

LECTERN GUIDE

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INTRODUCTIONS TO PENITENTIAL RITE AND READINGS, MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

The INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE is a model which can also be adapted for use as an introduction to the liturgy itself. The INTRODUCTIONS TO THE READINGS, if read by priest or lector before the respective readings, are intended to focus the attention of the listeners. The MODELS FOR GENERAL INTERCESSIONS relate to the theme of the homily outline and may be used to supplement the usual petitions. All rights reserved. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without permission.

January 1, 2008—Mary, Mother of God

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: Because we often act before we think, we frequently regret those decisions. We begin this Eucharist by remembering God's grace, which helps us to make choices that reflect our dignity as God's sons and daughters.

- 1 INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, the people of God begin their journey with a special blessing. God will be with them all the way.
- 2 INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul reminds us of the woman who brought Jesus into the world. Because she is the Mother of Jesus, she is also our Mother.
- 3 INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, shepherds disclose the great mystery surrounding the birth of Jesus. Mary reflects on these things in her heart.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For all those who work to promote respect for life at all its stages,
- 2) For all people striving to be peacemakers,
- 3) For people who are battling addictions,
- 4) For children with special needs and those who care for them,

January 6, 2008—Epiphany

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: Today as we recall the journey of the magi in search of the newborn King, we reflect on how faithful we have been in giving Jesus the gift of ourselves. We seek forgiveness for the ways in which we have withheld our love from him and from others, refusing to give the gifts of attention and concern, compassion and understanding.

- 1 INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, God's holy people lead the way for the rest of the nations. The nations will walk by their light.
- 2 INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, we hear about the mystery Paul is preaching. Jews and gentiles are to be united in Christ.
- 3 INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus the Messiah is manifested not to King Herod but to magi from the East who present the newborn king of the Jews with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) That all Christians may be as faithful as the magi in seeking Jesus and making him known,
- 2) That all nations may recognize Jesus as the Light of the World,
- 3) That the poor and the sick, the lonely and the misguided, may be gifted with love,
- 4) That we may be wise in following only those stars the Spirit provides,
- 5) That peace may reign in all hearts,

January 13, 2008—Baptism of the Lord

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: For most of us, our baptism took place long ago. But do we live it still, in our daily lives? As we come to this holy table, ask yourself, am I living my baptism?

- 1 INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, God introduces a special Servant. He will show the world the way that leads to justice.
- 2 INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, we hear that God the Father anointed Jesus with the Spirit at his baptism. Jesus then began his saving mission.
- 3 INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus is baptized by John, anointed with the Holy Spirit, and identified as God's beloved Son. Jesus' purpose is to fulfill God's plan of salvation.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) That all followers of Christ live up to their baptismal promises,
- 2) That the Holy Father enjoy health of mind and body,
- 3) That godparents be good examples as sponsors,
- 4) That the world may enjoy peace,

January 20, 2008—2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: God has sanctified us in Christ Jesus and called us to be holy. Let us seek God's help to let go of anything that keeps us from living a sanctified and holy life of love for God and our neighbor.

- 1 INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a Servant of God accepts the task to become a light to the nations guiding them along the path of faith.
- 2 INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul first reminds the people that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus. He recognizes that they have been "sanctified in Christ Jesus," but he will also make them face their shortcomings.
- 3 INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, John the Baptist reveals and bears witness to Jesus as both the Lamb of God and the Son of God. He will take away the sin of the world.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For the church, that it may be a light to the nations extending God's love to the ends of the earth,
- 2) For the guidance of the Holy Spirit upon the electoral process of our nation throughout the coming year and for wisdom for all who serve as civic leaders throughout the world,
- 3) For all who suffer because of war, violence and natural disasters, and for a respect for all human life from conception to natural death,
- 4) For the sick, especially among our loved ones, relatives, neighbors and friends,
- 5) For the courage to say "yes" on the part of those who are called by God to vocations of service, self-sacrifice and love,

January 27, 2008—3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

INTRODUCTION TO PENITENTIAL RITE: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" This call, which is the core of Jesus' message in the gospel, demands constant conversion in the lives of his faithful followers. May we experience his call afresh today.

- 1 INTRODUCTION:** In the first reading, a prophet sees a wonderful transformation taking place. Lands once poor and oppressed will enjoy the bounty of the Lord.
- 2 INTRODUCTION:** In the second reading, Paul urges the community to be united in mind and purpose. The people must dedicate themselves to Christ crucified.
- 3 INTRODUCTION:** In the Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming the presence of the kingdom of heaven. He calls others to follow him as disciples and share in the spreading of the Good News.

GENERAL INTERCESSIONS

- 1) For our parish; in thanksgiving for the communion we share in Christ,
- 2) That we may repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,
- 3) May our communion in Christ enable us to be honest with ourselves,
- 4) May we grow in appreciation of the cross in our lives,
- 5) That those called to follow Jesus in service to the church may respond generously,



Homily Helps

Mary,
Mother of God
January 1, 2008
Annual readings
Lectionary #18

Exegesis: G: Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB
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Exegesis of the 1st reading, Nm 6:22-27

In the opening chapters of Nm God prepares the people of Israel to leave Sinai and proceed to the promised land. The Israelites were encamped at the base of God's mountain for nearly an entire year. There they entered into a covenant relationship with God and there God gave them detailed instructions on how to conduct themselves as God's special people.

1) *A beginning.* Now expectations run high as the time draws closer for the people to set out on their journey to the promised land. Already a census has been conducted (hence the name of this book) and the people have received details about the order of the march as God leads them to Canaan. The people will soon take what should be the final steps to the land of the patriarchs. The long years of oppression in Egypt should now be a distant memory. That, at least, is what should happen. But as successive chapters reveal, the people will struggle to put their trust in God and move forward. Out of fear of the unknown they will constantly be tempted to look back at Egypt as a place that was at least familiar to them.

2) *A blessing.* But in this reading all the focus is on the positive. The blessing Aaron and his sons are privileged to give expresses just how gracious and attentive God is toward the people as the journey begins. The people enjoy all the advantages of a close relationship with God.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Gal 4:4-7

1) *"Born of a woman."* The emphasis is on the Son's becoming a human being. Jesus' Mother had an important and intimate role in the incarnation.

2) *"Abba, Father!"* God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. Therefore, we are able to recognize Jesus' Father as our Father. Thus we might say that the Mother of Jesus also has a special relationship with all the children of God.

Exegesis of the 3rd reading, Lk 2:16-21

The long awaited advent of the Messiah and Lord did not come in the expected form of a mighty warrior miraculously sailing in on a white cloud prepared for battle and determined to liberate the chosen people from their oppressors. The Messiah and Lord came in the form of an infant born in ordinary surroundings to common parents on a trip taking care of the business of the day. The first people to know that this event had taken place were shepherds, who were always placed on the lower rungs of social acceptability. The whole event emphasizes how God brings about extraordinary things in and through ordinary people

1) *Mystery.* It is the shepherds who go and tell Mary and Joseph and whoever else was there the angelic news that they had just become parents of the Messiah and Lord. Even though this information was given earlier to Mary at the annunciation by the angel Gabriel, this passage does not seem to take that into consideration. It is indeed news and it is amazing (Lk 2:16-18). We are told that Mary kept all these things and reflected on them in her heart (Lk 2:19). In other words the meaning of this great event took time and reflection to grasp, even on the part of Mary. She might have been the source of some of these stories as some years later she reflected back on their meaning.

2) *Naming.* According to typical Jewish practice Jesus was circumcised and named when eight days were completed (Lk 2:21). For the Jewish community circumcision came to symbolize the covenant that existed between God and Israel. When a male child was circumcised, he was incorporated into the people of God and became a son of the covenant. The child is named *Jesus* which means "YHWH saves." This symbolizes what the entire life and ministry of this newborn child will mean for Israel. With the birth, circumcision and naming of both John the Baptist and Jesus, the stage is now set for a whole new drama of salvation to unfold. There will be many more things for Mary to keep and reflect on in her heart!

PURPOSE: On this 41st World Day of Peace, to follow Mary's example as a peacemaker.

SUMMARY: Mary shows us how to be genuine peacemakers.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** [Homilist might consider using a three-ring binder containing several blank pages as a demonstration of what January 1 can mean.] The year 2008 is still fresh. Most of us have not yet made any terribly significant decisions this year, except to start it by joining in the celebration of the Eucharist!

In one sense, each day in 2008 is like a blank page in a notebook; we do not choose all the things that will happen to us this year, but we will choose how to respond to them. We will also initiate a certain number of decisions among our friends, relatives and coworkers. And they will choose how to respond to our actions.

When December 31, 2008 rolls around, what will we have written on the various pages of our life this year? In the next 365 days, will we have responded any more generously to God's grace than we are doing at this moment?

B) **APPLICATION** Jesus brings a peace based on God's love and care for each person. No one represents that peace better than Mary, the mother of Jesus and the mother of the church.

1) When Mary is confused, she prays, pondering where God is within the events of her life.

- a) Mary didn't get a AAA Trip Tik, describing how her life, Jesus' life and Joseph's life would unfold, what challenges and joys awaited her.
- b) In today's Gospel, we hear that Mary reflected on the events of her life, that she pondered them and prayed over them.
- c) Only such prayer and reflection enabled her to stay the course of what God asked of her throughout her life.
- d) Mary's faith at the death of Jesus is not the same as when he was born. Her faith at the end of her life was not the same as on the day that she told the Archangel Gabriel, "May it be done to me according to your word." She shows all believers what it means to grow in faith.

2) Mary's actions flowed out of her prayer.

- a) She chose to go to the wedding feast of Cana and ended up playing a crucial role in Jesus' first miracle.
- b) She chose to stand at the foot of Jesus' cross, even when she did not fully understand what God was doing.
- c) She chose to remain united in prayer with the apostles between Jesus' ascension into heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. She witnessed to the risen Jesus as others preached the Good News in far-away lands.
- d) Her life was a continual reminder of today's first reading—that God blesses us continuously and offers us God's peace. That peace is complete; it connects us to our deepest roots and thus to each other.

3) 2008 will have its share of heartaches and joys. Mary helps us deal with both.

- a) Today we suspect only a few items in each category.
- b) Like Mary's prayer, ours will be both communal and personal. We pray at Mass and in other public situations, but we also pray privately, turning over the events of our lives and trying to see God's action within them.
- c) Our prayer is not a retreat from action but rather a preparation for it.
- d) If Mary were living in our society, what injustices would attract her attention? What concrete actions might she take? What organizations might she join? What are we doing to promote peace?

C) **TRANSITION TO THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST** In every Eucharist, God affirms us as people made in the divine image and likeness, helping us live in a way that reflects that dignity. In time, the Eucharist was part of how Mary grew as a peacemaker. It can help us grow in that direction also—if we allow it, if we cooperate with and share the grace offered here.

(Pat McCloskey, O.F.M.)



Homily Helps

Epiphany
January 6, 2008
Annual readings
Lectionary #20

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Exegesis of the 1st reading, Is 60:1-6

In an oracle just before this reading Isaiah spoke about the restoration that comes when people turn away from sin and seek the Lord. Now the prophet announces that it is time for the people of Jerusalem to rise to their feet and witness the wonderful transformation God has in store for them.

1) *Divine light.* In the midst of a world where darkness and heavy clouds still prevail, Isaiah sees Jerusalem bathed in light and glory. Both elements are associated with God's presence throughout the Bible. Light was the very first of God's creations. Glory is typically associated with the things God does for salvation. When, for example, Isaiah was privileged to witness the proceedings of the heavenly court, he heard the seraphim declaring the earth to be full of God's glory. Succeeding oracles give evidence of all that God did to advance the plan of salvation. Now Isaiah speaks of glory again. This time it is associated with the salvation of the nations.

2) *Radiant people.* With God's chosen people at last focused on their true purpose in life, they reflect the light of God. Its brilliance serves as a beacon of light beckoning all the nations of the world to make their way to the Holy City. They come to give praise to God for all God has done for them. By land and sea wealth pours into the city, not to enrich its citizens but to give thanks to God. Gold and frankincense are items typically associated with the rituals of the temple.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Eph 3:2-3, 5-6

1) *Stewardship.* Paul sees himself as a proclaimer and conveyor of God's grace. His task is to announce to the people the mystery made known to him by revelation.

2) *The mystery.* The OT had many hints of God's intentions for all people. The story of creation reminds us that all human beings are fashioned in God's image. The story of Abraham tells us that all people would be blessed in his name. In Christ the mystery is revealed in its totality. Jews and gentiles are "members of the same body, and copartners in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

Exegesis of the 3rd reading, Mt 2:1-12

The story of the magi who come from the East to pay homage to the newborn infant Jesus is the gospel passage traditionally associated with the liturgical feast of the Epiphany. The overall thrust of the story is to point out that the insiders did not know about or accept Jesus as the long awaited Messiah. It was outsiders, Persian astrologers, who mysteriously knew about Jesus and made the long trip to pay him homage. This paradigm of being rejected by the insiders and accepted by the outsiders will predominate throughout Mt.

1) *The star.* The magi learned about the birth of Jesus, the newborn king of the Jews, through the presence of a star. Since the magi were astrologers they would be people well-versed in the study of astrological phenomena. Even in Judaism there was a tradition of a guiding star connected with the hoped for Messiah (Nm 24:17). King Herod, the current king of the Jews, was taken by surprise both by the presence of the magi and by their news. He did not even know where the Messiah was to be born and thus had to consult his advisors (Mt 2:1-6). Herod attempts to manipulate the magi into giving him vital information so that he could have the infant Jesus killed and thus eliminate a rival contender to the throne (Mt 2:7-8).

2) *The gifts.* While Herod wants to kill Jesus, the magi want to pay him homage as the Messiah. The star continues to lead them where they need to go. Upon finding the child Jesus and his parents the magi present gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These three gifts have been the foundation for thinking that there must have been three magi. Gold was a gift fit for a king. Frankincense and myrrh were very fragrant incense and oil used in the worship of the Lord in the temple. Ironically, frankincense and myrrh were also used at funerals. The symbolism here is not only pointing to Jesus the Messiah as the king of the Jews but also to his future death (Mt 2:9-11). The magi, having found and manifested the newborn messianic king of the Jews, return home untouched by Herod and his subversive plot (Mt 2:12).

PURPOSE: To identify with the magi who gave treasured gifts of faith and love.

SUMMARY: Jesus reveals himself to us as the king of all nations and of every heart.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** In his classic Christmas story, “The Gift of the Magi,” O. Henry introduces us to a pinch-poor couple named Jim and Della who scrape by on a budget of \$20 a week. Each has one prized possession. His is his grandfather’s gold watch. Hers is her knee-length brown hair. Between them, they have \$1.87 to spend on their mutual gifts. But love finds a way. Della secretly sells her gorgeous tresses to a wigmaker, and Jim sells his gold watch. Ironically, she buys him a platinum watch chain. He buys her a set of tortoise-shell combs. Each has given his or her all. O. Henry concludes: “Of all who give and receive gifts, such as these are the wisest. They are the magi.”

B) **APPLICATION** Today we celebrate the Epiphany or revelation of Jesus to the gentiles who are represented by the magi from the East. These three wise men, who were probably Persian astrologers, followed a star to find the newborn king of the Jews. Their gifts were the best they had to offer and they expected nothing in return. The story of the magi, who, as O. Henry wrote, “invented the art of giving Christmas presents,” can be a revelation to us about loving others as God loves us.

1) The magi took a long and arduous journey to find Jesus.

- a) When the wise men set out from Persia, they had no idea that their journey would encompass over a thousand miles and would require them to be on the road for about three months. They set no limits on how far they would travel or how long they would be willing to plod along atop their sturdy camels.
- b) Although the three gifts suggest that there were three magi, they were no doubt accompanied by a caravan of fellow seekers who were ready to go the distance to find the infant king their hearts sought.
- c) We too set out together during each new Advent and Christmas season to find Jesus in a deeper way than we have yet experienced him. Whatever obstacles or discomforts life sets in our path, we are not deterred from the goal of encountering the Son of God and King of Hearts.

2) The magi followed a star which they recognized as a divine light.

- a) In the first biblical story of creation, God’s initial pronouncement is, “Let there be light.” The wise men recognized that a particular star shone with a divine light that would unfailingly guide them.
- b) In his homily for Epiphany 2002, Pope John Paul II asked, “Who does not feel the need for a ‘star’ to guide him [her] on his [her] earthly journey?”
- c) Each of us feels that need and seeks a symbolic star either in a wise person, a Scripture reading, a memorable dream, an inspired story, or in steady prayer for guidance. Like the magi, we have to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to whatever star the Holy Spirit provides.

3) The magi gave their most treasured gifts and sought nothing in return.

- a) To the young infant the magi presented gifts literally fit for a king. Gold, frankincense and myrrh signified their recognition that Jesus was a King, not only of the Jews, but of all nations.
- b) When Jim and Della in O. Henry’s story presented their gifts of a costly watch chain and decorative combs, they did so at the cost of their most valued possessions. They saw in each other a reflection of the divine and they gave all that love had to give.
- c) Each of us is called upon to give our most treasured gifts of time and attention, care and concern, support and respect to those most in need of them—whether they be our children or our ailing elders, our neighbors or destitute strangers, our friends or unjust enemies. The King of Hearts requires it of us.

C) **CONCLUSION** Jesus reveals himself once again today as the one who reigns over all nations and over every heart as the God of love, the Holy Infant who wishes ever to be sought and found.

D) **TRANSITION TO THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST** As Christians who love wisely and well, we are the magi. Now we approach the altar to offer our most treasured gift of self and to receive the greatest gift of all, God’s own beloved Son.

(Gloria Hutchinson)



Homily Helps

Baptism of
The Lord
January 13, 2008
Series A readings
Lectionary #21

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Exegesis of the 1st reading, Is 42:1-4, 6-7

God identifies only certain figures in the Bible as “my servant.” Among them are Moses (Nm 12:7), David (2 Sm 3:18), and Job. In the oracles of Isaiah God has already given this title to the prophet himself (20:3), to the loyal Eliakim (22:20), and to Jacob/Israel representing the faithful people who endured the exile in Babylon (41:8). In this first of the so-called Servant Songs of Is the title “my servant” most likely refers to this faithful people also, although some would say it refers to the prophet alone, or another worthy figure from Israel’s history.

1) *Chosen.* God has chosen this Servant for a very important task. But the Servant will accomplish this task in a distinctive way. It will not be through the methods typically associated with prophecy: crying out in the street or raising a voice in the marketplace. The Servant will be meek and compassionate. As this oracle declares, he will not break any reed already bruised or quench any wick already smoldering. It seems the Servant will carry out God’s will by a suffering endured out of loyalty to God.

2) *Justice.* The Servant’s specific task is to introduce justice into the world. This was precisely what God was looking for all along from the people of Israel as expressed so memorably in Song of the Vineyard of Is 5. At last nations will learn to value the standards of heaven. They will no longer be blinded or shackled by the limited and hurtful agendas of the world.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, Acts 10:34-38

1) *Trinity.* Though it took some three centuries to formulate the mystery of the Trinity, Acts provides a basis for its development. It is God the Father who anointed Jesus with the Spirit at his baptism.

2) *Mission.* The result is that Jesus entered into his mission. “He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil.”

Exegesis of the 3rd reading, Mt 3:13-17

The baptism of Jesus by John is one of the few things that almost all NT scholars agree is a historical fact. It raises more questions than it provides answers. It would have been much easier for the evangelists to ignore the story than to include it. It is included because it really happened. The temptation is to attempt to interpret this event from a psychological point of view, thereby drawing conclusions as to why Jesus was baptized, what he was thinking, what he was feeling. There is no textual evidence that allows us to address any of those issues. As the event is now narrated in the Gospel, its meaning must be theological not psychological or personal.

1) *Baptism.* Unlike Mk, Mt portrays John as knowing full well who Jesus is when he comes for baptism. Mt clearly gives John a secondary role in relation to Jesus. John appears surprised, if not shocked, that Jesus has approached him for baptism (Mt 3:13-14). The reason Jesus gives for undergoing a baptism by John is a theological one and reflects the theology of Mt. The purpose is so that John and Jesus can “fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:15). In Mt’s theology this phrase means that they are doing the revealed will of God. Note carefully that there is no mention here of the forgiveness of sins. There is no indication that Jesus is serving as a model for the necessity of Christian baptism.

2) *Revelation.* The climax of Jesus’ baptism is the coming of the Holy Spirit to anoint Jesus for his messianic mission. This is followed by an utterance from the divine voice revealing that Jesus is the Son of God (Mt 3:16-17). The voice from heaven quotes a combination of Ps 2:7 and Is 42:1. Jesus is God’s Son as well as God’s unique Servant. Jesus’ baptism serves as a commissioning event whereby God grants him what he will need to carry out his ministry and do God’s revealed will. John the Baptist will fade into the background. Even though he knows who Jesus is, John is never portrayed by Mt as becoming a disciple of Jesus. From this point on, the focus will be on Jesus and his ministry as God’s Son and beloved Servant.

PURPOSE: To renew people's understanding of their own baptism by highlighting the likenesses between the baptism of the Lord and their own.

SUMMARY: There are two elements in Jesus' baptism that are present in our own baptism: first, that God holds each of us with loving hands; second, that we receive the power of the Spirit even as did Jesus.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** It was not your usual Baptism. No nervous godparents on the sidelines, no long lace dress that had belonged to great-grandfather, no silver mug newly initialed. As the water was poured, the candidate did not emit the first of a series of yells that would echo through the church. Instead of a font the place of Baptism was a mud-choked river. O yes, there were some extraordinary events. And that tempts us to set Jesus' baptism aside as unique. Nothing remarkable at our baptism, was it? Nothing out of the ordinary?

B) **APPLICATION** Or was it? On the contrary, the same Spirit who appeared at Jesus' baptism came down upon us at our baptism. God said to each of us what he said then: "You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased." We are God's children by grace, not by nature, but through our baptism we are made sisters and brothers of Jesus. We are baptized into his life, death and resurrection; we are anointed with the self-same Spirit who anointed him at Galilee. God gives us through our adoption at holy baptism the same gifts as those received by Jesus, two great gifts: the first, God holds us with loving hands; the second, we receive the power of the Spirit.

1) **What does it mean to be held in the loving hands of God?** Well, first, what it does not mean! Sometimes people see prosperity or full health or safety in time of danger as signs of God's special favor. What do the television preachers say? "Convert to the Lord and double your income! Send an offering and be cured of your ills!"

Isaiah knew what it means to be God's favored one: "I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations." To be held in God's hands is to be given to the world. The candle lighted for us is to shine through us into the shadows of the *whole* wounded world. There will be times for all of us when we will be like Jesus on the cross when he cried out that he had been forsaken. Wherever their Calvary may be, from factory floor to cancer ward, people will sometimes say they felt held by God *through us*, as we are with Jesus on our own Calvary. The first gift given at our baptism: *God holds us with loving hands*.

2) **The second gift that comes to us? God pours out upon us the power of the Spirit.** Isaiah tells us that the chosen servant will not trample the defenseless and already wounded. Rather, such a one will faithfully bring forth justice, opening the eyes of the blind and freeing prisoners. The Spirit's power *is* power, not to hurt or dominate, but to heal and to set free.

3) **I ask myself: how can I be more responsive to that baptismal becoming that began so many years ago?** Is baptism something automatic, done once long ago and now over, like a vaccination? Or is it still happening, even now, each time I offer myself for the lifting up of God's people? Is my own forgiving heart a mirror of the forgiveness I have received in my own baptism?

C) **CONCLUSION** In one of Flannery O'Connor's wonderful short stories, called "The River," Bevel, the five-year-old son of uncaring, alcoholic parents, is taken to the river by his babysitter to be baptized by a traveling preacher. In that scene the author catches the human and redemptive promise given in baptism:

"Have you ever been baptized?" the preacher asked.

"What's that?" [Bevel] murmured.

"If I baptize you," the preacher said, "you'll be able to go to the kingdom of Christ. You'll be washed in the river of suffering, son, and you'll go by the deep river of life. Do you want that?"

"Yes," the child said, and thought, I won't go back to the apartment then, I'll go under the river. "You won't be the same again," the preacher said. "You'll count." He held him under while he said the words of baptism and then he jerked him up again and looked sternly at the gasping child.

Bevel's eyes were dark and dilated. "You count now," the preacher said. You didn't even count before!"

The preacher's words, "You count now," were said to every one of us on the day of our baptism. The challenge before us is to make that baptism a reality every day of our lives. If each of us now "counts," then "counting" is both a gift and a responsibility. "This is my beloved," God says to you and to me, "my chosen one with whom I am pleased."

D) **TRANSITION TO THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST** As we gather at God's table, resolve to live your baptism, not as a long-ago ritual but as an event to be made real each day of our lives.

(Rev. Joseph W. Goetz)



Homily Helps

2nd Sunday
in Ordinary Time
January 20, 2008
Series A readings
Lectionary #64

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Exegesis of the 1st reading, Is 49:3, 5-6

This is one of four celebrated Servant Songs within the body of oracles attributed to a prophet referred to as Second Isaiah for the simple reason that his historical identity is unknown. The oracles of this Servant, who achieves so much in God's name, contrast sharply with oracles in the book lampooning the statues of false gods that have no power to achieve anything. This Servant of God probably represents the ideal Israel that emerged from the exile so much wiser about the things of God and ready to assume its role as a model of faith.

1) *From the womb.* The Servant was called to this important work from the womb. This phrase is particularly significant in a book emphasizing children as signs from God for the people. Thus the Servant joins other children in this book—Immanuel, Shear-jashub as well as other children of Isaiah, and a child born in the line of David—chosen by God to show the people the way that leads to faith. The Servant willingly accepts the God-given task to guide the people back to God.

2) *For the nations.* God expands the Servant's mission to include nations beyond the boundaries of Israel. The light of the Servant's message must reach to the ends of the earth. God's plan of salvation has a universal scope. The Servant is a model of faith for all to see and emulate.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, 1 Cor 1:1-3

1) *Paul the apostle.* Great as Paul is, he almost always has a companion. Here it is Sosthenes, perhaps the person mentioned in Acts 18:17, but we really know nothing about him.

2) *The Corinthians.* Though Paul sees the people as "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy," they are often stubborn, smug and proud. Paul is realistic in recognizing the good and bad in this community.

Exegesis of the 3rd reading, Jn 1:29-34

1) *Jesus the Lamb of God.* The primary role of John the Baptist in the Gospel of Jn is to bear witness to Jesus as the Son of God. That is clearly what is going on in this passage. First, John identifies Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). Lamb imagery is very important in Jn. It brings with it reference to the paschal lamb of Ex 12 as well as the apocalyptic lamb of Rev 5—7. The nuance that is important here, however, comes from the reference to taking away the sin of the world. What John is here revealing is that Jesus' death will be a sacrificial death undertaken for the sake of others. John is bearing witness to the atonement of Jesus. It also clearly reminds one of the activity of the Suffering Servant of Is 53:6.

2) *Jesus the Son of God.* Jesus came before John because Jesus and God had a Father-Son relationship before the creation of the world, as the prologue states (pre-existence). The purpose of John's baptizing activity was to reveal the true identity of Jesus. It was not for the forgiveness of sin (Jn 1:30-31). John is portrayed as having no previous knowledge of Jesus. The key for recognition was to be the Spirit in the form of a dove. Whomever that Spirit in the form of a dove came upon and remained with was the one to whom John was to bear witness (Jn 1:32-33). The word "remain" is very important for John. It implies a mutual indwelling that has important theological significance.

Because of these signs John can bear witness that Jesus is the Son of God (Jn 1:34). While John baptized with water, Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. That is not a quantitative statement implying the need for two kinds of baptisms. It is a qualitative statement indicating that, since Jesus is the Son of God anointed by the Holy Spirit, his ministry will be superior to that of John. Jesus is portrayed in Jn's Gospel as engaging in baptizing others. However, the reference to baptizing with the Holy Spirit extends to the whole of Jesus' ministry and not just one activity.

PURPOSE: To proclaim the strength of our faith foundation and to encourage people to continue to build on that foundation.

SUMMARY: Foretold by Isaiah and proclaimed by Paul, Christ will always be the true foundation of our life with God. All around us, members of the church are laying the foundation of faith and challenge us to continue to do so as well.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** A year from today, the people of the United States will inaugurate a new president. No one has yet cast a ballot for whoever that person will be. But for many months people have been laying the foundations of the election campaigns of one or another candidate. Often those campaigns involve “advance teams” who prepare for the appearance of a candidate in a city by making certain that a lively and enthusiastic crowd will be on hand for the candidates’ speeches. John the Baptist spent months in the wilderness of Judea laying the foundations for the arrival of a very different kind of leader than “the next President of the United States.” With the Holy Spirit, John formed an advance team to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

B) **APPLICATION** John had baptized and baptized and baptized, knowing all along that his was not the final baptism. His baptism was intended to lead to something greater. John knew that God was sending Another, the real source of life, the true leader of God’s people. John laid a great foundation by pointing to the One who was to be the savior, rather than claiming credit for himself.

1) Paul began his first letter to the people of Corinth by reminding them that Christ will always be the real foundation of their faith.

- a) Paul knew the people of Corinth. His preaching of the gospel had called them, not always successfully, to conversion.
- b) Paul built that foundation because he was “called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.”
- c) God the Father has called us today, no less than Paul was called, to be the people who continue to build on the foundation of faith in Christ which we have received.

2) That foundation of faith in Christ has come to us in many different ways.

- a) For some, the foundation was laid in Catholic homes by parents and grandparents, aunts, uncles and others who showed us what it meant to be people of faith.
- b) For others, the foundation may have included teachers, religious sisters, brothers or priests.

3) When Isaiah said, “I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth,” he spoke to us.

- a) We honor the holy people whom we have known by continuing to build on the foundation entrusted to us.
- b) Last week, when we celebrated the baptism of Jesus, we were prompted to realize that even if baptism came to us as children, we are called to make an adult choice to live out our baptism.

4) We build up the church in many ways as we seek to share the light God has given each of us.

- a) Some build the church as lectors, musicians or through other ministries.
- b) Some work behind the scenes or pass on the faith as catechists for youth or as members of an RCIA team.
- c) Many people donate lots of time and talent and no little part of their earthly treasure to keep alive the faith we have received.

5) As one privileged to see God gathering people together in prayer from “up front,” let me thank you for what you do to live out your baptismal calling.

- a) When you gather in prayer each week, you not only strengthen your own faith, you lay a faith foundation for others by your example.
- b) The greater our concern for each other, the stronger our faith foundation will be.

C) **CONCLUSION** What a great blessing it is to know that, as John proclaimed Jesus, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” our faith foundation is rock solid. Sometimes our foundations may seem lashed by storms or shaken by upheavals, but in Christ, the Son of God, they are secure. We can continue to build, to live a life of faith through our actions and our words. We are called to continue to build both for all of those around us now and for all of those who will someday come after us.

D) **TRANSITION TO THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST** John recognized Jesus through the coming of the Spirit at his baptism. We recognize Christ among us in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. May gathering around this table always fill us with an awareness of the grace and peace that come to us from God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Jack Clark Robinson, O.F.M.)



Homily Helps

3rd Sunday
in Ordinary Time
January 27, 2008
Series A readings
Lectionary #67

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Exegesis of the 1st reading, Is 8:23—9:3

Throughout his service to God as a prophet Isaiah had to contend with monarchs who refused to put trust in God. They turned instead to the conventional resources of the day. Isaiah dismisses such resources as “mediums and fortune-tellers” making chirping sounds or muttering things unintelligible (Is 8:19). Such weak advice eventually led to invasion by an enemy.

1) *Light*. This reading begins with the sad news that the northern territories of Zebulun and Naphtali were overtaken. It happened when the mighty empire of Assyria brought its armies into northern Israel to regain control of that important segment of land along the corridor between Assyria and Egypt. Isaiah probably refers to these places by their traditional names of Zebulun and Naphtali to bring to mind the ideal days of Joshua when the twelve tribes first settled in the promised land. How much things had changed by Isaiah’s time! But the prophet also looks forward to the restoration God will bring about. The light of faith will scatter the darkness of sin and ignorance.

2) *Plenty*. God’s restoration of Israel will bring new life to the land. The turmoil of war leaves no time for planting and working the fields. But when God delivers them from the influence of their enemies, the people will enjoy long-lasting peace and once again be able to enjoy the milk and honey of the promised land.

Exegesis of the 2nd reading, 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17

1) *Christ crucified* is key to Paul’s thought in 1 Cor and throughout his letters. When people fail to make this mystery the heart of their faith and life, they will be at odds with one another and break into factions.

2) *Paul mirrors this mystery* when he avoids fancy rhetoric and preaches the gospel in its stark simplicity. He makes it his point to highlight Christ and downplay the human instruments who minister to the people.

Exegesis of the 3rd reading, Mt 4:12-23

1) *Prophecy fulfilled*. According to both Mt and Mk, Jesus does not begin his ministry until after the arrest of John the Baptist. He chooses to begin his

ministry in Galilee, locating himself in the town of Capernaum. As he does throughout the Gospel, Matthew declares that this is done to fulfill an OT prophecy (Mt 4:12-16). He is probably thinking of Is 8:23—9:2 where the contrast between darkness and light is made.

2) *Repentance and the kingdom of heaven*. The core of Jesus’ message is: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17). For Mt the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is equal to Mk’s “kingdom of God.” While John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of the messianic age, Jesus radicalizes that message by declaring that it has indeed arrived and is present in the here and now. While it is not yet in its fullest manifestation, the kingdom of heaven has been actualized with the presence and preaching of Jesus who inaugurates the messianic age. Everything that Jesus teaches must be understood within the context of the presence of the kingdom of heaven. The presence of this new reality demands a change in the way those who believe in it live. Jesus addresses this change by proclaiming the need to repent. Repent does not mean feeling sorrow and remorse for wrong-doing. It means to radically reorient one’s life. If one was going north, then repent and go south. That is how radical the reorientation must be.

3) *Disciples*. Jesus’ ministry is not to be carried out alone. He calls disciples, followers, to share in the spreading of the Good News. None of the people Jesus chose to be his disciples needed a job. None were looking for a change of occupation and certainly none were looking for Jesus. That makes the dynamic of his call and their response all the more mysterious. Jesus simply calls them to assist him in fishing for people and they follow him immediately, no questions asked (Mt 4:18-22). Obviously it is not because of need or knowledge that they follow Jesus. The attraction goes much deeper than that and will not be fully realized until after his death and resurrection. Mt reports that the Galilean ministry was successful and consisted of teaching, preaching the gospel and healing (Mt 4:23-24).

PURPOSE: To challenge the faithful participants to accept that repentance is the condition for following Jesus.

SUMMARY: Our lives must be radically oriented to Jesus and the kingdom of heaven which Jesus proclaims is in our midst.

A) **ATTENTION-GETTER** Howard Storm, an atheist, was a professor in the art department at Northern Kentucky University. While traveling in France, he experienced severe abdominal pain, went to a hospital where he was diagnosed as having a ruptured appendix. Before surgery could begin, he flatlined from the aggressive infection. In his book entitled *My Descent into Death: A Second Chance at Life*, he recalls his brush with death and journey into another world that was, at first, dark and ugly, but then light and filled with radiant angels. Awaking after surgery, he spoke of a feeling of unimaginable love. He repeatedly told his astonished wife that "Love is all that matters." Those words were not in any way what she expected to hear from him. Howard was no longer an atheist; he had encountered God and now felt called to radically rethink his life's orientation. Returning to the United States, he investigated the world religions, felt called to be baptized a Christian and was ordained a minister. He rejoiced to have an opportunity to serve as a missionary in Belize. He is a gifted speaker and writer.

Sr. Teresa, a teacher, was on a train going to Darjeeling when she heard a voice telling her to commit her life to serving the poorest of the poor. Mother Teresa reoriented herself to serve the least of our sisters and brothers dying on the back streets of Calcutta. Her faithfulness to the call is honored by the church enlisting her among the Blessed.

B) **APPLICATION** "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" is the core of the gospel message. The reign of God is within us. The words repent and repentance occur no less than 50 times in the New Testament. Repentance is the condition for following Jesus. That the kingdom is at hand demands a change in the way of life for those who believe in it. Repent in the Scripture does not mean feeling sorrow and remorse for wrong doing. It means to radically rethink one's life orientation. Peter and Paul, James and John left their boats and their previous way of life to become fishers of men and women. Howard Storm and Mother Teresa experienced such a radical reorientation of their lives.

- 1) **What attracts you to Jesus?** Is Jesus and the kingdom of heaven, the communion of saints, the primary orientation of your life? God is jealous and will not tolerate other gods. Is today's celebration calling you to repent, to move from the darkness of denial into the light of God's love? Ask yourself these questions. "Am I addicted to alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography or sex? Am I a workaholic at the expense of my spouse and family? Do I live up to my marriage commitment to love and honor my spouse every day? Do I spend time with my children, giving them the time and good example they need? Do I seek justice in my professional and political life? What do I do to uphold the dignity of the poor, the unemployed or underemployed, the elderly and those who are sick? Am I a faithful steward of my time, talent and treasure?" If these questions aren't scratching where you're itching, no doubt you know the questions you need to face. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!
- 2) **"Is Christ divided?"** Paul is calling the Corinthian Christians back to the centrality of Jesus in their life as church. He knows that their controversies are drawing them away from their living in communion with the risen Lord and one another. Parishioners sometimes are divided over liturgical styles, scriptural or theological positions, forms of devotion and practice. We must remember that we are all members of the one Body of Christ. Perhaps, we need to radically rethink the orientation of our parish. Our communion in Christ requires constant, honest, loving dialogue to understand and respect one another. It's not easy, but let's join Paul in seeking, that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

C) **TRANSITION TO THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST** As the gifts are brought to the table, let us commit ourselves to being in communion with the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(Harry J. Meyer)