



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time | February 4, 2018

You Are Not Alone

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Illness, depression, and misfortune can make us feel alone and afraid. We wonder whether anyone can understand what we're going through or help us.

The first five chapters of Mark's Gospel give us several healing stories in which Jesus, by touch or word, restores individuals to wholeness. He casts out demons. He cures the sick, like Simon's mother-in-law. The stories confirm what our faith tells us—that God's healing power is for all people and that good news lifts us and gives us joy.

But for those touched by the loneliness of infirmity of mind, body, or spirit, the stories alone might not be enough. Instead, the fervent prayer of the psalmist might be our grace: "The LORD ...[heals] the brokenhearted" (Psalm 147:2-3). Or, our peace might rest in the simple knowledge of two often-overlooked lines from the Gospels: "They brought him many who were possessed by demons" (Matthew 8:16), and, "The whole town was gathered at the door" (Mark 1:33).

Simply put, everyone came, and no one was alone. No matter what our condition, we are not alone. Christ is there in our pain and suffering to give us the grace to endure. We're not always cured by human standards, but Christ helps us find wholeness no matter what we suffer—and in him we find our peace and our joy.

Isaiah told us that the name given to the Messiah was Emmanuel, which means "God with us."

In Christ, we see the evidence that God's promise has come true. +

"The LORD...[heals] the brokenhearted."

Psalm 147:2-3

Sunday Readings

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle; they come to an end without hope.

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

I have become all things to all, to save at least some.

Mark 1:29-39

[Jesus said,] "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come."

A Word From Pope Francis

Jesus sends his disciples out to all nations....We too were part of all those people of two thousand years ago. Jesus did not provide a short list of who is, or is not, worthy of receiving his message and his presence. Instead, he always embraced life as he saw it.

—Canonization of Fr. Junípero Serra, September 23, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When you look around, what needs for the gospel of love do you see?
- Which of these needs can you fill as Jesus' apostle?



Transforming Our Pain Into Sacred Wounds

By Richard Rohr, OFM

All religion is about transforming pain and what to do with that pain—the absurd, tragic, unjust experiences that make up our lives. The hurts, disappointments, and betrayals; the burdens of sinfulness and brokenness pile up throughout life. We must find a way to make our pain into sacred wounds. We must find a way to give meaning to our hurts and find God in that suffering. Our faith is a gift that helps us deal with life’s tragedies.

Throughout history, literature has idealized people at the top: presidents and leaders who hold power and control the system. But biblical revelation turns history upside down with empathy for victims. It idealizes the bottom. It says that true power is not focused at the top. Then Jesus comes to epitomize that message by becoming poor, naked, and expelled—the one who teaches us that the way down is really the way up.

Our lesson is that we need to stop looking for meaning at the top and, instead, go to the edges and the bottom where we find those excluded and expelled. By his life and teaching, Jesus reminds us that we have to be rejected. We have to experience being on the outside before we have something to say.

By his life and teaching, Jesus reminds us that we have to be rejected.

This is the gift of biblical revelation. It’s why we’re the only religion that worships the victim, the one considered the problem by religious authorities.

God of Surprises

When Christians call Jesus the Lord of history—this bleeding, naked, crucified man—we are turning history around! We may not realize how scandalous and silly this seems to others. But when you think about it, the crucified Jesus is an unlikely candidate for God.

But this is the very Jesus who, through his teaching and life, reminds us to be careful where we look for God. Expect to find God in unexpected places, he tells us. And so it is in all of history: It has been the excluded ones and people at the bottom who have the privileged viewpoint. Why? Because it is from that position that we meet God, that we understand the illusion and lies of a system built on power, prestige, possessions. But until all that is taken from us, we don’t know that. Until then we are simply playing the game, enjoying the fruits of the system.


Recall how Jesus sends his disciples to preach from a position of vulnerability. “Go out, take nothing for your journey,” he tells them. Why? Because he knows they’re going to fail and look like fools. They have to or they won’t have a message to deliver.

Hard Truths

It’s an initiation of sorts: Jesus sends his disciples into situations where people are going to laugh at them and consider them nobodies. Only when you are a nobody will you understand what it means to be somebody. That is when you will find your life on new ground. We call it the reign of God.

The Bible begins with a fall for a reason. The story of Adam and Eve is a microcosm of what will happen in every life. You and I will fall. Somewhere we will experience our own absurdity, our utter brokenness. This reality isn’t something to hold off; it’s a necessary, tragic, and beautiful part of the journey.

The answer to our pain is the Jesus who was rejected, betrayed, and abandoned; then hanged on a cross, bleeding and naked. The answer to our pain is the risen Christ, who reminds us that through pain we have new life. +



Lord, you hear the cry of the poor. Hear my cry for inner peace and happiness.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS *February 5-10*

Mon. St. Agatha:
1 Kgs 8:1-7, 9-13 / Mk 6:53-56

Tue. St. Paul Miki and Companions:
1 Kgs 8:22-23, 27-30 / Mk 7:1-13

Wed. Weekday:
1 Kgs 10:1-10 / Mk 7:14-23

Thu. Weekday:
1 Kgs 11:4-13 / Mk 7:24-30

Fri. Weekday:
1 Kgs 11:29-32; 12:19 / Mk 7:31-37

Sat. St. Scholastica: 1 Kgs 12:26-32;
13:33-34 / Mk 8:1-10



Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time | February 11, 2018

Healing Our Wounds of Separation

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Teenagers fear an outbreak of acne before a major event. They're sure every eye will focus on a small blemish that seems enormous to them. Sometimes they even avoid going out at all until their faces return to normal.

They're fortunate not to be living in ancient Israel, where skin outbreaks and eruptions were likely viewed as leprosy. Public contact was forbidden. They'd have had to shout "unclean!" as they approached someone. Their exile would have been religiously regulated, and those they met would have avoided any touch.

The man with leprosy who approached Jesus wouldn't have touched Jesus—it was bold of him just to ask Jesus' mercy. In a move that surprised everyone, Jesus reached out to touch the one who was "unclean."

I can only imagine the man's shock and relief just at the touch of a person who didn't see him as less than human. The wound of separation was healed at that moment, and Jesus confirmed it by healing the man's body. Nor did Jesus stop there. He restored the man to his community by asking him to follow Mosaic Law (the Law of Moses) and be declared clean.

Teenagers often think their physical flaws are the worst things they can suffer. In truth, it's separation—whether it comes from within us or from others.

Jesus has the power to heal whatever separates us and restore us to community with God and others. +

Sunday Readings

Leviticus 13:1–2, 44–46

The Lord said... "[He] shall dwell apart, taking up residence outside the camp."

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1

Do everything for the glory of God. Avoid giving offense.

Mark 1:40–45

"If you wish, you can make me clean." ...[Jesus] said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean."

The best thing we can do to restore ourselves to community with God and others? Follow Jesus.

A Word From Pope Francis

[Jesus says] he is the real instrument of the Father's mercy, who goes to encounter everyone, bringing consolation and salvation, and, in doing so, he manifests God's justice. The blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf regain their dignity and are no longer excluded because of their disease.

—General audience, September 7, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- How at peace am I with my own wounds, sins, and imperfections?
- Am I mature and free enough to ask for help and also reach out and help others in their moral or physical suffering?



“We should act as a balm for all wounds”

By Kathy Coffey

“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).

In a poll for the least-favorite Beatitude, this one might win. Our culture worships movie stars, sports heroes, corporate moguls—not saints. So why does Jesus proclaim that the persecuted are indeed blessed?

Jesus’ style is not to make rigid rules but to hold up inspiring models. He asks us to look with new eyes upon the celebrities we may have admired and find hidden virtues in people who are quiet, unpublicized, and principled. If we shift our sights, we may find them more courageous, uplifting, and creative than those who once received our adulation.

Relatively few North Americans have suffered the oppression that is known by those in Asia, Africa, South America, and Central America. In countries like Bosnia, Rwanda, or El Salvador, genocide is common, being a catechist is dangerous, and the mothers of the “disappeared” mourn their missing children.

You’ve had a glimmer of their experience if you’ve been the spokesperson for an unpopular, moral cause: the only ethical one in the department, the woman calling the Old Boys’ Club (or the Church!) to equality,

or belonging to any group scorned by authorities. You’ll quickly discover what it means to be “out.” While it pales beside the pain endured elsewhere, it teaches something about being ostracized for the gospel.

Bone-Deep Beliefs

Those who have undergone persecution are sustained by solidarity, inner freedom, and the knowledge that it doesn’t last forever. Standing with others who believe in the same cause, we at least are not alone.

The persecuted find intimacy with others that can surpass the idle conversations or superficial ties of secure relationships. Etty Hillesum, author of *An Interrupted Life*, died at Auschwitz at age twenty-nine. At the Nazi concentration camp she called herself “bread shared among the hungry.” Her journal’s last words resonate with compassion: “We should act as a balm for all wounds.”

At a deep level, the persecuted are united: Their relationships are based on bone-deep beliefs. Members of the armed services cherish wartime buddies. They put their lives on the line together. So our deepest affinities may be to those with whom we share unpopular beliefs.

Resting in Hope

From the writing of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gandhi, or Óscar Romero emerges a sense of inner freedom. As the Gospel says, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and

body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Like the early Christians, Archbishop Romero predicted he would outlive his own martyrdom: “If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people.”

We learn from the persecuted how much in our lives is superficial, how little is essential. Those who have been deprived of everything material still find joy and fulfillment.

Finally, Jesus directs us to place our sufferings in an eternal context. The problem that looms large now does not last forever. The persecuted teach us to carry burdens lightly and wear our chains loosely. They take God’s mission on earth seriously but can laugh at themselves.

The persecutions we undergo may be less dramatic, but we can approach them with the same qualities. When we feel diminished by criticism, rejected by the “in” crowd, or demonized by those who disagree with us, there is hope. We can rest in Jesus’ assurance that we aren’t alone, the pain doesn’t last forever, and the kingdom is ours. +



Lord, your love transcends the boundaries of the human condition. Open my eyes to see your face in all people.

From Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time,

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 12-17

Mon. Weekday:
Jas 1:1–11 / Mk 8:11–13

Tue. Weekday:
Jas 1:12–18 / Mk 8:14–21

Ash Wednesday: Jl 2:12–18 /
2 Cor 5:20—6:2 / Mt 6:1–6, 16–18

Thursday after Ash Wednesday:
Dt 30:15–20 / Lk 9:22–25

Friday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:1–9a / Mt 9:14–15

Saturday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:9b–14 / Lk 5:27–32



Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent | February 18, 2018

The Beauty of the New Covenant

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When our youngest daughter was three, we traveled to Hawaii to see her grandparents. It wasn't her first trip, but it was the first she would remember.

One day her grandfather took us to the pineapple fields. We got out of the car and started into a field. Suddenly, she stopped to stare at the sky. She was looking at the largest and most vibrant rainbow I had ever seen, its end planted firmly in the very field in which we stood.

"What is that?" she asked in a hushed voice. "It's a rainbow," I said. She'd seen

pictures of them, and we had drawn them with crayons, but nothing prepared her for the grandeur of this one, which arced up and away into the clouds. Everything else paled in comparison.

I can understand why the writer of the Noah story looks at the rainbow as a sign of both God's gracious covenant and peace. The sheer beauty of the reality reflects the glory of the Lord of creation.

But today, on this first Sunday of Lent, our real attention goes to the beauty of the new covenant unfolding with the preaching of Jesus. The call to repent is the call to change our lives in response to the love of God, whose kingdom is one of peace and joy.

The opportunity to change is the gift Christ gave us in his passion and resurrection. It's a sign of God's wondrous love.

When we understand that with all our hearts, we also will stare with awe and ask, "What is that?" +

Sunday Readings

Genesis 9:8-15

[God said,] "I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

1 Peter 3:18-22

Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit.

Mark 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained... for forty days.

*The call to repent
is the call to change
our lives in response
to the love of God.*

A Word From Pope Francis

In the face of tragedies which take the lives of so many migrants and refugees... expressions of empathy and compassion cannot help but spontaneously well up. "Where is your brother?" (Gen. 4:9)... This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us.

—Migration and Peace forum,
February 21, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- What important lessons have I learned from a challenge in my life? Maybe I can share that lesson with a friend or family member.



Our Path to Joy

By Bishop Robert F. Morneau

Jesus taught by word and deed. In his Sermon on the Mount we are given words that point to the path of happiness. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the peacemakers, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful. The beatitudes sketch out in exquisite detail the Christian map for happiness.

In the Gospel of John we are given a humble, simple, hospitable deed of washing feet. After he is finished, Jesus—knowing that the disciples lacked full understanding—urges them into action: “Blessed are you if you do it” [washing of feet and Jesus’ other teachings] (13:17b).

We have here a highly pragmatic path to happiness. In doing the loving thing and reaching out to others in service, we participate in the inner life of Jesus. By doing what Jesus did, we enter into a blessed way of life.

Conventional wisdom finds this absurd. The cultural messages we are given would have us believe that happiness lies in “doing it my way.” We are often told, “You only go around once, so grab as much as you can get,” and, “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” Biblical wisdom proclaims that blessedness lies in surrendering to God’s

will, in self-forgetfulness as we serve others, in washing another’s feet.

How do we do this? We wash one another’s feet by stopping to help a stranded motorist or holding the hand of a dying person. We wash one another’s feet when we attempt to change unjust systems, when we strive to end world hunger, when social justice and the gospel become our priority. The happiness and blessedness that Jesus proposes is not living well, feeling good, or staying in our comfort zones. It is risky business, this gospel living.

Missing the Point

It is consoling to see that the disciples often struggled to understand what Jesus was about. Peter saw suffering as inappropriate to Jesus’ life. James and John would have God send down fire upon an inhospitable Samaritan town. Thomas didn’t believe reports that Jesus had risen. We should not be surprised if we, too, find it difficult to equate blessedness with a life of service. Every day we should pray for two things: the knowledge to understand Jesus’ teaching, and the courage to put it into action.

If we are to become disciples, it’s insufficient to simply give a portion of our time, talent, and treasure to God.

The happiness and blessedness that Jesus proposes is not living well, feeling good, or staying in our comfort zones.

The cost of discipleship involves the giving of self. Since we are made in the likeness of a self-giving God, our vocation is to strive in grace to image the God who made us.

One simple, concrete expression of this self-giving love that leads to blessedness is the washing of feet. It is a symbol of a large reality, God’s kingdom: being totally for others, whatever their needs. In serving one another, we serve the Lord and become like Jesus.

Bountiful Byproducts

Those who serve as Jesus did experience an indescribable joy because through that service—be it the washing of feet, the giving of a cup of cold water, a word of affection—we are bonded to Christ and the community. In that bonding lies happiness, and from it flows two byproducts: joy and peace.

Concluding Prayer: Lord, sometimes we just don’t get it. Help us to understand that by caring for others we further your kingdom. Do not let us pursue a false blessedness through a life of self-seeking. Rather, draw us into your life and ministry. Therein we will do your will and know your peace. +



Lord, strengthen my resolve to be faithful to your covenant of love and be more compassionate and generous toward all people.

From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*,

Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS *February 19-24*

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
Lv 19:1–2, 11–18 / Mt 25:31–46

Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15

Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

Thu. Chair of St. Peter the Apostle:
1 Pt 5:1–4 / Mt 16:13–19

Fri. Lenten Weekday:
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26

Sat. Lenten Weekday:
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Lent | February 25, 2018

God's Test of Obedience

By Mary Katharine Deeley

The Apostle Paul was absolutely certain the love of God would find us no matter what happened and that if we had any role model and ancestor in faith, it was Abraham.

The stories are familiar. Abraham left his ancestral home to find a land promised him by a God who had only recently revealed himself. Abraham believed a child would come to him and Sarah, though both were old. Finally, he showed he would give everything in obedience to God when he was asked to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac.

This last story is troublesome to us. Would God require human sacrifice?

We can understand this as a story of faith in two ways. The traditional interpretation is that God requires everything from us and wants nothing to come between us and our love of God. God's "test" of Abraham is a test of obedience. Will we give our "all?"

The second way of seeing the story begins with our understanding that many of the surrounding nations practiced child sacrifice. It may not have been a surprise when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, since his neighbors were doing it, too. But at the critical moment, when the angel calls out to tell Abraham to stop, he does. The Lord wants a different relationship with his people.

Abraham's faith is shown as much in his obedience to the second order as to the first. God doesn't want us to be just like everyone else. Rather, God wants us as his own people, following the path he carves for us—even if it means going against the tide. +

We can understand the story of Abraham's faith in two ways.

Sunday Readings

Genesis 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18

"Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the angel.

Romans 8:31b–34

He who did not spare his own Son...how will he not also give us everything else along with him?

Mark 9:2–10

[God said,] "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

A Word From Pope Francis

Lent...is a special time for recalling the gift of our baptism, when we became children of God. The Church invites us to renew the gift she has given us, not to let this gift lie dormant as if it were something from the past or locked away in a memory chest.

—Homily, February 14, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Are we willing to stay peacefully within God's plan, even if it means sacrifice?
- Do we trust God's plans more than our own?
- Is there anything more beloved by us than God's loving plan for us?



Belonging to God

By Kathy Coffey

The First Commandment: “I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me” (Exodus 20:2–3).

Newspapers carried the story of a father who was boating with his son and the boy’s friend. When a strong, unexpected current carried the children overboard, the dad rescued them both. But after dragging them to safety, he could not save himself and drowned.

We can speculate about the gratitude the son, his friend, and their families will carry throughout their lives. Every breath they take is, in some sense, a gift of and a tribute to the heroic father who saved them. When people do us a big favor, we can rarely repay them. We breathe gratitude and cannot say thanks enough.

The extreme thankfulness that recipients must feel gives us a clue about the First Commandment. When we read about God freeing the Hebrews from Egypt, it’s hard to relate. Few of us know slavery firsthand. Hearing about people who are slaves today, many of them children, we’re appalled. We can only imagine what it means when someone unlocks the prison door and says, “You’re free.” To forget such a liberator would be the worst ingratitude.

Whatever our circumstances, God has freed us.

Awareness, Gratitude

After a gift like the one the Hebrew people received, how could they ignore God? How could they even think of worshipping anyone or anything else?

Before we get too high and mighty, scorning those ungrateful Jews, we should look at the ways God has freed us. Our situation may not be as obvious as imprisonment, but there are other, subtler forms of slavery. Some are caught in addictions to gambling, smoking, drugs, or alcohol. Others are trapped in unhealthy habits, fears, or relationships. From all of these, God is the ultimate liberator, freeing us in ways that surpass what we can do for ourselves.


Whatever our particular circumstances, God has freed us from something. And how gratefully do we respond? We probably need a reminder to put God first as badly as the Hebrews did.

If we say we belong to God completely and wholeheartedly, how do we show it? Do we set aside time each day to reflect on God’s ongoing action in our lives? (For harried commuters this can be done at stop signs.) Do we fall asleep naming the ways God was present in our days and the blessings he brought? If we take this commandment seriously, it will be reflected in our calendars and checkbooks. How do we spend our time and money?

Learning From Jesus

If we really want to know what this commandment means, we should look at the way it operates in Jesus’ life. He is passionately caught up in the love of his Father; his primary goal is pleasing God. Inspired and heartened by God, he responds constantly to God’s initiatives. Prayer punctuates his life; he often withdraws to renew his delight in God and be strengthened by their time together. During this time, he must experience God’s love, listen for God’s guidance, imagine God’s face.

Jesus shows us what it means to belong to God. During his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, every human instinct rebels against the course ahead, but he holds fast to whatever the Father asks. If we can share in his all-consuming love, it places us in the house of God at all times. As Jesus’ joy and compassion shows us, that’s a far better place to live than the house of slavery. +



Lord, you watch over me and love me as your child. Help me to see all people as your children and treat them with gentleness, love, and respect.

From Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS *February 26-March 3*

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
Dn 9:4b–10 / Lk 6:36–38

Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Is 1:10, 16–20 / Mt 23:1–12

Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Jer 18:18–20 / Mt 20:17–28

Thu. Lenten Weekday: Jer 17:5–10 / Lk 16:19–31

Fri. Lenten Weekday: Gn 37:3–4, 12–13a, 17b–28a / Mt 21:33–43, 45–46

Sat. Lenten Weekday: Mi 7:14–15, 18–20 / Lk 15:1–3, 11–32