



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 3, 2017

Countering Our Culture

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When my children were school age, my husband and I decided to use TV commercials as teaching tools. “What are they trying to sell you?” we’d ask. “How are they trying to get you to want it?” Their answers grew as they did: “They want you to think you’ll be cool.” “They’re showing you that rich people have this and hope you want to be like them.”

I often learned as much as our children did, and I like to think that, as a result, we were a little less vulnerable to the techniques.

A consumer culture like ours depends

on making people want more and better than they have. To support it, manufacturers must convince us that this cereal is better than that, this present will fill the void we have experienced, or that our true happiness depends on a brand name, location, degree, or career.

“Do not conform yourselves to this age,” Paul tells us in today’s reading from Romans. This age tells us we cannot be whole until we’ve achieved or obtained certain things.

In reminding us that our goal is not to be formed with this age, St. Paul states, rather, it lies in changing our form with Christ—actually changing our mind and heart so we can know and love God ever more deeply. So rather than conforming, we are better off transforming.

What does changing form look like for the Christian? It looks like loving the enemy, caring for those who have less, gathering at the eucharistic table, being good stewards of resources and, yes, taking up a cross and following Christ—even to death, if necessary.

There we will find our joy and our freedom. †

Rather than conform, transform.

Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 20:7-9

You seduced me, O LORD, and I let myself be seduced; you were too strong for me, and you prevailed.

Romans 12:1-2

“This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 16:21-27

[Jesus said,] “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

A Word From Pope Francis

The devil..., to divert Jesus from the way of the cross, sets before him false messianic hopes: economic well-being...a dramatic and miraculous style...; and lastly, a shortcut to power and dominion, in exchange for an act of adoration to Satan.... Note well how Jesus responds. He does not dialogue with Satan....Jesus is well aware that there can be no dialogue with Satan, for he is cunning. That is why Jesus...chooses to take refuge in the Word of God and responds with the power of this Word.

—Angelus, St. Peter’s Square, March 9, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How are you tempted by the enemy of your soul? Are you ever convinced you aren’t being tempted at all?
- How can you, with God’s help, approach those persons, places, or things that normally tempt you?



Winning and Losing for Jesus

By Fr. William H. Shannon

What is this topsy-turvy world Jesus is talking about, this world in which saving means losing and losing means saving? It sounds like telling the Yankees, “If you win a game, you lose; and if you lose a game, you win.” Say that to a baseball fan in the Bronx and see how far you get! What do Jesus’ words really mean?

Well, for starters, note that Jesus is not making the simple equation: save = lose, and lose = save. He is talking about losing one’s life for the sake of Jesus. This would have made perfectly good sense to the early Church martyrs (like Sts. Stephen, Agnes, and others), as it would for modern martyrs (Archbishop Oscar Romero, Jean Donovan, and others). All gave their lives in witness to their faith. For them, losing their mortal lives for Jesus’ sake meant achieving immortal life with him forever.

What does losing our lives for the sake of Jesus mean for us everyday Catholics who are not called upon to witness to our faith with bloodshed?

Taking on New Life

What does it mean for us to lose our lives in order to save our lives? First we

need to realize that the life we lose is not the same as the life we save. Saint Paul tells us that in Christ we become a new creation. We take on a new life in Christ.

Some years ago, a low-budget movie, *Jesus of Montreal*, was made in Canada. It is about the restaging of a passion play by a group of underemployed actors. In the show, an actor named Daniel takes the part of Jesus. At first he appears to be simply playing a role, but as the play progresses the role begins to turn real. He becomes increasingly identified with Jesus in his daily life.

On one occasion he goes into a studio where a sleazy commercial that demeans women is being made. He protests against it. When the producers try to eject him, he overturns their lights in a rage and walks out. The scene is clearly reminiscent of Jesus and the moneychangers in the temple.

This may be seen as a metaphor of our stories. We put on Christ in baptism. But that is only the beginning. At first it’s as if we are play-acting: doing Christian things, yet without full realization of who we have become. We have to grow into Christ in all aspects of our lives—and that takes time. The Apostle Paul writes:

The life we lose for Jesus is not the same as the life we save.

“We should grow in every way into him who is the head [of the body], Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

The Price of Discipleship

All this sounds fine until we read our Gospel reading. Reflecting on it jolts us to the core. It tells us that to grow into Christ, to become his disciples, we have to pay a price. Discipleship may bring joy, peace, and a sense of being grounded in Christ. But it inevitably brings the cross, too. Carrying our own cross will surely be part of our lives if we truly want to follow in the footsteps of a crucified Jesus.

The Scriptures make clear that it was necessary for Jesus to suffer. And Jesus makes clear that suffering applies to his disciples as well as to himself. The invitation to be a disciple is a great but costly grace. And it is an invitation. Jesus always respects our freedom.

Each of us needs only to look into our own lives to find our crosses. We can resent or embrace them. Embracing is the mark of a true disciple. †



Lord, your resurrection conquered sin and death. Give me the strength to overcome pride so I can become a humble servant of your love and peace. Amen.

From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 4–9

Mon. Weekday:
1 Thes 4:13–18 / Lk 4:16–30

Tue. Weekday:
1 Thes 5:1–6, 9–11 / Lk 4:31–37

Wed. Weekday:
Col 1:1–8 / Lk 4:38–44

Thu. Weekday:
Col 1:9–14 / Lk 5:1–11

Fri. Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary:
Mi 5:1–4a or Rom 8:28–30 / Mt 1:1–16, 18–23 or 1:18–23

Sat. St. Peter Claver: Col 1:21–23 / Lk 6:1–5



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 10, 2017

The Hour of Awakening

By Mary Katharine Deeley

One of my favorite retreat exercises is to ask participants to think of a motto that could guide them for the rest of their lives. What fragment of a prayer, scriptural text, or saint quotation would let people know how you want to live your life?

If nothing comes to mind, I give them Bibles and invite them to skim the epistles and Gospels for possibilities, reminding them that this is their motto for today and that they can change it tomorrow.

Once they have their mottoes, I ask them to reflect on what it would look

like if they lived with the motto always on their mind. The exercise helps focus people on what they do well and on what needs a little work.

Over the years, I've returned frequently to the beginning of the epistle that will be read on this day: "Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another." I remember when I've done that well and when—driven by anger, fear, or ego—I've fallen far short of the ideal. It has always appealed to me as a wonderful motto.

Today, however, I'm struck by Romans 13:11: "It is the hour now for you to wake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

I think there are many times when we're asleep and unaware of how we hurt others by what we say and do.

What if we saw everything as Christ did, touched everyone as Christ touched them?

If we put on Christ, we wouldn't need to tell people which words we hope will guide us. We'd simply become the living example to them. †

*Live your motto.
Live like Christ.*

A Word From Pope Francis

If you are not capable of performing fraternal reproof with love, with charity, in truth and with humility, you will offend, damage that person's heart: you will create an extra tale that wounds and you will become a blind hypocrite, as Jesus says...a sign which perhaps can help us: when one sees something wrong and feels that he should correct it but perceives a certain pleasure in doing so, then it is time to pay attention, because that is not the Lord's way. In the Lord there is always...the difficulty of doing something good.

—Morning meditation, September 12, 2014



Sunday Readings

Ezekiel 33:7-9

You, son of man—I have appointed you as a sentinel for the house of Israel.

Romans 13:8-10

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 18:15-20

[Jesus said,] "...Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Do I find the idea of charitable correction uncomfortable? Why or why not?
- How willing am I to receive correction from my peers? My spouse? My child? My boss?



How Can I Be Expected to Love My Enemies?

By Fr. William H. Shannon

Love my enemies? What in the world is Jesus thinking about: Why, there are times when I have trouble loving some of my friends! How can I possibly be expected to love my enemies?

If that's your reaction, you have lots of company. To reflect prayerfully about these strong words of Jesus, let me point out that this command is one of four different love commands in the Gospels.

First, there is the general Christian responsibility to "love God above all and your neighbor as yourself." Then there is the general Christian responsibility in today's second reading to "love your neighbor as yourself." Then there is the command that relates the disciples of Jesus to one another. Jesus says, "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you" (John 15:12). Finally there is the command that calls for a love that includes everybody. It's not enough to love friendly neighbors or other disciples. We must love without limits. For Jesus says: "I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

The first two commands make sense. Peace and harmony in family and society come from loving those we are close to. The disciples' loving of one another, though demanding at times, also makes good sense. For Jesus' disciples are called to imitate him. But the command, "Love your enemies," doesn't seem to make any sense at all. It seems to go against fundamental principles of justice and the duty we have to love ourselves and not allow ourselves to be victimized by others.

No Wiggle Room

The maddening thing is that this central teaching of Jesus is so all-inclusive. It allows us no wiggle room. We cannot choose which enemies we will love and which we will not. Nor can our love be simply an attitude. We have to act. We must do good to them even if they hate us. We must ask God's blessings for them even if they curse us. We have to pray for them even if they mistreat us.

The love Jesus calls us to is unconditional. It brooks no ifs. It's a love that


says, "I love you, no matter what you do or say, for you are the image of God."

Finding Our Sisters and Brothers

There's a story about a rabbi who was discussing with his disciples the difference between day and night: "When," he asked, "does the night end and the day begin?" One disciple replied, "Is it the moment when you can tell the difference between a sheep and a dog?" "No," the rabbi answered, "it isn't that." Then peering deeply into their eyes, he said, "It is the moment when you look into the face you have never seen before and recognize the stranger as a sister or brother. Until that time comes, no matter how bright the day, it is still night for you."

A moving story, but we have to take it a bit further. We have to be able to look into the faces of neighbors we *have* seen and responded to with anger, impatience, ill will. To look into the face of such people and see a sister or brother: This is the kind of unconditional, nonviolent love to which Jesus calls each of us. †

We cannot choose which enemies we will love and which we will not. Nor can our love be simply an attitude. We have to act.


Lord, I am grateful for your gifts of love, mercy, and forgiveness. Help me to share these gifts with those who have hurt me. Amen.
From *Grateful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 11-16

Mon. Weekday:
Col 1:24-2:3 / Lk 6:6-11
Tue. Weekday:
Col 2:6-15 / Lk 6:12-19
Wed. St. John Chrysostom:
Col 3:1-11 / Lk 6:20-26

Thu. Exaltation of the Holy Cross:
Nm 21:4b-9 / Phil 2:6-11 / Jn 3:13-17
Fri. Our Lady of Sorrows: 1 Tm 1:1-2, 12-14 / Jn 19:25-27 or Lk 2:33-35
Sat. Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian:
1 Tm 1:15-17 / Lk 6:43-49



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 17, 2017

Teaching Forgiveness

By Judith Dunlap

Some families hang on to grievances like treasured heirlooms. They look for insults and slights. Belligerence almost becomes a way of life. Remember the Hatfields and the McCoys? They are the antithesis of Christian behavior. Being generous with our forgiveness is the hallmark of our faith. Teaching, celebrating, and living forgiveness are characteristics of the home church as well as the larger Church.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that when we refuse to forgive we harden and close our hearts, making it

difficult for God's love to enter. Experts tell us that anger and grief that are harbored and rehashed can do physical as well as spiritual harm.

You do a great service to your children when you teach them to forgive and let go. When they have been injured, give them time to talk about their injury. Listen to and allow them to express their anger, grief, or frustration. Let them know they have a right to all of their feelings, but then help them see that hanging on to anger or grief for a long time is an uncomfortable way to live. Invite them to pray and ask God to heal their hurts and help them forgive, or even just want to forgive. Try to model this behavior by talking about your own hurts. Pray with your children, asking God to open your hearts to divine forgiveness.

In the Our Father, the prayer Jesus gave his disciples and his Church, we are reminded that forgiving others is the prerequisite for receiving forgiveness ourselves: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." When we open our hearts in an effort to forgive others, we allow God's loving forgiveness to enter. Inherent in that forgiveness is the mandate to pass it along. †

Harbored anger hurts you.

A Word From Pope Francis

We must not grow weary, then, of keeping watch over our thoughts and our attitudes, in order that we may be given even now a foretaste of the warmth and splendor of God's Face...which in eternal life we shall contemplate in all its fullness. Forward, thinking of this judgment which begins now....Forward, doing so in such a way that our hearts open to Jesus and to his salvation; forward without fear, for...if we ask forgiveness for our sins he will forgive us. This is what Jesus is like. Forward then,...which will bring us to the glory of heaven!

—General audience,
St. Peter's Square,
December 11, 2013



Sunday Readings

Sirach 27:30—28:7

Forgive your neighbor the wrong done to you; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.

Romans 14:7-9

For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Matthew 18:21-35

[Jesus said,] "Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- How kind, patient, and forgiving am I on a regular basis?
- How kind, patient, and forgiving would others say I am?



How to Really Forgive

By Fr. William H. Shannon

Every day I say a prayer at least seven times which, if I truly thought about its full meaning, would scare me half to death. I say the Lord's Prayer, in which I ask God to treat me the way I treat others. I suspect—though I don't like to admit it—that I secretly hope that God will treat me much better than I treat others.

It's not that I'm a nasty person. At least I don't think I am. But there are times when I treat others shabbily and find it hard to forgive. Oh, I can go through the external motions of being gingerly polite, but rancor may still be in my heart. So let's admit it: It takes courage to say the Lord's Prayer. In this text from Matthew, Jesus is blunt: If you forgive, God will forgive you. If you don't forgive, God won't forgive you.

What does Jesus mean by such strong, demanding words? First, he does *not* mean that our God is a God of retaliation who says, "I'll show you. If you don't forgive I will get even with you. I won't forgive you either." The God Jesus reveals loves us and continues to love us, no matter what we do.

The point Jesus is making is more subtle. He is telling us that God, much

as God might want to do so, cannot forgive us if we do not forgive others. He is telling us that forgiveness cannot be received by an unforgiving heart.

Receptive Hearts

As I write this, I look out the window of my office where I see a cement sidewalk. I think to myself: How nice it would be if I could look out and, instead of seeing slabs of concrete, encounter a colorful group of lovely flowers growing in the middle of that space. I might even ask a friend who has a green thumb to plant such flowers there for me. But alas, much as he might want to please me, it is impossible for my friend to do so. The concrete is too hard to receive the roots of the flowers.

Likewise, a hardened heart can be no more open to forgiveness than concrete is to flower seeds. We need to have our hardened hearts softened and opened by God's grace so that God's loving forgiveness can flow into us and through us to others.

Gift of Tears

Do you remember the story of the Israelites in the desert protesting to

Moses that they have no water to drink? God ordered Moses to strike a huge rock with his staff and, behold, water gushed forth in abundance. Early Church writers often prayed for the gift of tears that would open their hearts and enable them to receive God's loving forgiveness. Indeed, in an older Latin missal there was a Mass for the gift of tears. (This Mass has been revived in the latest version of *The Roman Missal*.)

The opening prayer is strikingly beautiful and relates to forgiveness:

*Almighty and most gentle God,
Who from a rock made flow
A fountain of living water
For your thirsting people,
draw now from the hardness
of our hearts
tears of sorrow
that we may weep
for our sins and,
by your continued mercy,
be ready to accept their pardon. Amen.*

The situation may well arise when this lovely prayer will prove helpful for you. Clip it out and take it with you for safe keeping. †

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for your endless mercy. Give me the humility and courage to forgive those who have hurt me. Amen.

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

***Jesus tells us we cannot receive forgiveness
if our own heart is unforgiving.***

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 18–23

Mon. Weekday: 1 Tm 2:1–8 / Lk 7:1–10
Tue. Weekday: 1 Tm 3:1–13 / Lk 7:11–17
Wed. Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gõn,
Paul Chõng Ha-sang, and
Companions:
1 Tm 3:14–16 / Lk 7:31–35

Thu. St. Matthew:
Eph 4:1–7, 11–13 / Mt 9:9–13
Fri. Weekday:
1 Tm 6:2c–12 / Lk 8:1–3
Sat. St. Pius of Pietrelcina:
1 Tm 6:13–16 / Lk 8:4–15



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 24, 2017

God's Payment to Us

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When I was a child, family allowances were pegged to age. The older we were, the more we got, reflecting our growing responsibility in doing household chores. If we did extra, we got extra—it was as simple as that. Complaints were few, and we waited in great anticipation for the day allowances were handed out.

Because of that experience, I feel some sympathy for the workers in today's readings who worked all day only to find they'd receive what the latecomers got. I certainly wouldn't have thought it fair if my fourteen-years-younger sister had gotten the same allowance I did!

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 55:6–9

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

Philippians 1:20c–24, 27a

I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Matthew 20:1–16a

[Jesus said,] "Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

But, as Isaiah so gently reminds us, God's ways are not ours.

God's wages cannot be measured in dollars. Grace, freedom, mercy, and love are the payment God renders for our willingness to work in his vineyard. These things cannot be divided because God is not stingy or miserly. Nor can they be earned, for they are gifts. God gives his gifts wholly and freely to all who turn to him.

Think of it this way: Does God give less grace or freedom to the adult who is baptized at thirty than to the thirty-year-old who was baptized as an infant? The question makes us laugh—of course not.

It is very much like us to want our fair share, and we've become accustomed to earning our wages. It is very like God to want every person to taste the joy and freedom of life in him, and the first step to doing so is simply accepting his invitation.

We might as well start now. †

*God's wages to us
can't be divided
because God is not
stingy or miserly.*

A Word From Pope Francis

Some of you said that this system cannot endure. We must change it. We must put human dignity back at the center and on that pillar build the alternative social structures we need. This must be done with courage but also with intelligence, with tenacity but without fanaticism, with passion yet without violence. And all of us together, addressing the conflicts without getting trapped in them, always seeking to resolve the tensions in order to reach a higher plane of unity, of peace, and of justice. We Christians have...a guide to action...the Beatitudes and the Last Judgment passage.

—Mass and blessing of sacred pallium for new archbishops, Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, June 29, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What wages do you expect from God?
- Do I treat all people with dignity?



Fairness vs. Generosity

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce

My three children, now teenagers, have always insisted that my wife and I be fair in our dealings with them. By fair, of course, they mean that we treat them absolutely equally.

“That’s not fair,” they point out with great regularity when one of them gets something the others didn’t: “He got to eat out and I didn’t. She got to stay out late and I had to come home early.” These minor injustices seem to be the ultimate in unfairness to them.

“Which would you rather have, fairness or generosity?” I often ask them. For many years they consistently chose fairness, but lately they have begun to consider the positive aspects of generosity.

There are many. For one thing, fairness implies a minimal, lowest-common-denominator kind of arrangement. If each child has to have exactly the same amount of everything—money, time, attention—then it seems that all parents can do is dole out their resources with one eye on the balance scale and the other on the bottom line.

Generosity, on the other hand, allows for the spontaneous gesture, the extravagant expenditure, the once-in-a-lifetime experience. Generosity is more fun, exciting, and unexpected

than fairness—and therefore more interesting. Fairness, on the other hand, is predictable, uninspiring, and subject to a lot of boring record-keeping.

At work, too, most of us would settle for simple fairness. There is so much injustice, inequality, lying, and cheating in the workplace that the idea of a fair wage or an evenhanded employer has great appeal.

Operating by New Rules

Consider a job where fairness was assumed and generosity was the goal. In such an environment, “How generous can we afford to be?” would be the driving force. Rather than minimizing salaries or benefits, employers would try to find ways to share with employees whatever wealth or profit was available. Customers would not be asked to pay the maximum the market would bear for minimum-quality products. Parties in negotiation would not try to win the best deal possible for themselves but would attempt to fashion win-win situations for all involved.

“That’s ridiculous,” you might say. “That’s not the way the world works.” But today’s parable of the workers in the vineyard suggests that generosity is the way God would have things. In describing God’s reign, Jesus told the story of the workers who were hired at

various times of the day and yet were paid the same.

Just as my children did earlier, the workers who were hired early in the day complained that the owner was not being fair. He pointed out, however, that each of them had been paid a just wage—one they had agreed to—but that he was free to be generous. “Are you envious because I am generous?” he asked.

Exactly. Many of us think that fairness is the best that we can get, and we’re not eager to give generosity a try.

Living the Kingdom—Now

But God’s reign is supposed to be “on earth as it is in heaven,” as Jesus prayed in the Our Father. That means that the way things are in heaven—in this case, generosity over fairness—is the way things should also be on earth. If we want the reign of God in our families and workplaces, then we must at least try to operate this world by the rules of the next, where “the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

That’s very lucky for all of us because, as my friend Fr. Bill Burke has observed, “We were all hired at five in the afternoon.” †

Generosity is more fun, exciting, and unexpected than fairness—and therefore more interesting.

WEEKDAY READINGS


September 25–30

Mon. Weekday:
Ezr 1:1–6 / Lk 8:16–18
Tue. Weekday:
Ezr 6:7–8, 12b, 14–20 / Lk 8:19–21
Wed. St. Vincent de Paul:
Ezr 9:5–9 / Lk 9:1–6

Thu. Weekday: Hg 1:1–8 / Lk 9:7–9
Fri. Sts. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael:
Dn 7:9–10, 13–14 or Rv 12:7–12a / Jn 1:47–51
Sat. St. Jerome:
Zec 2:5–9, 14–15a / Lk 9:43b–45

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September 24, 2017

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Lord, I am grateful for the gift of your compassion. Help me to be more generous in sharing your compassion with others. Amen.

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