

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of November, 2018

by Terry A . Modica



31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 4, 2018

Read:

Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Ps 18:2-4, 47, 51

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 12:28b-34



Reflect:

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus asserted the two greatest commands of the Law. He quoted from the ancient Hebrew scriptures, which we have for today's first reading. And the second reading, from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, explains how the Law of Love supersedes or fulfills all other laws. Jesus, who loved perfectly and never sinned against anyone, sacrificed himself for sinners. Therefore, we who want to follow him to heaven need to follow in his footsteps of love, by loving God and everyone else whole-heartedly.

Try as we might, though, we love imperfectly; we sin. The best penance, then, is an act of love, especially if it's a sacrifice offered to (or for) those who were harmed by our sin. But the damage we've caused has a ripple effect that goes far beyond anything we can see. This is remedied in the Catholic Church's Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus -- through the priest -- accepts our remorse and absolves our sins, while the entire earthly Body of Christ (the Church) -- through the priest -- accepts our penances for the earthly damage that our sins have caused.

Penance is not only an act of love, it's designed to strengthen our resolve to choose love when tempted to sin again. If the priest gives us an easy penance (for example, "Say the Lord's Prayer and three Hail Marys"), if we really want to become holier, we should ask God during those three Hail Marys for a penance that's a more difficult act of love. We should choose a sacrifice, something that requires loving God with our whole heart, soul, and mind as well as loving ourselves and our neighbors just as much.

Saint Anthony Mary Claret said, "The love of Christ arouses us, urges us to run, and to fly, lifted on the wings of holy zeal." How high is your love flying? Zeal

is a good measuring instrument of how much we love God.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Whom have you loved imperfectly this week?

† What act of penance could you do that would be an exercise in loving them better, treating them the way Jesus would?

† When will you complete the reconciliation through the sacraments of the Church?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What does "zeal" mean?

† Name some of the ways that we love God with zeal.

† Tell the story of a time when you made a sacrifice because of love. How did this reveal Jesus to others?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 11, 2018

Read:

1 Kings 17:10-16
Ps 146:7-10 (with 1b)
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44



Reflect:

Following Jesus requires trust, because he often takes us to unexpected places that require new growth, difficult sacrifices, and moving beyond the boundaries of what's familiar and comfortable.

Consider the two widows in the first reading and the Gospel. How could they give what common sense says they could not afford? Did they know with total certainty that God would take care of their needs? No. So they gave all they had because they were so in love with God that they trusted his love for them.

Trust is a sign of genuine love -- especially when the one we trust is God.

We can love others more freely and generously if we trust God to help us through the difficulties that occur when people prove themselves untrustworthy. Our freedom to love others unconditionally is not based upon how safe we are with them; it's based on how safe we are with God.

Each widow gave what she could not afford to lose. We cannot afford to love those who will cause us grief and disappointment and feelings of rejection, and yet Jesus tells us to forgive them and do good to them and go the extra mile for them.

Sometimes doing good to those who are difficult to love must include "tough love", which asserts boundaries that they are not allowed to cross. Remember what Jesus did: Until Good Friday, Jesus always walked away from his persecutors. Did he give up on them? Did he stop loving them? Not at all. Following Christ means that we have to watch for and trust God's timing on speaking up versus walking away.

Sometimes doing good to those who are difficult to love must include enabling them to reap what they

sow so that they begin to understand their need to repent. Instead of cleaning up their messes, we have to let them suffer from it. Think about it: Does God clean up our messes before we repent? Usually he won't even do that after we repent. What would we learn if someone else does the damage control?

Loving others always includes sacrificing ourselves and relying on God to comfort us, heal us, restore us, and bless us. We can trust God for this. Our jar of whatever we pour out to others for the sake of love will never go empty.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Jesus cares about you much more than anyone else can. Are you willing to look to him for the fullness of love that you need?

† What makes you feel unsafe with God? What needs healing or correction in your thinking so that you sit on Daddy-God's lap and feel secure and fully loved?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe a time when you gave more than you thought you could: more money, more love, more time, more patience -- more of anything. What motivated you to be so generous? What were the end results? What did you learn from it?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 18, 2018

Read:

Daniel 12:1-3

Ps 16:5, 8-11

Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

Mark 13:24-32



Reflect:

Do you have an unending problem? Where's Jesus? In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus speaks of his Second Coming. And here he hasn't even finished his first coming! How confusing it must have been to the disciples.

They grew even more confused after Jesus died, was resurrected, and ascended to heaven but delayed coming back. They remembered him saying that "this generation" will not pass away until all these Second Coming events have taken place, yet time passed, the apostles began to die off, and Jesus still had not reappeared in the clouds. The misery of living in this world continued.

Think of your own unending problem. Don't you wish Jesus would hurry up with his Second Coming and destroy all evil? Notice what Jesus said: "When you see these things happening, know that I am near, at the gates." He didn't give us a definitive clue about God's timing. So what was he trying to convey?

His nearness!

For the past 2000+ years, we have all been part of "this generation" that will not pass away before his Second Coming. It's the generation of Christian humanity, the Body of Christ on Earth in the form of Church community, the generation of children who have been adopted by God the Father through the sacrifice and resurrection of God the Son.

The final era (the "last days") of salvation began on the first Pentecost and will continue until the Second Coming of Christ. It is the age of the Holy Spirit, when Christ's earthly ministry is continued through us who are empowered by his Spirit.

The lesson in the fig tree is that we can discern when summer is near. In other words, we can discern -- in good times and in bad -- that Jesus is near to us, not in the flesh except during Mass in the Eucharist, but in his Holy Spirit.

Jesus is right now at "the gate" of your next step on the journey to heaven. A gate is meant to be opened so that we can pass through it. Jesus is opening the gate right now for you -- the gate of holiness, the gate of love. Step through it to live in the fullness of the mission he has planned for you here on earth.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What problems are you waiting to be rescued from? Is Jesus really taking too long, or is there a bigger, better plan he's fulfilling on your behalf?

† What do you need to do to become more aware of his nearness, his comfort, his joy and peace to help you endure the long wait?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What are the signs that the Church gives us that help us discern the nearness of Christ?

† What other "fig trees" has Jesus given to you that increase your hope and patience and endurance?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Solemnity of Christ the King

November 25, 2018

Read:

Daniel 7:13-14

Ps 93:1-2, 5

Revelation 1:5-8

John 18:33b-37



Reflect:

When the question of Christ's kingship comes up, Jesus re-directs us to the true meaning of divine kingship. Without denying that he is a king, he says: "The reason I was born into the world is to testify to the truth." He is not the king of a country or a world; he is the king of truth, the ruler of reality.

The perception of reality that we develop when Jesus is not our teacher and interpreter and revealer of truth is warped and blurred by the falsehoods and misunderstandings and counterfeits that float around in the kingdom of the world, which is ruled by Satan. But wait! The very idea that this world is ruled by Satan is a warping of the truth. It's not reality. Remember, Jesus came into the world to destroy the devil's domain and to bring all of creation into his kingdom. Those in this world who accept Christ's kingship listen to his voice and live in that truth.

When we sin, it's because we don't fully understand the reality of the situation. Jesus is not yet fully the king of that part of our lives.

For example, think of a person who has asked you for something that you cannot afford to give. Perhaps it's the building project at church. Or the sick neighbor. Or the aging parent who needs assistance.

Do you feel like you don't have enough to satisfy their needs? Are you so tired from your own burdens that you cannot take on someone else's? Well, it's our flesh nature that says we cannot enjoy doing more for others than we're already doing. This is a warped view of reality; it looks like we'll be happier if we cater to our own desires instead of taking care of someone else's need.

In true reality, a joyful lifestyle develops when we listen to Jesus, even when he says, "be like the Good Samaritan and take a detour to minister to others". We have to trust the truth that he teaches, regardless of how little we understand it.

Understanding grows in doing God's will more than in thinking about it. Joy grows when we see the fruits of what we've done. When we sin, it's because we cannot envision the good fruits that will come from doing things the way Christ tells us to. Under his kingship and the Holy Spirit's wisdom, we gain freedom to overcome all of our sinful tendencies.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† "FEAR" is "False Evidence Appearing Real." What is fear telling you about the ways of Christ? What teachings of the Church are you unwilling to trust?

† These are all areas where Jesus is not your king. What will you do to learn and understand the truth?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Name a common misconception that keeps people away from Christ or away from church? Why do people believe this unreality?

† How can we help them feel safe in learning the truth and accepting the kingship of Christ?

Comments/Prayer Requests: