



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)
February 5, 2023

You Are Really Something!

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

The description of the disciples found in today’s Gospel is an impressive compliment—and an even greater challenge. Jesus tells them they are “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13), bringing out the good taste of living. In other words, life would be bland and uninteresting without them. They are also the “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14), helping people find their way. Without them, others would stumble and fall. Jesus is telling them how important they are in the lives of others. They could each and all say: I am really something!

Such compliments are also a challenge. What must one do to be salt and light in the lives of others? The Isaian passage provides some suggestions: Share your bread with the hungry; shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked; don’t turn your back on your own; remove from your midst oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech. In other words, to be salt or light is to meet the needs of the needy. This teaching of Jesus is not as easy to do as it is to talk about.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples, his followers. They are not those who are simply curious about this itinerant preacher or remarkable healer. They have chosen to follow him, not merely from place to place, but to model their lives after his. Isn’t that what we also claim to be—his followers? Haven’t we promised to model our lives after his? If so, as both compliment and challenge he says to us as well, “You are really something!” †

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 58:7–10

[I]f you lavish your food on the hungry / and satisfy the afflicted; / Then your light shall rise in the darkness....

1 Corinthians 2:1–5

I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

Matthew 5:13 –16

[Jesus said,] “Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”

A Word from Pope Francis

I would like to ask you now, how do you want to live? As a lamp that is burning or one that is not? ...As burning lamps! It is truly God who gives us this light and we must give it to others. Shining lamps! This is the Christian vocation.

ANGELUS, ROME, FEBRUARY 9, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How is being salt or light a challenge for me?
- In what ways do I already enrich or enlighten the lives of others?

Isn’t that what we also claim to be—his followers? Haven’t we promised to model our lives after Jesus?



Justice, Mercy, and the Nature of God

By Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Part I

Anyone who claims to understand God is deceived because we know that God is ineffable. That means that we can know God but never adequately capture God in a concept. God is unimaginable. If God could be understood, then God would be as limited as we are.

God may be ineffable, but God's nature is known. Divine revelation, as seen through nature, as seen through other religions, and especially as seen through Jesus, spells out what's inside God's inexpressible reality.

What's revealed there is both comforting beyond all comfort and challenging beyond all challenge. What's revealed in the beauty of creation, in the compassion that is the hallmark of all true religion—and in Jesus' revelation of his Father—takes us beyond a blind date into a trustworthy relationship. Nature,

religion, and Jesus conspire together to reveal an Ultimate Reality, a Ground of Being, a Creator and Sustainer of the universe, a God who is wise, intelligent, prodigal, compassionate, loving, forgiving, patient, good, trustworthy, and beautiful beyond imagination.

God cannot be deciphered, circumscribed, or captured in human thought; but, from what can be deciphered, we're in good, safe hands. We can sleep well at night. God has our back in the end—both for humanity as a whole and for our own individual lives. As Julian of Norwich prayed: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." God is good.

Part II

The Gospels, as we know, reveal a God who is prodigal beyond all our standards and beyond our imagination. The God of the Gospels is the Sower who, because he has unlimited seeds, scatters those seeds everywhere without discrimination: on the road, in the ditches, in the thornbushes, in bad soil, and in good soil.

Moreover, that prodigal Sower is

also the God of creation, that is, the God who has created and continues to create hundreds of billions of galaxies and billions of human beings. And this prodigal God gives us this perennial invitation: come to the waters, come without money, come without merit because God's gift is as plentiful, available, and as free as the air we breathe.

The Gospel of Luke recounts an incident where Peter, just after he had spent an entire night fishing and had caught nothing, is told to cast out his net one more time and, this time, Peter's net catches so many fish that the weight of the catch threatens to sink two boats. Peter reacts by falling to his knees and confessing his sinfulness. But as the text makes clear, that's not the proper reaction in the face of overabundance. Peter is wrongly fearful, in effect, wanting that overabundance to go away. Rather, Jesus wants him—in the face of too much—to go into the world and share with others that unimaginable grace. †

(Continued next week)

PRAYER

Gracious God, Jesus calls us to be salt and light for the world. In his name we ask for your grace that we may be signs of your goodness to all we meet. Amen.

The Redemptorists

This reflection is an excerpt from *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Lent and Easter* by Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, available now from Liguori Publications. Visit Liguori.org to learn more and review our complete list of *Daybreaks* authors, including Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR; Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA; Fr. Daniel Horan, OFM, and others.

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 6–11

Monday, St. Paul Miki and Companions:
Gn 1:1–19 / Mk 6:53–56


Tuesday, Weekday:
Gn 1:20—2:4a / Mk 7:1–13

Wednesday, Weekday:
Gn 2:4b–9, 15–17 / Mk 7:14–23

Thursday, Weekday:
Gn 2:18–25 / Mk 7:24–30

Friday, St. Scholastica:
Gn 3:1–8 / Mk 7:31–37

Saturday, Weekday:
Gn 3:9–24 / Mk 8:1–10

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Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)
February 12, 2023

Choose One

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Law, wisdom, or virtue. Choose one. Today's first reading talks about wisdom. Throughout life, options are placed before us. Which should we pick? Life or death? Good or evil? How do we know which one to choose? Actually, we learn to choose through experience, either our own or the experience of those who have gone before us and left us their insights within our traditions—whether social, political, or religious. Some of these

traditions come to us as advice, others as law. One might say that law is really the expression or codification of social, political, or religious traditions. So, to follow the law is really to obey a certain kind of codified wisdom.

When St. Paul speaks about wisdom, he is referring to wisdom that comes from following the directives of God, not merely the insights gained through experience. He calls that a mature wisdom as opposed the wisdom of this age. It is the kind of wisdom we find in Jesus, who lived his life for others, a kind of wisdom that some might consider foolish.

In the Gospel, Jesus insists that he is not abolishing law but fulfilling it. He urges us to go deeper into law and find wisdom, to go even deeper into human wisdom, and there to find virtue. Law deals with exteriors; virtue addresses the inner heart. Law forbids murder; virtue forbids hatred. Where do you live? In law? In wisdom? Or in virtue? Choose one. †



To follow the law is really to obey a certain kind of codified wisdom.

A Word from Pope Francis

By accepting the Law of God in our heart, one understands that, when one does not love one's neighbor, to some extent one kills oneself and others, because hatred, rivalry and division kill the fraternal charity that is the basis of interpersonal relationships. And this applies to what I have said about war and also about gossip, because words kill.

ANGELUS, ROME, FEBRUARY 16, 2020



Sunday Readings

Sirach 15:15–20

Before everyone are life and death, / whichever they choose will be given them.

1 Corinthians 2:6–10

"What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, / and what has not entered the human heart, / [is] what God has prepared for those who love him...."

Matthew 5:17–37 or 5:20–22a, 27–28, 33–34a, 37

I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I too casual about rules and laws or too strict?
- What virtues shape my life?



Justice, Mercy, and the Nature of God

By Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

(continued from last week)

Part III

The Gospels recount an incident where Jesus goes to the synagogue on a Sabbath, stands to read, and quotes a text from Isaiah—except he doesn't quote it fully. He omits a part that would have been known to his listeners. It describes Isaiah's vision of what will be the sign that God has finally broken into the world and irrevocably changed things.

For Isaiah, the sign that God is now ruling the earth will be good news for the poor, consolation for the brokenhearted, freedom for the enslaved, grace abundant for everyone, and vengeance on the wicked. Notice, though, when Jesus quotes this, he leaves out the part about vengeance and seeing the wicked punished.

In heaven we will be given what we're owed and more (unmerited gifts, forgiveness we don't deserve, joy beyond imagining), but it seems we will not be given that catharsis we so much want here on earth: the "joy" of seeing the wicked punished.

We know we need God's mercy, but if grace is true for us, it has to be true for everyone. If forgiveness is given to us, it must be given to everybody. And if God does not avenge our misdeeds, God must not avenge the misdeeds of others, either. Such is the logic of grace and such is the love of God, to whom we must attune ourselves.

Part IV

Some day you will have to face your Maker! We've all heard that phrase. The hour will come when we will stand alone before God with no place to hide, no room to rationalize, and no excuses to offer for our weaknesses and sin. We will stand in a searing light, naked and exposed, and all we ever did, good and bad, will stand with us in that light. That prospect, however vaguely felt, makes for a dark corner in every person's mind.

But searing judgment of our souls is meant to be a daily occurrence, not a single traumatic moment at the end of our lives. We are meant to bring ourselves, with all our complexities and weaknesses, into God's full light every day. Genuine prayer brings us into that searing light.

We are meant to face God like this every day, not just at the moment of our death. So we should set aside time each day to put ourselves into God's presence without words and without images, where—naked, stripped of everything, silent, exposed, hiding nothing, completely vulnerable—we simply sit, full face, before God's judgment and mercy.

By doing this, we will preempt any traumatic encounter at the time of our death and we will begin, here and now, to enjoy more fully God's empathic embrace. †

(continued next week)



Abiding God, may we be faithful to the law of love your son revealed to the world. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

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WEEKDAY READINGS

February 13–18

Monday, Weekday:

Gn 4:1–15, 25 / Mk 8:11–13

Tuesday, Sts. Cyril and Methodius:

Gn 6:5–8; 7:1–5, 10 / Mk 8:14–21

Wednesday, Weekday:

Gn 8:6–13, 20–22 / Mk 8:22–26

Thursday, Weekday:


Gn 9:1–13 / Mk 8:27–33

Friday, Weekday:

Gn 11:1–9 / Mk 8:34–9:1

Saturday, Weekday:

Heb 11:1–7 / Mk 9:2–13

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Bringing Home the Word

Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)
February 19, 2023

Be Perfect

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Wow, that’s a tall order! But what does perfect mean? The Greek word means “full” or “complete.” In the first reading, Leviticus calls us to be holy, a word with cultic allusions—to be set apart to be used for God. Though not possessing exactly the same sense, there is a connection between perfect and holy, for to be set apart to be used for God will certainly make us perfect, fulfilled, and complete. So what does Jesus mean when he tells us to be perfect, as God is perfect?

Continuing our reflection on the Sermon on the Mount, we find Jesus telling us how we are to be perfect as

God is perfect. He offers two examples of extraordinary behavior. The Mesopotamian code of Hammurabi states “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” The punishment may not exceed the crime. This was a step forward in ancient justice.

Jesus said that this is not enough. There is to be no vindictiveness, no revenge, regardless of how equivalent it might appear. The reason for this is that God loves and cares for all, even those who do us injustice. God makes the “sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Matthew 5:46). In this way, we must be like God; we must love all, no exceptions. This is what it means to be perfect. It is indeed a tall order. But it is the way to be fulfilled, to be complete. †

Sunday Readings

Leviticus 19:1–2, 17–18

Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy.

1 Corinthians 3:16–23

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God....

Matthew 5:38–48

[Jesus said,] “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you....Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

God loves and cares for all, even those who do us injustice.



A Word from Pope Francis

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. This is the Christian innovation. It is the Christian difference. Pray and love: this is what we must do; and not only with regard to those who love us, not only with regard to our friends or our own people. The love of Jesus knows no boundaries or barriers.

HOMILY, BARI, FEBRUARY 23, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- As Lent begins this week, is there someone I need to forgive?
- Is there someone from whom I need to ask forgiveness?



(continued from last week)

Part V

If the Gospel of John is to be believed—and it is—Jesus judges no one. God judges no one.

That needs to be put into context. It doesn't mean there aren't any moral judgments and that our actions are indifferent to moral scrutiny. There is judgment, except it doesn't work the way it is fantasized inside the popular mind. According to what Jesus is quoted as saying in John's Gospel, judgment works this way: God's light, God's truth, and God's spirit come into the world. We then judge ourselves according to how we live in the face of them: God's light has come into the world, but we can choose to live in darkness. That's our decision, our judgment. God's truth has been revealed, but we can choose to live in falsehood, in lies. That's our decision, our judgment to make.

So then, this is how judgment

Justice, Mercy, and the Nature of God

By Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

happens: God's spirit (charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and chastity) has been revealed. We can choose to live inside the virtues of that spirit, or we can choose to live instead inside their opposites (self-indulgence, sexual vice, rivalry, antagonism, bad temper, quarrels, drunkenness, and factionalism).

One choice leads to a life with God, the other leads away from God. And that choice is ours to make. It doesn't come from the outside. We judge ourselves. God judges no one. God doesn't need to.

Part VI

There comes a point in life when our spiritual struggle is no longer with the fact that we are desperately in need of God's forgiveness, but rather that God's grace and forgiveness is overly lavish, unmerited, and especially that it goes out so indiscriminately.

God's lavish love and forgiveness go out equally to those who have worked hard and to those who haven't, to those who have been faithful for a long time and to those who jumped aboard at the last minute, to those who have had to bear the heat of the day and to those who didn't, to those who did their duty and to

those who lived selfishly.

God's love isn't a reward for being good, doing our duty, resisting temptation, bearing the heat of the day in fidelity, saying our prayers, remaining pure, or offering worship—good and important though these are.

God loves us because God is love and God cannot *not* love and cannot be discriminating in love. God's love, as Scripture says, shines on the good and bad alike. That's nice to know when we need forgiveness and unmerited love, but it's hard to accept when that forgiveness and love is given to those whom we deem less worthy of it, to those who didn't seem to do their duty. It's not easy to accept that God's love does not discriminate, especially when God's blessings go out lavishly to those who don't seem to deserve them. †



Loving God, we are called to forgive those who hurt us. When we are tempted to make exceptions, remind us that we are forgiven much. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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WEEKDAY READINGS

February 20–25

Monday, Weekday:
Sir 1:1–10 / Mk 9:14–29

Tuesday, Weekday:
Sir 2:1–11 / Mk 9:30–37

Wednesday, Ash Wednesday:
Jl 2:12–18 / 2 Cor 5:20—6:2 / Mt 6:1–6, 16–18

Thursday after Ash Wednesday:
Dt 30:15–20 / Lk 9:22–25

Friday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:1–9a / Mt 9:14–15

Saturday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:9b–14 / Lk 5:27–32



Bringing Home the Word

First Sunday of Lent (A)
February 26, 2023

Try It! You'll Like It!

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

If only temptation was obvious, we might have a better chance of avoiding it. But sometimes it's so subtle. It often disguises itself as something rather attractive. This is precisely what happened in the Garden of Eden. Scripture says temptation takes on a living form—a serpent that convinces the woman that the fruit of the wisdom tree will make them “like gods, who know good and evil” (Genesis 3:5).

Who wouldn't jump at such a possibility? Actually, who hasn't already fallen into that trap—acting as if we are God, thinking we know everything or wishing to be in complete control? Our

faith certainly encourages us to become more and more like God. What made that desire wrong was the way Adam and Eve sought to become like gods in their own way, not God's way.

The Gospel passage tells us that Jesus also was tempted. Who doubts that Jesus wanted to be successful in his ministry? But what would he do to ensure success? Would he use divine power to attract a following? No! Would he call upon God to protect him from misunderstanding, rejection, even physical harm? No! Would he bargain with the devil, who obviously exercised power over many people? No! That was not the way he would be the Messiah. Unlike the couple in the Garden, Jesus recognized what was wrong even when it was disguised as something good. How good are we at recognizing temptation in our lives? †

Sunday Readings

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

The snake said to the woman: “You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened.”

Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19

Through one righteous act acquittal and life came to all.

Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus answered [the devil], “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’”

Temptation often disguises itself as something rather attractive.



A Word from Pope Francis

Please: No dialogue with the devil! We must not enter into dialogue with temptation, we must not fall into that slumber of the conscience that makes us say: “But after all, it's not serious, everyone does it!” Let us look at Jesus, who does not seek compromises, he does not make agreements with evil.

ANGELUS, ROME, MARCH 6, 2022



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- During this Lent, should I seek help with a particular temptation?
- What resolution will help me love God more?



Homeward Bound

By Paige Byrne Shortal

On the first Sunday of Lent we hear about Jesus preparing for his ministry by going out into the desert and being tempted by the devil. Some years ago, my middle son, upon hearing that Jesus was offered the power to turn stones into bread, mumbled under his breath that Jesus should have taken the deal. I was shocked—not so much at what he said, but that he was listening at all. Before he could lapse back into his usual teenage taciturnity, I asked him to explain. He said, in that voice reserved for parents and idiots, that there is a lot of hunger in the world. Point well taken.

What would be so wrong with taking the deal? Three times Satan offers Jesus power. First, power over hunger: A man who can turn stones into bread need never be hungry again. He could feed the world. He could feed all those little children whose faces haunt us, stretching out their bowls for their one poor meal a day.

Second, political power over the kingdoms of the world: This is the power we long for when we say, “If I were the president.... If I were the pope....” Think of how much good you could do!

Third, power even over death and the suffering that precedes death: Don’t we all seek this power in some way?

Jesus’ response is always the same: *God is my only God*. The devil’s way is to do big things in a big way. God’s way seems to be to do the next little thing—to feed the one person placed on our path, not the whole world; to do the good it is in our power to do, not to long for more power; to accept the powerlessness of suffering and death.

The sustenance of the disciple is supposed to be the word of God. We are to devour it as a hungry child devours bread. We are to listen to the gospel like passengers stranded at an airport, on the edge of their seats, straining to hear every announcement, desperate for word of how and when they’ll finally get home. Too often, I listen to the readings as I do the stories of a garrulous old uncle—outwardly polite, but thinking of other things because, no offense, I’ve heard this story before.

Or have I?

A little girl heard the parable of the sheep and goats and Jesus’ astonishing identification with the poor—what we do for the least ones, we do for him. Her startled response was, “Do other Catholics know about this?” Her question echoes the words of John Carr, former Secretary of the Department of Social Development and World Peace for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. In a talk on the social doctrine of the church, he said that this parable is the only place in the gospel where Jesus tells us what we need to do to get into heaven. (You want to go read it now, don’t you? It’s Matthew 25:31–46.)

I need Lent. I need the desert of quiet where I can hear God’s word like I’ve never heard it before. I need to listen like a weary, travel-worn passenger who wants to find her way home. †



So that we may observe Lent with fasting, prayer, and sharing with those in need, we pray—Lord, let us be like you.

The Redemptorists

This reflection is from an issue of “Liguorian,” a bimonthly magazine published by the Redemptorists. To subscribe or purchase a gift subscription, go to Liguorian.org or call 866-848-2492.

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 27—March 4

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
Lv 19:1–2, 11–18 / Mt 25:31–46


Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Is 55:10–11 / Mt 6:7–15

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Jon 3:1–10 / Lk 11:29–32

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:
Est C:12, 14–16, 23–25 / Mt 7:7–12

Friday, Lenten Weekday:
Ez 18:21–28 / Mt 5:20–26

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Dt 26:16–19 / Mt 5:43–48

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