



# Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

October 4, 2020

## The Fruit God Expects

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

The Chosen People were often compared to a garden or vineyard that God had planted and cared for. First, he placed them in the Garden of Eden. Then he led them to flourish in Egypt before accommodating them in the Promised Land. After all his care and cultivation, he expected to find a fruitful return. In the Song of Songs and then with Jesus himself, not only are the people of God compared to a vineyard, but each of our souls is compared to a vineyard where God plants seeds,

waters, and expects to find new growth by thirty-, sixty-, or one hundredfold.

In the image of the Chosen People, the Church, or our souls, one thing is constant: God expects a return on his love. Not because he is selfish and in need of our response but because he knows our happiness depends on receiving and showing him that love.

Jesus says the vineyard will be taken away from those who don't care for it and given to those who will produce its fruit. In the same way, grace will be directed away from some and toward those who accept it and produce faith and love.

This is not a threat or "Catholic guilt." This is a true Father letting his children know he loves them too much to not take them seriously. He gives and gives for our growth and maturing, but if that generosity isn't sincerely embraced and appreciated, we will miss out on the true love of God+. Now is the time to accept his love and enjoy the fruits. +

***God expects a return on his love. Not because he is selfish, but because he knows our happiness depends on showing him love.***

### A Word from Pope Francis

Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God's redeeming presence at the eucharistic table...We long for this wound in the Body of Christ to be healed.

—Joint statement, Catholic-Lutheran commemoration of the Reformation, October 31, 2016



## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 5:1-7

The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, / the people of Judah, his cherished plant.

### Philippians 4:6-9

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.

### Matthew 21:33-43

[Jesus said,] "I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How does our Lord want to see fruit and growth in your life?
- Have I squandered God's harvest in my life?

# Making Eye Contact with Jesus

By Kathleen M. Basi

One ordinary afternoon, I pulled up to a stoplight—an ordinary mom driving an ordinary minivan with three small children chattering unintelligibly in the back. Beside our minivan stood a man in a camouflage jacket holding a cardboard sign that read, HOMELESS—HUNGRY—ANYTHING HELPS.

At moments like these, the wisdom of the world wrestles with the wisdom of Christ. You're not supposed to give beggars money because they might use it to buy drugs; instead, you're supposed to support the shelters that care for them. Still, I can't escape the conviction that when Christ said, "Whatever you did for the least of these" (Matthew 25:40), he didn't intend for us to just scatter our largesse from a safe distance. He meant for us to take a risk and look into his face, person to person. Yet we hardly ever do. We stare straight ahead and pretend we don't even see them, because eye contact with a beggar is a signal that we're ready to open our wallets.

As I gripped the steering wheel in my agony of indecision, I realized the noise in the back seat had shifted. My children were waving enthusiastically at the homeless man while they laughed and shouted, "Hi! Hi! Hi!"

In that moment, Jesus' words about becoming like children rang in my mind: "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). It was in this moment that those words



made sense for the first time. *My children are better Christians than I am*, I thought.

Obviously, it's easier for kids than for us. We're the ones who have money to give. We know, or at least we think we know, the whole story—the mental illness, the addictions, and the bad choices that land people in such a place. Kids don't get caught up in that, so they simply acknowledge the face of Christ.

Maybe that's why Jesus urged us to be childlike. Often, adults see a problem and, without realizing it, throw a roadblock in the way of solutions. Perhaps our mission as a Church is to stop focusing on the obstacles and strip every question down to the essentials: How do I acknowledge the face of Christ?

After all, the face of poverty is the face of Christ. And regardless of where I give money, I still have a responsibility to acknowledge his presence.

These days I keep a few singles in my wallet, and I roll down my window when I see a person begging at a stoplight. Maybe that person will use the money wisely, maybe not. I'm certainly not giving enough to help much. But at least it gives me the reason to be a little more childlike—and make eye contact with Jesus. +

***Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.***

Matthew 25:40

## PRAYER

*Lord, I am grateful for your vineyard of love. Remove my shortcomings that I may cultivate your gifts of compassion and peace.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

October 5–10

**Monday, Weekday:**  
Gal 1:6–12 / Lk 10:25–37

**Tuesday, Weekday:**  
Gal 1:13–24 / Lk 10:38–42

**Wednesday, Our Lady of the Rosary:**  
Gal 2:1–2, 7–14 / Lk 11:1–4

**Thursday, Weekday:**  
Gal 3:1–5 / Lk 11:5–13

**Friday, Weekday:**  
Gal 3:7–14 / Lk 11:15–26

**Saturday, Weekday:**  
Gal 3:22–29 / Lk 11:27–28

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# Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

October 11, 2020

## We're the Supporting Cast

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Life can make us think we are in control of our lives. We plan, think, execute, and succeed (or fail). Then along comes an illness, an accident, a job loss, or one of countless other things, and we realize we really aren't in control of much. This famous phrase sums it up: Man proposes, God disposes.

We can transfer this same false assumption into our relationship with God and expect Mass, prayer, and liturgy to work for us, fill us, and entertain us. But liturgy and prayer are about giving God his glory above all else.

When we pray, and especially when we enter into communal liturgy, we are reminded once again that it is all about what God is doing. Isaiah says the Lord will provide for all people. God will provide! We might prepare, serve, or participate, but the director, producer, and main actor is God. We are the supporting cast. That is why liturgy is not so much about our planning, participation, or entertainment but about entering into harmony with God's action and praising him as he asks.

The same point can be found in the Gospel. The king sends out invitations for his son's wedding and prepares the feast. He adjusts to the unexpected lack of interest and invites others. The ones who arrive are the ones the master has invited.

It would be foolish for one of the invited guests to vaunt their importance. Their role is to humbly enjoy and gracefully help the king and the newlyweds to shine on their night! +

***We might prepare, serve, or participate, but the director, producer, and main actor is God.***

### A Word from Pope Francis

Do good works, don't just say words that are gone with the wind...Through the good works that we carry out with love and joy toward others, our faith emerges and bears fruit... Is our faith fruitful? Does our faith produce good works? Or is it sterile...and therefore more dead than alive?

—Angelus, July 10, 2016



## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 25:6-10a

The LORD of hosts / will provide for all peoples / A feast of rich food and choice wines.

### Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me.... My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

### Matthew 22:1-14 or 22:1-10

[Jesus said,] "Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find."

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Is Mass about my pleasure or God's glory?
- How often do I serve and expect nothing in return?

# Shaped by the Cross

By Johan van Parys

Every night before going to bed, my parents would make the sign of the cross on each child's forehead and whisper, "May God bless you and keep you." Then we would go to our bedrooms, dip our fingers in the small holy water font, and sign ourselves. I remember asking my parents for their blessing before going on a trip or asking the abbot for his blessing before leaving the abbey. These simple signs have left a lasting impression on me.

The cross was everywhere when I was growing up; even today, we find the cross hanging in churches, schools, homes, offices, and cars and around our necks. The priest blesses people with the sign of the cross. Children are marked at their baptism and adults during the Order of Catechumens with the sign of the cross. Christians are shaped by the cross.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Christiane Brusselmans, the first woman to earn a doctorate in theology from the Catholic University of Louvain, experimented with an ancient process used to bring adults and families into the Church. Following the Second Vatican Council, her work and that of many others resulted in reinstitution of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)—rites lost during the early Middle Ages due to the shift from adult to infant baptism.

One remarkable rite that marks this process is the Rite of Welcome, in which we admit those seeking baptism



in the Catholic Church to the Order of Catechumens. The most moving moment is when the sign of the cross is drawn on the seekers' heart, hands, feet, and shoulders. I remember her instructing us to use big gestures to ensure recipients felt the weight of the cross, especially on their shoulders. The weight of the cross can indeed be heavy.

Our lives as Christians ought to be modeled after the cross. Each year, tens of thousands of people prepare themselves to join the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil. They stand in a long tradition rooted in New Testament times. Those who have been baptized in other Christian denominations celebrate the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist. Those not previously

baptized celebrate all three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist.

The sacrament of baptism relates images of baptismal bath, baptismal burial, and baptismal birth. First, we are washed clean from everything that prevents perfect union with God, who claims us as an adopted child. Second, we are buried with Christ so we may rise with him on the last day. Third, we are birthed into the Church—the body of Christ. Because of this rich sacramental symbolism, baptismal fonts are sometimes made in the shape of a cross. Catechumens enter on one side to be baptized and exit on the other side.

We should always remember the importance of the cross in our Christian journey. Without explanation, my parents impressed this on me each time they signed me with the cross. +



*Lord, I am grateful you guide us along safe paths. Help me to remain close to you and walk with you all the days of my life.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

October 12–17

**Monday, Weekday:**

Gal 4:22–24, 26–27, 31—5:1 /  
Lk 11:29–32

**Tuesday, Weekday:**

Gal 5:1–6 / Lk 11:37–41

**Wednesday, Weekday:**

Gal 5:18–25 / Lk 11:42–46

**Thursday, St. Teresa of Jesus:**

Eph 1:1–10 / Lk 11:47–54

**Friday, Weekday:**

Eph 1:11–14 / Lk 12:1–7

**Saturday, St. Ignatius of Antioch:**

Eph 1:15–23 / Lk 12:8–12

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# Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
October 18, 2020

## Our Divine Mark

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Have you ever wondered why so many ancient busts of emperors and gods still exist? In any major museum around the world, you'll see rows of these masterful sculptures. The Vatican Museums have one of the best of these collections.

Thousands of busts and statues of the emperors and gods were produced for civil use in ancient times. Just like the American president's portrait is in every US embassy, so Caesar's sculpted form was all over the Roman Empire. For example, a bust would be placed in the town squares of the outlying territories

to indicate that a border population belonged to the Roman Empire. The sculptures of Roman gods were also set up in public places around town so that a certain religious unity was preserved. Being within the empire obliged citizens to pay tributes and taxes, and it assured them of protection. Once the Caesars declared themselves divine, their statue also required sacrifice and worship.

The image of the Caesar marked what belonged to him: from land, to money, to people, to prayer. If you were under his image, you belonged to him.

We also carry the mark of a divine image that indicates to whom we belong. Each human being is made in the image of God, to be his reflection. We are sculpted and formed to reflect the artist who made us. God gives humans dignity because we are an eternal reflection of God's free, intelligent, artful, and beautiful nature. Our inalienable rights, rooted in our spiritual and rational nature, come from our Creator, as do our duties. No one can take them away.

It is proper to render unto Caesar what is his, but both Caesar and his subjects must render to God what belongs to God. +

*Everyone is made in the image of God.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

Every drug addict has a unique personal story and must be listened to, understood, loved, and—insofar as possible—healed and purified. We cannot stoop to the injustice of categorizing drug addicts as if they were mere objects.... Each person must be valued ...in his or her dignity.

Address to Pontifical Academy of Sciences, November 24, 2016



## Sunday Readings

**Isaiah 45:1, 4-6**

I am the LORD, there is no other.

**1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b**

We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers.

**Matthew 22:15-21**

"Whose image is this and whose inscription?" They replied, "Caesar's." At that [Jesus] said to them, "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I realize my dignity and value come from God?
- Do I render to God what he deserves?

# Political Campaigns Leave Christ Out

By Kathleen M. Basi

**F**aith and politics—are there any two words in the English language that are more fraught with potential to divide?

In the United States in 2016 and even in 2020, we went through a heartbreakingly ugly presidential primary and convention season, only to be thrust into an equally disgusting general-election fight—entire seasons in which the *modus operandi* seemed to be: “Say whatever you want, whether it’s true or not, because all things are justifiable in the pursuit of winning.”

When faith intersects with politics, we are faced with very hard choices. No party, no candidate, represents the totality of the Catholic faith. No party holds a moral high ground; the bending of truths and the oversimplification of issues is a near-universal characteristic of political rhetoric, and all party platforms contain positions that are inconsistent with the teachings of Christ.

Candidates often tell us that we stand at a point of no return—that if we don’t get the “right” result, our country is lost. And for this reason, we tolerate the behaviors, the shredding of opponents’ human dignity, the dishonesty, and the trash talking that stand diametrically opposed to the Ten Commandments. Even worse, we participate in them.

Most of us don’t want to own our guilt. We’d rather blame the system. If we take an honest look in the mirror, though, almost all of us are part of the



problem. Too often, the tone of our comments on social media and in our safe zones, among those who think like we do, mirrors the un-Christlike ugliness exhibited in direct mail, TV ads, and speeches. We fail to hold our candidates—even the ones we know personally—accountable for the tenor of the discussion. Then, too, there are the articles and editorials we choose to share. It’s easy to hide behind them, to let an author take the blame and refuse the responsibility we incur by spreading his or her influence.

The truth is, there is no one “point of no return.” We face crossroads every day, every election season, and in every conversation about social, economic, and governmental affairs. At each one,

we make a choice to put our faith in the driver’s seat—or to make a particular political party, candidate, or issue our god.

In the next few weeks, we, as individual followers of Christ, must decide whether to condone the false absolutes, the polarization, and the dehumanization that have come to characterize our political process, or to hold ourselves and all our leaders accountable to the standard set by Jesus. We all have a choice to make. What will you choose? +

*Almost all of us are part of the problem exemplified by the nastiness of politics. We must be more like Christ.*



*Lord, I am grateful for the power of your love and grace. Teach me to trust that you care about my human needs and obligations.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

October 19–24

**Monday**, Sts. John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues, and Companions:  
Eph 2:1–10 / Lk 12:13–21

**Tuesday**, Weekday:  
Eph 2:12–22 / Lk 12:35–38

**Wednesday**, Weekday:  
Eph 3:2–12 / Lk 12:39–48

**Thursday**, Weekday:  
Eph 3:14–21 / Lk 12:49–53

**Friday**, Weekday:  
Eph 4:1–6 / Lk 12:54–59

**Saturday**, Weekday:  
Eph 4:7–16 / Lk 13:1–9



# Bringing Home the Word

*Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)*  
October 25, 2020

## Jesus Gave and Asks for All

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Jesus was a radical. This is expressed by the word all in today's Gospel. All your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. What does that command leave out? That's right, nothing! Jesus gave it all, and he asks for it all. That is radical.

Jesus is the first one to give us the example of this total and self-giving surrender to God the Father. When prayer was more important than sleep, he prayed. When he had to go without food, like in the desert, he did. When he knew that God wanted him to stay in town, he did. And when it was time to move on, he did as well. When he knew God wanted him to preach a word of compassion or condemnation, he did, regardless of whether the person was a

beggar, Peter, Pilate, or Herod. He gave all his heart, mind, and soul to God.

And what about loving his neighbor as himself? He loved not only his perfect, immaculate Mother, but he also loved his imperfect fellow human beings: his apostles, disciples, and fellow Jews whose faith and understanding were slow. He loved Judas and chased down discouraged apostles heading to Emmaus. He loved his enemies just as much. Tax collectors, publicans, Roman soldiers, Samaritans all received words and acts of love. The poor also had a special place in his heart, as was evident by his many miracles of soul and body for them.

His love even went beyond those people he encountered in his life and reached everyone for all times. He established the sacraments and his Church to accompany on their earthly pilgrimage all those who would follow him throughout history. He descended into hell to save those who had gone before him and opened heaven.

In short, he gave it all! And so, he can ask the same from us as well. +

*Jesus is the first one to give  
us the example of total  
and self-giving surrender  
to God the Father.*

### *A Word from Pope Francis*

All of us, living and dead, are in communion, that is, as a union; united in the community of those who have received baptism, and of those who are nourished by the Body of Christ.... We are all the same family, united. For this reason, we pray for each other.

—General audience, November 30, 2016



## Sunday Readings

### **Exodus 22:20–26**

You shall not oppress or afflict a resident alien, for you were once aliens residing in the land of Egypt.

### **1 Thessalonians 1:5c–10**

And you became imitators of us and of the Lord.

### **Matthew 22:34–40**

[Jesus said,] "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is Jesus asking as you strive to give him your all?
- Joy comes from giving our all. Do you experience that joy?

# Translating the Gospel Message for All

By Johan van Parys

**M**y nieces and nephews are great kids—intelligent and kind—and I'm proud to be their uncle. Still, I regret their lack of participation in the life of the Church. From what other parishioners tell me, this is happening all around, not just in my family. Why are we losing so many young people? Why doesn't the gospel message get through to them?

This issue of the best way to communicate the gospel can be traced back to the apostles. Think about our Church's beginning—the time of Pentecost. Outside the Upper Room, I imagine great festivity as people from many regions and nations gathered in Jerusalem. Inside the Upper Room, the apostles were hiding, burdened with fear and uncertainty. Then suddenly everything changed. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the apostles overcame their fear and burst into the street. The sight of the apostles, on fire with the Spirit as they spoke about God's marvelous deeds, must have quieted the crowd. Miraculously, everyone was able to understand them despite ethnic differences and linguistic barriers.

From Jerusalem, the apostles spread throughout the world proclaiming the Good News to every nation known to humankind. They succeeded because they presented the Gospel truth in different languages through various channels.

Successful missionary activity has always relied on the translation of the



one and true message into the vernacular and familiar idioms of the people receiving the message. The failures of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century mission attempts in China were attributed to the Church's refusal to allow a Chinese Catholic rite that would have included "baptismal" pre-Christian theological language and accommodated ancestor worship, which was very dear to them. On the flip side, the success of the Church's mission in Central Africa has been ascribed to the introduction of a Congolese rite that considers the ethos of Central Africa and allows typical African modes of celebration.

As we preach the gospel in our current, ever-changing reality, we can do one of two things: turn inward and hide in a romanticized understanding of our perceived glorious past or find new ways

to preach the gospel. The first option might prove disastrous as the Church continues to crumble. The second, though not easy, offers hope—and the promise of a Church ever new and true.

During the next twelve months let us listen carefully to the spiritual needs of our people, learn to understand and speak their languages, and use their idioms wisely to spread the Good News. Let us pray for the knowledge and courage to do what needs to be done.

Finally, let us pray for the safe return of loved ones whose journeys have led them away from our Church. +

***Successful missionary activity relies on the translation of the one and true message into the vernacular and familiar idioms of the people receiving the message.***

**PRAYER**

*Lord, I am grateful your commandments to love are simple and to the point. Keep my focus on loving you. Stretch my heart to love my neighbor, too.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

October 26–31

**Monday, Weekday:**  
Eph 4:32—5:8 / Lk 13:10–17

**Tuesday, Weekday:**  
Eph 5:21–33 / Lk 13:18–21

**Wednesday, Sts. Simon and Jude:**  
Eph 2:19–22 / Lk 6:12–16

**Thursday, Weekday:**  
Eph 6:10–20 / Lk 13:31–35

**Friday, Weekday:**  
Phil 1:1–11 / Lk 14:1–6

**Saturday, Weekday:**  
Phil 1:18b–26 / Lk 14:1, 7–11

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