



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 2, 2018

Genuinely Model God's Love

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Our English word *hypocrite* comes from a Greek word that is pronounced almost the same. The Greeks often used the word to describe acting, but its root meaning is closer to this: "One who pretends or acts under a mask." We might describe such a person as two-faced.

There are several places in the Gospels where Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites because they say one thing and do another. Their actions appear to be part of a show so that others will think that they are good and holy. Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter when he points out that clinging to the letter of the law is

not what makes someone holy. Rather, it is the person with a pure heart free of greed, malice, envy, and evil of all kinds who is closer to God.

Jesus has the Old Testament Scriptures on his side. Psalm 15 lays out a wonderful description of the ones who will dwell with God forever in heaven. First and foremost, they are not hypocrites. Rather, they have integrity of heart and speak the truth (15:2). They "never defame a neighbor" (15:3). They practice what they preach and do it for the greater glory of God.

We all have moments when we act better (or sometimes worse) than we are because we want to appear differently to others. The challenge for us today is to be genuine, to let the love of God become the model for how we love. Then we will have no need to worry about whether we are following the law. Our own actions will tell us so. +

Sunday Readings

Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–8

[Moses said to the people,] "You shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it."

James 1:17–18, 21b–22, 27

Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.

Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23

[Jesus said,] "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition."

*Jesus notes that clinging
to the letter of the law
is not what makes
someone holy.*

A Word From Pope Francis

We all know...how much harm and scandal is done to the Church by those people who say they are deeply Catholic and often go to Church, but who then neglect their family in daily life, speak badly of others, and so on. This is what Jesus condemns because this is a counter-witness to Christianity.

—Angelus, August 30, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Am I ever guilty of not practicing what I preach?
- Instead of merely following Church law, is my emphasis on genuinely loving my neighbors?



The Paradox of Power

By Richard Rohr, OFM

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).

This is the familiar opening of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—his inaugural address. At the beginning of his teaching, Jesus gives us a revolutionary understanding of how change happens.

In God's reign, the "poor in spirit"—the excluded, rejected, overlooked, and useless—have a big advantage. They have a "privileged seeing" over the rest of us.

The poor in spirit are those who have been defeated somehow and then rediscover themselves in a new place of utter security and freedom. They no longer need or believe in the old power or identity that appears simple and naïve to those of us still playing the game. In our competitive eyes they are poor and powerless. In Jesus' eyes they are blessed and happy.

Beginning in the Hebrew Scriptures and continuing throughout the Bible, we are taken on a journey into powerlessness. Biblical revelation is repeatedly undercutting conventional power and relocating it. It is one of the most difficult messages God delivers.

The word of God is seeking to stop the cycle of violence that has plagued humanity and to unlock it from within. Problems cannot be solved by changing things from the top down or the outside in. Instead, the Bible gradually reveals

what I call spiritual power: transforming things from the bottom up and the inside out.

Slow but Effective

Spiritual power is the ability to influence others through one's very being, through the transformative influence of truth and love. It moves from God's very being to people who have let God love them, and from these people who have been loved by God to everything they touch. It is slow but ultimately effective.

Only vulnerable people can keep growing, converting. They allow events to influence them. It is always the vulnerable and powerless that God can risk sharing power with because they alone know how to handle power. The rest of us normally abuse it.

Who does God choose to show God's self to? An enslaved people rather than a dominant power—the Israelites instead of the Egyptians or Babylonians. They gradually learn that they are not alone, that someone else (God) is in control. And so, they let go of control!

The theme continues with barren women (Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca, and Elizabeth), neglected sons (Isaac and David), rejected prophets (all of them) and in the daily ministry of Jesus with the lepers, blind, lame, and poor (who

respond to him, while the powerful fight him and finally kill him).

Jesus as Model

Spiritual power reaches its fullness in Jesus. He never forces God's will, but invites transformation. Even after he models the way of powerlessness to his apostles, they argue about who is the greatest. He challenges them: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve..." (Matthew 20:25–28).

Through his life and teaching, Jesus revealed the nature of true power. He gave us a critique of all systemic power, prestige, and possessions that we still struggle to accept 2,000 years later. Without experiencing true spiritual power, we will never have the security to let go of all of its lesser forms. +



Lord, you come from the heart of the Trinity. Give me a pure heart, that I may reflect goodness and love.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 3-8

Monday, St. Gregory the Great: 1 Cor 2:1–5 / Lk 4:16–30

Tuesday, Weekday: 1 Cor 2:10b–16 / Lk 4:31–37

Wednesday, Weekday: 1 Cor 3:1–9 / Lk 4:38–44

Thursday, Weekday: 1 Cor 3:18–23 / Lk 5:1–11

Friday, Weekday: 1 Cor 4:1–5 / Lk 5:33–39

Saturday, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

Mi 5:1–4a or Rom 8:28–30 /

Mt 1:1–16, 18–23 or Mt 1:18–23



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 9, 2018

Opening Our Eyes and Ears to God

By Mary Katharine Deeley

It seems odd that Jesus would tell someone he just cured to keep silent about the whole incident. If I had experienced a miraculous cure, I think my first impulse would be to tell everyone about it and how it came to be. It's hard to keep that kind of good news to oneself. But Jesus' reasons for asking this went beyond mere modesty. He did not want people to follow him simply because of what he did. There were prophets and preachers at that time who called attention to God and appeared to cure those who were ill.

They cast out demons and preached their understanding of the truth. But Jesus wasn't like any other person. He wanted people to look within themselves and believe in him because of who he was: Emmanuel, God with us.

If we believe in Jesus only because we have seen a miracle, then our faith is not rooted in a deep conviction of heart and mind. The first time something bad happens, our faith will waver. If we believe only because someone else told us to, then when that person exits our lives, our faith may stop. But if we have had a personal encounter with Christ mediated through sacraments, in prayer, or through another person and have come to believe in Christ as the Son of God, then our faith will grow. It will see us through rocky times and brighten the rest of our days. We will be like someone whose eyes and ears have been opened, because we will see Christ present in the world and hear his voice calling to us to come and follow him. +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Then the eyes of the blind shall see, and the ears of the deaf be opened.

James 2:1-5

My brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

Mark 7:31-37

He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it.

If we believe in Jesus only because we have seen a miracle, then our faith may waver.

A Word From Pope Francis

The proclamation of the Gospel is destined for the poor first of all, for all those who all too often lack what they need in order to live a dignified life. To them first are proclaimed the glad tidings that God loves them with a preferential love... Go to the poor first of all.

—Diocese of Rome ecclesial convention,
June 17, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Is my faith in Jesus rooted in a deep, personal conviction?
- Do I regularly pray and participate in the sacraments to strengthen that conviction?



Praying in Good Faith

By Bishop Robert F. Morneau

Saint Monica, the mother of the great St. Augustine of Hippo, was a prayerful woman. She truly believed that what she asked of the Lord would be granted. In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes how he deceived his mother in leaving Africa to sail for Italy. His mother prayed tearfully to God that Augustine not be allowed to sail, yet he made the voyage anyway.

Here is a disturbing paradox. Does intercessory prayer work? We ask for healing of cancer, and a friend dies. We pray for peace, and wars continue. We implore our Lord for family unity, and alienation divides parents and children.

Are our prayers effective? What should we expect as we approach our providential Father in heaven?

Mary, the mother of Jesus, once again points the way. Her faith was deep and firm. Her refrain was: "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Yes, ask that Grandma's cancer be arrested, if it is your will, Lord. Yes, grace us with peace and family unity, but in your time, Lord. A radical trust and faith should underlie every petition.

Let us not limit our prayer life to asking the Lord to meet our needs. As people of faith we should praise God for God's majesty and glory; we should thank God for all the gifts in our lives;

we should appeal to God for forgiveness. We should come to God aware of our own sinfulness and our need for mercy. In the end, it is God's will that should be the basis of all prayer.

God's Will, Not Ours

Jesus said, "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike" (Luke 10:21). This is the same Jesus who, in the Garden of Gethsemane, prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42). The same dynamic that characterizes Mary's submission to God's will is present in her Son. God's will, not our desires, reigns supreme.

Surely when St. Monica realized that her prayer requesting that Augustine remain with her was not granted, she became discouraged. She possibly even developed doubts in a God who proclaims through Jesus that if we ask, we will receive; if we knock, the door will open; if we seek, we will find.

Again, what is needed is a radical trust that divine providence is at work and that, as Julian of Norwich says, "All shall be well."

Trusting in God

Every Sunday the community gathers in worship. We praise God, ask forgiveness, and petition the Lord regarding our needs and the needs of our world. In the end we know that we are gifted with God's love and mercy revealed in Jesus. We are also given the Holy Spirit who is the principal agent of our prayer and ministry. It is the Spirit who empowers us to rejoice when our prayers are "answered" as we desire. It is the same Spirit who enables us to trust that God's will is being worked out even when Grandma is not healed, peace remains elusive, and family unity is still lacking.

William E. Gladstone offers this prayer: "Pardon, O gracious Lord and Father, whatsoever is amiss in this my prayer, and let thy will be done, for my will is blind and erring." Gladstone knew that God could do so much more than we could ask for or imagine. This humble attitude is the key to all "effective" prayer. +



Lord, I am grateful for your faithfulness. Teach me to bring the comfort of your loving presence to those who are afraid.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 10-15

Monday, Weekday: 1 Cor 5:1-8 / Lk 6:6-11
Tuesday, Weekday: 1 Cor 6:1-11 / Lk 6:12-19
Wednesday, Weekday: 1 Cor 7:25-31 / Lk 6:20-26
Thursday, St. John Chrysostom:
1 Cor 8:1b-7, 11-13 / Lk 6:27-38

Friday, Exaltation of the Holy Cross:
Nm 21:4b-9 / Phil 2:6-11 / Jn 3:13-17
Saturday, Our Lady of Sorrows:
1 Cor 10:14-22 / Jn 19:25-27 or Lk 2:33-35



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 16, 2018

Discovering Gifts From the Poor

By Mary Katharine Deeley

The undergraduate students with whom I work are part of a generation whose opportunities to serve others began in grade school. Regardless of religious affiliation, culture, or race, these students raised money, contributed to canned food drives, helped at food pantries, or built houses with their classmates or fellow club members. Now in college, they have hundreds of opportunities to help those less fortunate who are sponsored by this nonreligious institution alone, let alone the many more offered by their respective religious houses and communities.

For the most part, they serve willingly, even eagerly. But I find that few of them sit down to reflect on the good work they do. They rarely consider the call to solidarity with the poor or the command of Christ to love one another. They just have a felt sense that they should.

For Catholics, as for all Christians, this felt sense has its roots in the faith we proclaim. If we truly believe that Christ is the Son of God and our Savior, our faith compels us to do what he did and to love as he loved. And it is more than that. Many people do service work because it's the right thing to do or because they want to give back. Those are good reasons. But we are called to be in a relationship of love with those we serve. We are challenged to see not only how we might serve them but to see the gifts they bring to us and how they shape our lives. We are called to accept them as our brothers and sisters. +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 50:5–9a

The Lord GOD is my help,
therefore I am not disgraced.

James 2:14–18

What good is it, my brothers,
if someone says he has faith
but does not have works?
Can that faith save him?

Mark 8:27–35

[Jesus said,] "You are thinking
not as God does, but as human
beings do."

*If we truly believe
that Christ is our Savior,
then our faith compels us
to love as he loved.*

A Word From Pope Francis

[Jesus said,] "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me." This is not an ornamental cross or an ideological cross, but it is the cross of life, the cross of one's duty, the cross of making sacrifices for others with love.

—Angelus, June 19, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I seize opportunities to do service work?
- When serving the less fortunate, am I willing to accept them as my brothers and sisters?



The Wisdom of the Poor

By Donald Senior, CP

Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours (Luke 6:20).

Jesus' words have punch, and this beatitude from Luke's Gospel is a good example. Unlike the version in Matthew 5:3 ("Blessed are the poor in spirit..."), in Luke's Gospel Jesus speaks directly to the poor, adding no qualifying phrase like "in spirit." The people addressed here are the real poor, without resources, and truly needy.

Why would Jesus tell poor people they are blessed? The unemployed, those threatened with eviction from their home, those with no food for their hungry children all might be enraged to hear someone say, "Don't worry, you are blessed to be suffering." Advocates for the poor have long criticized those who pat poor people on the head and say, in effect, "Hang on. God loves you and your reward in heaven will be great."

Luke's Gospel makes clear that Jesus' response to the poor was more than empty words. He was a healer who waded into the sea of broken humanity to heal bodies and spirits. He threw his lot with the poor, eating with them and welcoming them (15:1-2).

Right after the beatitudes in Luke's Gospel come the "woes." The first of these pulls no punches for those who had resources, yet refused to share them: "Woe to you who are rich, for you have

received your consolation" (Luke 6:24). Jesus' words were so provocative that he earned the anger of his opponents and put his life at risk.

Ultimate Vindication

So Jesus' blessings to the poor were not idle words. He believed the poor are truly blessed because, despite everything, God cares for the poor and would ultimately vindicate their suffering. This is a fundamental conviction of the Bible. The God of Israel, the God of Jesus is on the side of the defenseless and those without resources. And while Jesus worked hard to alleviate suffering, he also firmly believed that those crushed by poverty would, in God's realm, be lifted up and filled with abundant life. For Jesus this was not "pie in the sky, by and by" but an expression of his trust that God was faithful and that life extended beyond the realm of suffering and death.

But there was another reason why Jesus blessed the poor. Those who are poor embody a truth that the rest of us often forget. The poor know what it means to be dependent on others. They know firsthand how fragile life can be, and have no illusion about being in control of their destiny. These realities apply not just to the poor but to everyone, yet having a

lot of resources can sometimes delude us into thinking we are the masters of our own destiny and do not need others.

Hard-won Wisdom

The Bible appreciates the hard-won wisdom of the poor and knows too well the illusions that can befall the rich. That is another reason why Jesus blesses the poor—paradoxically, their dependence and lack of autonomy reveal how everyone ultimately stands before God.

It's hard to read anything nowadays without thinking of the terrible crises gripping the world. How should we read Jesus' words about the poor now? Surely we are more aware of the growing chasm between the "haves" and "have-nots" that creates so much enmity and suffering.

Jesus' words and actions remind us that God cares for the poor and that as Christians we have an obligation to share our resources with those in need. All of us are "poor" before God and depend on God's abundant and gracious mercy for our lives. +



Lord, I am grateful for the gift of faith. Help me to practice what I believe in my heart.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 17-22

Monday, Weekday:

1 Cor 11:17-26, 33 / Lk 7:1-10

Tuesday, Weekday:

1 Cor 12:12-14, 27-31a / Lk 7:11-17

Wednesday, Weekday:

1 Cor 12:31-13:13 / Lk 7:31-35

Thursday, Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn,

Paul Chŏng Ha-sang, and Companions:

1 Cor 15:1-11 / Lk 7:36-50

Friday, St. Matthew: Eph 4:1-7, 11-13 / Mt 9:9-13

Saturday, Weekday:

1 Cor 15:35-37, 42-49 / Lk 8:4-15



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 23, 2018

Participating in God's Unfolding Tale

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When I get engrossed in a book, I try to read it through without stopping. Sometimes I can't help myself and I peek at the last few pages to see where the author is taking me. It is satisfying to let a story unfold and allow ourselves to be surprised, but there is also a secret delight in glimpsing at the end of our journey and wondering how the storyteller will get us there.

Looking ahead to the end of the story is what the Book of Wisdom wants to do when it says, "Let us see whether his words be true...Let us condemn him to

a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him" (Wisdom 2:17, 20). The author knows that the end of the story will reveal the truth.

Jesus picks up the story when he gives the second prediction of his passion. He offers the disciples a glimpse of what is yet to come. The disciples, as usual, miss the point. Instead they argue about how they wanted the story to go—with one of them as the greatest over all. Like a good storyteller, Jesus takes them in a different direction. The ending he has in mind does not come close to defining greatness as they think about it—a prize for being the best. Rather, Jesus points to a child, and we suddenly realize that greatness has nothing to do with power or ability, but with innocence and openness to the unfolding tale.

The story Jesus tells and the life he lives will include death and resurrection for him and his followers. Let's participate in it fully because we do know how it ends. +

Sunday Readings

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him in the end.

James 3:16-4:3

For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice.

Mark 9:30-37

[Jesus said,] "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me."

The disciples, as usual, miss the point. They argue about how they wanted the story to go.

A Word From Pope Francis

For all of us, the Catholic Church continues to be a field hospital that accompanies us on our spiritual journey. It is the place where we can sit with others, listen to them and share with them our struggles and our faith in the Good News of Jesus Christ.

—Address to Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, September 21, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I live in humility as "last of all and servant of all," or do I seek self-serving glory?
- Does my life story follow the way God wants it to go, rather than me trying to take control?



How Much Is Enough?

By Kathy Coffey

You shall not covet your neighbor's house...or anything that belongs to your neighbor (Exodus 20:17).

“I want a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens where papa works.” In *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros remembers her childhood when the Sunday entertainment was riding around looking at beautiful homes. But eventually she quits going, not telling her family, “I am ashamed—all of us staring out the window like the hungry. I am tired of looking at what we can’t have.”

How many of us waste precious time and energy ogling “what we can’t have,” or figuring out a way to get it? In doing so, we overlook the great goods we *do* have: the endless reservoir of God’s love, the gifts of family and friends, the beauty of creation, a warm pool of memories, individual talents, health, the support of a faith community. Each of us could create a unique litany of blessings—a far better exercise than longing for the latest iPhone or designer jeans.

The trouble with envy is, it never ends. Those who own the beautiful homes others crave are probably wishing they also had waterfront property—or a Swiss chalet. What an infinite, frustrating loop! Desiring the brother’s Lexus or the friend’s swimming pool seems harmless, and cars or pools aren’t intrinsically evil. The problem is, they’re never enough.

We’ve all had the experience of yearning for something that we thought would bring happiness: the child’s bike, the adolescent’s car, the adult’s antique. Getting that object might thrill us temporarily, and we might even cherish it for some time. But eventually, the bike is outgrown, the car dies, and the antique joins the junk pile. No thing can provide the long-term happiness for which we were created.

“Good” Longings

Ignatian spirituality encourages our desires—as long as they are consonant with our deepest selves. These longings are good because they are planted in us by God. We should ask, then, for more wisdom, compassion, or kindness, because these will make us the fullest, best persons we can be. In contrast, a shopping list of things is simply too small for us, unworthy of God’s splendid children.

If we use the latest gizmos to shore up a weak ego or impress friends, we’re in big trouble, caught in a long quest for *more*. Nothing wrong with the gadget—the problem lies within if we can’t believe we’re *enough*: fashioned by God, redeemed by Christ, invigorated by the Spirit, and precious to some fine people.

What else do we need?

Most people who accumulate find that one thing leads to another. New furniture in the living room makes the dining room look shabby. And on it goes, until we don’t even realize we’re caught in an unending cycle. We work hard to afford storage lockers for stuff we don’t even use, then wonder why we’re not at peace.

Setting Limits

As life’s end approaches, do we want to cling stubbornly to possessions that probably won’t fit into the casket? Or will we be ready to ease joyfully into God’s arms because we’ve been there all along? If we set our ultimate sights on God’s face, anything lesser seems like a temporary distraction.

As Joan Chittister writes in *The Ten Commandments*, “Only God is really enough. Only when we see beyond all the things in which we are immersed, only when we learn to hold them all with a relaxed grasp, can we ever discover the One in whom all of them take their being.” +

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful that you are my advocate. Take away all my fears and doubts. Fill me with your wisdom and love that I may be an instrument of your peace in the world.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 24-29

Monday, Weekday:
Prv 3:27–34 / Lk 8:16–18

Tuesday, Weekday:
Prv 21:1–6, 10–13 / Lk 8:19–21

Wednesday, Weekday:
Prv 30:5–9 / Lk 9:1–6

Thursday, St. Vincent de Paul:
Eccl 1:2–11 / Lk 9:7–9

Friday, Weekday:
Eccl 3:1–11 / Lk 9:18–22

Saturday, Sts. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael:
Dn 7:9–10, 13–14 or Rv 12:7–12a / Jn 1:47–51



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 30, 2018

We Are All Part of the Mission of Christ

By Mary Katharine Deeley

One of the great religious scandals is the multiplication of Christian denominations. Fueled partly by arguments about structure, Scripture, theology, and emphasis on individual autonomy (“I don’t like what you’re doing, so I’ll start my own church”), the number has risen over the last few centuries into the hundreds. We can be certain this isn’t what Jesus intended. His frequent prayer was “that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and

I in you” (John 17:21). But Jesus knew the human temptation to exclude those whom we do not like or understand. The call for oneness can be distorted into the call for exclusiveness, with a select few deciding who’s in and who’s out, depending on criteria they alone decide.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus reminds the disciples that they are not the sole recipients of spiritual gifts or divine grace. Perhaps remembering the account in Numbers, Jesus gently points out that those who preach, heal, or cast out demons in his name are not doing wrong simply because they are not part of the twelve. They, too, can be part of Christ’s mission. Jesus reminds them (and us) of the catholic (universal) nature of the body of Christ. I think this prepared them for the spread of Christianity.

As Catholics, we’re diverse. Unique. We’re also united to many Christians through our common, Trinitarian baptism. And so we pray for the day that all people will be one in the fullness of Christ’s power and truth. +

Jesus knew the human temptation to exclude those we do not like or understand.

A Word From Pope Francis

Every child who, rather than being born, is condemned unjustly to being aborted, bears the face of Jesus Christ, ... And every elderly person, even if he is ill or at the end of his days, bears the face of Christ. They cannot be discarded, as the “culture of waste” suggests! They cannot be thrown away!

—Address to International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, September 20, 2013



Sunday Readings

Numbers 11:25–29

[Eldad and Medad] had remained in the camp, yet the spirit came to rest on them also.

James 5:1–6

You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure; you have fattened your hearts for the day of [your own] slaughter.

Mark 9:38–43, 45, 47–48

[Jesus said,] “It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I welcome Catholics from other cultures and traditions, even those very different from my own?
- Do I accept that other Christian denominations can also be part of Christ’s mission?



Being Catholic Matters

By Karen Sue Smith

In the comedy *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the main character, a woman named Toula, spends most of the film showing her boyfriend-turned-fiancé what it means to be Greek. The movie producers liked the script but tried to persuade writer Nia Vardalos to change the ethnicity; otherwise, they predicted, it wouldn't sell.

She insisted on being who she was—and the movie was a hit. Her film resonated with viewers across ethnic lines. They understood that being Polish, Hispanic, or Japanese isn't about the language, foods, ways of celebrating, or worshiping. Ethnicity is a self-reflecting pair of glasses through which families see themselves and relate to their neighbors.

Being Catholic is also a self-reflecting lens through which we understand ourselves and interpret our world. For most Catholics, the faith provides a childhood home. For some, it is a home chosen in adulthood.

Being Catholic means developing a set of attitudes so that we *want* to follow Christ, be good, help the needy, correct injustice, pardon sinners. It gives us values that help us discern right from wrong, our life's purpose, whom to marry, and how to raise children. We learn how to worship publicly, how to thank God at home, and how to mark the stages of our lives (in baptism,

Communion, vows). With ritual we anoint our sick and bury our dead.

Universal Language

Being Catholic means sharing beliefs, practices, behaviors, attitudes, and languages with others around the globe.

Understanding how enormous and embracing it is to be Catholic takes us a long way toward seeing how much our faith actually affects us. The reason Toula and her family explain, model, and welcome the non-Greek fiancé into their world is that being Greek is key to his understanding Toula. How else can he know her? And if he doesn't know her, can he truly love her? If ethnicity is this important, how much more important is faith!

Being Catholic doesn't mean, of course, that every Catholic follows every precept without fail, marries only other Catholics or enters every time the church door is open. It does mean that if we vary from the norm (for example, if we marry a Lutheran), we stay connected to the Catholic family.

It should be obvious that passing on the faith is essential for any serious Catholic parent. How else can all these values and practices be instilled? Even if a child later rejects the faith, parents will have given that son or daughter important beliefs and actions, and a community in which to grow.

Passing It On

Can one still be a good person without being Catholic? Certainly. We Catholics don't see ourselves as the only good people in the world! Can one still be a good person without being Greek? What if one *is* Catholic? Can "being Catholic" help me become a better person than I would have been otherwise?

Turn the question around. For a Catholic not to *be* Catholic, not to discover its riches, not to be part of the community, leaves an important set of blanks. Without being Catholic, how do I mark the milestones of my life? How do I anoint my sick loved ones? What community holds me accountable, supports me? How do I teach my children the meaning of their lives?

In his day Jesus knew that few would be silly enough to light a lamp and stick it under a basket. Likewise, today few people would refuse ownership of a home they inherited when they could live there, raise their family there, grow old there, and pass it to their heirs. +



Lord, I am grateful for your all-embracing love. Open my eyes to see you in everyone I meet.

Open my heart to welcome all of your people.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

October 1-6

Monday, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus:
Jb 1:6-22 / Lk 9:46-50

Tuesday, Holy Guardian Angels:
Jb 3:1-3, 11-17, 20-23 / Mt 18:1-5, 10

Wednesday, Weekday:
Jb 9:1-12, 14-16 / Lk 9:57-62

Thursday, St. Francis of Assisi:
Jb 19:21-27 / Lk 10:1-12

Friday, Weekday:
Jb 38:1, 12-21; 40:3-5 / Lk 10:13-16

Saturday, Weekday:
Jb 42:1-3, 5-6, 12-17 / Lk 10:17-24