

Bulletin Inserts 2021-22 Cycle C
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inspired by reflections from the Liturgy Center of St. Louis University

November 28th, First Sunday of Advent

“The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah.” Thus begin this year’s readings for the First Sunday of Advent. The first reading continues with God telling us, “I will raise up for David a just shoot.” In the Gospel, that “just shoot,” Jesus, warns, “Be vigilant at all times.” In these brief passages lies the sum of the Advent message. God assures us of the promise of one who will do what is right and just, making us safe and secure. In anticipation of the promise, we must be vigilant. St. Paul adds a prayer that we will increase in love for everyone. What better way to be vigilant than to spend our time and energy loving one another! This Advent let’s keep an eye and ear out for every opportunity to love as Jesus loved, to do what is right and just, to contribute to the safety and security of all.

December 5th, Second Sunday of Advent

In Sunday’s second reading, St. Paul extends a prayer to the Philippians that is as poignant and powerful today as it was when he composed it. He prayed “that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” Put that prayer in the context of Advent and our preparation for Christmas, and feel the true spirit of the season come alive. It is about love, about discerning what is of value, about righteousness. Material things like cards and presents, decorations and desserts are fine, but far more important are the things we cannot write or wrap, hang or eat. This Advent, let’s keep our priorities in proper order “for the glory and praise of God.”

December 12th, Third Sunday of Advent

The Third Sunday of Advent is “pink-candle Sunday.” It’s “pink-candle Sunday” because the message is Joy! Now the reality of the third Sunday of Advent for most of us is probably more anxiety than joy because Christmas is only about a couple of weeks away and we still have so much to prepare before the big day. All the more reason to take a breath and notice: The first reading does tell us to “shout for joy,” but why? Because *God* is rejoicing over *us*, singing joyfully because of *us*! Can you imagine? *God* is the one who is rejoicing and singing. We, sinful, stressed people are cause for God’s joy. Amazing! In the second reading, St. Paul also tells us to rejoice. He acknowledges anxiety, but tells us to set it aside, giving it to God who will give us peace. What better reason to rejoice than that! Of course, between the second reading and the Gospel we are reminded to be kind, generous, and honest. But what could be a more reasonable cause for joy? Happy Third Sunday of Advent! Happy home-stretch to Christmas!

December 19th, Fourth Sunday of Advent

Once again God surprises, choosing the tiny town of Bethlehem to be the birthplace of “one who is to be ruler in Israel.” This is not just a matter of geography; we know it is God’s way throughout all of sacred history. Jesus, the one who “shall be called peace,” who comes to do God’s will, comes from a totally humble beginning. His young, simple, working-class mother is no debutante, no child of royalty. Her cousin, Elizabeth, is alike except in age. These are ordinary people whom God has chosen to do extraordinary things. And how wonderful this is! It means that we, too, need not be rich or renowned to be chosen by God to receive divine blessings and to share them with others. God’s will for us is not a burden, but a gift to extend to everyone we meet on Christmas and throughout the New Year. Blessings of Peace, Joy, and Love this Christmas and always from Pax Christi!

December 26th, Holy Family Sunday

Sunday is the Feast of the Holy Family. On one hand it is a beautiful feast, but on the other it can be quite trying. We live in a time and culture where family is valued all too often more in name than in practice. There are those who simply don’t have family because they are old and their loved ones have died. There are those who are estranged from their families for any number of reasons. There are those whose family members are far away and missed painfully. And there are those who have been forcibly separated by border patrol or law enforcement. Equally harsh can be these verses from the first reading: “Whoever honors his father is gladdened by children” and “Whoever reveres his father will live a long life.” They’re fine if you have children and actually live a long life, but what if you don’t? How do we interpret them then: You weren’t good enough, so you were childless and died young? Of course that’s not what they mean, but if you’re hurting, those verses certainly don’t help. Unfortunately, focusing on family can add salt to already aching wounds.

So what can we draw from this feast day? One thing might be that the Holy Family knew pain and sorrow as well; hence, we can approach them in prayer, seeking their comfort and support. Another might be that we can strive to be family for one another. It doesn’t have to be a blood-family. We are all children of the same God and part of the one human family. St. Paul provides us with a good guide for how to do this: Be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient. Forgive, love, “let the peace of Christ control your hearts,” and be thankful. Let’s give it a try and be there for one another.

January 2nd, The Epiphany

*See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples;
but upon you God shines, and over you appears God’s glory.*

These words from Sunday’s first reading from Isaiah could be describing the world today. There is so much darkness in the forms of poverty, sickness, environmental destruction, violence, injustice, discrimination, ignorance, and fear that we can lose hope. But God shines upon us, lighting the way. It is the Christmas season when we are reminded of God with us not just in Spirit, but in the flesh, in the form of a beautiful baby boy. And that baby comes, like all babies,

small, vulnerable, and welcoming of all from lowly shepherds to learned wise men. He brings joy and awe to young and old, rich and poor, neighbor and foreigner. In his weakness is his strength as life suddenly revolves around him and his needs and the simple gift of his presence. Few can resist the charm of a new baby. Dark moods are lifted. Differences are forgotten. That new little one has distracted us, at least for a while, from the burdens of life, and we get a glimpse of the glory of God, an Epiphany of divine love and light.

January 9th, The Baptism of Jesus

*In truth, I see that God shows no partiality.
Rather, in every nation whoever fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to God.*

This Sunday we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. Baptism is a beginning, a beginning in faith and a beginning in community. It is an entry and a sending forth. For Jesus, it was the beginning of his ministry. For us, it can be no different. And who is invited into Baptism? St. Peter tells us in today's second reading all are invited. The community of the faithful is open to all without exception. To fear, that is reverence, God and to act uprightly are all that are required. Thanks to Jesus's ministry we know what that means: to be open to everyone, to care, serve, forgive, and love. Let us live our baptismal vows as Jesus modeled for us.

January 16th, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

When you hear this reading from St. Paul to the Corinthians, do you ever wonder what manifestation of the Spirit is yours—or do you already know? If you never related this to yourself, perhaps it is time that you do. If you feel you already know, wonderful! Now perhaps your manifestation of the Spirit isn't exactly as St. Paul listed them, but be assured that you, too, are a manifestation of the Spirit. We might say that is why God is able to say in Sunday's first reading: "No more shall people call you 'Forsaken,' or your land 'Desolate,' but you shall be called 'My Delight,' and your land 'Espoused.'" Yes, God's love for each of us is such that we are imbued with gifts that make us delightful in God's eyes. This love "weds" us to God and graces us with all the potential of a new and committed relationship. Let's strive to be the faithful and loving spouse that God invites us to be.

January 23rd, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

*God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it,
so that there may be no division in the body,
but that the parts may have the same concern for one another.
(1 Corinthians 12:24-25)*

Sunday's readings are about readings within readings. First Ezra reads the law of God to the people who are weeping and tells them to be joyful, not sad. Then Jesus reads from Isaiah a message of "glad tidings" for the poor, the captives, the blind and oppressed. In both cases, ordinary, suffering people are hearing God's words to them, words of hope and encouragement,

consolation and reassurance. These people are very much the people to whom St. Paul writes, as well, people who may not feel very important, but St. Paul tells them every part of the body has a role to play and the least among them warrants the greatest honor. Similarly, every person has a necessary, contributing role to play. The least may be the most worthy. All are interdependent; all are invaluable.

This message is most pertinent to us today when so many people are seen as disposable, unwanted, unwelcome, and unnecessary, whether in our parishes or schools, shops or workplaces, health care facilities or detention centers. Today's scripture is reminding us that all are precious, and the least among us the most so. Our duty is to care for one another. How do we respond?

January 30th, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*...faith, hope, love remain, these three;
but the greatest of these is love.*

We use the word love so freely. We love ice cream or we love a particular television show. We love to travel or to do yoga. We love our pets, our families, our friends. Maybe we even love God. What does that mean? In some languages other than English, there are multiple words for love, because love really differs in different contexts, but in English we "love"—just one word for many meanings. In Sunday's reading from St. Paul, he presents a totally radical description of love, and it's not easy. Read it very carefully. Reflect on it and relate it to your own life: your work; your relationships; your attitudes toward the disabled, the homeless, people of different faiths, refugees, people of different political parties, anyone who's different from you. We learn that God is Love and we are commanded to love God with our whole being and others as ourselves. How hard is that when we include all those people we may not like! St. Paul offers us a guide to which to aspire. God assures us we will not be abandoned in the effort. Jesus reminds us we must be open to God's love to receive it. Let's give it a try!

February 6th, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?

This is God's question in Sunday's first reading, but it is also God's invitation to all of us. Not ready to answer as Isaiah did, "Here I am. Send me."? Consider this: Neither Isaiah, Peter, nor Paul felt worthy of the call they received. Each recognized his lowliness in the presence of God, but God wasn't deterred. As a matter of fact, as God has done so many other times in scripture, God responds extravagantly. Think of those two large boats almost sinking under the weight of an enormous catch of fish in the Gospel. Remember the 500 fed with only a few loaves of bread and fish and the 12 baskets of left-overs. God is not troubled by our inadequacies. God calls and God enables, so when God calls you, don't be afraid to respond, "Here I am. Send me."

February 13th, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday's readings are a challenge, a *big* challenge. We hear Jeremiah telling us not to trust in human beings. We hear Jesus telling those who are rich, full, happy, and well regarded, "Woe to you!" St. Paul then warns that if Jesus is not raised, your faith is in vain. So extremely counter-cultural! Who doesn't want to be well off, full, happy, and respected? Who doesn't want to be able to trust other humans? And what's wrong with any of that?

What's wrong is when we make these priorities instead of putting God first. What's wrong is trusting humans more than we trust God. What's wrong is seeking earthly wealth, fullness, happiness, and respect at the price of our souls. There should be no doubt that God wants nothing but the best for us, but that may not be what we understand as best; it may actually be better. Let's empty ourselves to make room for God to do the filling.

February 20th, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

*To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

Please say Jesus was kidding! He didn't mean that literally, did he? We certainly have taken those words and found every excuse possible to ignore them, deny them, water them down, or in any possible way pretend they were never said. Yet, Jesus did say them, and we hear them in Sunday's Gospel. We also hear him say the equally famous command, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." That actually may be a bit more palatable, but it still means not retaliating, unless you like others to retaliate against you. It means not embarrassing another, not excluding anyone, not allowing friend or foe to suffer in any way you do not want to suffer. It's not about whether you actually do suffer or not; it's about the fact that you'd prefer not to suffer, so you shouldn't impose suffering on the other. And lest we think this is impossible or unjust, the clincher in Sunday's Gospel is this reminder: "for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Creator in heaven is merciful." Who knew being a Christian could be so hard? Let's strive to be worthy of the title!

February 27th, Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye,
but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?*

How easy it is for most, if not all, of us to criticize others! How hard it often is to recognize faults of our own! In Sunday's readings, Jesus is quite clear that we need to be more self-aware before we pick on others. He even points out that we can do a much better job of seeing others clearly when we've cleared our own vision. And what do we do when we've "cleared the way"? We help the other see clearly, too. Jesus is not telling us, get your own house in order so you can criticize others, but do so in order to help the other. In this way, we demonstrate our goodness and cultivate goodness around us.

March 6th, First Sunday of Lent

We all experience temptations, but hopefully nothing as extreme as the temptations Jesus experienced as described in Sunday's Gospel. Jesus had the power to resist his temptations, but we might not be quite as strong. Nevertheless, this Gospel invites us to think about the temptations we do experience and to work on ways to reject them. When we're tempted to eat too much, to eat what we know is bad for us, or to hunger for other material goods, let's remember Jesus's response to the devil: "*One does not live on bread alone.*" When we're tempted to compromise our integrity in exchange for worldly benefits, let's remember Jesus's message *to worship God, and God alone to serve.* And when we think we can take dangerous risks because we're counting on God to save us, let's remember *not to put God to the test.* We may not be Jesus, but we can apply his lessons to our humble lives.

March 13th, Second Sunday of Lent

How often are we like Abraham? God tells this old man with a post-menopausal wife that they will have descendants as numerous as the stars, and he accepts that, but then God says that Abraham will possess a massive expanse of land, and Abraham asks how he will know that to be true? Is one ordinary and the other extraordinary? Which one? Why question one and not the other, or why not accept both as gifts from God and rejoice in them? Perhaps even more amazing in this story is that God doesn't rebuke Abraham, but instead creates a ritual to confirm the divine promise. How magnanimous is God! How patient not only with Abraham, but with us, we who are much more like frightened and mystified Peter, James, and John in the Gospel and the folks whose "minds are occupied with earthly things," in St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians! And if even that can be topped, God sends us Jesus and makes it clear, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." Maybe it's time to trust God more intensely and listen more attentively.

March 20th, Third Sunday of Lent

In Sunday's Gospel, a terrible thing has happened. The occupying Romans have killed several Galileans and mixed their blood with that of the Roman sacrifices, utterly disrespecting the slain people. Jesus's reaction is to assure his audience that the victims of this massacre were no more sinful than anyone else. No one should consider him- or herself better or more worthy than another. Rather, all should strive to repent of their sins. Jesus then goes on to tell a story of a fig tree that isn't bearing fruit. The fig tree represents leaders at the time, but could represent us today, as well. The Good News is that God, like the gardener in the story, is willing to give us another chance to become fruitful. God—and the gardener—are even set to cultivate the tree, unproductive leadership, or us with fertilizer to help us along. God, the great I AM, out of love and mercy offers us a land flowing with milk and honey despite our frailty. Let us remember we are a community of equals and commit to bearing much good fruit for one another as God intends.

March 27th, Fourth Sunday of Lent

Sunday's Gospel is the ever-familiar story of the Prodigal Son, but all Sunday's readings could really be called the story of the Prodigal Father. Yes, the younger son in the Gospel was prodigal,

that is extravagant, extravagant in a negative way; he took his rather substantial inheritance in an untimely way and then spent it on very unacceptable behaviors. But the father in the story might be described as even more prodigal or extravagant. He welcomes his wayward son back with not just an abundance of gifts, but also an abundance of love and forgiveness. This father reflects God, and in the first two readings we witness similar generosity. Our Prodigal God feeds the Israelites with manna in the desert and us with the most extravagant gift of all, Jesus Christ. So, in the words of St. Paul, “let us be reconciled to God...so that we might become the righteousness of God in Jesus.” Let us be prodigal, that is extravagant, in our love of God and compassion for one another.

April 3rd, Fifth Sunday of Lent

See, I am doing something new!

This is God’s message in Sunday’s first reading. It continues to be God’s message to this day. In the Gospel we hear the familiar story of the woman caught in adultery. What was new in that story? What does it have to do with us today? The lesson of God’s mercy was certainly new then. The challenge to the men ready to stone the woman to think first about their own sins was also new. That they should have to admit their own failings before condemning another was certainly not the custom of the day. The invitation to the woman to go and sin no more was not only a new way to deal with an adulteress; it was an invitation to her to begin a new life. Similarly, God is ever ready to help us “turn over a new leaf,” whether it is to break a bad habit and replace it with a new and better one, to abandon a prejudice and develop a new openness to people and ideas different from our own, or to birth some other new way to grow, like St. Paul, in faith in Christ.

April 10th, Palm Sunday

What a spectacular liturgy is this Sunday’s liturgy! It takes us through so many emotions from the glory of Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem, welcomed with praise and honor, to the extreme stress of the Last Supper and Agony in the Garden to the abandonment by friends and followers to the injustice of a trial that leads to the release of a known murderer and the conviction of an innocent man to the ridicule of soldiers, and the excruciating physical pain of crucifixion. It’s almost too much to absorb. And yet there is more. In the midst of such fear and torture, Jesus still feeds his companions with bread and wine that is his body and blood. He continues to teach—about service and mercy, healing the soldier whom his own disciple has injured. He comforts the women and forgives his enemies. Jesus endures the unendurable so as to model for us what it truly means to love God, our neighbors, and our enemies devoid of violence or vengeance. We hear this story so often, it’s easy to become immune to the enormity of its message, but this is what it means to call ourselves Christian, to be Christ-like. Let us never become complacent in the presence of such greatness!

April 17th, Easter Sunday

The miracle of the Resurrection is so extraordinary, chances are we can’t really get our minds around it, not that it’s meant to be an intellectual exercise, but even emotionally, are we able to

appreciate even a bit of what Jesus's disciples must have felt that first Easter day? The Gospel readings tell us of their terror, disbelief, amazement, and misunderstanding. Perhaps it would help us to think of far more familiar experiences we have had that have led to similar feelings. What is it like when we think someone we deeply, deeply love is gone forever, totally defeated, and he or she returns home? How does it feel when we are certain that a beloved one has been lost in a deadly storm or accident or violent assault and we discover he or she escaped alive and well? Take those feelings and magnify them a thousand times. Only then might we come close to the extraordinariness of God's gift to us in the Resurrection. Let's pray for the ability to know the awe of this magnificent day all the way to the core of our being, so that we can truly be an Easter people for one another throughout the entire year. Happy, Blessed Easter from Pax Christi!

April 24th, Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday

Do you believe? Sunday's readings tell us that the Apostle Thomas doubted Jesus's Resurrection until he saw Jesus for himself. Do *you* believe? Do you believe Jesus when he says, "Peace be with you"? Do you believe that peace is even possible? Many people openly say they don't. Do you believe in the signs and wonders described in the first reading, the cures of physical and spiritual ailments? Many people have been so badly hurt in body and soul that they give up hope for any such healing. Do you believe that God sent Jesus to us and that the Holy Spirit empowers us? Jesus commissions us to go forth as God sent him and gifts us with the Holy Spirit, but if you aren't sure about Jesus, then can you accept his commission? It's a pretty tall order to do as Jesus did. It might actually be easier not to believe. Certainly doubting is understandable, and the story of Thomas offers us reassurance that it's OK, as long as we can get beyond our doubts and move forward. Believe. Be open to the Spirit. And go forth with confidence, loving God, neighbor, and enemies alike. Help make the world a peaceful place where justice reigns. If you believe, it *is* possible.

May 1st, Third Sunday of Easter

We must obey God rather than people.

Yikes! Really? But that could mean loving my neighbor as myself, and my neighbor is a nasty person. That could mean loving enemies, including "illegal" aliens and terrorists. That could mean forgiving my employer who denied me a promotion. That could mean disobeying an order to harm another or destroy property in the name of "defense." I could end up ostracized, fined, or even imprisoned.

"Do you love me?" Jesus asked Peter. Jesus asks us. If you do, "feed my lambs," "tend my sheep," "feed my sheep," "follow me." It may lead you where you do not want to go, as was true for Peter and the other Apostles in Sunday's first reading, but that is our Easter invitation. "We must obey God rather than people." It isn't easy, but go for it!

May 8th, Fourth Sunday of Easter

*My sheep hear my voice;
I know them, and they follow me.*

Do you hear Jesus's voice? If so, you may find yourself in trouble, like Paul and Barnabas in Sunday's first reading. While crowds have come to hear them, many don't like the message and are violently abusive, contradicting them at every opportunity. But Paul and Barnabas do not cower. Instead, they model for us one aspect of following Jesus: Stay faithful to the message.

Sunday is Mother's Day, and some may not realize what the historic message of Mother's Day is. In the original Mother's Day Proclamation of 1870, Julia Ward Howe wrote: "Arise, then, women of this day! Arise all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be of water or of tears! Say firmly: '...Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy, and patience. We women of one country will be too tender to those of another country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.' From the bosom of a devastated Earth a voice goes up with our own. It says 'Disarm! Disarm!' ...take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace....to promote the alliance of the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international questions, and the great and general interests of peace."

Some may disagree with this message. Some may reject it, but this is fundamental to Mother's Day. It also contains values fundamental to our faith: charity, mercy, patience, unity, and peace. St. John writes of "a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue," much like Julia Ward Howe's "alliance of the different nationalities." Let's honor our mothers and our God with efforts to hear Jesus's voice to love as he loved.

May 15th, Fifth Sunday of Easter

*As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.
This is how all will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.*

This new commandment of Jesus in Sunday's Gospel is much easier said than done. Just think how Jesus has loved: He loved to his death on a cross, and, along the way, he loved well beyond local norms. He loved the poor, the disabled, the sick and dying. He loved Roman soldiers and Samaritan men and women, enemies of his people. He loved prostitutes and tax collectors, people considered to be of ill repute, disparaged and rejected. He loved uneducated fishermen and children considered worthless and bothersome. He loves *us* despite our faults, prejudices, sins, and inadequacies. *That's* how he invites us to love—to love regardless of class, ability, ethnicity or religion, occupation, age, or any other category used to discriminate. Can we do it? Will we be recognized as his disciples? Let's give it a try!

May 22nd, Sixth Sunday of Easter

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

Once again, Jesus's message is one of peace; yet, we hear in Sunday's first reading that there is dissension, not peace, among some of the teachers of the new faith. Some believe circumcision is a necessity to be counted as members; others say no. Ultimately, the question is put to the apostles and elders who determine, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that circumcision is not required.

Millennia later we sometimes find ourselves in similar debates. Should our Church allow inclusive language, women deacons, married priests? How do issues like health care for all, gay rights, and military service fit into Church teachings? Wise and educated Catholics do not agree.

Jesus tells us what really matters is that we love him. The Holy Spirit will teach us what we need to know. How hard it can be to discern what the Holy Spirit is telling us, but how important it is that we listen with an open heart and an open mind!

May 29th, Seventh Sunday of Easter

Sunday's Gospel is a proclamation of unity, Trinitarian unity and unity between the Trinity and us, but what about unity *among* us? It seems common knowledge and acceptance that we are divided as a nation and among nations. The political divide literally keeps former friends and families apart. We feel it's better to avoid one another than to come together and end up fighting. We're even divided on Church matters.

What can we do? As usual, the answer lies in love. Jesus says to his Abba God, "I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them." It's certainly not easy to set aside our differences, and both Stephen and Jesus died because they would not compromise on what they knew was of God, but we can still seek unity through a shared love of God. We can strive to listen to one another, to care for one another, to recognize points of agreement, to respect points of disagreement, to refuse to be drawn into silence or complicity or violence, and to remember God's love for all of us regardless of who we are. If God can love us, can we not love in return?

June 5th, Pentecost Sunday

Pentecost Sunday is known as the birthday of the Church. Think how many of us celebrate birthdays in our culture: get-togethers with family and/or friends, cake, candles, song, gifts, but how do we celebrate Pentecost? Chances are it's just another Sunday. Wouldn't it be nice, even fun, to recognize Pentecost with some of the same excitement that marks other birthdays? As a matter of fact, what a birthday it is! We are the ones getting a gift, and what a tremendous gift: the Holy Spirit! Pentecost is the day the Church welcomes the Holy Spirit into our lives. And the Holy Spirit brings us even more gifts, thoughtful gifts specialized for each one of us so that when we come together and share them we have everything we need. We've already gotten the roots of a fine birthday celebration. We get together at Mass. We light candles. We share the Eucharist. We sing. Let's take it that extra step and do it with gusto, sharing what we have and who we are with one another, regardless of our differences. After all, the Holy Spirit teaches us it's our differences that make us whole.

June 12th, Trinity Sunday

Ah, the Trinity! A mystery that has confounded many people throughout time. Some question, “How can there be one God in Three Persons?” Some insist it is pure foolishness, but we Catholic Christians profess a Triune God, Three Persons in intimate relationship with one another, so intimate that they are indeed one. If it helps, think of three manifestations of one Divine Being, or think of a “circle of love” embracing parent, child, and the spirit that unites them. Think of someone who has helped form you into who you are, who has been teacher and guide, companion and support, who has inspired and encouraged, nurtured and loved. If one person can do so much, be so much, how much more can God be for us! Perhaps the real mystery is not how there can be Three Persons in one God, but how could there not be even more? God is greater than we can imagine, and that may be all we need to know.

June 19th, Corpus Christi

“I’ll be with you in spirit.” Have you ever said that to someone? Has someone ever said it to you? Usually it comes when someone can’t make a special occasion in person. It can be comforting, though we’d rather have the person with us in the flesh. It seems Jesus knew that feeling well. Providing us with himself in bread and wine makes it possible to have him with us not just in spirit, but in a tangible way. We can touch him, taste him, be nourished by him. This is what we celebrate in Sunday’s Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. And what’s more, we can all partake equally. In the Eucharist we do as Jesus asked us to do—we do this in remembrance of him, the one who fed the 5,000 and left no one hungry. The challenge for us today is to carry this forward. When Jesus says, “Give them some food yourselves,” he is also talking to us. We may not be able to multiply five loaves and two fish, but we can share what we have. Rather than ask, “Why does God allow this to happen” (hunger, destruction of farmland, investment in weapons rather than nutrition programs...), we need to remember what Jesus said: “Give them some food yourselves.”

June 26th, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

We live in an era when many people seem loath to make a commitment whether in small matters or large. People don’t want to commit to social gatherings any more than they want to commit to business appointments; yet, Sunday’s readings have much to say about making commitments. Elijah is calling Elisha to make a commitment as a prophet. Jesus is telling those who claim to want to follow him that they will have to commit unconditionally to the point of sacrifice. He’s not too patient with those who offer excuses. At the same time, Sunday’s readings refer to freedom more than once. Both Elijah and Jesus allow for commitments freely chosen. Chances are they knew full well that a commitment made under duress is not likely to hold. Are we willing to commit freely and unconditionally to God’s call to us—to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be guided by the Spirit, as St. Paul writes, and to embrace the nonviolence that Jesus practiced toward the unwelcoming Samaritans when James and John wanted to “call down fire from heaven to consume them”?

July 3rd, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

It's summertime and many people use this time to take trips. Can you imagine doing so without a suitcase full of changes of clothes, toiletries, maybe a hair dryer, chargers for phone and camera, and more? We certainly don't travel as Jesus ordered his disciples to travel in Sunday's Gospel: no sack (think luggage), no money bag, not even sandals. Fortunately, we don't have to follow that strict regimen, but what lesson can we take from it? Before answering that, let's look at another point in Sunday's Gospel. Those same disciples return to Jesus proud of their success even against demons, but Jesus tells them that is not what matters. Similarly, St. Paul writes that circumcision or uncircumcision doesn't matter. In both cases what matters is our relationship with God. In short, Sunday's lesson might be about priorities. Less important is what we pack for a journey. More important is that God is with us along the way.

July 10th, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

In the first reading this Sunday, Moses asserts that the command of God is not remote, but right within our grasp. Why is it then that we seem to find it so hard to recognize and follow? Could it be that we find the command not so much mysterious as we find it difficult and, therefore, unwelcome? Look at the story of the Good Samaritan. A scholar of the law wants to know what he has to do to gain eternal life. Jesus invites him to answer his own question. The scholar responds correctly: Love—God with one's whole being and neighbor as oneself. Clearly the answer is not remote but within the grasp of the questioner. Nevertheless, the scholar persists with another question: Who is my neighbor? It's critical that we understand that the Samaritan was an enemy of the Jews and taking a great risk to help the crime victim. The priest and the Levite were at some risk as well, but they put their own safety before compassion. Only the Samaritan acted as a neighbor. How hard is it for us to set aside risk or simply a busy schedule or material security to reach out to a neighbor who may also be "enemy"? Are we willing to help refugees at our southern border, homeless people on our city streets, a victim of an accident or crime happening right in front of us? God's command may not be remote, but it sure is challenging. Are we up to the task?

July 17th, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

It's all about attitude. In Sunday's Gospel, poor Martha is chided for asking Jesus to get her sister Mary to help with the serving. Jesus tells Martha Mary has chosen the better part. Before we even consider attitude, we could rejoice that Jesus is not reducing a woman's place to the kitchen, which was customary in his day—and is still customary in many places today. But back to attitude: Interesting that St. Luke talks about "serving," not setting a table, cooking, and cleaning, even though that's what we usually envision Martha doing with no help in sight. But let's change the picture a bit; let's focus on serving as caring for a guest. Especially since Martha is described as the one who welcomed Jesus in the first place, wouldn't it make sense that she is pleased that he accepted the invitation, and wouldn't she be eager to serve him? If this invitation has become a burden, the sense of service is getting lost, and it does sound like it's become burdensome. While Martha is absolutely right that there is work involved in treating a guest, it shouldn't be tainted with resentment. And serving shouldn't be focused on the tasks at hand but on the person for whom they are being performed. It would certainly have been nice if Mary and

any others present offered Martha some help, but a main point here is that you and your guest have the opportunity to enjoy each other's company, whether the meal is ready or the dishes are washed.

July 24th, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Can you imagine negotiating with God the way Abraham does in Sunday's First Reading? You have to give Abraham credit; he doesn't give up easily. And what about God? God sure is patient, going along with Abraham every step of the way. Then we have the Gospel where Jesus reinforces the idea that persistence pays. Now, we know that not every prayer we pray is answered, at least not the way we might hope, but St. Paul puts it all in perspective. God's responsiveness to our persistence is ultimately about forgiveness. As the psalm response says, on the day we call for help, God answers. Let's not forget to be equally attentive to one another.

July 31st, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

To be rich in what matters to God. What a punchline ends Sunday's Gospel! What matters to God? Clearly, it is not material wealth, especially if we hoard it for ourselves. What matters to God is far more expansive. A quick overview of scripture makes it clear and easy. What matters always comes down to LOVE—love of God, first and foremost, and love of neighbor who includes enemy. What matters is generosity. It is sharing. It is Christ in all, as St. Paul puts it. Anything else is vanity; that is, it is in vain. So let's not measure our success in what we have, but in how we use it for the benefit of all.

August 7th, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.

This statement by Jesus in Sunday's Gospel raises an important question for each of us: Where is our treasure? Is it in material wealth, comfort, and security? Is it in fine clothes, expensive jewelry, rich food, a fancy car, the latest technology, a vacation to brag about? It is in a prestigious position at work? Or is it in how much we love and are loved, how much we share with one another, how much we put our faith and trust in God? All Sunday's readings advise the latter. They also indicate an immeasurable reward for doing so. Sure seems worth a re-evaluation to set our hearts right.

August 14th, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*I have come to set the earth on fire....
Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth?
No, I tell you, but rather division.*

Pretty harsh words coming from Jesus in Sunday's Gospel, but let's try to understand them with an example from seven contemporary prophets. They're known as the Kings Bay Plowshares because they have tried to make real the scripture call to turn swords into plowshares. They are Catholic Christian peacemakers who have risked their freedom to stop a nuclear holocaust by

breaking into a nuclear weapons facility, hammering on nuclear warheads, and pouring their own blood on nuclear missiles. They are on fire with a passion for peace that may not look peaceful to some, that may cause division among people with drastically different ideas about how to protect the earth from total conflagration, that may rouse deep resentment among officials just as Jeremiah did, that may lead to their own crosses similar to Jesus's. Thus Jesus's message to us this Sunday could be understood to be that each of us needs to find what sets our hearts on fire, what we are willing to do no matter the divisions it may cause, to speak out and stand up for a peace the world does not know, a justice the world so desperately needs.

August 21st, Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

*People will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south
and will recline at table in the kin-dom of God.*

Good news, indeed! But wait! Then why are some people being rejected at the door, people who claim to have been in Jesus's company? The explanation is actually pretty simple. All are welcome, but not all have accepted the invitation. As the letter to the Hebrews puts it, not all have strengthened their drooping hands and weak knees. Not all have made straight paths for their feet, receiving God's discipline as an act of love. If we merely share space with Jesus without internalizing his lessons of love and compassion *for all*, making them our own, we are the ones who have rejected the invitation; God has not rejected us. So beware of contemporary bigotry and prejudices. God is far more open. Let us open our hearts and minds as well.

August 28th, Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Once again we find Jesus ruffling feathers in Sunday's Gospel. This time he is a dinner guest at the home of a prominent person and he is being observed quite hostilely. Does he put on his best behavior to surprise and satisfy his host and fellow guests? Remember, this is Jesus! To the contrary, he tells a parable in which he advises people to choose the lesser place a table and, worse, to invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind who could never repay the hospitality of the host. Is he serious? How many of us would do that? How many of us *have done* that? What is he really saying? If we listen carefully, we might understand that Jesus is telling *all* of us that God is the one who gives us value. God is the one who values us all. No one is better than another, not by social status, economic standing, physical ability, or anything else. We are called to be humble, to recognize that all we have comes from God, and that it is up to us to share what God has given us with each other. What matters is what we give, not what we get.

September 4th, Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Anyone of you who does not renounce all your possessions cannot be my disciple.

Ever wonder how Jesus had any friends? With statements like the one above from Sunday's Gospel, it's no wonder being Christ-like is so difficult. We may think we're pretty good at it, but are we? Better that we realize it's a real challenge. First, Jesus tells us to hate our families. Then, he talks about carrying one's own cross. Finally, he warns about not having the resources to complete a task. Perhaps the first reading helps our understanding a little. There, it is clearer that

earthen things can weigh us down. And in the context of writing on behalf of a runaway slave, St. Paul moves us from possession to freedom. So what is a message we can take from Sunday's readings? One that is not so unusual in scripture: Put God first. If family ties you down, choose God. If burdens hold you down, choose God. If deficiencies limit your efforts, choose God. Possessions bind us, whether things or people, especially people. We should neither try to possess nor be possessed by them. In God is our liberation; in God is our discipleship.

September 11th, Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday's readings are all about the extravagant mercy of God. People who have been rescued from slavery create a molten calf and start worshipping it. After some persuasion, God agrees not to destroy them. A prodigal son wastes his entire inheritance and is greeted with a feast. St. Paul, who has blasphemed and persecuted followers of Jesus, is welcomed as a great teacher of the faith. This is certainly not the typical behavior of most, if not all, of us humans. We believe in a "justice" that tries to even the score. We support punishment for reckless behavior. We may go so far as to deny the possibility of repentance and recovery. But are we not only the ones who might be called to be merciful, but also the ones who might need mercy? Let's be grateful for a God who is far more merciful than vindictive, who knows the power of second chances, and who is even willing to help us become our best selves.

September 18th, Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Never will I forget a thing they have done!

Yikes! What have they done? What have *I* done? This message from God to the people can be rather ominous depending on what any of us has done. Seems like there's been a lot of cheating going on in both the first reading and the Gospel this Sunday. What's confusing is that in Amos God seems quite angry, but in the Gospel Jesus presents a story in which the "unjust steward" is praised for his shrewdness. What's going on? One thing is certain: God cares about the plight of the poor. In the first reading they are exploited, but in the Gospel, the steward actually helps them by decreasing their debts. He may do it for his own benefit, but it helps the others as well and makes the master look very generous, because they don't realize this discount doesn't come from him. Another lesson for us is that we choose wisely who our master is. Needless to say, it should be God and not wealth or power. If we have been blessed with any degree of wealth, we need to "steward" it in a way that will please God and serve others.

September 25th, Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Welcome, protect, promote, and integrate.

Sunday is the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. In his message for this day in 2019, Pope Francis summed up his response to the challenges of contemporary migration with the four verbs above, but then he added that these verbs don't only apply to migrants and refugees, but "to all those living in the existential peripheries, who need to be welcomed, protected, promoted and integrated." He called on all of us to help build the city of God and humans.

It is very appropriate that this day coincides with Sunday's readings which make it very clear that God stands with the poor and suffering, not the rich and comfortable. Wealth is not a measure of superiority, and destitution is not a measure of inferiority. If we are blessed with more, we need to share with those who have less. Whether migrant, refugee, or native son or daughter, the way of Christ is to "welcome, protect, promote, and integrate."

October 2nd, Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Increase our faith.

This plea of the Apostles to Jesus in Sunday's Gospel could be our plea as well. No doubt, living in today's world, we share the desperation of Habakkuk in the first reading—and his frustration with God. Where is God in all the violence and destruction? Apparently, right here. We just have to wait with faith, because the vision will surely come. The problem is likely that our faith is too small, too weak. And because it is so lacking, because we can't envision a world free of violence and destruction, we lose hope; we fail to stir into flame the spirit of power and love with which St. Paul assures us God has entrusted us. Yes, we need to increase our faith. Let this be our prayer this week and always.

October 9th, Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

We're all quite familiar with Sunday's first reading and Gospel. In each, lepers are cured of their "unclean" skin condition. A Syrian and a Samaritan, two foreigners, are among those healed, and they are the ones who express deep gratitude. There's often been an implication that the other nine lepers who were with the Samaritan did not appreciate what was done for them or that they did not outwardly acknowledge the gift, but we really don't know that. What we do know is that the foreigners had particular reason to be grateful. The Samaritan, in particular, probably would not have been accepted in Jerusalem with the other nine. He chose to return to Jesus, where he knew he was welcome, to say thanks.

What can we learn from these readings? One thing for sure is that God does not discriminate when caring for us. Another might be not to assume the behavior or motivation of others. A third, of course, is to be grateful to God for God's compassion, to recognize the source of our many blessings.

October 16th, Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Pray always without becoming weary.

Easier said than done, even for Moses and the widow in Sunday's Gospel, but that is what Jesus tells his disciples. No doubt it's a difficult command because so often it seems prayers are not answered, but if we remember Habakkuk a couple of weeks ago, scripture also teaches us to wait; the vision (answer) *will* come. The Gospel clearly states that even a shameless judge will bow to persistence. Surely God is more responsive than that. And the first reading shows that God provides support when we do weary in our efforts. So persevere in prayer, as St. Paul says, "whether it is convenient or inconvenient." It is surely worth it.

October 23rd, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

“God is a God of justice who knows no favorites” we read this Sunday from the Book of Sirach. This can be a very comforting realization—or not. Do we really want justice when we are guilty of some misdeed? Don’t we like being a favorite among friends, family, or co-workers? But God is a God of justice, which means God does not favor the rich or powerful, the beautiful or talented. God cares as much for the poor and meek, the unattractive and ordinary, as everyone else. God loves us and cares for each and every one of us. That can be very hard to accept when we judge others because of their race or nationality, their sex or age, their educational level or economic class, their faith or political leaning, or any other label we give them. What God wants of us is not judgment that places some of us above others like the Pharisee in the Gospel, but the recognition that whatever we do have is God’s gift to us and ours to share with others.

October 30th, Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday’s Gospel has many interpretations. Was Zacchaeus a greedy man, a wrongly judged good man doing an unpopular job, a greedy man converted to a good man due to Jesus’s invitation, or someone else? We may never know for sure, but we do know that he wanted to see Jesus and climbed a tree to do so. We also know that Jesus invited himself to dinner at Zacchaeus’s home, and Zacchaeus was thrilled. And we know, whether it was something he was already doing or something new, that Zacchaeus was about to give most generously to the poor and anyone he may have extorted. If we refer back to the first reading, it would seem the Gospel is a perfect example of God’s unconditional love, of God’s magnanimous mercy. God gives all of us, not just Zacchaeus, the opportunity to do right and to do well. If God did not do that, God wouldn’t have created us in the first place. So, rather than judging Zacchaeus or those like Zacchaeus in our lives, we need to focus on God’s love of all and the generous invitation God gives us to be our best selves.

November 6th, Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

God is faithful and will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.

Thus St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in Sunday’s second reading. What consolation after hearing the first reading of horrific torture, but immeasurable faith! And what reassurance after hearing the Gospel in which Sadducees try to trip Jesus up with an extreme example of marriage and remarriage! These readings can be difficult to comprehend; the details can be a distraction from the key point: God is a God of Love who will be there for us well beyond our human limitations. Death will not be an end, but a transformation into something unimaginably wonderful. If we can believe that, we can experience those gifts of strength and protection about which St. Paul writes.

November 13th, Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

God comes to rule the earth with justice.

Such is the response to Sunday's psalm, and if we listen closely to all the readings, we may hear examples of justice in them. But wait! The Gospel also speaks of earthquakes, famine, and plagues, wars and insurrection, and division within families. Jesus says bluntly that following him can lead to seizure, persecution, being handed over to hostile forces and being hated, possibly even being put to death. Is that justice? Once again, we are faced with the reality of a tough road ahead. So why follow Jesus? Because faith tells us that justice *will* triumph in the end. There is no promise of Easy Street. Material riches will not last and will not save. As a matter of fact, those who seem to live on Easy Street, the proud and evildoers named in the first reading, will meet a just fate, as will everyone else. So let's persevere in doing our best and trusting in God to see us through.

November 20th, Christ the King

Sunday we celebrate Christ as King, but what does that mean in today's world? There are very few kings—or queens—left. We know them mostly from history and entertainment. The one real queen we know best is probably Queen Elizabeth of the United Kingdom, and she's more a figurehead than a head of state. So what do we mean when we call Christ a king? Is he only a figurehead, or is he a dictatorial monarch of olden days? Hopefully, we agree he is neither. Christ did, however, offer some commandments. The two greatest he said were to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. He also instructed us to love our enemies and to forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven times, in other words always. And he set an example that may not be very royal. He lived a simple itinerant life and died by torturous execution. This is certainly not the image of a king we are most likely to know or think of, but this is *our* king. How ready are we to follow his lead?