



Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of November, 2016

by Terry A . Modica



32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 6, 2016

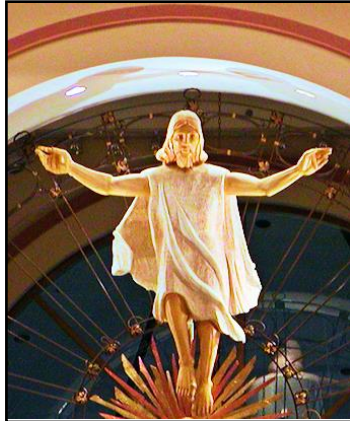
Read:

2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14

Ps 17:1, 5-6, 8, 15

2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5

Luke 20:27-38



Reflect:

Do you believe in the resurrection? That's the question that Jesus indirectly poses when he challenges the Sadducees in this Sunday's Gospel reading.

As Christians, we believe that someday we will experience a resurrection like Christ's after we depart from this present earthly "age" or stage of life. All believers who follow Jesus will live as the angels do. This is why Catholic funeral Masses are Resurrection Masses and use white instead of black as the liturgical color.

But do you believe in the resurrection of love? Jesus explained the resurrection in terms of marriage. A marriage is supposed to be a reflection of God's radical love for his people. Marriage is supposed to unite a man and a woman in an enduring love that is the very presence of God. It gives witness to the world that God's faithfulness and commitment to us is real.

So why would Jesus say that marriage is not a part of the resurrection of the dead? Why won't today's marriages become perfect and continue forever after both husband and wife have entered heaven?

Here on earth, love is imperfectly given and imperfectly received. Therefore, it's constantly dying and being resurrected again, every day, to the extent that each spouse repents and forgives. (The same is true of any friendship.)

Perfect love is God. We live as true children of God when we love our brothers and sisters the way he loves them. Marriage does not exist in heaven because it's an imperfect love: We love our spouses

more than we love others. In heaven, we will love our spouses fully (yes, even our ex-spouses!) *and* we will love everyone else just as much. And those who have loved us poorly will love us better than the best spouse could love us now.

Marriage is only an earthly foreshadowing of the divine, faithful, creative love that we will share with everyone in heaven.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Who has failed to love you enough? Who has caused you pain?

† How would you feel if that person were to greet you at the entrance of heaven at the moment of your death?

† Do you have enough love for that person to get you through the door?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How is a marriage like God's love?

† Describe the ways that God loves us, and relate these signs of true love to what you've experienced in good friendships. How is this a foretaste of heaven?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 13, 2016

Read:

Malachi 3:19-20a

Ps 98:5-9

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

Luke 21:5-19



Reflect:

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus says that the day will come when not one stone of the temple will be left mortared to another, because it will all be torn down. He's reminding us that everything here on earth is temporary.

Think of what you enjoy here on earth. It's temporary. What causes you to suffer? It too is temporary. What of this world do you depend on? It's temporary. What do you admire, trust, save, hope for, spend working hours to achieve and plan relaxation hours for a reward? It's all temporary – unless we are using it for the Kingdom of God.

We know that we're supposed to focus on the things of God, things that will last for all of eternity, but we're uncomfortable with the blind faith that this requires. We are like the disciples who looked for God's vindication against injustices and immorality in the temporal world: wars, earthquakes, plagues and famines. We wish that Jesus would hurry up with his Second Coming and stop all the evils and hardships.

In our daily lives, we seek God's help, but we look for something tangible upon which to base our faith. We want to know the future; we don't like the insecurity of not knowing what God has planned. We depend on what we can see more than we depend on God whom we cannot see, so we ask God to give us signs.

However, the best way to walk forward with God is to raise one foot in air, preparing to take the next step, and – while that foot is still in the air – ask God: "Where do *You* want me to place my foot next?"

This takes balance; if we don't remain centered in God, we teeter and fall. If God doesn't show us im-

mediately where to put our foot down to move forward, we can either fall away or fall into his hand.

God's hand is never temporary! God's hand provides true security based only on his endless, all-powerful, all-knowing love. It doesn't always feel that way, but his love and protection never fail.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What help from God are you currently waiting for? What wars and insurrections are plaguing your life?

† Do you believe that your problem is temporary or do you fear that it's permanent?

† What will you do this week to entrust yourself to the wisdom and guidance of Jesus?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† When waiting for God's guidance, how do you stay centered on God? How do you find and hold your balance while you've got one foot wavering in the air?

† What if you were to put your foot down in the wrong place and move in the wrong direction? Does God protect you then? How?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Our Lord Jesus Christ the King

November 20, 2016

Read:

2 Samuel 5:1-3

Ps 122:1-5

Colossians 1:12-20

Luke 23:35-43



Reflect:

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, one of the criminals hanging next to Jesus on the cross represents us. Jesus is our king and we want to spend eternity with him in his kingdom. As long as we have this attitude, there is no reason to doubt that when we die we will join Jesus in Paradise.

As the king of heaven, Jesus has the right and the authority to choose who is allowed into his kingdom. And as this Good Friday thief shows us, Jesus says, "Yes, come in, welcome!" to anyone who recognizes his authority.

Let's look at what the authority of Jesus is like. At the Last Supper, when he washed the feet of his disciples, he made it clear that the heavenly king exerts his authority by serving those who belong to his kingdom.

The next day, he took a crown of thorns instead of a crown of gold, because the glory of his kingship is not represented by earthly treasures but by riches that are given to others, the personal sacrifices that are motivated by love, even for those who don't deserve it.

After his resurrection, although he'd been healed from the destruction of death, his five crucifixion wounds were not healed. To this day, he still bears those wounds as a continual reminder to us that he does not use his authority for his own benefit, but for ours. Earthly kings wear expensive rings on their hands; our heavenly king wears the marks of sacrifice.

We belong to God's kingdom when we lovingly we serve others with Christ, when we understand the glory of giving generously to others, of making personal sacrifices, and of loving those who don't deserve our love.

If we offer to Jesus our sufferings because we realize that they have value, we wear the five wounds of Jesus in our souls. Of course we will join Jesus in Paradise – we have already united ourselves to him!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Reflect on a time when you submitted yourself to Christ's authority by obeying a difficult teaching of the Church or by doing something Christ-like that you didn't want to do. Did you feel loved by God? Did you feel served? How will you to become more aware of his service to you?

† What are you holding onto today that does not belong to his kingdom? What will you do this week to allow Jesus to be your king in every area of your life?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Name some of the ways that Jesus serves us. Does he do it directly to you or through other people in his kingdom?

† When you serve others, how is this a recognition of the kingship of Christ?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

1st Sunday of Advent

November 27, 2016

Read:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Ps 122:1-9

Romans 13:11-14

Matt 24:37-44

Reflect:

Hope is the theme of the First Sunday of Advent. In the readings for Mass, Isaiah describes a future in which all is well because (1) God is recognized as the highest authority and (2) obeying him is the people's highest priority.

This vision gave great hope to the oppressed Israelites. Today if we look at this as a description of heaven, it gives great hope to us, too. When we die, "terms" will be "imposed" upon us because we did not stay entirely on the paths of God (a good reason for purgatory), but we will be living in the light of the Lord after death and there will be no more wars to battle.

Knowing that this is our future, we can look at our present trials as preparations for heaven. The weapons that we use now to defeat and overcome the powers of darkness can be used as plowshares for enriching our soil (our earthly life), bringing us into new growth and producing a harvest in ministry. Sufferings that are turned into ministries to help others make hardships very valuable.

Although Isaiah was speaking of the coming of the world's Messiah through the Jews, these verses remind us that when we respect God's authority and make imitating Christ our highest priority, all is well for us. Our battles against evil aren't over yet, but Jesus has already won the victory for us. Our hope is not based on a wish for peace; our hope comes from the reality of what Jesus has already done and what he will do. So, "let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord!" (Psalm 122).



The Gospel reading tells us that our hope is realized only if we stay awake and alert to the activities of Christ. What are you despairing about? Despair and worry are merely distractions that make us forget that Christ has already won the battle. If we stay alert to the presence of Christ, recognizing his authority and following his ways, we live in hope – not wishful thinking, but a hope that's based firmly on reality.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What are you despairing about?

† What would it take for you to feel hopeful? In what way do you need Jesus to come to you now?

† What can you do to become more aware of his presence at your side?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How do you find hope in difficulties?

† Describe a time when you nearly lost all hope. How did Jesus rescue you from this?

Comments/Prayer Requests: