



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
September 6, 2020

Correcting Lovingly

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Today's readings are about fraternal correction. We are responsible for our brother's good, and God expects us to help him. This means being a good example and holding him or her to a gospel standard. If that means a hard dose of the truth, so be it, as long as that truth is given in love.

Ezekiel was a prophet who knew how to preach fire and brimstone, but he could also be tender and compassionate. He prophesied both about the destruction of Israel and how Yahweh would turn their hearts of stone into flesh. In Michelangelo's fresco *The Prophet Ezekiel* on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the strength of this

rugged prophet is evident. That Ezekiel is turned to listen to a cherub says a lot about his humility as well.

God told Ezekiel that if he didn't preach to the wicked, God would hold him responsible for their deaths. However, if he did preach and the wicked still didn't heed him, Ezekiel would be safe. The moral is, when God asks us to preach, take it seriously!

Jesus tells us if our brother sins against us, we should confront him in the presence of two witnesses. He even encourages us to bring the Church in as judge if a dispute between believers isn't resolved. However, this should always be done with love.

As humble Christians, we should accept corrections when they are done correctly. No one likes to be told he or she is wrong, but if we are we should rejoice in the truth, even if it hurts. And we should thank those who love us enough to correct us. +

*As humble Christians,
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Sunday Readings

Ezekiel 33:7-9

I have appointed you as a sentinel for the house of Israel.

Romans 13:8-10

The commandments...are summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 18:15-20

[Jesus said,] "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

A Word from Pope Francis

It is vital that the Church today go out to proclaim the Gospel to all, in all places, on all occasions, without delay, reluctance, or fear. We do so in obedience to the Lord's missionary mandate, certain of his presence among us until the end of the world.

Address to United Bible Societies,
October 5, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I find the idea of charitable correction uncomfortable? Why or why not?
- How willing am I to receive correction from my peers? My spouse? My child? My boss?

Seeing the Faces of God

By Kathleen M. Basi

Every so often when I read a Gospel story, I stop and say, “Huh?” It seems like some crucial piece of information is missing.

I get one of those inklings when I read the story of the disciples walking with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. It’s difficult to believe they didn’t recognize him. I mean, come on. These guys knew him; they hung out with him; they got the bonus explanations that the regular crowds didn’t. How could they not recognize him? The only thing I can figure is that maybe, just maybe, Jesus wasn’t wearing the face they knew.

A few years ago, there was a TV show about a teenage girl who kept meeting random strangers who turned out to be God in disguise. There was no rhyme or reason to God’s appearance. He might be a janitor, a rich woman, a pizza-delivery guy, or a mime. Once or twice the main character assumed she was talking to God when she wasn’t. The unpredictability of these appearances taught her to approach every person and situation as if God were present—because he was.

This principle may seem so obvious that it appears ridiculous. However, it’s hard to keep in mind in real life. Most of us want to do God’s will, if we could just figure out what it is. The world’s problems



seem so big—far bigger than we can handle. Most often, we focus on issues, ideas, and philosophies. But issues, ideas, and philosophies are only important because of how they impact people.

All too often, I find myself wandering through life on autopilot, completely unaware of God’s presence in those around me. Middle-class life seems far removed from the “least ones” (Matthew 25:45). We think we don’t cross paths with them, but maybe we do. Recently I learned that the hotel near my house shelters people in crisis. And in the shadow of a viaduct near my old house,

there used to be a tent community.

Every person we encounter has a story to tell and a broken place within that needs healing. Consider the man smoking at the next gas pump, the woman driving like a maniac in a school zone, the rude cashier at the big-box store, the girl showing too much skin at the pool. The people we often regard as irritants and obstacles are actually facets of God’s face.

If we took time to simply be aware—to look these people in the eye and recognize God’s presence in them—we will likely find that the “least ones” are a lot nearer and easier to reach than we ever expected. +

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for your gifts of love, mercy, and forgiveness. Help me to share these gifts with those who have hurt me.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 7–12

Monday, Weekday:

1 Cor 5:1–8 / Lk 6:6–11

Tuesday, 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

Wednesday, St. Peter Claver:

1 Cor 7:25–31 / Lk 6:20–26

Thursday, Weekday:


1 Cor 8:1b–7, 11–13 / Lk 6:27–38

Friday, Weekday:

1 Cor 9:16–19, 22b–27 / Lk 6:39–42

Saturday, Weekday:

1 Cor 10:14–22 / Lk 6:43–49

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September 6, 2020

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Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
September 13, 2020

Right Judgment

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Often when we think of a judge, we think of severity or cold justice. Courtroom and criminal-justice dramas—even some news coverage of major crimes and scandals—love depicting the offender as receiving his or her just rewards, with the judge or prosecutor smugly reflecting or sighing in relief.

But in the scriptural sense, a judge is much more. A good judge is an educator, teacher, and parent. Good judges promote wise living and respect for authority and the law. Their tools are sometimes mercy, sometimes penance, but always prompted by love.

A better image to understand the judge's role is a parent educating his or her child. Sometimes education means letting something slide; sometimes it means holding the child accountable. Both can be expressions of love.

Today's readings caution us against selfish passions that prompt us to judge. One who has been forgiven much but is then harsh with others will be severely punished—or as Sirach puts it, God "remembers their sins in detail."

Mercy toward others is key to the Gospel message. Some think they are good Christians because they don't steal and haven't killed anyone. They may even be active in their parish but are highly critical of others.

Remember, as Jesus said: "The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you" (Matthew 7:2). And, "So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart" (Matthew 18:35). +

Sunday Readings

Sirach 27:30—28:7

Remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook faults.

Romans 14:7–9

Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Matthew 18:21–35

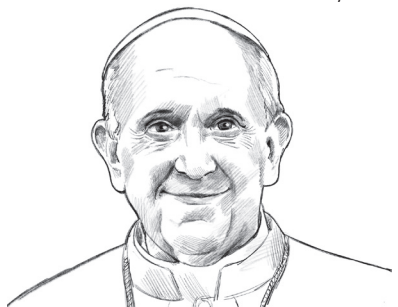
Jesus answered, "I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times."

***Good judges promote
wise living and respect for
authority and the law.***

A Word from Pope Francis

The increase in the rates of suicide in your cities, as well as bullying and various kinds of neediness, are creating new forms of alienation.... I ask you to pay special attention to [the young] and their needs. Try to create spaces...of generous and selfless love...to everyone, and not only to those who have "made it."

Meeting with bishops, Tokyo,
November 23, 2019



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How forgiving, patient, and kind am I on a regular basis?
- How forgiving, patient, and kind would others say I am?

Meaningless Ritual? Never!

By Johan van Parys

My liturgy professor once shocked me out of my post-lunch comatose state one afternoon by saying, “If the Eucharist does not cause you to want to make a difference in the world, then you are doing nothing more than making meaningless, ritual turns around an altar.” What could he possibly mean? Surely the Eucharist is more than just ritual turns, even if it doesn’t cause me to want to change the world.

Since that day, I have been affirmed in my thinking that the celebration of the Eucharist is never a meaningless ritual. The liturgy is always transformative, regardless of anyone’s state of mind or ensuing actions. Although we may not notice this in the short term, we can be assured of the efficacy of the liturgy in the long term. Just as water carves out even the hardest rock, liturgy molds us all into the image of Christ—even those with the hardest of hearts.

Though the connection between celebrating the Eucharist and working for the betterment of the world is apparent each time we celebrate the Eucharist, it’s made especially clear during the Mass of our Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday. On that day, we celebrate the Eucharist (Luke 22:15–20) and we wash feet (John 13:4–17) just as Jesus asked of us during the Last Supper. It’s important to remember to embody these acts we perform so solemnly on Holy Thursday during every day of our life. Christ



mandates us to pray for the needs of the world and, at the same time, work toward a better world. These two Christian characteristics of prayer and action are not mutually exclusive—prayer without action is hollow, while action without prayer is arrogance.

This all became clear to me one particular Holy Thursday many years ago. As our priest finished the washing of feet, I noticed a man entering the building and walking briskly toward the front of the church. He walked right into the sanctuary and sat down. Without hesitation, our priest walked over to the man and the two engaged in a brief conversation. He then motioned to the

servers, who brought a pitcher and bowl. The man took off his shoes, revealing his unwashed feet. Our priest knelt down and slowly washed the man’s feet. When finished, they both got up and hugged. The man walked out, never to be seen again. As we processed the Blessed Sacrament to the altar of repose later that evening, I couldn’t help but think that it was Jesus who walked in and sat down to have his feet washed right in our midst.

By the way, my former professor denies making the statement at the top of this column. He agrees that the celebration of the Eucharist is never a series of empty turns around an altar but always efficacious and constantly invites us to be Christ to the world. While some people know that and act upon it rather easily, others need a professor’s shocking wake-up call and the extraordinary opportunity to see Jesus’ feet being washed. +

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for your endless mercy. Give me the humility and courage to forgive those who have hurt me.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 14–19

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

Tuesday, Our Lady of Sorrows: 1 Cor 12:12–14,
27–31a / Jn 19:25–27 or Lk 2:33–35

Wednesday, Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian:
1 Cor 12:31–13:13 / Lk 7:31–35

Thursday, Weekday:


1 Cor 15:1–11 / Lk 7:36–50

Friday, Weekday:

1 Cor 15:12–20 / Lk 8:1–3

Saturday, Weekday:

1 Cor 15:35–37, 42–49 / Lk 8:4–15

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Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
September 20, 2020

A Message of Reform

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Alessandro Farnese was elected Pope Paul III in 1534 amidst very difficult times. Martin Luther had left the Church, and many German bishops, along with their kings, were separating from the faith. Part of the push for separation was financial, another part was political, and a third part was spiritual. The papal court and clerical life in Rome were often criticized, encouraging separation.

Pope Paul III started a reform by calling on nine respected cardinals to investigate the accusations and propose measures. The suggestions were received and true reform began to take root—although much of the success was due to the Council of Trent (called by

the pope in 1545) and the many saints active at the time: Ignatius, Philip Neri, Teresa of Ávila, Francis de Sales, Charles Borromeo, and others.

Another measure taken was to contract Michelangelo to paint two frescoes in the Papal Pauline Chapel—*The Conversion of Saul* and *The Crucifixion of St. Peter*—a kind of sixteenth-century marketing campaign. This chapel would send a message to all popes and the papal court; indeed, the frescoes challenged everyone in the Curia. Amidst the temptation to power and luxury, the pope was saying, “If you want power, it’s the power to serve that requires true conversion and embracing the cross.” The chapel needed a pithy Latin phrase to drive home this message of reform. It comes from today’s second reading: “To me, life is Christ, and death is gain.” That’s a good phrase to live by as we seek our own ongoing conversion. +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 55:6-9

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.

Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

For to me life is Christ, and death is gain.

Matthew 20:1-16a

[Jesus said,] “Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

*If you want power,
it’s the power to serve
that requires true conversion
and embracing the cross.*

A Word from Pope Francis

Jesus wants to make us contemplate the gaze of that landowner: the gaze with which he looks upon each of the laborers searching for work and calls them to go to his vineyard...It is a gaze which calls, invites one to get up and begin a journey because he wants life for each of us.

Angelus, September 24, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I love without strings attached or do I love to get something in return?
- What is holding me back from reforming my life?

God's Call Doesn't Wait

By Kathleen M. Basi



Occasions like New Year's, Ash Wednesday, and birthdays seem custom-made for adopting new life goals. It's neat and tidy to say, "As of January 1, I will no longer lose my temper with my children." "Beginning Ash Wednesday, I will stop using food to ward off boredom or anesthetize pain." But how often have you promised to change, only to find that within a few days or weeks you've reverted to your old ways?

Conversion doesn't happen according to a schedule, and God doesn't call us based on the calendar. He calls us when he has work for us or when we're tripping on our own weaknesses. In other words,

he calls every moment of every day. The question is, do we listen and respond?

When I find myself re-resolving the same things, I get frustrated. If my commitment is sincere, why doesn't it "take" the first time? Why do I have to keep starting over?

I once heard a homily that addressed this frustration. The priest urged us not to beat ourselves up when our attention wanders during Mass. We all come to the table filled with our own worries and concerns; its human nature to be distracted. The important thing is to keep turning back.

This, he emphasized, is the true meaning of repentance. Every time we consciously shift our focus from our own anxieties back to God, it's a recommitment—a moment of renewal.

This is an encouraging thought. Bad habits are easier to come by than good ones, and replacing the former with the latter requires constant vigilance. The practice of turning and returning to God defines the Christian journey, separating the true disciple from the seed that's sown in shallow soil and withers in the sun (Matthew 13:1-9).

We all need daily reminders of how much we depend on God's saving grace. We all need to be smacked upside the head with awareness of how little we can accomplish on our own.

God calls us when our lives are in need of refocus, when our hearts are in need of repentance—and that call doesn't wait for some artificially imposed milestone on a calendar. It comes every day, as reliable as the sun rising in the east, as certain as the failure of our own resolve and our own strength. Can you hear that quiet voice within your heart speaking, asking you to make a change? Don't wait for some date on a calendar to tell you it's time to start anew.

"Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). +

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for the gift of your compassion. Help me to be more generous in sharing your compassion with others.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 21-26

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


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

Wednesday, St. Pius of Pietrelcina:
Prv 30:5-9 / Lk 9:1-6

Thursday, Weekday:
Eccl 1:2-11 / Lk 9:7-9

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

Saturday, Weekday:
Eccl 11:9-12:8 / Lk 9:43b-45

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Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
September 27, 2020

Say Yes and Go Out

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

We can really relate to God when he repeats the people's blame and accusations at him for not being fair. In moments of suffering or injustice, it's easy to pass judgment and blame it all on God. It's especially difficult when innocent and good people (ourselves included) suffer. We're tempted to ask, "Aren't you supposed to treat your friends better?"

We only need to look at Marco Palmezzano's painting *Christ Bearing the Cross* to reconsider our complaints. How have we treated God?

Jesus was and is the most innocent of souls; no other being was or is as good

as Jesus. No one was asked to suffer like him, and he suffered not to gain for himself but to pay our debt. Relating it to today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is the son who, when asked to work in his Father's vineyard, promptly said "yes" and went. Always obedient, always docile, always loving.

Watching Jesus, we hear the echo of St. Paul's letter. Jesus humbly regarded his brothers and sisters as more than himself and was willing to go to the cross and win them back for the Father. Keep in mind, those siblings had destroyed family unity, squandered away their inheritance, sold their birthright, sold him into slavery with their sin, and very often refused his love. Yet "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God knows his merciful justice well and can kindly and provokingly ask in Ezekiel 18:25, "Is it my way that is unfair? Are not your ways unfair?" +

Sunday Readings

Ezekiel 18:25–28

Since they turned away from all the sins they committed, they shall live.

Philippians 2:1–11 or 2:1-5

Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves.

Matthew 21:28–32

[Jesus said,] "Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you."

No one was asked to suffer like Jesus, and he suffered not to gain for himself but to pay our debt.

A Word from Pope Francis

Today let us look at our hands, so often empty of love, and let us try to think of some free gift that we can give without expecting anything in return. That will please the Lord. And let us ask him: "Lord, let me rediscover the joy of giving."

Epiphany Sunday, January 6, 2018



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Am I fair to God by giving him thanksgiving, adoration, and obedience for his love?
- Am I fair to others by offering them gratitude and humble kindness?

I Have No Hands But Yours

By Johan van Parys

My mother was big on two major cleaning efforts each year. The first was Easter cleaning—she argued that just as our souls needed cleansing in preparation for Easter, so did our home. The second was a fall cleaning that coincided with the St. Michael Summer, named for the September 29 feast of the archangels.

Our share in these week-long adventures was a thorough reorganization of our closets. We were instructed to remove every item, discern what we wanted to keep or toss, and then organize all that remained. To this day, I have a perfectly organized closet.

Over the years I've come to appreciate my mom's connection between the physical cleansing of our home and the spiritual cleansing of our heart and soul. As Christians, we're called to search our soul to rid ourselves of everything that keeps us from sharing more perfectly in the Body of Christ. We do this mostly as individuals, but from time to time even the Church takes stock of where we've come from, where we are today, and where we're going.

This kind of spiritual exercise is necessary because being Christian isn't always easy. Neither is being the Church, especially in a constantly changing and challenging world. Some people are



trying to take the Church in a direction that makes it difficult to reconcile with the gospel. Others call for a return to the past, giving in to a false nostalgia for a Church they never knew and that may never have existed. Both responses are ill-fated—we can't go back to the past, and we ought to be true to the gospel.

The only way forward in this age—as in every age—is to engage completely and openly with the world while using the gospel as our compass. The essence of our message never changes. However, the language we use to express it ought to change constantly. Like everything else,

our spiritual lives necessarily evolve—and so does the Church's. The alternative is a slow but sure spiritual demise.

I wish my spiritual home were in as good order as my physical home is. I still hear my mother's voice asking me to clean my room and cleanse my soul. And I take solace in the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus that stands abandoned in a small Italian village. Due to years of neglect, the statue is badly in need of repair; it's cracked, and both hands are missing. Someone hung a sign around its neck that says, "I have no hands but yours." This image and invitation should prompt us to analyze our lives so we might be better Christians.

We're called to do this to realize that Christ's invitation is to be his hands, his feet, and his heart. +

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for your example of humble service toward others. Help me to be a humble and loving person toward all people.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 28–October 3

Monday, Weekday:
Jb 1:6–22 / Lk 9:46–50

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

Wednesday, St. Jerome:
Jb 9:1–12, 14–16 / Lk 9:57–62

Thursday, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus: Jb 19:21–27 / Lk 10:1–12

Friday, Holy Guardian Angels:
Jb 38:1, 12–21; 40:3–5 / Mt 18:1–5, 10

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