

# Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of September, 2017

by Terry A . Modica



## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 3, 2017

Read:

Jeremiah 20:7-9

Ps 63:2-6, 8-9

Romans 12:1-2

Matthew 16:21-27

**Reflect:**

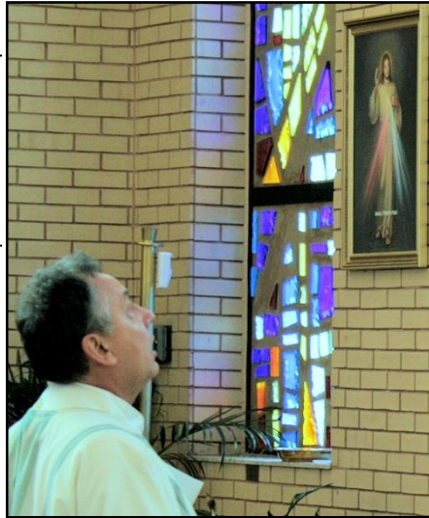
This Sunday's first reading is one of my personal favorites. I have often felt the way Jeremiah does here. I have yelled at God, "You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped!" And I allow it again and again. "You knew this would happen, Lord! Why did you lead me into this trial?" Have you ever felt that way?

Why do we let him do this to us? Why do we trust God even though he leads us into difficult situations? Why do we follow Jesus into giving our help and love to others even though it's going to feel very uncomfortable if not downright painful?

Walking with God and serving his kingdom is an adventure. We can expect the unexpected, and unfortunately in this world that includes suffering -- denying ourselves the opportunity to pursue self-centered agendas, taking up crosses, and following Jesus all the way to Calvary (but then of course, all the way to resurrection, too, as explained in the Gospel reading).

Because we love God, we are willing to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, like the second reading asks us to do. This is the highest form of worship; it's a spiritual communion that we experience outside of the Eucharistic liturgy of Mass. In union with Jesus, we *are* the Eucharist.

As Jeremiah's complaint shows us, we can safely complain to God. We can tell him, without getting punished, that we do not like working for him. Complaining to others, however, is a sin because it causes gossip and prejudices and makes God look bad.



Asking for prayer support during our trials is important, and we must keep doing this, but complaining to others shows how little we trust God. Eventually, we will see the good that comes from our sacrifices, and this is what we should communicate to others.

**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

† How do you feel when you do a good deed and it later works against you?

† Have you said "no" to allowing it to happen again?

† What brings the healing love of Jesus to you to help you recover?

**Questions for Faith Sharing:**

† What unexpected sufferings have you encountered while giving someone a gift of unconditional love or while doing some other service for the kingdom of God?

† How did you feel about God at that time?

† Was the cross you carried worth all the hardships? Explain.

**Comments/Prayer Requests:**

## 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 10, 2017

Read:

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Ps 95:1-2, 6-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20

### Reflect:

This Sunday's readings all speak of the need to stand up for what is holy and right and true in a way that that invites others to turn away from sin. If we don't, we indirectly play a part in the sins he or she commits, and we *will* be held accountable (see the first reading).

If we do take a stand against sin but without compassion and mercy and unconditional love, that too is a sin (the second reading).

Jesus shows us in the Gospel reading that in our efforts to stop a fellow Christian from sinning, it's important to rely on our Christian community for advocacy and prayer support. How?

First, we speak to the sinner. When we know that someone is harming himself and others (all sins are harmful even when we can't see the harm), if we don't try to impart this knowledge to him or her at least once, our silence is unloving and uncaring.

Once we've shared the truth, even if the sinner does not change, we're free of any guilt. But we must not stop trying, and so we take one or two others with us in a stronger effort to help the sinner understand and repent.

And if that fails, we try again with still more backing.

When every attempt to help someone has failed, only then do we quit. In reality, it's not us who's walking away. The sinner is the one who has chosen the path of separation. However, remember how Jesus treated the Gentiles and tax collectors (i.e., the outsiders, the

separated ones): He never stopped loving them. He still chose to die for them.



### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Whose sins have greatly disturbed you lately?

† What have you done about it? How loving and caring have you been in handling it?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What bothers you about the way some people have pointed out your sins or the sins of others? How could they have been more compassionate?

† Share the story of a time when someone successfully led another into repentance and growth. Explain why the effort was effective.

### Comments/Prayer Requests:



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

September 17, 2017

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Read:

Sirach 27:30--28:9

Ps 103:1-4, 9-12

Romans 14:7-9

Matthew 18:21-35

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### Reflect:

Jesus' message In this Sunday's Gospel reading explains a line from the "Our Father" prayer he had taught earlier (Matthew 6:12): "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

The strongest word here is "AS" -- the same as, just like, in equal measure.

If there is anyone we have not forgiven, if there is anyone we cannot pray for with love, we'd better keep our mouths shut during this part of the prayer to our Father, who is the Father of all.

Sometimes, it's difficult to forgive because we think "forgiving" means "forgetting". Jesus never said that we must forget what the debtor owes. Forgiveness means remembering -- and learning from the memory -- without demanding repayment or retribution.

Unforgiveness is a form of punishment: it's payback time. For example, if we remain angry, we hope that our anger or coldness will somehow punish the sinner into repentance. Well, guess what. That never works.

Here's something else we do that never works: holding a grudge to protect ourselves from getting hurt again. Grudges do not free us from the pain of bad memories. It chains us to them.

When we free others from the debts they owe us for hurting us (whether they seek it or not, whether they're still alive or not), we free ourselves and our healing begins -- *OUR* healing!

It's the most loving gift that we can give to ourselves, as it's a gift of love to others. Even when they don't recognize our gift, God does.



### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Who angers you because they don't deserve your forgiveness?

† What are you gaining from unforgiveness and resentment? What will you lose if you forgive?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What is the most difficult part of forgiveness?

† What steps do you take for pushing yourself into truly letting go of unforgiveness so you can find healing? Sharing this with others will spread good ideas that could change someone's life!

### Comments/Prayer Requests:

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

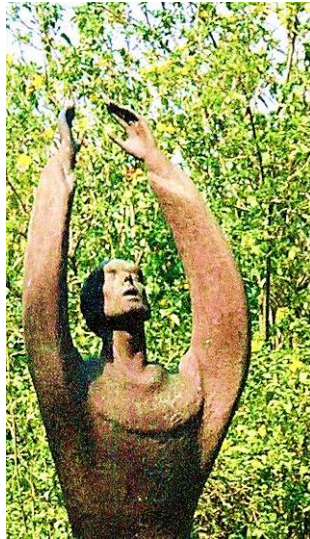
September 24, 2017

Read:

Isaiah 55:6-9  
Ps 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18  
Romans 1:20c-24, 27a  
Matthew 20:1-16a

### Reflect:

God's not fair! How many times have we felt that way? And it's true, at least by our standards. The parable in this Sunday's Gospel reading is a fine example of this.



The landowner seems to be very unfair. We can begin to understand him, however, if we think of this parable in terms of parenthood. A loving father cares about each of his children equally. Although he gives more attention to the child who needs it more, he loves the others just as much.

God the Father is like a vineyard owner who gives equally to all. Since we cannot earn our way into heaven, equal benefits are not an injustice to those who labored longer. Rather, God gives complete and perfect love even to those who only discovered, at the last minute, the value of having a relationship with him. He can do no less.

The first reading reminds us that as high as the heavens are above the earth, God's ways are greater than our ways and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We think that justice (fairness) means equal treatment, but that harkens back to the Old Testament concept of justice: "an eye for an eye". Jesus raised justice to its highest level, which means being equally loving and kind to all, whether they deserve it or not.

We don't have to *understand* God's higher ways. We only have to be *grateful* that God loves us even when we are unloving. No matter how undeserving of his love we might be, he still gives us the same amount of love that he gives to the holiest of saints. He loves us as much as he loves Mary the Blessed Mother of

Christ! "Am I not free to do as I wish with my own love?" he asks.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † When have you felt undeserving of God's goodness?
- † What evidence proves that he never stopped loving you? What did he do for you?
- † How has your own opinion of yourself interfered with feeling his love?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † Share the story of a time when you saw something good happen to a "bad" or undeserving person, or a time when you prayed for something that you didn't get while an unfaithful person received it without turning to God for help. Despite the unfairness of this, why are you glad that you have known God's love?
- † Can you also be glad for the blessings that unbelievers receive from God?

### Comments/Prayer Requests: