



Bringing Home the Word

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
November 7, 2021

God Notices Our Acts of Generosity

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Elijah is quite bold. He finds this poor woman collecting sticks to make her “last supper” on earth. She has run out of money, food, and energy. Even so, the prophet asks her to prepare him a cake and, in exchange for her hospitality, he promises she will not run out until God sends rain again. In her faith and humility, she says yes, and gives away all that she had to live on. God blesses her generosity! Jesus observes something similar. A poor widow willingly gives all

she has when, without anyone noticing, she drops her coins in the donation basket. God always notices our acts of generosity and multiplies them into eternity.

The first part of the Gospel stands in contrast with these two mighty widows. It shows us how *not* to be apostles. Jesus chastises the scribes and teachers of the law for three defects in their religious practice: pride, greed, and showing off. They love public greetings and special seating at church and parties. Jesus goes even further by saying they use their authority to devour widow’s houses. Could Jesus’ irony be any starker? While the widow is giving her last coins, the priest is using it to devour her livelihood.

We may never see in this life how God blesses our small or large acts of love, prayer, and generosity. Yet, we should keep doing them, not to be seen or rewarded, but because we love God, and to love is always the right thing. God sees, and a great reward awaits us. +

Sunday Readings

1 Kings 17:10–16

The God of Israel, says: The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry.

Hebrews 9:24–28

Christ...will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

Mark 12:38–44 or 12:41–44

[Jesus said,] “They have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she...has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.”

Jesus chastises the scribes for three defects in their religious practice: pride, greed, and showing off.

A Word from Pope Francis

Familiarity with the Lord, of Christians, is always in community. Yes, it is intimate, it is personal, but within the community. A familiarity without community, a familiarity without bread, a familiarity without the Church, without the people, without the sacraments, is dangerous.

—Homily, April 17, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I doing what I can do to help the poor and protect them?
- Is my piety and religiosity also expressed in charity and service?

The Joy of Natural Family Planning

By Kathleen M. Basi

In February, the airwaves will be filled with advertisements for chocolates, jewels, and roses. Valentine's Day is a secular celebration meant for the renewal of love—by which, of course, we mean being bewitched—swept away by something beyond our control.

It's a romantic idea, but infatuation is only the very tip of the iceberg called love. As Catholics, we've been blessed with a beautiful heritage. In a world reeling from the pain caused by the misuse of sexuality, the Church's teachings on marriage shine like a beacon of hope, pointing us toward a brighter future. Throughout its history, the Church has called upon married couples to be open to life—not to have as many children as possible but to remember that what God joined, we must not divide. In the case of the marital act, that means the unity of the couple cannot be separated from the potential to give life. In practical terms, it means using natural family planning (NFP). At its essence, this means reading the signs of fertility and infertility that God himself built into us as man and woman.

Although NFP is often dismissed as impractical and unreliable, most couples who have made the commitment attest that it has made their marriages stronger. There's a good reason for this: Successful NFP practice encourages team effort instead of placing the responsibility on one spouse. When husbands and wives communicate, good things tend to



happen. When they include God in their monthly discernment about family size, even greater things happen.

That's not to say NFP is without its challenges. Periodic abstinence requires sacrifice. Charting cycles requires a commitment to tracking fertility signs daily. Intimacy will often be planned instead of rising spontaneously.

Yet most NFP couples would say the sacrifices are worthwhile. Being intentional about physical intimacy keeps us focused on the needs of the other and prevents us from taking the gift for granted.

Living in tune with our sexuality—the deepest expression of our capacity to love as God loves—helps us better understand

what it means to be made in God's image. When we love our spouses fully, holding nothing back, we become happier and more secure in our marriages. And we rest in the knowledge that by avoiding unnecessary hormonal intervention, we are both protecting the health of the one we love and being good stewards of creation.

Maybe next February it will be time to give your spouse a different kind of Valentine's Day gift—the gift of yourself.+

For information from the Catholic Church on natural family planning (NFP), visit: <https://www.usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning>

Natural family planning can make your marriage stronger.



Lord, I am grateful for your abundant gifts. Open my hands and heart that I may give my all in sharing your peace and love with the world.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 8–13

Monday, Weekday: Wis 1:1–7 / Lk 17:1–6

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

Wednesday, St. Leo the Great: Wis 6:1–11 / Lk 17:11–19

Thursday, St. Martin of Tours: Wis 7:22b–8:1 / Lk 17:20–25

Friday, St. Josaphat: Wis 13:1–9 / Lk 17:26–37

Saturday, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini: Wis 18:14–16; 19:6–9 / Lk 18:1–8

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Bringing Home the Word

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
November 14, 2021

Do Everything Well

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The huge fresco behind the Sistine Chapel altar, *The Last Judgment*, may be the greatest representation of the coming of Christ at the end of time. The centerpiece of the composition is Christ the judge with the Virgin at his side represented in a halo, surrounded by a crowd of apostles, prophets, patriarchs, Old Testament heroines, martyrs, and saints who form a double crown of swirling bodies. Michelangelo painted hundreds of figures, all with exquisite attention to detail.

Just think, when Michelangelo was painting, his work in the chapel was destined to be seen by very few—the pope, his court, a few visiting kings

and diplomats at most. The Sistine Chapel would receive less foot traffic in Michelangelo's time than a medium- to small-sized parish today. Yet, Michelangelo painted with the same eye to perfection as if he knew his work would be seen by millions. He was not painting for the multitudes but for God and his patron, the pope.

Similarly, if we act with generosity and love, whether observed by millions or no one, we will follow the path to true freedom and love. We do what is right, not to be seen, but because we want to be true to God, ourselves, and others. Living like this, we will have no reason to fear the Last Judgment.

More than six million people annually see *The Last Judgment* in person, and countless more via broadcasts and social media. So do everything well, since it is seen by God and yourself—and maybe someday, by more eyes than you ever imagined! +

Sunday Readings

Daniel 12:1-3

Many of those who sleep / in the dust of the earth shall awake.

Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God.

Mark 13:24-32

[Jesus said,] "And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory."

*Do what is right,
not to be seen, but
to be true to God,
ourselves, and others.*

A Word from Pope Francis

Please, make the homily brief, but prepare it well. And how do we prepare a homily, dear priests, deacons, bishops? How should it be prepared? With prayer, by studying the word of God and by making a clear and brief summary; it should not last more than ten minutes, please.

—General audience, February 7, 2018



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I worry too much about being seen by others?
- Do I console myself knowing that no good deed goes unrewarded?

Endangered Species

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSsR

The United States Environmental Protection Agency keeps a list of endangered animals. The list includes both specific animals that are protected by law and people and agencies who receive money to protect animals. For example, agencies for wolves in certain parts of the country receive special funding and programs to keep the beasts from diminishing in number. And thanks to efforts by thousands of people, hope lives for the wolf.

Our Church faces similar problems with traditions becoming extinct. But with knowledge comes hope.

I know of three retreat houses that closed this past year. Maybe it's just a sign of the times. Retreat houses are in retreat. Religious that staffed retreat houses are fewer and aging. The cost of running a retreat or spirituality center is astronomical. Retreat houses have been sold to help dioceses and religious orders pay their bills. We are losing this great tradition amazingly quickly and with little notice. I wonder if the Church should have an organization responsible for conservation and preservation.

A good spiritual director is very difficult to find. Retreat houses used to cultivate them. Centers for spirituality somehow multiplied them. As clergy and religious get older and let go of ministries that were once staples of Catholic life, we must do more than just chronicle their final days. Someone needs to intervene and take action to hold on to what's



worth saving. Here are a few suggestions for the Church's endangered species list.

Retreat houses offer a place of quiet and solitude away from the everyday and ordinary. The number of retreat houses has fallen, but the desire for the experience has not. At some point in our lives, we all need to be alone with God. A parish-based, low-cost retreat program can't exactly replace an eight-, ten-, or thirty-day trek through the spiritual exercises, but it can help keep the tradition alive, maybe in a new way.

The religious articles store is gone! There used to be one or two brick-and-mortar stores in a community where one could buy rosaries, prayer books, first Communion cards, and statues.

That business has gravitated to an online storefront. Personally, I need to hold a rosary before I buy it. I can't get that experience with online shopping.

The inner-city priest is everything to everyone. I have been blessed to know some great inner-city priests. These men are mentors, social-justice gurus, prayer partners, linguists, city planners, community organizers, social workers, and therapists, and they still have plenty of time for Mass and the sacraments. The seminary doesn't train men for this anymore, but it should. What will we do when they and their valuable pastoral and ministerial skills are gone?

There is so much in the Church that is in danger of becoming a distant memory. There is so much worth saving. Keeping the faith alive requires the hard work of saving some tried and true treasures of our Catholic tradition. +

*We must do something
to save our precious
traditions from extinction.*

PRAYER

*Lord, I am grateful you
keep me safe in your love.
You are my hope.
Help me to trust you.*

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 15–20

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

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

Wednesday, St. Elizabeth of Hungary:
2 Mc 7:1, 20–31 / Lk 19:11–28

Thursday, Weekday:

1 Mc 2:15–29 / Lk 19:41–44

Friday, Weekday:

1 Mc 4:36–37, 52–59 / Lk 19:45–48

Saturday, Weekday:

1 Mc 6:1–13 / Lk 20:27–40

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Bringing Home the Word

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

November 21, 2021

Feeble, Fleeting Human Glory

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

In the eighteenth century, Lorenzo Sabbatini painted an amazing ceiling mural at the Vatican of Christ the King ascended in heavenly glory. Have you heard of the artist? He and his art were sought after by the wealthiest, most powerful people of his day—so famous then, but unknown today. Thus is the feeble nature of human glory.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is in chains at the mercy of Pontius Pilate. The Roman procurator failed to recognize him. Thus is the feeble nature of human recognition. Pilate had before him the King of Kings, the author of all authority in heaven and on earth, his maker and

judge. It appeared that Pilate was the powerful one, but Jesus knew all power really came from his Father. Thus, the feeble nature of vision without faith.

The elaborate scene painted by Sabbatini is what we should always keep in mind—Jesus taken up into the clouds as he blesses us. Cherubs dance and celebrate the return of the King, their fearless leader, who faced all the forces of hell and emerged victorious. He has taken his rightful throne and they are rejoicing at having him back. He still reigns from there today.

He has opened the gates of heaven so all his beloved can now enter and populate the mansions prepared for them from the dawn of time. We may often feel like victims of circumstances or totally limited by our failures, health, or enemies. Yet, we are more than conquerors if we allow ourselves to be set free by the truth of Christ's kingship. +

Sunday Readings

Daniel 7:13–14

His dominion is an everlasting dominion / that shall not pass away.

Revelation 1:5–8

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and who was and who is to come."

John 18:33b–37

Jesus answered [Pilate], "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world."

It appeared that Pilate was the powerful one, but Jesus knew all power really came from his Father.

A Word from Pope Francis

Jesus asks us to allow him to become our king...But we must not forget that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. He will give new meaning to our life—at times even put us to difficult tests through our mistakes and our sins—merely on the condition that we not follow the logics of the world and of its "kings."

—Angelus, November 25, 2018



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Do I judge people superficially or with a vision enlightened by the gospel?
- How can I truthfully and faithfully judge situations, and help others do the same?

Bothering God

By Kathleen M. Basi

Anxiety is a reality in modern life. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, almost 18 percent of adults in the United States suffer from it. And that figure comes only from diagnosable cases—not the average anxiety we all cope with at one time or another.

I've been thinking about this lately as it begins to manifest in my children. It reminds me that for two years in junior high I journaled my way through feeling unloved and worthless, convinced that the world would be better off if I just died.

I journaled, but I never asked for help. I didn't tell my parents, and I don't remember ever praying about it. On some level, I thought I had no right to bother God with my problems.

You might shake your head at the idea that anyone could think a major depressive episode is unworthy of God's attention. After all, "Even the hairs of your head have all been counted" (Luke 12:7). Yet how many times do we do the same? Budgets are cut and layoffs are threatened, triggering anxiety. Daily schedules become oppressive. Children make fledgling flights from the nest, causing parents to worry about safety.

Sometimes we pray about these things, but too often we focus on ourselves for answers—our own strength, our own ability to solve the problem. How easy it is to forget that we



accomplish nothing on our own, but that all things are realized through Christ who strengthens us (see Philippians 4:13).

As a parent whose children are beginning to experience the anxieties of life, I find this thought particularly poignant. So often, they internalize their worries. They try to bear burdens that are far too big for them, for fear of bothering me. And yet I ache for them—I long for them to ask me for help. When they bring me their deepest concerns, it draws us closer together. I can share the wisdom of experience—or, in some cases, simply validate theirs.

If this is how I feel about my children,

how much more must God long for us to reach out to him with the heartaches and anxieties that suck the joy from our lives? Yes, the practicalities will always be ours to put into action, but praying through them brings us closer to God, the source of our strength and the inspiration for all the best that lies within us.

By all means, bother God. He's waiting for you to lean on him. +

Too often we focus on ourselves for answers—our own strength, our own ability to solve the problem.

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful that you are the way, the truth, and the life. Help me to be faithful to the truth of the Gospel.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 22–27

Monday, St. Cecilia:

Dn 1:1–6, 8–20 / Lk 21:1–4

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

Wednesday, St. Andrew Dũng-Lac and

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

Thursday, Weekday:

Dn 6:12–28 / Lk 21:20–28

Friday, Weekday:

Dn 7:2–14 / Lk 21:29–33

Saturday, Weekday:

Dn 7:15–27 / Lk 21:34–36

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Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Advent (C)
November 28, 2021

God's Promise of Real Treasure

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

If anyone can keep a promise, it's God. His very nature is to be faithful to his promises and to fulfill all he has foretold. His promise after the fall of Adam and Eve was to send us a Redeemer, to bring peace to Jerusalem, and to reestablish his reign on earth. The prophets continually reminded the chosen race of God's fidelity and, although things looked far from their fulfillment, they insisted that God is faithful and would deliver.

Jesus, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise, comes in two phases. First, by

coming as a baby in Bethlehem. This Incarnation and his arrival as Savior is what we're preparing to receive this Advent. Extra prayers, generous giving of your time, and special sacrifices are the best way to ready your soul for his coming.

Jesus' Second Coming will bring to completion what he started on the cross. His glorious return, which all of creation will foretell in those last days, is when the full effects of Christ's victory on the cross will be seen at the judgment of all living creatures.

The advice for all Christians in this period of waiting and preparation is to keep watch; to not allow the delay to lead us to drowsiness. Don't let the vanities of this world dazzle us, for in time, they will become dust.

God promises real treasures that will endure forever and, as we know, God keeps his promises. +

Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 33:14-16

In those days, at that time, I will make a just shoot spring up for David.

1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all.

Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

[Jesus said,] "Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life."

Extra prayers, generous giving of your time, and special sacrifices are the best way to ready your soul for Christ.

A Word from Pope Francis

Advent is a continuous call to hope: it reminds us that God is present in history to lead it to its ultimate goal, to lead it to its fullness, which is the Lord...God is not distant, he is always with us, to the extent that very often he knocks on the door to our heart.

—First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I preparing my soul for Christ's coming by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving?
- Have I settled on which concrete acts I will do?

Put People First

By Fr. Bruce Lewandowski, CSsR

We had cleaned and waxed the floor in our church hall. It looked great! Then at a parish celebration soon thereafter, as chairs and tables were being dragged across the floor, I caught myself worrying more about scratches and scuff marks than whether people were enjoying themselves. I'm sometimes guilty of putting things before people. Maybe all of us do this sometimes.

Later, sometime after the party at the hall, I reread St. Paul VI's encyclical of March 26, 1967, *On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)*. In economic development, people first. With technological advances, people first. In political activities, people first. As we address the complexity of the world's problems, people first. You get the idea. Human progress happens and can be measured to the extent that national and world resources serve people and their needs. There is a resounding refrain throughout St. Paul VI's encyclical: Put people first.

What happens when we don't put people first is clear. Human dignity can be diminished, trampled on, and obliterated. The gap between rich and poor can swallow up the jobless, the homeless, and the friendless. *Populorum Progressio* sharply reminds us that if the poor don't progress, no one does. Development—whether social, economic, educational, or any other kind—isn't progress at all if it fails to



meet the needs of the weakest and most vulnerable.

St. Paul VI (1897–1978), who led the Church as Pope from 1963 until his death, wrote, “This struggle toward a more human way of life certainly calls for hard work and imposes difficult sacrifices. But even adversity, when endured for the sake of one's brothers and out of love for them, can contribute greatly to human progress” (PP 79). “We must travel this road together...Can countless innocent children be saved? Can countless destitute families obtain more human living conditions? Every individual and every nation must face up to this issue, for it is their problem” (PP 80).

Think about how our nation measures progress. We can't merely repeal the Affordable Care Act. It must be replaced, or 20 million people will lose their insurance benefits. Immigration reform can't just be about building a wall. It must be about building thousands of strong families and keeping them together. Decisions to stop sending American jobs abroad must go hand in hand with

making goods and services affordable at home while providing healthy wages and at the same time helping poorer nations develop.

Read *Populorum Progressio*. It helps to be reminded to put people first. Maybe you worry about the scuff marks like I do and forget about the people at the party. Progress starts small. Hold the door for someone; let another go first. Buy a homeless person lunch; you'll both enjoy it. Stop work for a minute and call your family. That's progress. People first! +

What happens when we don't put people first is clear. Human dignity can be diminished, trampled on, and obliterated.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to slow down and become more aware of my rushing aimlessly from place to place. Quiet my mind and steady my heart that I may live in your presence throughout the day.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 29–
December 4

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Is 2:1–5 / Mt 8:5–11

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

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Is 25:6–10a / Mt 15:29–37

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Is 26:1–6 / Mt 7:21, 24–27

Friday, St. Francis Xavier:
Is 29:17–24 / Mt 9:27–31

Saturday, Advent Weekday:
Is 30:19–21, 23–26 / Mt 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6–8

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