

Exodus 20:1-17. ¹

Preliminary Remarks

Because this passage, the Decalogue, forms such a large part of our tradition, my remarks are more lengthy than usual. I plan to break them into two parts. In order to do this, I will not comment on the Psalm this week.

1. **Jim Owen Proclaims the First Reading, NAB translation.** All write down words, phrases, images which “resonate.”

2. **Participants share words and images which struck the heart and mind and imagination as they listened.**

There is **no discussion, no questions** except for clarification.

3. Echo The Tradition (Fr. Pat’s Presentation)

There are 2 versions of the 10 commandments in the Bible.

This is the Priestly version, committed to writing about 550 B.C., during the Babylonian Exile.

The other version is in Deuteronomy 5:6- 21, probably put into writing a century or two earlier.

In this presentation, I am not going to go into the detailed meaning of every commandment.

Many Christians tend to think of the 10 Commandments as “eternally valid pure oracles” that dropped from heaven.

The “pure Word of God” untainted by any human admixture.

I am going to challenge that presupposition.

I am not suggesting this is appropriate material for a homily. It might be -- depending on the congregation.

There is a limit to how much background even the best preacher can give from the pulpit.

A homily is not a “bible study.” This “bible study” is something for those who want a bit more.

Perhaps it will foster more respect for the work that preachers do **every week** as we wrestle with the scriptures.

“Ten” “Commandments.” Everybody gets 10, but different traditions number them differently.

Most commentators say there are 13 commandments, if you count them all separately.

The Evangelical tradition considers the commandment against images as a distinct commandment.

We Catholics, along with the Lutherans, consider this as part of the “first” commandment.

The Evangelicals, like Exodus, combine all “coveting” into one commandment.

We Catholics have too many statues to have a separate commandment about images!

We get 10 commandments because, like Deuteronomy, we have two separate commandments against coveting.

In the Jewish tradition the first is: “I am the LORD who brought you out of Egypt . . .”

I once said to Rabbi Kline, “David, that’s not a commandment!”

He answered, “That’s not a problem, we call them *aseret ha-devarim*, literally “The **10 Words**.” Cf. **Decalogue!**²

Interesting Differences

Exodus 20

Deuteronomy 5

Reason for Sabbath Rest

God’s rest after creation (11)

Social-Justice Reason (15)

Status of Wife

Listed with other property (17)³

Listed separately from property (21)

¹ My main resources for this course are: Reginal H. Fuller, *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* (Liturgical Press, 1984); Dianne Bergant, with Richard Fragomeni, *Preaching the New Lectionary: Year B* (Liturgical Press, 1999).

² “Ten Commandments” is not a biblical phrase. I would have to check with a Church Historian to learn where the phrase comes from. Note that the NABRE changes Exod 20:1 from “all these **commandments**” to the more literal “all these **words**.”

³ English translations often obscure this. The NRSV is pretty good: “You shall not **covet** (**tachmod**) your neighbor’s house; you shall not **covet** (**tachmod**) your neighbor’s wife, . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Note the order. First comes “house” in the sense of “household,” then the sacred author lists all of the components of the household, beginning with the neighbor’s wife. By contrast, Deut 5:21 names the wife first, and uses two different verbs: one for the wife, and another verb for the components of the neighbors household. “Neither shall you **covet** (**tachmod**) your neighbor’s wife. Neither shall you **desire** (**titavveh**) your neighbor’s house, . . .” You might also notice that the language is patriarchal. There is no commandment against coveting the neighbor’s **husband** in the Law of Moses!

These differences should caution us against a naïve, fundamentalist approach to the Decalogue.

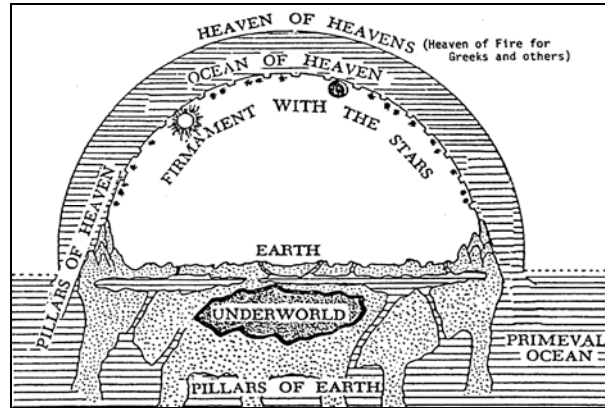
The final editor of the sacred text saw no need to harmonize the two versions.

Reading scripture is a bit like attending a family reunion: You get different versions of stories from different relatives.

OT Cosmos. Reading the short form of the passage can perpetuate an overly-simplistic understanding of the Decalogue. Reading the long form exposes us to some interesting thoughts.

You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in **the waters beneath the earth** (Exod. 20:4 NABRE)

Figure 1. Ancient Conception of the Cosmos



The “waters beneath under the earth” are not what we call “ground water!”

The Decalogue is expressed in terms of a “world-view” most people in the Developed World do not share.

The error of biblical fundamentalists is that they think Genesis 1 describes a round earth orbiting the sun.

It is not just their science that is faulty -- so also is their biblical interpretation.

Command against Adultery

When Moses brought the 10 commandments down from the mountain, there was not a single Israelite who thought

“You shall not commit adultery”

meant that he could have sexual relations only with one woman.

1) It was a polygamous society. The 12 sons of Jacob had 4 mothers. Jacob had 4 wives: Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah.

2) Seeing a prostitute was considered “foolish,” but there is no punishment for it the law of Moses.⁴

The only prohibition is against seeing a “cult prostitute” (Deut 23:17), i.e., one who works for another god/goddess.

Originally this was a “**property** law,” not a “**purity** law.” The commandment meant:

1) an Israelite man could have no relations with another man’s wife.

2) no other man could have relations with his wife.

When Jesus suggested that a man could commit adultery “against his wife,”

the astonished response of his disciples was, “Then it is better not to get married!”

To this day, in the Jewish religion, it is legally impossible for a man to commit adultery **against his wife**.

⁴ In Genesis 38, where Jacob has relations with a harlot (actually with his daughter-in-law Tamar, who disguised herself), nobody, including the inspired narrator, suggests that his action is deserving of any kind of punishment. The narrator records Jacob’s behavior simply as a “matter of fact,” with no suggestion that sin was involved. Consider how different this perspective is from the perspective of current Church teaching, e.g., as expressed in the *Catechism*! Not only Catholics, but other educated Christians are often astonished at how **different** biblical teaching is from the contemporary teaching of their Church. Fundamentalists go through all kinds of mental gymnastics to disguise this fact. Catholic fundamentalism tends to be more magisterial than biblical.

Development of Doctrine. The *Catechism* teaching on the Decalogue, of course, is based on the teaching of Jesus. It also adopts many presuppositions of “Western Civilization,” ultimately influenced by Christian teaching. But the “problem” that this oversimplification causes is two-fold. It presumes that:

- 1) what we believe today is what God’s people has **always** believed.
 - a) A more sophisticated oversimplification is “always believed **since NT times.**”

- 2) no further evolution of human thought can possibly affect God’s “pure word” in the Decalogue.

Such over-simplification is not a problem when most of the laity are peasants, or have only a grammar-school education. Once the laity begins going to college, and even achieving advanced degrees, such oversimplification is problematic. That is, if someone’s knowledge of literature & science is college-level, and the religious learning is grammar-school level, the religious teaching will begin to seem “childish” to them.

What is Culturally Conditioned?

The assumption that husbands cannot commit adultery against their wives?

Most Catholics, even very conservative ones, would agree.

The assumption that keeping “male & female slaves” is acceptable to God? Verse 10 presumes their presence.

About 150 years ago, verses like this were used to justify slavery as “God’s law.”

Today, all by the most conservative Christians would not regard this as “eternally valid truth.”

Does the Decalogue say anything about the morality of trans-gender medical procedures?

Here is an issue that is controversial!

Is it any more controversial than slavery was 150 years ago?

Story: **“We will have to see what Moses said about that.”**

Culturally Conditioned

We never receive the “pure” word of God with no admixture of “human tradition.”

Mistake of the Reformers: attempt to purify the Church simply by eliminating all post-biblical tradition.

The Catholic equivalent: we have the “pure” word of God in magisterial statements, at least in the infallible ones.

The mystery of the Incarnation is: **God is always involved with human “messiness.”**

Yes, we are blessed to inherit an ancient Tradition, a wise Tradition.

But we cannot make that Tradition -- biblical or post-biblical -- into an idol.

We always have to discern the implications of that tradition in the light of the “signs of the times.”

This phrase comes from Pope John XXIII, and was why he called the Second Vatican Council.

An Insight from Jewish Mysticism.⁵ How much of the Decalogue did the LORD actually say?

Some say the first commandment was all that the people heard.

Some say only the first word “I” *anoki*.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel (died 1815) said the people heard only the first letter, Aleph!⁶

Everything else in the Decalogue is mediated by Moses and by later tradition.

4a. Echo the Tradition Again: Questions, Comments, Observations

Break. In view of the importance of the Ten Commandments, I have decided to devote 2 sessions to this reading. We will omit our study of the Psalm today.

⁵ Rabbi Benzion Kaganoff, quoted by Stephen Wylen, *The Seventy Faces of Torah: The Jewish Way of Reading the Sacred Scriptures* (Paulist, 2005), p. 171. See also: Gunther Plaut, “The Decalogue: General Introduction,” in *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, revised edition (New York: Union for Reform Judaism, 2006) 487-488.

⁶ *Aleph* is sometimes called a “silent letter.” In English it is the little catch in your voice that distinguishes “sheets” from “she eats.” Scholars represent it by the ‘ in the scholarly spelling of *anoki*, “I.” We do not need a letter in English for this sound, because we use it only between words. However, Hebrew uses the sound in the middle of words, so Hebrew needs a letter for it.

Exodus 20:1-17, Part 2: Remarks on a Few “Particulars” in the Passage

Verse 2. “You.” Second Person **Singular.**

Verse 5. A **Jealous God.**

Most ancient gods and goddesses did not care who else you worshipped, as long as you worshipped them. YHWH was different. He **did** care! He was like a jealous husband.
 Note that here YHWH does not claim that he is the ONLY God.
 That revelation will not come until about 700 years after Moses (ca. from 1250 to 550 B.C.)

Jewish thought about YHWH went through several phases

YHWH is one of many gods, but he is the **only God** we are allowed to worship.
 YHWH is one of many gods, but he is **more powerful** than other gods, and the only God we are allowed to worship.
 YHWH is the **only God**, and worshipping other gods means worshipping demons, or beings that do not even exist.
 Parts of the Decalogue apparently date back to the earliest phase.

Verse 5. The Sins of the Ancestors -- The LORD remembers these to the 3rd & 4th generation.

- 1) Human Experience. The sins of parents do affect their offspring.
 Consider the effects of: alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, broken homes, . . . on children.
 No great amount of “faith” is required to see this!
- 2) No belief in afterlife. A requirement of divine justice.
 How would this have sounded to a Jew during the Exile? Paradoxically, it would have inspired **hope!**
 Isolated from its historical context the biblical sentiment paints a grotesque portrait of God.

Verse 8. Remember the Sabbath Day

This could also be translated “Remember Saturday.”
 This is more obvious in languages like Spanish (*Sábado*) and Italian (*Sabato*).
 It is a peculiarity of the English language that sometimes “Sabbath” means Sunday!
 You will note that the *Catechism* tells us to “Remember the Lord’s Day.” I.e., “Remember Sunday.”
 Clearly, after the resurrection, the Church believed it had the authority to alter one of the 10 Commandments.
 The main commandment, by the way, is to remember the day by **RESTING**, not by worshipping!
 This is another difference in emphasis between Church teaching and biblical teaching.
 I am not suggesting that this change of emphasis is in any way unjustified or **wrong**.
 I **am** suggesting that it is wrong to think, “The Decalogue has **always** meant what we understand by it today.”
 This realization can make us more humble when the Church is asked to consider new religious policies.
 Even policies that are different from those we find in the Decalogue!
 Simply being different from the Decalogue is not an automatic disqualification.

Verse 13. You Shall Not Kill

The NABRE has a good note on this verse.⁷
 This is more accurately rendered in the NRSV, “You shall not **murder**.”⁸

⁷ NABRE, note to Exodus 20:13, Kill: as frequent instances of killing in the context of **war** or certain **crimes** (see vv. 12-18) demonstrate in the Old Testament, **not all killing** comes within the scope of the commandment. For this reason, the Hebrew verb translated here as “kill” is often understood as “**murder**,” although it is in fact used in the Old Testament at times for **unintentional** acts of killing (e.g., Deut 4:41; Josh 20:3) and for legally sanctioned killing (Num 35:30). The term **may** originally have designated **any** killing of **another Israelite**, including acts of **manslaughter**, for which the **victim's kin could exact vengeance**. **In the present context, it denotes the killing of one Israelite by another, motivated by hatred or the like** (Num 35:20; cf. Hos 6:9). *It thus appears to me -- Fr. Pat -- that the note plainly admits that “murder” is the better translation of the word in its present context, i.e., here in the Decalogue! Why the USCCB decided not to translate the word thus “in its present context” is a mystery to me.*

The bible **does** allow for capital punishment and for war in certain circumstances. Pacifists and those who oppose capital punishment, cannot argue from the **original meaning** of this commandment. However, they are free to argue that:

- 1) **since** so many other ideas have changed since ancient times, e.g.:
 - the awareness that the command against adultery binds husbands just as strictly as wives,
 - the awareness that it is not God's will that certain human beings be enslaved,
 - the awareness that Sunday is a more important day for Christians than Saturday
- 2) we are perfectly justified in giving the word a **deeper meaning** than it originally had
- 3) and it is high time to do so!

4b. Echo the Tradition Again: Questions, Comments, Observations

5. Proclaim the Text. Pat Davis Reads the First Reading from the NABRE

6. Participants Name the Good News: for the original listeners; for the present-day hearer.

7. Name the Challenge

Participants share the challenges of the text for the first hearers.

How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the present day listener?

What is the pain and bondage and brokenness in the human situation touched by this text?

Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

Omit this week to make more time for First Reading

Response: Lord, You have the Words of Everlasting Life.

1. **X Proclaims the First Reading, NAB translation.** All write down words, phrases, images which "resonate."

2. Echo Back a Response

Participants share words and images which struck the heart and mind and imagination as they listened.

There is **no discussion, no questions** except for clarification.

3. Echo The Tradition (Fr. Pat's Presentation)

4. Echo the Tradition Again: Questions, Comments, Observations

5. X Proclaims the Psalm from a Second Translation

6. Participants Name the Good News: for the original listeners; for the present-day hearer.

7. Name the Challenge.

Participants share the challenges of the text for the first hearers.

How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the present day listener?

What is the pain and bondage and brokenness in the human situation touched by this text?

1 Corinthians, 1:22-25.

1. **Margie Caplis Proclaims the 2nd Reading, NAB.** All write down words, phrases, images which "resonate."

2. Echo Back a Response

Participants share words and images which struck the heart and mind and imagination as they listened.

There is **no discussion, no questions** except for clarification.

⁸ So also **Anchor Bible** (2006), **Darby Bible** (1894), **English Revised Version** (1885), **God's Word to the Nations** (1995), **Jewish Publication Society** (1917), **JPS Tanakh** (1985), **New American Standard Bible** (1995), **NET** (= New English Translation, available for free on the inter-NET), **NETS** (= NET of the Septuagint, 2007), **New International Version** (2011), **New KJV** (1982), **New Living Translation** (2017), **Rotherham Bible** (2001).

3. Echo The Tradition (Fr. Pat's Presentation)

Paul and Corinth⁹

Paul founded the Church at Corinth, probably sometime between A.D. 50-52.

Late A.D. 56 or early A.D. 57, he heard about problems at Corinth, while he was in Ephesus -- perhaps in prison.

Ephesus is in modern day western Turkey, across the Aegean Sea from Corinth, which is in Greece.

Some people from Chloe's house brought Paul news about divisions within the community. (1 Cor 1:11).

Because he was not able to return to Corinth, Paul addressed the problem by letters.

We have 2 letters to the Corinthians in the NT.

In 1 Cor 5:9, he mentions a previous letter he had written to them. This letter has not survived.

Background: Shame of the Cross

For us, the cross is a religious symbol.

It is sometimes used as a pendant on a piece of jewelry.

Can you imagine beginning prayers with the Sign of the Noose?

Or the Sign of the Electric Chair?

If so, you can begin to imagine the shame that was attached to the cross in the first century.

The OT and the Messiah.¹⁰

To understand this, many Christians have to unlearn a lot of catechetical oversimplification.

When I was in the 2nd or 3rd grade, I learned that people began to hope for **the Messiah** "after Adam & Eve sinned." Here's some historical background.

After Saul (ca. 1000 B.C.) if you asked about the Messiah, Joe Israelite would have pointed you to the reigning king.

The reigning king was usually such a disappointment that eventually prophets began to hope for an **ideal king**.

The Babylonians deposed the last reigning Jewish king in 586 B.C., when they destroyed Jerusalem.

Eventually the Persians, who had conquered the Babylonians, allowed the Jews to return to their own country.

Sometime after 500 B.C. some Jews began to hope that **the Davidic dynasty** would be **restored**.

However, the Persians preferred to have a high priest as the local ruler, rather than a king.

Originally this was simply a hope that the Persians would change their policy.

This "Davidic King" would have been a subordinate king, subject to the Persian Emperor.

It gradually became clear this was not going to happen -- the Persians were not going to change their policy.

The hope for a great **Davidic** ruler in **the distant future** finally began to be born.

This developed form of Messianism arises very late in OT times.

Other Jewish Hopes

The current system of **High Priest rulers** would bring about God's will -- the most "conservative" hope

No radical changes are needed. We are doing fine. Everything is under control.

A priestly Messiah

Two Messiahs: one priestly (tribe of Levi), one royal (tribe of Judah, family of David) -- the hope at Qumran.

A "Suffering Servant"

-- sometimes imagined as the personification of the entire people

-- sometimes imagined as a particular individual who would vicariously suffer for the people.

A "**Son of Man**" who would judge / rule the world in God's name (Daniel 7).

A "**Prophet Like Moses**" would be a great liberator to renew Israel's glory.

⁹ Most of this information comes from Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Doubleday, 1997; now published by Yale) pages 428 and 512.

¹⁰ Lawrence Boadt, "Hope for a Messiah," in *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Paulist, 1984) pp. 531-535; [Second Edition, Revised and Updated](#) by Richard Clifford & Daniel Harrington (Paulist, 2012) pp. 462-465.

There is no “suffering Messiah” in the OT.

The OT never portrays the Messiah as a figure who suffers.

The **only** way you can have a suffering Messiah is if you imagine he is the **same person** as the Suffering Servant. Before Jesus, nobody ever imagined that these **two very different figures** would be the same person!

In 2 Cor 1:20 Paul will say “All of God’s promises find their ‘yes’ in him.”

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| Are you looking for the royal Messiah? | That’s Jesus! |
| The Son of Man? | That’s Jesus! |
| The Prophet like Moses? | Guess who! |
| The priestly Messiah? | Same one! |
| The Suffering Servant? | Ditto! |

God **could have sent 4 or 5 different** people to fulfill the promises of the OT.

This is hard for Christians to understand -- we read the OT with 20-20 hindsight of what God **actually did** in Jesus.

Deuteronomy 21:23

Hebrew: . . . for a hanged man is accursed by God (RSV)¹¹

A “tree” is mentioned earlier in the verse, though not specifically in this phrase

LXX: . . . for anyone hanging on a tree is cursed by a god. (NETS)¹²

Paul alludes to this verse in Galatians 3:13, “Cursed be every one hanged on a tree!” (RSV).

When he was a pious Pharisee, the very idea that someone cursed by God could be the Messiah enraged Paul.

That is why he persecuted the Church. He considered the very idea of a crucified Messiah to be blasphemous!

Paul’s Call

We have a “Feast of the Conversion of Paul.” Paul never refers to this experience as a “conversion.”

He always refers to it as a “call.” Using this language puts him in the tradition of the OT prophets, called by God.

Paul had expected that if he ever saw Jesus, he would see him in hell.

Paul’s “call” involved a vision of Jesus Christ, exalted in heaven.

Paul then “repented” in the NT sense of the word, he **changed his mind**.

If someone who had had been crucified could be the Messiah,

Paul needed to change everything he knew about scripture!

He needed to change his mind about how God acts in the world!

“Jews Seek Signs”

These “signs” are not “random miracles.” Jews are looking for the signs of the messianic age.

No messianic age -- no messiah! It’s that simple!

The nations have not beaten their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks!

There world is still full of injustice and oppression, horrible diseases and natural disasters.

Paul would say that, despite this, the power of God in Jesus Christ (Messiah Jesus) is at work in our broken world!

This is not obvious! It is a statement of **faith**. Immediately before our passage, Paul wrote:

it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe (RSV).

¹¹ In OT times, among Israelites the “hanging” usually came after the execution by some other method, e.g., stoning. It was a way of dishonoring the body of the executed, thus covering the person’s memory with shame.

¹² **LXX** is the Roman numeral for seventy: L (50) + X (10) + X (10) = 70. According to legend, the Hebrew OT was translated into Greek by seventy scholars. The Latin word *septuaginta* means “seventy.” LXX is a common abbreviation for the Greek translation of the OT. In English this translation is usually called “the **Septuagint**.” Usually I will not take time to explain this, but since we have new members in our study group, I decided to make this footnote. NT authors frequently quote the LXX, which sometimes differs significantly from the Greek. For instance, the Hebrew original of Isaiah 7:14 says that a “young woman” will conceive; the Greek translation says that a “virgin” will conceive. Suppose you would like to know what this translation said, but, like most people, you don’t read Greek? Your best resource is the **NETS**, the New English Translation of the Septuagint. You can buy [hard copy](#), but it is available for free online at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/>.

“Greeks Seek Wisdom”

Evidently some of the Corinthians wanted to stress the **wisdom** of the teachings of Jesus. They wanted to “tone down” the emphasis on the cross. They thought that stressing the **wisdom** of Jesus would make him more “respectable.” The cross, as they saw it, was not **essential** to the message of Jesus. It was an unfortunate end to an otherwise successful career as a wise teacher. Better not to “overemphasize” it!

Paul’s Reaction

Paul, because of his personal experience of God and Jesus Christ, reacts in the strongest terms possible. He “doubles down” on his emphasis on the centrality of the cross. If we want to see the action of God in our world, we have to begin with the horrific reality of the cross. The other night on the news were some pictures of people who had been tortured in Syria. Even though the worst parts were blurred, the images still haunt me. Paul would look at those images and say, “God was there!” In the midst of all of the injustice, cruelty, and agony, “God was there!” Human wickedness cannot drive God out of our world.

Christ Crucified: The Power of God and the Wisdom of God

It is just as hard for people to see God’s power and wisdom in our broken world as it was for Paul to find a crucified Messiah in the OT.

Reading the Bible never convinced Paul of this --

It was the **power** of God that changed his mind. It was a miracle.

If we recognize God’s power in the cross, it is because God has worked a miracle in our lives.

Often Christians are puzzled why non-believers do not believe.

The **miracle** is that anyone believes this unlikely story.

If you bear the name Christian, it is because, like Paul, God has worked a miracle in your life.

Your miracle might not be as “dramatic” as Paul’s. Or as “sudden.”

Sometimes change happens over years & decades, and we can never put our finger on an exact moment. But if you bear the name Christian, there is a miracle in your “story” somewhere.

4. Echo the Tradition Again: Questions, Comments, Observations

5. X Proclaims the Second Reading from a Second Translation

6. Participants Name the Good News: for the original listeners; for the present-day hearer.

7. Name the Challenge. Participants share the challenges of the text for the first hearers.

How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the present day listener?

What is the pain and bondage and brokenness in the human situation touched by this text?

John 2:13-25.

1. Jim Owen Proclaims the Gospel, NAB translation. All write down words, phrases, images which “resonate.”

2. Echo Back a Response

Participants share words and images which struck the heart and mind and imagination as they listened.

There is **no discussion, no questions** except for clarification.

3. Echo The Tradition (Fr. Pat’s Presentation)

Usually we read from Mark in Year B.

Since Mark is the shortest Gospel, we supplement it at times with selections from John. This Sunday is one of the exceptions, when we read from John.¹³

The Gospel of John was the last of the four canonical Gospels to be written.

Tradition ties this Gospel to John, the son of Zebedee.

Scholarship suggests that we are probably honoring **several** saints on the **Feast of John, Apostle and Evangelist**

1) **John the son of Zebedee**, one of the Twelve

2) The **Beloved Disciple**, not a member of the Twelve, a resident of Jerusalem not present during the Galilean ministry

This disciple helped the community to remain faithful even when they were no longer welcome in synagogues.

3) The **Evangelist** who wrote most of John 1-20, probably about the year A.D. 95.

For reference, Mark wrote about A.D. 70; Matthew and Luke, about A.D. 85.

4) The **“Final Editor”**¹⁴ who added John 21, and perhaps a few other passages, somewhere around A.D. 105 - 110.

Literary Structure of John¹⁵

Prologue John 1:1-18

The Book of Signs John 1:19-12:50 Signs and Discourses of Jesus during his ministry¹⁶

The Book of Glory John 13:1-20:31 Jesus returns to the Father. Fully glorified, he gives the Spirit.

Epilogue John 21:1-25

Where does the Gospel Begin?

1) Mark began his story with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist.

2) Matthew and Luke begin their stories with the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus.

3) John the begins the story of Jesus “in the beginning.” This echoes the first words of Genesis.

Of all the Gospels, only John begins the story of Jesus with the Word “who was God” already existing in heaven.

In more technical language: of all the Gospels, **only John** teaches a **pre-existent** Christ.

Exalted Portrait of Jesus “High Christology”

None of the other Gospels gives the title “God” to Jesus. (Many Christians are surprised to learn this.)

The other Gospels call Jesus “Son of God,” but never “God.”

By contrast John uses this title twice.

Once in the poetic prologue (John 1:1)

Only in John does Thomas call the resurrected Jesus “my Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

There is no transfiguration scene. John’s Jesus is always transfigured! -- at least for the narrator and the reader.

We saw that in the Synoptics, the transfiguration was limited to 3 special disciples.

And these three were forbidden to even mention the experience until after the resurrection.

By contrast, John reports after the first sign in Cana

... **he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him (John 2:11).**

The “glory” of Jesus is visible to Johannine disciples -- and not just 3 of them on a special occasion.

There are no narratives of exorcisms in John. John’s Jesus does not mess with little assistant demons.

His battle is with the “Prince of this World,” i.e., Satan (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

¹³ The summer, July 25-Aug. 29, Sundays 17-22 of Ordinary Time, we will read selections from John 6, the Bread of Life Discourse.

¹⁴ In scholarly works he is usually called “the final redactor,” but most people don’t know what a “redactor” is!

¹⁵ See Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 334.

¹⁶ The seven “signs” are: **Changing water into wine at Cana (2:1-12)**; Healing the royal official’s son (4:46-54); Healing a cripple on the Sabbath (5:1-18); Feeding the 5,000 (6:1-15); Walking on the Sea (6:16-21); **Healing a man born blind (9:1-12)**; **Raising of Lazarus (11:1-44)**. The signs **highlighted in yellow** find now parallels in the other Gospels; they are found only in John.

A Unique Perspective

The Gospel of John is not like a newsreel from the life of Jesus.

It is the result of **decades** of prayerful **post-resurrectional** reflection on the mystery of the person of Jesus.

All the deeds and sayings of Jesus are **dramatized** with this 20-20 hindsight.

Verses 13, 18, 20. "The Jews"

Occasionally in this Gospel "the Jews" simply means "Jewish people."

Most of the time it is a **coded** expression for "**the enemies of Jesus.**"

The expression is used **as if** Jesus, his mother, and all of his disciples were **not** Jews!

The other Gospels describe the enemies of Jesus as "chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, elders of the people."

These all become simply "the Jews" in John.

An unfortunate result of this is that it has resulted in centuries of anti-Semitism and Jewish persecution by Christians.

In the last century this resulted in the Holocaust, which Jews prefer to call the *Shoah*.¹⁷

Contemporary Catholic-Jewish Relations. We are blessed to live in happier times.

Pope John XXIII invited the Jewish leaders of Rome to the Vatican. *Io sono Giuseppe, su fratello.*

The Good Friday prayer was changed.

Formerly we prayed for "the perfidious Jews."

Now we pray for "the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God."

Alas, there are Catholics who want to go back to the old prayer!

Pope John Paul II was the first pope ever to visit the Jewish Synagogue in Rome, and to pray there.

In 2002 the PBC published *The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*.

Official Catholic teaching is that it is an error to blame all Jewish people everywhere for the death of Jesus.

In bygone ages, it was Christian teaching (Catholic & Protestant) to hold the Jews in contempt.

The Catholic Church, along with some Protestant Churches, has officially rejected this teaching.

Verse 17, "Zeal for your house **will** consume me"

Depending on your Bible this is Psalm 69:10, 69:9, or 68:10.¹⁸

The Hebrew, as well as the Greek reads: "Zeal for your house **has** consumed me."

By changing the tense, John makes this a **prophecy**. Zeal for the Temple will ultimately result in Jesus' death.

In the Synoptic Gospels, the cleansing of the Temple occurs in Holy Week --

It leads almost immediately to the death of Jesus.

For literary reasons, John wants to put the raising of Lazarus (chapter 11) in that climactic position.

So he moves the scene of the Temple Cleansing to the beginning of the Gospel.

Here it also serves as a "thematic" passage.

In the "Book of Signs" (John 2-12) the various feasts of Judaism are fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

The Temple cleansing foreshadows this.

Verse 18, What Sign Do You Do? There are two kinds of "signs" in John.

The Book of Signs contains seven signs that reveal the "glory" of Jesus -- to those who have faith.

Our story for today immediately follows the Wedding at Cana, which ends with verse 11

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him (RSV).

This is the **first** kind of "sign" in John.

¹⁷ The word "Holocaust" gives religious meaning to the horrific event. Many Jews find this offensive. The Hebrew expression *Ha-shoah* means "the disaster, the catastrophe."

¹⁸ 69:10 is the Hebrew number; you will find it in Bibles such as the NAB and NABRE, which follow the Hebrew. 69:9 is the numbering of the KJV, and many Protestant Bibles that follow the KJV numbering; 68:10 is the Greek numbering, if you want to look up the English version of the Greek in the NETS.

The **second** kind of sign is a sign **demanding by unbelievers as “proof”** of Jesus authority. This is the kind of sign that “the Jews” are demanding in this scene. Jesus **never gives this kind of sign** in John.

Verse 22, “. . . when he was **was raised from the dead . . .”** (NAB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NET)

OR . . . **when he **rose** from the dead . . .** (JB, NJB, Knox, Kleist-Lilly).

The Greek verb can be translated either way, depending on the context.

It looks **passive** (was raised) but the passive can have an **intransitive** meaning (rose).¹⁹

Usually in the NT it is translated in the passive, because the normal NT formulation is:

EITHER God raised Jesus from the dead; OR Jesus was raised from the dead by God.

However, John has **very high Christology**. Consider the following:

No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father." (John 10:18 RSV)

The Johannine Jesus has the power to raise himself! -- Unlike the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, or Luke!

Consider also verse 19, just 3 verses before this one:

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (RSV)

It is clear that “**when he **rose** from the dead . . .”** is the more accurate translation in the Johannine context!

John’s Jesus is always “transfigured!” -- at least for the narrator and the reader.

Notice that even the disciples don’t “get it” in this scene.

Only **after** the resurrection do they “remember,” and come to a deeper faith.

This “remembering” is not simply calling to mind a past event. It is seeing that event with a **deeper faith insight**.

This is one of the grounds for our Catholic understanding of “Tradition.”

It is not simply repeating the past actions & teachings of the Church.

It is **reinterpreting** these past actions & teachings **with deeper faith** in light of the **signs of our times**.

We do this in confidence that Jesus has not “left us orphans (14:18).” Through his Spirit he continues to act in our midst.

4. Echo the Tradition Again: Questions, Comments, Observations

5. **X Proclaims the Gospel from a Second Translation**

6. Participants Name the Good News: for the original listeners; for the present-day hearer.

7. Name the Challenge. Participants share the challenges of the text for the first hearers.

How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the present day listener?

What is the pain and bondage and brokenness in the human situation touched by this text?

¹⁹ If any of my seminarian students read some Greek, look up ἐγείρω in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, & Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature*, meaning 2.a.