

## Like No Other Days

A brief warning of sorts. Recently I had written somewhat extensively on some of the material covered in this brief essay <sup>1</sup>. At the same time I felt parts of that article required fleshing out in order to clarify a specific point or two. More precisely, what is of concern here are the nine days between Jesus' Ascension and descent of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost. Indeed, nine days is a short period of time, barely over a week. That means we have to milk it for all we find there, and believe me. The nine days contains an abundance of good stuff. Not only that, just being in such a special space (and time) as when I wrote this has a way of expanding to embrace so-called secular time. Without this ability to reach beyond the narrow temporal borders of nine days we can lose quite a lot of what's being communicated so forcefully to us.

Actually a desire to write about this special time had been on my mind for quite a while. I recall it's occurrence each year as being so precious as well as passing by quickly...too quickly. At one time in my eagerness I thought of telling people about my new-found discovery but promptly put it aside. That was discouraging at first but after awhile quite enlightening. The best approach was to remain silent, jot down a few notes about these nine days and let it go at that. In other words, move over and let the Spirit act accordingly.

The nine days at hand come towards the end of a cycle of one hundred and fifteen days with regard to the liturgical calendar. The cycle begins with Ash Wednesday, moves through Lent and then Easter. The remaining few weeks which had been added on over the centuries terminate with the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Actually I prefer the word "terminate" over "end" because it's fancier and signifying what's out of the ordinary. You don't end something special but tidy it up by a termination which implies having attained a goal. So keeping this grander scale of time in mind helps us better appreciate this most unusual time short as it may be.

As for the nine days between the Ascension and Pentecost, I believe they have given birth to the notion of a novena <sup>2</sup>. Though such observances have diminished, nonetheless they are based on a sound principle. Actually the idea of a novena

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<sup>1</sup> **The Real Culprit** posted on this homepage.

<sup>2</sup> A novena is a nine day period of prayer, either private or public, used in the Catholic Church to petition God for special graces or favors. The word comes from the Latin *novem* meaning nine, and is often associated with specific feast days or events. Novenas can be prayed for various intentions, such as preparation for a feast, asking for intercession from a saint, or seeking healing.

helped me look at this unique period of time from a mythic point of view. By that I mean a way of describing something with emphasis upon telling a story. SA story has the ability of freeing you up. It enables you to cover a broader expanse of territory and not feel compelled to stick to the literal truth, wonderful as that may be. However, the mythic approach is not a license to pull anything that fancies you out of the air. Staying true to the essence of the story at hand is a discipline in and by itself.

The uniqueness of these nine days chiefly consists of God in the person of Jesus Christ who is no longer walking upon the earth. In other words, he is physically absent. Although God had paid a visit now and then under various guises as through an angel or the like, scripture always had him present with regard to human history. As for his presence upon the earth, consider the first recorded one which is in accord with Gn 3.8: “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” More precisely, the walking at hand is not God *per se* but his voice or *qol*. Though this isn’t the time to go into it, *qol* ties in with the utterance of a word or *davar*, that being more as an expression. From there it isn’t far to view *qol/davar* as *Logos*, a well known word applied to Jesus Christ.

Although God had been very active setting up the garden, only now at this particular evening is his *qol* manifested to human beings. It will turn out to be a less than desirable experience for all involved as we’ll soon see. Prior to this time he had been using his *qol* a lot when he had brought the seven days of creation into existence. The context at hand brings up an important question. How does a voice walk as recorded in Gn 3.8? It does so at a time of day affiliated with its own nature, that is, the *ruach* rendered in the RSV as the cool of the day, literally the wind or spirit. And so the divine *qol* is restricted to walking during the twilight hours when the *ruach* is active. Indeed, it’s a far cry from the intense activity of bringing creation into existence over a period of seven days. Evening provides an opportune time for God to relax while at the same time concealing him from being seen by the two humans and any other creatures. Twilight doesn’t allow a full view nor is the *qol* wholly subsumed by shadows.

When the Lord decides to deal with the man and woman he does so through this *qol*. However, this evening differed from all other evenings which were filled with pleasant how-are-you encounters. During the *ruach* of the day or during the twilight which is relatively short he proceeds to lambaste the two along with the serpent. He

can do so with impunity since all three can't quite put their finger on the divine *gol*. To them it seemed everywhere as well as nowhere. Given the Lord's essentially immature nature as spelled out in **The Real Culprit**, he's reluctant to make himself known. We could call it a defensive mechanism on his part, something the two humans realized and instinctively would pass on to their descendants who could use it against him. In essence it consists of doing what God detests the most, worshiping objects made by human hands, that is, gods.

From the Garden of Eden onward for countless generations the Lord dealt with the human race through this disembodied *gol*. Note that those occasions when the Lord was described through images of a cloud, darkness and the like. He loved to conceal himself and speak from that vantage point. In other words, concealing yourself is a great way to cover a deficiency you don't want people to see. At first you'd think a being which is almighty would lack such fear. Nonetheless, it turns out to be true. Above and beyond all else the Lord doesn't wish anyone to discover his innate immaturity, a shocking insight if it ever got out. That's where Job will come in and why the Lord slammed into him with all his might, fearing him above all other human beings.

From this guise the Lord at will could slay the humans who violated his covenant and escape this action with impunity. After all, he is the Lord God to which all things are subject. Obviously on occasion the human race deserved to be punished, but the Lord seemed to have an almost sadistic tendency by favoring this mode. He knows it won't get him any where yet can't escape what seems to border upon an addiction. Should this be allowed to continue, history would consist of an almost infinite struggle between the Lord asserting himself and humans going astray. Both would make up, separate and start the sequence all over again. This pattern had been in place for a long time among so-called primitive religions. As time went by, there was a growing sense for a change but the way to effect it continued to remain out of reach.

Right from the get-go Jesus had been watching his Father operating like this and decided it was time to take action. Though we have details of his birth, how wonderfully it affected a world gone astray, Jesus' departure from the Father was very different from his last known venture. For example, the Father briefly visited the earth when he felt threatened by the tower of Babel. That represented a human

attempt to assail his turf and his alone. “Come, let us go down <sup>3</sup>, and there confuse their language that they may not understand one another’s speech” [Gn 11.7].

Jesus carefully examined that incident and knew he had to take a different approach. Instead of causing confusion, he would bring peace and harmony or at least show the way to that end. He figured the best way to go about it was to consider the Father’s impact upon the human race, and instead of being in their midst he’d become one of them. Indeed, Jesus wasn’t pleased with what met his eyes, but it was the best option available. Given the circumstance, the Father clearly was on the spot yet sanctioned this mission with some reluctance. He couldn’t help but offer severe warnings that the humans would seek to do in his Son. Indeed, the Father had plenty of evidence on his side. As we all know, things turned out as predicted.

Thus Jesus took a position quite different from his Father while at the same time he had in mind his experience going way back to the beginning in Genesis. By no means was Jesus naive. After a short three years of actively engaging humans he managed to impart a message that in some ways was unlike the religion of the past centuries. Though Jesus was faithful to the divine Law or *Torah*, gone are the days, for example, of “Thus says the Lord.” No longer would God be hiding behind such expressions indicative of an immature mindset and meting out punishment for generation after generation. No small wonder that those who were official representatives of the old way were hostile and eventually did him in. However, even that failed, for Jesus rose from the dead.

It turned out literally impossible to keep Jesus down. We read in the Gospels that despite teaching and healing those among whom he moved, his primary focus was upon a small group of men called disciples. Hopefully they were destined to carry on his work not just for the present generation but for the future. Though they were cut from the same cloth as Judaism’s religious representatives, they were amenable not just to receiving what Jesus had been teaching but willing to pass it on which became a reality at Pentecost. That’s quite an amazing accomplishment when you consider they were with Jesus for the short period of three short years.

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3 As for the first person plural, it doesn’t seem to refer to another divine being. Often we speak like this, children included, when about to do something spontaneously or on the spur of the moment.

A quick note as to the time before Jesus' brief ministry. A lot had been made of the so-called hidden years of Nazareth. We have virtually no information of what had transpired over a thirty year stretch of time. However, one thing for certain can be said of it. Because the two realities, human and transcendent, are so unlike each other, a considerable amount of time is required for both to dovetail and work together. If Jesus became a man whole and entire and started teaching right away, to be sure the divine would erupt with destructive force into the human and natural world.

How to effect a resolution to such a dilemma? Jesus knew that he must not do anything dramatic like the Father with regard to the tower of Babel. Even shortly before Jesus' ministry the devil tempted him with all sorts of wondrous things. It was the final step in Jesus becoming familiar with all the temptations to which humans were subject. Once he renounced them, he could commence his ministry as a human being among other humans, however vile and pathetic they may be. The challenge obviously is for Jesus to maintain both the divine and the human in his own person. Fortunately for him this balance lasted three years. Given the immense disparity between the two natures, Jesus couldn't have continued longer his balancing act longer than that.

Note the importance of the fifty days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the prime focus of this essay. He literally passed through doors, walls and the like but was more focused on handing down some final teachings to his disciples. Though he didn't have as much time temporally speaking as during the last three years, the fifty days are far more compact despite their shortness. You could say they resemble a concentrate that once released into a larger environment, spread out and filled every corner. Consider, for example, the costly ointment used by Mary to anoint Jesus' feet. It's fragrance filled the entire house (cf. Jn 12.3).

So having filled those place where the disciples had confined themselves with the ointment of his words, Jesus was preparing them as well as himself to return to his native land. The Father too was watching but with increasing anxiety. There he was, comfortably ensconced in heaven. He wasn't alone but had the Holy Spirit of whom Jesus spoke in somewhat cryptic, vague terms. Both asked among each other and within themselves—more specifically the Father—what the Son would do once he arrived among them. Surely the Father would be in for a tongue lashing and the Spirit forced to look on. Thus they watched Jesus with fear and trembling as he

began to ascend. Contrast this with the disciples who gazed upward and in a longing fashion. Too bad the gaze was not mutual in the sense of sharing the same sentiment.

Chances are that Jesus ascended slowly so both Father and Holy Spirit would get the most from it. I was tempted to say suffer from it, but that would be a bit too much though perhaps not entirely off the mark. Jesus wasn't acting in a mean or malicious way but fulfilling his real mission to be described a bit later. Yes, Jesus had accomplished his goal or better, almost set in place everything needed for it to happen. I say "almost" in the sense that a second incarnation was required which will be coming shortly.

So during this special kind of absence of God for nine days towards the end of fifty days we have the clear and definitive revelation of what this whole drama was about. Yes, the Son had redeemed and will continue to redeem mankind. More importantly, by his very ascension Jesus is beginning the real task at hand, the redemption of the Father. In brief that consists of the Father abandoning his somewhat immature way of bullying people around, dealing out death and destruction here and there...and in fact enjoying it. A major component of the lesson the Father had learned was that at long last he could more clearly see why his people abandoned him and worshiped so-called false gods. Indeed, they were a viable alternative to being bullied around and more specifically, a relief from being lectured at. I had dealt with the significance of lecturing earlier, so I won't bother expounding it here <sup>4</sup>.

As for these nine days about which this brief essay is about, they are to be relished and cherished in a special way. If we do, it will spill over to the liturgical year in two directions, past and future. We can make this a reality by listening closely to the echos of what had happened in heaven above. Such is the genius of the liturgical year. It has an ability unlike anything from the calendar year to make present an event that took place in the past and raise it to the transcendent realm. That is to say, space and time as we know it aren't abolished but have become malleable.

The reason for taking delight in the divine echos noted above is that they reverberate right to us without diminishing the primary mission of Jesus Christ. That, of course, is to redeem the Father, with the important qualification that we've already been redeemed. The lesson for the Father just before all this had happened?

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<sup>4</sup> Again, refer to **The Real Culprit**

He had watched Jesus redeeming us humans. Therefore if we humans can benefit that, surely the Father can do the same with far greater ease. So we've become teachers for his benefit. At long last a truce has come into existence between heaven and earth far better than the covenant signified by the rainbow which God had established in Gn 9.13.

In an article posted on this homepage to which I already referred in footnote four, I had taken a different twist on the so-called infamous original sin depicted in Genesis. Instead of re-explaining it...that would be too cumbersome...that article dealt in greater details about its effects. I had maintained there as well that while Jesus had become man to redeem us, in actuality his task was to redeem the Father. One was a preparation for the other. Part and parcel of this task was that upon Jesus' arrival in heaven, he and the Father had to hack it out among themselves. This would last for the next fifty days or from the Ascension to Pentecost. It was an occasion all the heavenly beings stayed away from as far as possible. Right from the beginning or in Genesis the Father had acted as a bully often going overboard in response to human frailty and sin. In fact, he acted in a downright immature manner. And so in that article Job becomes a kind of intermediary dealing with this unruly divine behavior in preparation for Jesus.

Once Jesus had presented divine reality in a manner that hadn't been done before (we call it revelation), he finished his work by dying, rising and then ascending into heaven. As noted above, the Father was watching all this and becoming increasingly nervous. The person who had set the stage for this drama was, of course, Job. He had to face an unholy alliance between God and Satan, the two hell-bent (pardon the expression) upon his personal destruction. The reasons aren't given which at first can cause some misunderstanding. Should you look more closely, the Lord was intensely jealous...yes, envious...of a mortal human being acting in what for him was a presumptuous manner. Being unable to stand it any longer, he enlisted his worst enemy as an ally, that is Satan.

And so the lengthy trials of Job, especially having had to listen to his friends who delighted in preaching to him, came to an end. However, the Lord had to get one in on Job. Towards the end of the book he rambles on for several chapters saying how tremendous he is, able to do this and that extraordinary deed at whim. All the while he was waiting for Job to kowtow to him. In the meanwhile Job listened but remained unimpressed. The solution? God recognized that a mortal human being



had overcome him. The only option (chiefly to save face) was to restore Job to his former glory, a generous but in many ways a weak response. Something further begged to be done. However, we'll have to wait for Jesus to do that.

Indeed, Jesus became man. Right away he marveled at all the negative stuff people had to put up with in life which is why he cured so many. Important as it was, such cures were more along the lines of a token to get people interested. Unfortunately things didn't pan out as hoped for. There must have been times when Jesus as God being a man must have felt so overwhelmed that he had second thoughts of being a human. Also he had to ward off sentiments of resentment towards the Father for all the misery about him. Indeed, Jesus didn't have to go far to see the universality of this. This counters any criticism as to how limited his field of activity in Palestine had been, let alone a mere three years of active ministry.

On top of it all, Jesus must have thought much about Job, of how the Lord afflicted him chiefly out of jealousy. We hear much about how Jesus is compared with the suffering servant in Isaiah, but Job is a whole different story. From his unique vantage point he could see more clearly what the Lord had failed miserably to see generation after generation. Fortunately for Jesus he didn't have to put up with this profound, seemingly endless misery more than three years.

So after having taught, cured and especially offered himself for humans, Jesus knew that after his resurrection it was time to return home and get on with the real issue at hand. Having spent considerable energy redeeming humans, he was faced with a more daunting task. He had to come face to face with the Father and buy-him-back, the literal meaning of redemption. In that way the Father could shed his immaturity and jealousy despite being almighty. Thus, if you will, the Father could come into his true nature difficult as that learning process may be at first.

The meeting between Son and Father was awkward as we can imagine or come close to imaging. There was considerable back and forth, and to the Father's credit, he humbled himself perhaps more than the Son had done by becoming human. That's an important lesson he had learned. Gone are the days when he thundered at his awesome power as in the concluding chapters of the Book of Job. The Father renounced his arrogance and let's face it, frequent manifestations of childish behavior.



The best part about this was the presence of a third divine person nearby who had been silently watching this drama unfold. Finally the Father and Son agreed to allow this person known as the Holy Spirit to be mediator...Paraclete...between them both. After this major reconciliation the Father and Son jointly said if it worked for us, why not send the Spirit to the humans and see if it does the same with them? And so it came true nine days after Jesus had ascended into heaven. He and the Father remained there but at Pentecost dispatched the Holy Spirit to the humans below, a second incarnation if you will as already noted.

By reason of his nature as *Pneuma* or wind, breath, the Spirit wasn't as limited as Jesus had been. In other words, it <sup>5</sup> wasn't directly affected by all the suffering he had encountered. Because the *Pneuma* lacked human nature, it had the advantage of moving anywhere at anytime, obviously a huge advantage. Interestingly *Pneuma* the Greek for *Ruach* or Spirit, the same word (lower case 'r') with regard to the "cool of the day" noted in Gn 3.8. With this in mind we can say that the *qol* or voice of the Lord which walked during that twilight time of *ruach* has come full circle to the *Pneuma* sent by both Father and Son. By reason of it's nature the *Pneuma* could move...blow...anywhere it wished and could hang around humans indefinitely if not forever. Thus *Pneuma* balanced Jesus who was the only divine person to have experienced human nature up front and personal. That should be kept in mind at all times, he as mediator both between man and the Father.

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5 *Pneuma*: neuter, so I'll stick with the impersonal "it."