

Bulletin Inserts 2022-2023 Cycle A
by Rosemarie Pace, Ed.D.

November 27th, First Sunday of Advent

It is the hour now for you to awake from sleep.

In Sunday's readings, Jesus simply warns, "Stay awake." St. Paul's variation in his letter to the Romans suggests that people have been sleeping, so they need to wake up. Either way, the message is pretty clear: We need to be alert to what's happening around us. As we begin a new liturgical year with this First Sunday of Advent, there is so much we should be attending to. People all around us, maybe including us, are suffering from conflicts and war, from environmental disasters, from a lack of affordable health care or housing, from injustices small and large. Are we walking around in a state of ignorance or denial, or are we taking to heart the realities that cry out to us for help? This Advent let our preparations include preparations for the coming of Christ not only as an infant, but also as the promise of peace and justice which we share as co-creators with him.

December 4th, Second Sunday of Advent

Justice shall flourish in God's time, and fullness of peace forever.

Sunday's readings are full of images of justice and peace. In the first reading Isaiah depicts a beautiful image of the "peaceable kin-dom" where all different species, often predator and prey, live in gentle harmony. In the second reading, St. Paul prays that all, Gentiles and Jews, join together to glorify God. And in the Gospel, John the Baptist chastises the elite of his day to repent and bear good fruit as proof of their repentance. We might link these readings in reverse: We, too, need to repent of our sins and do good works as evidence of our transformation. In our transformed state, we, too, can glorify God in community with those who are like us and those who are different. Finally, we, too, transformed and united as one, can anticipate God's dwelling where all will live in peace. Such is the promise of Advent. Of such is our faith.

December 11th, Third Sunday of Advent

Be strong, fear not!
Here is your God who comes with vindication;
with divine recompense who comes to save you.

How we all long for the world described in Sunday's first reading! Unfortunately, we know that isn't the world in which we live today. St. Paul tells us to be patient. He suggests we look at the prophets and how they endured hardship and practiced patience, but how hard that is. Yes, Jesus performed the healings and delivered the good news of which the first reading speaks. Why then do we still witness and experience so much suffering? How long are we supposed to be patient? Jesus says, "Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." He may have had a different meaning in mind, but maybe not. Are we offended by the long wait, or are we willing to trust

that God will in fact “come and save us”? And can we see the little, daily blessings that help us on the way? *Jesus is coming, and he is already here.* Let us rejoice and be glad!

December 18th, Fourth Sunday of Advent

It seems fair to say that most of the attention in Advent and at Christmas time, if not focused on Jesus, is on Mary, but Sunday’s readings should really direct our attention to Joseph and the workings of God. Yes, Mary is the one bearing the Christ-child, but Joseph is the one with a huge dilemma: What to do about his betrothed when she is already pregnant and not by him? On one hand, we could say God created a serious problem for both Mary and Joseph. On the other hand, we can see how God steps in to make things right. First of all, of course, God knew Mary and Joseph well enough to have chosen them for this monumental responsibility, parenting Jesus. In particular, God knew Joseph would believe and follow a dream that was beyond remarkable. God could trust Joseph, and Joseph could trust God. We, too, need to remember that God is there for us to help us through crises that may seem insurmountable. We, too, need to develop our trust in God through thick and thin. God already believes in and trusts us to do what we have been chosen to do. Let’s proceed with that knowledge and confidence.

December 25th, Christmas Day

The story of Christmas is so grand, it requires four liturgies to tell it, from Christmas Eve through Christmas Day. It also requires three evangelists to complete it, if ever it could be completed! Nevertheless, hearing the story year after year for a lifetime, it’s so easy to think we know it, and we struggle to find something new to say about it. Maybe that’s because we don’t need to find anything new to say. It is, in itself, ever-fresh and beautiful and instructive. From the Christmas story we learn of God’s great love for all of us, especially the poor and outcast represented by shepherds. We learn of God’s great generosity to us, nourishing us with the Son lying in a food trough meant for animals. We learn of God’s great humility, coming as a helpless infant in need of the most basic care. We learn to love and give and to do so humbly, because that is the story of Christmas always and everywhere.

January 1st, Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God

What a Sunday it is! Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. World Day of Peace. New Year’s Day. Take your pick; it’s special. A day to honor Mary. A day to commit to peacemaking. A day to start anew with resolutions to do and be better. In Pope Francis’s 2022 World Day of Peace Message, he writes “peace is both a gift from on high and the fruit of a shared commitment. Indeed, we can speak of an “architecture” of peace, to which different institutions of society contribute, and an “art” of peace that directly involves each one of us. All can work together to build a more peaceful world, starting from the hearts of individuals and relationships in the family, then within society and with the environment, and all the way up to relationships between peoples and nations.” Let this commitment be our tribute to Mary and our New Year’s resolution. Happy New Year from Pax Christi New York State!

January 8th, The Epiphany of the Lord

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

Oh how easy it is for us to see the darkness, but God shines upon us and covers us with Divine glory! That may be *our* epiphany or revelation of God with us. Sunday's readings are full of truly good news of God's love and care—from bringing the Magi safely to Jesus in the manger to sharing Jesus with all of us, Gentiles and Jews, people of every nation, race, and economic status. Let us be as welcoming as God has been to us. Let us be a light to others as God is light for us.

January 15th, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

*I will make you a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.*

In Sunday's first reading, God tells Jacob that he will be more than a servant; he and the tribes of Israel will be a light to the nations. What an honor, but also what a responsibility! Why be a light to the nations? God says so "that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." In other words, being a light is not just for the tribes of Israel, but for the whole earth.

We are descendants in faith of these ancient people. It is fair to assume, then, that we too have been made a light to the nations for all the earth. How are we living out this honor and responsibility? As Christians, in particular, we know Jesus to be the Light of the World. We are his followers. How are we carrying on his mission to a world that can appear so very dark these days of deadly conflict and deep fear? Let us open ourselves up to the light that God has made us so that we can help resolve the conflict and ease the fear.

January 22nd, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

*I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that all of you agree in what you say,
and that there be no divisions among you,
but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose.*

Did St. Paul really mean that everyone agree and be united in the same mind and purpose? Is that even possible? Is it desirable? Sunday's readings may leave us a bit uncertain, but St. Paul is pretty clear when he directs our focus to Jesus and not to all the others who have taken on leadership roles in the early church. And Jesus, himself, invites us to repent and follow him, so, again, the focus is clearly on Jesus. The fact is we may still disagree on some things, but the core of our faith is Jesus and what he taught. Some disagreements might help us discern and grow in our understanding, but we must always go back to the source who is Jesus. We must always remember his greatest commandments: to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbor as ourselves, and never to forget the toughest one of all, "Love your enemies; do good to those who persecute you." Now, that's where we find our unity!

January 29th, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Beloved and misunderstood, that's what we can say about the Beatitudes, the heart of this Sunday's readings. In fact, they are far more closely connected to the first reading that tells us to seek justice and humility than we might realize. What the Beatitudes are not is a message of consolation for all kinds of suffering. Rather they acknowledge the reality of suffering and remind us of our need for God to endure and overcome it. A more accurate translation of "Blessed" is "Truly honorable" are you, amazing in just how contrary that idea is to a mentality that aims toward wealth, power, and prestige. So, truly honorable are we when we work for justice no matter the cost, humbly relying on God to sustain us in our efforts.

February 5th, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Your light must shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly God.*

Wait a minute! Doesn't this Gospel passage contradict what we hear when Lent begins about *not* displaying our prayers, fasting, and almsgiving? Aren't they good deeds? If we're not supposed to show them off, how do we also let them shine for all to see?

Perhaps the answer has to do with intent. When we do all that Isaiah describes in Sunday's First Reading, we do not need to turn on any light switch. Our deeds speak for themselves. When we act out of faithfulness with no regard to self, we glorify God and conquer the darkness. Let us do good for God's sake and let the light shine where it will.

February 12th, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday's Gospel is perhaps one of the most challenging of all. Jesus is not mincing words when he elaborates on all the ways he is fulfilling the law and the prophets. He takes what might have already seemed strict laws and made them even more difficult to obey: Don't just not kill; don't even be angry. If a body part causes you to sin, remove it. Don't just avoid false oaths; don't swear at all. Can anyone be that good? Well, if we go back to the first reading, the answer is yes: "If you trust in God, you too shall live." It's a matter of choice, our choice. And St. Paul assures us that God has prepared more than we could ever imagine if we but love God.

February 19th, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Hard enough to love your neighbor as yourself, but in Sunday's Gospel, Jesus tells us to love our enemies, too. At least that means he recognizes that we might have enemies. He doesn't say don't have enemies, just that we must love them. But how do we love enemies? The first reading might help. It says, in part: "Though you may have to reprove your fellow citizen, do not incur sin because of him [or her]. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people."

While that was referring to neighbor, not enemy, we know Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets; hence, love your enemies as well. Again, notice that reproof is acceptable. It's how we do that that matters. We need to respect everyone. We need to recognize God in them, not just in ourselves. We need to pray for them. In today's climate of divisiveness, this may seem counter-cultural, but it is what it means to be Christian.

February 26th, First Sunday of Lent

Temptations run through Sunday's readings from Adam and Eve to Jesus. Adam and Eve don't do too well, succumbing to the temptation, but Jesus does very well keeping God first and foremost despite hunger and weakness. How do we handle temptations? Probably more like Adam and Eve sometimes (most times?) and like Jesus occasionally. Our challenge this Lent is to be more like Jesus more often than not, to remember that God is Number One always. If God is our constant reference point, we may find ourselves ever stronger in our ability to overcome temptations and to be made righteous as St. Paul professes.

March 5th, Second Sunday of Lent

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

Once again we hear God's voice proclaiming Jesus as beloved Son, and we hear the command to "listen to him." How well do we listen to Jesus? Do we listen only when we like what he says, or do we listen when his message is much harder to accept? Do we listen when he tells us to love God with all our being, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and, hardest of all, to love our enemies? Do we listen when he says to forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven times (always)? Do we listen when he says to a nation with the largest military budget in the world to put away your sword? Do we listen when he tells us he who is Messiah will have to suffer and die before coming into his glory? Jesus's message is not easy to hear, let alone to follow. Let us at the very least give it a sincere try.

March 12th, Third Sunday of Lent

A theme for this Sunday's readings might be, "Things are not always what they seem." After all, who would expect the tap of a staff on a rock to cause water to flow from it? And who would expect someone to die for an unworthy person? And why on earth would Jesus, a Jewish man, ask for water from a Samaritan woman who was considered worthless and then proceed to have a lengthy theological discussion with her? What was she even doing at the well alone at noon? But none of those things was what they seemed. All of them were surprising revelations about God, God's miraculous power, God's selfless mercy, God's immeasurable love, God's unconditional acceptance and boundless generosity. Not only do we see God in remarkable ways, but we also see that the Samaritan woman is much more than she might have seemed to anyone who simply judged her for her five husbands and live-in boyfriend. Jesus saw beyond that and considered her worthy of their thoughtful conversation about faith. How often do we see beyond what seems obvious to see the heart and soul of a person? Let's give it a try this week and throughout Lent into Easter.

March 19th, Fourth Sunday of Lent

In Sunday's first reading, God warns us not to judge from appearances. Interesting that the second reading makes reference to darkness which does not allow us to see, at least in the physical sense, and the Gospel focuses on a blind man who also cannot see, at least in the physical sense. Whether in the dark or physically blind, we are not able to judge from appearance, but St. Paul advises us to live in the light which allows us to see—and judge? And Jesus cures a blind man, enabling him to see—and judge? So what are we to make of this paradox? Could it be that we are to use our sight—or insight—in the light not to judge, but to see Christ's light and to use it to do God's will?

March 26th, Fifth Sunday of Lent

Sunday's readings are an important lead-up to Easter. They all speak in different ways of resurrection, to life after death. God in the First Reading, St. Paul in the Second Reading, and Jesus in the Gospel all promise that death is not the end for us who believe. What they don't do is deny or withhold death or the sorrow that comes with it. Jesus even weeps, something we never read in any other Gospel passage. And Jesus wasn't just mourning a dear friend; he was risking his life going back to Judea where people tried to stone him.

Now we know that we can't expect our own loved ones to be raised from the dead the way Lazarus was, but all these readings reassure us that God is with us in our sorrow and that God will also be with us at the resurrection of the dead. May our faith and our hope carry us to Easter and stay with us forever.

April 2nd, Palm/Passion Sunday

*And behold, the veil of the sanctuary
was torn in two from top to bottom.*

Sunday's readings move us from the glory of Jesus's gallant entry into Jerusalem to his torturous death as one ridiculed and demeaned. At the end of his life, we hear that "the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom." This is a rather graphic description that suggests the tragic significance of Jesus's death, but there is more to it than that. When the veil of the sanctuary is torn it reveals what is behind the veil. It reveals the true, sacrificial nature of God. It reveals a "king" who is not domineering, but a servant leader, a total contrast to kingly stereotypes.

So what veils hide similar revelations from us? Let those veils be torn this Holy Week as we see people seeking asylum at our borders, people living under occupation, people living in war zones, people living in poverty, people in prison and being trafficked, the sick, the disabled, the elderly all with new eyes. Also let the veils be torn that deny climate change, ignore the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation, tolerate corporate greed and political grandstanding. We, too, need to see behind the veils to see God's truth, God's love, God's mercy, and hope for the resurrection.

April 9th, Easter Sunday

*Let us celebrate the feast,
not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness,
but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Thus St. Paul writes to the Corinthians in one of the optional Easter Sunday readings. It is a good message for all of us today. Let us celebrate this miraculous feast with sincerity and truth. But what does that mean? How might we be sincere and truthful as we celebrate Jesus's Resurrection? We might begin with an acknowledgement that we really don't have an intellectual understanding of the resurrection; it's not an intellectual exercise. We might also admit that it's hard to believe, especially when times seem very dark as they do now. But if we are people of faith, if we are a resurrection people, we do trust that light has conquered the darkness, that life has conquered death, and that it will continue to do so. We actually see it happening right now. We see it in nature. We see it in the many ways people are reaching out to each other. We see it in those who protest sexism, racism, military coups, occupations, and wars despite the grave risks to themselves and their loved ones. And we know it because we believe. This too shall pass and all will be well, because God provides.

April 16th, Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday

Sunday's readings are rich with several images and messages. In the First Reading, we have a picture of a beloved community relishing in each other's company, praying and eating together, sharing what they have, and "enjoying favor with all the people." Heavenly! In the Second Reading, St. Paul directs our attention to the hope we can have because of God's mercy and our own faith that bring joy and salvation. And then there's the Gospel! First we encounter a group of frightened disciples holed up in a locked room. Then Jesus appears with a message of Peace. He commissions them to carry on his work and empowers them with the Holy Spirit. But there is also St. Thomas who missed this initial visit. He doubts until Jesus returns.

Where are we in all these scenes? Are we the beloved community? Are we a people of faith and hope rejoicing in God's mercy and salvation? Are we hiding in fear in need of a greeting of peace? Have we been sent to carry on Jesus's work? Or do we doubt it all because we haven't seen it with our own eyes? Likely we're all of these people at different times, but let us commit ourselves to become the beloved community filled with faith, hope, joy, courage, and an eagerness to serve.

April 23rd, Third Sunday of Easter

Once again we get to join two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They are depressed and, most likely, frightened. They are leaving their community of Jesus followers disillusioned and despondent. But then a man they don't recognize joins them. In conversation they report what has been happening in Jerusalem, and he responds with a scripture lesson that links those happenings with what is written. The disciples still don't recognize Jesus, not until they share a meal.

How often do we not recognize Jesus, no matter what he says? How often do we expect something or someone different and so miss what is right in front of us? Surely it is hard to recognize Jesus in those who are dirty or threatening. Some of us even find it hard to see Jesus in people who speak different languages, are of different races or nationalities, follow different faith traditions or hold different political views.

One of the lessons we can draw from the road to Emmaus is that Jesus may not always be immediately recognizable, but we need to listen and observe and be open, because he might be right there beside us.

April 30th, Fourth Sunday of Easter

*The sheep follow him,
because they recognize his voice.*

The sheep may recognize the shepherd's voice, but do we recognize our Shepherd's voice? Let's admit it: It can sometimes be difficult to know what's authentic and what's not. So how do we recognize the true voice of our Shepherd? In fact, it really shouldn't be that hard. For three years, Jesus provided us with numerous answers: Love God first and foremost with your whole being. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you. Forgive not seven times but seventy times seven. Put away the sword. St. Paul adds "be patient when you suffer for doing good." He reminds us that when Jesus "was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten." When we are trying to determine if the voice we are hearing belongs to our Shepherd, Jesus, just compare it to these messages. Then follow.

May 7th, Fifth Sunday of Easter

*Amen, amen, I say to you,
whoever believes in me will do the works that I do,
and will do greater ones than these.*

Who can imagine doing greater works than Jesus; yet, this is what Jesus says in Sunday's Gospel. Even with him saying that, I doubt that any of us is inclined to take it literally. But some do come close. Consider your favorite saint or, closer to home, someone you truly admire in your family, neighborhood, parish, school, workplace, or the larger community. Maybe it's the person who runs the local soup kitchen or homeless shelter or the firefighter who runs into the fire while others, of necessity, run away. Perhaps it's a Nobel Peace Prize winner or another internationally recognized hero or heroine. Jesus is basically telling us that any of us has the potential to do great things as long as we believe and follow his example. All we have to do is try.

May 14th, Sixth Sunday of Easter, Mother's Day

Sunday's readings touch on a number of important points not just for when they were written, but also for us today. St. Peter tells us, "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope." In this time of turmoil, as Christians, hope is fundamental to our Easter faith, and our Easter faith is reason for our hope. St. Peter also tells us, "It is better

to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.” He does not deny that there will be suffering, but says let it be for doing good, whether the suffering comes from those who mock us for being hopeful or it comes from the pain of seeing others suffering and trying to help. Then Jesus assures us, “you will see me, because I live and . . . you are in me and I in you.” Yes, we are meant to be people of hope who, even when we suffer, do so for good because we are in God and God is in us.

And who are better examples of this than mothers? Sunday is Mother’s Day, and mothers can be a very impressive group of people. Most mothers are known for their unconditional and sacrificial love, their wisdom and guidance, their generosity and mercy. Mothers are life-givers, and the original Mother’s Day Proclamation of 1870 affirms that in a very profound way. In that Proclamation, 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.’”

Let us heed both Sunday’s readings and the Mother’s Day Proclamation and be people of hope, willing to suffer to do good and to nurture “charity, mercy, and patience” and, above all, peace!

May 21st, Seventh Sunday of Easter

This Sunday we find ourselves between Jesus’s Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Jesus is no longer physically present on Earth. His disciples have returned to the upper room to pray. Very likely they are feeling both sad and anxious. Their beloved friend and teacher has gone, this time forever, and he has left them with a monumental charge. They may not feel up to the task, but the promise of the Spirit is with them. Jesus has prayed in their presence that they have accepted God’s word and understand and believe. With such assurance, they will carry on. Jesus “will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world.” And so are we. It is now our charge to carry on Jesus’s word, his service to one another, his love, mercy, and compassion. Let it be so.

May 28th, Pentecost Sunday

One of many themes we might draw from Sunday’s readings is that of unity in diversity. In the first reading, we hear how people speaking a wide variety of languages all understand what is being preached in just one language that is not their own. In the second reading, we hear about the many different gifts, services, and workings that different people possess, all products of the same God given for some benefit, and we hear how all those differences comprise one body. In the Gospel, Jesus delivers a message of peace, a commission to do as he did, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to a motley crew of scared disciples.

The feast of Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. Could it be that this Church is meant to be a model of unity in diversity in which we, different as we are in many ways, still speak one language of “love, revealed in patience and kindness, generosity and trust, and a faith both forgiving and enduring” (John Kavanaugh, SJ)? Let it be so!

June 4th, Solemnity of the Holy Trinity

Sunday is Trinity Sunday. Each year we are reminded of the mystery of the Trinity, one God in three divine persons. We may hear various attempts at explaining this mystery and may have our own understanding of it. What we most likely come to realize is that the Trinity requires faith more than reason. But this Sunday, St. Paul provides us with something we *can* grasp. He says, “Brothers and sisters, rejoice. Mend your ways, encourage one another, agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.” The God who is Holy Trinity will be with us. Let us live as St. Paul advises. Let us be an extension of the Trinity in the world today.

June 11th, Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

Sunday’s feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is so filled with symbolism, it is hard to address it all, let alone comprehend it fully. We are all taught that the Body and Blood of Jesus are infused in the bread and wine we receive in the Eucharist each time we attend Mass. By receiving consecrated bread and wine we are becoming one with Jesus, just as any food and drink become absorbed into our bodies and unite us into one being, which raises the question: Why bread and wine? Why not fish and water? Both were pretty prominent in the Gospels. One explanation is that both bread and wine are made from the blending of many parts into one whole, whether multiple grains of wheat or multiple grapes, both crushed and transformed into something new and better. Another explanation notes that bread is basic nourishment while wine is more celebratory. In short, receiving Jesus in the form of bread and wine means recognizing our own many parts as broken and blended into one people who experience the fullness of life, its struggles and its joys, just as Jesus did. When we receive the Eucharist, let’s not forget: We are one body, one body in Christ.

June 18th, Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

God is good: God’s kindness endures forever, and God’s faithfulness to all generations.

Sunday’s Psalm is one of great comfort for those who were “troubled” and may have felt “abandoned” as Jesus sees the crowds in the Gospel and as we may also feel today. All of Sunday’s readings speak of God’s compassion for the people. Jesus, in particular, commissions “laborers for the harvest” to care for those who are sick both physically and spiritually. But wait! How is it he then advises the Apostles to go only “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”? Some commentators explain that this was Jesus’s first mission, not so much to neglect others but to start with the Israelites because they were his people and they were so needy. Whatever the reason at the time, we can be reassured that that was not Jesus’s ultimate mission. In fact, we know that he actually cured the Canaanite woman’s daughter, reached out to Samaritans, praised a Roman soldier for his faith, learned from one and used the others as examples of goodness. All of us are beneficiaries of God’s kindness, and all of us are called to give without cost.

40-Day Fast for Christian Nonviolence

Pax Christi New York State joins others around the country in an annual fast for Christian Nonviolence. This fast is an opportunity to remember, repent, and resolve to transform our culture of violence, whether the violence of our streets or the violence of international conflict. It begins July 1st and ends on August 9th, the tragic triple anniversaries of the executions of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), holocaust victim; Blessed Franz Jaegerstaetter, martyr for refusing to serve in Hitler's army; and the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Japan, the largest Christian community in Japan. PCNYS frames it with prayers made available for you to pray alone or in community. Please sign up to fast with us by responding at our website (www.paxchristinys.org) or Facebook page. Thank you.

June 25th, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light;
what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.*

Jesus's message, his teachings, are meant for the masses. He invites—calls—us to proclaim them without fear or hesitation. In Sunday's readings we are assured that God is with us, knows us down to the hairs on our heads, loves us, protects us. Our only fear should be that of disappointing God, of not listening and not speaking out. And what is it that Jesus said that we are to share? As always: Love. Forgive. Be generous. Welcome the stranger. Care for those in need. Today he might say those things this way: Take care of yourself so as to take care of others. Appreciate those who are taking risks to provide for you. Help those who are suffering from compromised health or isolation or economic difficulties. Stand with those who have been victims of racism, violence, and loss. Let's shine a light into the darkness now and always.

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July 2nd, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Hospitality. One important theme of Sunday's readings is Hospitality. The woman of Shunem is a model of hospitality, going so far as to have a room built for the prophet Elisha who is a frequent guest. Jesus also speaks of hospitality in a variation on the theme in the Gospel. He speaks of receiving him, which means receiving his Abba God, and he speaks of receiving a prophet and simply giving a cup of water to a lowly one.

At this time of economic stress and racial awakening (especially on the part of those who have wanted to ignore or deny the tensions and injustices that have always been present), we need to

think a whole lot more about hospitality or receiving those in need, those different from ourselves, those who are Jesus in our time. How welcoming are we of a newcomer to our neighborhood, workplace, school, or church? How open are we to strangers in our midst? How accepting are we of people who are different from us, whether by race, faith, sexual orientation, political persuasion, or any other label? Let us learn hospitality from this Sunday's scripture, and let us put it into practice.

July 9th, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am meek and humble of heart.*

Sunday's readings can seem quite unrealistic. We know everyone has burdens that can, at times, overwhelm us. We are living right now in a time of economic hardship and racial tension. We are a divided nation in many ways; yet, Jesus comes to us and presents a picture of easy-going bliss. Very comforting if you can believe and trust, but also very suspect if you tend to be more skeptical and questioning. So what do we make of this?

If we look back at the first reading, we learn of a king who is "meek and riding on an ass," who "shall banish the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem," who shall banish the warrior's bow and "proclaim peace to the nations." This is our king, Christ the King, whose reign is "meek and humble of heart." This is our nonviolent Savior whose "yoke is easy" and whose "burden is light." It is not so much that all burdens will disappear, but that the means for dealing with them reject violence and embrace love, compassion, mercy, and gentility. Let's remember that and practice Jesus's way when feeling weighed down.

July 16th, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Whoever has ears ought to hear.

"Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear." But hear what? Jesus makes it clear in Sunday's Gospel that not all will hear and understand; not all are even intended to hear and understand. Sounds a bit elitist, no? But wait! If we look at how he explains the seeds sown wildly and extravagantly, they represent people—us—who lack understanding and become victims of evil or who are quickly distracted by trials and tribulations or who are readily tempted by worldly goods or, if we do in fact hear, understand and are abundantly fruitful. Could it be that the choice is ours? It is not God who is being selective. Clearly God is tossing those seeds everywhere without limit. As Isaiah writes in the first reading, God waters the earth that it might be fertile and nourishing for all of us. It is we who must be receptive to God's great generosity. It is we who must not only claim the title Christian, but who must be Christ-like in our words and deeds.

July 23rd, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Those who are just must be kind.

Sunday's first reading serves as a wonderful summation of the Gospel. It speaks of a God who appears timid or lenient to some because of judging with clemency, giving ground for hope, and

permitting repentance. In the Gospel, we encounter a householder whose crop of wheat is sown with weeds by an enemy. Instead of getting upset and angry, instead of ripping out the weeds or going after the enemy, he tells his servants to let the wheat and the weeds grow together. To some he, too, may appear lenient or even timid, but no; he is wise. He shows patience. He trusts the good seed to survive and make itself known as it grows, just as the weeds will reveal themselves in time. Then the two can be separated without harm to the wheat. Small seeds, like the mustard seed and yeast, have great potential, but they need time to reach it. The householder, like God, allows this to happen. May we be as willing to appear weak, so that true strength can triumph.

July 30th, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Can you imagine anything so valuable that you would be willing to sell everything you have to acquire it? Do you think of heaven that way, God, your relationship with God? We probably all think of heaven as the greatest destination we could want and God as the most spectacular being we could know UNTIL we put them in the context of sacrificing everything we have to achieve them. Let's face it, we probably aren't thinking about God or heaven when we're competing for a pay raise or promotion or even just the last parking space in a parking lot. How many of us make choices based on how they will benefit our material wealth or prestige rather than how they will enrich our souls and the well-being of others? These are questions Sunday's readings might raise for all of us. Solomon asked God for an understanding heart. Of course, he was already the king's son and heir. He probably didn't have any material needs, but he certainly could have had material wants; yet, he asked for understanding to judge God's people and distinguish right from wrong. When we are facing such an opportunity, may we also ask God to help us distinguish right from wrong so that we decide wisely what our true priorities should be.

August 6th, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

This Sunday we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration and we commemorate the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. *"How could we keep the memory of these two events on the same day? In one, Christ's body is transfigured; in the other, Christ's body is disfigured beyond recognition. In one, the disciples wake up to the dazzling brightness of the face of Christ; in the other, people were scorched by the blinding brightness of atomic death. In one, the cloud descended, affirming the belovedness of the Son; in the other, the cloud rose, condemning human life. In one, the disciples longed for it to last; in the other, all longings were reduced to ashes.... Perhaps, by keeping these two memories together, one day we will learn to see the affirming radiance of Christ in our brothers and sisters, and thereby learn to love and not to kill."*

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August 13th, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Lord, save me!”

In Sunday’s Gospel, this is Peter’s cry when he realizes how strong the wind is as he walks on water, gets frightened, and begins to sink. No doubt, this could be our cry on many occasions, but when we are caught in a storm, whether an actual weather storm or another kind, are we as quick to cry, “Lord, save me”? Peter may have been a bit too impulsive at times, but he knew to whom to turn when in trouble. Jesus may have chided him for doubting instead of having stronger faith, but, in fact, Peter did have faith that it was Jesus and none other who could save him. And Jesus did catch Peter even as he questioned him. Even if he wavered, Peter also had faith to get into the water in the first place in the midst of a violent storm.

We might think we’d be smarter than that, but are we? Do we sometimes step into dangerous situations without thinking of the consequences? And is that always wrong to do? Certainly, it’s not wise to run into a burning building without the proper training and equipment, but, with the right training and equipment, sometimes that’s the exact thing to do to save a life. And let’s remember the ultimate Savior is always there for us, whether wise or impulsive. May he be the first one to whom we turn, just as Peter did. We can call 911 afterwards.

August 20th, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

~~Isaiah 56:7

Sunday’s readings speak emphatically about faith and inclusion. Going all the way back to Hebrew scripture, we learn of a God who welcomes everyone. It would actually seem that initially Jesus didn’t get the message. He was ready to ignore the Canaanite woman and her pleas for her daughter’s cure clearly based solely on the fact that she was not one of his faith and ethnicity. But she didn’t let him get away with such prejudice. She displayed faith that went beyond a religious identity and ethnicity. She demonstrated true faith in a God of compassion and healing. It is that faith that Jesus came to recognize, that St. Paul recognized as the “apostle to the Gentiles.” It must be our faith, as well, because most of us no more belong to Jesus’s religious heritage and ethnicity than did the Canaanite woman. And it is our responsibility to be as welcoming as the One in whom we profess our faith and, like the Canaanite woman, not to let anyone else get away with such prejudice.

August 27th, Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

When we hear Sunday’s scripture readings, we might wonder about God’s wisdom and knowledge, or at least of Jesus’s. First, he had to ask who people said he was, and then he responded to Peter’s response with such praise and generosity that he seemed to forget Peter’s record of stumbles and falls with more to come. But that is exactly where God’s riches, wisdom, and knowledge lie—in seeing beyond human weaknesses and failings and recognizing the

sincerity of heart and remarkable potential of one who struggles but comes through in the end. We can be so grateful that God's judgments are so much better than ours might be. They give not only Peter, but all of us, reason to hope and to rejoice.

September 3rd, Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

*But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones;
I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.*

The "it" to which Jeremiah refers in the passage above is God's call to him to prophesy. Doing so has brought him all kinds of trauma and rejection. He wants to abandon it, but the call is too strong to resist. All of Sunday's readings touch on this call in various ways. Jesus tells his disciples and us that we must deny ourselves and take up our crosses to follow him. St. Paul tells the Romans and us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice not in conformity to our current times, but transformed. No one is saying this is easy. As a matter of fact, it's darn hard, unpleasant, and potentially deadly, but if we are open to the call, it is also irresistible. Our challenge is to be open, to learn what our "it" is, and to do it no matter the cost. Clearly, Jesus assures us it is worth the price.

September 10th, Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

*You, Ezekiel, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel;
when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me.*

Some very esteemed people (Augustine, Aquinas, St. Francis of Assisi) believe this message to Ezekiel is not only for him, but for us, as well. But how do we know the voice we hear is God's? Many good people believe their position on an issue is right, moral, even Godly, but it is totally opposite the position of other equally convinced people; yet, God is quite clear: It is an *obligation* to speak up to steer people away from any wickedness. What to do? Perhaps St. Paul has the answer: "Love one another." Quoting Jesus, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In this there is no doubt, no room for racism, sexism, ageism, classism, homophobia, Islamophobia, or any other kind of prejudice. And, in the Gospel, Jesus provides us a method for addressing our differences from one-on-one dialogue to engaging the community. The key thing is that we are not silent, but that we speak with love.

September 17th, Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*If we live, we live for God;
If we die, we die for God.*

So St. Paul writes to the Romans and so we read in Sunday's liturgy. Wow! Do we really live for God? Do we really die for God? Just think what that means if it's true. According to Sunday's other readings, it surely means forgiving offenses without limit, not just in the number of times we forgive, but no matter the size of the offense. Now, again, do we live and die that way? Do you? Do I? That is one very tall order, but that is what God does for us and what God wants of us. In such a world, there is no room for interpersonal fights, no room for communal conflicts, no

room for war. Of course disagreements will happen. They are actually opportunities for growth, but we are not to allow them to result in violence. God is love and forgives ceaselessly through love. We must strive to do no less.

September 24th, Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.*

Truer words could not be spoken if we connect this passage from Sunday's first reading to the Gospel in which those who work for an hour receive the same wage as those who put in a full day's labor. It's probably safe to say that we agree with those who worked the full day, but this parable is not about pay; it's about God's love and consideration for human need. Respecting human dignity, God recognizes everyone's basic earthly needs and wants to provide. God also knows our eternal aspiration. Think of the pay in this story as heaven. What more could be given? There is no more to give, and heaven is for everyone according to our merciful God. Yet one more interpretation: Instead of people doing the same work for different lengths of time, think of people doing different jobs full-time. In our culture, entertainers and athletes often receive seven-figure salaries while most teachers and health care workers receive five. Is that just? Yet, we seem to accept that reality all too complacently. Perhaps what really matters in this story is that we use the talents God has given us the best we can in tribute to God, free of comparison and jealousy of others.

October 1st, Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory;
rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves,
each looking out not for your own interests, but also for those of others.*

Say what you mean and mean what you say. Such could be the moral of Sunday's Gospel, at least in regard to the second son who says he will go out into the vineyard to work, but doesn't. How often do we say we'll do something, but renege from doing it, possibly leaving the person who asked in a bind? And why might we renege? Maybe there's a good reason, but often there's not. Selfishness may be the reason, and that we know is wrong. St. Paul reminds the Philippians and us to see others as more important than ourselves. He does not say we should only look out for their interests, "but *also* for those of others." That word "also" is very important. When we consider others' interests, we do not say yes to a request and then leave it undone. When we consider others' interests, we listen and respond with whatever action is required. We need not deny ourselves, but we see serving others as a priority that just might also serve ourselves. We recognize our interdependence and communal relationship and, in so doing, give honor to God.

October 8th, Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

*I have chosen you from the world, says Jesus,
to go and bear fruit that will remain.*

Sunday's Gospel Acclamation could be considered a summation of Sunday's readings. Jesus has chosen all of us to bear fruit that will remain. But what fruit is that? We know there are many varieties of fruit, so we can be fairly confident that the fruits that we bear will also vary. The key thing is that they are good and enduring. St. Paul writes about things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, and worthy of praise. He encourages his readers to keep on doing what they have learned from him, what he has given, said, and done as instruction for them. These things can be the fruit we bear in all their diversity. When we do these things, we need "have no anxiety." We need not worry about being like those rejected and destroyed in the First Reading and the Gospel. Rather, we can experience the "peace of God" within us.

October 15th, Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

On one hand, Sunday's readings present a festive picture of banquet and wedding celebration. They are filled with images of rich food and fine wine. But on the other hand, in particular in the Gospel, the picture is mixed with some serious darkness. People are rejecting the invitation. They are even assaulting the messengers who were extending the invitation. The king who is the host is enraged and destroys the murderers and their city. He then invites whoever is around, whether good or bad, but again becomes angry when one guest is not properly attired. What's going on here? What's with this king?

These readings reveal God's lavish generosity, offered to everyone regardless of worthiness. They also reveal our role: to accept and come open to God's invitation. We are not asked much, just to put on a "garment" of receptivity. We might also learn from this story to follow God's lead and be equally open to all, regardless of social class, race, level of education, or any other label, and to be generous with our gifts for they come from God.

October 22nd, Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar
and to God what belongs to God.*

We can get caught up in this verse from Sunday's Gospel, as did the Pharisees and Herodians, if we focus on the first part, but the important part is the second: Repay to God what belongs to God. Let us ponder what belongs to God. Jesus asks whose image is on the coin presented to him. We know the answer is Caesar's. Jesus goes on to say give to Caesar what belongs to him. But whose image do we bear? Are we not taught that we are made in God's image? Then do we not belong to God, and thus is God not the one for us to repay? Sunday's Gospel Acclamation puts it another way, but the message is similar: "Shine like lights in the world as you hold on to the word of life." Our obligation is to God—"there is no other"—and we repay God by being a light to the world, loving, caring, forgiving, and

reconciling all without exception. If we do that, just think how much better “Caesar’s” world will be as well.

October 29th, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Love. Love is the theme of Sunday’s readings. Jesus tells a lawyer out to test him that the greatest commandments are all about love, love of God and love of neighbor. The real test is ours: What is love? Who is our neighbor? How do we love both God and neighbor? We need to read further to get some answers. Sunday’s first reading makes it clear that love is action, and loving God requires love of neighbor. Neighbor includes the alien, the widow, the orphan, and the poor, in short, the least among us. And who among us has not at one time or another been an alien, widow (or widower), orphan, or impoverished in some way? In short, neighbor includes everyone. God will not tolerate anything less from us than such all-inclusive love. Let us remember that when we are tempted to exclude, discriminate, or pre-judge anyone because of race, nationality, religion, age, ability, class, sex or sexual orientation, educational level, or even political affiliation. Clearly, love is not easy, but it is what God commands of us. That alone should convince us that it’s worth the effort.

November 5th, Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Unity and Equality. These are the messages of Sunday’s reading. Why? Because we are all children of the one God. We are all one family. One God created us, as it says in the First Reading. We are to show no partiality, no superiority. Rather, we are to be humble, serving one another, as Jesus says in the Gospel. Another tough expectation for those of us who would prefer to be more like the scribes and the Pharisees. Hard to accept that we are no better (or worse) than the beggar on the street or the neighbor who doesn’t pick up after his dog or the co-worker who’s always late or the politician who stands for everything we oppose. This list could probably go on forever, but there we have it. We are all children of the one God, and God calls us to treat each other ever with that in mind—and heart and soul.

November 12th, Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Resplendent and unfading is wisdom...and found by those who seek her.

Sunday’s readings speak of wisdom and readiness. In short, it is wise to be ready, prepared for what might come. We hear about the ten young women awaiting the bridegroom and his bride who are late in coming. Five are prepared for such a possibility with extra oil for their lamps; five are not. The five who are prepared are called wise. This Gospel might be considered a warning to all of us to think ahead, but the First Reading is equally important because it assures us that wisdom is waiting for us if we only seek it. It is not something only available to the few; it is there for all of us should we accept it. And with wisdom, we can be ready for whatever God sends our way.

November 19th, Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

If we don't see Sunday's readings as a challenge, we are probably missing the point. Focusing on the Gospel, we hear about three servants given substantial amounts of money, which is what the talents are at the time of this Gospel. Two servants multiply what they receive and one does not. The two are praised and the one is condemned. What's going on here? Is God condoning "playing the market" and denouncing caution?

There are actually a number of interpretations to this Gospel. One rooted in the cultural history of the time states that the master may be wealthy, but not necessarily through honest means. The two profitable servants follow his suspect example. The third servant is actually the one whose behavior is honest and reputable even in the eyes of some more recent rabbinical scholars. Another interpretation from church historian Eusebius claims that the original version punished the first two servants and praised the third. The more common interpretation compares the "talents" to gifts from God that are ours to use wisely, not abuse as we sometimes do to the environment and one another, and to multiply as we should such virtues as love, mercy, and gratitude. Whatever the original intent, the last interpretation is certainly worth following.

November 26th, Solemnity of Christ the King

Whatever you did for one of the least of mine, you did for me.

Once again we have come to the end of the liturgical year with the Feast of Christ the King, but what a King! This "Christ the King" is no king as we know of kings. This King relates himself to "the least" in the kingdom, and then tells us that whatever we do for the least among us, we do for him. These actions include feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the ill, and visiting the prisoner. Whoa! Really? If we look around us, we see homeless, hungry, thirsty, poorly dressed people on the street in the richest country in the world. We see our government officials denying asylum seekers entry into our country, let alone refuge. We see medical staff struggling to provide for the sick because of inadequate resources in a country that prides itself on its health care. We see prisons overflowing with not only those who need to be there for their own and our safety, but nonviolent people, disproportionately people of color, who do not require incarceration. What are we doing for the least among us in whom our King resides? Let us strive to serve this rather unconventional King who does not command wealth and power, but love and compassion.