

23 April, Second Sunday of Easter

42) And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43) And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44) And all who believed were together and had all things in common; 45) and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all as any had need. 46) And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, 47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2.42-47

“They” refers to the recently baptized three thousand who heard Peter preaching immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit. Almost at once...for there seems to be little or no time frame...these newly baptized did what they were compelled to do, organize their lives by laying the groundwork for forming a community. Vs. 42 gives the four forms essential for such an enterprise. As for the first or the teaching, at this point it consisted of just the basics. Since the disciples were still circulating, people depended upon them to recount not their personal teaching or *didache* but that of Jesus which they did from memory. That means their memories of Jesus were transmitted into the memories of these new Christians. They had to ensure the stability of this transmission both for the current generation lives as well as preserving it for newcomers to the Christian faith plus the next generation. This brings up the importance of *koinonia* or fellowship, community, for *didache* without which it couldn't exist. Everyone would get the same information, bounce it off each other, and once it has been secured, write it down. Breaking the bread or what soon would be called Eucharist would be the distinctly Christian expression of *koinonia*, so this rite coupled with transmission of teaching quickly became one and the same.

Once this seminal community got underway...three thousand members possibly breaking into more manageable groups staying in contact with each other...it was only natural they drew attention to themselves. This is expressed by fear or *phobos* which is the biblical kind meaning reverence. At the same time the apostles were present through whom signs and wonders were being accomplished. While important, ultimately these become secondary to the breaking of bread and fellowship, these two including the teaching and prayers of vs. 42. The importance of *koinonia* is reflected by all (three thousand at this juncture) having all things as *koinos* or shared among each other.

Despite the *phobos* or fear which this seminal Christian community generated is their attendance at worship in the Jerusalem temple which they saw in unison with the breaking of bread. While in the temple, many of the newly baptized recalled Jesus' words about that building being destroyed in the not too distant future. Also Jesus implied that his own body is greater than the temple, a realization that impelled these Christians to break

bread. Instinctively but not clearly they knew the latter would supersede the temple. So once this breaking of bread has taken greater root in their awareness, they could eat gladly and with generous hearts as vs. 46 states. This flows automatically over to praise of God and finding favor (*charis*, also as grace) with the people. Such behavior is spontaneous as well as infectious which is why the Lord increased their number, another ominous sign that the temple's days are numbered and that the eucharistically based community will replace it. Such is the meaning of being saved as this last verse has it.

30 April, Third Sunday of Easter

14) But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words...22) "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—23) this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24) But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. 25) For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; 26) therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. 27) For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor let your Holy One see corruption. 28) You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' 29) "Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30) Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, 31) he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades nor did his flesh see corruption. 32) This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33) Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear. Acts 2.14, 22-33

This excerpt begins with vs. 14 comes after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and followed immediately by a scriptural justification for the mission of Jesus Christ. Peter is standing, pretty much struck in amazement at what just transpired, after which he lifted his voice still fresh from uttering other tongues (cf vs. 4). However, he felt the obligation to address those still present who had just witnessed the event of Pentecost. The intervening verses consist of Peter's interpretation of a passage from Joel (2.28-32) relevant to the miracle so many had witnessed. This forms a back-drop, if you will, for explanation of other scriptural passages which is the most natural thing a devout Jew could do. While it might be argued that the Joel passage was a later insert, chances are that Peter, newly

anointed by the Spirit, uttered it whole and entire without giving a thought. So right from the start of the church's existence we find a natural unity between what we call the Old and New Testaments.

Peter stresses the fact that Jesus is attested by God, *apodeiknumi*...pointed out or shown in the sense of making evident...literally “into (*eis*) you” through *dunamis*, *teras* and *semeion* or power (in the sense of having the capacity to do something), wonders (an omen in the sense of indicating a coming event) and miraculous signs. The “*eis* (into) you” is similar to “in your midst (*mesos* or in the middle of).” All three are self-evident which is why Peter says “as you know.”

In vs. 23 Peter makes a distinction, if you will, between those he's addressing as having crucified Jesus and lawless men. However, attention should be there but upon God who effected this, *horizo* meaning to mark off by boundaries. It therefore situates the crucifixion within a specific context where these two types of people are instruments. And by instruments they are part of both the divine plan and foreknowledge, *boule* and *prognosis*, the former also meaning counsel. So if those present are responsible for Jesus' crucifixion and are cut to the quick, that's secondary. Immediately Peter turns attention away from that to Christ's resurrection and launches into a lengthy quote from Ps 16.8-11.

The quote from Psalm Sixteen is the second biblical passage after Joel used by Peter within the immediate context of Pentecost. For a presentation of these verses, refer to an excerpt from *Notes on the Psalter* also on this home page posted after the notations relative to the passage at hand.

In vs. 25 Peter mentions David as author of the psalm verses he's about to quote and brings up his name again in vs. 29 as a central authority as witness to the person of Jesus Christ. Everyone knew of King David, so by quoting him Peter establishes his own authority as leader of the new Christian community at its very beginning. The noun *parresia* ('confidently') is important here which pertains to the freedom to speak freely as a citizen, a vital asset as leader.

With regard to vs. 33, it's the Holy Spirit who inspired King David and by extension, Peter, this Holy Spirit having just manifested itself at Pentecost. In light of both the Joel and Psalm Sixteen passages, the first and most urgent task of Peter with the other disciples is to justify, if you will, the connection between Israel's tradition of prophecy and kingship (i.e., David) and the birth of a new community at Pentecost. At that very moment people were unaware that a new community had been inaugurated but quickly afterward it began to form. “And all who believed were together and had all things in common” [vs. 44]. Their first task is to unpack the words of vs. 33, “promise of the Holy Spirit...which you see and

hear.” The seeing is the tongues of flame upon the disciples and the hearing consists of speaking other tongues.

From *Notations on the Psaltar* as noted above:

Vs. 8: “I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” Such is the result of *yasar* during the *leyloth* mentioned above. The keeping of the Lord or *shawah* is a making equal or similar; second meaning of this verb is to fear. “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him” [Is 40.25]? The notion of resemblance is suggestive of a person being made in God’s *eikon*, image. Note that such *shawah* is constant, *tameyd*, almost in the sense of an ontological identification of the psalmist with God. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two realities is maintained: before me, *lenegdy*, signifying place-in-front-of or not identical with. This word is prefixed by the letter l-, literally, to; translation would be to before me. This implies Moses’ words, “I pray you, show me your glory” [Ex 33.18], not your face which would be identical with God’s own self.

“Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.” In many cultures the right has always been symbolic of good as opposed to the left hand. The word for right hand is *yamyn*; note that God is at the psalmist’s *yamyn*, not the other way around. This word is also used for south, for when one’s right hand is towards this direction, the face is towards the east or sunrise. With this in mind Ex 33.18 quoted in the paragraph above can be understood in terms of Moses having God situated at the south while Moses’ face is towards the east, sunrise. This position results in constancy, in not being moved, *mut*; use of the future tense suggests continuance of that keeping or *shawah* already discussed.

Vs. 9: “Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure.” Two aspects of the psalmist’s condition which rejoice, heart (*lev*) and soul (*kavod*). The latter more accurately means liver which was considered the heaviest of the internal organs, *kavod* being the verbal root with this meaning. “My heart is poured out on the ground” [Lam 2.11], more specifically, that which is most interior is made exterior as a result of sadness. This rejoicing or *gyl* comes from the verbal root suggestive of a round dance.

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

Vs. 10: “For you did not give me up to Sheol or let your godly one see the Pit.” Give up or *hazav* connotes the finality of abandonment, an apt verb with regards to Sheol, the abode of the dead which the psalmist’s soul or *naphash* escapes. This verse is quoted in Acts 2.27 by Peter on the day of Pentecost.

The psalmist identifies himself with being a godly one or *chasyd*, from the root *chasad* or one who is the object of God’s tender love. The pit or *shachat* implies corruption: “But you have held back my life from the pit of destruction” [Is 38.17]. This text literally reads, “But you have in love to my soul,” *chashaq* rhyming with *shachat* or pit. “To see” this pit is equivalent to actual presence in it.

Vs. 11: “You show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.” Because Sheol infers a downward direction, the path or ‘*orach* leads in the opposite or upward direction. Consider this verse in light of two ascensions, that of Enoch and Elijah: “Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him” [Gen 5.24]. Note the words he was not, ‘*eynenu*, signifying a thorough “noughting” or disappearance from the earthly sphere. The second ascension reads, “And as they [Elijah and Elisha] still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” [2 Kg 2.11]. This latter example is an upward movement effected indirectly by God through the medium of a chariot of horses; the former is by God himself.

The ‘*orach* or path is a more poetic word as compared with the more prosaic *derek*. Here its “upward” direction as noted in the last paragraph is associated with life, *chayeym*. It is God who shows this ‘*orach* to the psalmist, more accurately, causes to make known, the verbal root being *yadah*. I.e., we have here an indirect discovery on part of the psalmist of the path, not a clear manifestation.

“In your presence there is fullness of joy.” The Hebrew verb is *savah*, to fill, which bears resemblance to another verb, *shavah*, to swear an oath and from which is derived the number seven. Note that joy, *samach*, is in the plural, *simachoth*, implying an indeterminate number. ‘*eth-paneyka*, before you or in your presence, face, source of joys.

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

7 May, Fourth Sunday of Easter

14) *But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words...36) Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." 37) Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38) And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39) For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." 40) And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." 41) So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. Acts 2.14, 36-41*

Here the Joel passage is commented upon to some degree though not in the excerpt.

The small particle *de* or “but” is important to show Peter’s response to vs. 12 when some people were wondering about the apostles speaking in tongues immediately after the Holy Spirit’s descent at Pentecost. They asked, “What does this mean?” It was obvious that Peter had to give an explanation which he did at once, calmly yet fearlessly. The words “standing” with the eleven and “lifted his voice” demonstrate this fact. Peter asks those around him who had been drawn out of curiosity to “give ear to my words,” the verb being *enotizomai*. Literally it means to receive into the ear and comes across as something like “pay the utmost attention.”

Peter begins a lengthy quote from the prophet Joel (Jl 2.28-32) which amounts to the very first direct quote from the Old Testament by the New with the added importance that it is uttered by the one who demonstrates himself as the budding church’s leader. Besides, this passage at the fountainhead of the church’s existence shows that the sense of mystery, awe and excitement it contains can and should remain and inform subsequent generations. As for Peter, most likely he cites the passage not so much from memory but spontaneously without reflection in light of the Pentecost experience which was just moments ago. Instead of “last days” it begins with “those days,” the Spirit’s manifestation and Joel’s prophecy cementing the union between the two Testaments (of course, the New was just coming into existence). In other words, “days” applies equally to both Testaments. As for the “days” of the second Testament, God will pour out his Spirit upon every human being, Pentecost being the first pouring and limited to the more immediate apostles.

The Joel passage continues with the young, old, free and slave all engaged in prophesying along with wonder in the heavens, etc. This signals yet another “day,” the one belonging to the Lord which is both “great and manifest,” the latter adjective being *epiphanos* or literally to shine upon, with obvious reference to Epiphany. This “day of the Lord” will

supersede the day of the first and second testaments characterized by a freedom and ease of relationship with the Lord. It's characterized by having the ability to call on the Lord's name at any time and be saved.

As for the verses for this week's excerpt (36-41), Peter speaks of Christ's crucifixion, a mere several weeks ago. Nothing is said of his resurrection; it seems the descent of the Holy Spirit is more important referred to in vs. 29. This is certainly true in light of Pentecost. If the presence of this Spirit can be communicated to people as quickly as possible, so Peter believes, what's true not just about Christ's death but his resurrection will follow naturally. The way this happens follows upon what Christ says after his resurrection, namely, to go into the world, preach the gospel and baptize (cf. Mk 16.15).

14 May, Fifth Sunday in Easter

1) Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2) And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3) Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom whom we may appoint to this duty. 4) But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5) And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6) These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them. 7) And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. Acts 6.1-7

This passage deals with a concrete situation that arose in the first days of the church's life when people were attempting to establish some kind of order within in it, especially in light of Pentecost and not knowing that they were headed to becoming independent of Judaism. What's key here isn't the details but the whole ball of wax summed up by murmuring which is rendered just as the verb *gogguzo* sounds, guttural in nature and thus indistinct. Fundamentally it means something uttered in a low tone of voice and behind one's back and takes place within the context of the growing number of disciples. Despite the nice positive tone of the excerpt at hand, a larger number of people is bound to become fertile ground for the spread of rumors, etc, and hence *gogguzo*.

To remedy the situation at hand, the twelve disciples asked that persons of three qualities be put in charge caring for widows, this particular group perhaps more susceptible to

murmuring: of good repute, full of the Spirit and having wisdom. The first is the verb *martureo* or to give testimony, witness which applies here of comporting oneself in a become manner publicly. The second is to imitate the recent descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The third group is to be *sophos* or wise, this adjective also meaning skilled at some craft. All three combined should take care of any exigency that should arise in the future as well as the present situation.

Once the seven men who filled the threefold criteria above are chosen, the apostles prayed and laid hand upon them. Note that as soon as this happened, there's no mention of the problem about ministering or the "daily distribution" of vs. 1. That took care of itself right away, almost miraculously. What's more important is that the word (*logos*) of God increased and disciples multiplied, the two working hand in hand.

This excerpt concludes with mention of many priests becoming obedient to the faith. Nothing more is said of this nor is there need to elaborate. Implied is that those responsible for ministering in the Jerusalem temple saw that their ministry had come to an end or better, was fulfilled, and that it was time to move on to new calling where their priesthood might assume a different role. And so these priests represent a transition from one testament to another without their knowing it despite the risks of opting out of a prestigious and even lucrative occupation.

21 May, Sixth Sunday in Easter

5) Philip went down to a city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6) And the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs which he did. 7) For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8) So there was much joy in that city...4) Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John 15) who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; 16) for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17) Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8.5-8, 14-17

This incident takes place just after the stoning of Stephen and before Philip's conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch, showing that early on he was one of the most active of the apostles. When he made his way to Samaria surely thoughts of Jesus with the Samaritan woman must have been running through his head, especially his words about drinking water that which well up to eternal life (cf. Jn 4.15, etc.). Perhaps the reason for the trip is that Philip received an invitation from this same woman or those Samaritans with whom

Jesus spoke, those who “believed because of his word” [Jn 4.41]. Thus he had an audience that in many ways was predisposed to his message.

In addition to preaching in Samaria, Philip had worked signs or *semeion* which took the form of dispelling unclean spirits and healing, this in line with what Jesus himself had performed. Despite this, the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman mentioned above took precedence once the excitement over Philip’s activity had settled down. So when vs. 8 says “there was much joy in that (Samaritan) city,” much of it must have centered around a sharing of the inhabitants’ fond recollection of Jesus having been there with the woman plus Philip’s sharing of his knowledge about the master.

Quickly word got back to Jerusalem of Philip’s venture which cause Peter and John to pay a visit. Obviously they were eager to continue this work but in a way were driven by curiosity to see how things were working out there due to the above mentioned incident of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. It seems that Jesus interacted with her alone, that is, without disciples, so Peter and John wished to take advantage of this foothold among people traditionally at odds with Judaism as a whole and see if pursuing it is worthwhile.

The visit to Samaria by Peter and John paid off. They did some inquiring, were impressed, but found that the people hadn’t received the Holy Spirit. This was a necessary first step of initiation associated with baptism where in 2.38 Peter says “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Also the notion of the Spirit falling upon those to be baptized reflected the falling of the same Spirit at Pentecost. There the Spirit rested on each apostle (cf. 2.3) which Peter and John copied, if you will, by the act of placing hands upon the Samaritans to receive the same Spirit. In other words, Pentecost is duplicated by baptism and carried forth from there.

25 May, Ascension

*1) In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach
2) until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3) To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking of the kingdom of God. 4) And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father which he said, "you heard from me, 5) for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." 6) So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7) He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8) But you shall receive*

power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." 9) And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10) And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes 11) and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1.1-11

“First book” is the Gospel according to St. Luke, Luke being the speaker here. Note that he uses “began” or *archomai* with respect to what both Jesus did and taught. This verb sets up a time frame extending throughout Jesus’ life as in Luke’s gospel and culminates through the word “until” or *achri*. This *achri* is synonymous with “the day” of Jesus’ ascension. It extends further, if you will, through Pentecost by mention of the Holy Spirit which initially pertains to the apostles. Thus Luke bids Theophilus (‘Loved by God’) to keep in mind his gospel account before launching out into Acts.

Luke continues by giving a summary of what Jesus had done during the forty days after his resurrection, making the important connection between two baptisms, that of John and that of the Holy Spirit. In a sense the *achomai-achri* or began-until corresponds to these two baptisms.

Despite Jesus making repeated statements about his mission as one of salvation and devoid of political overtones, even when he had risen from the dead the disciples couldn’t get the political idea out of their heads. It was incredibly ingrained, not with them alone but with others living under Roman occupation. Jesus doesn’t exactly clarify the situation. He tells the apostles that it isn’t for them to know both times and seasons appointed by the Father. The two words *chronos* and *kairos* encompass both chronological time and special occasions which may be said to stand outside space and time.

What Jesus just communicated by bringing in his Father as along privy to *chronos* and *kairos* times now shifts to bring the apostles’ attention to the Holy Spirit. That person will give them power or *dunamis*, the capacity to do as well as follow up on something. Upon hearing this, the apostles may have continued thinking...hoping...it referred to power in the political sense. But when Jesus throws in the aspect of being witnesses, it doesn’t sound at all political.

After this exchange two things happened to Jesus simultaneously but in order. First he was lifted from (*epairo*) earth and second, was taken by (*hupolambano*) a cloud into heaven. Note the two prepositions prefaced to the verbs at hand, *epi* and *hupo* or upon and from under. The former verb is passive whereas the latter is active. How far Jesus was lifted

isn't indicated, but implied is that the cloud came down fairly close to earth, almost enabling him to step within it.

While this being lifted up and taken transpires, the apostles' attention was riveted, the verb *atenizo* meaning that they were transfixed and couldn't move without blinking their eyes. Without knowing it, two men in white robes...the notion of angels is implied but not specified...stood next to them. They asked in a tone of both a rebuke and with some humor why they were acting this way. Jesus will return the same way as this twofold ascent, but they said nothing of when. Such uncertainty isn't meant to cause anxiety but can be taken as an invitation, albeit disguised at the time, to maintain that *atenizo* upward. It will come into play shortly with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. However, when the Spirit descends and rests upon the heads of those present, this resting will nullify *atenizo*. No one will have to have their eyes turned upward looking for Jesus to return.

28 May, Seventh Sunday in Easter

12) Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away; 13) and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. 14) All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.
Acts 1.12-14

A fairly brief passage, appropriate for on the threshold of Pentecost and the coming descent of the Holy Spirit. If the passage were longer in this situation, it'd detract from the excitement over an impending event which everyone involved had an inkling about but didn't understand fully.

The disciples returned to Jerusalem after Jesus had ascended into heaven, chastened to some degree by the two men in white robes who bade them to return to that city. They had been down this road before, having been rebuked by Jesus, and without further ado obeyed them. While en route to Jerusalem from the mountain, the eleven must have turned back to look at the two men in white robes who lingered in case any of the disciples decided to turn back.

The upper room is synonymous with the names of the apostles and early church. Nothing is said of any conversation that took place, perhaps none being needed since all were confused at what they had witnessed. When vs. 14 says that they devoted themselves to

prayer, they went at it more earnestly than at any other time in their lives. The verb *proskartereo* and adverb *homothumadon* reflect this perfectly. The former has the preposition *pros* (it signifies straight-forwardness) prefaced to the verbal root which by itself represents strength and stamina. Then throw in *homothumadon* and you have a *thumos* (generally, seat of emotion) which is *homoios* (like, similar). In other words, a burning desire shared by all present.

Not so much by way of footnote but to give a place of honor does this passage conclude with Mary along with *the* women and Jesus' brothers. The definite article regarding women perhaps signify those who stood by Jesus from the beginning to the end. Then there are the famous "brothers" often confused as physically related to Jesus. Since they are bound up with these women, perhaps they too were like them, quietly and discreetly following Jesus but remaining in the background. Chances are by this presence-at-a-distance they got to know more about Jesus than his disciples. They had a unique opportunity to make known to other what they've garnered over the years as ratified by the descent of the Holy Spirit and missionary role that ensued.

4 June, Pentecost Sunday

1) Now the whole earth had one language and few words. 2) And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3) And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. 4) Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." 5) And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. 6) And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7) Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language that they may not understand one another's speech." 8) So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9) Therefore its name was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. Genesis 11.1-9

The following is taken from *Expansions on the Book of Genesis* also posted on this same homepage.

“Now the whole earth had one language and few words,” a verse which applies to approximately three generations stemming from the three sons of Noah. What could have been that first language? As for the garden of Eden, there was no need for a language since

the first man and woman required no words to communicate with each other due to the immediate presence of the Lord. And so we have to look for a first language originating outside the garden of Eden with the banishment of the man and his need to communicate with his two sons, Cain and Abel. Adam was in between two worlds: the one of no language and the one of language. That is to say, he had to speak with Cain and Abel who obviously were born outside Eden yet had first hand knowledge of it through their parents. Any exchange was quite rudimentary yet marked by nostalgia for the days of uninterrupted communion the first man and woman enjoyed with God. Despite the flood which came later, this single yet rudimentary language survived and became the true unifying element among a disparate population. If it could come unscathed through two calamities, people of the day felt reasonably confident they could continue communicating among each other with ease. However, that was soon not to be the case.

“And as men migrated from the east.” Up until now the three chief strands of post-flood generations were concentrated in a fairly small area. The verb for “migrated” is *nasah* has a more forceful connotation meaning to pull up, pluck out and suggests a somewhat violent, sudden displacement from this location. “Men”—and the generic term is implied as in the Hebrew “they”—engaged in this *nasah* “from the east.” No specific place is given, not even a reason for wanting to migrate, except the cardinal direction of east intimates an attachment with the garden of Eden. And so this general movement away from the east represents a movement away from Eden, a movement which can never be left behind permanently and always sought. Finally the flood came which wiped out all familiar places, so a new sense of belonging had to be cultivated.

The place to which the descendants of Shem, Ham and Japeth came turned out to be “a plain in the land of Shinar.” The word for “plain” is *bighah* which also translates as “valley” and suggests that which is cleaved, and anything cut in half like this can be either a plain or a valley...or both together with one half being one and the other half, another. Regardless whether Shinar was a valley or plain, it is a geographical location and had been mentioned in 10.10: “the beginning of his (Nimrod) kingdom was Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.” Thus Shinar is associated with the descendants of Ham and then Nimrod, “a mighty hunter before the Lord” [10.9].

Obviously it was natural for these new settlers to emulate the mountain of Eden, an unfulfilled nostalgia which never let go. If they couldn't ascend the mountain on which it was located, they hoped to copy what was beyond their reach. As for such a herculean effort, no time is wasted between the settlement of Shinar and the construction of a city and tower. After preparing their materials they uttered their desire to “build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens.” The story at hand is remembered best for the tower, not the city, which was just as important. Due to the tower's importance to rival and perhaps

surpass the garden of Eden, it took priority over building the city; people could continue living in tents until that was completed. Nevertheless, some elements of the city must have been put in place with the tower smack in the middle. Its centrality is an attempt to reconstruct an image of the tree “in the midst of the garden (of Eden),” 3.3. This mis-identification was a yet another sign of arrogance, of presuming to have knowledge of the garden of Eden and wishing to emulate it. As for the tower or *migdal* (that word suggests fortifications), its top (*r’osh* or head) was intended to reach the heavens; the Hebrew text is more graphic, “in the heavens” (*shamym*) revealing the haughty confidence of the builders.

The purpose of constructing the tower? That the people who settled in the plain of Shinar decided to “make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” At first glance this sounds reasonable because the people had a tenuous grip on the land after their recent migration from the east. The presumption of reaching “in the heavens” noted just above is based in the fact that the people didn’t realize the value of their “one language and few words” (vs. 1), that this unity was sufficient to sustain them in their newly settled territory. This making of a name as embodied in the tower, so the people presumed, would prevent their being scattered, *puts* being the verb which implies being broken into pieces. The builders of the tower had in mind the sudden and alarming scattering which happened once Noah’s ark had landed, hence they wished to prevent their dispersal from getting out of hand before distance would destroy that one language and few words. That’s why they the words “upon the face of the whole earth” are stressed, not just the area close to the ark’s landing site but the entire globe. So instead of attempting to gain control over the new territory laid out before them, they should have copied their descendants’ father, Noah, that is, his walking with God.

“And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built” [vs. 5]. This is the first of two descents, the second being described in vs. 7. What does this coming down consist of? Did anyone witness it? Chances are it took place on the city’s outskirts away from prying eyes. Actually, this is the first time the Lord appeared on earth since having walked with Noah in the pre-flood days, 6.9. It must have been strange for him experiencing a new yet at the same time old place as he compared the post with the pre-flood earth. Nothing is explicit about this walking, let alone his manner of descent and later, his ascent. Curiosity got the best of the Lord, so he wanted to see what was going on in the plain of Shinar. If he didn’t disguise himself, the sight of divine splendor would have dazzled people. And so the Lord had to assume a disguise to prevent his recognition which involved somehow contracting himself to fit within the confines of space and time. That’s tough enough, let alone the disguise itself. The one he settled upon was as an ordinary man, the best way to go incognito among the people. Some of the descendants of Shem, Ham and

Japheth might have been able to pick him out from among the crowd, having recalled that their ancestor Noah walked with God, and were familiar with his disguise.

When the Lord came upon the first man and woman in the garden of Eden, they hid themselves. Here in the city of Shinar there wasn't any need to express shame while the Lord was among the people because they were pre-occupied with wild celebrations and congratulating themselves for such an accomplishment (as for the name Babel, that doesn't happen until vs. 9). Note the words upon which this festivity rests, namely, "had built," as referring to both city and tower. Just as Moses came down from Mt. Sinai (cf. Ex 32.7ff) at the Lord's request and heard the "sound of singing" (Ex 32.18), something similar must have gotten the Lord's attention which compelled him to descend to the city of Shinar. Even though he had been walking freely about the people there—certainly not as he had done with Noah and Enoch earlier—it was easy to hide right out in the open because people were more concerned about celebrating. Unfortunately Shinar turned out to be a precursor of Sodom and Gomorrah. So at long last the people who migrated from the east to the plain of Shinar founded not just a city but a tower which emulated the mountain on which the garden of Eden was located. The only thing it lacked was the cherubim and flaming, revolving sword (cf. 3.24). The people conveniently left them out of their plan so nothing would block their ascent to their new tower and prevent them from glorying in their achievement. With all this commotion about him, the Lord decided to do something and do it quickly else the people would come to ruin. So why not hit them where they were most vulnerable? The target? Their common language with few words.

"And behold, they are one people, and they have all one language" [vs. 6]. Of course the Lord was aware of what was transpiring from his perch in heaven yet couldn't get a first-hand view—one from that of a human being—unless he descended and walked incognito among the people. As noted above, the people did have one language, the first thing that struck the Lord, and that was vital for ease of communication. Unfortunately, much of this language was used in either shouting or profanity, given the timing of the Lord's arrival. And so he had to do something as quickly as possible.

Vs. 6 continues with "this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them." The word expressing the Lord's astonishment (*hen* or behold) now comes to an observation based upon reason, not emotion. The verb *chalal* is used for the noun "beginning" which had been commented upon earlier, essentially conveying the idea of to perforate, pierce through. Thus *chalal* is a perforation or an opening which, in turn, signals the start of an event and is appropriate because it intimates an opening—let's say a small one—which upon release, there's no telling how powerful it will be and what manifestation it'll assume. *Batsar* is the verb for the English "impossible" which can be rendered as to restrain as well as to cut off. It's the

opposite to *chalal*, that is, that there will be no means of cutting off this *chalal* once it is unleashed. The Hebrew thus reads “now nothing will be cut off from them all which they propose to do.” As for the verb “propose,” it’s *zamam* which suggests laying in wait, to plot. While out and about in the city, the Lord got wind of this *zamam*, that what the people were celebrating was the start of future, even grander projects. If they could construct such a city and erect such a tower which was as high as the mountain on which lay the garden of Eden, there was no limit what they could accomplish. The next tower would pierce the heavens which is really why the Lord had decided to come down and check things out. Use of the verb *zamam* is telling: because it applies more to scheming as opposed to planning, truly what the Lord heard in the streets was alarming.

Vs. 7 restates the Lord’s descent in vs. 5: “Come, let us go down (*yarad*) and there confuse their language.” *Havah* is an adverb of exhortation (‘come’) as used in vs. 4 when the inhabitants of the city rallied themselves together for building both the city and the tower. Here is a second descent by the Lord, the first one being in vs. 5. He saw how raucous was the celebration over completion of their impressive works, this being the first city built since the one constructed by Cain and named after his son, Enoch (cf. 4.17). The Lord didn’t come down to that city since it wasn’t raised in imitation of the garden of Eden on the mountaintop and posed no threat of usurpation. He wanted to compare the both cities, the former having no tower.

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

“So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city” [vs. 8]. *Puts* is the verb for “scatter abroad” used in vs. 4, the fear of

being broken into pieces (the fundamental sense of *puts*) and the rationale behind constructing both the city and tower to emulate the garden of Eden. The Lord effected this scattering by the breath of his mouth, his *ruach*, blowing them like so many leaves over the earth from the plain of Shinar. Vs. 8 concludes with “they left off building the city,” *chadal* which means just this, they ceased their work. When the Lord first descended under the guise of a man, both the city and tower were complete; more work remained with finishing and the city, even entertaining thoughts to go beyond the limits originally laid down. Nothing is said of the tower. It remained there for many years afterwards as a reminder to the former inhabitants’ hubris. The structure was so lofty that no matter where the people were scattered they could see it looming in the horizon as a reminder of their vain efforts. While looking back at it, everyone were unable to express their frustration; although they retained the one language, many words had been injected into it instead of the original few.

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4) So Moses cut two tables of stone like the first; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai as the Lord had commanded him and took in his hand two tables of stone. 5) And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6) The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7) keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." 8) And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth, and worshiped. 9) And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray you, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for your inheritance." Exodus 34.4-9

The following is excerpted from *Expansions on the Book of Exodus* also on this homepage.

“And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord” [vs. 5]. Compare with 24.16: “The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days” whereas here the Lord descends in the cloud. You could say this descent is a more abbreviated one—short so as not to have Moses be absent from the people and thus giving them time to fashion another idol—to redo what had been lost. As for the Lord’s descent in the cloud, he “stood with him there.” That is to say, Moses did not enter the cloud but took up the same position or stood right there with the Lord as connoted by the verb *natsav*. Thus the two *natsav*’s became as one. Only on this descent the Lord takes the opportunity to proclaim (*qara*’, ‘to call’) “in (*b-*) the name of the Lord.

It may have appeared to Moses that the Lord was boasting to no one except himself which would be quite an impressive display for Israel to witness if it could. It was not unlike Moses being in the hole when “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord’” [33.19].

Vs. 6 spells out this proclaiming or *qara'*: “The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.’” Moses already had experienced the divine *havar* or passing by (‘and while my glory passes by’, 33.22) but not in that protective crevice nor covered by the Lord’s hand. This *havar* is “before him” or literally “on his face” (*hal-panayw*) which couldn’t be a more vivid or direct way of putting it. Four elements comprise the divine *qara'*: *rachum* or “merciful;” from the verbal root *racham* last noted in 33.19 which is not unlike the verse at hand. “Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them” [Ps 78.38]. Second is *chanun* or “gracious;” from the verbal root *chanan* as in 33.19. Such *chanun* is ‘erek as far as anger goes, this adjective being suggestive of something long and drawn out. Third comes “steadfast love” or *chesed* celebrated when Israel had crossed the Red Sea and saw the Egyptian host drowned (cf. 15.13). Such *chesed*, wonderful as it is, is even greater: *rav*, an adjective applicable either to mass, weight or expanse. *Rav* also modifies the fourth element or ‘*emeth* (‘faithfulness’), the only other reference in Exodus being 18.21: “men who are trustworthy” or literally “of truth.”

Vs. 7 flows as a continuation of vs. 6: “keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” A second mention of *chesed* within the same larger sentence which the Lord keeps or *natsav* just like Moses did on Sinai and the Lord (cf. vss. 2 & 5). So *natsav* is fleshed out more with regard to that most important divine attribute of *chesed*, of being immovable...not just for the current generation or those Israelites in the wilderness but “for thousands,” thus projecting *chesed* as *natsav* indefinitely into the future (Canaan). The point of vs. 7 vis-a-vis *chesed* is not that it’s a blanket term but a reminder that the Lord is watchful of transgressions. *Nasa'* is the verb for “forgiving” first noted with a different meaning in 20.7, actually its alternate meaning: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” However, the fundamental sense is that of lifting or raising as in Dt 24.15: “for he is poor and sets his heart upon it.” In the verse at hand, *nasa'* has three objects: iniquity, transgression and sin (*hawon*, *peshah* and *chata'ah*), words which have been noted respectively in 20.5, 23.21 and 32.30. At the same time or in conjunction with this keeping and forgiving (*natsav* and *nasa'*) are two actions: a maintaining of one’s guilt, that is to say, not clearing it or *naqah* noted in 20.7 which refers to being pure or free from punishment. The object of *naqah* is “guilty” or those who lack such *naqah*, this verb

being used a second time. The second is “visiting” the iniquity committed by earlier generations, the verb *paqad* which as noted in 3.16 can be translated in multiple ways though the one at hand is close in line to its fundamental meaning. Here *paqad* does not last for the duration of the current generation but extends all the way to the third or fourth which, according to modern standards, is not that long because of a short life span.

“And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth and worshiped” [vs. 8]. *Mahar* or “made haste” causes Moses to be in awe...not that the Lord had revealed something new and unexpected but that he was grateful for divine tolerance and justice. Such is the meaning of *mahar* which connotes a certain unreflective, automatic response. “Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron in haste” [10.16].

This sudden response of humility on Moses’ part did not preclude him from beseeching the Lord as he now does in vs. 9: “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, let the Lord, I pray you, go in the midst of us although it is a stiff-necked people.” This echoes in part the words of 33.13: “If I have found favor in your sight,” the word *chen* being used in both instances. The same applies to “I pray you” where the particle *na’* is used. Moses knew that already he had found divine *chen* personally and wishes to extend it to the people whom he knows is stiff-necked, *qasheh* being the adjective as in 32.9 as used by the Lord himself: “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.” So if Moses and the Lord concur on this point, something positive may come of the situation. The request for the Lord to go “in the midst” or *qerev*, bold as it is, therefore loses its cutting edge. Moses continues in the same verse with “and pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for your inheritance.” Wisely he uses the first person plural, that is, he includes himself while intimating that he as leader of Israel is also *qerev* the people. *Salach* is the verb for “pardon” and is not unlike *nasa’* of vs. 7 as a lifting up or removal as in Jer 33.8: “and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.” The genuine sign of boldness on Moses’ part apart from asking the Lord to be *qerev* Israel is for him to be their “inheritance” or *nachal* (verbal form) as in 23.30 where it means “possess.” Such *nachal* would last beyond the wandering in the wilderness which more properly belongs to the Lord as *qerev* and therefore carries over into Israel’s possession of Canaan: “and they shall *nachal* it forever” [32.13].

The first part of vs. 10 has the Lord’s response which runs as “Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been wrought in all the earth or in any nations.” As for the covenant or *beryth*, already it had been created in 24.7 as a “book” (*sepher*) or after Moses had ascended Mount Sinai and restated in 31.16 (“perpetual covenant”). However, that *beryth* Moses smashed when he came upon Israel worshiping a molten calf and was re-written by the Lord in 34.1 on “two tables of stone like the first.” The Lord’s willingness to engage in a second *beryth* is put in simple,

straight-forward words here prefaced by “behold” or *hineh*. It is used to get Moses’ attention as well as signifying that the Lord desires to forget Israel’s idolatry and start anew. While the Lord doesn’t acquiesce explicitly to Moses’ request to be in their midst and to be their inheritance—technically he remains silent on this—still the proposition of the covenant is just as fine if not better as the rest of Chapter Thirty-Four spells out. As for the “marvels” or *pala’* (verb), Moses must have wondered how the ten plagues of Egypt, Israel’s passage through the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army being drowned there could be surpassed, not including the Lord’s miracles in the desert and his fearful manifestation on Mount Sinai. In fact, *pala’* is used in 3.20 with respect to all these events or at least as pertaining to Egypt. The words “in all the earth” and “in any nations” served to heighten Moses’ curiosity as what would happen. Given his age, his thoughts must have turned to a successor who could handle what seemed to surpass the incredible events just outlined.