

# Breaking the Bread

A Monthly Publication of the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology  
October 2004



## Reading the Bible from The Heart of the Church

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## ST. PAUL CENTER FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

A non-profit research and educational institute promoting life-transforming study of Sacred Scripture in the Catholic tradition.

Founder & President  
Scott Hahn, Ph.D.

Editor  
David Scott

Email:  
office@SalvationHistory.com

Phone:  
(740) 284-1778

Fax:  
(740) 284-1825

Address:  
5A Hawthorne Court  
Steubenville, Ohio 43952

Website:  
www.SalvationHistory.com

## 'He Must Reign'

### Dr. Scott Hahn

As I write these lines I'm packing my bags to head off to deliver a lecture at Oxford University.

England is like a home away from home for me. The English and I speak the same language (although with different accents!). Cardinal Newman and hundreds of our ancestors in the faith studied at Oxford. Every time I return, too, I'm pleased to find more students and faculty have converted to the Catholic faith.

But one difference between us and our British cousins always stands out for me—the monarchy. It's such an alien idea for Americans—we can't believe kings and queens still exist, let alone that they might rule by "divine right."

This intrigues me, because the more I study Scripture, the more I'm convinced that the notion of divine monarchy is the key to unlocking the meaning and promises of the Gospel.

The Kingdom of God is at the heart of our Lord's preaching and mission—He said it was "at hand" and "in our midst." He gave Peter the "keys to the Kingdom" and sent His Apostles to proclaim the Kingdom to the ends of the earth.

But what happened to the Kingdom—where did it go? Modernist wags used to say: "Christ preached the Kingdom, but all we got is the Church."

The wags had it exactly right—for all the wrong reasons. They were mocking the Church and implying that Jesus hadn't made good on His promise. But a close reading of Scripture shows that He truly did—that the Church is the restored

Kingdom of David that all the prophets looked forward to.

The *Catechism* repeatedly associates the Church with the Kingdom (see no. 541 among others).

What I've discovered is that this ancient understanding of the Church reflects the literal and historical meaning of the New and Old Testaments.

Christ is the royal Son of David and the Church is the Davidic Kingdom



restored. No other interpretation has such explanatory power. Scholars have spent much more time studying the Sinai covenant that made

Moses and Israel a nation. But we need to better understand the covenant God makes with David—which makes Israel an international kingdom that unites all nations under God the Father and the Davidic king who is also God's Son.

Explaining this has become one of my driving passions. It's the subject of the new on-line class I'm writing for advanced students. And it will be the theme of the second annual West Coast Biblical Studies Conference next January (see Page 4 for details.)

And this "Davidic Christology" and "Kingdom Ecclesiology" is the subject of the paper I'll be delivering at Oxford. So I'd better get back to packing!

# Biblical Reflections on the Sunday Mass Readings

*Breaking the Bread*

*October 2004*

*Did not our hearts burn within us...while He opened to us the Scriptures?*

## Life By Faith

October 3 *27th Sunday Ordinary Time*

Habakkuk 1:2-3;2:2-4 Psalm 95:1-2,6-9

2 Timothy 1:6-8,13-14 Luke 17:5-10

## Returning Thanks

October 10 *28th Sunday Ordinary Time*

2 Kings 5:14-17 Psalm 98:1-4

2 Timothy 2:8-13 Luke 17:11-19

## *Reading the Bible From The Heart of the Church*

The Bible readings we hear at Mass on Sunday are selected and arranged to show us what the *Catechism* calls “the unity of the divine plan in the two Testaments” (nos. 128-130).

The Liturgy invites us to read the Old Testament in light of the New and the New Testament in light of the Old. When we read this way, we see that what God says and does in the Old Testament points us to what Jesus says and does in the New, and what Jesus says and does in the New Testament sheds light on the promises and events we read about in the Old.

The divine plan of the two Testaments continues in the Church’s Liturgy. That’s why we reread and relive the great events of salvation history every Sunday. As the *Catechism* teaches, the Liturgy reveals the mysteries of God’s plan and enables us to live them (nos. 1094-1095).

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—Editor

Because of his faith, the just man shall live. We hear in today’s First Reading the original prophetic line made so central by St. Paul (see Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38).

We are to live by faith in Christ who loved us and gave himself on the Cross for us (see Galatians 2:20).

The world, though, can seem to us as seventh-century Judah seemed to Habakkuk—in the control of God’s enemies. The strife and discord we face in our own lives can sometimes cause us to wonder, as the prophet does, why God doesn’t seem to hear or intervene when we cry for help.

We can’t let our hearts be hardened by the trials we undergo. As today’s Psalm reminds us: Israel forgot His mighty works, lost faith in the sound words of His promise. They tested God in the desert, demanding a sign.

But God didn’t redeem Israel from Egypt only to let them die in the desert. And He didn’t ransom us from futility only to abandon us in our trials. He is our God and we are the people He shepherds always—though at times His mercy and justice seem long delayed.

If we call on the Lord, as the Apostles do in today’s Gospel, He will increase our faith, will stir to a flame the Holy Spirit who has dwelt within us since Baptism.

As Paul tells us in today’s Epistle, the Lord will always give us the love and self-control we need to bear our share of hardship for the Gospel—with a strength that can come from God alone.

Our task is to continue doing what He has commanded—to love and to build up His kingdom—trusting that His vision still presses on to its fulfillment.

For His vision still has its time. One day, though we are but “unprofitable servants,” we will be invited to eat and drink at our Master’s table. It is that day we anticipate with each celebration of the Eucharist.

A foreign leper is cleansed and in thanksgiving returns to offer homage to the God of Israel. We hear this same story in both the First Reading and Gospel today.

There were many lepers in Israel in Elisha’s time, but only Naaman the Syrian trusted in God’s Word and was cleansed (see Luke 5:12-14). Today’s Gospel likewise implies that most of the 10 lepers healed by Jesus were Israelites—but only a foreigner, the Samaritan, returned.

In a dramatic way, we’re being shown today how faith has been made the way to salvation, the road by which all nations will join themselves to the Lord, becoming His servants, gathered with the Israelites into one chosen people of God, the Church (see Isaiah 56:3-8).

Today’s Psalm also looks forward to the day when all peoples will see what Naaman sees—that there is no God in all the earth except the God of Israel.

We see this day arriving in today’s Gospel. The Samaritan leper is the only person in the New Testament who personally thanks Jesus. The Greek word used to describe his “giving thanks” is the word we translate as “Eucharist.”

And these lepers today reveal to us the inner dimensions of the Eucharist and sacramental life.

We, too have been healed by our faith in Jesus. As Naaman’s flesh is made again like that of a little child, our souls have been cleansed of sin in the waters of Baptism. We experience this cleansing again and again in the Sacrament of Penance—as we repent our sins, beg and receive mercy from our Master, Jesus.

We return to glorify God in each Mass, to offer ourselves in sacrifice—falling on our knees before our Lord, giving thanks for our salvation.

In this Eucharist, we remember “Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David,” Israel’s covenant king. And we pray, as Paul does in today’s Epistle, to persevere in this faith—that we too may live and reign with Him in eternal glory.

## Hope From on High

October 17 *29th Sunday Ordinary Time*

Exodus 17:8-13 Psalm 121:1-8

2 Timothy 3:14-4:2 Luke 18:1-8

The Lord is our guardian, beside us at our right hand, interceding for us in all our spiritual battles.

In today's Psalm we're told to lift our eyes to the mountains, that our help will come from Mount Zion and the Temple — the dwelling of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Joshua and the Israelites, in today's First Reading, are also told to look to the hilltops. They are to find their help there—through the intercession of Moses—as they defend themselves against their mortal foes, the Amalekites.

Notice the image: Aaron and Hur standing on each side of Moses, holding his weary arms so that he can raise the staff of God above his head. Moses is being shown here as a figure of Jesus, who also climbed a hilltop, and on Mount Calvary stretched out His hands between heaven and earth to intercede for us against the final enemy—sin and death (see 1 Corinthians 15:26).

By the staff of God, Moses bested Israel's enemies (see Exodus 7:8-12;8:1-2), parted the Red Sea (see Exodus 14:16) and brought water from the Rock (see Exodus 17:6).

The Cross of Jesus is the new staff of God, bringing about a new liberation from sin, bringing forth living waters from the body of Christ, the new Temple of God (see John 2:19-21; 7:37-39).

Like the Israelites and the widow in today's Gospel, we face opposition and injustice—at times from godless and pitiless adversaries.

We, too, must lift our eyes to the mountains—to Calvary and the God who will guard us from all evil.

We must pray always and not be wearied by our trials, Jesus tells us today. As Paul exhorts in today's Epistle, we need to remain faithful, to turn to the inspired Scriptures—given by God to train us in righteousness.

We must persist, so that when the Son of Man comes again in kingly power, He will indeed find faith on earth.

## No Favorites

October 24 *30th Sunday Ordinary Time*

Sirach 35:12-14, 16-18 Psalm 34:2-3,17-19, 23

2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18 Luke 18:9-14

Jesus draws a blunt picture in today's Gospel.

The Pharisee's prayer is almost a parody of the thanksgiving psalms (see for example Psalms 30,118). Instead of praising God for His mighty works, the Pharisee congratulates himself for his own deeds, which he presents to God in some detail.

The tax collector stands at a distance, too ashamed even to raise his eyes to God (see Ezra 9:6). He prays with a humble and contrite heart (see Psalm 51:19). He knows that before God no one is righteous, no one has cause to boast (see Roman 3:10; 4:2).

We see in the Liturgy today one of Scripture's abiding themes—that God “knows no favorites,” as today's First Reading tells us (see 2 Chronicles 19:7; Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:11).

God cannot be bribed (see Deuteronomy 10:17). We cannot curry favor with Him or impress Him—even with our good deeds or our faithful observance of religious duties such as tithing and fasting.

If we try to exalt ourselves before the Lord, as the Pharisee does, we will be brought low (see Luke 1:52).

This should be a warning to us—not to take pride in our piety, not to slip into the self-righteousness of thinking that we're better than others, that we're “not like the rest of sinful humanity.”

If we clothe ourselves with humility (see 1 Peter 5:5-6)—recognize that all of us are sinners in need of His mercy—we will be exalted (see Proverbs 29:33).

The prayer of the lowly, the humble, pierces the clouds. Paul testifies to this in today's Epistle, as He thanks the Lord for giving him strength during his imprisonment.

Paul tells us what the Psalmist sings today—that the Lord redeems the lives of His humble servants.

We too must serve Him willingly. And He will hear us in our distress, deliver us from evil, and bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom.

## Lover of Souls

October 31 *31st Sunday Ordinary Time*

Wisdom 11:22-12:1 Psalm 145:1-2, 8-11, 13, 14

2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2 Luke 19:1-10

Our Lord is a lover of souls, the Liturgy shows us today. As we sing in today's Psalm, He is slow to anger and compassionate towards all that He has made.

In His mercy, our First Reading tells us, He overlooks our sins and ignorance, giving us space that we might repent and not perish in our sinfulness (see Wisdom 12:10; 2 Peter 3:9).

In Jesus, He has become the Savior of His children, coming himself to save the lost (see Isaiah 63:8-9; Ezekiel 34:16).

In the figure of Zacchaeus in today's Gospel, we have a portrait of a lost soul. He is a tax collector, by profession a “sinner” excluded from Israel's religious life. Not only that, he is a “chief tax collector.” Worse still, he is a rich man who has apparently gained his living by fraud.

But Zacchaeus' faith brings salvation to his house. He expresses his faith in his fervent desire to “see” Jesus, even humbling himself to climb a tree just to watch Him pass by. While those of loftier religious stature react to Jesus with grumbling, Zacchaeus receives Him with joy.

Zacchaeus is not like the other rich men Jesus meets or tells stories about (see Luke 12:16-21; 16:19-31;18:18-25). He repents, vowing to pay restitution to those he has cheated and to give half of his money to the poor.

By his humility he is exalted, made worthy to welcome the Lord into his house. By his faith, he is justified, made a descendant of Abraham (see Romans 4:16-17).

As He did last week, Jesus is again using a tax collector to show us the faith and humility we need to obtain salvation.

We are also called to seek Jesus daily with repentant hearts. And we should make our own Paul's prayer in today's Epistle: that God might make us worthy of His calling, that by our lives we might give glory to the name of Jesus.

## **Our New Home (For Now)**

The St. Paul Center has a new home—at least temporarily.

At the order of local zoning officials, the Center in early September was forced—on very short notice—to vacate its offices and find new quarters for its operations.

“We put out an urgent e-mail to our supporters for prayers—and within days we had found a suitable site,” said Center director Rob Corzine. “A heartfelt thanks to all for your prayers. We feel blessed to have been able to make such a smooth transition.”

Corzine said the Center’s Board of Directors will be seeking funding and support to establish a permanent home to meet the growing needs of the Center. Those interested in supporting this campaign can find more information on the response card enclosed in this issue.

For the time being, however, the Center has a new location in Steubenville. The Center’s mailing address, phone numbers and e-mails will all remain the same.



*Friends of the Center help us move out of our old home*

## **Bible Interpretation Expert Joins Center**

Dr. Peter Williamson, a leading authority on Catholic biblical interpretation and evangelization, has joined the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology as a Senior Fellow.

“Peter is a fine scholar and teacher,” said Dr. Scott Hahn, President of the St. Paul Center. “His study of the Catholic principles for interpreting Scripture is a touchstone for students of the Church’s teaching.”

An Assistant Professor of Sacred Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, Dr. Williamson received his S.T.B., S.T.L. and S.T.D. in Biblical Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University.

Dr. Williamson is the author of *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church”* (Loyola/Biblical Institute, 2001).

For more information, see our website. Click on “Center Associates and Staff.” Also, check out Dr. Williamson’s excellent introduction to Catholic biblical interpretation—available in our online Resource Library. Click on “The Church and the Bible,” then on “Interpretation: Issues and Principles.”

## **‘Church as Kingdom’ West Coast Conference Slated for Jan. 29-30**

“He Must Reign: The Catholic Church Is the Kingdom of Heaven” will be the theme of the Second Annual West Coast Biblical Studies Conference.

The conference, co-hosted by the St. Paul Center and the Catholic Resource Center, is slated for January 29-30, 2005, at the Ontario Convention Center in southern California.

Speakers will include Dr. Scott Hahn and Center associate, Michael Barber, among others.

Space is limited and early and pre-registration is highly encouraged.

For more information, contact the Catholic Resource Center at (877) 526-2151 or [info@CatholicRC.org](mailto:info@CatholicRC.org).

