



## Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of October, 2016

by Terry A . Modica



## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 2, 2016

Read:

Habakkuk 1:2-3; 2:2-4

Psalm 95:1-2,6-9

2 Timothy 1:6-8,13-14

Luke 17:5-10



### Reflect:

This Gospel reading is disturbing. After doing a lot of hard work, the last thing we want to hear from God is: "You're an unprofitable servant."

Think of how hard you work. Whether it's at home or for a business or in ministry, we're never rewarded enough, right? Instead, we're given *more* work! At home, we try to relax after a busy day but one of the kids or an elderly relative needs help. On the job, we're given more work because our colleagues are either too lazy or they've been laid off. In the parish, most of the work gets done by only 10 to 20% of the people.

Jesus says that our reaction to all this should be: "Lord, I'm an unworthy servant of your kingdom, because I've only done what's expected of me." Is he implying that it's right to be burdened with more to do when we're tired? Not at all! What he is telling us is that there's a difference between doing what's required out of mere obedience and volunteering to go the extra mile because we love and we care.

Resting is important. Jesus took time out to pray and to recover his energy. Delegating work to others is right, too, so that we don't burn out. Jesus is the supreme example of a delegator who is also a servant. Balance is healthy and necessary.

When we stop short of going the extra mile, it's usually because we have an unbalanced view of faith. Unaware that we're serving Christ in our everyday tasks, and unaware that we're serving others *with* Christ, we settle for a mediocre, half-hearted attitude.

We limit our potential. And then we're astonished that Jesus would suggest that we can command trees to cast themselves into the sea! When was the last time you saw *that* happen?

Here's the connection between doing more than the minimum and having a supernatural faith: For both to occur, we have to know that God's love is available all the time and that from this comes his desire to serve us. Knowing this, we're confident that he can accomplish anything he wants in us and through us. If we care like he cares, we *want* to go the extra mile with him. And then when we get hurt or tired, he restores us.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What's the mulberry tree in your life? What problem is so deeply rooted that it seems immovable?

† Who in your life is so stuck in sin that you've lost hope for change? Can you be a worthy servant of God and surprise that person with gestures of love that are unexpected and unrequested?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe examples of service that show the difference between doing our duty and doing more.

† How does volunteering to serve above and beyond what's expected reveal God's love?

### Comments/Prayer Requests:

## 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 16, 2016

Read:

Exodus 17:8-13

Psalm 121:1-8

2 Timothy 3:14 -- 4:2

Luke 18:1-8



### Reflect:

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, God promises to secure the rights of his faithful ones who seek his justice. When we're abused, neglected, rejected, abandoned, or falsely accused, God comes to our rescue. And speedily, he says! What? He's not helping you fast enough? Is he breaking his promise with you?

Although God often seems way too slow, whether it takes months or years (and it often does) before your problem gets resolved, Jesus is in fact at your side immediately delivering you from evil, in the very moment you begin to cry out to him.

The real question is not "Where is Jesus?" nor "Why doesn't he care enough to help me sooner?" The question that matters – for the healing of our souls – is stated in the last sentence of this Gospel passage: As he's arriving to help us, do we greet him with faith? Or is fear spinning our minds in such turmoil that we don't see him as he stands right next to us offering a helping hand?

If we're not living by faith, we inadvertently expand our problems. Are you feeling miserable after calling upon God for help? Look! Jesus is at your side begging for your trust. Are you feeling frustrated because God is not removing the obstacles you're facing? Look! Jesus wants you to follow him in a direction that's different than where you think you should go.

We all have adversaries. Jesus is wielding his sword of truth against the spirits of darkness who are working against you; he is driving them away. But if we reject the truth he wields, his sword is of no help to us.

What about the troublemakers who continually annoy you? When our eyes are on them instead of on Jesus, we miss the healing embrace that he's offering to us as vindication.

When we live by faith, we experience God's vindication every day, even while injustices continue. We experience it in our hearts as we receive his peace and his patience and his endurance.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What injustices are frustrating you today? What evil is being done against you?

† What will you do right now to be a faith-filled follower of Christ? What action will you take to conquer your fears and choose to give God your trust?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe an injustice that you recently witnessed or experienced. What shocked and dismayed you the most about it?

† What is fearsome about it? And what does trust for the Lord encourage you to believe about it?

### Comments/Prayer Requests:

## 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 30, 2016

Read:

Wisdom 11:22--12:2

Ps 145:1-2,8-11,13,14

2 Thessalonians 1:11--2:2

Luke 19:1-10



### Reflect:

Notice the determination of Zacchaeus in this Sunday's Gospel reading. His view of Jesus was obstructed, but that didn't stop him from seeing Jesus. He had an obstacle (the crowd) and a handicap (his short stature), but he refused to allow any of this to prevent him from reaching his goal of getting a clear view of Jesus.

In fact, Zacchaeus was so eager to experience Jesus that he did something drastic: He climbed a tree! Maybe he felt embarrassed hanging onto a tree limb; maybe onlookers thought he was odd. Maybe someone tried to talk him down. Maybe the tree was rough and tore his clothes and scratched his skin. None of that stopped him.

We all have handicaps – prejudices, misconceptions, bad training, spiritual laziness, fears and doubts, and so on – which obstruct our view of Jesus. And we all have short stature: we are much smaller than God and cannot see the goodness that he sees in and beyond our hardships. In our short-sightedness, we conclude that Jesus has abandoned us, and we feel so very alone.

Instead, we should be like Zacchaeus. In our desire to see Jesus fully, as he really is, we should do everything possible to find a way around all obstacles and overcome all spiritual handicaps.

Notice that once Zacchaeus climbed the tree, Jesus zeroed in on him and gave him personal attention and affirmation. How did Zacchaeus respond? He *quickly* descended from the tree and welcomed Jesus with *delight*. He had so much enthusiasm that he wanted to quadruple the penance for his sins!

Do you see Jesus in the Eucharist at Mass? If Zacchaeus' reaction to Christ's presence isn't our reaction, it means our view is still partly obstructed. We need to climb higher.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † What are you "short" on? What in your faith life is too small?
- † What is crowding your life and obstructing an enthusiastic relationship with Jesus?
- † How can you overcome this handicap so that you can see Jesus and recognize his nearness and hear his affirmation?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † Name some signs of spiritual determination that you've seen in others.
- † Why are we able to see Jesus better when we pray more fervently, sing in Mass more enthusiastically, serve others more eagerly, immerse ourselves in scripture more hungrily, care about others more cheerfully, or donate our treasures more generously?

**Comments/Prayer Requests:**