



Bringing Home the Word

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | July 2, 2017

The Race We Run

By Mary Katharine Deeley

What was it like in those years after the crucifixion? What was it like to talk about an experience and a relationship unlike anything ever encountered? What was it like to go to jail for preaching what you described as good news even though it seemed foolish to many of those who were listening?

Paul saw it in terms of a race whose finish line was heaven and for which he was willing to spend his last ounce of energy. Peter saw that once he acknowledged who Jesus was, he had no

choice but to proclaim the truth of his heart. He knew Jesus was the Messiah because he saw it in the looks of those who were healed, fed, and restored at Christ's hand. He experienced it in the love Christ gave him, even after he denied him. He saw it in the faces of those whom he healed in Christ's name and who eagerly came to baptism and the outpouring of the Spirit.

What is it like now? How do we know in our hearts that Jesus is the Messiah? And how has that made a difference in our lives? Is this relationship so unlike any other that we are willing to be poured out, to spend our energy to proclaim the good news even though it may seem foolish? That's an uncomfortable question for many Catholics today.

For many of us, religion and faith are private, and sometimes that helps us avoid arguments or endless debate. But the compelling story of our redemption begs to be told, if not in words, then in lives transformed. This is our story and our race to be run full out to the very last. †

Once Peter acknowledged who Jesus was, he had no choice but to proclaim the truth of his heart.

Sunday Readings

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

...Elisha promised, "This time next year you will be cradling a baby son."

Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

Matthew 10:37-42

[Jesus said,] "...Whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me."

A Word From Pope Francis

Commitment to mission is not something added on to the Christian life...but is an essential element of faith itself. A relationship with the Lord entails being sent out into the world as prophets of his word and witnesses of his love...We must overcome a sense of our own inadequacy and not yield to pessimism, which merely turns us into passive spectators of a dreary and monotonous life. There is no room for fear! God himself comes to cleanse our "unclean lips" and equip us for the mission.

—Fifty-fourth World Day of Prayer for Vocations, November 27, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How can I live my life as though nothing is more important than Jesus?
- Do I regularly witness to my love for Jesus, using words when necessary?



We Are Called to Be Missionaries

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

If you are a Catholic, you are a missionary. All Catholics are called to be missionaries.

That doesn't mean we have to leave home and go to some distant land to preach the gospel to those who have never heard of Jesus, although some Catholics accept that vocation. Every Catholic is a missionary because we all participate in the mission of Jesus Christ.

What it means to be Catholic can be described in various ways, but following Jesus is at the heart of it. We are Catholics because God has called us to follow Jesus. We follow Jesus out of love, and love is generative. That's the very nature of love.

For example, as a husband and wife grow in their love for one another, they will seek ways in which their love can find expression beyond themselves. They may decide to have children and start a family. They may decide to express their love in a ministry of service. Love always seeks some outward, generative expression. This generative love is at the heart of our understanding of God as Trinity: The love of the Father generates the only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from their love. This generative love is the reason for creation; it is the reason for the Incarnation. "God so loved the world..." It was Jesus' mission to proclaim this love or, in the language of the Bible, to announce the kingdom of God.

It was love that moved Jesus to open his arms on the cross and to breathe the Holy Spirit into the Church. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). Jesus has commissioned us to continue his mission of announcing the kingdom. At the Eucharist, we as a Church gather to proclaim our "yes" to God's offer of love.

To the Ends of the Earth

Through the Eucharist, we are continually being transformed into Christ's body and empowered by his Spirit. As Catholics we are to be the sacrament, the outward sign of the "I love you" that God spoke in Jesus Christ. God doesn't want this great love to be kept a secret. God wants this "I love you" to embrace every man and woman and to reach the ends of the earth. In order for that to happen, the Catholic Church must be a missionary Church.

Being a missionary is what makes being Catholic so exciting! Being Catholic is not just being a member of a club. It is not something we do from time to time at our local parish. Being Catholic means that we are missionaries of the good news, that we are living signs of God's generative love.

We announce by our words, but especially by our deeds, that the way things are is not the way things have to be. We do not have to live in fear. God's love is more powerful than evil. Peace

is possible. Even the "little ones" are important. God is a God of abundant life. Sins are forgiven. Justice will triumph. Death is not the end. Easter holds the final word! To carry this message—to participate in the mission of Jesus—is the joy of being Catholic.

Living Signs

Not everyone finds being Catholic a joy. I think of the man who, when asked why he no longer went to Mass, replied: "Because I see Catholics in Church looking so holy that they could be Jesus Christ himself. But when they walk out those doors, you can't tell them from anybody else."

That's where being a missionary kicks in. When we walk out those doors, can people see that we are different? I don't mean "different" in some superficial way. Are we more generous, more tolerant, more open, more truthful, more just, more concerned about the poor, more generous with our wealth, more inclusive? In short, are we more Catholic?

If our mission is to announce the kingdom of God, we ourselves must be living signs of that kingdom. †

Source: *Every Day Catholic*,
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Lord, your death on the cross brought life to the world. Help me follow your example of selfless love.

From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

July 3–8

Mon. St. Thomas:
Eph 2:19–22 / Jn 20:24–29
Tue. Weekday:
Gn 19:15–29 / Mt 8:23–27
Wed. Weekday:
Gn 21:5, 8–20a / Mt 8:28–34

Thu. Weekday:
Gn 22:1b–19 / Mt 9:1–8
Fri. Weekday:
Gn 23:1–4, 19; 24:1–8, 62–67 / Mt 9:9–13
Sat. Weekday:
Gn 27:1–5, 15–29 / Mt 9:14–17



Bringing Home the Word

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | July 9, 2017

A Simple Life

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When my children were young, we went for a walk around the neighborhood. On one street we encountered two girls, about five and six years old. The elder child had her arm around the younger and was talking convincingly. “I’ll tell you how it goes,” she said. “I’ll tell you what to do, and you do it.” The five-year-old, all eyes, nodded her head at the wisdom of these words.

I don’t advocate that one person should tell another what to do, but I know I was smiling, because I thought,

“It would be nice if the world was so simple.”

Our readings today present the deceptively simple solution to the demands and the temptations of the world. It is as though God is saying, “I will tell you how it goes.”

In the face of war and devastation, Zechariah shows us the God of peace, who rides a donkey and whose justice lasts forever.

In the face of hunger, anger, and oppression, the psalmist prays to God, who is slow to anger and abounds in mercy, who raises up the fallen and satisfies the desire of every living thing, and whose reign lasts forever.

In the face of death of body and spirit, Paul talks about the life that can be ours if we but open ourselves to the Spirit of God.

And Jesus, seeing that we are burdened by temptations, the expectations of others, the laws that oppress rather than help us live, invites us to become like children, to take off the heavy yoke that binds and put on the yoke of Christ which gives life. Is he telling us what to do? Yes. All that’s left is for us to do it. †

Wouldn’t life be great if we just obeyed Jesus?

A Word From Pope Francis

God has hidden [the mysteries of his Kingdom, the manifestation of divine lordship in Jesus and the victory over Satan] from those who are all too full of themselves and who claim to know everything already..... One can easily think of some of Jesus’ contemporaries whom he repeatedly admonished, but the danger is one that always exists and concerns us, too. The “little ones,” for their part, are the humble, the simple, the poor, the marginalized, those without voice, those weary and burdened, whom Jesus pronounced “blessed.”

—World Mission Day, June 8, 2014



Sunday Readings

Zechariah 9:9–10

Behold: your king is coming to you, a just savior is he, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Romans 8:9, 11–13

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Matthew 11:25–30

[Jesus said,] “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How can I yoke myself to Jesus, my Lord and king?
- What burdens, stressors, or disappointments can I hand over to God this week?



Staying God's Course Amidst Sin

By Bishop Robert F. Morneau

"Behold I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves, so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

Jesus was a realist. The world, although charged with the grandeur of God, is also an environment scarred by sin and the misuse of the gift of freedom. For centuries Christian writers spoke of life as a warfare, a battle unto death. So Jesus gives two pieces of advice to the disciples, to us: Be shrewd! Be simple! To ground these characteristics in his followers' imagination, Jesus points out the cunning of serpents and the simplicity of doves. These metaphors contain a wealth of wisdom.

Be shrewd! When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about the payment of taxes, they received an answer that foiled their plot to incriminate him. The wolves were after the innocent Lamb. Jesus fended off their designs by distinguishing one's double obligation to God and to the city of man. Jesus answered a question with a question, thereby confusing his opponents. Jesus himself was shrewd—in the ways of the kingdom.

Shrewd, too, was Oskar Schindler (1908–1974), a German industrialist who helped save more than a thousand Jews from Hitler's death camps. Living in a culture of hatred and death, Schindler used his intelligence, material resources, and the God-given grace of compassion to thwart time and time again the work

of the Nazis. Perhaps our passage, "I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves" was engraved on his heart.

Be simple! In contrast to serpents that are bound to the earth and depend upon deception for their survival, doves have as their realm the spaciousness of the sky and the gift of flight. Although their simplicity may hold more complexity than we are aware of, the image of simplicity captures the quality of single-mindedness. Doves live in total dependency upon divine providence, as do we all. We, as human beings, can live with an awareness that we are radically poor and, therefore, everything is a gift. Consciousness of our innate poverty tends to simplify life.

All About Love

In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau's classic, he cries: "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! Let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your account on your thumbnail....Simplify, simplify."

Whether or not Thoreau had Matthew's passage in mind, the advice here is similar to that of Jesus. There is one thing that is necessary. Martha thought it was hospitality; Mary opted for contemplation. Martha waited on table to express her love; Mary gazed upon the face of Jesus and knew that love simplified everything.

As disciples of the Lord we are sent. Through baptism we have been given a mission to invite others to know, love, and imitate the life of Jesus. But we are sent

into a world filled with forces contrary to gospel values. We work and live in an ambiguous culture, one of death, blatant consumerism, violence, and injustice that violates human dignity. We need a shrewdness that is first cousin to prudence if our ministry in such an environment is to succeed.

Sense of Direction

We are sent but not alone. The Spirit is given to us and is the principal agent of our discipleship. God's Spirit is simple, for God is love. Here is the cornerstone that supports and sustains our Christian community and ministry. It is the Spirit that unifies all of our activities so that they lead to the glory of God.

Jesus is Lord and the true vine feeding us life and love. Prayer keeps us united to him. We are to bear fruit through service and witness. And, in all this, we give glory to God. Nothing can be simpler, nothing can be shrewder. †

Source: *Every Day Catholic*,
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Lord, you give rest to the weary of heart. Help me create space in my life to rest in your presence.

From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*
Rev. Warren J. Savage and
Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

July 10–15

Mon. Weekday: Gn 28:10–22a / Mt 9:18–26

Tue. St. Benedict: Gn 32:23–33 / Mt 9:32–38

Wed. Weekday: Gn 41:55–57; 42:5–7a, 17–24a / Mt 10:1–7

Thu. Weekday: Gn 44:18–21, 23b–29; 45:1–5 / Mt 10:7–15

Fri. St. Kateri Tekakwitha: Gn 46:1–7, 28–30 / Mt 10:16–23

Sat. St. Bonaventure: Gn 49:29–32; 50:15–26a / Mt 10:24–33



Bringing Home the Word

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | July 16, 2017

What Will We Yield?

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Like many families, we planted a garden in the back yard to enjoy the flowers and teach our daughters where food comes from. Cucumber seeds, tomatoes, green beans, and carrots went into the soil. We watched for weeds and bugs. There wasn't a lot we could do about the squirrels. And we plucked the few items of produce our claylike soil allowed to grow.

In the process, I discovered two things. I don't have the patience or passion for gardening that some of my friends do, and I have the utmost respect for those who tend the fields and flocks that supply our food. Every seed they plant expresses their hope in harvest. The farmer rejoices in what happens when seed, earth, and water come together.

So it is with God, who plants *us* on this earth and fills us with his word. We are God's expression of hope for the world. We are the ones through whom God can show forth his love to all. But today's parable in the Book of Matthew makes it clear that whatever ground is in our hearts and souls strongly affects the outcome.

If we are open, ready, and waiting, we will show forth the rich harvest of God's grace and righteousness. If our hearts are rocky or thorny, the yield will be like the handful of beans in my back yard, or it may be nothing and the world will not know God through us.

But we are fortunate. God is a far more patient gardener than I was and will continue to work the soil of our hearts and minds so that when we are planted, we may give a hundred times over the love that God has shown in planting us. †

A Word From Pope Francis

Saint Francis...invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. "Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker" (*Wisdom* 13:5)...For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty....The world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.

—*Laudato Si'*,
May 24, 2015



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 55:10–11

My word...shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it.

Romans 8:18–23

We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now....We also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption.

Matthew 13:1–23

[Jesus said,] "But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How often do I spend time outdoors enjoying nature?
- What messages from God can I find in the natural world today?



The Sharp Compassion of Jesus

By Bishop Robert F. Morneau

“Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division” (Luke 12:51).

Why did Jesus come to earth?

What was his mission? Was he sent for unity or division, for life or death, for love or hate?

The answer is quite clear: Jesus came that we might have life in great abundance (John 10:10). But there is a deep, universal paradox here. In Luke’s Gospel, it would appear that division, not peace, is Jesus’ real mission.

We need to ponder and to pray over this paradox. The poet T.S. Eliot provides an insight: “Beneath the bleeding hands we feel/The sharp compassion of the healer’s art.” The surgeon cuts away the cancer, a bloody “divisive” act, indeed. Yet the motive is not to inflict pain. Rather, it is to bring healing. No false tenderness allows the healer to withhold the knife; no good parent avoids disciplining his or her child. To bring health and peace, pain is sometimes needed.

So Jesus causes “division” wherever there is an unhealthy, unholy union. Out of compassion and love, the Lord separates us from everything that keeps us from the love of the Father. This may appear cruel, but it is in fact a great act of divine kindness. Shakespeare’s Hamlet addresses his mother, the queen, in these words: “I must be cruel only to be kind.”

“Graced” Division

Pope St. John XXIII spoke often about peace, the peace that is the kingdom of God. In his encyclical Peace on Earth (*Pacem in Terris*), he maintains that peace demands four elements: truth, freedom, charity, and justice. Jesus came to inaugurate that kingdom; he came to express truth, to incarnate love, to foster freedom, and to promote justice. In this mission there would be much “division,” since people often opted for untruth and indifference, slavery and injustice.

Each of us must distinguish graced division from divisions that are simply destructive. The surgeon’s knife separates a diseased organ or a tumor from the body—a moment of grace. The slave trader separates children from their parents—a horrendous sin. Moses placed before his people a choice of life or death (Deuteronomy 30:19). We are given the same choice: to be agents of life and peace or instruments of death and chaos.

Just before Communion we pray, “Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles, Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.” So when we read, “Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division,” we know that Jesus is making reference to what is called a false peace, one in which relationships are not harmonious. Jesus will have nothing to do with such unions—he will split them apart out of love and for the sake of truth.

The Big Peace

The human condition requires choices that sometimes cause division and pain. We need but note the mission work of the following Christians: Alan Paton, in his opposition to apartheid in South Africa; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his involvement in a plot to assassinate Hitler; Martin Luther King, Jr., in his ministry to secure human rights; Thomas Merton, in his stand against nuclear war; Dorothy Day, who fought against the status quo that kept so many in radical poverty. All of them came to bring “division,” not peace. These disciples of Christ fought for the big “peace”: the kingdom of God.

Those great people showed us that God’s word is a two-edged sword. And we can be like them. It is a good spiritual exercise for all of us to write out our mission statement. What has God called us to be and to do? Why have we come to this earth? Surely a major task we have all been given is to bring peace, right relationships. We can, with God’s help. †



Lord Jesus, you completed God’s work on earth. Help me know and accomplish God’s will.

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Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

July 17–22

Mon. Weekday:
Ex 1:8–14, 22 / Mt 10:34–11:1
Tue. Weekday:
Ex 2:1–15a / Mt 11:20–24
Wed. Weekday:
Ex 3:1–6, 9–12 / Mt 11:25–27

Thu. Weekday:
Ex 3:13–20 / Mt 11:28–30
Fri. Weekday:
Ex 11:10–12:14 / Mt 12:1–8
Sat. St. Mary Magdalene: Sg 3:1–4b or
2 Cor 5:14–17 / Jn 20:1–2, 11–18



Bringing Home the Word

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | July 23, 2017

The Parable of the Car Trash

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When our children were smaller, my husband would periodically clean out my car. His method was always interesting to me. Into a bag would go receipts, empty juice boxes, stray books, mittens, pens, loose change and anything that would get in the way

of vacuuming the floor. He made no distinction between trash and stuff we could keep. Then he'd bring it all to me to sort through. I used to playfully laugh at his carefulness: "Really, you kept the soda can?"

I have come to realize that his method of cleaning is an echo of today's parable. Young shoots, whether wheat or weeds, look very much alike. What if, in our zeal to toss out weeds, we throw away the wheat as well? Jesus tells us it is better to gather them all together at the end when they look more like their true selves and deal with them then.

Perhaps there might be some final use for the juice box or the soda can before we throw it away. At least they can be recycled! I find this a remarkably hopeful attitude and, while we do end up throwing out a great deal, we have occasionally uncovered some treasures that might have been lost forever.

Maybe the kingdom of heaven is also like a person cleaning out a car. Whether field or car, I'd like to think that God watches over what he plants and carefully looks to find new strains of wheat among the tried-and-true stalks. And in his mercy, God will carefully examine everything before he lets go of the weeds altogether. †

Sunday Readings

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19

You taught your people, by these deeds, that those who are righteous must be kind; and you gave your children reason to hope that you would allow them to repent for their sins.

Romans 8:26-27

The Spirit...comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought.

Matthew 13:24-43 or 13:24-30

[Jesus] replied, "...If you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest; then at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

A Word From Pope Francis

The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love. "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16), John affirms for the first and only time in all of Scripture. This love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus' entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in favor of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion.



—*Misericordiae Vultus*,
April 11, 2015

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I more readily imitate God's judgment, justice, or mercy?
- How can I practice all three?



Some of the Ways We Talk to God

By Phyllis Zagano

The first thing we need to know and believe is that prayer—any type of prayer—is real, and that God knows our needs and always answers our prayers.

Most times when we think of prayer, the prayer of petition comes to mind first. It is common to say that sometimes God’s answer to our prayerful pleas is “no” but that, come to think of it, the “no” we seem to hear is in fact a “yes.” God always affirms who we are as humans. That is, when we pray in petition for things we want, God kindly teaches us who we are by supplying what we truly need.

In other words, we may *want* a new car to impress friends and neighbors, but what we *need* is security from God. Once we accept that gift—a gift born of prayer—then the rest becomes easy.

So the first petition we must present to the Lord is a genuine petition to see ourselves as God sees us. And God sees us, always, as perfect for what we are to do and how we are to be, so long as we cooperate in God’s plan and with God’s will.

People often want to know what the best type of prayer is. I do not believe there is any “best” prayer, provided that every prayer is rooted in an understanding of our dependence on God and his unconditional love for us.

There are four essential movements of the heart that follow our accepting

that God exists and God loves us. They are adoration, petition, contrition, and thanksgiving. Each is a separate movement of the heart and of the head, and each is “best” for a certain time of life or even for a certain time of day.

Loving and Being Loved

Adoration is at once the easiest and the hardest type of prayer because it requires that we do nothing but love and be loved. That involves giving up control, which most of us do not like to do.

But think of the wonder in a baby’s eyes as the child looks at you. And think of the wonder in your eyes as you look at the child. This is how you are with God, and God with you, in the prayer of adoration. No words—at least not many—just a sharing of love between two beings for whom there is nothing and no one else in the world at that moment.

Contrition is another familiar type of prayer. With contrition we acknowledge that we have made a mistake, denied God’s perfect creation of us, and tried to remedy the pain of that denial.

Sometimes we do this with excessive alcohol or food, or sometimes we misuse our sexual faculties. Sometimes our insecurities cause us to lie, cheat, or steal. These are real forces in everyone’s life, and we need to apologize to God for denying who we are and forgetting that our real security is with God, not with creatures or with creature comforts. So we say “sorry” in a deep, genuine way and move on.

Answered “in Love”

Petition, as stated earlier, involves simply asking a favor of God. Sometimes the favor we ask cannot be granted—the loved one will die, the job will end, the illness will return. Here we can feel angry with God. That is actually very healthy, for we have the right as God’s beloved to complain and to complain loudly. As we do, we might hear more clearly how God has answered our prayers in love (albeit in the negative) and how God wants us to have lives that mirror his love for the world.

Thanksgiving is the final mode of prayer, and it deserves much more attention than we give it. Thanksgiving is more than simple manners—like the thank-you notes we may write after receiving gifts at birthdays and Christmas. Thanksgiving is a minute-by-minute attitude that brings us to the place of conscious dependence upon the Lord and joyful acceptance of God’s will in our lives.

So when we pray, we find God’s gift of joy in life—without our even asking for it.†

Source: *Every Day Catholic*,
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Lord, do not abandon me, for I am small and weak. I need your love.

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Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

July 24–29

Mon. Weekday:
Ex 14:5–18 / Mt 12:38–42
Tue. St. James:
2 Cor 4:7–15 / Mt 20:20–28
Wed. Sts. Joachim and Anne:
Ex 16:1–5, 9–15 / Mt 13:1–9

Thu. Weekday: Ex 19:1–2, 9–11, 16–20b / Mt 13:10–17
Fri. Weekday:
Ex 20:1–17 / Mt 13:18–23
Sat. St. Martha: Ex 24:3–8 / Jn 11:19–27 or Lk 10:38–42



Bringing Home the Word

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | July 30, 2017

Finding Wisdom and God

By Mary Katharine Deeley

If you could ask for anything, what would it be? In the classic story *The Monkey's Paw*, a couple's first wish is granted but at a terrible price, and the owners realize what the old adage tells us: "Be careful what you wish for—you just might get it."

In the first reading today, Solomon

is given the opportunity to ask God for anything, and after praying, he finally asks for wisdom that he might discern what is right. God affirms the goodness of the wish and, noting that Solomon did not ask for riches or victory in war, grants it gladly.

In spite of some of his more questionable choices later in his life, Solomon will always be remembered for this request. Wisdom, as we find out in another part of Scripture, is God's "unfailing treasure; those who gain this treasure win the friendship of God" (Wisdom 7:14).

In today's Gospel, Jesus compares the kingdom of God both to a treasure and to someone who searches for one.

I think the desire for the kingdom of God and the desire for wisdom come out of the same longing in our hearts. We might find God's wisdom in surprising places, but once we find her, we must be willing to give all we have to acquire her, for she will help us know what is of God.

At the same time, the kingdom of God goes in search of us. Maybe we are God's pearls and, with wisdom as a guide, each one of us can become children and friends of God, knowing what is right.

Find wisdom, then, and do what you must to get her. When you do this, you shall also find God. †

Sunday Readings

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

[Solomon said,] "Give your servant, therefore, a listening heart to judge your people and to distinguish between good and evil. For who is able to give judgment for this vast people of yours?"

Romans 8:28-30

We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose

Matthew 13:44-52 or 13:44-46

[Jesus said,] "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

A Word From Pope Francis

The Apostle Thomas, at the conclusion of his impassioned quest, not only came to believe in the resurrection but found in Jesus his life's greatest treasure, his Lord. He says to Jesus: "My Lord and my God!" [John 20:28]. We would do well, today, and every day, to pray these magnificent words, and to say to the Lord: You are my one treasure, the path I must follow, the core of my life, my all.

—Mass with priests, men and women religious, consecrated people and Polish seminarians at St. John Paul II Shrine, Kraków, July 30, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What are you searching for? What are you willing to give up for it?
- Are there riches or treasures that have a stronger hold on your heart than the kingdom of God?



Behind Jesus' Rich Man/Poor Man Parable

By Alice Camille

What's so bad about being rich? Is it a sin, after all, to work hard and reap the rewards of your labor?

The Bible tells us that God hears the cry of the poor, and the Church teaches that God has a preferential option for the poor. This implies we ought to be looking out for the poor as well. So does this mean that God doesn't hear the cry of the well-to-do and God has it in for the SUV-driving crowd?

Lots of ancient morality stories deal with the disparity between rich and poor, and some of these tales fall into the category of "next-life reversals." We can see the basic outline of these stories in the parable Jesus tells of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar (Luke 16:19-31). Remember this one?

The rich man, called Dives by tradition (*dives* is Latin for "rich"), dines sumptuously every day, while Lazarus desires but does not get even the crumbs that fall from the rich guy's table. Instead, he sits outside, his running sores licked by dogs. But it gets better for our hero Lazarus. In the next life, he gets to lie in the bosom of Abraham in heaven, while the rich fellow groans in the torments of the netherworld. Not quite the end of the story, but that's enough for now.

Why does the rich man get the netherworld, while Lazarus gets paradise? There is no hint in the story

that Dives is a bad man or, for that matter, that Lazarus is a good one. So we are nearly led to believe that being rich is the sin of the first man and being poor is the virtue of the second. But that's not right, either. So what are we to understand from this story?

Seeking the Full Story

Perhaps we want more details to fill in the blanks about these characters. Was the rich man aware of Lazarus at his door? Did he know about his hunger, the sores, the dog situation, and did he choose to do nothing about it? And how about Lazarus? How did he get to be in this awful predicament, and did he do anything to contribute to his striking lack of success?

We begin to imagine that Dives must have made a big mistake (something we might avoid with a little forethought); say, he forgot to give to the Bishop's Annual Appeal or the United Way. And seeing Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham at the end, we presume that he ended up on skid row, not because he was lazy, did poorly on his SATs, or had a drinking problem, but because he got laid off in a failing economy. What we want, in short, is evidence that the rich guy was a bad guy, and the poor man a victim of injustice.

But the parable tells us none of that. What we do know is that the rich man had a great life and Lazarus had a lousy time of it, and that after they died, their fortunes were reversed.

Final Lessons

Unlike many afterlife reversal stories from antiquity, however, Lazarus does not jeer at the rich man's fate from where he now sits in heaven, a sign perhaps of his good-heartedness. He never wanted to break into the rich man's house and take his stuff, either; he just wanted the crumbs.

And we catch a glimpse of the rich man's soul when he does not protest his final state but asks only to warn his brothers, still guilty of the same choices he made. This in itself may be an admission of his negligence. Dives acknowledges that his brothers remain blissfully unrepentant in their self-serving lifestyle.

The bottom line would seem to be that those whose needs are well-met (and then some) must have great compassion. No excuses. Suffering is all around us. So, pick a cause, any cause: But be compassionate! It's no sin to be rich, but it's a fatal error not to share. †

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Lord, your death on the cross reveals the kingdom of heaven on earth. Help me be more aware of God's presence.

From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*
Rev. Warren J. Savage and
Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

July 31–August 5

Mon. St. Ignatius of Loyola:
Ex 32:15–24, 30–34 / Mt 13:31–35
Tue. St. Alphonsus Liguori: Ex 33:7–11;
34:5b–9, 28 / Mt 13:36–43
Wed. Weekday:
Ex 34:29–35 / Mt 13:44–46

Thu. Weekday:
Ex 40:16–21, 34–38 / Mt 13:47–53
Fri. St. John Vianney: Lv 23:1, 4–11,
15–16, 27, 34b–37 / Mt 13:54–58
Sat. Weekday: Lv 25:1, 8–17 / Mt 14:1–12