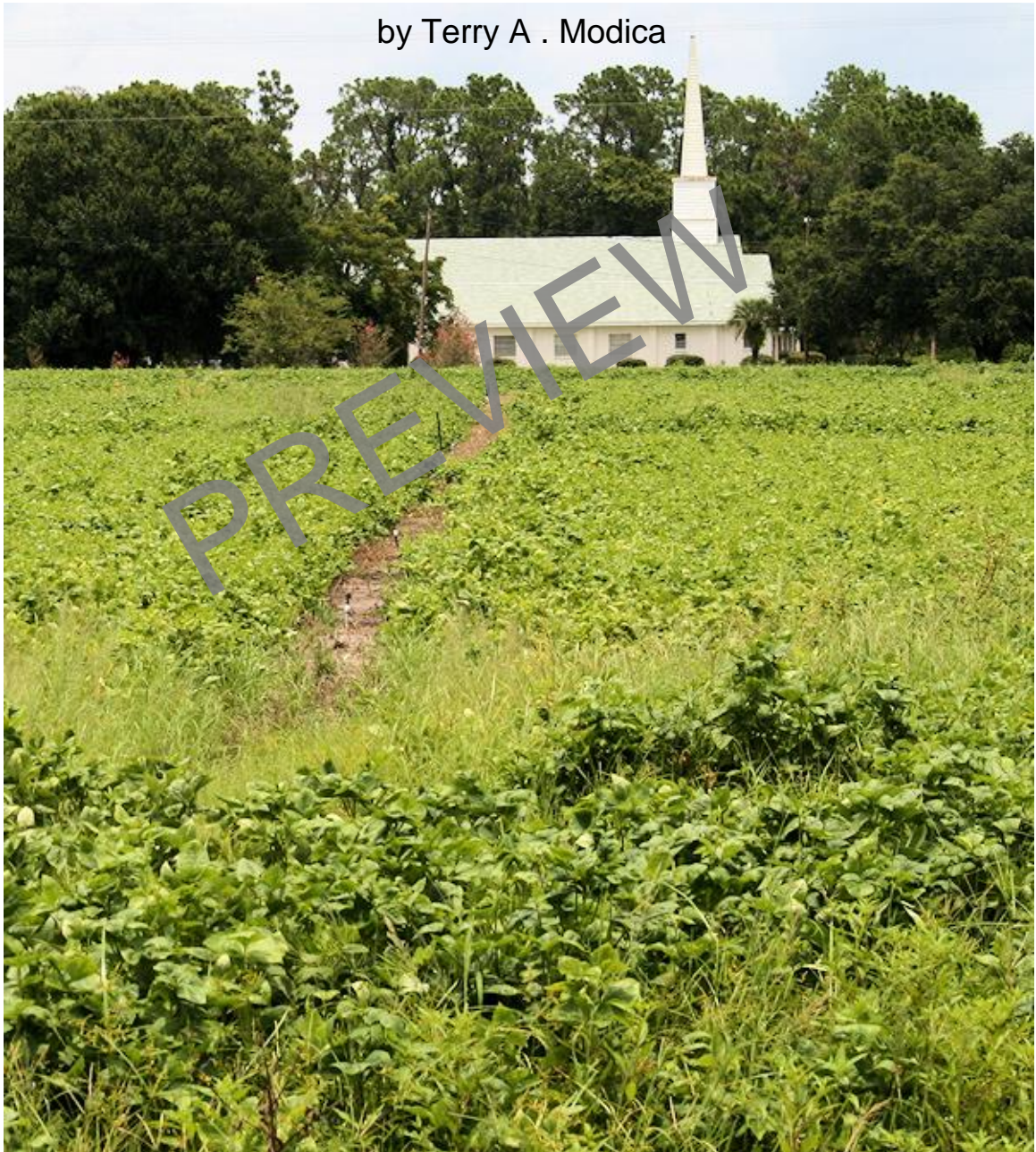


Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of July 2017

by Terry A . Modica



13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 2, 2017

Read:

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

Ps 89:2-3, 16-19

Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

Matthew 10:37-42

Reflect:

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus emphasizes the importance of keeping our eyes on him and always making him our top priority. Nothing else matters as much as our relationship with God. This means following Jesus wherever he leads, doing everything his way, all the way, every day, giving him our 100% (no excuses for being mediocre in our faith), laying down our lives in service to others like he did.

Laying down our lives means making sacrifices, such as giving our cup of cold water to someone who's thirsty. It means receiving someone into our busy schedules and listening for the prophet in him; for example: What is God saying to us through this person?

When we refuse to lay down our lives for others, we reject the Cross of Christ and his sufferings, which he submitted to for our sake. This does not mean, however, that we can never say no to others. Jesus wants to lead us away from the harm of abuse or demands that are sinful or the enabling of unhealthy behaviors. Saying no in such cases is yet another Way of the Cross.

When we truly follow Christ, we can receive all that he is and all that he has for us. When we let go of our fears and personal goals, letting Jesus lead us into new places and new ways of handling problems, we discover new life in Christ. His ways are always far better than what we had feared would happen.

This is the difference between a mediocre faith and a life in Christ that is full of adventures, miracles, surprising solutions, healing, victories, and realizing how very precious and important we are to God.



Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Who has asked you (either consciously or unaware) to lay down a part of your life for them?

† When have you said no?

† When have you said yes -- and was it worth the sacrifice?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Why is laying down our lives for the needs or requests of others worthwhile? Share a story from your own life that illustrates this.

Comments/Prayer Requests:

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 16, 2017

Read:

Isaiah 55:10-11

Ps 65:10-14

Romans 8:18-23

Matthew 13:1-23

Reflect:

This Sunday's readings are about sowing seeds. The important thing to remember about seed sowing is that the effort is worthless if the seeds are not changed by being cast to the ground.



Each seed must give up its former self, dying in the dirt while new life stirs within it. Only then can it send out a tender, first root, which will multiply and grow stronger and deeper to support upward growth. Even so, it has to be properly nourished to survive.

If all this takes place, the end result is a plant that looks nothing like the seed, which as it grows develops the ever-more important mission of benefitting the wider world of Nature beyond itself.

As we listen to Jesus explain the parable, we say yes, we want to be seeds that become fruitful lives. But desiring it does not automatically transform us. What is it that makes the soil of our lives rich and growth-producing?

The reading from Isaiah tells us that it is God himself who is the rich soil -- God and his Word. Saint Paul reminds us in the second reading that suffering is part of creation (seeds must fall in the dirt and die in order to produce a fruitful life). Redemption grows from suffering and death.

We will never feel truly fulfilled until we've surrendered to the soil and have allowed God to nourish our growth.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What tender, new roots do you have that are sprouting from times of suffering and loss?

† What blessings are springing up from them?

† What ministry (what benefit to others) could be a fruitful gift of these blessings?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Share with your faith sharing group what it means to give up your former self to allow new life to stir and grow.

† What is the will of God (what does the Word say) regarding the end result? Give examples from your life or from the lives of others.

Comments/Prayer Requests:

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 30, 2017

Read:

1 Kings 3:5,7-12

Ps 119:57,72,76-77,127-130

Romans 8:28-30

Matthew 13:44-52

Reflect:

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God is like a buried treasure, a pearl purchased at all cost, and a net from which the bad catch of fish will be tossed away and the good catch will be valued.

In other words, our Christian lives are a huge cache of valuables. If our treasure chest has any worthless trash, the garbage needs to be tossed away to make room for more valuables. Some of our treasures have only temporary, earthly value, and ultimately they be will worthless unless they're used for the kingdom of God.

The reading from Romans tells us that all things work together for the good of those who love God. As we purge our lives of false pearls and dead fish, we become more like our Lord. We become more useful to the kingdom of God. Even the bad things that happen to us, under the creative hand of our all-powerful, mercifully loving God, get put to good use as polishing cloths that brighten our pearls and bring out from us a better shine.

In the first reading, Solomon could have asked God for great wealth and he would have received it, but he asked for an understanding heart so that he'd have wisdom to rule the nation well. Even though he ruled imperfectly, his reputation as the wisest king on earth spread throughout the known world *and* he accumulated great wealth.

This is meant to teach us that when we seek first the treasures of God's kingdom, then we can safely use the treasures of the earth, because God's wisdom guides us in using them for the benefit of his kingdom. The more we love Christ and follow his ways,



the easier it is to identify what's really valuable, separate out the junk that does not belong to God, and use everything else for his purposes.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What treasures are buried within you? What pearls of wisdom have you gained, and what did it cost you to learn these?

† Write a list of your many good qualities. How do they prove that the Lord's presence is within you?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Choose one treasure, gift, or pearl that God has given to you – something that reveals the kingdom of God. How did you discover it or gain it?

† What affect does it have on others?

Comments/Prayer Requests: