

An excerpt from "Preaching the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 115:3 (2009), 269-285, by Raymond F. Collins.

In the days after Christmas two experiences reminded me of the importance of the Old Testament in the life of the church. One was my reading of Kathleen Kennedy Townsend's *Failing America's Faithful*.

Maryland's former lieutenant governor wrote about her mother, Ethel, reading to her children not only passages from books on the saints for boys and girls but also Old Testament stories. These stories shaped the young Kathleen's vision of what God wants for his people.

The second experience was when an Episcopalian friend of mine told me about her daily reading the Book of Isaiah during Advent and the Christmas season. She commented on the impoverishment of the church and its theology because of its failure to make fuller use of the prophetic book.

These two lay persons had an appreciation of the rich treasures that God has given us in the Old Testament. The clergy's preaching on the Old Testament enables the laity to more fully appreciate the treasures that God has provided.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 3, 2009

LITURGY

1 John 3:1-2 explains what it means for us to be called children of God. We are loved by God. We have a child's experience of God as Father.

John 10:11-18 contains the parable of the Good Shepherd, an iconic figure in the history of the Christian church.

Acts 4:8-12 describes Peter's response to the Sanhedrin whose members had questioned him and John about the healing of a crippled beggar.

The man, lame from birth, was brought daily to the "Beautiful Gate" of the temple in order to beg (Acts 3:1-11). Luke Peter characterizes Peter as a prophetic figure. Peter is endowed with the Holy Spirit, as were other important figures in Luke's two-part narrative (Luke 1:15, 41, 67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9). Endowed with the Spirit, Peter politely responds to the Sanhedrin, addressing its members as "leaders of the people and elders," but his response quickly becomes a message for all Israel (v. 10). In effect, Peter's apologetic speech becomes a kerygmatic speech, an example of the apostles' witnessing to Jesus in Jerusalem in response to the commission given by the departing Jesus (Acts 1:8).

The point of departure of Peter's address is the cure of the cripple. The crippled beggar "was saved" (*sesotai*). The Greek verb is ambivalent, meaning both healed and saved. Luke's emphasis is on the once crippled man's salvation. Salvation in the name of Jesus Christ becomes the focus of the remainder of Peter's speech.

Salvation is a major theme in Luke-Acts (Luke 1:69; 2:11; 7:50; 8:36, 50; 15:1-32; 19:9-10; Acts 7:25; 15:11; 28:28), Salvation is the deliverance of human beings from all sorts of evil, temporal and eschatological, physical and spiritual, individual and social.

Quoting Joel 3:5, Peter's Pentecostal discourse proclaimed,

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"everyone shall be saved who calls on the name of the Lord" (Acts 2:21). The cure of the crippled beggar provides Luke with an example of someone who called on the name of the Lord and was saved.

Peter's response about the cripple being saved in the name of Jesus Christ is a direct answer to the Sanhedrin's query, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" (Acts 4:7). Jesus Christ is the power by whom the cripple has been healed and saved. That is the same Jesus Christ for whose death the leaders of the Jews had been responsible, the very Jesus Christ whom God had raised from the dead.

To provide a scriptural apologetic for one who had been rejected yet but vindicated by God, Luke's Peter cites Psalm 118:22 (cf. Luke 20:17; 1 Pet 2:7).

The final words of Peter's speech proclaim the exclusive nature of salvation. Among New Testament authors, Luke alone emphasizes the exclusive character of salvation. Verse 12 contains the first explicit mention of "salvation" (*soteria*) in Acts (cf. Acts 7:25; 13:26, 47; 16:17; 27:34).

Luke, a first-century evangelist, was obviously unaware of the world in which we live in which people of various religious persuasions, or none, have not heard the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The issue of the salvation of such people was beyond the purview of the inspired evangelist. At the present time the issue remains a subject of much theological reflection and intense inter-religious dialogue.

BROKEN FOR US

As is often the case in seasonal liturgies, there no real link exists among the three liturgical readings. Each of them must be contemplated on its own.

Luke's account of Peter's "defense" of the cure of the cripple provides the homilist with a unique occasion to speak about the nature of salvation. All too often people think that salvation is a matter of saving one's soul. The biblical notion of salvation is much more comprehensive and wholistic, involving physical and social aspects as well as a spiritual dimension.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 10, 2009

LITURGY

1 John 3:18-24 continues the theme of our being children of God, with a focus on the kind of obedience that is appropriate to God's children.

John 15:1-8 contains the parable of the vine and the branches, illustrating how the life of the branches depends on their adhering to the vine.

Acts 9:26-31 is an important episode in Luke's narrative account of the life of the early church. Following the narrative of Paul's "conversion" (Acts 9:1-19). Luke's account is principally intended to show the positive relationship that existed between Paul and the community in Jerusalem.

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Initially, the initial reaction of the church in Jerusalem to Paul was not positive. Paul had to suffer for the name of the Lord (Acts 9:16), Paul was the object of a death plot by Jews (Acts 9:23-24). He was rejected by the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26). His suffering came from non-believers and believers alike.

Only through Barnabas, acting as an intermediary, was Paul reconciled with the disciples in Jerusalem. Joseph, aka Barnabas, thus plays out the implications of the name given to him by the apostles (see Acts 4:36-37). The name Barnabas means son of encouragement or son of consolation. Barnabas will exercise a similar intermediary role again when he was deputized by the church in Jerusalem to recruit Saul for the mission of preaching the gospel to Greek-speakers (Acts 11:22-26).

That Paul was reconciled to the church in Jerusalem and was assimilated into its mission is indicated by Luke as he describes Paul freely moving among the disciples and preaching openly in the name of the Lord. Some diaspora Jews, "the Hellenists," took issue with Paul's proclamation and tried to kill him. Once again, Ananias' vision of Paul's suffering for the name of the Lord is fulfilled.

Rallying to Paul's support, the church of Jerusalem hastened him on his way to the port city of Caesarea. From Caesarea Maritima Paul could return to his home in Tarsus, Cilicia (Acts 9:11) in south central Asian Turkey. Paul's departure from Jerusalem allowed peace to be restored to the church. Together with the body of believers throughout all of Palestine, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, the church in Jerusalem grew in numbers (cf. Acts 6:1, 7). As he often does, Luke notes that this took place under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

BROKEN FOR US

As the Pauline Year draws to a close, Luke's story of Paul deserves to be the subject of a homily. The observant reader of the New Testament will surely note that many of the details of Luke's narrative are in tension with the story that Paul tells in Galatians 2. While it is difficult to reconcile the two accounts of Paul's relationship with the church in Jerusalem, the reader must bear in mind that Luke is trying to show the positive aspects of the apostle's relationship with the Jerusalem community while the apostle himself is trying to show that he had received a revelation from the Lord (Gal 1:11-12) and was in no way dependent on a merely human tradition.

The homilist should stress, as Luke does, the unity between Paul's mission and that of the church in Jerusalem. The homily might also highlight that the difficulties that Paul encountered came not only from those who rejected the gospel but also from some within the church itself. A final point to be noted is that not even an apostle can fulfill his mission without the assistance of someone else, in this case, Barnabas, "the son of encouragement."

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

An excerpt from "Preaching the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 115:3 (2009), 269-285, by Raymond F. Collins.

May 17, 2009

LITURGY

1 John 4:7-10 is a profound reflection on love.

John 15:9-17 is an important segment of the Farewell Discourse. The departing Jesus talks about the commandment that he gives to his disciples.

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48 is a condensed version of Peter's dialogue with (Acts 10:24-33) and speech to Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43). According to the narrative structure of Acts, Cornelius is the pioneer Gentile who accepts the gospel and is baptized (Acts 10:44-49). Cornelius' conversion provides a warrant for Paul's mission to the Gentiles.

Prepared by a vision (Acts 10:1-8), the Roman centurion falls at Peter's feet in a gesture of homage and "adoration." Peter refuses to accept a kind of homage that ought to be restricted to God, as Paul and Barnabas will later do in Lystra (Acts 14:15).

Emphasizing Peter's words with a formulaic "proceeded to speak" (cf. Acts 8:35; 18:14), Luke says that God is not a respecter of persons; God shows no partiality. God has no favorites. In context, Peter means that Jews do not enjoy an exclusive claim to God's benefaction.

Indeed, no matter where people are from they are acceptable to God if they reverence him and practice righteousness, that is, if they have faith and manifest charity. This principle underlies the inclusion of Gentiles within the church.

As Peter was speaking, Cornelius and his entourage received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44). This amazed those Jewish Christians who had accompanied Peter from Joppa to Caesarea, headquarters of the Roman garrison. That Cornelius and his companions speak in tongues is a kind of Pentecostal event, a sure sign of their reception of the gospel (cf. Acts 2:4; 1 Cor 12:10, 28).

Peter adds that baptism should not be withheld from Cornelius and his Spirit-endowed companions. Recipients of the Spirit, they should be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and so enter into the communion of the church, together with the circumcised believers who had taken umbrage at what had happened to the Gentiles.

BROKEN FOR US

The reader of Luke-Acts surely recognizes that Luke introduces the Cornelius story into his narrative to show that the Pauline mission, that is, the reception of Gentiles into the church, had a precedent in the practice of the church in Jerusalem.

The reading suggests that the homilist focus on the unlikely scenario in which we Christians, most of whom are Gentiles, are involved. Jesus came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt 10:6; 15:24) and sent his disciples to those same lost sheep (Matt 10:16). As a result of Peter's vision (Acts 10:9-33), the word of God and the possibility of receiving baptism has been extended to Gentiles. Cornelius was among the first of the Gentiles to have been

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incorporated into the body of believers; we follow in his stead.

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Thursday, May 21, or Sunday, May 24, 2009

LITURGY

Ephesians 1:17-23 or **4:1-13** provides an option between two deutero-Pauline readings that speak of the exalted Christ in heaven.

The latter is available as a liturgical reading only in Cycle B whereas Ephesians 1:17-23, the reading appointed for Cycle A, may also be read in Cycle B and Cycle C.

Mark 16:15-20, the canonical conclusion of Mark, was most likely not a part of the original gospel.

Acts 1:1-11 begins with a two-verse prologue that recalls the prologue of the Third Gospel (Luke 1:1-4). This shows that Luke and Acts should be read as a two-part work. The use of related prologues is conventional in Greek historical works. Another example is Josephus' *Against Apion*.

Luke's prologue briefly summarizes the activity and teaching of Jesus during his public ministry. Luke then gives a description of Jesus' final instruction to his disciples (Acts 1:3-8) in which four motifs can be identified. The first is an instruction on the kingdom of God, a reality not yet understood by the apostles. Their question about the imminence of the kingdom prompts Jesus to reply that the coming of the kingdom is dependent on the will of the Father alone (Acts 1:6-7).

Jesus then orders the apostles to remain in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 24:49b). Jerusalem is the point of departure for the proclamation of the gospel (cf. Luke 24:47, 52-53). The first part of Luke-Acts began with the temple service of Zechariah in Jerusalem and ends with Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension in Jerusalem. The second part of Luke-Acts begins in Jerusalem and concludes with Paul in Rome, at the end of the earth.

The third instruction contains the promise of the Spirit (Luke 24:49a; Acts 1:4-5, 8). The descent of the Spirit, narratively described in Acts 2:1-13, is described as the promise of the Father (v. 4) and as the baptism of the Holy Spirit (v. 5). The descent of the Spirit, coming down upon the apostles, contrasts with the ascent of Jesus, who goes up from among the apostles.

Jesus' final instruction is the commissioning of the apostles (v. 8). Witnessing to Jesus is a characteristic trait of the disciples (Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 7:58; 10:39, 41; 13:31; 22:15, 22; 26:16).

The commission that the apostles be witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea, Samaria, to the end (singular in the Greek text) of the earth announces a rough outline of the Book of Acts. Peter is Jesus' principal witness in Jerusalem, Philip in Samaria, while Paul witnesses to Jesus in the world of the Gentiles, indeed unto the end of the earth.

Verses 9-11 describe the Ascension. As in Luke 24:4, two men in white interpret Jesus' absence. In Luke 24:4-7 the angelic figures

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announce that Jesus had been raised by the Father. In Acts 1:10-11 similar figures announce that Jesus has been taken up into heaven by the Father. One day he will return in the same way, presumably on the cloud (cf. Daniel 7:13). In the interim between Jesus' ascension and his return is the period in which the church exists, the period in which the apostles and successive generations of disciples will continue to witness to Jesus.

BROKEN FOR US

The Feast of the Ascension is not so much the celebration of the absence of Jesus as it is the celebration of his glorification and the expectation of the gift of the Spirit. It is a time to recall that the era that began with the return of Jesus to the Father is the era of the church. It is the time when all the disciples of Jesus, endowed with the Spirit, are to witness to Jesus no matter where they might be.

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 24, 2009

LITURGY

1 John 4:11-16, a passage that includes the important affirmation that God is love, continues the Johannine reflection on divine and human love.

John 17:11b-19 is an excerpt from Jesus' High Priestly prayer.

Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26 is an edited version of Luke's account of how membership in the group of apostles was restored to its symbolic compliment of twelve, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

The lectionary text omits much of Luke's reference to the death of Judas whose betrayal and demise created the apostolic vacancy. In Acts, the passage chosen for today's reading follows the listing of the names of the eleven apostles who gathered in the upper room, together with some women, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and others of his relatives.

One hundred and twenty does not represent a head count; rather it is a round and suggestive number (12 x 10) which indicates the growth of the early church in Jerusalem in the time after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Peter rises as the spokesperson in the gathering, the first time that he exercises this role in Luke's account of the history of the early church.

Peter's primary concern is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. The fulfillment of Scriptures is a major motif in Luke-Acts (cf. Luke 4:18-21; 24:26-27, 44-47). Using the expression "it is necessary" (*dei*), Luke suggests that there is some degree of necessity about the scriptures being fulfilled (cf. Luke 24:26, 44).

Peter's speech reflects the popular attribution of the Psalms to David, highlighting their prophetic nature. Luke's use of "Scripture," in the singular, refers to a single passage, in this case, Psalm 109:8, the only citation of this psalm in the New Testament.

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The Psalm is quoted in Greek translation—the common practice in the Book of Acts—which uses the word *episkope* to designate the office that must be filled. The quotation would not function as well in Hebrew.

Candidates for the vacant office must have accompanied Jesus throughout his public ministry and been witnesses to his resurrection.

As is his custom throughout Luke-Acts, Luke cites Jesus' baptism by John as the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (cf. Luke 3:23; Acts 10:37).

The assembly proposes two candidates for the office, Judas Barsabbas and Matthias. Following the example of Jesus who prayed before important moments in his ministry, including the appointment of the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-16), the community prayed for divine guidance in making the choice between the two candidates. Casting lots, a traditional way of discerning God's choice in both the Old Testament (Leviticus 16:8; Jonah 1:7-8) and at Qumran (1QS 5:3; 6:16), the community chose Matthias to fill the apostolic compliment. This account of the choice of Matthias is the only mention of the twelfth apostle in the New Testament.

BROKEN FOR US

Today's first reading provides the homilist with a unique opportunity to speak about the replenishment of ministers within the church. Two principles emerge from the Lukan narrative that the homilist should bear in mind. The first is that vocations to the ministry should arise from within the believing community. The second is that, in answer to the community's prayer, the Holy Spirit will identify those who are called to ministry.

An all too facile solution to the "lack of vocations" in the United States is the importation of priests from Asia and Africa. More often than not this is a matter of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. All of the dioceses of the United States have far more priests for the number of Catholics than do the areas in Asia and Africa from which most of these recruits come. Importing foreign clergy as a way of responding to ministerial need is, moreover, not in keeping with the biblical paradigm suggested by the Lukan account.

PENTECOST SUNDAY

May 31, 2009

LITURGY

1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13 or **Galatians 5:16-25** provides an option for the second reading. The Corinthians reading may be used in Cycles A, B, and C, while the Galatians reading is appointed for reading only during Cycle B. The passage contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruits of the Spirit.

John 15:26-27; 16:12-15 is a composite text from the second part of the Johannine Farewell Discourse in which the departing Jesus speaks about the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth.

Acts 2:1-11 is Luke's description of the first Christian Pentecost.

An excerpt from "Preaching the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 115:3 (2009), 269-285, by Raymond F. Collins.

The Jewish feast which occasioned a large gathering of Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem was the Feast of Weeks, celebrated fifty days after Passover. The feast was originally an agricultural celebration in which first fruits and lambs were offered (Exodus 23:16; 34:12; Leviticus 23:15-21; Deuteronomy 16:9-12).

On the Jewish feast of Pentecost the church of Jerusalem—120 members strong (Acts 1:15)—gathered in one place (Acts 2:1). The sound like a roaring wind which they heard recalls motifs found in biblical narratives of theophanies, particularly the Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19) and Elijah theophanies (1 Kings 19:11-12). The tongues of fire which came to rest on each of them signifies that the experience is that of baptism with the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5). That the Spirit came in the form of tongues implies that their charism was that of speaking. Filled with the Holy Spirit, as Jesus was (Luke 3:21-22; 4:1), the disciples were enabled to speak out boldly. Luke clearly indicates that their charism was one of speaking. Not only did the parted fire descend on the disciples in the form of tongues but those who heard them heard them speak in different languages.

It was not the out-of-the ordinary or ecstatic nature of the event that mattered to Luke. What mattered to the evangelist was that the disciples were able to communicate. By saying that everyone "heard" them speaking in their own language seems to indicate that Luke understood the event to have been auditory rather than vocal. In any case, his message is that, through the gift of the Spirit, the gospel is to be proclaimed to people of different languages.

The amazed and disparate group of people who heard the disciples apparently included immigrants (Acts 2:5) as well as pilgrims (Acts 2:10). Using the literary convention of a list of nations (cf. Genesis 10:2-31), Luke suggests that the group came from sixteen different areas. Similar lists were used by Hellenistic Jewish authors to emphasize the extent of the Diaspora (cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 3:160-172, 205-209; Philo, *Gaius* 281-282; *Flaccus* 45-46). Luke uses the device to symbolize the spread of the gospel throughout the Mediterranean basin and the Near East.

BROKEN FOR US

Images of the Last Supper tend to show only twelve persons sharing the Passover with Jesus. Images of Pentecost tend to show tongues of fire descending on just twelve disciples. In fact, both celebrations admitted of a wider participation by the disciples of Jesus. The Spirit descended upon the members of the church of Jerusalem, not only upon the recently restored compliment of Twelve Apostles.

This being so, the first Christian Pentecost can rightly be considered the "birthday" of the church. On the first Christian Pentecost, the members of the church were baptized with the Spirit.

On that occasion, the Spirit inspired the members of the church of Jerusalem to foreshadow the preaching of the gospel to people of many languages and cultures.

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The mission which began at Pentecost is a mission that continues today. The gospel must be preached to people of different languages and cultures in such a way that they truly "hear it." Doing so is one of the great challenges that faces the church of the third millennium.

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

June 7, 2009

LITURGY

Romans 8:14-17 speaks of the Spirit of adoption who moves believers to call upon God as "Abba, Father."

Matthew 28:16-20 offers Matthew's version of the Great Commission. Different from the Lukan version of the commission read on the Feast of the Ascension, Matthew's account mentions baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40 is a biblical passage which, obviously, does not speak about the Trinity. It proclaims that among the nations of the earth Israel was the only nation that was privileged to enjoy the experience of God as did Israel.

Israel was the beneficiary of divine revelation, exemplified in God's self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3; cf. Exodus 20:18-26). Not only did Israel experience God as the God of revelation, Israel was also privileged to experience God as the God of mighty deeds. The "testings" that Israel experienced were God's demonstrations of power in the ten plagues (Deuteronomy 7:19; 29:2-3; cf. Exodus 7:14-9:32). God inflicted these plagues on Egypt for the benefit of Israel.

The liturgical lection omits the verse that Israel was the beneficiary of this two-fold manifestation of God because it was loved by God (Deut 4:37). Because Israel was the beneficiary of this unique experience of God, God demands that Israel acknowledge God to be the Lord of heaven and earth. Uniquely privileged, Israel was also to acknowledge God by the quality of its life. It was to keep the statutes and commandments of the Lord, among which the precepts of the Decalogue, described shortly thereafter, are preeminent (cf. Deuteronomy 5:6-21).

BROKEN FOR US

It is obvious that, despite the typological reading of the text by various Fathers of the Church, an Old Testament reading is not going to speak about the Trinity. Typically, however, modern theology attributes to the Word the function of being the self-revelation of God. The Spirit is described as the power of God *ad extra*.

Today's first reading highlights each of these functions of the persons of the Trinity, asking us to reflect that already in biblical times there was preparation for God's Trinitarian self-revelation. The reading also indicates that God's revelation calls for an appropriate response. A first response is the acknowledgement of God, the theological virtue of faith. Faith is to be put into practice

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in love (Galatians 5:6), the essence of the statutes and commandments that God has given us (Matthew 22:40; cf. James 2:8).

THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

June 14, 2009

LITURGY

Hebrews 9:11-15 compares Jesus' self-sacrifice with the sacrifices of the temple in Jerusalem.

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26 is Mark's description of the Passover meal during which Jesus instituted the celebration of the eucharist.

Exodus 24:3-8 describes the ceremony in which the people ratify the covenant that God has made with them. Moses initiates the ceremony by recalling the Ten Commandments, the words of the Lord, and the case law contained in the Book of the Covenant, the ordinances (Exodus 20:22-23:33). These functioned as the covenant provisions to which Israel was bound.

Since the people agreed to the prescriptions, Moses transcribed them, perhaps for reading during a covenant renewal ceremony (see Exodus 17:14; 34:27-28; Numbers 33:2; Deuteronomy 31:9, 22 as biblical descriptions of other occasions when Moses wrote). The participation of the entire people is symbolized by the erection of twelve pillars, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. The altar signifies the presence of God.

With everything prepared, the ceremony begins with the offering of holocausts, bulls, and peace offerings to the Lord (see Leviticus 1, 3). The blood of the animals, symbolic of life, is gathered in large bowls. Half of the blood is poured on the altar, symbolizing Yahweh's participation in the covenant. Then Moses read the Book of the Covenant, with the people once again agreeing to its demands. Then Moses sprinkles the remaining half of the blood on the people.

The shared blood symbolized the vital covenant, a bond and communion of life, between Yahweh and his people.

The blood that was shared is described as the "blood of the covenant," an expression reprised by Matthew and Paul in their respective accounts of the Institution of the Eucharist (Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 11:25).

BROKEN FOR US

The reading from the Book of Exodus is a vivid reminder of an aspect of the eucharist that is often overlooked, namely, that it is a covenant meal, symbolically celebrated. With its iteration of the fact that the people accepted the precepts of the covenant, Exodus reminds us that a covenant ritual makes little sense apart from the life, in union with God, that it expresses. As the Hebrews accepted the demands of the covenant before participating in the blood ritual, so Christians should live the new covenant in their lives before they celebrate the eucharistic ritual.

The Exodus reading with its recall of the erection of the twelve

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pillars and its frequent mention of the people, also reminds us that the covenant celebration is a celebration of a people with its God.

The celebration of the eucharist is a community celebration in which individuals take part. Without the community the eucharist makes little or no sense.

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 21, 2009

LITURGY

2 Cor 5:14-17 speaks about the believer's appropriate reaction to the death of Christ.

Mark 4:35-41 describes Jesus stilling the storm.

Job 38:1, 8-11, one of the two Sunday liturgical lections from the Book of Job recounts part of a theophany. And may the reader excuse my overly enthusiastic plea for preaching about Job on page 81 of the January-February issue of *Emmanuel* in which I stated that Job appeared only once on a Sunday in the three-year liturgical cycle!

The first verse of the reading is an introduction to the first of two lengthy discourses (cf. Job 40:1) by the Lord who intervenes in the debate between Job and his friends. The Lord's name, "Yahweh," occurs in verse 1 for the first time in Job since the opening chapters of the book (Job 1-2).

As is often the case in the Hebrew scriptures, a storm serves as a setting for a theophany (Psalms 18, 50; Nahum 1, 3; Habakkuk 3).

The Hebrew term for storm, *se'arah*, also meaning whirlwind (see 2 Kings 2:1, 11), is frequently used in reference to divine anger. Thus the setting of the theophany symbolizes divine displeasure at the tenor of the discussion between Job and his friends.

The rhetorical question in the liturgical reading is designed to motivate humility in the human auditors. Humans must recognize that they are inferior to God. In verses 8-9 God, the Creator, is described as giving birth to the sea, the clouds, and darkness. Reference to the womb and swaddling clothes evoke the event of a birth and the wrapping of a new-born. Parental imagery continues in verses 10-12 as Yahweh self-describes himself as setting limits, preventing "his children" from doing harm or being harmed. The warmth of the imagery contrasts with the angry curse of Job in 3:3-8.

BROKEN FOR US

The storm is the obvious link between today's first and third readings. Both readings describe a theophany. In Mark Jesus manifests divine power by calming the storm, asserting divine power over an unruly sea and leading his disciples to wonder about his identity. In Job, Yahweh describes himself as the creator and provident God. Yahweh has created the sea and other elements in the universe and has set limits upon their power.

It has sometimes been said that the great moral and political issue of the twenty-first century will be the use of the world's water

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supply. Believers stand in awe at the water that God has created. In faith they marvel at the power of the sea, so often destructive yet so capable of providing energy. With a prayer of gratitude they thank God for water, with its many different uses. Water allows animals and humans alike to drink. Water allows crops to grow. Water nurtures the fish that we eat. A person of faith can only look at the water that God has created with awe and reverence.

There is, however, a large number of ethical issues that arise from the water that God has created. One is the availability of clean water for people to drink, a two-pronged moral dilemma which involves both the avoidance of polluting and the distribution of water to those who need it. Another ethical challenge is the conservation of water so that it might serve the multiple purposes for which God created it. Yet another is the over-fishing of seas and rivers. Akin is the issue of global-warming and the melting of the polar ice caps. None of these moral issues should escape the concern of a person of faith who professes that God has created the waters, bringing them forth from the womb and wrapping them in swaddling clothes.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 29, 2009

LITURGY

2 Cor 8:7, 9, 13-15 portrays the gracious generosity of Jesus as an example to be followed by the church at Corinth as it prepares to help the saints in Jerusalem.

Mark 5:21-43 describes Jesus raising of the twelve-year old daughter of Jairus from the dead and his healing of the woman with the abnormal menstrual flow.

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24 is a composite reading from an inspired work by a Hellenistic Jewish author, conventionally known as Pseudo-Solomon, who wrote about a century before Christ. Immortality is the dominant theme of the first part of the book (Wisdom 1:1-6:21). The theme of immortality clearly dominates the exposition of the author's thought until Wisdom 5:23.

In the first of the assembled passages in today's reading, Pseudo-Solomon affirms that God has made human beings for immortality.

Death is the antithesis of what God wants for the men and women that he has created. He finds no pleasure in the death of the beings that he has created. Immortality is not, however, due to the spiritual nature of the human soul. Rather it results from the relationship with God that he describes as justice or righteous. In the author's view, it is this relationship that is undying. Hence, passage from this life-death in the ordinary, everyday sense of the term-is not death, as he understands death.

Pseudo-Solomon returns to the theme of immortality in an excerpt of chapter two that has been incorporated into today's composite liturgical reading. He affirms that God has created humankind for incorruption. The proof? We have been created in the image of God,

An excerpt from "Preaching the Word: Homiletics," *Emmanuel* 115:3 (2009), 269-285, by Raymond F. Collins.

a deliberate divine act (cf. Genesis 1:26-27). It is the devil who is the cause of death. The devil's envy brought death to human beings (cf. Genesis 3:1-7; 22-23). Those who express allegiance to the devil by their evil actions and malicious words will experience death (see Wisdom 1:16).

BROKEN FOR US

Jesus' raising the daughter of Jairus from the dead, despite the obstacle of distance and notwithstanding the fact that mourners were already present when Jesus arrived at the house of the synagogue official, serves both as a foreshadowing of the resurrection in which we shall participate through Jesus and as a sign that God, represented through Jesus, his agent, does not will death.

Pseudo-Solomon reflects, almost philosophically, on the nature of human mortality. It is noteworthy however that, although he lived in Alexandria, a center for the study of philosophy, his argument is religious rather than philosophic. He grounds human immortality in the creative act of God. We humans have been created in God's image and likeness, "the image of his own nature" (Wisdom 2:23), that is, the image and likeness of the immortal God. A second basis for human immortality is righteousness or justice, that is, human's right relationship with God, and with one another.

From each of these two points of view, the basis of human immortality is not the nature of the soul; it is rather the quality of a human being's relationship with God. Thus understood, immortality is a gift from God rather than an innate characteristic of human existence.