



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

September 3, 2023

The Cost of Discipleship

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

In 1937, *The Cost of Discipleship* by a German Lutheran pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was published. The book reflected on the Sermon on the Mount, and the demands it outlined led to Bonhoeffer's arrest and eventual death at the hands of the Nazis. It can be very dangerous to be faithful to Jesus' way of life. This shouldn't surprise us. Jesus' teaching cost Jesus his life.

Though the Gospel reading does not provide us with a program of action, it repeats Jesus' charge to take up our cross and follow him. This cross is different for each of us; it makes very personal

demands. We are called to lose our life for his sake. This was true at the time of Jesus; it is true today.

This was true at the time of the prophet Jeremiah as well. He was called to proclaim God's word to his own people. They would not listen. Instead, "I am an object of laughter; / everyone mocks me" (Jeremiah 20:7). The prophet wants relief from his prophetic responsibility. Who wouldn't? What follows is quite moving. He makes up his mind that he will stop talking about God—but he can't. "It [the word of God] is as if fire is burning in my heart... / I grow weary holding back" (Jeremiah 20:9). That is the cost Jeremiah had to pay. The cross was the cost Jesus paid. And what of us? †

A Word from Pope Francis

Let us make sure that the cross hanging on the wall at home, or that little one that we wear around our neck, is a sign of our wish to be united with Christ in lovingly serving our brothers and sisters, especially the littlest and most fragile. The cross is the holy sign of God's Love.

ANGELUS, ROME, AUGUST 30, 2020



Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 20:7–9

All day long I am an object of laughter; / everyone mocks me.

Romans 12:1–2

Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God.

Matthew 16:21–27

[Jesus said,] "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

*The cross every person
has to take up is different
for each one of us.*



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What is the cost of discipleship for you?
- What in your life might be the cross you are being asked to bear?

A Balanced Perspective

Kathleen Basi

We live in a world where science reveals wonders as distant as the far reaches of the universe and as intimate as the center of our own DNA. We prize knowledge and revere those who help us reach greater understanding of the world and ourselves.

It's good to seek wisdom, but focusing too much on intellect makes it easy to get jaded about the things that defy scientific testing. We think we should be able to pull apart the strands of the universe and reduce everything to its components. When we can't, we start worrying that we're being "taken for a ride."

Yet mystery surrounds us. For instance, after decades of research, scientists still uncover new components to human breast milk. In every age, humans have looked to the night sky with wonder and awe, marveling at the size of the universe and our own tiny place within it. And who contemplates



the death of a child without asking, *Why?*

Mystery is part of the human experience. It can inspire awe; it can deepen grief; it can challenge our faith. As we long to understand the earth, so we long to understand the One who made us. Yet some things will always remain unfathomable. The tension between these two opposing realities will not be resolved on this side of eternity.

The deeper we dig, the more we will understand about God. Yet the more we understand, the more layers of mystery are revealed.

Frustrating, as it may seem, that's a good thing. Greater understanding allows us to exercise control over our surroundings. Yet the more control we impose, the easier it is to forget that every breath is a gift from God. Contemplating all that cannot be understood offers a much-needed balancing perspective—namely, that there is a bright center of the universe, and *I am not it*.

As hard as it may be, living the faith means accepting—even embracing the reality that not all things can be known and understood. At least, not right now. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke said it beautifully, in his *Letters to a Young Poet*, when he spoke of being patient toward the unknown, embracing the questions within, and living in the moment to uncover the answers. †

Published in *Liguorian*, September 2015

Living Our Passages Well

Death is a passage to new life. That sounds very beautiful, but few of us desire to make this passage. It might be helpful to realize that our final passage is preceded by many earlier passages. When we are born, we make a passage from life in the womb to life in the family. When we go to school, we make a passage from life in the family to life in the larger community. When we get married, we make a passage from a life with many options to a life committed to one person. When we retire, we make a passage from a life of clearly defined work to a life asking for new creativity and wisdom. Each of these passages is a death leading to new life. When we live these passages well, we are becoming more prepared for our final passage.

Fr. Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, IMOH



Gracious God, as we celebrate Labor Day, we pray, encourage us in our work, calm us in our rest, and inspire us in our prayer. Amen.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 4–9

Monday, Weekday:

1 Thes 4:13–18 / Lk 4:16–30

Tuesday, Weekday:

1 Thes 5:1–6, 9–11 / Lk 4:31–37

Wednesday, Weekday:

Col 1:1–8 / Lk 4:38–44

Thursday, Weekday: Col 1:9–14 / Lk 5:1–11

Friday, 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

Saturday, St. Peter Claver:

Col 1:21–23 / Lk 6:1–5



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

September 10, 2023

It's None of My Business

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

This statement might sound like we are respecting the independence of others. It is none of our business how they live their lives, how they behave in society, how they worship God. We mind our own business; they mind theirs. After all, are we our brother's or sister's keepers?

Today's readings challenge this attitude. Ezekiel is told that he must proclaim God's will to the Israelites. If he reneges in his calling and someone dies in guilt, Ezekiel will be held responsible for that death. However, if the wicked refuse to hear this message, their death

in guilt will be their own doing, for one must freely accept God's word. In the Gospel, Jesus outlines a way for his disciples to lead sinners back to the community. Both Ezekiel and the disciples have responsibilities to those who are not living faithfully. They both take steps to call them back. In this sense, they act as their brother's or sister's keeper. However, they do not meddle in the other's business. The sinner must freely decide to return. God does not force repentance.

This might be a hard message. Who wants to step up and point out another's error in leaving the Church? However, if we are really concerned, we will do what we can to bring them back. We might not proclaim like the prophet or the disciples did. But the way we live our lives should show them the true value in being a faithful follower of Jesus. ✠

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,] "If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother."

***The sinner must freely
decide to return.
God does not force
repentance.***



A Word from Pope Francis

When we see a mistake, a fault, a slip, in a brother or sister, usually the first thing we do is to go and recount it to others, to gossip. And gossip closes the heart to the community, closes off the unity of the Church. The great gossip is the devil.

ANGELUS, ROME, SEPTEMBER 6, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Is your life an example of the values of your faith?
- Pray for those you love who have left the practice of the faith.

Gentle Confrontation

Paige Byrne Shortal

Nowhere in the Bible is there a suggestion that we will get along without disagreements. In today's Gospel reading from Matthew, we hear Jesus tell us what to do when there is a serious conflict. The process remarkably resembles what the folks in Alcoholics Anonymous call an "intervention."

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother."

Scary, huh? Who wants to confront someone in person, directly and alone? Jesus says it's the first necessary step. The best way to approach is to first remind yourself that you love the other person and then confront him or her without malice or vindictiveness. Try simply stating how you feel; how the person's actions affect you. It's called an "I-Statement." Example: "When you drink too much, I feel afraid and angry."



"If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you so that every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses." This is the classic intervention. During this encounter the concern for the other person must be obvious at all times. The goal is to make it clear that the behavior is harming others and can no longer be supported or tolerated. If the problem is such that

special help is needed, it's good to have a plan in place—perhaps the phone number of a counselor, a nearby AA meeting that day, an appointment with a professional.

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell the Church." Notice, that going public is the third step, not the first! We involve the community only when the first two steps have failed.

"And if they refuse to listen even to the Church, treat them as you would a Gentile or tax collector." Jesus is referring here to those who do not belong. It is his version of tough love. We are not to hate or harm the person, but in order to render them unable to do any further harm to the community, we must ignore them.

With each step we take to help another, we must pray, remembering the promise of Jesus: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." †

The Younger Son By Henri Nouwen

The younger son's return takes place in the very moment that he reclaims his sonship, even though he has lost all the dignity that belongs to it. In fact, it was the loss of everything that brought him to the bottom line of his identity. He hit the bedrock of his sonship. In retrospect, it seems that the prodigal had to lose everything to come into touch with the ground of his being. When he found himself desiring to be treated as one of the pigs, he realized that he was not a pig but a human being, a son of his father. This realization became the basis for his choice to live instead of to die.

In My Own Words, page 68



Generous God, help us to accept others as we want to be accepted; to love as we want to be loved. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 11–16

Monday, Weekday:

Col 1:24—2:3 / Lk 6:6–11

Tuesday, Weekday:

Col 2:6–15 / Lk 6:12–19

Wednesday, St. John Chrysostom:

Col 3:1–11 / Lk 6:20–26

Thursday, Exaltation of the Holy Cross:


Nm 21:4b–9 / Phil 2:6–11 / Jn 3:13–17

Friday, Our Lady of Sorrows:

1 Tm 1:1–2, 12–14 / Jn 19:25–27 or Lk 2:33–35

Saturday, Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian:

1 Tm 1:15–17 / Lk 6:43–49

Bringing Home
the Word 

September 10, 2023

© 2023 Liguori Publications, a ministry of the Redemptorists. One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057. Scripture quotations in this publication are from the *New American Bible*, revised edition, © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC. The Pope Francis quotation is used with permission and copyright © 2023 *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*. All rights reserved. 1-800-325-9521. Liguori.org.



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
September 17, 2023

Limitless Forgiveness

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

What makes seven such an important number? It's the symbolism. It signifies wholeness, completeness, and totality. So, seventy-seven (or seventy times seven in some Bible translations) suggests infinity. Peter was exaggerating when he suggested that he might forgive his brother seven times. He presumed that if he acted in this way, his behavior would demonstrate the immeasurable extent of his personal graciousness. Jesus' response implied that there should be no end to our forgiving another. To underscore the significance of this magnanimity, Jesus offered God (in the guise of the king who forgave a huge debt) as the exemplar of forgiving.

Forgiving another's offense against us could well be one of the most difficult things we are asked to do. To ask for forgiveness does not seem as difficult. After all, when we bump into a perfect stranger in an elevator, we say, "Forgive me." But to forgive someone who has deliberately offended us, who has dishonored our sense of personal dignity, as slight as that offense might be, is neither as easy nor as casual a gesture. And yet, we must.

We all carry debts to others. Both the first reading and the Gospel passage remind us that the debts owed to us by others in no way compare with the debt we owe God, and yet God shows us compassion and forgives us. If we are grateful children of a compassionate God, we will want to be like God and we will forgive others. †

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, [forgive] not seven times but seventy-seven times."

*Jesus taught there
should be no end to our
forgiving one another.*



A Word from Pope Francis

How much suffering, how many wounds, how many wars could be avoided if forgiveness and mercy were the style of our life! Even in families....It is necessary to apply merciful love to all human relationships: between spouses, between parents and children, within our communities, in the Church and also in society and politics.

ANGELUS, ROME, SEPTEMBER 13, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- When you pray, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," do you mean it?
- Who does it hurt when we fail to forgive?

From Forgiven to Forgiver

Fr. Henri Nouwen

Perhaps the most radical statement Jesus ever made is: "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate." God's compassion is described by Jesus not simply to show me how willing God is to feel for me, or to forgive me my sins and offer me new life and happiness, but to invite me to become like God and to show the same compassion to others as he is showing to me. If the only meaning of the story were that people sin but God forgives, I could easily begin to think of my sins as a fine occasion for God to show me his forgiveness. There would be no real challenge in such an interpretation. I would resign myself to my weaknesses and keep hoping that eventually God would close God's eyes to them and let me come home, whatever I did. Such sentimental romanticism is not the message of the Gospels.

What I am called to make true is that whether I am the younger or the elder son, I am the son of my compassionate Father. I am an heir. No one says it more clearly than Paul when he writes: "The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, provided that we share his sufferings, so as to share his glory." Indeed, as son and heir I am to become successor. I am destined to step into my Father's place and offer to others the same compassion that he has offered me. The return to the Father is ultimately the challenge to become the Father. †

From The Return of the Prodigal Son

Avoid All Forms of Self-Rejection

Fr. Henri Nouwen

You must avoid not only blaming others but also blaming yourself. You are inclined to blame yourself for the difficulties you experience in relationships. But self-blame is not a form of humility. It is a form of self-rejection in which you ignore or deny your own goodness and beauty.

When a friendship does not blossom, when a word is not received, when a gesture of love is not appreciated, do not blame it on yourself. This is both untrue and hurtful. Every time you reject yourself, you idealize others. You want to be with those whom you consider better,

stronger, more intelligent, more gifted than yourself. Thus you make yourself emotionally dependent, leading others to feel unable to fulfill your expectations and causing them to withdraw from you. This makes you blame yourself even more, and you enter a dangerous spiral of self-rejection and neediness.

Avoid all forms of self-rejection. Acknowledge your limitations, but claim your unique gifts and thereby live as an equal among equals. That will set you free from your obsessive and possessive needs and enable you to give and receive true affection and friendship. †

From The Inner Voice of Love



Merciful God, give us generous hearts and open minds that we may forgive others as we have been forgiven. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 18–23

Monday, Weekday: 1 Tm 2:1–8 / Lk 7:1–10

Tuesday, Weekday: 1 Tm 3:1–13 / Lk 7:11–17

Wednesday, Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn, Priest, and Paul Chŏng Ha-sang, and Companions:
1 Tm 3:14–16 / Lk 7:31–35

Thursday, St. Matthew:


Eph 4:1–7, 11–13 / Mt 9:9–13

Friday, Weekday:

1 Tm 6:2c–12 / Lk 8:1–3

Saturday, St. Pius of Pietrelcina:

1 Tm 6:13–16 / Lk 8:4–15

Bringing Home
the Word 

September 17, 2023

© 2023 Liguori Publications, a ministry of the Redemptorists. One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057. Scripture quotations in this publication are from the *New American Bible*, revised edition, © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC. The Pope Francis quotation is used with permission and copyright © 2023 *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*. All rights reserved. 1-800-325-9521. Liguori.org.



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
September 24, 2023

It's Not Fair!

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

The story in the Gospel doesn't sound fair. Some people worked from early morning until evening; others joined them at the end of the workday. But they all got the same pay. How can that be fair? Perhaps fairness isn't the point of the story. But then, what is?

The landowner, symbolizing God, hired the workers "after agreeing with them for the usual daily wage" (Matthew 20:2). If the earliest workers presumed that the agreed-upon wage would be changed, does that make God unfair? Those workers expected God to conform to what they considered just—and justice certainly is a very important value. However, God acted out of divine generosity—a quality we hope to

benefit from but which might engender resentment when it is bestowed upon others.

As difficult as this story might seem to us, it raises some important questions about ourselves. Perhaps the story is not so much about God as it is about our own attitudes. If we are faithful to what we believe is God's will for us, do we then presume that God owes us some kind of compensation? Do we expect that God will act according to our standards of retributive justice (this-for-that) rather than restorative justice (bring-it-back-to-life)? Do we resent God's graciousness toward others?

It is better that we all look to God for generosity than for justice. If we do, we will find, as the psalm response tells us: "The Lord is gracious and merciful" (Psalm 145:8). †

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."

*Do we resent
God's graciousness
toward others?*



A Word from Pope Francis

Let us remember who was the first canonized saint in the Church: the Good Thief. He "stole" Paradise at the last minute of his life: this is Grace. This is what God is like, even with us. Instead, those who seek thinking of their own merits fail; those who humbly entrust themselves to the Father's mercy...find themselves first.

ANGELUS, ROME, SEPTEMBER 20, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do you look to God for generosity or justice?
- Would it help to pray for the grace to remember that everything is a gift from God?

Our Life: Prayer, Community, and Service

Paige Byrne Shortal

Many folks have a gut-level “Not fair!” reaction to today’s Gospel. The laborers who show up at dusk and work for an hour are paid the same as those who come at dawn and work all day? You’ve got to be kidding!

This parable is not about working conditions in first-century Palestine, but just for a moment, let’s say it is. Have you ever seen folks standing by the side of the road with a sign, “Will work for food!” and thought, *Why don’t they get a job? Why are they so lazy?* Have you ever tried standing on a highway entrance ramp from early morning until the sun goes down? Standing there in the cold or in the rain without a hot cup of coffee or a sandwich? That’s a more difficult day than I had today.

Consider those laborers in the parable who were waiting in the marketplace to be hired, even at the end of the day, hoping against hope to earn enough to put a little food in their mouths and the mouths of the children. Are we so sure they are undeserving?

I was talking with my friend Bob about this reading. Upon retirement, Bob decided to get more involved with the St. Vincent de Paul Society. He was first attracted to their mission statement: “Inspired by Gospel values, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic lay organization, leads women and men to join together to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to



those who are needy and suffering in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frederick Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul.” (Important side note: Our Church’s annual memorial to St. Vincent de Paul will take place on September 27.)

Bob pointed out to me the three essential elements: spirituality, faith community, and service. The combination of the three is significant. There are organizations for enhancing one’s spiritual life, clubs for providing fellowship, and plenty of not-for-profit groups for service. The three elements together provide necessary balance and what is needed for the Christian life: prayer, community, and service.

Serving the poor is a Gospel mandate. Jesus talks about it often. The only picture of the last judgment in the Gospels is described in Matthew 25: “I was hungry and you gave me food....Just as you did

it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul offers a way to serve even for people like me: people who are frankly afraid of encountering the poor, of not knowing what to say, of the inconvenience, of not being able to help very much.

We who live well can be blind to the poor whom Jesus calls his brothers and sisters. When I die, I want to hear Jesus say, “I was hungry and you gave me food...so come on in and join the party!” †

***Serving the poor
is a Gospel mandate!
The Society of St. Vincent
de Paul offers ways
to do just that.***



*Wondrous God, we ask for
the grace to see as you see
and to reflect your face
to each person we meet.
We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 25–30

Monday, Weekday:

Ezr 1:1–6 / Lk 8:16–18

Tuesday, Weekday:

Ezr 6:7–8, 12b, 14–20 / Lk 8:19–21

Wednesday, St. Vincent de Paul:

Ezr 9:5–9 / Lk 9:1–6

Thursday, Weekday:


Hg 1:1–8 / Lk 9:7–9

Friday, Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael:

Dn 7:9–10, 13–14 or Rv 12:7–12a / Jn 1:47–51

Saturday, St. Jerome:

Zec 2:5–9, 14–15a / Lk 9:43b–45

Bringing Home
the Word 

September 24, 2023

© 2023 Liguori Publications, a ministry of the Redemptorists. One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057. Scripture quotations in this publication are from the *New American Bible*, revised edition, © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC. The Pope Francis quotation is used with permission and copyright © 2023 *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*. All rights reserved. 1-800-325-9521. Liguori.org.