



Bringing Home the Word

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

June 5, 2016

Slowing Down for God

By Janel Esker

I've been teased over the years about how fast I walk. A work colleague even named me Flash for running by his office "in a flash" every day. He claimed no one wanted to get in my way for fear of being run over. I do walk quickly, and it probably has to do with my predilection for getting a lot done in little time. I'm all about efficiency.

But in my single-minded focus, I can miss opportunities to connect, help, or simply be present to someone—a colleague, my spouse, or even a stranger. When I take the time to stop,

I have remarkable moments of holy companionship.

Jesus, while not necessarily a divine speed walker, was heading into Nain in today's Gospel, probably with a particular destination in mind. He could have easily walked by the passing funeral procession. But Jesus was deeply moved by this grieving widow. Jesus not only interrupts his plans—he touches the woman's dead son, rendering Jesus ritually unclean.

Yet this risky action brings life—not just to the man, but also to his mother, whose legal standing in society was dependent on her son's. Her life is also restored.

Jesus' actions remind us that while our plans and projects are good, God is regularly found in interruptions—if we're willing to stop and risk reaching out. Instead of speeding past the homeless man, might we stop and invite him for a sandwich? Instead of deftly avoiding the coworker who always has family problems to share, might we take time to listen with real empathy?

Let the interruptions come—God may be bringing new life to someone through you. †

*“When I take the time to stop,
I have remarkable moments
of holy companionship.”*

A Word From Pope Francis

We all have within us some areas... that ...are a little dead; and some of us have many dead places in our hearts, a true spiritual necrosis! When we are in this situation, we know it, we want to get out but we can't. Only the power of Jesus...can help us....But if we become attached to these tombs and guard them within us and do not will that our whole heart rise again to life, we become corrupted...Let us hear that voice of Jesus who...says: “Come out! Leave that tomb you have within you. Come out. I give you life, I give you happiness, I bless you, I want you for myself.”



—Homily, April 6, 2014

Sunday Readings

1 Kings 17:17–24

“The word of the LORD comes truly from your mouth.”

Galatians 1:11–14a, 15ac, 16a, 17, 19

“The gospel preached by me is not of human origin....But it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Luke 7:11–17

“A great prophet has arisen in our midst.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What distracts me from my relationship with God?
- How might God be speaking to me through the interruptions in my life?

Catholic Calendar: St. Ephrem (June 9)

By Mary Lee Barron,
PhD, APRN, FNP-BC

What songwriter wouldn't be surprised to learn that someone would be singing her or his songs more than a millennium later? Think about how you feel when you hear a favorite song or hymn. Does the truth of the lyrics or the melody connect to something in your soul? We don't always come to know the truth by reading it. Sometimes it enters our hearts and souls through music or poetry. Saint Ephrem understood this, so that's exactly what he set out to do. Ephrem led the Church in understanding the importance of music and poetry in imparting the truth and invigorating the faith.

Pope St. John Paul II described the Church as having two "lungs": the Western and the Eastern Church. Saint Ephrem helps us breathe in the whole of our Catholic heritage. Pope Benedict XV declared him a doctor of the Church in 1920; he is the only Syrian so recognized. Not only did St. Ephrem compose hundreds of hymns, he served as a deacon, teacher, theologian, philosopher, and preacher.

Ephrem was born in Nisibis, near the eastern border of modern Turkey. He was likely from a Christian family. He functioned as deacon of Nisibis for most of his adult life. Nisibis was seized on three occasions and finally relinquished to the Persians by the Romans in a peace treaty. Christians had to leave the city.



Ephrem was exiled to Edessa, where he spent the last ten years of his life in a cave. He died in 373.

Syriac Christianity is a lyrical, poetic approach to theology. It is not an analytic approach to the Scriptures. For Ephrem, the point of reading the Bible was to induce contemplation. He believed that every word of the Lord has its own image; each of us hears and interprets those words in accordance with our own capacity and gifts.

False doctrines were rampant in Ephrem's time. Tradition tells us that Ephrem first heard heretical ideas in songs and, to counteract them, he made up his own hymns. Sometimes he used the same melodies.

Little is written about the role of women in liturgical worship in the early Church. Western scholars, particularly women, have developed a renewed interest in Ephrem's ideas. He believed

women had a rightful place in church choirs. Many of Ephrem's hymns were written for women's choirs, and he used extensive feminine imagery in his poetry. Jacob of Serugh, a sixth-century writer, referred to Ephrem as a "second Moses for women."

The Prayer of St. Ephrem, probably the most well-known of his writings, is used for days of fasting in Eastern Christianity:

*O Lord and Master of my life,
take from me the spirit of sloth,
meddling, lust of power, and idle talk.*

*But give rather the spirit of chastity,
humility, patience and love to thy
servant.*

*Yea, O Lord and King, grant me
to see my own sins and not to judge
my brother, for thou art blessed
unto ages of ages. Amen. †*

PRAYER

Lord, your love makes me whole.
Open my ears to hear your voice
amid all the noise and confusion
of life.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

June 6–11

Mon. Weekday:
1 Kings 17:1–6 / Matthew 5:1–12

Tue. Weekday:
1 Kings 17:7–16 / Matthew 5:13–16

Wed. Weekday:
1 Kings 18:20–39 / Matthew 5:17–19

Thu. Weekday:
1 Kings 18:41–46 / Matthew 5:20–26

Fri. Weekday: 1 Kings 19:9a, 11–16 /
Matthew 5:27–32

Sat. St. Barnabas: Acts 11:21b–26; 13:1–3 /
Matthew 5:33–37

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BHW001



Bringing Home the Word



Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time June 12, 2016

Humble Mercy

By Janel Esker

If today's media circus had been alive and well in first-century Palestine, it would have pounced on the events in today's Gospel reading. You can imagine the headlines: "Mystery Woman Crashes Elegant Dinner; Host Mortified." Blogs would light up with sordid details of the woman's sinful past. Simon the Pharisee would visit talk shows expressing shock and threatening a lawsuit. The woman would be offered her own reality show: "Real Sinners of the Mediterranean." Of course, after two days of nonstop coverage, the whole event would be forgotten.

For Jesus, none of this drama mattered. His focus was solely on this woman who, though uninvited, made her way to him and publicly demonstrated her great repentance. In spite of Simon's protests and, most likely, the rest of the attendees' shock, Jesus gave her his full attention, and most important, his forgiveness. No gossip, no dramatic expelling of the woman, no show of great power. Just a quiet and humble exchange between Jesus and a repentant sinner.

And so it can be for us, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation. Jesus waits with a calm and compassionate heart for our sincere repentance. We need only to name our sin, as the woman did, and ask forgiveness. No matter what other voices complain against us, no matter how grave our sin, no matter how long it has been—Jesus' attention is on us and us alone. No media circus, no expert analysis, no dredging up everything bad we've ever done. Just an honest, humble encounter between us and the Lord.

Listen. Can you hear Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven?" †

"Jesus waits with a calm, compassionate heart."

Sunday Readings

2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13

"The LORD on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die."

Galatians 2:16, 19-21

"I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me."

Luke 7:36-8:3

"I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven because she has shown great love."

A Word From Pope Francis

God's face is the face of a merciful father who is always patient. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience he has with each one of us? That is his mercy. He always has patience, patience with us, he understands us, he waits for us, he does not tire of forgiving us if we are able to return to him with a contrite heart.... Let us never tire, let us never tire! He is the loving Father who always pardons, who has that heart of mercy for us all. And let us too learn to be merciful to everyone. Let us invoke the intercession of our Lady who held in her arms the Mercy of God made man.



—Angelus, March 17, 2013



- What do I need to seek forgiveness for?
- To whom or what do I devote most of my attention?

Holy Year of Mercy: A Time of Grace and Conversion

By Fr. Norman Langenbrunner

Pope Francis' emphasis on mercy continues the call for mercy issued by other recent popes. In his encyclical, *The Mercy of God (Dives in Misericordia)*, Pope St. John Paul II described "a heartfelt appeal by the Church to mercy, which humanity and the modern world need so much" (DM 2). Pope Francis' exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)* was animated by his focus on mercy, reiterating his oft-spoken reminder, "God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy" (EG 3).

Awareness of divine mercy, however, isn't new to God's people. Examples are found throughout the biblical story of salvation. God intervenes for a number of women who are childless, such as Abraham's wife, Sarah, and Samuel's mother, Hannah. Yahweh forgives his people's rebellion as they wander the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. The prophets and psalms consistently offer the message of divine mercy. The gospel of mercy is reflected in the miracles Jesus performed and parables he taught. The God of the Scriptures is a God of mercy.

Jesus both demonstrated mercy and demanded it of his followers. Pope Francis points to the miracles Jesus worked, the relationships he formed, the parables he taught. His mercy prompted

him to feed the hungry crowds; restore a son to his grieving mother; and speak of the lost sheep, the lost coins, and the welcome shown the Prodigal Son. In the parable of the servant who refused to imitate the master who forgave him a debt, Jesus made it clear that mercy is the criterion for all his followers: "Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?" (Matthew 18:33).

To be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful (see Luke 6:36) is a solemn goal not just for the Jubilee Year but for our lifelong journey. "In this Holy Year," Pope Francis wrote, "we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society... May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!" (Bull Of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee Of Mercy [*Misericordiae Vultus*], 15). As we enter the second half of this Jubilee Year, may we each take the Holy Father's message to heart and put the Spirit and gospel residing there into action throughout our families, parishes, workplaces, and communities.

Works of Mercy

Pope Francis' ambitious Holy Year agenda stems from the very heart of mercy: "It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and

spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty" (MV 15). What works of mercy can you perform this week, month, and year?

The Corporal Works of Mercy

- + Feed the hungry
- + Give drink to the thirsty
- + Clothe the naked
- + Welcome the stranger
- + Heal the sick
- + Visit the imprisoned
- + Bury the dead.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy

- + Counsel the doubtful
- + Instruct the ignorant
- + Admonish sinners
- + Comfort the afflicted
- + Forgive offenses
- + Bear patiently those who do us ill
- + Pray for the living and the dead. †



PRAYER

Lord, your love and forgiveness bring peace to the world. Open my heart to show great love and forgiveness to all people.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

June 13–18

Mon. St. Anthony of Padua:
1 Kings 21:1–16 / Matthew 5:38–42
Tue. Weekday:
1 Kings 21:17–29 / Matthew 5:43–48
Wed. Weekday: 2 Kings 2:1, 6–14 /
Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18

Thu. Weekday:
Sirach 48:1–14 / Matthew 6:7–15
Fri. Weekday: 2 Kings 11:1–4, 9–18, 20 /
Matthew 6:19–23
Sat. Weekday: 2 Chronicles 24:17–25 /
Matthew 6:24–34

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Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time June 19, 2016

The Daily Cross

By Janel Esker

I'm a woman of routine, particularly in the mornings. I do certain things in a certain way every morning as if I'm crossing items off a to-do list. Get up. Rub eyes. Stumble to the bathroom. Put in contacts. Wash face. Take shower. And on and on. Even if you aren't a routine-driven person during the rest of the day, you probably do some of the same things every morning.

What if "take up your cross" was also on our to-do list, right after "take shower" or "drink coffee?" Jesus asks us to do nothing less in today's Gospel when he declares we should take up our

cross daily. Ugh. I'm not so enthusiastic about that. Aren't crosses just for some days—those harder-than-ordinary days? Not every day, Lord. That seems like too much.

But while we may resist, we know the Lord is right. Even Jesus, who didn't carry a physical cross with him every day, carried the burden of knowing his way of life would lead him to crucifixion. He was aware of what lay ahead for him—but even with that heavy emotional cross, he still brought healing and peace to so many. He carried his cross with grace, courage, and perseverance.

Jesus doesn't simply tell us to carry our cross; he also says, "Follow me." Everyone has crosses, but how we carry them makes a difference. Do we follow him in the way we carry our cross—without complaining, still praising God, always seeking to bring life to others? Are we still joyful and hopeful while carrying our cross?

Jesus has given us quite an example. When drinking your coffee tomorrow morning, take time to ponder how you will take up your cross—and follow Jesus—that day. †

Sunday Readings

Zechariah 12:10–11; 13:1

"They shall look on him whom they have pierced."

Galatians 3:26–29

"Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus."

Luke 9:18–24

"He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter said in reply, 'The Christ of God.'"

A Word From Pope Francis

Jesus is the center of creation; and so the attitude demanded of us as true believers is that of recognizing and accepting in our lives the centrality of Jesus Christ, in our thoughts, in our words, and in our works. And so our thoughts will be Christian thoughts, thoughts of Christ. Our works will be Christian works, works of Christ; and our words will be Christian words, words of Christ. But when this center is lost, when it is replaced by something else, only harm can result for everything around us and for ourselves.



—Homily for the conclusion of the Year of Faith, November 24, 2013

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- To what do I need to say no so that I'm freer to love and care for others?
- What routines and traditions keep me mindful of God and my vocation?

Discovering the Christian Message

By Elizabeth McNamer

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,” Jesus commanded his apostles (Matthew 28:19). And in the first hundred years after his death, the message had been carried to much of the known world. The evangelization process began early. On the first Pentecost, some 3,000 people were converted in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). Paul would eventually travel thousands of miles creating Christian communities in Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, and many other places. Through his efforts the message would reach Rome, where, 300 years later, it would become the official religion of the Roman Empire.

What, then, attracted so many to Christianity? The enthusiasm of the messengers cannot be underestimated. (The word *enthusiasm* means “filled with God.”) The Christian message offered something more substantial than the other options. It made demands. It called for right living, caring for widows and orphans and loving one another. It offered the solace of resurrection. And its adherents were willing to die for their beliefs.

Jesus left no books of theology. He had preached, taught, cured the sick, lived an exemplary life, and been crucified as a criminal. But he had risen from the dead! This was the basic message, the *kerygma*. “He is risen!” was the message proclaimed on Pentecost. The significance of this glorious message was



that if he is risen, so will we be raised! Belief in the resurrection, Paul reminds us, is the foundation of Christianity (1 Corinthians 15:12).

This essential proclamation contained the seed of all that would later develop: “Son of God,” “pre-existent Messiah,” “second person of the Trinity.” But it took the Church several centuries and four major councils to come to terms with who Jesus was. Unorthodox ideas arose early. The first of these was the Ebionite heresy (adoptionism). For its proponents, referring to Jesus as the Son of God meant that he, like Moses, had been adopted as a son during his baptism in the Jordan. They could not accept the developing theology of the Incarnation of Jesus in the womb of a virgin. Eusebius writes, “They regarded him as plain and ordinary. A man esteemed as righteous through growth of character and nothing more, the child of a normal union between a man and Mary.”

Gnostics spread the message that Jesus had been spiritual only and did not have a real body. This heresy is sometimes referred to as “the docetic Christ.” This meant that he had not died since he didn’t have a real body in the first place. Much later the Arians believed that Jesus had a real body but was less than divine, not on a par with God.

In the face of all these conflicting ideas, it was often difficult for the early Christians to understand exactly what they believed about Jesus. Nevertheless, they persevered in faith and continued to pray, discern, and dialogue about what God had truly revealed to them. From their efforts was born our creed(s), a canon of Scripture, and answers to questions of ritual and authority. This revelation of who Jesus is and what he stands for continued in and through the Church. With Scripture and Tradition, each generation is led to faith and hope in the paschal mystery and sent out into the world. †

PRAYER

Lord, you gave your life as a gift of love for the whole world. Help me be a selfless servant of your love, compassion, and peace.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

June 20–25

Mon. Weekday: 2 Kings 17:5–8, 13–15a, 18 / Matthew 7:1–5
Tue. St. Aloysius Gonzaga: 2 Kings 19:9b–11, 14–21, 31–35a, 36 / Matthew 7:6, 12–14
Wed. Weekday: 2 Kings 22:8–13; 23:1–3 / Matthew 7:15–20

Thu. Weekday: 2 Kings 24:8–17 / Matthew 7:21–29
Fri. Nativity of St. John the Baptist: Isaiah 49:1–6 / Acts 13:22–26 / Luke 1:57–66, 80
Sat. Weekday: Lamentations 2:2, 10–14, 18–19 / Matthew 8:5–17

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Bringing Home the Word

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time June 26, 2016

Hearing No, Saying "Yes"

By Janel Esker

When our eight-month-old daughter began to crawl, it quickly became evident that we needed to teach her the meaning of the word no. She was drawn to all the things she shouldn't touch—computers, electrical outlets, hot liquids. However, in response to our firm "No!" she smiled and giggled. Not exactly what we were hoping for. It took a while for her to learn that she had some restrictions on her newfound freedom.

I recalled my daughter's amused reaction to "No!" when I read St. Paul's warning against "biting and devouring one another"—the unethical behavior among the Galatian community—gossip, backbiting, cheating. Clearly God had said "no" to these behaviors long ago, but the Galatians continued to exhibit them—kind of like laughing in God's face.

Saint Paul reminds them that in Christ they do have freedom, but it's not unbridled. This freedom comes with responsibilities—a commitment to love and serve one another rather than treat each other immorally and unethically.

Next week we celebrate our country's gift of freedom. But the freedom we enjoy through Jesus is deeper. It's freedom from sin and death, and it isn't restriction-free. It comes with a full-time, wholehearted commitment to work for the good of others with love. It's less about hearing no and more about saying "yes" to what God asks of us in gratitude for such a great gift. †

"The freedom we enjoy through Jesus comes with responsibilities."

Sunday Readings

1 Kings 19:16b, 19–21

"You shall anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah, as prophet to succeed you."

Galatians 5:1, 13–18

"You were called for freedom, brothers and sisters. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh."

Luke 9:51–62

"No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God."

A Word From Pope Francis

Even in the midst of difficulties God acts and he surprises us....But he asks us to let ourselves be surprised by his love, to accept his surprises. Let us trust God! Cut off from him, the wine of joy, the wine of hope, runs out. If we draw near to him, if we stay with him, what seems to be cold water, difficulty, sin, is changed into the new wine of friendship with him....

If we walk in hope, allowing ourselves to be surprised by the new wine which Jesus offers us, we have joy in our hearts and we cannot fail to be witnesses of this joy....If we are truly in love with Christ and if we sense how much he loves us, our heart will 'light up' with a joy that spreads to everyone around us.



—Homily in Basilica of the Shrine of Our Lady of the Conception of Aparecida; July 24, 2013

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do I use my freedom?
- Does my yes mean yes, and my no mean no?

Drafting New Christians

By Sarah Vabulas

Evangelization is in my blood. Something happened the day I first received the sacrament of confirmation and I've never been the same. When Archbishop John Donoghue of Atlanta marked the sacred chrism on my forehead in the shape of a cross and said, "Be sealed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit," my mind, heart, and soul were forever changed. I attribute my desire to evangelize to my confirmation.

I first learned the art of evangelization by watching and emulating my high-school youth ministers. As I transitioned into college, I learned from my peers, from my religious-studies classes, and from self-exploration of my gifts and talents. At the women's college I attended, I found in my religious-studies courses a wonderful and intelligent group of women to call my friends. We had an immediate shared bond of interest in theology and the Church—and we also enjoyed a good drink.

We used to debate (over instant messenger, of course) about whether we were actually drinking alone if we drank by ourselves in our dorm rooms while reading the Litany of Saints. Only religious-studies students laugh at such nerdy jokes! We also created a secret code for when we would want to go out to a pub and chat about homework or



theology—we called it Exegesis. Our professors began to pick up on our shenanigans and wanted to join the fun, so we printed T-shirts that said "Exegesis..." on the front and "I know I want to" on the back. It was our own way of evangelizing on campus and to each other.

In college I received an education not only from books but from my peers in how to love another no matter what. This has been integral in my efforts to continue to preach the gospel post-college. I believe every person has an interesting story to tell. No two individuals have traveled the same path in life, and because of that we all have a unique story to share. I love to sit in places, meet new people, and learn about them. Acknowledging a person by looking him in the eye and genuinely seeing him can have a profound impact.

You never know the inner turmoil someone may be battling.

For a few years, I lived within walking distance of a sports bar and would hop over there to grab dinner and a pint after work. I was usually alone, so I sat at the bar—the best place to sit in any restaurant! I befriended the bartenders and several of the wait staff since I was a regular. I was comfortable there. And because I knew I was safe, I opened up a bit more to meet other people sitting near me at the bar. I can't tell you the countless number of people I met during my visits there, but a few of the encounters have stuck with me over the years.

All I do is go to dinner and strike up a conversation with a neighboring patron, acknowledging his dignity and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide my words and actions. This is the call of the New Evangelization. It's how we say "yes" to the Lord in our everyday lives.†

PRAYER

Lord, by your cross and resurrection you set us free. Liberate me from the prison of selfishness and empower me to lovingly serve my brothers and sisters.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

June 27—July 2

Mon. Weekday: Amos 2:6–10, 13–16 / Matthew 8:18–22

Tue. St. Irenaeus: Amos 3:1–8; 4:11–12 / Matthew 8:23–27

Wed. Sts. Peter and Paul: Acts 12:1–11 / 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 17–18 / Matthew 16:13–19

Thu. Weekday: Amos 7:10–17 / Matthew 9:1–8

Fri. Weekday: Amos 8:4–6, 9–12 / Matthew 9:9–13

Sat. Weekday: Amos 9:11–15 / Matthew 9:14–17

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