

Homily for Tuesday in Holy Week, April 7, 2020

The Holy Eucharist

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Year A: Isaiah 49:1–6; Psalm 71:1–12; John 12:37–50\**

Saint Mary's Lectionary Project was started by Father Matthew Mead, when he served here over a decade ago now. Monday through Friday, our congregations for the daily 12:10 Mass include many people who are on a break from their jobs. Very early on, we started to shorten appointed psalms and, when appropriate, appointed lessons. We marked the changes with an asterisk in the footer appointed scriptures were given.

Two or more years ago, I began to include a footnote to explain what we had done when the one of the lessons was changed. Today's appointed gospel lesson, the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry in John, omits three verses. We included them. They are an example of textual dishonesty that, in my opinion, happens far too often in our Eucharistic lectionaries.

Today the gospel begins, "Though Jesus had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him; it was that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been

revealed?”<sup>1</sup>—the beginning of God’s words to the prophet Isaiah, after God says, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then Isaiah says, “Here am I. Send me.” That’s not the whole passage in Isaiah; the evangelist wanted us to hear what else Isaiah said. This is a literal translation, that of Raymond Brown, of the officially omitted verses from today’s gospel:

The reason they could not believe was that, as Isaiah said elsewhere, “He has blinded their eyes, and numbed their [hearts], for fear they might see with their eyes and perceive with their [hearts] and so [turn themselves] and I shall heal them. Isaiah spoke these words because he had seen his”—that is, Jesus’—“glory, and it was of him”—Jesus—“that he”—Isaiah—“spoke.”<sup>2</sup>

Father Brown, in his commentary on this gospel, draws our attention to the culture of the time it was written. The Greek word “heart” is usually translated as “mind” because in the first century the heart was thought to be the center of a person’s physical and mental life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 12:37–38.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible 29, 29A (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966, 1970), I:483, with the notes on 483 and 484.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 484.

At the beginning of John’s gospel, in the prologue, we read, “He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.”<sup>4</sup> Why this happened, is an issue that the four evangelists and Paul wrestle with.

I am not an expert on a determinism, a philosophical position that, in the words of the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, “leaves no room for the exercise of free will.”<sup>5</sup> But I do know I am not a philosophical determinist.

Then there’s the theological quagmire of “Predestinarianism”<sup>6</sup>—predestination—no human freewill; God has already determined your eternity before you were born.<sup>7</sup> I don’t believe in predestination either.

I think it’s important to be as honest as we are able about what we know and don’t know about the mystery of our own relationships with God, not to mention the ground of relationship we share by faith, by the bread we share together (when we can) and the cup we share (again, when we can).

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<sup>4</sup> John 1:11.

<sup>5</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. “Determinism,” 395.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “Predestinarianism,” 1117.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v., “Predestination.”

Moses was able to turn God’s wrath away from the destruction of those he led out of slavery.<sup>8</sup> The story of the golden calf concludes with these words, “And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people.”<sup>9</sup>

I conclude with words from the First Letter to Timothy, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, . . . so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Exodus 32:7–14.

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 32:14.