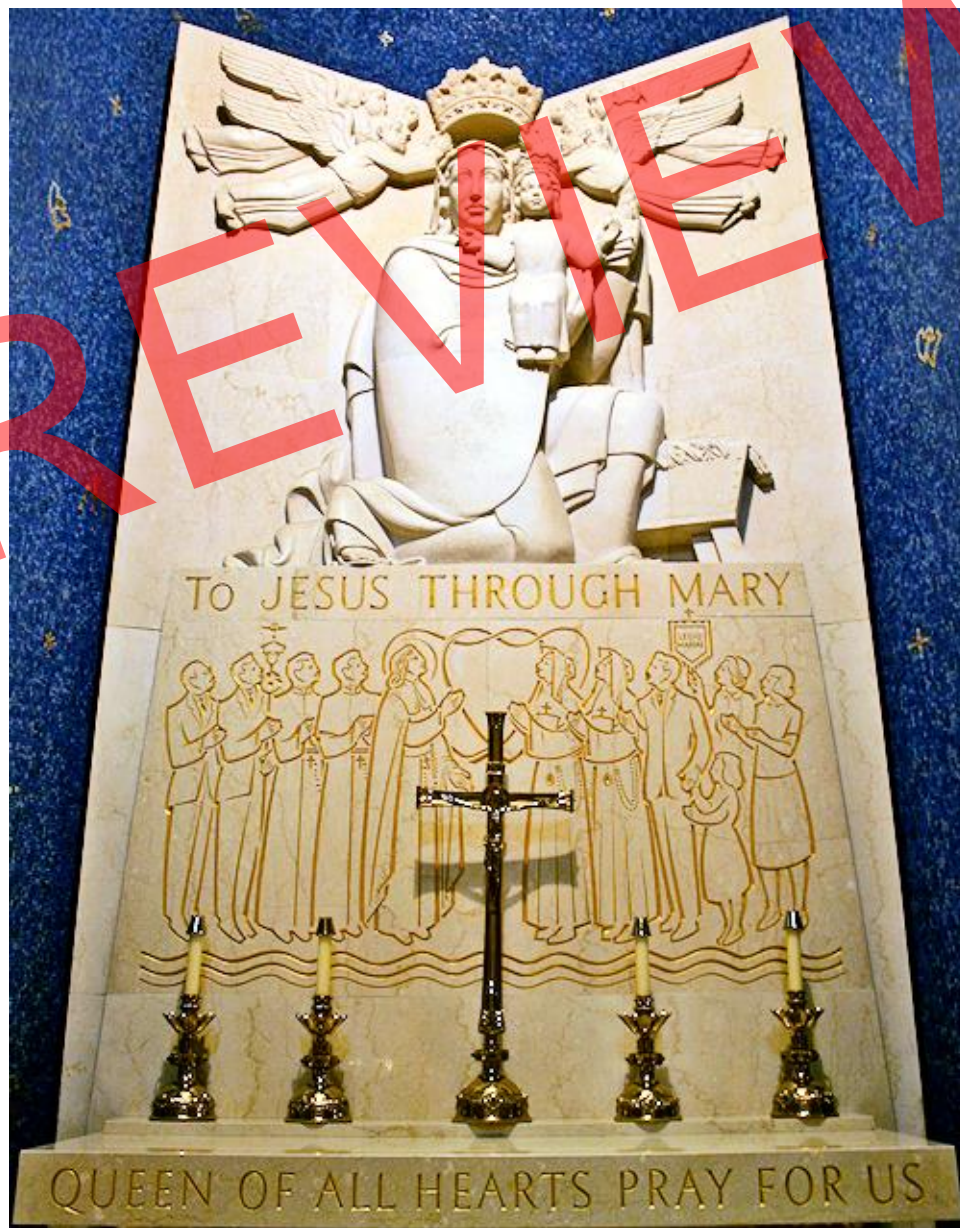


# Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of October, 2018

by Terry A . Modica



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

October 7, 2018

Read:

Genesis 2:18-24

Ps 128:1-6

Hebrews 2:9-11

Mark 10:2-16



### Reflect:

Do you love someone who isn't loving you back? Have you experienced God's supernatural love helping you love those who are difficult to love?

For those of us who are married, we expect to be loved by our spouses as much as we need to be loved. And we assume that it's always going to be mutual: We will always be loved by our spouse with the same passion as we love them.

However, most marriages enter difficulties that require supernatural love as well as supernatural persistence. That's why we need the Sacrament of Matrimony instead of just a civil ceremony at the courthouse or beach. Marriages need divine grace to endure with the permanence that God provides.

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus explains that the law of Moses permitted divorce (Deut. 24:1) because of the hardness of people's hearts. This is not an approval of divorce. He wants us to have hearts like his own, which never stops loving anyone.

In the days of Moses, when a marriage became difficult or unsatisfying, many men abandoned their wives. Although marriage was, from the beginning (Genesis Chapter 1) supposed to be a permanent covenant that united one man with one woman, a bill of divorce would allow an abandoned or rejected woman to remarry for her protection. It was never intended to be an approval of divorce.

Marriage is a reflection of God's faithful union with us. Permanence in marriage is a divine gift from God so that we can reflect him well. If we don't believe in the permanence of love within marriage, how can we believe that God is always in love with us -- including

when we don't deserve it? And how can the children and others who watch us believe?

Remember, sometimes the lover goes to the Cross for the beloved. The vocation of marriage ordains the spouses to be a reflection of Christ's passion for all.

God never forces us to stay "married" to him. He loves us even when we turn away from him. Likewise, an unloved spouse is called by God to continue loving the one who abandons the marriage, even if only from afar. This is also true in any God-ordained friendships, and between priests and the laity they serve, and parents with their children.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Have you ever quit a relationship because it was too hard? Did you really stop loving that person?

† How is the way you handled it like or unlike the heart of Christ?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How has God helped you love someone who quit loving you? How did you open yourself to receive his divine help?

† Describe how this reveals to others what God's love is really like.

### Comments/Prayer Requests:

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

October 21, 2018

Read:

Isaiah 53:10-11  
Ps 33:4-5, 18-20, 22  
Hebrews 4:14-16  
Mark 10:35-45



### Reflect:

To be great in the kingdom of God means to be a servant, says Jesus in this Sunday's Gospel passage: We are to serve the needs of others for the benefit of the kingdom.

This does not mean that our own needs and desires and dreams don't matter. Being a servant for God is not slavery; it's an honor and a blessing, because it unites us to the saving servanthood of Christ.

Being a servant like Christ means that we are treated by the Father the same way Jesus was treated. Our Master will not belittle us, disrespect us, nor over-work us.

The alternative is to be a slave to our worldly passions and possessions and the ways of the world. Worldly enslavement does belittle us. It reduces us to less than what God created us to be.

The ways of Christ empower us to be like Christ himself: free to enjoy all of the benefits of the kingdom of God, free to live a holy life, and therefore, free to be great in the eyes of our Father.

In this freedom, there is great joy. Although the ways of Christ are not easy and sometimes lead to the Cross, this cup of suffering increases our holiness and makes us even greater in heaven. When we make sacrifices for the benefit of others and we understand that our sufferings are part of our growth in holiness, they become much more bearable, because what had seemed like a curse is redeemed into a very significant blessing.

Do you know anyone whose prayers have not been answered? It's not because God doesn't care, nor because he can't help them. He answers the prayers of others through our servanthood. Jesus serves others through us.

Our top priority must always be our own relationship with God, so that we receive an abundance of whatever he wants us to share with others in service to their needs. We cannot give what we don't have. We cannot serve others well -- we cannot be the presence of Christ for them -- unless we ourselves have first been served by Jesus.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † What has God blessed you with abundantly?
- † What insights, gifts, talents, wisdom, etc., do you have?
- † How are these indications that Jesus has served you?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † How has Jesus been a servant to you?
- † Share how you have passed this service onto someone else (or would like to). For example, how has he served you with his unconditional, forgiving love? Or how has he served you by meeting an unmet need? In turn, how has this helped you to be a servant for others?

### Comments/Prayer Requests:



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

October 28, 2018

Read:

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Ps 126:1-6

Hebrews 5:1-6

Mark 10:46-52



### Reflect:

After Jesus touches our lives -- answers a prayer, gives us a healing, provides a life-changing insight, or makes any other kind of difference -- what do we do next? Our life has been changed by divine grace. Do we make the most of this new opportunity?

God never forces us to take a new direction or follow a certain path, not even if we've made a bargain with him, such as: "Lord, if you heal me, I will go to Mass every day."

Jesus says to us what he said to Bartimaeus, the man he healed in this Sunday's Gospel reading: "Go your way; your faith has saved you." Go where?

Sometimes his instructions are a little more informative than that. When he cures someone from sin, he adds: "Go and sin no more". Okay, but go where?

Every step we take is important. Where we go and what we do next makes a difference that ripples off into the future with ramifications (blessings and/or woes) that are impossible for us to predict. Jesus isn't down-playing the significance of this. Rather, what happens next is so important that he wants us to have full control over it.

Jesus told Bartimaeus "Go *your* way." And what did Bartimaeus do with that freedom? He "followed *him* on the way." He opted for the best possible direction. His life changed dramatically, not only because he had been blind and now he had good eyesight, but because he wanted to learn from Jesus and become one of his followers.

How many times have we returned to an old familiar path after an encounter with Christ? If following him means taking a new direction, getting involved in a

new ministry, or changing careers or friends, we too often settle back into old routines. Comfort zones are hard to leave. But following Jesus is a life-changing adventure if we're sincere about our faith.

Following Jesus and learning from him should be our highest priority. Every encounter with Christ should change us -- even at Mass when we reunite ourselves to him in the Eucharist.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Think of the last time Jesus responded to your need for help. What changed afterward?

† How long did the change last?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe a time when you changed directions in your life because of an encounter with Christ. What did Jesus do for you?

† How did you figure out which way to go afterward?

### Comments/Prayer Requests: