



# Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 3, 2019

## Moving Toward a Transformational Love

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In my work as a pastoral associate, I frequently speak with couples preparing for marriage. They often ask for suggestions about readings and desire to have something a little unconventional. When I ask what they mean, they will say something like, “We’ve heard that love reading so many times, and some of the Gospel readings we have heard aren’t what we want to say.” I ask them what they think love is and, after a pause, they begin to tell me

### Sunday Readings

**Jeremiah 1:4–5, 17–19**

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.

**1 Corinthians 12:31—13:13 or  
1 Corinthians 13:4–13**

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

**Luke 4:21–30**

And [Jesus] said, “Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place.”

what they believe about love. It usually includes words like patient, humble, wanting the good of the other. We look at the reading from Corinthians again and they suddenly understand why so many choose it. It is one of the more beautiful descriptions of love that we have, and the love Paul describes is grounded in the Lord—God’s love for us and the love we must have for each other.

I think the ending of the passage is of greatest importance to marriage and the Christian life. Marriage is a process of becoming known. We “put aside childish things,” (1 Corinthians 12:11) like unrealistic notions of romantic love, and work at loving a real person. Spouses begin their marriage knowing each other only partially but grow in understanding with each passing day. That wisdom leads to unity and transforms the spouses. This movement mirrors our life with God. We know very little as baptized infants and children. But as we pray, worship, and serve, we come to know God more until we meet him face to face and our lives are one with his. +

*Marriage is a process of becoming known. We “put aside childish things” and work at loving a real person.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

No matter how many Sunday Masses, if your heart does not reach out to others, if you do not know what is happening to your people, your faith is weak, unhealthy, or dead. It is a faith without Christ; faith without solidarity is faith without Christ, it is faith without God, faith without brothers and sisters.

—Address in  
Paraguay,  
July 12, 2015



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How can I develop the attributes noted in Reading 2: patience, kindness, humility?
- Do I remember to realistically love my spouse (or another loved one), warts and all?

# Called to be Missionaries



If you're Catholic, you are a missionary. All Catholics are called to be missionaries.

That doesn't mean we have to leave home and go to distant lands to preach the gospel to those who have never heard of Jesus, although some Catholics accept that vocation. Every Catholic is a missionary because we all participate in the mission of Christ.

What it means to be Catholic can be described in various ways, but following Jesus is at the heart of it. We are Catholics because God called us to follow Jesus. We follow Jesus out of love, and love is generative. That's the very nature of love.

For example, as a husband and wife grow in their love for one another, they will seek ways to express it beyond themselves. They may decide to have children. They may decide to express their love in a ministry of service. Love

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

always seeks some outward, generative expression. This generative love is at the heart of understanding God as Trinity: The love of the Father generates the only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from their love. This generative love is the reason for creation and the reason for the Incarnation. "God so loved the world ..." It was Jesus' mission to proclaim this love or, in the language of the Bible, to announce the kingdom of God.

Love moved Jesus to open his arms on the cross and to breathe the Holy Spirit into the Church. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). Jesus commissioned us to continue his mission of announcing the kingdom. At the Eucharist, we as a Church gather to proclaim our yes to God's offer of love.

## To the Ends of the Earth

Through the Eucharist, we are continually transforming into Christ's body, empowered by his Spirit. As Catholics, we are to be the sacrament, the outward sign of the "I love you" that God spoke in Christ. God doesn't want this great love to be a secret. God wants this "I love you" to embrace everyone. For that to happen, the Catholic Church must be a missionary Church.

Being a missionary is what makes being Catholic so exciting! Being Catholic is not just membership in a club or something we do occasionally at our parish. Being Catholic means we are missionaries of the good news, living signs of God's generative love.

We announce by words, but especially by our deeds, that the way things are is not how they have to be. We don't have to live in fear. God's love is more powerful than evil. Peace is possible. Sins are forgiven. Justice will triumph. Death isn't the end. Easter holds the final word! To carry this message—to participate in Jesus' mission—is the joy of being Catholic.

## Living Signs

Not everyone enjoys being Catholic. I think of the man who, when asked why he no longer went to Mass, replied: "Because I see Catholics in church looking as holy as Christ himself. But when they walk outside, you can't tell them from anybody else."

That's where being a missionary kicks in. When we walk out those doors, can people see we are different? I don't mean different in some superficial way. Are we more tolerant, open, truthful, inclusive, and just? Are we more concerned about the poor and generous with our wealth? In short, are we more Catholic?

If our mission is to announce the kingdom of God, we must be living signs of that kingdom. +



*Lord, your love never fails. Help me to embrace life with gratitude and love and joyfully welcome all people into my heart.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

February 4–9

**Monday, Weekday:**  
Heb 11:32–40 / Mk 5:1–20

**Tuesday, St. Agatha:**  
Heb 12:1–4 / Mk 5:21–43

**Wednesday, St. Paul Miki and Companions:** Heb 12:4–7, 11–15 / Mk 6:1–6

**Thursday, Weekday:**  
Heb 12:18–19, 21–24 / Mk 6:7–13

**Friday, Weekday:**  
Heb 13:1–8 / Mk 6:14–29

**Saturday, Weekday:**  
Heb 13:15–17, 20–21 / Mk 6:30–34



# Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 10, 2019

## Glimpsing God's Abundance

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In her later years, my mother lived on a lake in Wisconsin, not far from our home. There, our daughters learned to swim and fish. One day, when our younger daughter was about eight, we went to the end of the pier to fish quietly. She had learned to cast her rod after a fashion and was happily doing that when I looked out to where I expected to see the bobber on her line and realized it wasn't there. Just as I started to ask about it, she gave a little yell as her line suddenly took off and she grabbed her rod to hang on. She saw the foot-long

bass jump out of the water a little distance away and her eyes widened. With some help, she got the fish to the pier, where my husband netted it. The amazement of a child who had never caught more than small fish was evident, and she proudly helped clean it for the evening meal.

I can only imagine what the apostles, who were seasoned fishermen, felt that day on the Sea of Galilee, the subject of today's Gospel. Likely it was amazement at this stranger who apparently knew more about fishing than they did, but there was also a glimpse of an abundance they didn't know was possible and a sense that Jesus meant life for them. Peter drops to his knees, suddenly aware of his doubts and sins. Jesus simply tells him not to be afraid, shows him what he can do with God's help, and waits for him to follow. Let's approach the life God calls us to with the same amazement and humility. +

## Sunday Readings

**Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8**

I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send?" ... "Here I am," I said; "send me!"

**1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or**

**1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 11**

After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

**Luke 5:1-11**

[Simon said,] "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets."

*The apostles likely were amazed at this stranger who apparently knew more about fishing than they did.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

Let us ask ourselves: How do I follow Jesus? Jesus speaks in silence in the mystery of the Eucharist. He reminds us every time that following him means going out of ourselves and not making our life a possession of our own, but rather a gift to him and to others.

—Solemnity of Corpus Christi, May 30, 2013



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I make a practice of offering my doubts and temptations to God?
- When life is difficult, can I use prayer to calm my fears?

# Rising From a Spiritual Rut



She was in a rut. As she trudged through the routine, she ticked off the mental litany: Get water, wash dishes, do laundry, cook meals. Then she got nudged out of her rut and into another world. Sound familiar? You may know her by another name: the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4–42).

She may seem like us. The woman at the well follows a worn path, when she is surprised by a stranger. Jesus' request for a drink is preposterous. Even today, Orthodox Jews don't share meals or vessels with those whose dietary practices are less strict than theirs. Furthermore, Jesus comes tired and thirsty to a well without a bucket! Even more shocking, he, who isn't even supposed to talk publicly with a woman, takes a playful tone with her.

Jesus is no lover of ruts. He entered human life in a totally unexpected way—

By Kathy Coffey

born in a stable, not a palace; to young peasants, not royalty. He refused to believe the teachers who protested, "But we've always done it this way!"

Jesus shakes people from their comfy grooves. He broke taboos; he healed and promoted compassion. Blind Bartimaeus gladly gave up his begging routine. Matthew abandoned the daily grind of tax collecting. Jesus startled his disciples, upsetting their calcified notions of holiness. And we who follow Christ, what do we do when we're stuck?

We might search out each day's unique joys. We can find beauty year round: blue shadows on snow, first buds tight as fists, sunlight playing on summer leaves, brassy colors of autumnal harvest. Saint Teresa of Ávila once described the spiritual life as dragging buckets to water a garden (remember, she lived in dry Spain). Then, God's grace comes as rain, disrupting the weary routine.

If we don't take those routines too seriously, we discover that the world doesn't end if we shift them a bit. A regular at the 9 AM Sunday Mass? Try the Saturday afternoon. You may meet old friends you haven't seen in years. For a wild-and-crazy change, attend a different parish! (It might make you appreciate your own.) If Scripture is growing stale, spend time instead with the marvelous spiritual authors writing now.

If your routine has been centering prayer, try praying with music. Or set aside your usual devotions and spend a few silent minutes each day simply

listening for God's whisper. Why cling to practices that fail to nurture? If it's not feeding you, quit doing it—at least for a while. No hard and fast rules restrict how we read, reflect, or pray.

Surely the disciples on the road to Emmaus knew what it was like to be paralyzed in a rut of sorrow and anxiety. When a "stranger" (Jesus) joins them, Luke 24:17 records, "They stopped, looking downcast." Stuck in the ultimate rut of grief, they don't start moving again until Jesus encourages them to share their story. Despite already knowing, he asks what's been happening in Jerusalem. Take note: telling Jesus of our stuck situation is a good first step beyond it.

If we've slid into a rut, we must nurture our deepest selves with whatever we need: a walk, bike ride, latte, book, new shirt, a change of routine, or time with a friend. Self-nurturing may seem "selfish," but we are God's beloved children! God designed our minds, souls, and bodies for stimulation, not stagnation.

God's creation brims with beautiful variety. Maybe it's time to look at the night sky, stroll through a meadow or a botanical garden, taste something new from the produce aisle or farmer's market. *Vive la différence!* +

## PRAYER

*Lord, you are the Word made flesh. Open my heart to share your message of love and hope with the people around me.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

February 11–16

**Monday, Weekday:**

Gn 1–19 / Mk 6:53–56

**Tuesday, Weekday:**

Gn 1:20–2:4a / Mk 7:1–13

**Wednesday, Weekday:**

Gn 2:4b–9, 15–17 / Mk 7:14–23

**Thursday, Sts. Cyril and Methodius:**


Gn 2:18–25 / Mk 7:24–30

**Friday, Weekday:**

Gn 3:1–8 / Mk 7:31–37

**Saturday, Weekday:**

Gn 3:9–24 / Mk 8:1–10

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February 10, 2019

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# Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 17, 2019

## God's Nurturing Messengers

By Dan Finucane

Flower bulbs have an “up” end and a “down” end. It matters how you plant them. I didn't know that when I was a teenager. If you plant bulbs pointing up, they grow and blossom. If you plant them pointing down, they're in trouble. If you plant them more or less at random, there could be gaps in the flower bed.

I learned this one spring when our parish got a new pastor. He hired a few of us from the parish. I was the flower planter. He didn't select me for this job because of my knowledge of flowers. He picked me because he wanted to hire young parishioners to give us a little

spending money.

Later that spring, when the flowers starting blooming, some of mine didn't. Our new pastor wasn't upset. He thought it was funny. He thought I could learn a little about planting bulbs...but I learned a whole lot more from this man who knew people have to grow into the job of being human. People might start going in the wrong direction, but they can be turned around with gentleness. They might even blossom.

The Bible is full of plant images. Today Jeremiah describes how a shrub in the desert doesn't know when its next drink will come. He describes those who are really blessed—the ones who are planted by a stream.

The Scriptures aren't really trying to give us information about plants. (I haven't found anything helpful there about bulbs.) But some basic growing points are clear. God isn't too keen on tearing up the garden. God plants near living streams. God teaches us to *trust* by an amazing, surprising strategy. God gives us messengers who *trust us*, guide us, nurture us—give us room to grow. +

***People might start going in the wrong direction, but they can be turned around with gentleness.***

## Sunday Readings

### Jeremiah 17:5–8

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD...They are like a tree planted beside the waters.

### 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16–20

Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

### Luke 6:17, 20–26

And raising his eyes toward his disciples [Jesus] said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.”

## A Word from Pope Francis

No vocation is born of itself or lives for itself. A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people, in the experience of fraternal love. Did not Jesus say: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”?

—Day of prayer for vocations, May 11, 2014



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I available to mentor others, especially a young person who is heading in the wrong direction?
- Am I grateful towards those who mentor or nurture me?

# The Beatitudes' Promises



Who are the happy, fortunate, blessed people? What is the source of happiness?

One of the most important, paradoxical sections in Scripture is the vision of happiness Jesus gives in his Sermon on the Mount. In the Gospels of Matthew (5:3–10) and Luke (6:20–26), Jesus proclaims what blessedness is and makes promises to those who follow his proclamation. The blessed, happy, and fortunate, he tells us, are the poor in spirit, those who mourn and are merciful, those who seek righteousness and peace, the pure in heart, and the persecuted. The promise awaiting them is God's kingdom!

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* In our more honest moments, we recognize our neediness, intellectual limitations, spiritual inadequacies, and moral failures.

By Bishop Robert F. Morneau

In our helplessness, we turn to God. Our response of gratitude, itself a grace, means the kingdom of heaven is ours.

*Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.* Life's journey involves having our hearts broken repeatedly. Sometimes this is due to our own sin, sometimes because of the cruelty of others. Jesus reminds us that the truth sets us free. Those who are honest about their sorrows and sins will gain his consolation.

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.* These meek individuals strive to emulate Jesus in obedience, and submit to whatever is sent their way. The meek know that God is ultimately in control, and they are about doing his divine will. Peace will be their everlasting inheritance.

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.* We all have longings: for meaning, intimacy, and depth. But one of the deepest longings is for justice. Only when rights are protected and promoted, when we fulfill our obligations to God and to others, will this hunger and thirst be satisfied.

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.* If we give mercy, we shall get mercy. God has been merciful to us, and we should pass this gift to others. A merciless Christian is a contradiction in terms. Mercy is love in the face of sin and injury. Mercy is the presence of Jesus in a wounded, fractured world.

*Blessed are the clean of heart, for*

*they will see God.* The pure of heart are those who are undefiled by attitudes that distance us from God. We know our seeing is dependent upon the condition of our hearts. If pure, we shall see the glory of God and our own as well as others' dignity.

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.* God's peace is the rightness of relationships. Peace embraces four satellites: truth, charity, freedom, and justice. Peacemakers are instruments of all four of these graces. When that work is done well, they know themselves to be blessed because they are truly children of God.

*Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* This beatitude exemplifies Jesus' radical message: that persecution and happiness go together. The true Christian longs to share fully in the life of Jesus: his life, suffering, death, and resurrection. This is the gateway into the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus' mission was to take people from sin and death into the happiness of heaven. The beatitudes describe his vision, charting the path to make that journey. In the end, it is all the work of the Holy Spirit. +

## PRAYER

*Lord, you never forget us;  
you answer all our needs.  
Keep me from being anxious  
about many things.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

February 18–23

**Monday, Weekday:**

Gn 4:1–15, 25 / Mk 8:11–13

**Tuesday, Weekday:**

Gn 6:5–8; 7:1–5, 10 / Mk 8:14–21

**Wednesday, Weekday:**

Gn 8:6–13, 20–22 / Mk 8:22–26

**Thursday, Weekday:**

Gn 9:1–13 / Mk 8:27–33

**Friday, Chair of St. Peter:**

1 Pt 5:1–4 / Mt 16:13–19

**Saturday, St. Polycarp:**

Heb 11:1–7 / Mk 9:2–13



# Bringing Home the Word

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 24, 2019

## Learning to Love Our Enemy

By Paige Byrne Shortal

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you....” Oh no! This impossible gospel again! Love your enemies? Turn the other cheek? If someone takes my cloak, I don’t give him my tunic. I look for a way to get it back and sue for damages besides.

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” Jesus didn’t just preach. He acted as he wants us to act and tells us, “Do as I do.” “Love one another as I have loved you,” he said. At the Last Supper after he washed his disciples’ feet, he said, “I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

But love my enemies?

Well, OK, who is my enemy? For

some it is the enemy of our nation. For others it is our current president and his administration, whoever it happens to be. For some the enemy is those who criticize the Church. For others it is the Church’s leadership. For some the enemy is a boss or former boss. For some it’s black people or white people, rich people or poor people, refugees who are trying to get into our country or citizens who are trying to keep them out. For some the enemy is as close to home as a parent who was abusive, a brother or sister, a daughter-in-law or son-in-law, an ex-spouse.

We tend to think *our* enemy is the exception; that *our* reason for hating is reasonable and not what Jesus was talking about. Find me the Gospel passage that offers the exception. I’d really like to read it and let myself off the hook.

If we have a hatred that’s gnawing at us, perhaps this points the way to our Lenten discipline. If we can’t love our enemies, we can pray for the grace to do so. If we can’t pray to love our enemies, we can pray for the desire to do so. If we can’t pray for the desire to love them, we can at least pray for the desire for the desire. Let’s start on Ash Wednesday. +

***We tend to think that our enemy is the exception.***

## A Word from Pope Francis

The cross of Christ bears the suffering and the sin of mankind, including our own. Jesus accepts all this with open arms, bearing on his shoulders our crosses and saying to us: “Have courage! You do not carry your cross alone! I carry it with you.”

—World Youth Day, July 26, 2013



## Sunday Readings

**1 Samuel 26:2, 7–9, 12–13, 22–23**

The LORD repays everyone’s righteousness and faithfulness.

**1 Corinthians 15:45–49**

Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.

**Luke 6:27–38**

[Jesus said,] “Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back.”

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I look for the good in others, including those I dislike?
- Can I pray for the grace to understand—and even love—my enemies?

# Battling Addiction— Surrendering to God's Grace



By Paul M. Smith

*"I don't belong here!"* kept repeating in my impaired brain as I sat propped against the concrete wall. My head was pounding, my stomach churning. *"I'm the father of three, a community leader, a radio and television personality. How could this happen again?"*

The evening was a blur except for the flashing lights in my rearview mirror, prompting a familiar sinking feeling. There was no point in taking the field sobriety test. I could barely stand, much less walk a straight line. I vaguely remember verbally abusing the arresting officer and faking a heart attack in an attempt to avoid a Breathalyzer test. No one was fooled. My blood-alcohol content was well over the legal limit.

Now, sitting in the drunk tank, surrounded by a dozen men, some vomiting, others lying in their urine, I wondered:

*"How could I have fallen this low again?"*

I hadn't gone more than a day or two in my adult life without drinking or using drugs, usually both. I was fourteen when I took my first drink, whiskey straight from the bottle. I drank the whole thing and passed out.

As a teenager, drinking helped me fit in. It made me feel more comfortable around people. I could talk to girls. I even thought I could dance. (I now know that I can't!) Later there came two divorces, multiple arrests, the threat of losing good jobs, and the alienation of my children. My response was to simply drink and drug more. Finally, yet another humiliating arrest convinced me of my powerlessness. It was only then that the grace of God could enter me to expel my obsession for self-destructive drinking.

My conversion was gradual. I had abandoned my strict Catholic upbringing in favor of the lure of the world. Having no idea how to live on life's terms and with nothing to numb the pain, I became more miserable with each passing day. I visited recovery groups but rebelled against joining a twelve-step program. They talked of a Higher Power and, though I believed in God, I had kept him out of my life.

Then I met the man who would become my spiritual guide. A recovering alcoholic himself, this missionary priest showed me by gentle example his love for Jesus and the Church. I gradually became willing to ask for help and to embrace the support community that is the backbone

of recovery. I had to break my natural tendency towards isolation in order to join in the group.

I returned to church, becoming active in my parish. I was encouraged to pray and make a fearless examination of conscience, followed by an honest confession in the sacrament of reconciliation. I humbly received the Body and Blood of Christ. Through receiving his Precious Blood for this final time, I was freed from my past sins, became willing to make amends, and able to become the man I was created to be. The Catholic formation of my youth has become a firm foundation for continued spiritual growth.

Life is still filled with daily challenges, hardship, and pain. I'm still an addict, but my "addiction" today is to God's grace. Through faith, there is joy, hope, and love-sustaining substitutes for chemical escape.

I'm grateful that the obsession to drink and drug has been lifted by God's grace. As I face other destructive patterns in my daily walk, I'm reminded of the words of St. Paul as he struggled with his "thorn ... in the flesh." The Lord spoke to him saying, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). +

**PRAYER**

*Lord, you command me to love my neighbor. May your love dispel the hatred and resentment in my heart so that I may love all people unconditionally.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

February 25–March 2

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


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

**Wednesday, Weekday:**  
Sir 4:11–19 / Mk 9:38–40

**Thursday, Weekday:**  
Sir 5:1–8 / Mk 9:41–50

**Friday, Weekday:**  
Sir 6:5–17 / Mk 10:1–12

**Saturday, Weekday:**  
Sir 17:1–15 / Mk 10:13–16

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