



Bringing Home the Word

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time | November 5, 2017

A Humble Challenge

By Janel Esker

It takes a lot to shock us these days. Long gone are the television shows with married couples in twin beds. It's hard to find a non-G-rated movie without profanity. Halloween costumes are skimpier and more grotesque every year. What used to startle us is now commonplace.

The same, unfortunately, can often be said about Jesus' words in the Gospels. How many times have we heard him say, "The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted?" These words, in their first-century Mediterranean

context, were incredibly shocking. Jesus' contemporaries believed that prosperity and honor were signs of God's favor. To hear that God actually wanted us to humble ourselves upended all they believed. No wonder Jesus ended up in trouble with those in power.

But are Jesus' words simply the "same ole, same ole" for us? When was the last time we were startled by Jesus' challenge to humble ourselves? No, we don't have phylacteries to widen or tassels to lengthen. Yet certainly we've sought unnecessary recognition when we felt we weren't being credited for our work. We've cut off others in traffic or pushed our way to the front of a line because we felt our time was more important than everyone else's. Instead of deeply listening to a friend, we've drawn the conversation back to our accomplishments and needs.

Perhaps it's time to let Jesus' words sink in more deeply—to let them shock us. Saint Paul reminds us today, "You received not a human word but...the word of God, which is now at work in you who believe." Let's invite Jesus to shake us up and allow his word to work in our hearts.†

*Let Jesus' words
sink in deeply.*

A Word From Pope Francis

Let us all remember this: one cannot proclaim the gospel of Jesus without the tangible witness of one's life. Those who listen to us and observe us must be able to see in our actions what they hear from our lips, and so give glory to God! I am thinking now of some advice that St. Francis of Assisi gave his brothers: preach the Gospel and, if necessary, use words.

Preaching with your life, with your witness.

—Homily,
April 14, 2013



Sunday Readings

Malachi 1:14b—2:2b, 8–10

Why, then, do we break faith with each other, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?

1 Thessalonians 2:7b–9, 13

...You received not a human word but, as it truly is, the word of God.

Matthew 23:1–12

[Jesus said,] "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- As a parent, am I a priest in my family? Do I lead my children in prayer, teach them the faith, and set a good example of faith and love of God?
- Do I pray for priests and offer them support and help?



Ways the Gospels Make Us Uncomfortable

By Kathy Coffey

It may be a shift to read the Gospels and feel discomfort. While the words and actions

of Jesus enlighten, they're no escape hatch. Conflict, tension, and frustration still plague believers.

But we read the Gospels for one purpose: to know Jesus better—not for warm fuzzies, easy answers, or reinforcement of prejudices. Nor will we always encounter “Jesus, meek and mild.”

He who threatened the cozy assumptions of his contemporaries may have the same effect on us. If we rely on the wrong supports, like wealth (Luke 6:20, 24), prestige (Matthew 23:1–12), or religious rituals (Mark 2:27–28), he'll challenge us, too.

Jesus questioned many of the customs of his time—such as the subservient role of women and the authority of the Pharisees. “It is hard to believe [Jesus] was simply an early flower child who traipsed through the sunlit fields talking about lilies and love!” Nathan Mitchell writes in *Real Presence: The Work of Eucharist*. “Who would seek to arrest and execute such a sap?”

The Perils of Storytelling

We may be uncomfortable with the Gospels' storytelling if we want just the facts. We might prefer a precise blueprint or spreadsheet to rambling, inconsistent stories. But if we compare the Bible to our own complex, difficult life stories, we grow more comfortable with its mixed genres.

We find links where the larger story of God intersects with our personal lives.

So we reflect not only on Jesus' and the Hebrews' experience in the desert, but also on our own desert times.

Wandering in the wilderness brings valuable insights we don't learn in secure kitchens.

As much as we enjoy the intriguing connections, storytelling has its shortcomings. It's unscientific, subject to interpretation, and sometimes wildly inaccurate. Two people who attended the same party might tell radically different accounts.

So, too, each Gospel writer has a different emphasis. Even within the Gospel of John, there are inconsistencies: “Jesus was deeply *troubled*” (13:21), but in the next chapter Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be *troubled*” (14:1).

Those who enjoy stories listen beneath the words. Their primary interest is the meaning stories give our experiences. We don't read the Gospels primarily for scientific accuracy or historical fact but to follow Jesus better.

We read through the lens of a human author who will sometimes shade, condense, or exaggerate. Sometimes we may also need to read biblical interpretation, but most important is our response. There's an old saying: The Gospel gives the chapter headings; we write the texts in our lives.

Too Good to Be True?

The Gospels have been misused to incite guilt. Some people may need that stern correction to luxuriating while

others starve. But many hard-working people are simply trying to survive, raise families, and do their jobs while being as generous as possible with their time and treasure. They certainly don't need another guilt trip!

What we may find harder than guilt is the Gospels' insistence on how splendid we are. Jesus walked among the diseased, smelly, and sweaty, and assured them that even in poverty, mourning, or persecution, they were blessed. Mired in our own problems, do we struggle with *good news*?

Admittedly, the central message is hard to absorb. We, limited and flawed, are made in his divine image. Throughout the Gospels, the message recurs: You are not a slave. You are a friend and adopted child with an eternal inheritance—not condemned to futility or the finality of death.

The implications could be uncomfortable. God chose us for a unique purpose and equips us to get it done. So, no whining or stalling—get on with it! †



Lord, I am grateful for your life of humble service. Give me a humble, willing heart to serve the needs of your people.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 6-11

Mon. Weekday:
Rom 11:29–36 / Lk 14:12–14

Tue. Weekday:
Rom 12:5–16b / Lk 14:15–24

Wed. Weekday:
Rom 13:8–10 / Lk 14:25–33

Thu. Dedication of the Lateran Basilica:
Ez 47:1–2, 8–9, 12 / 1 Cor 3:9c–11, 16–17 / Jn 2:13–22

Fri. St. Leo the Great:
Rom 15:14–21 / Lk 16:1–8

Sat. St. Martin of Tours:
Rom 16:3–9, 16, 22–27 / Lk 16:9–15

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Bringing Home the Word

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time | November 12, 2017

Fundamental Planning

By Janel Esker

At first glance, the well-prepared (including me) might take great pride in today’s Gospel. You know who you are—you whose purses contain everything but the kitchen sink, you who stockpile food and fuel just in case “the big one” hits. I rarely leave the house without food, drinks, tissues, and reading materials and am often the one others come to when they’re less than prepared for a long wait, unexpected hunger, or a surprise runny nose. And I’m hardly humble about my planning abilities—it’s perhaps my favorite topic for gloating.

Then how, on a recent weeklong trip, did I forget to pack underwear? My family was shocked that The Planner had forgotten something so basic. No gloating that week!

In gospel times, lamp oil was also a necessity—how would a lamp remain lit without oil? Yet five of the women in the wedding procession left home without it. Did they just forget? Did they think the bridegroom would be on time so there’d be no need for lamps after dark? How did they miss something so fundamental?

We too, in our busy lives, often miss the fundamentals. *Fundamental 1:* Life is short and we will die—at a time we don’t know. *Fundamental 2:* Nothing is more important than our relationship with God.

Today’s Gospel challenges us to think about how we’re preparing ourselves for the end of our lives. We prepare wills, trusts, and health-care directives, but how about spiritual preparations? What are we doing to deepen our relationship with God every day? How are we living our Christian faith more concretely on a daily basis? These are the fundamentals. How prepared are we? †

We sometimes miss the basics.

A Word From Pope Francis

Dear brothers, unless we train ministers capable of warming people’s hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointments, of mending their brokenness, what hope can we have for our present and future journey? It isn’t true that God’s presence has been dimmed in them.

—Address to bishops of Brazil, July 27, 2013



Sunday Readings

Wisdom 6:12–16

Resplendent and unfading is wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 or 13–14

God, through Jesus, [will] bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Matthew 25:1–13

[Jesus said,] “Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I constantly in contact with the mercy of God so I am always ready?
- How am I living now so that I am always prepared for the final encounter with Jesus?



Why Do We Suffer? *By Michael D. Guinan, OFM*

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, the Mexican and Haitian earthquakes, the Indian Ocean tsunami. Accidents, terror attacks, disease, and death. Natural disasters and those produced by humans bring with them so much suffering. Ancient literature from Egypt and Mesopotamia attests that even then people called out, “Why?” In the lament psalms of the Bible, the psalmist cries out, “Why, Lord?” Our voices join an age-old chorus!

The problem of suffering is difficult. How can we understand a benevolent, just God in the face of such human experiences?

Perhaps the best biblical example of this struggle is found in the Book of Job. Job suffers the loss of possessions and family and is afflicted with a terrible disease. Friends hear of his plight and come to console him. After Job’s cry of pain, the discussion begins.

Why is Job suffering? One easy answer that surfaces immediately is that Job deserves it; he is suffering because of his sins. When Job rejects this, his friends counter, in effect, “Don’t give us that! All humans are rotten sinners!” For them, all suffering is somehow a punishment for sin. Sad to say, Job’s friends have vocal descendants even now. While it is true that our sinful actions have consequences, as an all-purpose explanation, this one is too simplistic.

Problem or Mystery?

Even within the Book of Job, the situation is more complicated. As readers, we know from the start that his friends are wrong. Job is righteous, and his suffering is allowed by God to test his virtue. Other answers also appear in the book. Like any good ancient Near Eastern father, God disciplines us through suffering to make us better (5:17–18, 36:15). Or, suffering is mysterious, so who are we to understand God’s ways? (11:7–10, 15:8–9).

Although these responses may give temporary relief, ultimately they are not satisfactory answers to the meaning of suffering. While we seek understanding, perhaps this is not the best approach to the problem. In fact, maybe the problem with suffering is that it is not really a “problem” at all, but a mystery.

What is the difference? A problem is something “out there.” We can see all the pieces, survey its dimensions. The question is, how do we put it together? How do we solve it? Problems are solved intellectually. A mystery is different. It is a situation in which I am so immersed that I can never get far enough away to see it all “out there.” Love and death are mysteries. So is suffering.

Mysteries involve us on the deepest levels of our relationships with ourselves, others, the natural world, and with God. To be human is to be enmeshed in these relationships. When they grow into greater wholeness (through love) or come apart (through suffering), we are in the

presence of mystery. We will never solve the meaning of suffering any more than the meaning of love.

“I Am With You”

At the heart of Christianity is the affirmation that, through the Incarnation, Jesus entered into these relationships too. Jesus fully shared in the human condition. When he faced suffering and death, he also called out, “Why?” His final words from the cross were, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). We know that God did not forsake Jesus but raised him to everlasting life.

Nowhere in Scripture do we read, “Have faith in me, and you will understand everything, including suffering!” But we do read, whatever the suffering, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.” We do not suffer alone. Together, we survive all suffering—even death itself! †

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 13–18

Mon. St. Frances Xavier Cabrini:
Wis 1:1–7 / Lk 17:1–6

Tue. Weekday:
Wis 2:23–3:9 / Lk 17:7–10

Wed. Weekday:
Wis 6:1–11 / Lk 17:11–19

Thu. Weekday:
Wis 7:22b–8:1 / Lk 17:20–25

Fri. St. Elizabeth of Hungary:
Wis 13:1–9 / Lk 17:26–37

Sat. Weekday:
Wis 18:14–16; 19:6–9 / Lk 18:1–8

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Lord, I am grateful for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help me to keep awake to the movement of your Spirit in my life.

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



Bringing Home the Word

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time | November 19, 2017

Be Alert and Awake

By Mary Katharine Deeley

“Stay awake.” My siblings and I used to huddle in our rooms on Christmas night, determined to stay up for Christmas dawn. We’d inevitably fall asleep, awakening around dawn to find the presents already around the tree and Jesus in the manger.

“Stay awake,” we would say again on New Year’s Eve. This got a little easier as we got older and beat on pots and pans to celebrate the New Year.

Special occasions call for special wakefulness. We anticipate, we watch, we try to glimpse the first signs of the

holiday, birthday, or first day of vacation. These are important to us, and we don’t want to miss them.

Saint Paul tells us to stay alert and prepare for the return of the Master, for “the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night.” At the end of the Church year, everything is about watchfulness. We reflect on the end times, when Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead and draw all creation to himself.

What happens in the end? We show God what we’ve done with his many gifts. We behave as children of light and refuse to fall asleep (a metaphor for turning away from God) so we’ll be found waiting when Christ comes again. We keep the faith, knowing our hope is in the Lord.

When we were children, the temptation to fall asleep was great; we didn’t always make it to the first minutes of celebration. As adults in faith, the stakes are much higher. If we fall asleep here, we may miss the party altogether.

Let’s encourage one another while we still have time.†

Sunday Readings

Proverbs 31:10–13, 19–20, 30–31

When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls.

1 Thessalonians 5:1–6

Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober.

Matthew 25: 14–30 or 14–15, 19–21

[Jesus said,] “Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities.”

A Word From Pope Francis

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security....

More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges...while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: “Give them something to eat”

(Mark 6:37).

—The Joy of the Gospel
(*Evangeliium Gaudium*),
November 24, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What are the most important talents I have? Think of virtues, abilities, qualities, time.
- Which talent should I invest in more so I can enjoy the return God wants?



Doubling Our Love *By Joyce Rupp*

The parable of the talents is a call to look at what we have—or have not done—with God’s gifts. Today “talent” refers to a natural ability or gift. The word has its roots in the Greek *talanton*, meaning a weighted amount of money of significant worth. A talent in Jesus’ time was a valuable coin. Invested wisely, its worth could greatly increase.

I can imagine Jesus looking at the people he taught and noticing the differences in age, physical features, and social conditions. He knew that beneath these externals there was a treasure of love in each. He longed for them to recognize and share their goodness. Then he thought of the talent, the precious coin, as a way to teach them.

In this parable three servants are each given talents “according to his ability.” They are expected to use them so the value will be multiplied. Two of the three do so and are praised for being “faithful servants.” Not so the fearful servant who did nothing with what he was given. He feared displeasing the master, getting hurt by doing the wrong thing, and doubted he could meet the challenge. In doing so his gift lay unused, so he was reprimanded severely.

Guaranteed to Grow

The greatest talent we all have is our capacity to give and receive love. This gift in all of us, like the parable’s coin, has immense value. Love has the potential of growing in worth when invested in others. It has the ability of increasing in strength, depth, and quality.

Like the fearful servant, we can let this treasure of love lay idle. When we are in situations that challenge us to invest our love, we can hold back. Who wants to forgive someone who has done harm, do a kind deed if there will be no gratitude, or visit a lonely person when the day’s schedule is already full? At these times we would rather hoard our love, keeping it to ourselves.

One good deed can generate many more if we are willing to share our love. Kyle Sawyer, a ten-year-old boy, decided to raise money for a spinal disease affecting his sister. Kyle’s dedication and enthusiasm led him to find others who would help him make 2,000 paper cranes as a fund-raiser. They were sold as decorations for a hospital lobby, and after much hard work fueled by love, his efforts brought in \$12,000. Amazing what a young boy can do with one talent!

Many times we invest our love by extending simple, genuine kindnesses to others. A local pastor asked parishioners to describe loving deeds others had done for them that had made a difference. The responses he received were not about grandiose gestures. They were about

simple, loving actions like visiting a grieving widow, helping a senior citizen buy groceries, offering child care when a single parent was seeking work, listening to a confused teenager, and hugging someone who was crying.

Learning From Loss

Often the wounded share the fullest amount of love. Parents whose young children have died reach out to others with similar loss. Recovering alcoholics spend long hours supporting others struggling with sobriety. Disabled persons volunteer as receptionists for charitable organizations. We are never too old or young, too wounded or busy to significantly share ourselves with others.

Large or small, our deeds of love can make an immense difference. We might ask ourselves: How can I loosen my tight grip on the precious coin of my love? What keeps me from sharing this valuable God-given talent? How can my love grow and multiply? †



Lord, I am grateful for all your blessings. Help me to use your gifts of love and compassion to rebuild people’s lives.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 20–25

Mon. Weekday: 1 Mc 1:10–15, 41–43, 54–57, 62–63 / Lk 18:35–43

Tue. Presentation of the Blessed Virgin: 2 Mc 6:18–31 / Lk 19:1–10

Wed. St. Cecilia: 2 Mc 7:1, 20–31 / Lk 19:11–28

Thu. Weekday: 1 Mc 2:15–29 / Lk 19:41–44

Fri. St. Andrew Dũng-Lạc and Companions: 1 Mc 4:36–37, 52–59 / Lk 19:45–48

Sat. Weekday: 1 Mc 6:1–13 / Lk 20:27–40



Bringing Home the Word

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe | November 26, 2017

Honoring Our King

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In 2013, many people were eager to hear about the birth of the newest heir to the British throne, Prince George.

What makes people so interested? Does the whole idea of royalty capture our imagination and give us a fairy tale moment—a chance to live in a simpler time (at least to our childhood selves)?

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. This story is emphatically not a fairy tale, and not like any king we've experienced or read about here on earth.

This King comes as one who was obedient to his Father, even to death on a cross. This King comes, raised from the dead, to destroy death and put all things under his reign.

This King also comes as a shepherd to gather his scattered sheep, bind their wounds, and give them pasture.

And this King gathers the nations before him to judge not by how powerful they were, but how they cared for the least among them.

On the last Sunday of the Church year, before we turn our faces again toward Incarnation and birth, we remind ourselves that we are still on a journey with the King of Kings and that he will come again. It's part of the eucharistic prayer in the Acclamation of Faith at every liturgy: "We proclaim your death, O Lord, and profess your resurrection *until you come again*" (emphasis added).

Let us strive to be even more eager, more joyful, and more prepared for this King to come than we were for Prince George.

Let us begin now to live into the new life he has given us. †

He judges the nations by how they cared for the least among them.

A Word From Pope Francis

Mother Church teaches us to give food and drink to those who are hungry and thirsty, to clothe those who are naked... through the example of so many dads and mamas, who teach their children that what we have extra is for those who lack the basic necessities. It is important to know this. The rule of hospitality has always been sacred in the simplest Christian families: there is always a plate and a bed for the one in need.

—General audience, September 10, 2014



Sunday Readings

Ezekiel 34:11–12, 15–17

I myself will search for my sheep and examine them as a shepherd examines his flock.

1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 28

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Matthew 25:31–46

[Jesus said,] "...Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I ready for that final exam?
- What should I do today in order to be ready for the loving return of Jesus?



The King and His Kingdom

By Fr. William H. Shannon

You don't hear much about kings these days. They seldom make the news. Perhaps this is the reason you may find it difficult to get excited when Jesus tells us, "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Yet that kingdom must have meant something exciting to Jesus. He was continually speaking about it. So it's fair to ask: Just what made Jesus so enthusiastic about the kingdom of God?

Perhaps I should begin by asking readers, "What do you think Jesus meant by the kingdom?" I put the question to a friend who is ninety-three years old. "I think Jesus meant that the kingdom is the way God wants the world to be," she said. "The world is partially there (there are lots of good people), but it is not yet fully there." An excellent answer to a difficult question.

"The kingdom of God is the way God wants the world to be."

Jesus himself never offers one simple answer to that question. He gives lots

of hints, but we shouldn't be surprised that he never defines it. Jesus was not a philosopher proclaiming abstract truths. He was a storyteller. He describes the kingdom in stories taken from real-life situations his hearers would understand.

Perhaps you've noticed his parables tell us not what the kingdom *is*, but what it is *like*. It's like the sower who puts seed in the ground and waits for it to grow. It's like a pearl merchant who gives up all his pearls to have one special gem. It's like a lowly mustard seed that grows into a big tree, a fishnet that catches good and bad fish, a banquet for which some show up and others do not.

Making the Kingdom Come

Each story gives us insights into what the kingdom meant to Jesus. It is a multifaceted reality that can never be fully captured in words or any single story. Perhaps the clearest way I can sum up what I think Jesus meant is to repeat the words of my wise friend: "The kingdom is what God wants the world to be."

But God is not content just to let this happen. God challenges us to bring it about. Do you know what God's greatest challenge to us was? It was Jesus. A Christian writer called Jesus the "one-man-kingdom of God."

What this writer meant was that Jesus was the first person totally human—as he was also divine—who fully accepted the kingdom of God. God says to us: Look

to Jesus and in him you will see what the kingdom is. Listen to Jesus. He will tell you what it means to enter the kingdom.

The Church, the Kingdom

Jesus' preaching invites all to accept the kingdom and God's rule. He gathers followers, then sends them out to proclaim the kingdom. After his resurrection he gave this task of proclaiming the kingdom to the Church. So could we say that the Church *is* the kingdom? Not exactly. The Church is the *instrument* of the kingdom, calling people to accept God's loving reign over them. The Church is also the *sign* of the kingdom. People should be able to look to the Church and see in it—to some degree—God's loving family.

When we celebrate the Eucharist we are reminded of the difference between the Church and the kingdom when we ask for Jesus' peace: "Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom, where you live forever and ever." Only in the kingdom, where the fullness of God's reign is achieved, do we find true peace and unity. †

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful that you are my gentle shepherd. Show me how to care for your people with the same love and compassion you show me.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 27–
December 2

Mon. Weekday:
Dn 1:1–6, 8–20 / Lk 21:1–4

Tue. Weekday:
Dn 2:31–45 / Lk 21:5–11

Wed. Weekday: Dn 5:1–6, 13–14, 16–17,
23–28 / Lk 21:12–19

Thu. St. Andrew:
Rom 10:9–18 / Mt 4:18–22

Fri. Weekday:
Dn 7:2–14 / Lk 21:29–33

Sat. Weekday:
Dn 7:15–27 / Lk 21:34–36

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