

## 1 June, Seventh Sunday of Easter

*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away; 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. 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*

This passage obviously has the task of preparing us for the descent of the Holy Spirit, this Sunday being unique by reason of its situation between the Ascension and Pentecost. Jesus is absent and so is the Holy Spirit. Thus the eleven are held in abeyance for nine days.

The disciples had just witnessed the ascension of Jesus into heaven after which they made their way back to Jerusalem meaning a walk down the hill into the valley and up again to the city. Perhaps the two men who were standing by them as Jesus went up into heaven accompanied them, at least part of the way. Then again, given the way heavenly beings have appeared in the Bible, this may have not been the case. Usually they disappear as quickly as they have appeared. So all this must have made for a very interesting conversation among the eleven.

Where to go and what to do after this unique event? The only lead was to obey Jesus' words, "he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father" [1.4]. Jesus hadn't given any specific length of time. The only clue the disciples had here was an association of Jesus' baptism and descent of the Holy Spirit. So off they went to the only place that could offer them comfort, the upper room where not long ago they had celebrated the Passover. By going over Jesus' words at that time the eleven just might figure out what was supposed to happen and when. So much of what Jesus had communicated that night was about the Holy Spirit. However, he hadn't said anything about baptism, let alone by the Holy Spirit.

One person they must have questioned vigorously was Mary, Jesus' mother, who was present. However, it turned out that even she didn't know. Mary had been present at the crucifixion; nothing is said of her being at or near the resurrection, let alone ascension of her son. Her absence from these two crucial events were sufficient evidence for the apostles that Mary was as ignorant as they were.

The verb *proskartereo* as "devoted" (themselves) means more specifically to be strong in the direction towards-which. That is to say, the preposition *pros* (towards) implies that this being strong is taken up and aimed in a certain direction. The adverb *homothumadon* translates as "with one accord," *thumos* being at the heart of the word which refers to one's heart, the seat of emotions and commonly used with regards to anger. The nature of this prayer is left unspecified. However, it could be both liturgical (Psalms) and private, alternating between them both. All present knew this was the best way they could pass the time waiting but certainly with some anxiety despite Jesus' reassurance. In the meantime, many of them cast a glance across the valley over to Olivet where they had just seen Jesus ascend into heaven. Had the two men clad in white returned there? No, but sometimes the disciples must have thought they saw them or confused them with other people.

This time in prayer must have dragged on for everyone involved. So after a while, Peter decided to get up and have the original eleven apostles chose a successor to Judas. Note that this section, not in today's excerpt, begins with "in those days." And "those days" refers to the nine between the Ascension and Pentecost. In later years the apostles and others in the upper room must have reflected with some fondness of that time. It never left their minds and was instrumental in how they approached their mission of preaching about Jesus Christ.

## 8 June, Pentecost

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in*

*his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." Acts 2.1-11*

According to tradition, Pentecost is the day when the Torah was given, that is, seven weeks after Passover. In the situation at hand, Passover meant the Last Supper during which we don't pick up any anticipation of Pentecost on the disciples' part either according to Jewish tradition or as we've come to know it. Perhaps during the supper or immediately afterward Jesus informed the disciples to gather on that day. He didn't give an explanation...that would provoke useless questions...just to do it, wait and see what happens. His deliberate vagueness must have added to the tension and anxiety during those seven weeks which had been punctuated by appearances of Jesus, not to mention his ascension. Would Jesus make another appearance on Pentecost or should they get on with celebrating the giving of the Torah, the original meaning of that feast? Even if they went through with the celebration, it would be a hollow one, and everyone knew it. So when they gathered together they didn't know what would happen.

When the disciples made arrangements to gather, some of their friends and people who had known Jesus, perhaps even having been healed by him, tagged along. They weren't allowed in because they needed space in order to focus on all that transpired the past two months or so. Still, these people hung around outside watching and waiting with as much anticipation as those inside. So right from the start this gathering, despite being behind closed doors, had a public character about it as the text recounts. Those who assembled spontaneously weren't only Jews but people from all corners of the Roman Empire. In a sense they were representatives of the regions from which they came...disciples-in-waiting, as it were...some of whom must have been commissioned by the disciples to join in the mission of evangelization.

This mission now reached its completion, that is, essentially. We have the appearance of Jesus, his teaching, death, resurrection and ascension followed by the descent of the Holy Spirit, both effected under the guidance of God the Father. It was an easy outline to follow, really, which could be communicated to people everywhere. However, some of those who received it needed to reflect more as to the nature of Jesus and the Spirit. Everyone accepted the reality of God...it went unquestioned...but these other two persons? How did they fit in? Those questions, even doubts, would be raised and disputed some time after the expectation of Jesus' immediate return phased out followed by the inevitable crisis of disappointment. Some knew all along this expectation had no foundation and already were quietly praying and studying in order to obtain a deeper understanding of these mysterious events. Key to it, it seems, is recalling how Jesus frequently spoke of fulfilling scripture in his own person. At the same time his closest followers were oblivious to this. Yet even from the beginning pages of Acts we see the disciples interpreting Jesus, as it were, through scripture and doing it almost automatically, as they been born to do this. To carry this over into the realm of theology beyond the Jewish world now was the task at hand.

## **15 June, Trinity Sunday**

*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. And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 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...And Moses made haste to bow his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, "If now I have found favor in thy 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 34.4-6 & 8 9*

"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."

"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 echos 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 worshipping 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.

## 22 June, Corpus Christi

*And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord...and when your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna which your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Dt 8.2-3 & 14-16*

"And you shall remember," *zakar* being the verb which implies being mindful and from which the noun "male" derives, the idea being that a male is the primary means by which memory of the past is obtained and passed onto future generations. The object of *zakar* here is the "way" or *derek* God has led Israel for the past forty years. It began in Egypt...a very short trek to the Red Sea from populated areas...and began in earnest crossing it on dry land after which the bulk of time was spent wandering in unknown territory. Everyone knew the quickest way from Egypt to Israel was by the coastal route, for that was a chief means of communication and trade. Despite the constant backsliding, it is to Israel's credit that she persevered for an incredible stretch of time all those years, that is, with full knowledge of the short coastal route.

By the guidance of Moses and more especially by encounters with the living God Israel persevered in that *derek*. The miracles wrought in the desert are incidental compared to whether Israel would keep God's commands, the verb being *shamar* which means keeping constant watch. These commands were not known in Egypt nor in the time before Israel came into that country. Some four hundred years had passed while the Israelites maintained their identity. Perhaps many felt that despite the hardships of living in the Sinai desert, it was a way of recapturing that national identity that had been watered down over four centuries. Central to the forty year experience was Mt. Sinai where the Lord gave the laws or Torah to Moses. In other words, we're dealing with a real challenge, a cultural shift, if you will. Instinctively they knew this *shamar* would be instrumental for future formation of their identity and if carried out, would inspire countless generations in the land of Canaan. Discussions about this must have taken place during the constant wanderings in Sinai, ample time and leisure to work out the details before entering Canaan. Perhaps more than expected wished the wandering would continue indefinitely instead of facing the responsibility of conquering and then settling a new yet old land.

Because the period of forty years is necessary for formation of this *shamar* of divine precepts, it and *zakar* or memory stand out because they form the essence of what's being communicated. The bane of *zakar*...of handing down the *shamar* of God's commandments...is forgetfulness: of the various trying experiences in the desert. The Lord knows full well how precarious is this ability to remember or more accurately, to put into practice what's remembered. It starts off well enough but quickly degenerates into forgetfulness. Yet exposure to this painful on-again, off-again alteration endures and serves to carry Israel through to Canaan and the establishment of its nation many years later. Furthermore, this remembering...this *zakar*...continued much longer than that, right down to the present day. Because the forty years were a formative period for Israel, it has been held up as a model for spiritual renewal ever since, of the necessity to cultivate the ability to remember the means by which the Lord communicates himself and to avoid forgetfulness of it.

## 29 June, Sts. Peter and Paul

*Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from*

*birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Acts 3:1-10*

This feast of the Church's two most important apostles takes the place of the first Sunday after the Lenten-Easter-Pentecost season. Rarely does this happen which reveals the importance of their roles which is spelled out in this passage immediately after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The first sentence is more loaded than at first glance. The going up of Peter and John to the temple occurred at the ninth hour, some six hours after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost ('since it is only the third hour of the day,' 2:15). In other words, the two were engaged in intense conversation as they left the "upper room" [1:13]. It was difficult to break away from their companions, not to mention the crowd that had gathered outside, but knew they had to make their way to the temple. They must have had an inkling that this visit would be like no other or more accurately, that it would be their very last walk there. By losing themselves in the crowds streaming to the temple, Peter and John were able to have some private conversation and begin to make sense of what had happened...and what was about to happen. At this very early stage in the church's history the two apostles weren't aware that the upper room, if you will, had just superseded this central place of Jewish worship. On that walk to the temple, however, they may have had an inkling of this ground shifting event but as yet could not articulate it to themselves. Nevertheless, they had an anticipation that the ceremony in the temple they were about to attend would be taking on a wholly new dimension. It would be familiar, of course, but something irrevocable had intervened.

The ceremony of Pentecost consists in commemorating the Feast of Weeks mentioned in Ex 34:22, "the feast of in-gathering at the year's end." Certainly Peter and John had experienced this on a wholly new level. It must have been extremely difficult as they anticipated how to comport themselves within the temple since they couldn't share their experience in the upper room with their fellow Jews. To speak publicly that the temple worship was in essence part of the past though no one knew it yet, would have roused widespread condemnation.

It turned out that Peter and John were spared that fear and embarrassment. En route to the temple they encountered a man lame from birth, that is, he had no conception of what it was like to walk except by observing everyone about him doing it. Suddenly this man recognized the two. From his location by the Beautiful Gate he had seen Peter and John go back and forth many times with Jesus and the other disciples and knew they were associated with him. Jesus too must have seen him but did not stop to heal him. He knew that at a later time Peter and John would do this in his name. A glance by Jesus at the lame man may have communicated his intent which is why he picked out Peter and John from among the throng at Pentecost.

Once Peter had healed this lame man (nothing is said of John participating), they didn't enter the temple. Peter addressed the crowd that had witnessed this healing as recounted in the rest of Chapter Three after which they were arrested. So the well meaning intention of going to the Jerusalem temple for Pentecost services had been thwarted by a lame man. Little did he know that he was playing a pivotal role at the church's very beginning. If he hadn't been at the Beautiful Gate, an ideal spot for getting alms from people going to and from the temple, Peter and John would have entered the temple, celebrated Pentecost and came out deciding that their experience in the upper room was of less significance than they had imagined at first. Thus the memory of Pentecost as associated with the Holy Spirit may never have been preserved.

In sum, these events required careful sorting out to see if they were either a coincidence or some kind of divine intervention. Despite the recent descent of the Holy Spirit upon Peter and John, they required the larger community for discernment. A short time after having been arrested, having returned to their "friends" [4:23] and resumed preaching about Jesus, a kind of second Pentecost occurred. That is to say, "the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" [4:31]. Now it was clear that the Pentecost Peter and John were about to celebrate in the Jerusalem temple had been superseded by this

new Pentecost. For it to happen outside the temple, Israel's holiest place, must have confused the disciples and their followers. How could this be, that the Holy Spirit was manifest in an ordinary upper room? That must have taken considerable time to sort out.

### 6 July, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. Zechariah 9.9-10*

This is the first Sunday in Ordinary Time since 2 March, four months ago. Now that the Church's most sacred holy days are behind us (Lent through Easter through Pentecost and the Sundays afterward), this text can be read in light of all that has transpired during that time. It gives room for pause as to what these events mean and how they will continue to inform throughout the rest of Ordinary Time until Advent six months hence. For this reason the prophet's exclamation "rejoice greatly" and "shout aloud" has special meaning.

As for these two words, the first is *gyl* which fundamentally means to go in a circle as well as to tremble. One can't but help think in terms of forming a circle to dance, a circular dance. The second is *ruah* which can refer to sounding a trumpet as in an alarm. Both apply to not so much to Zion and Jerusalem, more or less synonymous here, but to those who are descendants of them and are presented as daughters which intimates a more maternal concern than if sons were used. So if daughters are referred to, that means Zion and Jerusalem take the role of a mother.

The text brings back thoughts of Palm Sunday or Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem followed a week later by his crucifixion as noted in Jn 12.15. It reads differently there as follows: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on an ass's colt." Immediately is mentioned the disciples' ignorance who "did not understand this at first." The words "at first" are important in that the disciples had a vague inkling of Jesus' action which was stored up in their memory and became vivid in light of the Zechariah verse after Pentecost. Between the two points in time other important incidents had occurred and later were revealed to them. Witness, for example, the freedom and ease with which they cited biblical references throughout the Acts of the Apostles. Without this connection between the Hebrew scriptures and the words and deeds of Jesus, appreciation of who he is and the deeds he had done may not have come down to us as fully.

Just last Sunday (feast of Peter and Paul) the first reading was about the man born blind who sat by the Beautiful Gate. If this were the gate through which Jesus had entered, the blind man would have heard the commotion as he approached. But as noted there, Jesus did not heal him but left that to Peter and Paul shortly thereafter, that is, after his death and resurrection. Although blind from birth and most likely having no education, over the years he must have picked up quite a lot about his Jewish faith by reason of his position near the temple. That is, he heard learned scholars and preachers giving lectures outside the temple as well as people discussing various aspects of their faith. So upon being healed, he was quick to understand the significance of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem even before the disciples.

Obviously the passage at hand belongs to Palm Sunday with the image of the king coming in humble fashion and conveys a message of disarmament, if you will, the disarmament of Ephraim and Jerusalem. This is not quoted by John nor Matthew in their Palm Sunday accounts though any reader of the Hebrew scriptures would have seen this as important to what Zachariah was communicating.

"Dominion" or *moshel* is found only two other times in the Bible, Job 41.33 and Dan 11.4. For a king to extend his rule he must exert military action but not in the case at hand. By disarming both Ephraim and Jerusalem (the former is noted two other times, vs. 13 and 10.7), universal "peace" (*shalom*) shall be established, not otherwise. And so the non-militaristic way, if you will, of establishing peace parallels the future way of redemption by Jesus Christ one week after his entrance into Jerusalem. Surely this was part of the disciples understanding of this passage when it became clear, along with the rest, after Pentecost.

### 13 July, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and return not there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Isaiah 55.10-11*

"Rain and snow" or *geshem* and *sheleg* represent two contrasting seasons, the former usually referring to heavy downpours which cause severe flooding. Both fall down without returning to their source, making their journey one way. The function of both is to "water" the earth, *ravah* meaning to drink, to satisfy. "They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink for the river of your delights" [Ps 36.8]. Compare this one way downward journey of natural water with the divine *davar* or word: "The Lord has sent a word against Jacob, and it will light upon Israel." In other words, this *davar* will descend from heaven and remain with Jacob and Israel. Despite the frequent references to *davar* as living upon earth, rarely do people appreciate it, hence the reason for prophets. They live among their fellow men and are receptacles, if you will, for catching the *davar* after which they speak it to those in their midst. So between this catching and its presentation a period of digestion is required to make the transfer.

Note the two functions once the rain/snow reaches the earth: "bring forth and sprout" or *yalad* and *tsamach*. The first more specifically means to give birth and the latter as to prosper, to succeed.

As for the "word" of God (*davar*) already mentioned, it is now specified as not just coming from heaven but from the very mouth of God. That means God has not just uttered his *davar* and sent it on its way but is present with it on the earth, an extended echo or resonance, if you will. Note, however, that unlike the one way journey of rain and snow, this *davar* returns to God but not as "empty" or *reyq* which also can mean impoverished or vain. In other words the *davar* is not one way but returns "to me" or goes right back into God's mouth.

Nothing is said of how long this *davar* will reside on the earth but long enough to allow vegetation to come to life. Like the moisture of rain and snow, the *davar* does not remain on the surface of the earth but sinks in where it waters vegetation in a wholly secret fashion. So the time this *davar* is hidden away is equivalent to the time of growth in people, the *davar* taking root and developing. Obviously this is reminiscent of Christ as *Logos* or expression in his incarnation.

*Chephats* is the verb for "prosper" which means to incline or take delight in: "but you shall be called my delight is in her" [62.4]. Similar to this exuberant delight and consequent to it is the prospering for which the *davar* had been sent, *tselach*. "I have brought him, and he will prosper in his way" [48.15]. All this comes about by sending ('for which I sent it') or *shlach*.

## **20 July, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

*For neither is there any god besides you whose care is for all men to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly...For your strength is the source of righteousness, and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all. For you show your strength when men doubt the completeness of your power, and rebuke any insolence among those who know it. You who are sovereign in strength judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose. Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous man must be kind, and you have filled your sons with good hope because you give repentance for sins. Wisdom 12.13 & 16-19*

*Mello* is the verb for "care" which connotes intention for the future and here applies to the Lord's just judgment, something other gods (*theos*) are incapable of doing. From such divine care follows an outline of the passage at hand:

Divine *ischus* or "strength" is equivalent to *arche* or "source" or more accurately, the first principle of anything. It, in turn, pertains to "righteousness" or *dikaiosune* in which all men participate thereby enabling a greater participation, namely the *arche* itself.

The verb *despozoo* for "sovereignty" pertains not just to governance but to the mastery of all things, the result being a type of mercy previously unknown to human beings in the guise of *pheidomai* or sparing all. This isn't specified but can refer to that *mello* or care above. In sum, both *despozoo* and *pheidomai* are with respect to "all," that is the entire human race.

*Endeiknumi* means “show” or more literally, to show-in (*en-*) with regard to divine *ischus* which applies to might or power compared to *dunamis*, the capacity to do something. And *dunamis* follows as “power” or more accurately with regard to its “completeness,” *teleiotes*, the end or goal for which anything is done or made.

*Exelegcho* or “rebuke” is the making of a conviction or refutation with regard to human “insolence,” *thrasus*. This is not necessarily a negative term but connotes boldness and spirited-ness as well as confidence in the good sense. However, in the case at hand, *thrasus* pertains to persons who are conscious (*eido*, 'know') of their arrogance.

The verb *despozo* ('sovereign') occurs a second time with respect to *ischus* ('strength'), that is God having mastery every manifestation of power, natural, human or otherwise.

The consequence of divine *ischus* is what seems to be its opposite, “mildness” or *epieikeia*, which reads literally upon (*epi-*) that which is reasonable.

*Diokeio* means “govern” or more literally, to manage a household: through (*dia-*) prefaced to the verbal root for house, *oikos*. Such household management, if you will, is done with “forbearance” or *pheidomai* (verb) noted above as “sparing.”

The verb *dunamai* (from which *dunamis* is derived) translates as “have power” or the capacity to act, the verb for the former being *paristemi*, literally as to stand beside (*para-*).

*Didasko* or “have taught” concerns the man who is righteous (*dikaios*), that is, he in turn must be “kind,” *philanthropos*: *philos* pertains to what is dear or friendly and is prefaced to *anthropos*, man as in mankind.

*Euelpidos*: a hope which is good, *eu-* being suggestive more of an adverb (i.e. 'well') or way of comporting oneself as good which pertains to God's sons, a more distinct group than “all men” at the beginning of this passage. Essential to such a son is the ability to repent, the noun *metanoia* being used as putting one's mind (*nous*) after (*meta-*), that is putting oneself after or beyond the current situation of human frailty).

## 27 July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." (And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day). And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father although I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered or counted for multitude. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this your great people?" It your the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. 1 Kings 3:5 & 7-12*

Verse 6 is not included in the lectionary but is inserted here and noted in parentheses.

Two references pertaining to Gibeon worth mentioning...Gibeon is a tribe which tricked Joshua (Chapter Nine) into sparing them from extermination by having pretended to come from a distance. Later King Saul planned to kill the Gibeonites (cf. 2Sam 1-9) yet King David helped them by handing over seven of Saul's sons to be hanged. Surely Solomon, the son of David, must have had these two events in mind while he was at Gibeon to perform a sacrifice ('for that was the great high place', vs. 4) just as his father had done. In sum, Solomon's presence there was not in accord with worship of the God of Israel who nevertheless appeared to him in a dream.

As for this dream, note that the Lord “appeared” (*ra'ah*, the common verb meaning to see) to Solomon after which he spoke to Solomon. That is, the dream at hand consists not of what we usually consider as essential



to it...vivid images, etc...but a voice which uttered words. Solomon must have been taken aback by the Lord's open-ended generosity ('Ask what I shall give you') and responded in natural enough fashion by recalling the Lord's *chesed* ('steadfast love') to his father, King David. Solomon knew of his father's misdeeds which nonetheless outshone his faithfulness to the Lord compared with King Saul, he now being the third king. Also there were plenty of people still around who knew of the two kings' deeds. By mentioning David, Solomon was playing a card against the Lord, if you will, a bargaining chip which hopefully will work on his behalf at the beginning of his reign. Although not as forceful as his father, already Solomon demonstrated his cunning. Solomon compares himself to a "child" (*nahar* can refer to a new-born child or a young man) who doesn't know how to go out or to come in, a rather charming image of an infant learning how to walk, alternating between crawling and taking faltering steps. This image of relative helplessness is made all the more stronger by Solomon being "in the midst of" (*betok* connotes the very center of a thing) a numberless throne he must now rule.

"Understanding mind" is just what the Lord is looking for. David had this to a certain extent, so Solomon decided to capitalize on it and use it for his own benefit. The son reveals himself to be quite different from the father. That is to say, David was known as a warrior king who united Israel whereas Solomon is more retiring, a trait that will get him into trouble later on. All this emphasis upon a leader's faults (including Saul) is a testimony that the document at hand is quite accurate. Most other nations don't stress the foibles and faults of their rulers; if they do, they're dispatched quickly by those who have been rebuffed. Also the text lacks a sarcastic manner of speaking which intimates that the author had a larger picture in mind.

As for the phrase "understanding mind," we have the noun *lev* or more specifically "heart" with the verb *shamah* or to hear. And so Solomon is asking for a heart which hears or better, listens. In fact he is hearing right now in the dream. By having a *lev* so disposed, Solomon wishes the dream to spill over into the hard business of governing a kingdom. This heart which listens has a specific function which Solomon is keen enough to realize, namely, that it must "discern" between good and evil, *byn* meaning to understand and from which the preposition *beyn* is derived. Thus *byn* is an apprehension which can see between things, if you will, as between the good and evil of which Solomon is speaking. And *byn* is to be put at the service of governance, *shaphat* being a verb which more specifically means to judge.

The Lord was pleased with Solomon's request for such *byn* or as vs. 10 puts it literally, "And the word was good in the eyes of the Lord." Here *davar* is the noun for "word" which is not unlike the Greek *logos*, word as expression. And so the dream comes to a conclusion by the Lord saying (inverse, so to speak, to Mary with regard to the angel Gabriel), "I now do according to your word" or according to your *davar* which corresponds to the divine *davar* communicating to Solomon in the dream.

There is one unfortunate element to this dream, however. The Lord himself says that no other king will be like Solomon. This must have stuck in Solomon's mind long after the dream and contributed to a growing arrogance and abuse of power which to him had a divine sanction. History would prove otherwise.

### 3 August, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*"Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Harken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Isaiah 55.1-3*

This passage begins with the exclamation *hoy* or "ho" which generally means "alas" and thus connotes a threat as well as the beginning of a lamentation. "Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine" [5.22]. Although the text at hand is other than this, *hoy* serves to get one's attention as Wisdom does, a fact soon to be demonstrated.

The excerpt at hand brings to mind the words of Jesus which may be presented in two parts from St. John's Gospel: 1) "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" [4.14]. 2) "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" [6.51]. In other words, we have two verses related to the two ways we take in nourishment, drinking and eating, both of which must have struck

the apostles later when reflecting upon the words and deeds of Jesus.

"Hearken to me diligently" is rendered by the double use of the common verb *shamah* (to hear in the sense of listening). The delighting or *hanag* means to live softly and delicately as in 58.14: "then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth." In the verse at hand, this *hanaq* is with regard to "fatness" or *deshen* which applies to unusually rich food. Thus the idea is not just of a banquet but something bordering on excess, almost an orgy. "I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness" [Jer 31.14].

So while a person is enjoying this extraordinary abundance, the Lord says to those at table, if you will, to incline his ear and approach him. In other words, they are to get up from the banquet table and draw near to the Lord. Next comes a second hearing where the verb *shamah* ('hear') is used as directed to one's "soul" or *nepshesh*. This noun is in the plural and often refers to one person being addressed as well as more. The idea is that one soul is common to everyone, intimating a common unity of mankind.

The exact nature of what will be heard isn't spelled out but brings to mind the opening summons of Wisdom in Proverbs Eight: "Does not wisdom call, does not understanding raise her voice?" The rest of this chapter speaks with great eloquence along the lines of the invitation in Isaiah and continues into Chapter Nine which speaks of a similar invitation issued by Wisdom to "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed" [vs. 5]. So it appears that any transmission of divine, life-giving words...and words are nourishment in all these passages...begins with a summons done in a gentle way that will get a person's attention.

So after the person in Isaiah inclines his hear and comes to the Lord with the prospect that his soul will live (presumably up to that point his soul wasn't truly alive), the Lord gets right to the point. He wishes to make a covenant which is everlasting. Automatically this brings up the whole string of covenants throughout Israel's history but centers more on a familiar historical figure, the second king of Israel, David. And so the person invited is to participate in the "steadfast, sure love" for David. That is to say, a *chesed* (virtually untranslatable as is well known) which involves zeal and ardor, not unlike *eros* modified by *'aman*. That is to say, a love which is able to be verified. Everyone listening to this passage is familiar with the ups and downs of King David, hence his appeal. If the Lord can show such *chesed* to him, anyone else is able to follow.

## 10 August, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*And there he came to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." And he said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still, small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 1Kings 19.9 & 11-13*

Vs. 10 is included here. It is not in the selected reading for today.

Elijah takes refuge in a cave in order to flee the wrath of Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, after he had slain the prophets of Ba'al on Mount Carmel. Despite that incredible incident, Elijah loses courage at Jezebel's threat; "So may the gods do to me and more also if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow" [vs. 2]. Her words must have resounded off the walls of the cave, so much that he couldn't stand being in it. This cave is on Mount Horeb, the place when the Lord revealed the Torah to Moses, is a natural place of refuge for a prophet like Elijah. Besides, it offered a good refuge to Carmel from which he had just fled so ignominiously, having slipped out alone undetected amid the confusion for which he had been responsible. As for Horeb...presumably in the Sinai wilderness...is a considerable distance to travel. However, the fear and cowardice shown by such a prophet made this journey seem like a day's walk. Elijah was haunted by Jezebel and the scorn people must have shown him for acting so cowardly. By now Horeb had become

sacred in Jewish tradition. Therefore chances are that Elijah had encountered a number of people who made it a pilgrimage destination and perhaps stayed there for an extended period of time. He traveled in disguise lest his identity be uncovered.

Upon settling within the cave, the “word” of the Lord came to Elijah, that *davar* which comes in the form of speaking but is more a presence not unlike the *logos* noted in the 27 July entry. The divine *davar* resounded within the cave in a way like no other which came as a relief insofar as it drowned out Jezebel's words...her *davar*...which had been echoing no so much in the cave but in Elijah's head. There's a definite hint of humor in the Lord's *davar*, not entirely unlike his question to the first man, “What are you doing here?” Elijah responds without hesitation saying that he had been “very jealous” for the Lord which is rendered by a double use of the verb *qana'*, something like “I have been jealously jealous.” Elijah continues to speak quite nervously, detectable by the lengthy response about how Israel had forsaken the divine covenant (etc., etc.). That didn't impress the Lord who knew full well Elijah's lack of courage at the words of Jezebel, more threatening than the four hundred prophets of Ba'al whom he had just outwitted and then put to death.

The Lord wasn't out to shame Elijah nor make him feel guilty (already he was suffering from that) but told him to exit the cave and ascend the summit of Horeb. This, of course, was in imitation of Moses and most likely with those pilgrims who were making their way. En route Elijah continued to disguise himself so as not to be recognized and be ridiculed for his cowardly flight from Mount Carmel. People would have assailed him for daring to ascend this most holy of mountains after his recent victory on Carmel followed immediately by the way he melted at Jezebel's words.

Once on the summit, the Lord manifested himself not unlike he had done to Moses, something Elijah must have expected. Would he receive a copy of the divine Torah as well and return to the people and lead them away from their apostasy? Indeed, it would be like Moses leading them from Egypt. The first three manifestations of the Lord—certainly he was taking a delight in this—can be summed up in the words, “behold, the Lord passed by.” They are reminiscent of Ex 34.22: “and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.” In other words, this *davar* is crucial to the divine presence, signifying that it transcends human frailty which otherwise would not survive long unprotected.

Elijah realized that all was going well, but something wasn't quite right because his experience didn't parallel what he knew of Moses being on Horeb, most likely the very spot on which he was standing or more accurately, laying prostrate. All the right ingredients were there: strong wind, earthquake and fire but then a sudden pause. Nothing. Was that all? Was Elijah to return empty-handed from this most sacred spot and become a fugitive from Ahab and Jezebel for the rest of his life?

Finally Elijah perceives that “still, small voice.” It is to his credit that he could hear this *qol* or “voice” which consists, of course, of the *davar*. Only this time the voice is unlike all his earlier dealings with the Lord. Now the *qol/davar* is *demamah* and *daq*. The first is a noun meaning silence as in Ps 107.29: “He made the storm be still (or literally 'to silence'), and the waves of the sea were hushed.” The second is an adjective meaning thin or beaten small as by a smith. “Full of incense, beaten small” [Lev 16.12]. To actually hear such a *qol* and its *davar* is extraordinary, given that Elijah is on top of a mountain in the middle of the desert, that is, in a perfectly silent environment with only the wind making any sound.

The words which follow seem to contradict the Lord who bade Elijah to “go forth” from the cave. In other words, he had heard that *qol* on the summit of Horeb but returned to the familiar cave as quickly as possible.

He figured it would be safe there, not unlike Moses in his “cleft of the rock.” Now Elijah eases out to the cave's entrance but goes no further. But before returning at once to the cave Elijah wraps his face in a “mantle” or *'adereth* which implies something wide. This *'adereth* will become very important later when Elijah ascends into heaven and leaves it to his successor, Elisha. “And he took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan” [2Kg 2.13]. We could say, then, that between the time of the divine communication of the voice which was *demamah* and *daq* and Elijah's return to the cave, he had this mantle enveloping him not unlike the cloud that overshadowed Moses. However, it did not prevent Elijah from making his way down without using his eyes, all the time guided by the divine *qol*.

This remarkable incident begins with another question from the Lord, identical to his first. “What are you doing here?” It ends here but continues with the same words of being jealous for the Lord and anguished over Israel having forsaken the covenant. With that unchanged attitude despite all that had just happened, the Lord sends Elijah away stuck pretty much in his pride. However, his mission is just about to take a wholly new course.

### 15 August, Assumption of the Virgin Mary

*And David assembled all Israel at Jerusalem to bring up the ark of the Lord to its place which he had prepared for it. And David gathered together the sons of Aaron and the Levites...And the Levites carried the ark of God upon their shoulders with the poles as Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord. David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brethren as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy...And they brought the ark of God and set it inside the tent which David had pitched for it; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. 1 Chronicles 15.3-4; 15-16 & 16.1-2*

This excerpt should be read in light of Second Samuel, Chapter Six which describes the same event.

The text begins with the verb *qahal* for “assembled,” an important word because it concerns the very identity of Israel. *Qahal* intimates a special time or occasion...a *kairos*, if you will...when the people are not only gathered together but due to the event at hand, have special insight into their identity with regard to God's sovereignty over them. In sum, *qahal* can be both political and religious...or both.

In vs. 1 David has prepared a place for the “ark” or *'aron* (usually it refers to a wooden chest and is the word for the ark of Noah as well), that is, he pitched a tent for it. Compare this apparently transitory dwelling with the permanent houses he made for himself. Actually David didn't act out of selfishness. The tent has a purpose of reminding the people of their forty years of wandering in the Sinai wilderness after four hundred years of being in Egypt. Although Egypt is referred frequently as a place of bondage and slavery, it was not such for the bulk of that long time, only during the pharaoh's reign when Moses came on the scene. Also the tent reminds the Israelites of their wanderings within the land of Canaan before occupying it fully. While the preparation of the “place” (*maqom*) is relatively easy, that is, with regard to the tent, the location is far more important because it will be a focal point of worship from this point on. A tent is also reminiscent of the transitory nature of temporal reality with the divinity residing within it.

Not just anyone was designated to bear the ark of the Lord but the Levites (the **RSV** says that they “did not exist as a special class in the time of the historical David”) along with the sons of Aaron. Note the similarity between *'aron* and *'Aron*, “ark” and “Aaron”...in other words, the same spelling. So it seems that this particular group was born to carry the ark of the Lord and henceforth will support it in its permanent dwelling place.

“Poles” are used to bear the ark, *motah* being the noun and can refer to a yoke. “I have broken the bands of your yoke” [Lev 26.13]. *Motah* is used only in this instance concerning the ark whereas *bad* is used in the Book of Exodus verses and also can mean a branch or fine linen. “When the tabernacle is to set out, the Levites shall take it down” [Num 1.51]. Here *mishkan* is used which means a habitation or dwelling place in which the *'aron*

is situated. These Levites are to follow Moses' instructions as they had done while traversing the Sinai wilderness or more accurately "according to the word of the Lord." *Davar* is the noun for "word" and as mentioned earlier, is not unlike the Greek *logos* as expression. We could say that while the Levites were in the actual process of carry the ark, this *davar* was echoing continuously in their ears, giving them strength and guidance. Chances are that the Levites recalled their march after the pattern of the milch cows which also bore the ark from the Philistines to the Israelites: "they turned neither to the right nor to the left" [1Sam 6.12]. Once the Levites had brought the ark into Jerusalem, they set it "inside" the tent, *betok* meaning the very center or middle (*tok* prefaced with the preposition *b-*, 'in'). the musical instruments stopped suddenly and everyone held their breath while this was being carried out with the greatest care and delicacy. Upon having been put down, the ark would not move forever. Now a Levite rushed from the tent and gave a signal that all went well after which the people erupted into shouts of joy. David could inaugurate the ark's arrival with sacrificial offerings after which he blessed the people in the name of Lord. This would be the established pattern "continually before the ark as each day required" [16.37].

### 17 August, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Thus says the Lord: "Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed..."And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant--these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.* Isaiah 56.1; 6-7

Right away this excerpt begins with two commands from the Lord with regard to "justice and righteousness" or *mishpat* and *tsedaqah*. The former pertains to a decision already handed down whereas the latter, the state or welfare resulting from this decision. *Shamar* is the *verb* for "keep" and is associated often with regard to observing the divine Torah and found frequently in Ps 119. *Hasah* is the simple verb for "do." If this keeping (more in the passive mode) and doing (more in the active mode) is carried out, the person will receive both divine "salvation" and "deliverance." The length of time isn't specified but most likely depends upon each person's disposition and desire. *Yeshuhah* is the first which is the same and the proper name Jesus. Therefore the Lord could be intimating a promise of his coming. *Tsedaqah* follows and forms the second command of the Lord used with the verb *galah*, "be revealed" or more specifically, to uncover. Thus righteousness and deliverance are one and the same and belong to one's essence. All that's required is to realize it...to realize that already one is *tsedaqah*.

Now the Lord speaks of "foreigners" or *neker* which derives from a verbal root meaning to be strange, not to know, and comprises the rest of the excerpt. This intimates that the first verse belongs more specifically to a native of the land, a Jew. The relationship of the foreigners with the Lord comprises the rest of the excerpt and may be outlined as follows, the consequences of which will be noted afterwards:

- "Join" or *lavah* which also means to borrow (as with money). "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant which will never be forgotten" [Jer 50.5]. In the verse at hand, *lavah* is used with the preposition *hal* ('on,' 'upon') and can be taken literally as "upon the Lord."

- "Minister" or *sharath* which connotes waiting upon. "For the Lord chose them (Levites)...to minister to him forever" [1 Chron 15.2]. The idea is that these foreigners may partake in performing the same liturgical service as the Levites, that is, having a share in their priesthood.

- "Love" or *'ahav* connotes longing or panting after and is with respect not so much the Lord directly but to his "name" or *shem* which suggests the Lord's presence among human beings. In other words, *shem* intimates both divine transcendence and immanence.

- "Servants" or *heved*, a term which also can refer to a slave.

- "Keeps" the Sabbath or *shamar* which is noted above with regard to "justice." The first biblical mention of the Sabbath is Ex 16.23: "Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord" and pertains to the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness after the appearance of the manna and quails which had nourished them.

- Does not "profane" the Sabbath or *chalah* which basically means to perforate or to pierce through, that

is, pierce the Sabbath through with profane activity.

-“Holds fast” or *chazaq*, that is, to be strong with regard to the divine covenant.

Those foreigners who carry out the seven commands just listed the Lord will bring to his holy mountain which can mean either Mount Sinai or most likely, the temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. Regardless, the two are more or less identified as sharing the same reality. The temple is more than likely intimated because the text mentions “house of prayer,” *tephilah*. In his dedication of the Jerusalem temple King Solomon speaks of this prayer: “and they pray to the Lord toward the city which you have chosen and the house which I have built for your name, then hear in heaven their prayer and their supplication” [1Kg 8.44-5].

“All the peoples” include not just the Jews but the foreigners to which these seven commands pertain. *Ham* is the noun for “peoples” which can include both.

## 24 August, Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

*I will thrust you from your office, and you will be cast down from your station. In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, and I will clothe him with your robe and will bind your girdle on him and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him like a peg in a sure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house.* Isaiah 22.19-23

The person whom the Lord will thrust from office is Shebna, an official under King Hezekiah who attempted to usurp power to himself, this before the invasion of King Sennacherib of Assyria.

Note the two positions of authority at hand and the verbs associated with them when Eliakim will become a father to Jerusalem and Judah:

-*Matsav* or “office” and *mahmad* or “station.” Just going by the use of the letter “m,” more or less drawn out, we get an idea of stability, of constancy. The former also applies to a military garrison as in 2Sam 23.14: “David was then in the stronghold; and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem.” The latter has four other biblical references, one of which being 2Chron 9.4: “the attendance of his servants” or those standing about him.

-*Hadaph* or “will thrust” suggests being pushed in an unceremonious manner. “Because the Lord thrust him down” [Jer 46.15]. The verb *haras* for “will be cast down” intimates more a pulling, and that as always downward. “I will build them up and not tear them down” [Jer 24.6].

Note that while Shebna is being cast down (rather, is about to be down in the future), the Lord will summon Eliakim to take his place. However, later on this fellow will prove himself not up to the job when he is part of a delegation to meet King Sennacherib of Assyria who was about to capture Jerusalem. Shortly afterwards Eliakim visited Isaiah for consultation who told him that the Lord will defeat Sennacherib. And so mention of Eliakim is to be tied in with the saving prophecy of Isaiah and his association with the “house of David.”

Obviously the Lord knew what would happen yet threw in his lot with Eliakim, if you will, and decided upon a transfer of authority from Shebna which has the following three elements:

-*Lavash* or “will clothe” with “your robe” or the one belonging to Shebna, *kutoneth* being a tunic with sleeves worn by both men and women. “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them” [Gn 3.21].

-*Chazaq* or “will bind” which more specifically means to strengthen. “You have strengthened the weak hands” [Job 4.3]. In the verse at hand, this verb applies to a “girdle” or *avnet*, a belt which usually is part of the liturgical apparel of a priest. “These are the garments which they shall make: a breast piece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban and a girdle” [Ex 28.4].

-*Natan* or “commit,” the common verb to give as applied to Shebna’s “authority,” *memshalah* which applies to its exercise or rule. “Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and all his army and all the kingdoms of the earth under his dominion” [Jer 34.1]. In the verb as hand, the text reads literally “in (*b-*) his hand.”

Once Eliakim assumes the authority previously held by Shebna, he will rule just as King David had done, that is, he will hold the “key” to his house, *miphteach*. It has two other biblical references, Jdg 3.25 and 1Chron 9.27, the former being cited here: “they took the key and opened them, and there lay their lord dead on the floor.” This verse had echos of the authority Jesus handed over to Peter: “I will give you the keys of the

kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" [Mt 16.19].

The fastening of Eliakim as a (tent) peg suggests that he will carry on King David's legacy, something that did not prove true. Nevertheless, the army of King Sennacherib will fail to capture Jerusalem and suffer defeat (cf. Is 37). The "throne of honor" (*kavod*) is therefore the "house of David."

### 31 August, Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

*O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; every one mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.* Jeremiah 20.7-9

The **New American Bible** puts the opening words somewhat humorously though not with this intention: "You have duped me, and I was duped."

The prophet Jeremiah utters these heart-felt words or more accurately, writes them down after having uttered them so they would remain fresh in his mind. Although this writing means the event has taken place earlier—not much a delay, given the intensity involved—Jeremiah feels as though he's writing to himself or perhaps even in vain. Still, if he can make his feelings objective, they may have value for posterity which fortunately is what had happened.

*Patah* is the verb for "deceived" used twice to emphasize that the Lord has gotten the upper hand over Jeremiah. Fundamentally it means to spread out, to be open, quite unlike the way Wisdom opens herself and summons everyone without distinction to come to the feast she has prepared (Chapters 8 and 9). The situation in the verse at hand occurs right after the incident Jeremiah had with Pashhur, the priest in the house of the Lord where the former loudly condemns the latter. However, to be deceived by the Lord is very different from human circumstances; it is bound to work out positively in a manner which is not foreseen. "And if the prophet be deceived and speak a word, I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet" [Ezk 14.9].

Jeremiah moves on and equates his having been deceived by the Lord as "stronger" or *chazaq* than he. This verb means to tie fast or to bind implying that once Jeremiah is so bound, the Lord prevails, *yakal* being used a second time in this excerpt as "I cannot."

*Secoq* is the noun for "have become a laughingstock" and is derived from a verbal root meaning to laugh but to do so in a derogatory manner. "It is like sport to a fool to do wrong, but wise conduct is pleasure to a man of understanding" [Prov 10.23]. If this miserable condition weren't enough ('all the day'), Jeremiah is subject to being mocked, *lahag* meaning to hold up to scorn and revilement. "You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples" [Ps 44.19].

Certainly Jeremiah has a grudge against Pashhur who had cast him into prison. Incidentally, Jeremiah calls him "Terror" or *Magor*, the same word used in vs. 10 or immediately after this excerpt ('For I hear many whispering, terror is on every side!'). We don't know how long Jeremiah had been imprisoned, but most people seem to have agreed with this punishment for his prophesying against them. So when Jeremiah opens his mouth, not only does he speak but cries out and shouts. His imprisonment hadn't phased him in the slightest. Actually it gave him time to reflect and re-intensify the message of his original prophecy. "Violence and destruction" or *chamas* and *shod*: the former suggests a tearing away and the latter, oppression or a deadly tempest.

So when people heard Jeremiah not just proclaiming the same message as before his imprisonment but even more forcefully, no small wonder that he feels rejected. Note, however, that he attributes the divine "word" or *davar* (akin to the Greek *logos*) as both a "reproach and derision," *cherpah* and *qeles*. The former suggests insolence and the latter, scorn. Both last "all day long" just like being a laughingstock, the same phrase being used.

Now Jeremiah finds himself in a difficult situation as well as not having a receptive audience to his prophesying. After this daily frustration (he seems to forget how lucky he is at having been released from prison), Jeremiah angrily ponders within himself whether or not to continue with his task. Earlier it had seemed so clear as coming from the Lord but now is obscured. This pondering is indicated by the words "If I

say” which means he isn’t necessarily going to speak but wants to very much. However, something holds him back. It’s almost as though his wish to speak and the words he is playing out in his mind are one and the same, a not uncommon experience embarrassing to admit.

Even if Jeremiah speaks or does not speak, he’s faced with the conundrum of having in his heart a “burning fire” or *‘esh bohereth*, that is, as all consuming as well as undergoing a process which will make him brutish, animal-like which is the meaning of the verbal root *bahar*. The latter is found in 10.14: “Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols.” The intensity of this feeling for the Lord is not just in Jeremiah’s heart but within his bones, meaning it is all-pervasive and inescapable. Finally Jeremiah acknowledges that he can’t live like this. It’s wearying him out, *la’ah* being the verb as applied to holding in this fire and *kul* suggestive of sustaining as well as nourishing.

## 7 September, Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

*So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way; he shall die in his iniquity, but you will have saved your life. Ezekiel 33.7-9*

“So” is rendered by the conjunctive *w-* which commonly means “and” and begins many verses in Ezekiel as well as other books. This seems to be a way of connecting events that can be tied together and recalled more easily. Also, the action flows more quickly without overwhelming the reader or listener. In a way, the reader can set his own pace to reading the text by keeping in mind this conjunctive.

The common very *natan* (to give) is rendered as “have made” and pertains to *tsopheh* (‘watchman’) which derives from a verbal root meaning to shine or to be bright, and that ties in nicely with the idea of keeping a sharp eye-out. Usually we consider a watchman as situated on a city wall or tower looking outwards, especially during the night hours. There’s something both challenging and romantic about those hours when everyone is asleep and the city’s safety is dependent upon the watchfulness of those on the wall. “House of Israel is a common expression but has a more homey touch to it here insofar as a watchman is keeping guard over this house, that is, compared to the much larger unit of a city.

The Lord himself appoints Ezekiel as a watchman who, as the last paragraph recounts, is someone on the lookout. Here, however, emphasis is upon hearing a “word” or *davar* from the Lord. This *davar* is singular yet when re-uttered through the prophet’s mouth, if you will, assumes multiple meanings as is the case at hand. As a watchman, Ezekiel has to direct not his vision but his capacity for listening to the divine mouth for this *davar*. Nothing is said if he misses it, however.

Note that the *davar* at hand has two aspects prefaced, as it were, by “if” (*ky-*). In other words, this *ky-* applies goes first to the “wicked” or *rashah* which usually applies to a person who is unrighteous. The Lord warns Ezekiel to “speak” to this wicked person, the verb *davar* being used. Thus the *davar* of the Lord needs to be *davar*-ed by Ezekiel, the two being one and the same. The connection and meaning must be grasped first by Ezekiel himself and then by the wicked person at hand. Such *davar/davar* is a warning, the verb being *zakar* which, like *tsaphah* (verbal root for watchman), means to be bright and connotes teaching as well.

The Lord puts Ezekiel not so much under a threat but under a strict following of his *davar*. He does this by saying that if Ezekiel does not *davar*, he will “require” the wicked man’s blood, the verb being *baqash* being used here. *Baqash* means to seek with emphasis upon touching, almost groping, in order to feel one’s way about.

The second aspect of *davar* as prefaced by “if” (*ky-*) pertains to Ezekiel having warned the same wicked person who again doesn’t heed the divine *davar* through Ezekiel’s *davar*. This will result in the wicked man dying in his “iniquity” or *haon* which implies guilt contracted through sin. At the same time, however, Ezekiel, by reason of his fidelity as watchman to listening to the divine *davar*, “will have saved” his own life. The verb is *natsal* which implies a pulling or drawing out from a desperate situation. The object here is *nepesh* (‘life’) which more fundamentally means soul.

Immediately after this excerpt the Lord bids Ezekiel to “speak” to the house of Israel, the more common *‘amar* being used which, if you will, is secondary to the more emphatic *davar* in the sense that *‘amar* flows from it.



Thus Israel turns out to be the wicked man whom Ezekiel as a watchman primed for listening instead of seeing must deal with.

#### 14 September, Exultation of the Holy Cross

*From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 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. Numbers 21.4-9*

This incident takes place after the Israelites had destroyed the Canaanites and shortly before that, the death of Aaron on Mount Hor. No small wonder that the Israelites "became impatient," especially after having lost their second in command, *qatsar* being the verb which fundamentally means to be short or to reap. Although not in the English text, we have literally and vividly, "the soul (*nephesh*) of the people became short on the way." *Nephesh* is used again as "we" (loathe), that is, our souls did this loathing.

The people grumbled against Moses where the words run literally as "they spoke in (*b-*) God and in (*b-*) Moses." In other words, they really put their case to the Lord and Moses which must have grieved both so soon after Aaron had died. It's easy to see how they "spoke in Moses" but not so clear as how they "spoke in God." Perhaps it was a continual stream of complaining which started among a few and then spread rapidly throughout the camp. As for the food the Israelites had come to loathe (manna and quails), they may not have felt this way if Aaron were still alive to help Moses calm their nerves.

The noun for "serpents" or *nachash* is derived from a verbal root of the same spelling meaning to hiss or to whisper. This also refers to the practice of enchantment and sorcery. The serpents are "fiery" or *saraph* which is related to the angelic seraphim. Chances are their fiery-ness refers to their color as well as ferocity in the way they attacked the people, reminiscent of some of those swarming animals in the plagues that afflicted the Egyptians. Certainly this put a huge strain on Moses who had to deal with the people minus his trusted brother whom he must have dearly wished were alive during such a crisis. The words "so Moses prayed for the people" sound rather bland, not at all indicative of his desperation. Actually his prayer was the most fervent since just before crossing the Red Sea. What mitigated his distress was at least the Israelites recognized that they had sinned which brought on this attack by the fiery serpents.

Hardly an interval existed between Moses' prayer and the Lord's response because the Lord saw the plight of his servant standing there all alone facing a desperate multitude, some who were barely alive after having been bitten and others scared to death that the same fate would overtake them at any moment. The Lord bids Moses to make an image of a fiery serpent. He didn't specify the material but quickly and wisely Moses chose "bronze" (*nechsheth*) which more specifically means brass. This material gleamed brightly though with an orange-ish hue in the sun and therefore was easy for all to see. Besides, *nechsheth* is of the same root as *nachash*, "serpent." It was as though the bronze/brass reflected upon the afflicted people and effected a cure, bright yet mellow. Actually, the cure happens at once. All the people had to do was "look" at it, *navat*, which means to behold or have respect for what one is looking at. This *nachash* which is *nechsheth* is on a "pole" or *nes* which also means a military banner or standard. Anyway, the idea behind it is a high pole, the higher the better so the image could be seen without effort.

Jesus, of course, uses this dramatic incident as a sign of his impending crucifixion though intimates it indirectly: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up" [Jn 3.14]. *Ophis* is the noun for "serpent," more or less general but to attentive listeners, the *nachash* which is made of *nechsheth*. Instead of looking at the *nachash...navat...belief* is required not so much for a cure but for eternal life: "that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" [vs. 15]. And so belief is a special kind of *navat* compared to a physical gaze.

Note that Jesus speaks these mysterious words just after saying that "no one has ascended into heaven but he

who descended from heaven, the Son of man" [vs, 13]. This puts a refinement, if you will, upon the belief/*navat* just noted. Unlike Moses who raised on a pole as a military standard of sorts (*nes*) the serpent of bronze (brass), Jesus speaks of himself as have descended from heaven which, of course, comes before being raised up (into heaven, or back into heaven). Thus being raised on this *nes*, Jesus has left heaven and hasn't yet returned there. He is in a kind of in-between space where redemption is effected.

### 21 September, Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord that he may have mercy on him and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* Isaiah 55.6-9

*Darash* is the verb for "seek" and fundamentally means to rub, to beat or to tread. Thus seeking the Lord as presented here is quite forceful and persistent, even bordering upon presumption. To miss this is to miss the entire point of the message. It presumes that the Lord "may be found" (*matsa*), the preposition *b-* (in) being prefaced to the verb which helps to carry over this persistence and forcefulness. Perhaps the Lord would not want to be found if the urgency of *darash* were not present. Similarly, the Lord is "near" or *qarov*, not unlike *matsa* although the nature of both are left unspecified, that is to say, the when and where-ness. The Lord is speaking this way through his prophet Isaiah, somewhat cryptically, leaving it up to those whom he's addressing to figure this out. That means the listeners...the people of Israel...are left with the option of either succeeding or failing. This 50-50 chance, if you will, isn't meant to cause anxiety even though the stakes are high. Instead, the intent is to spur on the seeking. What will happen then is equally problematic, but the act of doing it seems the purpose of the Lord speaking so.

*'Aven* is the noun for the English adjective "unrighteous" and connotes emptiness and vanity. It is an interesting choice of word in conjunction with "thoughts" which are equally empty. *Machashavah* as "thoughts" intimate anything conceived in the mind with purpose, usually negative or evil. Forsaking them (*hazav*) hopefully will result in returning to the Lord (*shuv*). Thus *hazav* and *shuv* are one and the same action but are to be done in this sequence else it won't work. The result, however, is one of divine mercy and pardon, the verb *racham* connoting tender affection and *salach* suggesting a lifting up of a burden. Actually the literal reading with regard to the second word runs as "multiply to pardon."

In light of the unrighteous man's *machashavah* or "thoughts" the Lord is quick to say that his thoughts are unlike his, very much so, yet they are nonetheless thoughts. The same is applicable to "way" or *derek* concerning the wicked man. Thus the two types of thoughts and ways at hand run parallel to each other...very close, in fact...yet infinitely different. This difference brings to mind that "great chasm" between Abraham and the rich man, so close yet so far apart (cf. Lk 15.19-31). This paradox of closeness and remoteness is borne out by the extreme difference between heaven and earth, yet both form one reality. One can't exist without the other. Here the Lord makes yet again an analogue between *machashavah* and *derek*, thoughts and ways. Any attempt to bridge both is impossible. However, instead of being a cause for despair, it is one of hope, where the Lord seems to be putting emphasis upon the attempt...the seeking or *darash*...instead of any clear-cut, definitive achievement.

### 28 September, Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die for it; for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die. Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is lawful and right, he shall save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.* Ezekiel 18.25-28

The question posed is in the context of earlier examples in Chapter Eighteen as pertaining to individual

responsibility. What may have really riled the people are the words of vs. 24: “none of the righteous deeds which he (the righteous man) has done shall be remembered.” In other words, why bother being righteous, let alone practice it? *Takan* is the verb for “just” which means to make level or even as well as to weigh in the sense of examine thoroughly. Although Israel may not appreciate it, their God responds to such a lament while the gods of the nations remain silent. They may not like his response, but surely he isn’t silent. In other words, Israel always can count on a dialogue, even if painful as here when the Lord throws back at the people the very question they had just posed.

It seems that the examples here as well as earlier in the same chapter take into consideration this unique dialogue which began way back in the Garden of Eden and continued though in a more reduced form, that is, among chosen people such as prophets. Just as the extended age of people diminished, so the broader communication by God with them did the same. It seems that from the Garden of Eden to Mount Sinai (and hence the person of Moses) one such phase of this dialogue had developed. From Mount Sinai with the giving of the Torah there was less need for a designated person...prophet...to speak on behalf of the Lord. Throughout all these two general periods the Lord doesn’t get angry with his people for their sins, if it may be put this way. Note that within them the Lord is always saying “hear” or “pay attention. Such attentiveness would go a long way to assuage his anger which means that the dialogue which had stopped will now resume. That’s where the person of Jesus Christ changes the two just mentioned periods. He speaks freely with sinners and they with him.

### 5 October, Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dugged it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry! Isaiah 5:1-7*

This section is taken from “Expansions on the Book of Isaiah” which, at the time of this insertion, was being developed.

Vs. 1: Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

The particle *na’* is an interjection indicative of desire and spontaneity coming from deep within a person as is the case here, “Let me sing.” Presumably it is a continuation of Isaiah’s vision where he participates in the ups and downs relative to God’s dealing with his people. *Dod* means “beloved” as well as “love” as in this verse and sometimes translated as “uncle,” this being the only use of the noun in Isaiah. “For your love is better than wine” [Sg 1.2].

*Kerem* means “vineyard” and is found last in 3:14 as an image of the Lord’s people as is the case at hand. It is reminiscent of the parable of the tenants in Mt 21:33-39. Part of the second sentence translates literally as “in the horn of the son of oil.” Such oil (presumably from olives in the vineyard) is the delight of the Lord.

Vs. 2: He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. The digging and clearing of stones hearkens back to much of Chapters Two and Three, the wickedness and unfaithfulness there now being replaced with “choice vines” or *soreq* which derives from a verbal root meaning to intertwine or to clean out by combing. It has one other reference, Jer 2:11: “I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock.”

The presence of a watchtower (same in the parable mentioned in vs. 1) suggests that what is being cultivated is extremely valuable and requires protection, that is, grapes for the best wine. Despite the effort put into this project, the vineyard produced “wild grapes” or *be’ushym* which has one other biblical reference, vs. 4.

Nothing to avert this could be done until harvest, all the more tragic because it applies to the entire crop. On a positive note, the Lord viewed the maturation of the vines over a period of time by ascending his tower and having his workers check on them. He allowed the wild grapes to grow despite protestations by those who worked for him. In other words, they were frustrated and tried in vain to understand why their lord allowed this, not knowing that he had in mind a larger picture. At the same time they feared their master and did not contradict him.

Vs. 3: And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard.

“And now” (*vehatah*) are ominous words, ones those to whom they are directed would rather not hear, especially with this new chapter getting off to a good start. Note the plural “inhabitants” (*yoshev*) regarding Jerusalem and singular “man” (*ysh*) for Judah. They must have been very familiar with the Lord’s vineyard, the effort he had put into it, as well as the unfortunate yield of wild grapes. In other words, they ridiculed him and held him up to scorn behind his back. But now they are caught off guard suddenly and asked to “judge” (*shaphat*, cf. 3.14) between the Lord and his vineyard, the very last thing they wanted but couldn’t escape. “I pray you” is another example of *na’* noted in vs. 1 but said here with force. While they must have done this and failed miserably, the succeeding verses don’t record it.

Vs. 4: What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

Obviously the inhabitants of Jerusalem and man (singular, that is) of Judah could not respond to these two embarrassing questions. The only thing they could do is stand there with heads cast down. *Qavah* is the verb “looked for” which essentially means to wait, to expect, quite indicative of what that Lord had done during the extended time of the grape growing season until harvest. “And he looked for justice but saw bloodshed” [vs. 7].

Vs. 5: And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

This verse begins with another “and now” or *vehatah*, the last one being in vs. 3, which again is indicative of something ominous about to happen to the (plural) inhabitants of Jerusalem and the (singular) man of Judah. The verb for “will tell” is *yadah* (cf. 1.3), more commonly as to know in an intimate sense. *Mesukah* is the noun for “hedge,” the other biblical reference being Prov 15.19: “The way of the sluggard is blocked with (a hedge of) thorns.” The hedge was designed not just keep out trespassers but animals, small and large, that is, it is something like an uncultivated boarder area to form a natural barrier. It seems to form the first of two barriers, the outer one, the second being a wall. The result is *bahar* or “devoured,” noted last in 4.4 as its alternate of “burning.”

*Gader* means “wall” or more properly hedge but hedge as fence to distinguish it from *mesukah*. “How long will you assault a man?...this leaning wall, this tottering fence” [Ps 62.3]? *Parats* is the verb used with *gader*, more to scatter as though the hedge will be smashed to smithereens. “For you will spread out to the right” [54.3✓]. Immediately after this comes a trampling which is passive, not directly from the Lord as with *parats*. *Ramas* means “trampled down” and noted last in 1.12. Perhaps the Lord is doing the hard work here, allowing for enemies of Judah and Jerusalem to swarm in and do the trampling at will.

Vs. 6: I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

*Shyth* is the verb for “make waste” which connotes a putting or appointing. “Dimon’s waters are full of blood, but I will bring still more upon Dimon” [15.9]. This verb is similar in form and pronunciation to *shayth* or “thorns” which has six references, all in Isaiah, the next being 7.23: “there will be only briers and thorns.” This same verse contains the word for “briers” or *shamyr*.

“Pruned and hoed” or *zamar* and *hadar*: the former primarily means to sing praises as in 12.5✓: “Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things.” *Hadar* fundamentally means to set in order and has three other biblical references, one of which is 7.25✓: “as for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe.” So without this breaking up of the soil within the vineyard and no rain falling upon the grapes, it will take no time for it to become useless.

Vs. 7: For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!

The house of Israel got wind of where things are going simply by the way Chapter Five began. There seems to be a distinction between Israel and Judah: to the former belongs the Lord’s vineyard and to the latter (note again singular ‘man’), his planting which is “pleasant” or *shahshuhym*. This is a noun which means

delight...“his vineyard of delight.” “Your statues are my delight; they are my counselors” [Ps 119.24].

A juxtaposition of two opposites, each with similar sounding words to make this juxtaposition all the more dramatic. Both are in connection with the Lord looking for or expecting them, *qavah* as in vs. 4:

1) “Justice and bloodshed,” *mishpat* (cf. 4.4) and *mispach*. The latter is the only biblical use of this term.

2) “Righteousness and cry,” *tsedaqah* (cf. 1.27) and *tshaqah*. For the latter, cf. Ps 9.12: “He does not ignore the cry of the afflicted.”

## 12 October, Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain, and Moab shall be trodden down in his place, as straw is trodden down in a dung-pit. Isaiah 25.6-10*

The order of the Hebrew text runs literally: “will make the Lord of hosts to all the people in this holy mountain.” In other words, the primacy of the Lord is paramount followed by the people which, in turn, is followed at last by the mountain, that mountain most likely being Mount Zion, in many ways an image of Mount Sinai. So what had happened on Sinai in some ways is replicated here on Zion. “All the people” seems to include not just Israelites but those who have streamed to Jerusalem.

Note two uses of “feast” or *mishteh* which fundamentally means drinking. Generally speaking it will consist of four things: 1) “fat things” or *shemen* which also translates as oil, 2) “wine on the lees” or *shemrym* which consists of dregs or the most excellent part of wine, 3) fat things with respect to “marrow” or *machah* which applies to the bone, possibly in reference to the essence of wine and 4) again, wine on the lees which are “well refined” or *zaqah*. In sum, all four represent not just the best type of wine available but the vineyards or grapes from which they had come. As for the connection with Mount Sinai, consider Ex 24.11 with respect to the elders who ascended there with Moses: “they saw God, and they ate and drank.”

Mount Sinai is known for the Lord having descended upon it in order to communicate with Moses. As Ex 19.18 recounts, the mountain “was covered with smoke because the Lord descended on it in fire.” That is to say, the Lord manifested himself in darkness or obscurity. Compare this with a very different type of obscurity described by Isaiah, the “covering” over all peoples, not just the Israelites. *Lut* is the noun here used with the verb “cast from which it is derived. Implied here is something that has been wrapped around, very different from those descriptions of smoke, darkness, etc. relative to the Lord on Mount Sinai. Clearly such *lut* is not from the Lord but self-inflicted, if you will. So this *lut* must be destroyed or *balah* which literally means to devour. In vs. 8 *balah* is used for “swallow up” which is followed by the Lord wiping away tears from the faces of the people. This is clearly reminiscent of Rev 7.17: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” This is the concluding verse of a song sung by the angels standing around the throne, elders and four living creatures (cf. vs. 11).

Vs. 9 has the verb *yashah* (‘might save’) and the noun derived from it, *yeshuhah* (‘salvation’) which can be seen in light of the proper name Jesus.

It seems that Moab had been responsible for the difficulty afflicting Israel, for it is singled out as destined to be trodden down. The verses of this excerpt from Isaiah are in the future, not the present, which means that Moab still is in the process of attacking Israel. The Lord’s hand, by resting upon the mountain, will push down Moab, as it were...not just to the ground but beneath it, that is, to the dung-pit.

## 19 October, Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed...For the sake of my*

*servant Jacob and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. I am the Lord, and there is no other besides me there is no God; I gird you though you do not know me that men may know from the rising of the sun and from the west that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other.* Isaiah 45.1, 4-6

Here the Lord takes the unprecedented step of calling a foreign leader, the most well known one of the time, his “anointed” or *mashyach*. Most likely the Israelites were astounded at this title but upon second thought, didn’t care as long as someone...anyone...was capable of setting them free. It seems that Cyrus is not so much unwilling to fulfil this role but ignorant of it. Not only that, he seems ignorant of it throughout. Hence he requires some training which is why the Lord has “grasped” his right hand to subdue nations, *chazaq* being the verb which means to hold fast as well as to strengthen. If this is so, then the Lord, not Cyrus, will be doing the subduing of nations. How much aware Cyrus will be of this is not recorded.

Verses 2 and 3 (not included in this week’s excerpt) speak of the Lord accompanying Cyrus and giving him “treasures of darkness and riches stored in secret places.” *Otsar* is the noun for “treasures” which means a storehouse which oddly enough is filled with “darkness,” *choshek* perhaps suggestive of the mystery at hand, for Cyrus to personally figure out. *Matmon* means “riches” or those things which are hidden away in a double fashion, if you will, because it’s used with the verb *satar* which means to hide. And so Cyrus, a non-Israelite, has the unique privilege to access what normally lays outside the reach of those who have inherited these mysteries.

After having uttered these rather shocking words, the Lord continues to speak about his choice of Cyrus at the service of Israel. The Lord both names him and “surnames” him, the latter verb being *kanah* which means to address or call someone by name endowed with honor. This verb has three other biblical references, one of which is Is 44.5: “and will take the name Israel.”

Apparently Cyrus will perform his duties at the service of the Lord in ignorance though this doesn’t preclude he had some knowledge of what was going on. The Lord stresses Cyrus’ ignorance two more times by the words: “though you do not know me.” Yet this ignorance turns out to be knowledge for the Israelites who will recognize that the Lord is at work. Emphasis upon the Lord being God is in the context of ignorance. One is favorable (as already noted), that is, Cyrus not knowing he is a divine agent and the other is not favorable, that the people had forgotten the Lord. And so this double ignorance, favorable and unfavorable, work together not just for the benefit of Israel but from the sun’s rising to its setting, perhaps indicative of the entire earth. Only a world figure such as Cyrus could effect this, not Israel in its relative insignificance.

## 26 October, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*"Whoever sacrifices to any god, save to the Lord only, shall be utterly destroyed. "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. "If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down.* Exodus 22.20-26

Not exactly the most pleasant excerpt from scripture to hear at the beginning of a Sunday Mass...

This passage contains a total of eight dire warnings: utterly destroyed, wrong, oppress, afflict, wrath will burn, will kill, become widows and fatherless.

The verb *charam* means “utterly destroyed” suggests a shutting in, to prohibit; such restrictiveness therefore carries over to the idea of being consecrated to God. Hence by putting something to death you are saving it. “Everything so devoted is most holy to the Lord” [Lev 27.28]. This is especially true in the circumstance at hand, offering sacrifice to a god other than the Lord. The intensity of these words, along with the passage’s tone, should be taken in light of Israel having spent some four hundred years in a highly polytheistic society such as Egypt. Then the people left suddenly for the alien conditions of the desert where they were confronted with an environment deprived of virtually everything except what they carried with them. Actually their ancestors prior to descending into Egypt were semi-nomadic. To take that life style up again must have seen

repugnant, something many Israelites vowed they would never do. And so they thought their sojourn would be a few weeks at most, certainly not forty years. It was a way of escaping the oppression of the new pharaoh which, they hoped, was temporary and would be mitigated upon returning to their homes. Surely, they thought, this would be a small price to pay by leaving the security of the fertile though narrow Nile River valley for the desert beyond it. So by this stage in their exile in the Sinai desert Moses has to drill into his people the necessity to abandon the practices they had acquired over four centuries. This is a seldom appreciated job on his part, no mean feat. The harshness with which he communicates this divine instruction mirrors, of course, the harshness of Sinai. It's not unlike a person withdrawing from drugs, that is, experiencing considerable painful reaction.

In the Sinai wilderness the Lord speaks of not oppressing anyone who is a stranger. Chances are the Israelites encountered a scattered tribe or two, but these words can be intended for the future or when the people enter Canaan. This stricture to observe hospitality takes into consideration can be seen in the context of the harsh physical environment just mentioned. The desert environment makes people stand out more, if you will, with little or no place to hide. Either they perish or are taken in which is what the Lord demands. Such was the hospitality of Egypt way back when pharaoh invited Joseph's brothers to reside in his country, a fact that can be lost given the very different situation four hundred years later.

Mention of taking a neighbor's garment as a pledge and restoring it before the sun sets has greater significance than at first glance. The contrast between the intense burning sunlight of day and the cold blackness of night is dramatic in a desert environment. For this pledge not to be returned before this overwhelming darkness comes...and it rushes upon the scene with little twilight time in the desert...intimates that it will be refused completely. Two references from the Gospels intimate this: "Tie him hand and foot and throw him outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" [Mt 22.13]. And the brief but dramatic statement concerning Judas: "And it was night" [Jn 13.30].

## 2 November, All Souls

*But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever. Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love because grace and mercy are upon his elect, and he watches over his holy ones.* Wisdom 3.1-9

Because this passage bears a certain resemblance to Chapter Eleven of Hebrews which eloquent describes those who walked by faith and considered themselves exiles while on earth, it is worth comparing the two. The overall idea of both passages is that the chosen of God are a minority, actually a minuscule amount of the general population, inserted there for their benefit.

Here "souls of the righteous" are spoken of (*psuchai dikaion*) which seem to be dead but are alive even while physically alive. In other words, once in the divine hand, there's no distinction between being alive or being dead. In contrast to those who are *dikaioi* or righteous are the "foolish" or *aphron* which literally means those who are without sense, lacking in *phren*, a term applicable to the midriff or viscera. And so to be *aphron* means to be without a *psuche*, if you will, an inner guiding principle located in one's intestines. Such persons don't seem to be necessarily evil but essentially are dull and lacking of perception which is why they failed to comprehend their *exodos* or "departure."

Apparently the righteous souls were punished, though this is not spelled out. Chances are those who are *aphron* had a role to play in this. If so, they contributed to trying them, the verb being *paideuo* which fundamentally means to rear a child, to educate him. Such *paideusis* is effected over an extended period of time which in this verse's context, is aimed at preparing the righteous souls as a sacrificial offering. Once this education, if you will, is complete, there comes a "visitation" or *episkope*, literally, a watching over. Furthermore, the *paideusis* results in the "time" or *kairos* of this visitation. A *kairos* event is a proper time,

one different from the succession of moment-to-moment and occurs all at once. Those so trained will return to be among the *aphron*, as it were, who may be designated as the stubble among whom they are sparks. Not only that, they will assume leadership positions over people and over whom the “Lord will reign.”

Ultimately the presence of the *psuchai dikaion* among those who are *aphron* or without sense will change them into the faithful who similarly will “abide” with him or God in “love” or *agape*. The verb here is *prosmeno*, the preposition *pros* signifying continuous presence (*meno*, to remain) as well as a dynamic, ongoing movement, that is, direction towards-which.

Although vs. 10 isn’t included, it mentions those who are “ungodly” or *asebes*. They may be some of those who are *aphron* or foolish but not necessarily so. To be *asebes* means not to have *eusebeia* which often refers to piety or reverence.

## 9 November, Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

*Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me round on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side...And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the stagnant waters of the sea, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes every living creature which swarms will live, and there will be very many fish; for this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes. Ezekiel 47.1-2, 8-9*

One way to appreciate this passage is to read Psalm 48, especially the concluding verses concerning Zion on which is situated the temple: “Walk about Zion, go round her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels; that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide forever.” The concluding words in Hebrew are revealing: “he will lead us to death.” All in all, these verses are in imitation of the Lord guiding Ezekiel through the temple enabling him to take in all the details. The same applies to John as the angel shows him around the heavenly Jerusalem.

The passage at hand follows a detailed tour, if you will, of inside the temple, notably ordinances to be observed by the prince (cf. 46.2, etc.). Throughout the Lord is guiding Ezekiel almost by the hand, all the while taking delight in showing off his new home. Obviously the prophet is impressed, drinking it all in. Compare this description with Chapters 21 and 21 of Revelation, the heavenly Jerusalem, which had no temple “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” [21.22]. Like the temple in Ezekiel, here water flows from below the temple’s threshold or entrance whereas in Rev 22.1-2 it is “flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.” John is like the prophet Ezekiel being shown around, only he is guided by an angel, not the Lord.

All in all, the theme of water dominates this passage with the Jerusalem temple being its source, very important in a desert environment. The whole purpose of the temple being a reservoir, if you will, is summed up by the words “that the waters of the sea may become fresh.” Here the verb *rapha’* is used which fundamentally means to be healed. Surely these healing waters are “clear as crystal” [Rev 22.1]. No matter how distant these waters flow from the Jerusalem temple, those living near them will derive the same benefits as though they were present at the temple’s threshold.

The passage at hand is towards the end of the Book of Ezekiel. After the Lord has completed his tour of the temple for the prophet, he divides the land and concludes with a description of the gates of Jerusalem. The very last words are “The Lord is there.” So to get “there,” all one has to do is be by the waters which will return the seeker to the temple. Compare this conclusion to Ezekiel with that of Revelation: “Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” In other words, Revelation ends with the not yet presence of Jesus Christ.

## 16 November, Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

*A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands...She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She*



*opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy...Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.* Proverbs 31.10-13, 19-20 & 30-31

This is the last Sunday of the 2014 liturgical year, Advent beginning 30 November. Chapter Thirty-One of Proverbs in its entirety sings the praises of the faithful wife, a good way to bring this year to a close...almost...for next Sunday is Christ the King. Because the Lectio site has a document on Proverbs (i.e., brief notations), the following are lifted from it:

Vs. 10: A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

When the anonymous mother of King Lemuel speaks like this, perhaps she is thinking of King Solomon's mother, Bathsheba who is similar to wisdom. The rest of Chapter Thirty-One contain acrostic verses, that is, each verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

*Chyl* is a noun for "good" and noted last in vs. 3.

*Meker* is a noun for "precious" with two other biblical references and means price or wares. "I will pay for it" [Num 20.19]. *Rachog* is the adjective for "far more" and alternately means far off and is noted last in 7.19. It modifies "jewels" or *penynym* noted last and commonly applies to rubies.

Vs. 11: The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

*Batach* is the verb for "trusts" and noted last in 3.5 and *lev* is the noun for "heart" as in 9.16 which belongs to the wife's "husband" or *bahal* noted last in 3.27 as "possessors."

*Chasar* is the verb for "have (no) lack" noted last in 9.16 and in the verse at hand refers to "gain" or *shalal* noted last in 1.13 as "spoil."

Vs. 12: She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

*Gamal* is the verb for "has done" and suggests a repaying and even weaning of a child as noted in 3.30. In the verse at hand, *tov* (cf. 8.19) or "good" is contrasted with *rah* or "harm" (cf. 8.13).

*Chayym* is the noun for "life" noted last in 8.35.

Vs. 13: She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands.

*Darash* is the verb for "seeks" and connotes a trampling by reason of eagerness in one's search. It has one other reference in Proverbs, 11.27: "He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, but evil comes to him who searches for it."

Vs. 19: She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.

The two parts of this sentence are reversed in the Hebrew text.

*Shalach* is the verb for "puts" noted last in 9.3 and here pertains to the "distaff" or *kyshor*, the only use of this term in the Bible. Note the use of *yad* and *kaph* for "hands." The latter is noted last in 6.3 and refers more to the palm of the hand.

*Tamak* is the verb for "hold" noted last in 5.22 and suggests a holding fast with regard to the "spindle" or *pelek*, the only use of this noun in Proverbs. Fundamentally *pelek* means a circle or environs as with the seven references in Nehemiah. "Next to them Rephaiah, the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired" [Neh 3.9].

Vs. 20: She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.

*Kaph* is the noun for "hand" noted in the previous verse which here the woman "opens" or *paras*, a verb meaning to break, to cleave. "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet" [29.5]. The woman does this to the "poor" or the *hany* noted last in vs. 9.

Compare *hany* with *'evyon* where both are mentioned in vs. 9. The former applies more to those who are afflicted (the verbal root *hanah*) and the latter, to those who are oppressed. In the verse at hand, the woman "reaches out" or *shalach* her hand, a verb found in the previous verse.

Vs. 30: Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Note the following two pairs:

1) "Charm" and "deceitful" or *chen* and *sheqer*. The first word is noted in 5.19 and the second is a noun as in 6.16.

2) "Beauty" and "vain" or *yophy* and *hevel*. The first is noted last in 6.25 and the second is a noun as in 13.11: "Wealth hastily gotten ('from vanity') will dwindle, but he who gathers little by little will increase it."

The phrase "fears (*yare'*, cf. vs. 21) the Lord" is noted last in 3.7 and is used here with *halal* ('to be praised') as in vs. 28.

Vs. 31: Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

*Pery* is the noun for “fruit” noted last in vs. 16.

*Halal* is the verb for “praise” as in the previous verse. Such praise is to be done not by the woman herself but by the reputation of her “works” or *mahseh* which is derived from the verbal root *hasah* (cf. vs. 29). “Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established” [16.3].

*Shahar* is the noun for “gates” noted last in vs. 23. Note that in this place of comings and goings the woman’s works will be praised compared with her husband actually sitting there with the elders.

## 23 November, Christ the King

*“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness...I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice. “As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, rams and he-goats. Ezekiel 34.11-12 & 15-17*

This is the last Sunday of the liturgical year 2015. Interestingly, each new liturgical year doesn’t begin with the association of a number (i.e., year). The common idea of movement or motion is not present. Instead, each liturgical year as well as season succeeds the previous one which is quite different in its feel from progressing. Actually, there’s no point to which one progresses. Instead, it is the person of Jesus Christ who transcends this idea of moving forward.

This passage begins with two similar words, “thus and “behold” or *koh* and *hineh*. The first is the Lord bringing attention to the people his presence while the second implies his immediate involvement in their lives. This is re-enforced by the Lord saying “I, I myself” because no created being is qualified for this searching of sheep, *darash* being the verb which means to tread or to trample. *Darash* suggests that the Lord is about to walk up and down Israel in search of these lost animals, clearly reminiscent of Jesus’ parable about the lost sheep. “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost” [Mt 15.4]? Here *poreuo* or “go after” is equivalent to *darash*. This parable is followed by another which is similar, the woman who lost one coin who sought diligently until she found it (cf. vs. 8). The verb here is the common *zeteo* with the adverb *epimelos* where the preposition *epi* (upon) is prefaced to the root indicative of intense or careful attention to details.

Not only does the divine shepherd *darash*...tread after...these lost sheep, he will “seek them out,” *baqar*. We could say that first the Lord engages in some *darash* after which he arrives at a given place and begins *baqar*. The latter means to cleave open and is a more localized work, if you will. It also means to ask questions and to inspect diligently, something you couldn’t do in a larger, more diversified area.

The verb *baqar* is used again in vs. 12 which reads literally, “in the day that he is among his sheep” for “when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad.” The two words “day” and “among” or *yom* and *betok* suggest a presence which is constant and no longer in need of seeking because the sheep have been found. For example, *yom* is equivalent to the Greek *kairos* or special event which transcends our notion of space or time. *Yom* is used again with regard to “day of clouds and thick darkness” or *hanan* and *haraphel*. The former is a general or common term whereas the latter is suggestive of obscurity. “A day of clouds and thick darkness” [Jl 2.2]. In the verse at hand, such a *yom*...*kairos* or occasion...isn’t specified. It seems that the words here are by way of preparation for Israel for some future, unknown place of pasture.

The words “make them lie down” are perhaps the most important part of the image presented here, for the verb *ravats* means to recline as a quadruped does, that is, folding all four legs under its body. That means more difficult to get up should something happen suddenly and hence more trust in the shepherd’s care. So when Ps 23.2 says “He makes me lie down in green pastures,” the psalmist has in mind this *ravats*. Not that both examples have this “makes me” which has an element of force about it but one which the sheep comply willingly.

Finally, the Lord judges between sheep and sheep (i.e., the different kinds) as well as between rams and he-goats. It is, of course, reminiscent again of Jesus at the final judgment when “he will separate them one from

another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" [Mt 25.32]. The verb *aphorizo* intimates a marking off or making a distinction. In the passage at hand the divine shepherds is doing this in the presence of his flock. The same applies "when the Son of man comes in his glory" [vs. 31].

## 26 October, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*"Whoever sacrifices to any god, save to the Lord only, shall be utterly destroyed. "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. "If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him. If ever you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down. Exodus 22.20-26*

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## 1 November, All Saints

*Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun with the seal of the living God, and he called with*

a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads." And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel...After this I looked and behold, a great multitude which no man could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Revelation 7.2-4, 9-14

This excerpt is lifted from "Notes on the Book of Revelation" posted on this, the Lectio Divina Homepage.

Vs. 2: Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea. Compare two similar forms of movement as though both were equivalent: the angel ascending (*anabaino*) and the "rising" (*anatole*) of the sun." Implied is that the angel precedes sunrise or perhaps foretells it much as twilight before dawn. He may be paralleled with the Magi of Mt 2.1: "Behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem" inquiring about the birth of Christ. I.e., they came just prior to sunrise or before his birth. Also vs. 2 contains *anatole*: "We have seen his star in the East." Seal or *sphragis* as in 5.1, the scroll sealed with seven seals, only in vs. 2 it is more specific, as belonging to the "living God" (*zao*), that is, God who is actively engaged in what is going on. Such a seal indicates that God has property rights, so to speak, over his creation, but this emblem is not further designated. Perhaps it is more like a standard for all to behold much like the sun as it comes over the horizon. This particular angel transmits the seal, as it were, to the four angels just mentioned, that is, those endowed with the power to harm (*adikeo*), a verb which also means to treat unjustly. "For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality" [Col 3.25].

Vs. 3: saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads." Note the first person plural, "we," which includes the four angels as well as the angel with the seal in the previous verse. Also, this angel mentions the servants (*doulos*) of "our" God: he acknowledges their subjection to God in the same fashion as his fellow angelic beings. Forehead or *metopon*: a verse reminiscent of Gen 4.15: "And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him." Although not specified as on Cain's forehead, this mark or *oth* is a sign of favor clearly visible to people. Another reference: "It shall be upon Aaron's forehead" [Ex 28.38], that is, referring to a signet with the engraving "Holy to the Lord" [vs. 36]. Such a sign is *zontos* or living to correspond with the "living God" of vs. 2.

Vs. 4: And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel. Note the verb hear (*akouo*)...John did not see this number as he did with regard to four angels and the other angel in vss. 1 & 2. This number (144,000) was already present rolled up, as it were, and is now fully revealed. As vss. 5-8 describe, this number can signify perfection since it is divisible by the number twelve and pertains to each of the twelve tribes of Israel (also cf. 14.1 & 3). The twelve tribes can trace their origins back to Jacob as their father in Gen 49 where he blesses each one. In the context of this story, Joseph plays the most important role in that as virtual king of Egypt, he was responsible for burying his father Jacob not in that country but in Canaan, the future promised land (cf. 50.12).

Vs. 9: After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. Another use of "after this," "look" and "behold" which connotes temporal extension of John's vision which took

place outside the confines of space and time. Cf. back to 1.10: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." *Ochlos* or crowd as in Mt 15.33: "Where are we to get bread enough in the desert to feed so great a crowd?" In the verse at hand, such a multitude is beyond counting; three general categories of human society are enumerated: tribe, people and tongue. Note emphasis upon tribe (*phule*), the basic division of Israel as recounted in vs. 5-8. Compare with Acts 2.5: "Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven." The next few verses recounts the wide variety of foreigners at Jerusalem who observed the disciples as they spoke after having been filled with the Holy Spirit. The "great multitude" of vs. 9 can be taken as those who were made disciples and baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28.19).

The redeemed are depicted as before the throne, an inverse image of the tower of Babel: "because the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" [Gen 11.9]. Also note the distinction in vs. 9 between throne and Lamb.

"White robes" or stole as in 6.11; here *periballo* is used for clothed, more specifically, to be cast about in the color white as though these people were permeated by it. In addition to these garments, they hold palm branches or *phoenix* in their hands. "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'" [Jn 12.13]! Note that this fabulous bird, the phoenix, is the same term, perhaps due to the branches' resemblance to plumage. This mythical bird died in the fire after which it rose, a symbol which can be applied to Jesus Christ in this triumphal procession into Jerusalem.

Vs. 10: and crying with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb!"

An exclamation similar to the one noted in the previous verse, that is, Jn 12.13. There the crowd welcomed Christ as he entered Jerusalem; here they acknowledge him as having entered, as it were, for he is by God the Father on the throne. *Soteria* or salvation which in Hebrew is *yeshuhah*, the proper name and function of Jesus Christ. Note here that such *yeshuhah* is first attributed to God (the Father) on the throne and then to Jesus the Lamb; i.e., both share in this salvation which is being disclosed as Revelation continues. (Cf. elsewhere on this Home Page for an article entitled "The Name of Yeshuhah and the Psalms" which gives a full list of those this word and its verbal root which forms the basis of the name Jesus. It is located under "Part Four").

Vs. 11: And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God.

Around or *kuklos* as in 5.11. Here the angels form a circle not only around the throne but the elders and four living creatures, that is, forming an outer circumference embracing these other groups. It is as though their praise were directed through the elders and creatures towards the throne, rather before (*enopion*) it. They manifest praise by falling on their faces, a common act of submission. "Then Abram fell on his face" [Gen 17.3]. Note the two prepositions used in vs. 11: upon (*epi*) and worship (*proskuneo*), that is on and then towards.

Vs. 12: saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Observe how this verse begins and ends with Amen, a term commonly used to conclude a prayer. Its situation at both ends, as it were, shows that praise of God has no beginning nor end. Seven attributes are given to God; all are joined by "and" as if to show that one flows into another.

Vs. 14: I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "these are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

In vs. 13 one of the twenty-four elders asks if John knows the identity and source of those persons first mentioned in vs. 9. Most likely this elder acts as an interpreter for much of John's vision and continues to speak through vs. 17, the conclusion of chapter seven. John defers to the elder who begins to give the source, the *pothen* (whence, vs. 13 and ek, from, vs. 14), which is the "great tribulation" (*thlipsis*): "For then there will be great tribulation such as not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be" [Mt 24.21]. This verse has its precedent in Dan 12.1 in conjunction with "Michael, the great prince." Those who destined to be delivered from this cataclysm are "written in the book," that is, they are rolled up, so to speak, much like the scrolls of Revelation. Cf. vs. 4: "but you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end." Such rolling up of the scroll/book makes knowledge grow: "Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase."

Those clothed in white have come out (*ek*) of the great *thlipsis*, the location where they had washed their robes (*pluno*). This is a special type of washing: whiteness derives from redness, of blood, and is akin to baptism: “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized” [Mk 10.38]?

## 2 November, All Souls

*But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever. Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love because grace and mercy are upon his elect, and he watches over his holy ones.* Wisdom 3.1-9

Because this passage bears a certain resemblance to Chapter Eleven of Hebrews which eloquent describes those who walked by faith and considered themselves exiles while on earth, it is worth comparing the two. The overall idea of both passages is that the chosen of God are a minority, actually a minuscule amount of the general population, inserted there for their benefit.

Here “souls of the righteous” are spoken of (*psuchai dikaion*) which seem to be dead but are alive even while physically alive. In other words, once in the divine hand, there’s no distinction between being alive or being dead. In contrast to those who are *dikaios* or righteous are the “foolish” or *aphron* which literally means those who are without sense, lacking in *phren*, a term applicable to the midriff or viscera. And so to be *aphron* means to be without a *psuche*, if you will, an inner guiding principle located in one’s intestines. Such persons don’t seem to be necessarily evil but essentially are dull and lacking of perception which is why they failed to comprehend their *exodos* or “departure.”

Apparently the righteous souls were punished, though this is not spelled out. Chances are those who are *aphron* had a role to play in this. If so, they contributed to trying them, the verb being *paideuo* which fundamentally means to rear a child, to educate him. Such *paideusis* is effected over an extended period of time which in this verse’s context, is aimed at preparing the righteous souls as a sacrificial offering. Once this education, if you will, is complete, there comes a “visitation” or *episkope*, literally, a watching over.

Furthermore, the *paideusis* results in the “time” or *kairos* of this visitation. A *kairos* event is a proper time, one different from the succession of moment-to-moment and occurs all at once. Those so trained will return to be among the *aphron*, as it were, who may be designated as the stubble among whom they are sparks. Not only that, they will assume leadership positions over people and over whom the “Lord will reign.”

Ultimately the presence of the *psuchai dikaion* among those who are *aphron* or without sense will change them into the faithful who similarly will “abide” with him or God in “love” or *agape*. The verb here is *prosmeno*, the preposition *pros* signifying continuous presence (*meno*, to remain) as well as a dynamic, ongoing movement, that is, direction towards-which.

Although vs. 10 isn’t included, it mentions those who are “ungodly” or *asebes*. They may be some of those who are *aphron* or foolish but not necessarily so. To be *asebes* means not to have *eusebeia* which often refers to piety or reverence.

## 9 November, Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

*Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me round on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side...And he said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the stagnant waters of the sea, the water will become fresh. And wherever the*

*river goes every living creature which swarms will live, and there will be very many fish; for this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes.* Ezekiel 47.1-2, 8-9

One way to appreciate this passage is to read Psalm 48, especially the concluding verses concerning Zion on which is situated the temple: "Walk about Zion, go round her, number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels; that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will be our guide forever." The concluding words in Hebrew are revealing: "he will lead us to death." All in all, these verses are in imitation of the Lord guiding Ezekiel through the temple enabling him to take in all the details. The same applies to John as the angel shows him around the heavenly Jerusalem.

The passage at hand follows a detailed tour, if you will, of inside the temple, notably ordinances to be observed by the prince (cf. 46.2, etc.). Throughout the Lord is guiding Ezekiel almost by the hand, all the while taking delight in showing off his new home. Obviously the prophet is impressed, drinking it all in. Compare this description with Chapters 21 and 21 of Revelation, the heavenly Jerusalem, which had no temple "because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" [21.22]. Like the temple in Ezekiel, here water flows from below the temple's threshold or entrance whereas in Rev 22.1-2 it is "flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city." John is like the prophet Ezekiel being shown around, only he is guided by an angel, not the Lord.

All in all, the theme of water dominates this passage with the Jerusalem temple being its source, very important in a desert environment. The whole purpose of the temple being a reservoir, if you will, is summed up by the words "that the waters of the sea may become fresh." Here the verb *rapha'* is used which fundamentally means to be healed. Surely these healing waters are "clear as crystal" [Rev 22.1]. No matter how distant these waters flow from the Jerusalem temple, those living near them will derive the same benefits as though they were present at the temple's threshold.

The passage at hand is towards the end of the Book of Ezekiel. After the Lord has completed his tour of the temple for the prophet, he divides the land and concludes with a description of the gates of Jerusalem. The very last words are "The Lord is there." So to get "there," all one has to do is be by the waters which will return the seeker to the temple. Compare this conclusion to Ezekiel with that of Revelation: "Yes, I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." In other words, Revelation ends with the not yet presence of Jesus Christ.

## 16 November, Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

*A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands...She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy...Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.* Proverbs 31.10-13, 19-20 & 30-31

This is the last Sunday of the 2014 liturgical year, Advent beginning 30 November. Chapter Thirty-One of Proverbs in its entirety sings the praises of the faithful wife, a good way to bring this year to a close...almost...for next Sunday is Christ the King. Because the Lectio site has a document on Proverbs (i.e., brief notations), the following are lifted from it:

Vs. 10: A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

When the anonymous mother of King Lemuel speaks like this, perhaps she is thinking of King Solomon's mother, Bathsheba who is similar to wisdom. The rest of Chapter Thirty-One contain acrostic verses, that is, each verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

*Chyl* is a noun for "good" and noted last in vs. 3.

*Meker* is a noun for "precious" with two other biblical references and means price or wares. "I will pay for it" [Num 20.19]. *Rachoaq* is the adjective for "far more" and alternately means far off and is noted last in 7.19. It modifies "jewels" or *penynym* noted last and commonly applies to rubies.

Vs. 11: The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

*Batach* is the verb for "trusts" and noted last in 3.5 and *lev* is the noun for "heart" as in 9.16 which

belongs to the wife's "husband" or *bahal* noted last in 3.27 as "possessors."

*Chasar* is the verb for "have (no) lack" noted last in 9.16 and in the verse at hand refers to "gain" or *shalal* noted last in 1.13 as "spoil."

Vs. 12: She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

*Gamal* is the verb for "has done" and suggests a repaying and even weaning of a child as noted in 3.30. In the verse at hand, *tov* (cf. 8.19) or "good" is contrasted with *rah* or "harm" (cf. 8.13).

*Chayym* is the noun for "life" noted last in 8.35.

Vs. 13: She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands.

*Darash* is the verb for "seeks" and connotes a trampling by reason of eagerness in one's search. It has one other reference in Proverbs, 11.27: "He who diligently seeks good seeks favor, but evil comes to him who searches for it."

Vs. 19: She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.

The two parts of this sentence are reversed in the Hebrew text.

*Shalach* is the verb for "puts" noted last in 9.3 and here pertains to the "distaff" or *kyshor*, the only use of this term in the Bible. Note the use of *yad* and *kaph* for "hands." The latter is noted last in 6.3 and refers more to the palm of the hand.

*Tamak* is the verb for "hold" noted last in 5.22 and suggests a holding fast with regard to the "spindle" or *pelek*, the only use of this noun in Proverbs. Fundamentally *pelek* means a circle or environs as with the seven references in Nehemiah. "Next to them Rephaiah, the son of Hur, ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, repaired" [Neh 3.9].

Vs. 20: She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.

*Kaph* is the noun for "hand" noted in the previous verse which here the woman "opens" or *paras*, a verb meaning to break, to cleave. "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet" [29.5]. The woman does this to the "poor" or the *hany* noted last in vs. 9.

Compare *hany* with *evyon* where both are mentioned in vs. 9. The former applies more to those who are afflicted (the verbal root *hanah*) and the latter, to those who are oppressed. In the verse at hand, the woman "reaches out" or *shalach* her hand, a verb found in the previous verse.

Vs. 30: Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Note the following two pairs:

1) "Charm" and "deceitful" or *chen* and *sheqer*. The first word is noted in 5.19 and the second is a noun as in 6.16.

2) "Beauty" and "vain" or *yophy* and *hevel*. The first is noted last in 6.25 and the second is a noun as in 13.11: "Wealth hastily gotten ('from vanity') will dwindle, but he who gathers little by little will increase it."

The phrase "fears (*yare'*, cf. vs. 21) the Lord" is noted last in 3.7 and is used here with *halal* ('to be praised') as in vs. 28.

Vs. 31: Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

*Pery* is the noun for "fruit" noted last in vs. 16.

*Halal* is the verb for "praise" as in the previous verse. Such praise is to be done not by the woman herself but by the reputation of her "works" or *mahseh* which is derived from the verbal root *hasah* (cf. vs. 29). "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established" [16.3].

*Shahar* is the noun for "gates" noted last in vs. 23. Note that in this place of comings and goings the woman's works will be praised compared with her husband actually sitting there with the elders.

## 23 November, Christ the King

*"For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness...I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice. "As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, rams and he-goats. Ezekiel 34.11-12 & 15-17*

This is the last Sunday of the liturgical year 2015. Interestingly, each new liturgical year doesn't begin with the



association of a number (i.e., year). The common idea of movement or motion is not present. Instead, each liturgical year as well as season succeeds the previous one which is quite different in its feel from progressing. Actually, there's no point to which one progresses. Instead, it is the person of Jesus Christ who transcends this idea of moving forward.

This passage begins with two similar words, "thus and "behold" or *koh* and *hineh*. The first is the Lord bringing attention to the people his presence while the second implies his immediate involvement in their lives. This is re-enforced by the Lord saying "I, I myself" because no created being is qualified for this searching of sheep, *darash* being the verb which means to tread or to trample. *Darash* suggests that the Lord is about to walk up and down Israel in search of these lost animals, clearly reminiscent of Jesus' parable about the lost sheep. "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost" [Mt 15.4]? Here *poreuo* or "go after" is equivalent to *darash*. This parable is followed by another which is similar, the woman who lost one coin who sought diligently until she found it (cf. vs. 8). The verb here is the common *zeteo* with the adverb *epimelos* where the preposition *epi* (upon) is prefaced to the root indicative of intense or careful attention to details.

Not only does the divine shepherd *darash*...tread after...these lost sheep, he will "seek them out," *baqar*. We could say that first the Lord engages in some *darash* after which he arrives at a given place and begins *baqar*. The latter means to cleave open and is a more localized work, if you will. It also means to ask questions and to inspect diligently, something you couldn't do in a larger, more diversified area.

The verb *baqar* is used again in vs. 12 which reads literally, "in the day that he is among his sheep" for "when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad." The two words "day" and "among" or *yom* and *betok* suggest a presence which is constant and no longer in need of seeking because the sheep have been found. For example, *yom* is equivalent to the Greek *kairos* or special event which transcends our notion of space or time. *Yom* is used again with regard to "day of clouds and thick darkness" or *hanan* and *haraphel*. The former is a general or common term whereas the latter is suggestive of obscurity. "A day of clouds and thick darkness" [Jl 2.2]. In the verse at hand, such a *yom*...*kairos* or occasion...isn't specified. It seems that the words here are by way of preparation for Israel for some future, unknown place of pasture.

The words "make them lie down" are perhaps the most important part of the image presented here, for the verb *ravats* means to recline as a quadruped does, that is, folding all four legs under its body. That means more difficult to get up should something happen suddenly and hence more trust in the shepherd's care. So when Ps 23.2 says "He makes me lie down in green pastures," the psalmist has in mind this *ravats*. Not that both examples have this "makes me" which has an element of force about it but one which the sheep comply willingly.

Finally, the Lord judges between sheep and sheep (i.e., the different kinds) as well as between rams and he-goats. It is, of course, reminiscent again of Jesus at the final judgment when "he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" [Mt 25.32]. The verb *aphorizo* intimates a marking off or making a distinction. In the passage at hand the divine shepherds is doing this in the presence of his flock. The same applies "when the Son of man comes in his glory" [vs. 31].

+ End of Liturgical Year 2014 +