



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
September 5, 2021

A Church of and for the Poor

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The book of James is one of the hardest hitting in the New Testament. He is a tell-it-like-it-is apostle, warning the early Church not to show partiality to the rich and powerful. This is always a danger, especially in a Church that relies on donations. While gratitude to donors is understandable and proper, it's easy for gratitude to become preference, partiality, and a different moral standard. James warns the Church against this.

Jesus warns us, too. He talks about inviting the poor to a party rather than those who can repay us. He tells us that

when we give, that the left hand should not know what the right is doing. He warns the rich that the path to heaven is narrow.

Jesus' call to salvation was for all, but his pastoral focus was certainly with the poor. So, he dedicated much of his time reaching out to those who could give nothing in return: the blind, deaf, lame, and lepers. And his attention didn't stop at the materially poor but extended to sinners and those thought to be impure.

This love for the weak was a sign of the Messiah as proclaimed by many prophets, including Isaiah. The Anointed of God would come to vindicate the poor, orphaned, widowed, sick, and oppressed.

Jesus did exactly that, and it was this solicitude and miraculous power that began convincing Galileans, and eventually those in Jerusalem, that he was the long-awaited One. Pope Francis said he longed for a Church of the poor, for the poor. It seems Jesus did, too. +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 35:4-7a

Say to the fearful of heart:
Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.

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

And [immediately] the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly.

While gratitude to donors is understandable, it's easy for it to become partiality and a different moral standard.

A Word from Pope Francis

Remember that story about the poor widow lady...Her husband had committed suicide; he jumped from the bridge into the river. And she wept. She said, "I am a sinner, a poor woman. But my poor husband! He is in hell."...And the Curé of Ars said, "But wait a moment, ma'am, because between the bridge and the river, there is the mercy of God."

—Homily, March 18, 2019



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do I have a heart for the poor as Jesus did?
- How can I express that real preference in practical ways?

Want to Be in That Number?

By Kathleen M. Basi

When I was a child, I had a book about saints that I loved. It was filled with color pictures and heroic, larger-than-life stories. I spent hours trying to decide whether I liked Catherine of Siena or Catherine of Alexandria better. I felt as if I ought to like Siena better for cutting her hair off and being a nun and all, but Alexandria's picture was prettier.

It was years before I realized most of these people weren't the golden-haired northern Europeans portrayed in my book. It was later still before I realized that by focusing on legends and miracles, I had turned sainthood into something reserved for a select few—something far beyond the reach of an ordinary mortal like me.

These days, I prefer to think of the saints as real people, flawed and fragile, representing every country and culture on earth. Yet for all their diversity, each of them sought exactly what I seek: discernment and courage to walk in the footsteps of Christ in a way that is authentic both to his example and to the time and place in which I live.

Now, my favorite stories speak not of miracles, but of extraordinary courage in ordinary situations—like Elizabeth Ann Seton, who, as an impoverished widow, founded the first parochial school in this country, along with a new order of religious—all while raising her own children.

They speak of deeply practical courage



in extraordinary circumstances—like Maximilian Kolbe, who willingly starved to death in place of a fellow concentration-camp prisoner in Auschwitz. In my opinion, that would be even harder than volunteering for a firing squad, where at least the end would come quickly.

And then there are figures with checkered pasts, like Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton—those who don't have feast days in the Church calendar but whose words and actions have reverberated like an earthquake, reshaping the foundation of my faith.

Real people. Real lives. People stumbling through their world in all its messiness, trying to find the path to holiness amid chaos and to identify their

individual purpose for why God placed them on this earth. Those people give me hope. If they managed to find their purpose, maybe I can, too.

It's no longer enough for me to read a paragraph or two about the legendary exploits of those whose names begin with "Saint." I want to know how the real people behind those legends lived. How they learned to mirror God while surrounded by cranky kids and clueless coworkers and spouses who insist on using dish towels to wipe dirty mouths. Because that is the path I need illuminated. +

Saints are real people with real lives seeking the discernment and courage to exemplify Christ.

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 6–11

Monday, Weekday:
Col 1:24–2:3 / Lk 6:6–11

Tuesday, Weekday:
Col 2:6–15 / Lk 6:12–19

Wednesday, The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Mi 5:1–4a or Rom 8:28–30 / Mt 1:1–16, 18–23, or 1:18–23

Thursday, St. Peter Claver:
Col 3:12–17 / Lk 6:27–38

Friday, Weekday:
1 Tm 1:1–2, 12–14 / Lk 6:39–42

Saturday, Weekday:
1 Tm 1:15–17 / Lk 6:43–49

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September 5, 2021

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Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
September 12, 2021

Changing Our Mentality

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Jesus presents a different way of seeing, hearing, and judging. It takes some getting used to!

Peter, as a good friend, wants to protect Jesus from the cross he is announcing. Yet Jesus doesn't want protection from the will of the Father—rather he wants support. He invites Peter to change his mentality.

Jesus knew what was coming; he must suffer and be rejected. Suffering and rejection are not absolute evils. Our goal in life can't be to avoid suffering and to be accepted by everyone. If we pursue good and follow Jesus, we will also experience rejection. When Jesus tells us that following him means taking up our cross,

it shouldn't surprise us when a cross is planted in our path with a sign saying, "Pick me up."

In the first reading, the prophet says he opened his ear and didn't rebel. When the consequences of this faith were abuse and rejection, he didn't shield his body and face. He could do so because, like Jesus, he was rooted in love and not fear. He didn't fear their arguments, ideas, and insults. He didn't fear what they could do to his body, for they couldn't touch his soul, his heart, his freedom.

When we know we are loved, and are following what is right, we have a confidence and a strength that the world knows not.

It is a different way of seeing, hearing, and judging. It is of a higher order, a deeper source, and brings total peace. And it takes some getting used to! +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 50:4c–9a

I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who tore out my beard.

James 2:14–18

Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.

Mark 8:27–35

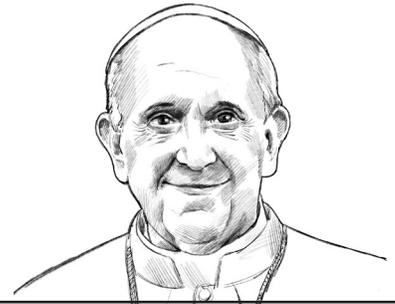
[Jesus said,] "You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

*Our goal in life can't be
to avoid suffering
and to be accepted
by everyone.*

A Word from Pope Francis

You may know all the commandments, all the prophecies, all the truths of the faith, but if this isn't put into practice, is not translated into works, it serves nothing....A faith without works, a faith that doesn't get you involved, isn't faith. It's words and nothing more than words.

—Homily, February 21, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- When amidst situations of opposition, do I find my peace in Jesus and the truth?
- What might steal my peace? Talk to Jesus about it and look for a solution in his gospel of the cross.

Stop. Pray. Stay!

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSSR

My older sister is a Felician sister in Livonia, MI. During a visit some weeks after she entered the convent, our family was given a tour of the motherhouse. Everywhere there were paintings and statues of Jesus, Mary, St. Francis, and Blessed Mary Angela, the Felician founder. All were very nice, but one image in particular got our attention. We stood still, silent. None of us had ever seen anything like it.

It was a statue of Jesus after the scourging at the pillar. He was almost life-size, crowned with thorns, covered with bloody wounds, and robed in purple. His appearance was so moving that we couldn't help but linger there. And as we did, the kind sister guiding our tour told us about a child from the Montessori, which is staffed by the sisters on the motherhouse grounds. Upon seeing the statue, the child blurted, "I hope the police know about this." The power of that image was undeniable.

It has been a long time since that day at the motherhouse. I've seen many pictures of Jesus, Mary, and the saints since then. But none made me want to stop and pray and stay there, lingering. Sadly, a lot of religious art is less than beautiful or inspiring. It doesn't evoke any reaction, except maybe boredom or nostalgia. The image of Divine Mercy is overused. T-shirts of the immaculate conception are sold by the thousands. Coffee mugs of the Sacred Heart clutter every rectory kitchen.



If you page through religious catalogs or go online, what you find is kitsch, the dull repetition of images and figures that no longer speak to our graphically astute, million-pixeled, ultracolored, high-definition reality. The visual world around us has grown by leaps and bounds, each day more and more striking, with evocative, heart-stopping, breathtaking images, while religious, devotional art has stayed mired in the past, gradually slipping into irrelevance. Whatever happened to good Catholic art? How did the Church that gave birth to the ceiling paintings of the Sistine Chapel come to settle for "good ol' plastic Jesus?"

Maybe there's a connection between the abandonment of popular devotion

and the demise of good Catholic art. During the 1960s and '70s—the time when much religious art was removed from churches and stored in warehouses, sold, or destroyed—many Catholics were also told that there was no room for their beloved popular devotions in our modern times.

Iconoclasm, the rejection and removal of religious art, for many meant the simultaneous loss of cherished prayers, novenas, and devotions. Only recently, with the resurgence of interest in devotions like the rosary and the chaplet of Divine Mercy, have we seen a return to Catholic art. As popular devotions find new life in the Church today, isn't it time to give new life to Catholic art, too? But not by resurrecting and reproducing old art from a time that will never return. We need new Catholic art that will make us stop and pray and stay today. +

*Is Catholic art
a thing of the past?*

PRAYER

*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 13–18

Monday, St. John Chrysostom:
1 Tm 2:1–8 / Lk 7:1–10

Tuesday, The Exaltation of the Holy Cross:
Nm 21:4b–9 / Phil 2:6–11 / Jn 3:13–17

Wednesday, Our Lady of Sorrows:
1 Tm 3:14–16 / Jn 19:25–27 or Lk 2:33–35

Thursday, Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian:
1 Tm 4:12–16 / Lk 7:36–50

Friday, Weekday:
1 Tm 6:2c–12 / Lk 8:1–3

Saturday, Weekday:
1 Tm 6:13–16 / Lk 8:4–15

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Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
September 19, 2021

Jesus' Cleansing Love

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The Master of Fossa, a painter of unknown name, traveled the Umbrian region in the 1300s, creating works of Franciscan spirituality. His triptych panel, *Stories of the Passion*, interprets the scenes of the passion and death of Christ as an act of service to poor sinners. The souls of his brothers and sisters were dirty. And yet he comes down from heaven, bends over our iniquity, and gently takes us into his hands while nursing us back to cleanliness and life.

Christ's greatness is revealed in his service. "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant

of all" (Mark 9:35). Jesus didn't wish to be first; he merely wished to be faithful. His goal was to love the Father and win us back, and that meant service and the cross.

In a detail of the painting, Peter is on his papal throne while Jesus kneels in front of him. What a role reversal! Peter should be washing Jesus' feet, but no. Even Peter tried to reject this act of service, but Jesus insisted—or else Peter could have no part in his reign.

Peter needed to be washed and purified before serving and sanctifying others. So it is with us. During this Mass, allow your soul to be taken into Jesus' hands. Feel him cleanse you, pouring his warm grace over your wounds. Accept his gentle, loving attention as he caresses, dries, and restores you. Only when you have known his mercy and love can you then be an agent of that love to others. +

Sunday Readings

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

With violence and torture let us put him to the test / that we may have proof of his gentleness.

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,] "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."

Allow your soul to be taken into Jesus' hands. Feel him cleanse you, pouring his warm grace over your wounds.

A Word from Pope Francis

The *Catechism* firmly states that human power has limits and that "it is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly." All such use and experimentation "requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation."

—On Care for Our Common Home (*Laudato Si'*), May 24, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do I take the time to place myself in Jesus' presence and receive his healing touch?
- The sacrament of reconciliation is a privileged moment of healing. Do I take advantage of this grace?

Wise Christian Stewardship

By Kathleen M. Basi

“God gave you a body so you can do good things in the world. And you can’t do that if you don’t take care of your body.” This is a pretty common refrain in my parenting arsenal. It is intended to be an entry-level lesson on sexuality, but in fact it’s a pretty universal concept: We have a responsibility to use what we have been given wisely.

When we hear the words “Christian stewardship,” we tend to reduce it to “time, talent, and treasure”—specifically, to our gift to the Church. Yet as important as that is, it’s not the whole story.

Christian stewardship means the wise use of everything we have and everything we are. It means care of the earth: picking up litter, not running the car while I check my phone in the parking lot, recycling, reusing plastic bags, turning the thermostat down in the winter and up in the summer, shopping consignment, and using The Freecycle Network, which coordinates a worldwide network of “gifting groups” to divert reusable goods from landfills.

It means care of relationships: turning off the electronics and focusing on each other, playing games together, eating dinners together, and supporting each other’s endeavors.

It means being aware of how much I have—home, running water, electricity, and especially my own unique talents and charisms—and embracing the



responsibility to share that wealth with others.

If my charism is a love of children, it might mean offering a stressed-out mother a few hours off. It might even mean taking kids for a whole weekend to allow another couple a weekend to reconnect.

If my charism is physical strength, it might mean helping a neighbor fix a broken step or replace a faucet. It might mean mowing the yard for an elderly or sick acquaintance, or someone overwhelmed by circumstances.

If my charism is cooking, it might mean meals for new mothers or families facing loss, extended illness, or emotional stress.

If my charism is joy and the gift of gab, it might mean visiting shut-ins, nursing homes, and retirement centers.

When “time and talent” Sunday comes around, we naturally focus on how to give back to God through the Church. Our parishes can function only if we share our gifts. But the responsibility of Christian stewardship doesn’t end there. The Church can grow only if we evangelize—and actions, as the old adage says, speak louder than words.

God gave us our bodies; we honor him by using them to do good things on the earth in his name. +

*Giving of our time,
talent, and treasure is
only part of the story.*

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 20–25

Monday, Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn, Paul Chŏng Ha-sang, and companions:
Ezr 1:1–6 / Lk 8:16–18

Tuesday, St. Matthew:
Eph 4:1–7, 11–13 / Mt 9:9–13

Wednesday, Weekday:
Ezr 9:5–9 / Lk 9:1–6

Thursday, St. Pius of Pietrelcina:
Hg 1:1–8 / Lk 9:7–9

Friday, Weekday:
Hg 2:1–9 / Lk 9:18–22

Saturday, Weekday:
Zec 2:5–9, 14–15a / Lk 9:43b–45

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Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
September 26, 2021

Protect Life

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The tapestry by Pieter van Aelst in the Vatican Museum, *Slaughter of the Innocents*, may not seem to have much to do with today’s readings, yet it does. Let me explain: This wall-size work of art depicts the murder decreed by Herod of all the children two years and under. It was his desperate effort to extinguish any possibility that the Messiah might eventually contest his throne.

The reading of James could very well be applied to the greedy and avaricious Herod. “You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure; you have fattened

your hearts for the day of [your own] slaughter” (James 5:5). All the wealth, authority, and success he had only led him to be more grasping and insecure. Anyone who sees a threat to his own well-being in the birth of a child reveals his own internal poverty of spirit.

Rather than remove the little ones from our lives, we should do all we can to edify and maintain their faith. Jesus, as well as James, has harsh words for anyone who would lead a little one to sin.

Herod was the first who needed to hear the words of the Messiah he was trying to silence. If anything causes you to sin, even something as precious as a hand or foot, it’s better to cut it off and live physically impaired rather than maintain apparent wholeness while spiritually rotting from within. The life of our souls and that of the little ones is of paramount importance, and no material security should be placed ahead of it. +

Anyone who sees a threat to his own well-being in the birth of a child reveals his own poverty of spirit.

A Word from Pope Francis

It is our great responsibility, as baptized persons, to proclaim Christ, to carry the Church—this fruitful motherhood of the Church—forward. Mary, during the persecution of the first Christians, prayed so much and moved those who had been baptized to go forward with courage.

—Homily, April 17, 2013



Sunday Readings

Numbers 11:25–29

[Moses said,] “If only all the people of the LORD were prophets! If only the LORD would bestow his spirit on them!”

James 5:1–6

Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries.

Mark 9:38–43, 45, 47–48

[Jesus said,] “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Do I protect life as a gift from the Father, from conception to natural death?
- How do I help the little ones in my life come to know Jesus?

Climbing Zacchaeus' Tree

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSsR

The story of Zacchaeus is a favorite for many (Luke 19:1–10). It's appealing because of Zacchaeus' desire to see Jesus, his shortness of stature, his sinful reputation, and his spontaneous tree-climbing. And it's unforgettable because of Jesus' gift of mercy. Everyone can identify with all or part of this story.

For me, it's all about the tree. The tree is right smack in the middle of the story. It creates the dividing line for the before-and-after pictures of Zacchaeus. Before the tree, it's Zacchaeus the sinner. After the tree, Zacchaeus is redeemed. The tree is the vehicle, the instrument, the tool that makes the after shot possible. The tree allows Zacchaeus to reach a pivotal point, bringing about a life-changing encounter. After that meeting, Zacchaeus would never be the same.

Look at the trees in your life! Trees offer a meeting place, a spot for encountering the living God and the possibility of experiencing life-changing grace. Look at trees as if all were the tree in the story of Zacchaeus!

Stop and find the beauty in trees. Individually or a forest full of them, they are inspiring. Fall leaves or sprouting spring leaves remind us that nature can draw us closer to God, revealing the wonder of it all.

The Family Tree: Sometimes the closeness and familiarity of family can keep us from seeing God living and active in those nearest and dearest to



us. We can encounter the living God through our mother, father, sister, brother, or husband or wife. A young mom with her newborn baby in her arms told me that she and her husband were humbled that God would choose them to help create a new person.

The Money Tree: My mother always says that money doesn't grow on trees. It's the fruit of hard work. Most of us know work as a burden, part of the curse brought on us by Adam and Eve's original sin. But isn't work the continuing of God's good creation? A carpenter takes wood and makes beautiful furniture. A chef mixes simple ingredients to make something delicious. We are charged with perfecting

what God has given us, mixing together unheard-of combinations of things, raising them to new and spectacular levels.

The Tree of Life: The cross is the tree of life. It is the surest sign of God's love for us. The cross of Christ on Calvary undoes the original sinful act in the Garden of Eden. Saint Alphonsus urges us to gaze at the cross, and there we will find every reason to love God. "By his wounds we were healed!" (Isaiah 53:5).

Look at the trees! Nature, family, work, and faith—similar to trees—all invite us to a life-changing experience of grace. Climb one! You will never be the same. +

*Flowers and plants,
seas and rivers, sun
and moon all proclaim
God's goodness.*

PRAYER

*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 your people.*

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 27–
October 2

Monday, St. Vincent de Paul:
Zec 8:1–8 / Lk 9:46–50

Tuesday, Weekday:
Zec 8:20–23 / Lk 9:51–56

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

Thursday, St. Jerome:
Neh 8:1–4a, 5–6, 7b–12 / Lk 10:1–12

Friday, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus:
Bar 1:15–22 / Lk 10:13–16

Saturday, The Holy Guardian Angels:
Bar 4:5–12, 27–29 / Mt 18:1–5, 10

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