



Bringing Home the Word +

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

November 3, 2019

Hurry to See Jesus

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I'm the shortest one in nearly every picture in which I appear. It's not that I'm that short (about three inches below average), but I am surrounded by taller people. Consequently, Zacchaeus has always been a particular favorite of mine. I certainly would have tried to get higher to see Jesus, too. Maybe Zacchaeus and I would have shared a branch.

But Zacchaeus inspires me for another reason. When Jesus, whom Zacchaeus knew only by reputation, called to him, his response was immediate. He came down to stand in front of Jesus. In their

society, tax collectors were considered traitors and ostracized by all. In the process of working for the Romans, Zacchaeus strengthened Caesar's influence and likely charged more than he should have to support a wealthy lifestyle when most Jews lived in poverty.

Seeing Zacchaeus in the tree, Jesus seized the opportunity to bring conversion to a sinner. Instead of judgment or bitterness from a stranger, Jesus offered him words of welcome. Zacchaeus heard the invitation (literal and spiritual) in Jesus' statement—"I must stay at your house"—and "received him with joy" (Luke 1:5–6).

When Jesus enters our house, we find the strength to turn from sin. The effect of Jesus' presence on Zacchaeus was immediate. As they stood together, he turned from his sin and promised to care for the poor and make restitution for anything he stole. Let us hurry to receive Jesus into our hearts and turn away from our sin as well. +

Sunday Readings

Wisdom 11:22—12:2

For you love all things that are / and loathe nothing that you have made; / for you would not fashion what you hate.

2 Thessalonians 1:11—2:2

We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling.

Luke 19:1–10

[Jesus said to Zacchaeus,] "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

A Word from Pope Francis

The politics of nonviolence have to begin in the home and then spread to the entire human family. "Saint Thérèse of Lisieux invites us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile, or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship."

—Fiftieth World Day of Peace,
January 1, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS SUNDAY REFLECTION

- Am I listening for Jesus' invitation into my heart and home?
- How can my family and I make our home a more welcoming place for Jesus?

***Seeing Zacchaeus in the tree,
Jesus seized the opportunity
to bring conversion
to a sinner.***

Love Is Our Truest Vocation

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

Being Catholic is not something that happens to us overnight. It takes work and practice—a lot more than just an hour a week in church. It's really the task of a lifetime.

What makes one a Catholic? In one sense, one becomes Catholic by receiving the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist—just as a person becomes married by celebrating the sacrament of matrimony. But as any married person will tell you, the wedding itself doesn't make a marriage. To really become what one promised in the wedding vows takes time and hard work.

Similarly, one doesn't take on Catholic identity merely by receiving the sacraments. Like marriage, Catholic identity requires time and effort. Catholic identity, like marriage, is about love. And love is an art.

Years ago in music school, I would spend hour after hour at the piano learning two pieces required for the end-of-semester recital. After weeks of practice I could play those pieces rather well. But just because I could play two songs didn't mean I was an artist. A real artist isn't limited to a couple of pieces. Artists can play all the pieces.

Similarly, to be good at the art of



Catholic loving you have to be able to love all the pieces. You have to love everyone—even as God loves everyone and invites people of every race, language, and way of life to the great nuptial banquet of the kingdom.

What It's All About?

Love everybody? While this may seem impossible,

it is at the heart of Catholic identity. Our Catholic vocation is essentially a call to be lovers, just as Jesus was. Following Jesus doesn't mean we have to become carpenters, fishermen, or preachers. Following Jesus means we have to become great lovers.

Jesus was an artist at loving. He could play all the pieces. He loved rich and poor people, saints and sinners. As a sign of that universal love, he opened his arms on the cross and shed his covenant blood for all.

Clearly we don't arrive at this Catholic, all-embracing level of artistry overnight. When learning to play the piano, one starts with easy pieces and gradually works up to the harder ones. The same is true with the art of loving: We start with the easier pieces (loving our parents, children, friends, neighbors) and slowly work up to the harder pieces—the people who are not like us.

From Feelings to Action

And this loving goes deeper than surface niceties. The loving that lies at the core of Catholic identity leads to concrete acts: embracing the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the prisoner. It requires working for peace. It involves concern for the earth. It demands justice for the poor.

And because the objects of our loving are human, limited, and sinful, our loving will most certainly entail forgiveness—both forgiving and being forgiven. We who follow Jesus are called to announce the kingdom of God by being ambassadors of reconciliation and instruments of peace.

The Eucharist is the marvelous sign of Catholic identity. The Eucharist takes us into the body of Christ. It fills us with the spirit of Christ so we can truly become Catholic, all-embracing lovers. Love is our vocation. Love is the heart of our Catholic identity. +



*Lord, I am grateful for your tenderness and mercy.
Help me to change my heart and show your love and compassion to all people.*

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 4–9

Monday, St. Charles Borromeo:
Rom 11:29–36 / Lk 14:12–14

Tuesday, Weekday:
Rom 12:5–16b / Lk 14:15–24

Wednesday, Weekday:
Rom 13:8–10 / Lk 14:25–33

Thursday, Weekday:

Rom 14:7–12 / Lk 15:1–10

Friday, Weekday:

Rom 15:14–21 / Lk 16:1–8

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



Bringing Home the Word +

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

November 10, 2019

Imagining Life after Death

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul talks about life after death with the simple phrase, “we shall be changed” (15:51–52). In the Nicene Creed, we “look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” This is the hope of our faith: even in death, our communion with God cannot be severed. But what will life after death be like?

That’s the question that the Sadducees had trouble answering. It’s important to know that the concept of resurrection was a fairly recent development in

Jesus’ time. The idea was disputed. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection; the Pharisees did. The Sadducees were trying to trip Jesus up with their question about multiple marriages. They clung to the notion that life after death would be exactly like life on earth. Thus, the practical issues would present insurmountable problems. Jesus was not fooled. He tells them that when God raises us up, we will come fully into our identities as children of God.

God has revealed much about life after death since then. We know we will stand before God when we die and face his judgment and mercy. We know we will be able to turn our backs on God (hell) or turn toward him (heaven). We know that for many, purification (purgatory) will be part of that process. Afterward, our loving union with God will remain eternally. Perhaps that truth will inspire greater faith, hope, and witness here and now. +

Sunday Readings

2 Maccabees 7:1–2, 9–14

“You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to live again forever....”

2 Thessalonians 2:16—3:5

But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.

Luke 20:27–38 or Luke 20:27, 34–38

[Jesus said,] “They can no longer die, for they are like angels; and they are the children of God.”

A Word from Pope Francis

The Eucharist demands that we be members of the one body of the Church. Those who approach the Body and Blood of Christ may not wound that same Body by creating scandalous distinctions and divisions among its members. This is what it means to “discern” the body of the Lord.

—On Love in the Family
(*Amoris Laetitia*),
March 19, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do I envision my day of judgment and eternity thereafter?
- How does that vision influence my attitudes and behavior here on earth today?

We know we will stand before God when we die and face his judgment and mercy.

Our God Speaks to Us

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

We Catholics believe in a God who speaks. Our God is not a silent, distant God but a God who wants us to know who he is and who we are and what life is all about. We believe in a God who freely chooses to reveal his mysterious plan to create us, love us, and take us to himself. We believe in the God who spoke to Abraham, who spoke to the patriarchs and prophets, and who spoke his definitive word in Jesus Christ.

And just what did God say? God didn't waste a lot of time talking about incidentals: "The earth is round." Or, "Today is Wednesday." God got right to the point and said, "I love you!" And we hear God's most emphatic "I love you" in the birth, life, preaching, healing, passion, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ.

This kind of revelation demands more than a yes of agreement to a proposed fact: "Yes, the earth is round." "Yes, today is Wednesday." The word of love that God speaks in the Bible demands more of us than "yes, that's true."

It calls for a total yes—a yes of commitment—the kind of yes that couples exchange in their wedding vows. "Margaret, do you take Joseph to be your husband?" "Yes, I do." Saying "yes, I do" to the proposal of love that God offers



us in Jesus Christ is what being Catholic is all about.

That is why the Bible is essential to Catholicism. How can we say yes to Jesus, how can we be a disciple of Jesus unless we know Jesus? And to know Jesus we must know the Scriptures, for as St. Jerome said, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."

The Scriptures are not a list of propositions to be believed. They are an encounter with a person to be loved.

From Generation to Generation

God has not appeared to me as he did to Elijah. I was not there by the Sea of Galilee with Peter and Andrew, James and John, when Jesus walked by and said, "Follow me." I wasn't knocked to the ground in a blaze of light like St. Paul. I received the faith quietly, gradually. My parents (and teachers, neighbors, and friends) handed on the tradition they had received from their parents, spouses, teachers, and friends. And that generation handed on what they had received from the generation before them, all the way back to the apostles.

Those who knew Jesus and witnessed his death and resurrection were commissioned to preach and make disciples. Some disciples handed on the message orally and some, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote down their faith

experience. Catholics treasure God's self revelation in both its written and oral forms. Catholics cherish Scripture and Tradition. Both reveal the same divine mystery. When the Scriptures are proclaimed at Mass, we believe Christ is present. It is Christ who speaks to us.

Ongoing Conversation

I keep a file of my Sunday homilies in the hope that, three years from now when the same readings are used, I will be able to use the same homily over again. But it never works out that way. Each time the passages are proclaimed, God says something new. When I hear Jesus tell Peter and Andrew, "Come after me," the words imply something different—something more—for me now than they did when I was fifteen, or when I was twenty-five, or even when I was fifty.

God speaks to the Scriptures and in the Tradition handed down to us from the apostles. And if we respond to God's word with lives filled with God's Spirit and lived in imitation of Jesus, the definitive Word of the Father, we can be confident that the message will continue to be passed on—generation after generation—until all the ends of the earth hear God's great "I love you." +



Lord, I am grateful for the promise of eternal life. Help me to live as a child of the resurrection.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 11–16

Monday, St. Martin of Tours:

Wis 1:1–7 / Lk 17:1–6

Tuesday, St. Josaphat:

Wis 2:23—3:9 / Lk 17:7–10

Wednesday, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini:

Wis 6:1–11 / Lk 17:11–19

Thursday, Weekday:

Wis 7:22b—8:1 / Lk 17:20–25

Friday, Weekday:

Wis 13:1–9 / Lk 17:26–37

Saturday, Weekday:

Wis 18:14–16; 19:6–9 / Lk 18:1–8



Bringing Home the Word +

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

November 17, 2019

Our Leader through Strife

By Mary Katharine Deeley

As we come to the close of the Church year, our readings turn more and more to the end times. These words are not easy to hear. Certainly, when we think about the persecution of Christians, the civil wars that seem far too frequent, and the number of people, nations, and even religious groups who claim to have the sole answer to everyone's problems, we can find a striking resemblance to Jesus' description of the coming days.

What our world is undergoing is not new. In every age people have been persecuted, wars have been fought,

natural disasters have occurred, and many have claimed to be saviors. Jesus admits this openly and still tells us not to despair. He promises to walk with us and to give us the wisdom to speak even in the midst of great trouble. It's tempting to follow the charismatic speakers and powerful leaders who claim to have the truth or single solution to our human limitations and vulnerabilities. Jesus urges us not to do that, but to look to him alone for what we need.

Our imperfect and passing world will always have places and times of great suffering and strife. Jesus doesn't promise to take it all away; he promises to lead us through it. God will never abandon us and will provide more than a temporary fix. If we doubt that, we have only to look to Jesus' death and resurrection to see that he was willing to take the worst the world had to offer in order to offer us the very best. +

Sunday Readings

Malachi 3:19–20a

For the day is coming, blazing like an oven, / when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.

2 Thessalonians 3:7–12

In toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you.

Luke 21:5–19

[Jesus said,] "You will be hated by all because of my name, but... by your perseverance you will secure your lives."

A Word from Pope Francis

We hear these children and their cries of pain... the sufferings, the experiences, and the pain of minors who were abused sexually by priests. It is a sin that shames us. Persons responsible for the protection of those children destroyed their dignity. We regret this deeply and we beg forgiveness.

—Feast of the Holy Innocents,
December 28, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

REFLECTION
QUESTIONS

- Do I sometimes look to charismatic leaders to solve my problems?
- Have I been disappointed by those same leaders?

Jesus promises to walk with us and to give us the wisdom to speak even in the midst of great trouble.

Why Do We Believe in God?

By Phyllis Zagano

If a friend asked you why he or she should believe in God, how would you answer? Catholics have a common understanding of what it means to speak of God. But in our pluralistic society where different religions meet every day, just what people mean by God is unclear. Christians,

Muslims, and Jews all believe in a single God but think about him differently.

When agnostics say they don't know about God, it is the God of these great Western religions they profess ignorance of. The same is true of atheists, who do not believe in one supreme being who created the world and sustains its existence.

For most, either you believe you are in charge—or not. If you believe you are not in charge but that the cosmos is ordered by a supreme intelligence and not by chaotic chance, then you likely believe in God.

Why is that? A French philosopher named Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) presented an interesting wager. He said we all either bet there is a God or that there is not. The possible results of Pascal's wager really argue for belief in God.

If we bet that there is a God and there is not, then we effectively lose nothing. However, if we bet that there is not a God



and there is a God, then we lose everything. And if we bet that there is a God and there truly is a God, then we win everything. This is a coldly rational way of looking at God, but for many it is a way to start thinking about his existence.

Limits of Human Reason

Even so, we cannot really know much about God. That is because our intellects are limited and if God is God, then he is without limits. Our minds are unable to surround the enormity and complexity of God.

Before Pascal, many great thinkers such as St. Anselm (1033–1109), St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and René Descartes (1596–1650) presented proofs for God's existence. Even today, philosophers argue the point. But arguments and counterarguments about the existence of God are limited by the confines of human reason. In the end, whether we are a brilliant philosopher or the simplest child, the Church teaches that everyone can know and love God.

How can that be? To begin with, Christianity teaches that God came into history as Jesus Christ. The mission of Jesus was to teach us about the Father, who loved Jesus—and us—into being. The fact of that love is understood in the person of the Holy Spirit. This is how

we understand God as the Trinity. In the Church's earliest years, Christians hammered out the definition of God that remains today and which forms the first words of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...."

Unique Evidence

Even so, after millions of people have professed the Apostles' Creed, and after brilliant philosophers have "proved" God's existence, why should we believe?

The question is best understood in the negative. How can anyone see a sunrise or a baby and not believe in God? How can anyone watch a flower grow or see a wave upon the shore and not believe in God? How can anyone who has seen reflected in his or her own heart, the bright star in the east that continues to shine throughout eternity, not believe in God? +



Lord, I am grateful for your command to love. Help me to persevere in loving and serving all people.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 18–23

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

Tuesday, Weekday:
2 Mc 6:18–31 / Lk 19:1–10

Wednesday, Weekday:
2 Mc 7:1, 20–31 / Lk 19:11–28

Thursday: Presentation of Blessed Virgin Mary:
1 Mc 2:15–29 / Lk 19:41–44

Friday, St. Cecilia:
1 Mc 4:36–37, 52–59 / Lk 19:45–48

Saturday, Weekday:
1 Mc 6:1–13 / Lk 20:27–40



Bringing Home the Word +

Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (C)

November 24, 2019

A Different Kind of King

By Mary Katharine Deeley

The readings for the solemnity of Christ the King in each of the three Sunday cycles help us to see how different Jesus' kingship is from that of earthly rulers. The reign of Jesus is not tied to judgment or authority, for he subjects himself to the judgment and authority of others. His reign is not tied to an ability to make and defend laws, for he submits to the existing law, which condemns him to death on a cross. His reign is not tied to the power to conquer nations or to lead great armies against oppressors. Christ the King comes to save, to conquer "death and the devil"

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 636, 1019).

Rather, the kingdom of God is about comfort, peace, redemption, truth, real justice, and mercy. Even from the cross, Jesus forgave his enemies and held on to no anger or hate. He welcomed repentant sinners into the kingdom. He resisted the temptation to impress others with the power that came from who he was and who he knew. In the great contradiction of our faith, the power of Christ the King is manifest in his willingness to become powerless for love of us.

What does that mean for us, his disciples? We, too, must let go of power, reject destruction, and turn toward God. As we make our way, we are called to practice forgiveness, hospitality, and humility in loving all of God's children. As we close this year and enter another Advent, this may be the best gift we can give to Christ our King. +

A Word from Pope Francis

[Jesus] shows us that he enjoys dominion because he is a servant, glory because he is capable of abasement, kingship because he is fully prepared to lay down his life. By his passion and death, he takes the lowest place, attains the heights of grandeur in service, and bestows this upon his Church.

—Homily,
October 18,
2015



Sunday Readings

2 Samuel 5:1–3

The LORD said to [David]: "You shall shepherd my people Israel; you shall be ruler over Israel."

Colossians 1:12–20

In him were created all things in heaven and on earth, / the visible and the invisible.

Luke 23:35–43

Above him there was an inscription that read, "This is the King of the Jews."

***The kingdom of God
is about comfort, peace,
redemption, truth,
real justice, and mercy.***

REFLECTION QUESTIONS SNOTISNU REFLECTION

- How often do I catch myself trying to impress others?
- Like Jesus, am I willing to reject power and prestige and, instead, turn toward God?

Finding God's 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.

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." This writer meant that Jesus was the first person totally human—and 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. +



Lord, I am grateful for your gentle presence. Remember me even when I forget you.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 25–30

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

Tuesday, Weekday:
Dn 2:31–45 / Lk 21:5–11

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

Thursday, Weekday:
Dn 6:12–28 / Lk 21:20–28

Friday, Weekday:
Dn 7:2–14 / Lk 21:29–33

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