



Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of September, 2016

by Terry A . Modica



23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 4, 2016

Read:

Wisdom 9:13-18b

Ps 90:(1) 3-6, 12-17

Philemon 9-10, 12-17

Luke 14:25-33



strength. When we lack this intimate bond with Christ, we stumble and fall, crushed by the weight of our crosses. But if we are willing to make sacrifices out of love for others, like Jesus did, we embrace him more fully and we receive his love more deeply. And this is the most satisfying way to live!

Reflect:

What in your life is a higher priority than your relationship with God? That's what Jesus wants us to look at in this Sunday's Gospel reading. Which people? What work? What trial? What possessions? What friendships? What goals? What activities?

What crosses do you want to get rid of that, if you do escape from them, would require you to abandon Jesus on his cross? (Hint: What sacrifices of love are you unwilling to make?)

Jesus says that unless we are first and foremost committed to discipleship – learning from him and making every effort to become more like him – we are ill prepared for all the other tasks of life.

In other words, we can start building toward good goals, but if our relationship with Christ is not our highest priority, we'll miss his guidance and his surprises and his blessings. We'll get distracted by worldly interferences and sin. We'll become victims instead of victors in the battles we face. Anything good that we achieve will be less than the best, because there is much more in the kingdom of God than what we can imagine.

A disciple is a student. We learn from Jesus how to love others, even when this becomes a cross to carry. He teaches us how to live a life of joyful love but also of unconditional, forgiving love. And we learn from him how to put up healthy, holy boundaries against those who interfere with our spiritual growth, and this too can be a cross.

The strength to follow Christ and become more and more like him every day requires a conscious effort to grow stronger in our ability to carry our crosses while uniting ourselves to his cross and to his

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Consider your daily activities: What are your top priorities?

† What do you value more than the time you spend with Jesus in prayer, scripture, and other faith-building activities?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† What are some common ways that we move God down in priority?

† By making him our highest priority, what are ways that we can lovingly show concern for others even while putting God ahead of them in our daily activities?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 11, 2016

Read:

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14
Ps 51:3-4, 12-13, 17, 19
1 Timothy 1:12-17
Luke 15:1-32



Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading is an assurance of God's desire to regain what has been lost. Our Lord is a God of reconciliation and renewal. He pursues those who have strayed from the truth. Why? Because he cares – he cares more than we do about the people we know who are "lost sheep" or "lost treasures" like the coin in this parable.

Think of the people who have been lost to you because they have abandoned you. God cares and is pursuing them to bring healing to the relationship, and he will continue his efforts even until they take their last earthly breath (sometimes the healing comes after death).

Think, too, of people who are neglecting their faith. Jesus is a Good Shepherd who will never give up pursuing them. Why? Because their value to your family and the Church is important! Their absence is depleting the strength of the community. And God, who is the source of the life of the community, is doing everything possible – well, even the impossible – to lead them to repentance and healing and a safe return.

However, we cannot leave it all up to God. He works through us. Only when we've tried and our influence is nil does God say, "Let go. Trust that I am continually working on the problem." We can believe that Jesus is still chasing after them, even though they hide from him. He is not far from them, even though they push him away.

If there is something else we can do to invite them back into the sheepfold, but we don't, someday we will have to explain to Jesus why we didn't. Why did we fail to love as much as he loves them? Why did we let them stray away without researching how we

could help them? Have we done anything to push them away?

No matter how difficult it gets as we partner with Christ to bring others back to the sheepfold, the most important thing we can do is keep loving them unconditionally. Hopefully, they will see in us the love that Jesus is offering to them.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Who are the lost sheep and missing treasures of your family and your parish community? What will you do this week to reveal Jesus and his merciful love for them?

† Is there a parish ministry or an evangelization program that you could join to learn how to better help others turn to Jesus?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† When the lost are not ready yet to turn to Jesus or return to us or to the Church, how do our attempts to give them Jesus prepare them for an eventual conversion?

† Why is it worth trying, even if we don't see any fruits for our efforts? Even if it includes sacrifice and extra humility on our part?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 18, 2016

Read:

Amos 8:4-7

Ps 113:1-2, 4-8

1 Timothy 2:1-8

Luke 16:1-13



Reflect:

Poverty, as exemplified by many Saints, is not the only path of holiness. This Sunday's Gospel reading tells us how a person can be affluent and holy at the same time.

If we recognize that our possessions are gifts from God that are meant to enhance his kingdom, we are holy. But if we cling to money and material wealth as if they are meant only for our own benefit, we've divided ourselves from God, because God's Word emphasizes the importance of distributing to others a generous portion of everything we've received.

When acquiring wealth is a higher priority than distributing what we already have, God is not our master. This is true not only with material goods, but with everything else that is good, too.

We are all richly blessed one way or another: How readily to do use your riches for the benefit of others?

The "dishonest wealth" of which Jesus speaks is anything that "belongs to another". When we use other people's money (for example, taking out a loan from the bank) to our own advantage, we are not being trustworthy stewards unless it also glorifies the kingdom of God.

Likewise, if we misuse time by catering to selfish desires at the expense of those who need our attention, we are untrustworthy in the kingdom of God. Jesus wants to bless people through you. He has called you to be a distributor of his gifts. If we ignore this primary principle of God's economy, Jesus says, "Who will give you what is yours?"

What is ours, if we're trustworthy enough to be good stewards, are riches that will remain with us for all of eternity: the wealth of the spirit, the approval and praise of God, the fullness of love, etc.

To be holy with affluence, we have to first be trustworthy with the love that belongs to others – the love that God feels for them. Our trust-ability is found in the sharing of our temporal (earthly) goods as well as eternal goods (faith, wisdom, hope, etc.).

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What are you reluctant to share?

† What do you fear will happen if you surrender it to God for his use and his purposes?

† What do you need to do with this fear so that you can become a good steward of God's riches?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Name any material possession that seems to be used only for worldly or selfish purposes. Can it be converted into a gift for others and used for the glory of God? If so, how?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 25, 2016

Read:

Amos 6:1a, 4-7
Ps 146:(1b) 7-10
1 Timothy 6:11-16
Luke 16:19-31



Reflect:

What was the rich man's sin in this Sunday's Gospel story? What tormented him after he died? Being wealthy is not sinful; what tortured his soul was his decision to not share his wealth with Lazarus while he had the opportunity.

Death is not a closing of life; it's the opening up of our souls so we become fully alive in the truth of God's love. Death awakens us to the full reality of who God is and all the gifts he has given us and how well – or how poorly – we've invested those gifts.

Whenever we share with others the gifts that we've received, we're investing in God's kingdom. In God's economy, our investments always pay off very well. We receive more than we give away so that we can share even more!

In contrast, when we keep something for ourselves, we lose it like a flower that's "protected" in a dark box. The flower wilts. It cannot grow in the dark. Everything we try to protect ends up useless and even poisonous: We stagnate spiritually as well as emotionally. The gift rots. Our selfishness destroys our union with God who is the Master of Generosity.

Every day, we're given opportunities to share something – some blessing from God – with others.

Perhaps what made the rich man in the parable turn away from Lazarus was his disease. Since Lazarus was covered in sores, we can surmise that he was a leper and highly contagious.

This leads us to the question: Do we share less because we feel disgust toward those who need what we have? Or maybe fear holds us back. Or resent-

ment or unforgiving anger. To be united to God and experience everlasting joy, we cannot live in this state. We have to let love motivate us. Love has no limits; it's always generous.

In the second reading, we hear: "Compete well for the faith." Against whom are we competing? Ourselves! Are you holier today than you were the last time you had an opportunity to be generous? Are you spiritually stronger because you've worked hard at becoming more loving and generous?

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Bring to mind someone you find disgusting and unlikable. How generous are you toward him or her? If you've missed an opportunity to share a blessing with this person, the Sacrament of Reconciliation will give you strength, through special grace, to overcome this sin.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Give examples of times when people turn away from opportunities to be generous. Explain reasons why this happens.

† How have you personally been a Lazarus who was denied what you needed because of someone's prejudice? What did you learn from that experience that changed your own attitudes about generosity?

Comments/Prayer Requests: