan*) and slept (*ekatheudon*).

-vs. 6: at midnight (*meses nuktos*) there was a cry (*krauge*), behold (*idou*), the bridegroom, come out (*exerchesthe*) to meet him (*eis apantesin*).

-vs. 10: those who were ready (*etoimoi*) went in (*eiselthon*) with him to the marriage feast (*eis tous gamous*) and the door was shut (*ekleisthe*).

-vs. 12: truly (*amen*) I do not know (*oida*) you.

-vs. 13: watch (*gregoreite*) therefore, for you know (*oidate*) neither the day (*hermeran*) nor the hour (*horan*).

Is 62.2: "And you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give." Note the verb *naqav* for "to give" which is richer than at first glance: implies a boring or piercing as well as to specify something; another meaning pertains to cursing. Thus when the Lord gives a "new name" he really means it by making it penetrate to one's core. You could easily see how the idea of cursing is tied in because when engaged in such an act we're really focused upon "boring" our curse deep into the other person!

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature be thus minded" [Phil 3.14-15]. A separation is set out here between goal and the means to it: goal or *skopos* and pressing on or *dioko*, a verb which also means to persecute. Here the *skopos* is "persecuted" in that it's pursued with the same intensity as one would vent anger on a person or a group of persons. Paul was familiar with such *dioko* (cf. Acts 22.4), only in the verse at hand he switches this energy to the divine *skopos*. He associates the focusing of *dioko* with those who are mature, *teleios*; this adjective connotes having in view the end result (the *skopos*), as though it were already present. Such maturity...end-mindedness...is rare. People may have the energy of *dioko* but can't quite align it with *skopos*. To be "thus minded" is to have *phronesis*, a term associated with *sophia* or wisdom. "In all wisdom (*sophia*) and insight" [*phronesis*, Eph 1.8].

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

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

Three times each day the Angelus is commemorated: 8 am, 12.30 and 7.50 pm. Part of the formula is 'And the Word became flesh...and dwelt among us.' 'Dwelt' in Greek literally means 'has pitched his tent.' I.e., signifies a nomadic background. With this notion of tent-pitching in mind spread out in the course of a given day, when the Angelus is celebrated we can reflect upon how well did we 'pitch our tent' since the last Angelus. More specifically, the Angelus can invite us not to be rooted in our existence, only provisionally or enough to get through to the next tent-pitching. Then we pack up and move on.

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

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

August 17, 20th Sunday of the year. Chapter six of John's Gospel consists of 71 verses, so we continue along with the 'bread of life theme' as we did for the past several Sundays (and possibly for the next few; haven't looked ahead). As noted above, Jesus speaking about himself and his relationship with his

Father is full of dynamic verbs: come down, draw, raise up, sent. These terms are interesting when applied to the concept of grace; the term itself isn't that common in the Gospels although it's sprinkled throughout Paul's epistles. We (especially Catholics) have come to think of grace in admittedly gross terms, as an amount of indefinable divine stuff meted out according to our merits. Grace has become something of a commodity neither fully divine nor full human...not unlike an emanation but certainly having a defined temporal limit. Such a conception doesn't jibe with this Gospel's powerful imagery or those dynamic verbs just noted. This is especially true when it comes to eating and drinking as we all know from daily experience, imagery Jesus applies to himself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

in the process of getting there. With regards to the two verse under discussion, the verb *endemeo* (to be at home) is first applied to the body or corporeal existence. Then *endemeo* is used with respect to the Lord (with the added bonus of *pros*).

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Mark 10.2-16) deals with the Pharisees asking Jesus about divorce. He quotes the Genesis verses about God having created man and woman. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' The Greek has *proskollaomai*, literally, 'to glue upon.' Note the use of *pros* prefixed to the verb which harkens back to the last entry of *pros* as in-the-direction-of or towards. The Genesis account has the man leaving his parents and 'gluing with' his wife, not the other way around. The Gospel continues with what seems to be an incident unrelated to this, namely, Jesus blessing little children. Perhaps it could be taken as a continuation of sorts from the incident dealing with marriage or the fruits of marriage.

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

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

-vs. 17: 'setting out (*ekporeuomenou*) on his journey (*eis hodon*), a man ran up (*prosdramon*).' Note the prepositions: *ek-* (from), *eis* (into), *pros-* (towards).

-vs. 19: Jesus quotes several of the Ten Commandments (Dt 5.16-20) which stress the 'do not' aspect of keeping the divine law; the only one quoted which lacks this negativity is 'honor your father and mother.'

-vs. 20: the man claims to have kept these 'negative' commandments.

-vs. 21: 'Jesus looking upon (*emblepsas*) him.' The first of three 'lookings,' the second being vs. 23 and the third, vs. 27, which is the same verb as vs. 21.

- '(Jesus) loved (i.e., had *agape* for)' the man.

- 'You lack (*huserai*) one thing; go (*hupage*):' almost a play on words here. It is as though such a going will make up for the lack.

- 'Sell what you have...and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' First comes the heavenly treasure after which there is a following of Jesus. It seems that such following implies not having these treasures.

- vs. 22: `he had great possessions (*ktemata*).` Compare such *ktemata* with `treasure in heaven` of the previous verse.
- vs. 23: `Jesus looked around` (*periblepsamenos*).
- `riches (*chremata*):` compare with *ktemata* in previous verse and `treasure in heaven` of vs. 21.
- vs. 24: `disciples` is used here who show their amazement at the man whom Jesus just addressed and went away. Such amazement is stressed indirectly with regard to the disciples actually having left their possessions and family to follow Jesus. It is almost a reflection upon what they might have done otherwise or could do otherwise. Cf. Peter's remarks in vs. 28 with regards to this abandonment of worldly goods.
- `How hard (*duskolon*) it is to enter the kingdom of God.` Compare the adjective *duskolon* with the adverb *duskolos* of the previous, `how hard it will be.`
- vs. 25: The image of a camel entering (*dielthein*) a needle's eye is compared with a rich man's difficulty entering (*eiselthein*) God's kingdom. Note the two prepositions prefixed to the verbs: *dia-* and *eis-* or `through` and `into.` The latter is emphasized by another preposition, *eis*.
- vs. 26: `and they said to him` reads in Greek, `and they said to themselves.`
- vs. 27: `Jesus looked at (*emblepsas*) them.`
- `With (*para*) men it is impossible, but not with (*para*) God; for all things are possible with (*para*) God.` Note three uses of the preposition *para* which alternately means `besides` or `from.` It is richer or subtler in meaning and connotes a certain presence or being-with.
- vs. 31: `But many that are first (*protoi*) will be last (*eschatoi*), and the last (*eschatoi*) first (*protoi*).` Possible reference to special favor of the Jews vis-a-vis the Gentiles. One example of the `first` is the man who left Jesus despite keeping the divine commandments; the `last` are the disciples who aren't necessarily mentioned as keeping these commandments but of their having left their possessions and families.

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

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

Dedication of St. John Lateran, Rome; Gospel: Jn 2.13.22. 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The verb *luo* is used for 'destroy' which fundamentally means 'to loosen,' 'set free...' almost a kind of dissolving. It's in response to the Jews' request for a sign. Usually a sign (*semeion*) is something stable or existing out there for all to behold. We could take this 'destroy'/loosening as a sign difficult to perceive, for it's in the process of going from visibility to invisibility. The obvious reference Jesus makes is his death on the cross inferred in vss. 21-2. Vs. 22 makes a close association between Jesus' resurrection and their memory: 'his disciples remembered that he had said this.' Then such a recollective process is tied in with 'the scripture and the word (logos) which Jesus had spoken.'

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

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

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

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

term with the frequently noted *adamah*.

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

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

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

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

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

Continually: literally in Hebrew, 'all the day' which can be paralleled with the recent diminution of human life expectancy in vs. 3.

There is a play on words *evil (rah)* and only (*raq*).

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

Today's Gospel (Lk 21.25-8; 36-8) is truly a 'last day' excerpt, for the next chapter introduces the Last Supper. While the Gospel employs images of natural elements being shaken up, it's interesting to look

at the human response, a similar shaking up. Here are several phrases which capture this:

-`Distress (*sunoche*) of nations.` Literally, a holding-together and thus by implication, a narrowing down or constriction.

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

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

In contrast to these troublesome things Christ puts it positively:

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

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

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

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

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

-`Voice crying` or *qol qore*; two different words related to speaking which rhyme here, intentionally so.

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

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

This excerpt begins with vs. 3, `A voice cries.` Such a voice is anonymous as with vs. 6 directed to Jeremiah which similarly reads, `A voice says, `Cry!``

December 8, Immaculate Conception. A familiar Gospel (Lk 1.26-38) which will later tie in with Christmas. One observation concerning vs. 35: `The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.` There are three uses of the preposition *epi* (upon): 1 & 2) `will

come upon you.` Here the verb has the prefix *epi* followed by the same preposition `upon you.` 3) `Will overshadow you.` *Epi* is prefixed to the verb. Such overshadowing or `*epi*-ing` is interesting in that it implies constant presence of the Spirit yet at the same time constant distance much like a cloud overhanging a person. This cloud creates a certain atmosphere which sets Mary apart from other people. It is reminiscent of Ex 10.23, `But all the people of Israel had light where they dwelt.`

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

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

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

`At the beginning of your supplications a word went forth, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly beloved` [Dan 9.23]. Words to Daniel from the `man Gabriel` [vs. 21]. The Hebrew for `greatly beloved` is *chamudoth*, noun for `desires.` This is a favorite theme of the Cistercian Fathers which they translate as `man of desires` and neatly sums up the spirit of their Order. The verbal root *chamad* implies more...pleasant, precious, comely as well as something coveted. `I sat down under his shadow with great delight` [Sg 2.3] or better, `I delighted and sat down.`

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

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

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

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

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

The next part of today's Gospel is from chapter fourteen where Christ comes to the synagogue at Nazareth and situates himself within the context of Is 61-2, about the Spirit of the Lord being upon him, etc. After having identified himself with the contents of this passage, Jesus sat down 'and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.' The word for 'fixed' is *atenizo* which also means 'to stare.' Compare with Stephen as he was being stoned, 'But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God' [Acts 7.55]. 'Gazed' is similarly *atenizo*. Such attentiveness is also found in today's first reading from Nehemiah 8.3: 'And he (Ezra) read from it...and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.' The verb 'were attentive' is lacking in the Hebrew text which literally reads 'to the book of the law' or to the Torah.

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

The Syriac text containing some chapters on prayer by Issac of Nineveh or the Syrian contains the word 'conversation' applied to God. The Syriac is *soad* or *sooda* which alternately translates as 'rug' or 'cushion.' This keeps in line with the Oriental practice of sitting on the floor in a relaxed fashion. Thus the imagery is much richer and reminiscent of Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper.

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

February 2, Presentation. Three mentions of the word 'Spirit' or *Pneuma* in today's Gospel (Luke, chapter 2) with reference to Simeon: 'and the Holy Spirit was upon him,' 'it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit,' 'inspired by the Spirit.' Another interesting point with regard to Simeon is that 'he

should not see death before he had seen th Lord's Christ.' I.e., two types of seeing. A bit later (pertaining to Mary) we have 'and a sword will pierce through your own soul also.' The word for 'sword' is *rhomphaia*, of the large, two-handed variety or a Thracian javelin as opposed to a short Roman sword. Most likely this pertains to Mary's presence at Calvary. There in John's Gospel one of the soldiers pierces Christ's side with a spear or lance (*logche*) which more specifically refers to the iron tip of such a weapon.

Seventh (and last) Sunday in Ordinary Time...last in the sense that this Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. The first reading contains an interesting verse: 'For they were all asleep because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them' [1 Sam 26.12]. Reference is to David when he entered King Saul's camp. *Radam* is the verb for 'deep sleep;' also connotes snoring. We find it in Gen 2.21 concerning the creation of woman: 'The Lord God caused a deep sleep (snore!) to fall upon the man.' I note these two verses with the same verb in light of today's Gospel (Lk 6.27-38), the so-called sermon on the plain which corresponds to Matthew's sermon on the mount. Much ink has been spilled over them, so it's best to leave them as they are without judging oneself concerning such lofty standards. The concept of *radam* as used in the first reading (plus Genesis) is simply a little trick, if you will, of dealing with the beatitudes. Perhaps we could get some insight into them if we were to fall into a deep sleep (along with snoring) and allow grace to operate upon us.

February 29, Leap Year and First Sunday of Lent. Today traditionally begins the actual Lenten season with the temptation of Christ, Lk 4.1-13. There are two interesting verses where the devil seems to control Jesus. 'And showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.' The Greek for 'moment' is *stigma* which alternately means a sting or mark branded upon the body: 'For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus' [Gal 6.17]. The second verse of interest pertains to this verse as well as two others where the devil seems to be guiding Jesus or leading him around: 'And the devil took him up,' 'and he too him to Jerusalem' and 'he set him on the pinnacle of the temple.' These incidents have greater power in the narrative by the Gospel's closing verse, 'he departed from him until an opportune time.' That is to say, the *kairos* (used here) is an occasion made all the more dramatic by the way the devil was guiding Jesus about in order to tempt him.

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

'You are people peculiarly his own' [Dt 26.18]. Thus reads the New American Bible's translation for today's first reading at Mass. The RSV has, 'people for his own possession' which sounds more normal. 'Peculiarly' has a note of oddness about it, not quite in synch with the text. The Hebrew word is *segulah* (a noun) which connotes property in the sense of wealth. For another reference, cf. Ex 19.5: 'You shall be my own possession among all peoples.' Apart from this, it's refreshing to hear readings from Deuteronomy and Exodus at Mass during Lent instead of St. Paul's epistles.

Second Sunday of Lent. Typically, this Sunday has a Gospel on the Transfiguration (Lk 9.28-36) designed to encourage those starting out on the Lenten pilgrimage. This time around it was prefaced, as it were, by the first reading which recounts a covenant God makes with Abraham (Gen 15.7-21). First note the 'deep sleep' (*tardemah*) which fell upon Abraham, the same word used in Gen 2.21: 'So the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up

its place with flesh.' Cf. remarks there regarding the verbal root *radam* (to sleep or to snore heavily). Both verses use the verb *naphal* (to fall). In both cases the LXX has for *tardemah* the Greek word *ekstasis* which can translate as 'ecstasy.' Compare *tardemah* with the disciples (vs. 32), 'Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep (*bebaremenoi hupno*).' Also with regards to Abraham, 'a dread and great darkness fellow upon him.' *Chashekh* is the word for darkness, usually in the negative sense as in Is 8.22: 'And they will look to the earth but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish.' In the verse at hand, this term can apply to God's presence as in Dt 5.23: 'And when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness.'

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

'For it is a difficult combat which is proposed to the mind living in retirement.' A terse, right-to-the-point remark by Sadhona (Syriac text) in one of his letters to solitaries. Sometimes a brief remark like this sums it all up when referring to spiritual combat a solitary...actually anyone...faces when getting real with the spiritual life.

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

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

implies we have to take a chance that people will remember us. Habitation in Greek translates more accurately as `tent`.

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

The (biblical) Hebrew language has many verbs for `to hide.` Here is a list in transliterated form with a scriptural quote for each which is prefaced by a brief nuance of meaning:

-*chava`*: `And the man and his wife hid themselves` [Gen 3.8].

-*chavah* (related to the one just above): `To hide themselves in the open country` [2 Kg 7.12]. Both *chava`* and *chavah* don't seem to have a special alternate meaning.

-*chaphas*: to disguise oneself. `But when the wicked rise, men hide themselves` [Prov 28.12].

-*taman*: to hide in the sense of to bury. `And Jacob hid them under the oak which was near` [Gen 35.4].

-*kachad*: to cover over in the sense of denying. `We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent` [Gen 47.18].

-*kanaph*: to cover over; `wing` is derived from this verb. `Yet your teacher will not hide himself anymore` [Is 30.20].

-*kasah*: to cover over. `The Lord said, `Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do`` [Gen 18.17]?

-*mastar*: to take refuge. `From whom men hide their faces he was despised` [Is 53.3].

-*nus*: to take to flight. `In the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites` [Judg 6.11].

-*saphan*: to preserve, to cover as with rafters. `And he saw a portion assigned by the law-giver there preserved (hidden)` [Dt 33.21].

-*Satar*: to veil over. `And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God` [Ex 3.6].

-*Halam*: to hide in the sense of covering over. `The thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly` [Lev 4.13].

-*hamam*: to shut, close. `Wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you` [Ezk 28.3].

-*tsaphan*: to lay up in store, to be laid up. `When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes` [Ex 2.3].

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

Lazarus lay with the rich man inside his house feasting away. It's almost as if that distance was suddenly revealed by the *chasma* in Hades. At the Gospel's end the rich man begs Abraham to warn his five brothers of their impending fate...to close that physical *chasma* while there's still time. Then Abraham responds that the *chasma* can be closed by listening to Moses and the prophets.

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

1) 'Your rowers have brought you out into the high seas' [Ezk 27.26]: 'rowers.'

2) 'Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase' [Dan 12.4]. Here such running is connected with the increase of knowledge.

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

'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kind, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them' [Is 11.6]. A well-known quote, to be sure. While reading it in the context of some research I was struck by the Hebrew verb *gur* for 'shall dwell,' for it seemed out of place. Then I examined it more closely and my original suspicions were confirmed. *Gur* fundamentally means 'to tarry,' 'to sojourn' in the sense of being a stranger or exile. It doesn't necessarily mean sitting down together, i.e., the wolf and lamb, but that they will continue their own respective activities in a place that isn't their own. The other sense I pick up is that two opposing forces don't have to be reconciled in a forced manner, but they can retain their opposition kind of along the Ying-Yang model. However, I'm reluctant to impose that Eastern model on the Isaiah quote but throw it out anyway.

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

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

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

30].

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

This morning shortly before dawn while it was still pretty dark, from the corner of my eye I caught a comet sinking into the southwestern sky. These events happen very quickly, so you’re lucky if you see one. Contrary to ancient opinion, a comet reminds me of those connectors between heaven and earth. They are also like those daimons of which Socrates speaks in the Symposium (2023-03a): ‘They (spirits in between god and mortal) who shuttle back and forth between the two, conveying prayer and sacrifice from men to gods; while to men they bring commands from the gods and gifts in return for sacrifices. Being in the middle of the two, they round out the whole and bind fast the all to all. Through them all divination passes, through them the art of priests in sacrifice and ritual, in enchantment, prophecy and sorcery. Gods do not mix with men; they mingle and converse with us through spirits instead, whether we are awake or asleep. He who is wise in any of these ways is a man of the spirit.’

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Two great readings, the first from Exodus 17.12 when Israel was battling Amalek. ‘And Aaron and Hur held up his (Moses) hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.’ Aaron and Hur must have said to each other or certainly to themselves, ‘Will this trick really work, especially when Moses’ hands grew weak and the enemy prevailed?’ The second reading (Lk 18.1-8) speaks of the unjust judge who ‘neither feared God nor regarded man.’ He passes a just judgement for a widow who bugged him continually (the case isn’t stated) mostly out of fear which seems contrary to ‘nor regarded man.’ She certainly must have been a formidable character, for the judge admits ‘she will wear me out.’ The Greek verb here is *hupopiazo*, alternately as ‘to treat with severity.’ It’s also found (‘to pummel’) in 1 Cor 9.27, ‘But I pummel my body and subdue it, least after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.’ *Hupopiazo* reminds me of when King David fled Jerusalem just before his son Absalom arrived. ‘As Shimei came he uttered curse after curse and threw stones at (i.e., pummeled) David’ [2 Sam 16.6]. Instead of killing him, David told his servants to let Shimei alone and continue his cursing which he did.

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

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time...and about a month out from the beginning of Advent. Today’s Gospel has the familiar contrast between the self-righteous Pharisee and tax collector, Lk 18.9-15. ‘The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself’ [vs. 11]. The Greek text may read literally, ‘stood to (*pros*) himself (and) prayed these.’ Compare with the parable’s hero ‘standing far off (*makrothen*), would not even lift up his eyes to heaven’ [vs.13]. The very different meaning of both prepositions speaks volumes of what Jesus is trying to communicate here. *Pros* signifies direction towards-which whereas *makrothen* simply conveys a sense of physical distance. The use of *pros* intimates the Pharisee’s self-absorption in his righteousness, that it was ‘towards’ himself and not God.

Today's Gospel (Lk 19.1-10) has the chief tax collector Zacchaeus up on the sycamore tree waiting to get a glimpse of Jesus as he passed by. The text is charming in its own right, very direct with a touch of humor with Zacchaeus perched up in his tree. Its message can be summed up by the last verse, 'The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.' The Greek *zeteo* is a common verb which sums up Christ's mission (followed by saving the lost). I quickly looked up the English 'to seek' in a biblical concordance and was surprised to see how few references applied to Jesus doing this. The vast majority of references (apart from common usages) pertained to people seeking him. The 'lost' the verb is *apollumi* with implications of destruction is surely one of those things not fully understood and subject to all sorts of (mis-) interpretations. However, Jesus used it addressing Zacchaeus (also vs. 9, 'Salvation has come to this house'), so in general 'lost' may apply to anyone who has engaged in immoral or irreligious behavior. When you come right down to it, even in the circumscribed area in which Jesus operated there must have been tons of 'lost' people, let alone those in other parts of the world.

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.

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?

'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 they 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. A telling verse of this Gospel 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.

With regards to the famous image of the cave dwellers in Plato's Republic (Book 7), they are captivated by the shadows on the wall as opposed to the sunlight outside the cave. Not only this 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 a vague 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.

'And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, 'Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons'' [1 Sam 1.8]? As Chapter One reveals, Hannah has suffered at the hands of Elkanah's other wife, Peninah, because she was without child. Elkanah had traveled to Shiloh 'year by year' [vs. 7], so poor Hannah got the brunt of abuse...not only there but at home. The dullness and insensitivity of Elkanah over such a long time is astounding, kind of brutish despite what almost is a complaint in vs. 8.

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. What struck me this

time `round there`s always something new, albeit small, that grabs your attention each year is Jesus` response 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. The words, `for thus it is fitting for us` are a participatory gesture where two people are equals in carrying through the act.

There`s a special character about Sunday evenings after the day was done. The weekend has run its course, and the morrow will bring another work week. I`d call the atmosphere of those evening hours...provided you pay close attention...to one akin to the road to Emmaus. Christ has risen, and his disciples do not recognize him while walking along. In brief, Sunday evening may be summed up as: `Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent` [Lk 24.29]. This time, quite brief, is when we make a switch from the previous week to the one which will dawn in a few hours. Earlier we`ve had our conversations without recognizing Christ who `vanished out of their sight` [vs. 31] just as quickly as he had appeared.

`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 fascinating 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. Amid what was most likely a tumult of people in the desert John did recognize 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. A passage by Abba Isaiah has a nice twist to this image: the bronze serpent is 'rusty' or in Syriac, *shchtny*, not made of gold or silver. Such rust represents 'Christ according to the flesh' which is subject to deviation or *mztlyn*. 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.'

I just completed Kirsch's God against the gods which centered around the Roman emperors Constantine and Julian (the so-called Apostate). The latter died in a battle against the Persians, and the Christians saw his death as coming from God. While covering much familiar material, giving an picture of that period of history, virtually filtered through the newly victorious Christian perspective, is enlightening. Julian wasn't the devil depicted but quite tolerant which as Kirsch argues, was a feature of paganism towards most forms of worship. You get a sense of 'what might have been' towards the book's end, how history could have turned out differently if a truce were made between the old religions and Christianity, of polytheism and monotheism. Kirsch has argued that the latter is susceptible to fanaticism; even the 'mono' in monotheism suggests that, i.e., only one (type of worship). That'd be okay in and by itself, but we have inherited the political and social structures tied into 'mono.' Although Kirsch doesn't mention it, as far as Christianity is concerned, Protestantism represents 'real' monotheism in that it banished the cult of saints and the Virgin Mary whereas Catholicism has retained this 'polytheistic' element which, in fact, was present pretty much from the start of Christianity. All in all, this reappraisal of the origins of Christianity within the pagan/Hellenistic culture of its time sets the stage for a reconsideration of from where we've come and to where we might be going. It takes place within the larger present 'religious war' going on...or apparently going on...between Islam and the West, of democracy and totalitarianism.

Consider the parable about the Pharisee and tax collector who prayed in the temple (Lk 18.9-14), one familiar to us all. 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...and this means the entire neighborhood. Surely his conversion must have made an impact, and he was subject to derogatory remarks, a hard thing to live with. This is 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.

The second century Church Father Origen of Alexandria has come under both heavy criticism and praise down the centuries. It's easy to understand both sides of the aisle. Regardless, Origen really put the Church on her feet as far as interpretation of Scripture goes. How you be critical of someone so early in her history? Anyone that pioneering is open for criticism. One of the sharpest censures leveled again 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, a theme of his De Principiis. What's interesting is that he had in mind the Greek aversion for infinity, a fact which ties in with 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.`

February is the most awkward month of the year which is mirrored by a Syriac proverb, `Oh February, gloomiest month of them all who casts a gloom upon us all.` The word `gloom` is derived from the same Syriac word as February, so there`s a play on words. Apart from George Washington, Valentine`s Day and Ash Wednesday, nothing much going on. Besides, February is supposedly the snowiest month of the year.

Feast of the Presentation, somehow 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 a quick one. 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.

Ash Wednesday, which introduces 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.`

`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`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 I have 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.

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].

Third Sunday of Lent. This Lent is really whipping by as they all do; never experienced it or any other liturgical season as a drawn-out. Today's Gospel we were offered either the 'long' or 'short' form and fortunately opted for the latter deals with the Samaritan woman's conversation with Jesus at the well [Jn 4.5-42]. A rich dialogue, to be sure, worthy of extensive commentary, but I'll settle on 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 where Abraham sends 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`ahn*) 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.

Fourth Sunday of Lent or Laetare Sunday or in other words, halfway through Lent which the Church intimates as a cause for rejoicing. I guess its roots go back to when people did industrial strength penance. As was the case last Sunday, there's an option of either the long or short form for the Gospel (Jn 9.1-41), and fortunately we opted for the latter. It is about the blind man whom Jesus cured on the Sabbath and has a rather long, drawn-out dialogue between him and the Pharisees. All this 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 *l'at*, 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.'

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 those rare instances when the New American Bible translation shines).

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 I take in this context as the realities of rhythm and harmony being carried over into one`s soul (*eis to entotes 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.

Palm Sunday and first day of spring (7.34 am). Consider the Greek word for `palm` or *phoenix* which is found in John`s Gospel: `So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him crying `Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!`` More specifically *phoenix* pertains to date palms which are of a reddish hue and the same name for the mythical bird which died in fire and rose from its own ashes. I don`t know if John used this word deliberately one week from Christ`s resurrection, but it`s a nice little insert. Furthermore, palm branches do resemble feathers of a large bird.

Holy Saturday. Here is an anonymous `ancient homily` for today (author unknown, PG 43.439.451.462-3) which sums up the feel of this day in a fine way:

Something strange is happening. There is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: `May the Lord be with you all.` Christ answered him: `And with your spirit.` He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: `Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.`

I am your God, who for your sake has become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order, you O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person, and we cannot be separated.

For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to earth and beneath the earth. For your sake, for the sake of the human race, I became like a man without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On my back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your back. See my hands nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.

I slept on the cross and a sword pierced my side for you who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side has healed the pain in yours. My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in hell. The sword that pierced me has sheathed the sword that was turned against you.

Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life itself am now one with you. I appointed cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them worship you as God is worshiped. The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.

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

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

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

ekstasis which can translate as 'ecstasy.' Compare *tardemah* with the disciples (vs. 32), 'Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep (*bebaremenoi hupno*).' Also with regards to Abraham, 'a dread and great darkness fell upon him.' *Chashekh* is the word for darkness, usually in the negative sense as in Is 8.22: 'And they will look to the earth but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish.' In the verse at hand, this term can apply to God's presence as in Dt 5.23: 'And when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness.'

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

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

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

During the Easter season the familiar Angelus (thrice daily) is replaced by the Regina Caeli where we are encouraged to rejoice with the Virgin Mary over the resurrection of her son. It's considerably briefer than the Angelus. Such brevity with the brisk ringing of the bells has a definite joyful tone to it. These fifty pre-Pentecost days have a significance which is daily commemorated at the 'Little Hour' of Terce, usually celebrated around 10 am. Some words from its introductory hymn: 'It is the hour our souls possess with your full flood of holiness.' I.e., the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles during the awkward mid-morning period on Pentecost. I say 'awkward' in that despite the brevity of Terce (not in excess of five minutes), it occurs when we've just gotten underway with work. To pause during this initial momentum takes some discipline and lifts us from what can be the demanding aspects of our daily work. There's some genius the Church had by inserting this Hour with the just-quoted introductory words...the last or unexpected time you'd expect a manifestation of the Spirit, mid-morning during work.

Third Sunday of Easter. Today's Gospel (Jn 21.1-19) has Jesus meeting the disciples on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias. Note two ways of presenting his 'revelation': 1) 'After this Jesus revealed himself' [vs. 1]. 2) 'This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples' [vs. 14]. Both use the verb *phaneroo* in the sense of manifestation and not to be confused with *apokalupsis* or 'revelation' as in the Book of Revelation which implies more an uncovering. Vs. 1 has Jesus revealing himself whereas vs. 14 puts it in the passive mode, 'was revealed.'

After Low Sunday and the completion of the Easter Octave, Easter itself loses its power which is inevitable as with other liturgical seasons the Church delineates. Inevitably, the nature of time presses forward; next stop is the Ascension quickly succeeded by Pentecost. After a few weeks of 'trailers' or add-on feasts (Corpus Christi, for example), we pass into Ordinary Time. Prior to Easter Sunday the Church has opened its Big Guns, that is to say, she offers the best assembly of scriptural readings in her

arsenal. Even during the octave the readings quickly `degenerate` (italics, for lack of a better word) into the relatively prosaic Acts of the Apostles. There the readings assume a more historical stance as opposed to the poetical and theological nature of pre-Easter texts. You almost get the sense that yes, we can move up to the Resurrection, historically speaking. However, this historical movement is different from the pre-Resurrection historical stance just noted. While it does move in real time and real space, those dimensions are saturated with poetry and theology. From the Resurrection onwards we hit a kind of wall after which things go blank and are presented with `fillers` by witnesses to the Resurrection. There we seem to get just plain history, if you will. Then Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit, comes which helps us along after which we're set on our own ways.

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

Seventh Sunday of Easter...actually, one of the more unusual Sundays of the year in that Christ had already ascended into heaven last Thursday (Ascension). The disciples are pretty much left as they were before meeting with Jesus, i.e., previously he didn't exist for them but now exists as a strange type of memory. He's in mid-air, as it were, between earth and heaven: not fully belonging to each. From Ascension Thursday until next Sunday, Pentecost, we are held in abeyance before receiving the Holy Spirit. That feast represents a `second incarnation` in that the Spirit descends upon the Apostles and therefore gives birth to the Church. Such intervals as the one we're experiencing right now are to be sought out and savored; they teach us much more than we see at first glance.

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

`When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul' [Acts 23.12]. Forty men made this oath, and shortly afterwards Paul was sent to Caesarea to make appeal to the procurator Felix. In other words, the forty conspirators were left hanging, neither eating nor drinking! I wonder what became of them and if they finally gave up, having withered away from lack of nourishment.

Today's Gospel (Mt 8.5-13) recounts the centurion approaching Jesus to heal his servant (*pais*). The term fundamentally means `child` but can have this alternate meaning; *doulos* is the more common term for `servant` and lacks a sense of endearment. Given our understanding of ancient times and the lowly condition of this class, it's all the more unusual that the centurion goes out of his way. Perhaps the servant was of particular value to him, hence the solicitude. However, something deeper may be at work here than first imagined. We have a dialogue about Jesus offering to come to the centurion's house to which the latter states his unworthiness. The real point of the story is when the centurion recounts his command over soldiers. He can stay to them with impunity, `come,` `go` and `do this.` Upon hearing such words, Jesus marvels at the child-like unconscious manner by which the centurion tells Jesus how he comports himself with regards to those under his command. Certainly a different

approach compared with so many others who enjoy lording their authority over subordinates. Such a child-like expression may be this Gospel excerpt's real intent. Jesus' marveling parallels the centurion's detachment which doesn't take human authority that seriously, or just serious enough to produce the required results.

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's Gospel (Lk 9.51-62) speak of Jesus' resoluteness in ascending to Jerusalem in order 'to be received up' [vs. 51]. These words are a noun in Greek (*analempsis*), literally, 'taking up,' 'ascension'...the only use of this term in the New Testament and most likely referring to Jesus' impending death. The bulk of the text is full of upward movement (towards Jerusalem), with some rather harsh instances: the Samaritans who didn't receive Jesus, the disciples wanting to rain down fire upon them, Jesus rebuking the disciples and the man who approached him en route who wanted to bid his family farewell first but was rejected. The Gospel finally concludes with Jesus saying that 'no one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God' [vs. 62]. That is to say, not fit for the *analempsis*. Not untypically for Jews, Jesus and his followers probably recited or sang the 'Songs of Ascents' or those Psalms (120-134) as they got closer to their goal. We may rename them 'Songs of *Analempsis*' in light of the Gospel.

This double-edged meaning of *analempsis* reminiscent of a reading during yesterday's Vespers (first for Sunday, 2 Cor 12.1-10). Clearly different but with connotations of violence in both, physically as well as spiritually. That reading was Paul's account of having been 'caught up (*harpazo*) into the third heaven.' The term means being taken away by violent force. For a startling demonstration, cf. Acts 23.10: '...the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks.' The interesting point about the Vesper reading is that Paul speaks of himself as 'a man,' 'this man.' I.e., both phrases intimate a distinction between such a 'man' and Paul while clearly referring to the same person. Paul speaks of this experience as having happened 'fourteen years ago' [vs. 2]; despite the time lapse and all the tumult he had undergone, his *harpazo* was clearer than all other events. It seems that once a person experiences a *harpazo*, there comes to clear realization that the 'man' who had undergone it is distinguished...not separated...from the person giving an account about it. Not entirely unlike the distinction between body and soul, with the latter being subjected to this *harpazo*.

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

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

St. Mary Magdalene. This is one of those delightful feasts the Church presents due to its rarity. I mean that most of her commemorations are serious with always some sense of duty and suffering hovering in the background. Today we recall a person whom we know as in love with Jesus Christ and not noted

for anything extraordinary: no written works nor accomplishments. The same can be said of Sts. Joachim and Ann (26th) and Martha (29th). Interesting how the second half of July crowds these folks in, kind of in tune with the idea of vacation time. Today you can relax with Mary Magdalene and not gear yourself up to imitate some heroic deed. A prime indicator is the first reading from the Song of Songs where the bride goes around the city in search of her beloved. The bride does find her spouse 'scarcely had I passed them' [3.4]. Compare with the Gospel when Mary encounters the two angels about Jesus (cf. Jn 20.13). The next verse has Jesus present, almost as though he had crept up behind her and the two angels while they were conversing.

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

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

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

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

concluding verse of this passage makes more sense: 'Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.'

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

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. So here we are at the end of the liturgical season as far as ordinary time goes. Week after next is Advent. Whenever seasonal shifts like this occur as well as the first snow which we saw two days ago, everybody remarks at how quickly time had passed since we were there before. 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.

'And the angel who talked 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 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, i.e., natural phenomena. Although Aristotle succeeded brilliantly, 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. I can appreciate Aristotle's observation towards the end of his life which 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. I think it goes deeper than that, for stories have a way of interpreting reality that's more appealing than a bald, philosophic (and scientific) approach.

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.

'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!'

I'm currently half way through Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*. He's an proponent of Epicurean philosophy and lays stress upon the concept of atoms. For the ancients, atoms were taken literally, as that which is indivisible, the smallest constituent of created reality. It's a surprisingly modern concept all the more remarkable for the absence of the divinity. Given the traditional society in which this idea had been developed, it's no small wonder that Lucretius and those before him could get away with such ideas in a society permeated with gods and goddesses, and to go against them was to go against society's basic tenets. Most likely Lucretius and his compatriots did the requisite sacrifices, quite unlike Christians who did not and paid the price. Apart from all this, Lucretius' treatise mirrors how even we moderns tend to conceive reality, as small invisible particles (for us, sub-atomic particles) bouncing around and giving form to what we perceive. Epicureanism never had the larger following as more 'spiritual' philosophies such as Stoicism, for something in human nature rebels against this materialistic view of reality and of our human constitution. We moderns might look at it with horror not so much because the soul is mortal and dissolves along with the body, but at how other modern philosophies and theories of society spun off with dire consequences. I'm sure that Lucretius himself would recoil at how materialism was so interpreted because for him and others of his era materialism was a praxis...a mode of life...leading to liberation, not enslavement.

The Greek word *hule* 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.' In brief, it might be said that *ta stoichei*, as letters of the alphabet, give order to *hule* or raw matter. *Ta stoicheia* allow for interpretation of the physical world and everything within it, a kind of channel for obtaining wisdom.

So here we are in the nine day period until Pentecost. Christ has ascended into heaven, rather, returned to his native home, while we on earth are kind of left holding the bag. It's an awkward period though a good one, quite short and different from other liturgical seasons. Although we are situated well past the Ascension in historical terms, it conveys a reality with which we can play and have practical ramifications here and now. Not that the Ascension may be labeled 'practical' but our attention to it has a lasting effect upon our perceptions of space and time. During this interim period I wonder what Christ must be doing in heaven, most likely talking with the Father and Spirit as to the latter's descent and how it'll be effected. Possibly the bulk of the dialogue is between the Father and Son with the Spirit listening in. Surely their discussion is influenced by the disciples being left as orphans. Then again, they probably think this short nine day period is sufficient for them to appreciate the need for a non-bodily presence of God (which will be the Spirit). 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. Most people would concur that talk

about the Spirit is vague and diffuse. One way of getting a better handle on the Spirit is consideration of three verses 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.

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 life span 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.

St. Matthias. This year the celebration of St. Matthias couldn't come at a better time, the Saturday before Pentecost. Chapter One of Acts speaks of how the eleven disciples met to choose an successor to Judas. It was necessary to have a full complement of twelve disciples (as the twelve tribes of Israel, etc), so they elected Matthias. Right after that in Chapter Two we have the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit needed, as it were, a stable platform on which to rest; eleven disciples would be the equivalent of a table with three legs.

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]. 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 him: `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.

I've often noted the Greek word *aporia* which 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 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 mind-set 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 and see where the two differ and converge.

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 to the point of restriction, 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 somehow automatically we 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.

I like the 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' [X.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.

I read an interesting quote from an excerpt of (then) Cardinal Ratzinger's entitled Memoirs. It was written just when the Nazis were coming into power or spreading their tentacles deeper into German society. Ratzinger said that training in the classical tradition of Greek and Latin endows a person who studies them (i.e., their literature and history) with the ability to resist tyranny. Immaculate Heart of Mary. I have a greater affection for this 'western' feast over that of yesterday, Sacred Heart. The reason is liturgical. 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. 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.

I've been assembling notes on the concept of image (*eikon*) from Hubert Merki's book which I read once or twice some years back. That is to say, he systematically goes through the Greek and then patristic period citing how/when *eikon* is used. An image by nature is a secondary reality which participates in a primary one. Then you throw in the idea of likeness which seems to be an actualization of *eikon*, i.e., *eikon* in action. By reason of *eikon*'s secondary nature in which we are supposedly made, there's always a tension of either abiding in it or usurping its reality. We can sort of hang around as *eikon*, but that'd get us nowhere unless it were put into action which, as noted, is where likeness comes into play. It would be fun to explore the concept of image according to the Hebrew word *tselem* (alternately as shadow, image), simply because of its non-philosophical nature. Then we can throw in *demuth* for 'likeness' to counter the Greek *homoiototes*. *Demuth* seems more interesting in that it derives from the verbal root (essential to understand Hebrew concepts) *damah*, 'to be silent,' 'to rest.'

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 (*splagchnizomai*, 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, I've noted elsewhere on this Home Page that the verbal root ('*ashar*') means 'to be happy.' From it derives the relative pronoun '*asher* (who, which, that). While it may seem a bit alien to those unfamiliar with Hebrew, attention to verbal roots is key to appreciating the subtleties of the language and thus scripture. 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 or that 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. 66). 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 (*homologeo*) 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 not 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

Today`s Gospel (Mt 10.37-42) presents a series of contrasts or balances which may be outlined as follows. Note that the `versus` is not to be taken in the opposing or antagonistic sense:

- loves father or mother vs. more than me
- loves son or daughter vs. not worthy of me
- doesn`t take up one`s cross vs. not worthy of me
- finds one`s life vs. will lose it
- loses one`s life vs. will find it
- receives you vs. receives me
- receives prophet vs. will receive prophet`s reward
- receives righteous man vs. will receive righteous man`s reward
- gives cup of cold water vs. not will lose reward

`Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust` [Ps 40.4]. `Blessed` is one of those words I`ve commented upon in several places, a key term which unlocks a lot of what the Hebrew Bible has to say. The English is weak by comparison; same applies to the Greek *makarios* and Latin *beatus* which are more familiar. They are often associated with the `blessedness` of the Sermon on the Mount. `Ashrey is the Hebrew term which suggests a forward, rushed and even excited motion, not unlike a young child running. It`s also tied in with the relative pronoun (who). Thus `ashrey is a state difficult to nail down because it`s always in transition, hence the value of centering attention upon the relative pronoun which makes a connection between the person on one hand and action he or she is in the process of effecting on the other. The verse at hand has *gever* for `man` which intimates more a strong or mighty warrior-like man; implication is that such a person requires strength and diligence to engage in this process.

Ancient monastic tradition speaks of the noonday devil, the time when the sun is at its zenith and the devil most active. Although it originally applied to a desert environment, the image can be used elsewhere, even in this stifling humidity. I wonder what image the Desert Fathers would have come up with if got started in this weather. Over the years I`ve met people from desert regions, even the Middle East, who find New England`s humidity intolerable by comparison. In addition to the noonday devil there`s a junior cousin who makes his appearance around 3.30 in the afternoon. He gets under way when the day is about 2/3 done just at that point before we make an almost imperceptible shift from the mode of daylight to that of evening and therefore night. This devil takes the form of a hard-to-define restlessness or boredom because by 3.30 pm the bulk of our work is done, and we look forward to the relaxing hours of evening. Still there remains about an hour...really a short period...of awkward time needing to be filled. Usually we continue with the day`s work, the typical solution, but often this won`t do. Maybe that`s why the English instituted tea time which is more than a break from work. It`s too pervasive to call it that, having sunken into their culture by defining a period of time almost begging to be defined. Since we don`t have that tradition in the USA, one alternate is to get outdoors of possible just for the sake of doing something different, and then come back. After all, we`re only talking about a single hour. Once over that hump we`re good for the rest of the day.

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, today`s Gospel being Mt 11.25-30. We have one of those welcomed passages which at first glance don`t come along terribly often, notably the easy yoke he bids

his followers to take up. Some observations, especially the first part of the Gospel, are as follows. `I thank you` (*exomologeo*) 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 *exomologeo* 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 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*²⁴) 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.

`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]. We can lift two patterns 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. For him it simply is. This emphasis upon nouns, as it were (*geber/mivtach*) is balanced by the dynamism of him being `ashrey` or `blessed,` a point touched upon earlier. `Ashrey` is forward-looking and related to the relative pronoun who/which/that as used in the verse at hand, `asher. Thus `blessed` is not only dynamic and forward-looking but in a way transitional, indicative of passing from one place (state) to another.

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. The Gospel for today is quite rich, dealing 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, I 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 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.

Several entries ago I spoke of Socrates' last days recounted in the *Phaedo*. I was intent on narrowing down as closely as possible what inspired him to live as he did and came up with the statement quoted then, '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 these are 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 or 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.

Earlier this week was the feast of St. Benedict (11th). Consider a verse from Vespers of that day: 'Knowingly unacquainted with the world's ways.' I like the juxtaposition of 'knowingly' and 'unacquainted': they 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.

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. As was the case last week, today we have a 'multiple choice' or choice between the longer or shorter Gospel version (Mt 13.24-30 and 24-43 respectively), so we'll stick with the former. Here 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.

While I focused in upon the shorter Gospel, the longer version contains an explanation of this parable, vss. 37-43. 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* which means something put before 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?'

St. Mary Magdalene. One of those special, gentle feasts which stands out from the other liturgical commemorations. By that I mean Mary doesn't fall into the category of what we've come to perceive as saints, people who engaged in superhuman feats of virtue and deeds. The first reading set the tone, from the third chapter of Song of Songs, where the bridegroom goes about the city in search of her beloved. Today's feast also has a nice way of spilling over into two similar ones on the menu: Sts Joachim and Ann on the 26th and St. Martha on the 29th.

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.

Sts. Joachim and Ann. Another favorite in a trio starting with St. Mary Magdalene on the 22nd and concluded with St. Martha on the 29th. Favorites in the sense noted on the 22nd that these folks aren't directly related with Christ's ministry and all the seriousness that involves, not to mention saints the Church commemorates in ensuing centuries. They are summer spaces or vacations, if you will, in which we can relax and catch a glimpse of what the Church is like in heaven. All these good folks were friends of Christ (questionable re. Joachim and Ann in that they were Mary's parents but will include them anyway), people to whom he didn't have to look down but be at ease. Quite rare when you think of it. I'd even exclude the Apostles; Jesus is frequently admonishing or instructing them.

'Now therefore hold him not guiltless, for you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.' Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David' [1

Kg 2.9-10]. Such are the last words from Israel's greatest king, a matter-of-fact statement by King David just as he was about to die, wishing the worst for one of his enemies. You get the impression that he was completely oblivious to the fact that he as well as his enemy were headed for the same place. That's why some of the Old Testament accounts are appealing, no beating around the bush.

`At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night and said, `Ask what I shall give you` [1Kg 3.5]. This is a prelude to the Lord giving Solomon wisdom for which he is famous. However, note the place where the Lord appeared, Gibeon. In the preceding verse we have, `And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place.` In other words, Solomon sacrificed at the `high places` which were in conflict with the worship of the Lord. This didn't seem to bother the Lord, for he appeared at Gibeon. Those early days were fraught with a mixture of polytheism and monotheism which hadn't yet been hammered out. In a sense this was beneficial in that the poly of polytheism offset what became in some instances a rather cold, aloof perception of God through monotheism. You also get the sense that back then people moved easily and without remorse between the two systems of worship.

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.

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. Usually I focus upon the Gospel, but the first reading (1 Kg 19.9-13) is a clear favorite, Elijah at Mount Horeb. There's an obvious connection between the first reading and Gospel which makes me consider that the disciples, steeped in Jewish tradition as they must have been, interpreted their hair-raising event in light of the Elijah story later on as the account was written down.

First note the 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 (*tuva*), 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. One take on this is that 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*, 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]. These are 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.

`Our citizenship exists in the heavens` (Philippians 3.20). *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 or a 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.

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time with this evening being the Vigil of the Assumption, `two Sundays` in a row, if you will. Today`s Gospel (Mt 15.21-8) recounts the Canaanite woman`s faith in Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus` rejection of her plea is in apparent conformity with his disciples. They said, `Send her away` to which Jesus responded that he was sent `only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.` To really drive home the point he says, `It is not fair to take the children`s bread and throw it to the dogs.` Most likely the disciples were so pleased they could hardly contain themselves. At the same time Jesus was setting them up for a revelation of healing based upon faith. The last word was left to the Canaanite woman who agreed to Jesus` observation here upon which he immediately healed her daughter. Note that we don`t hear nor see from the daughter herself who remains some distance from all this, and one can imagine her response upon hearing the incident. The parable at hand bears some parallel with that of Lazarus and the rich man which is only found in St. Luke`s Gospel, namely, `[Lazarus] desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man`s table` [Lk 16.21]. perhaps the Canaanite woman is not unlike Lazarus in Abraham`s bosom (vs. 23) both due to their undesirable social condition on one hand and their exceptional faith on the other.

Assumption. I 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 *aparache*. 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]).

`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 visa-a-vis Peter's confession.

`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]. Apart from the intensity of these words from King Jeroboam, son and immediate successor to Solomon, these words are reminiscent of Plato's *Meno* where he ponders whether or not virtue can be taught. By that I mean 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.

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.

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.'

There's a passage in Plato's Phaedrus that pretty much sums up a latent tension in him as well as in virtually all Western thought: '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 'out 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.’ I don’t know which is funnier, the passage itself or the comment on it.

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 in with 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 at a later time 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.’

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. 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, I don’t recall places where John the Baptist had given 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.

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. Here the persons invited didn’t show up at the wedding banquet, 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. 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 did not. In a large assembly of people like this it must have been difficult to discern the two types, and the garment-less 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.`

If you pay attention closely to how people talk about God, almost always they use imagery pertaining to the sense of sight, for example, the `beatific vision.` This simple fact came home to me when I revisited a document by Gregory of Nyssa, namely, scriptural references to the Song Commentaries by Origen, Gregory and Bernard of Clairvaux. T here the imagery relates primarily to taste and feeling. Both are more intimate than sight which focuses upon objects out there; the latter two take in and absorb what they are perceiving, more an incorporation in the literal sense of the term.