



A journal for restless minds

A TIME OF CONVERSION

Ordinary time isn't so ordinary

THE SIN OF THE WORLD

His singular achievement

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The music danced

DEACON'S DINER

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

A Time Of Conversion

Ordinary time isn't so ordinary

Questions concerning the liturgical seasons almost always center on Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time officially begins on the day immediately following the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

The first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year, and continues until the Christmas season which concludes with the Baptism of the Lord. Thus, Ordinary Time begins the following day, either on Monday or Tuesday, not on Sunday. The remainder of the week, however, is counted as the First Week in Ordinary Time, which means the following Sunday is the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Ordinary Time is bifurcated, that is, it is interrupted for the duration of Lent and the Easter Season, resuming on the Monday immediately following Pentecost Sunday and concludes on the thirty-

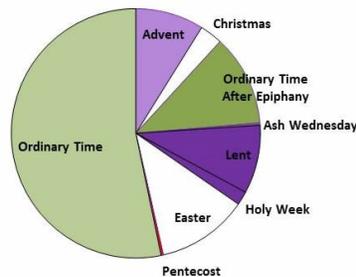
fourth Sunday (The Solemnity of Christ the King).

Our bishops write: *"Christmas Time and Easter Time highlight the central mysteries of the Paschal Mystery, namely, the incarnation, death on the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Sundays and weeks of Ordinary Time, on the other hand, take us through the life of Christ. This is the time of conversion. This is living the life of Christ."*

Ordinary Time is a time for growth and maturation, a time in which the mystery of Christ is called to penetrate ever more deeply into history until all things are finally caught up in Christ. The goal, toward which all of history is directed, is represented by the final Sunday in Ordinary Time, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe."

Ordinary Time offers us an extraordinary opportunity to grow and mature in our faith and in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Why not make it Extraordinary Time?

Liturgical Year



The Sin Of The World

His singular achievement

Today we are presented with two announcements concerning *parousia*, the “coming” of the Messiah. The Greek word *parousia* literally means “presence, coming, arrival, or advent” although for most Christians it has come to mean the end time, when Christ will “come in glory.” Even Jesus used *parousia* many times to describe just such an event. For example, when he spoke to his disciples just before his passion and death he told them, “For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming [parousia] of the Son of man be.”¹

When we read such passages it makes it difficult for us to think of *parousia* as meaning anything other than “coming in glory”—the end times. Yet, this projects more than is merited onto a fairly common, and even mundane, Greek word. “Coming in glory” at the end of time is not what *parousia* originally meant.

This in no way precludes such a coming (*parousia*) at the end of time yet there is more that can be discerned if we take a closer look at the word itself.

Let us begin by considering the first reading for today from Isaiah 49. At first blush it would appear to be a conversation between God (Yahweh) and his servant people, Israel. Yet, that is in fact not the case at all, rather, it is believed by most theologians and exegetes to be a conversation between

Yahweh and the Messiah. As one writer puts it: “You are my servant, and you will be a spectacular success; people will be able to see the glory of God by looking at you.”² Here we hear the Father encouraging the Son, telling him how his success will reflect his glory. But in the verse that follows, which is omitted from today’s reading, the Messiah laments, “But I said: I have laboured in vain, for nought and to no purpose have I spent my strength.”³



Clearly, the Messiah is expressing a profound sense of failure in his mission. Those who were present at his crucifixion would not have seen the glory of God in him at that moment. Indeed, most observers would have looked at it as a total failure.

But when we read verses 5-6, we hear God the Father reassuring the Messiah, his Son, by telling him he is glorious in his eyes and that he has his back, that God is his strength. God tells him that saving Israel would be an insufficient reason for his coming (*parousia*) into the world, that he will make him “a light to the nations,” so

that “salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”⁴

Theologians are wont to call the final *parousia*, the coming of Christ at the end of the age as the final “advent” when we will see him as he is. “Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”⁶

Each year we observe his coming, his *parousia* during the weeks of Advent, the coming of the Lord, which of course, presages his *parousia*—the arrival of Christ the Lord—at his birth, coming in human form.

Since the coming, *parousia*, of Christ—through the millennia that have followed—Christ has, as he promised, always been present, *parousia*, in the world. In his incarnation, he came into the world, he arrived, *parousia*; and, as he ascended into heaven, returning to the Father, his last words were a promise to remain with us forever. “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”⁵ His *parousia*—his presence—remains with us today and will be with us until he comes again.

Christ’s enduring *parousia*—presence—and Christian hope for an imminent *parousia* have been recognized since the early days of the church, born of faith in a liturgical *parousia*. Consider how often we hear “The Lord be with you” throughout the liturgy, admitting to the presence of Christ in all those present.

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Theologian Jaroslav Pelikan has observed that “*The coming of Christ was ‘already’ and ‘not yet’: he had come already—in the incarnation, and on the basis of the incarnation would come in the Eucharist; he had come already in the Eucharist, and would come at the last in the new cup that he would drink with them in his Father’s kingdom.*” Liturgical *parousia* was universally understood from the earliest days of the church.

What the ancients saw in the liturgy was the coming of Christ: the *parousia*; and what they meant by *parousia* is what Catholic theology came to express as the “*real presence*” or “*substantial presence*” of Jesus Christ.⁷

When we celebrate the liturgy—that is the “*breaking of the bread*”—we experience what the earliest Christians experienced: the glorious coming, *parousia*, and real presence, *parousia*, of the Lord.

In the Gospel, John sees Jesus coming toward him and exclaims, “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. ... he is the Son of God.*” John saw Jesus coming, *parousia*, in the sense of a visit by an emperor or king, a sometime used meaning of the word, for he knew that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, and a king.

But there is more than an acknowledgment of kingship in his acclamation which we should consider. John calls him the “*Lamb of God*” and claims that his mission is to take away the “*sin of the world.*”

We are thoroughly familiar with the phrase because we hear it at every

Mass. “*This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world*” but we probably have never given it much thought.

“*Unblemished lambs*” were a common sacrifice in Jewish temple liturgy, sacrificed for their innocence as a pure offering to God for his provenance. In the same way, Jesus offered himself as a pure, unblemished sacrifice for the sake of all the world. He was a sinless—pure, unblemished—member of a sinful people.

It is interesting that the original word for “*lamb*” in Aramaic was “*talyā*,” which meant not only “*lamb*” but also “*slave*” or “*servant.*” Whichever interpretation you might prefer, surprisingly fits, don’t you think? Perhaps, John the Baptist intended any or all of those meanings.

Notice also that John doesn’t use the plural but the singular when he says, “*the sin of the world.*” The Greek that is used here is *ten hamarten* which is the singular. The liturgy alternates between the two perspectives: in the Gloria we find the singular (“*you take away the sin of the world*”) while as previously noted, we hear the plural at the Lamb of God, (“*you take away the sins of the world*”).

We recognize the sinful nature of humankind; we accept our concupiscence, our inclination to sin. We all sin, and we sin in different ways and at different times. Although we can speak of “*sins*” (in the plural), but all our sins are of a single piece; they are simply different manifestations of our sinfulness, our sinful nature. In a very

real sense, it is our “*original*” sin, our sinful nature, that is most important here, and it is in understanding the nature of original sin that must be taken into consideration.

The original sin our first parents committed was not a simple act of disobedience but rather in placing themselves on equality with God, believing they were gods. And we are often guilty of the same.

Thus it is original sin which John the Baptist refers when he sees Jesus approach. It is the one sin, more than any other sin, which is in most need of forgiveness. It is the one sin common to all humanity. It is the sin of the whole world. All other sins are but different manifestations of original sin for they all embody the belief that the sinner has no need for or cares less for God. Sin of any kind denies our need for God. To different degrees when we sin we state by our thought and deed that there is no God, no truth, and that all that matters is the self.

Let us remember that Christ is always *parousia*. Let us turn away from sin and welcome his *parousia* into our lives. Amen.

Homily for the
The Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Isaiah 49:3, 5-6
1 Corinthians 1:1-3
John 1:29-34

1. Mt 24:27.

2. Eleonore Stump, *Failure*, The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.

3. Is 49:4.

4. Is 49:6.

5. Mt 28:20.

6. 1 Jn 3:2.

7. Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), pp. 12-13.

Once Upon A Dream

The music danced

Music is the voice of the soul singing praise to God. It is prayer with wings that are want to lift the spirit beyond the bounds of earth to pierce the veil of heaven.

I was once asked whether I ever used contemplative prayer in my faith life. Like many, prayer was often perfunctory and rote, lacking of any meaningful purpose. To my reasoned mind, contemplation engendered raw and visceral visions of a small naked cell of foreboding emptiness and silence; nothing to break the endless monotony of catatonic staring at cold barren walls. So I answered, without a second's thought, in the negative to such unpleasant thought.

Yet, after but a moment to reflect, I realized the nightmarish image held no sway upon reality; contemplative prayer was far more than any thought or vision; it was and had been an integral part of my life although I had not recognized it as such. I came to realize that, rather than avoiding it, I had been devoting much of every day in contemplative prayer, at times as much as four hours throughout the day.

How was that possible? Just thinking of it brings a smile, for I came to understand that the music soothed my restless soul and purged all unholy thought from my mind. Whenever I would sit before the piano my soul

would sing with such joy to God, as it dispelled all the ugliness, the hatred, bitterness, anger, vile and sinful thoughts from my mind, heart, and soul.

Music envelops me, wrapping my entire self with a blanket so complete the light within my soul is captured there. I lose all thought of time and space and being to the notes that dance upon the keys; from where these notes arrive, I know not, except from where else but God.



Some of those who create the music that we hear will tell you that they compose it long before they hear it played; hearing every note so selfishly complete, from a place deep within, that its playing is little more than afterthought. But then I cannot help but think of all the melodies denied to those who would await, quite eagerly I suppose, to hear them, but for the lack of ever putting note to paper.

My soul cries out in melodies which can but be expressed by laying hands upon the instrument of my de-

sire and teasing out what rests within, note on note until the song bursts forth, to find release from deep within. I hear the song, but hear it not, until it plays upon the keys. I cannot help but wonder why, but then again, I care little in the knowing, satisfied only that I hear the music and in the moment have no conscious thought of anything but God.

Music plays upon my soul; it gives it wings to soar, if only for the briefest flight.

I know not why nor do I care at all. It matters only that the music moves me in unexpected ways. I never know where the muse will lead me yet I laugh at journey's end for it never is what was expected and yet it is precisely what it was meant to be. Isn't that the same with life? We never know what is in store yet what awaits us in the end is precisely what God intended.

The music that I write taunts and teases without respect for beat or measure. Music, to my wayward ear, should ebb and flow, as water flows down its courses, never forced to run a steady pace but to meander for a while until the moment when it cries for speed: a lively dash through narrow channels, down thundering chasms to calm still waters once again. Measured beat and cadenced note will seldom find a place to rest upon the score, for the music cannot sing with such hard shackles worn.

The Spirit moves the fingers, breathing melody to life; my poor play denies what credit may come due, for

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the beauty of the music, of the song which God has so wonderfully inspired is of his making, none of mine.

Whether what is written pleases all or some or none at all is of small concern for every note and nuanced beat comes from him with consummate love; he has, with perfect pitch, composed the song for each to play.

It is we who, like a child with wild abandon, beats with neither artistry nor skill upon the keys. We care not for the melody but the discordant noise we make from their pounding. We stubbornly refuse to play the music—the music which God has inscribed upon the soul—for we listen not to him but to the gods of our mortal base desires. We choose to contemplate our navel rather than meditate upon his score divine.

The music writ upon the soul plays soft and low and yet the world and all its noise is silenced by the whispered melody it evokes. Mindless beats and violent notes so amplified to turn the mind to vacuous mush can deny but for the moment the unceasing love song which still plays within. It cannot be silenced lest the heart is stilled from beating, though it can be lost, forgotten, remembered only by a passing thought so brief, not worth a mention.

Yet the song plays on and on and forever, no matter whether ear is bent to hear it. There is no need for naked walls or empty rooms, silence will not increase the volume nor will darkness improve the sound.

It is the measure of devotion, the immersion of the mind, and the loss of self-awareness that gives the soul its voice. Such contemplation holds the soul beneath the surface, banished from the constant twists and turns of wind and wave and the tumult of a blasphemous world.

In contemplation there is no silence, there is no noise, only music, a duet played by you and God.

Why then do we deny ourselves the music writ upon the soul? Why are we reluctant to enter into communion with the Composer of our song? Why do so many refuse to listen to the sweet, sweet melody of a loving God?

The instrument upon which I hear his music is uniquely mine and mine alone. Every soul hears their song, written for the instrument which God has made. God writes the music, creates the instrument upon which to play the notes, yet he leaves the playing of it to the musician. We can choose to play what he has written or simply refuse to listen. Either choice, the music will forever play.

Once upon a dream the music danced. I know not from whence it came or where it wished to go, but only that it lingered long enough for the writing of it.

I have no answers, only questions; God has no questions, only answers. There is great symmetry in that.

Each moment of our lives plays a different tune; each sings a song far different than the last. So it is with music. Thank God for that.

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

Faith Comes From What Is Heard

Lawrence Feingold

Emmaus Academic

July 8, 2016, 756 pages.

Called To Communion

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger

Ignatius Press

1996, 165 pages.

Orthodoxy

G. K. Chesterton

Digireads.com

March 30, 2004, 121 pages.

Originally published 1908.

PERIODICALS

First Things

Institute on Religion and Public Life

Editor: R. R. Reno

Ten Issues per year.

www.firstthings.com

Touchstone

A Journal of Mere Christianity

Editor: James M. Kushiner

Bi-Monthly.

www.touchstonemag.com

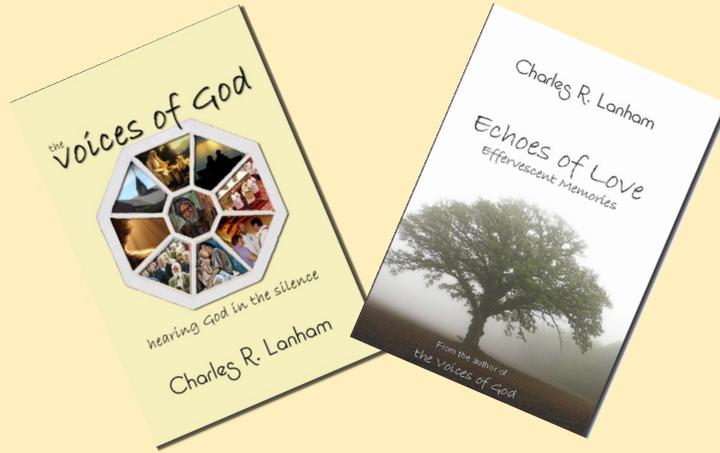
Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the Faith, Defend the Faith

Editor: Tim Ryland

Bi-Monthly.

www.catholic.com



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

deaconscorner.org

Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

He is the author of **The Voices of God: Hearing God in the Silence**, **Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories** and is currently writing his third book **Without God: Finding God in a Godless World**.

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Each issue of **Colloquī** can be viewed or downloaded from

<http://deaconscorner.org>.

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