

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of November, 2017

by Terry A . Modica



31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 5, 2017

Read:

Malachi 1:14b--2:2b,8-10

Ps 131:1-3

1 Thessalonians 2:7,9,13

Matthew 23:1-12



Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading contains a verse that, when taken literally, has been used by some Protestants to condemn Catholicism because we call our priests "Father." By that logic, when Jesus said, "Call no one on earth your father," he meant our dads, too, right? Did he never call St. Joseph by the title father? Perhaps when Jesus as a lad had a question about carpentry he said, "Hey dude who's married to Mom!" I don't think so.

To understand what Jesus means in this scripture, we need to read the whole passage: This singled-out verse is actually part of a teaching about equality. He is telling us that we must not consider anyone to be superior to ourselves -- no one but God is superior to us.

Jesus says here: "The greatest among you must be your servant." At other times in other scriptures, Jesus says that if we want to be greatest, we have to be the servant of all, because we must not think of ourselves as superior to others. But in today's lesson he's telling us not to think of ourselves as inferior, either. He trying to cure our low self-esteem.

Do you know, for example, that as a person you are not inferior to the pope? This is why he's called the servant of the servants of God. As Christ's representative in Church leadership, he serves us in everything he does, whether it's presiding at Mass or writing a Church document or making authoritative decisions.

No matter what someone's credentials are, no matter how much authority God has given to our priests and other Church leaders, and no matter how rich or famous or well-liked anyone is, we are all equally loved by God. We're all equally important to God. To see our

worth, we must learn to see ourselves through God's eyes.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Do you feel served by those who have higher status? Why or why not?

† When you don't, how much of this is your own attitude of assuming that you're inferior? What will you do to shift your thinking and accept your own value according to God's perspective?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† When someone's job or talents or position in the family or church seems greater than yours, how do you overcome your feelings of inferiority?

† How does Jesus convey to you that you are inferior to no one?

Describe a time when you felt inferior but then became aware of your equal value. (This story will help others who are struggling to overcome their own feelings of inferiority.)

Comments/Prayer Requests:

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 12, 2017

Read:

Wisdom 6:12-16

Ps 63:2-8

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13



Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading shows us what it means to be truly foolish. We believe in Christ – good! We pray – good! We put time into our faith growth and we value opportunities for more faith formation – very wise! And we say that we trust God – wonderful!

But what happens when God doesn't answer our prayers fast enough? What if we need Christ's loving embrace or his protection from evil and yet we're suffering with no end in sight? Where is Jesus then?

Usually, God's timing is not ours. We think we have the right idea about how soon God should intervene when we ask for his help. Right now is a good time for it, right? Of course! But perhaps not from God's perspective. (Why do we want to leave God in charge anyway, if he doesn't see things our way, huh?)

When we despair over unanswered prayer, the reality behind it is that we're emotionally unprepared for any timing that's different from what we think it should be. The foolish bridesmaids thought the groom would arrive before their lamps burned out. They thought they understood the situation. Do we?

Furthermore, if God's plans are illogical – if they don't make sense to us – we distrust them. And then we get ourselves into the mess of trying to handle things apart from God.

We cannot trust our logic. We cannot trust our perception or our understanding of the situations we're in. The sooner we decide to enjoy the absurdity of being a Christian, the sooner we will find out that God's ways are awesomely much, much better than anything we can imagine!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What have you resisted doing because it doesn't make sense?

† What can you do, where can you turn, to whom can you go for help in discerning whether or not it's God's plan for you?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How do you know when an illogical plan is really what God wants you to do?

† What's happened in your life that has taught you to trust the Holy Spirit's surprises?

† Share a lesson you learned when you weren't ready for God's plan because you didn't believe it.

Comments/Prayer Requests:

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 19, 2017

Read:

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

Ps 128:1-5

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Matthew 25:14-30

Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading reminds us not to bury the gifts that God has given us. To do so is to be a "wicked, lazy servant!"

Ouch.

We all have at least one buried talent. There's more we could be doing for the kingdom of God, but we think: "Not me. I'm not gifted enough" or "Someone else can do it better than I can" or "God can't be telling me to do *that*" or "I don't have the time, the financial resources, the know-how, or good enough health" or "I'm retired now and I've been waiting a long time to finally focus on my own desires."

There's no holy excuse for wasting anything good that God has given us, but sadly it happens quite often, because we don't realize how necessary our talents are for the Church and our joint mission of spreading Christ's influence upon the world.

What's pushing your gifts and talents aside? What's interfering with your usefulness to the kingdom of God? Now is the time to open wide your potential and release your talents into God's plans!

We are all gifted "enough" to make a difference for God's kingdom, because our abilities come from him. We're his servants, and it's up to him, not us, to decide what we're capable of doing. Even the homebound and the bedridden have a divine purpose that can be accomplished in their circumstances and sufferings. Often, these precious people are very powerful prayer warriors and have some of the soundest wisdom on earth.

Have you ever been challenged by the question: "If God is so good, why does he allow evil to happen?"



The answer is: It's not God that allows it. It's we who allow it! We are the Body of Christ on earth. We are his hands and feet and vocal chords and embracing arms. Jesus truly wants to make our world more heavenly, but too many of us have seemingly good reasons to bury the gifts that could make a difference. Indeed, this is wicked laziness!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † What good have you done? Hear God assuring you: "Well done, my good and faithful servant! Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you greater responsibilities. Come, share your Master's joy!"
- † What "greater responsibilities" can you say yes to using the gifts that he's provided? What's stopping you from saying yes?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † How would you recommend, based on your own experiences, that Christians invest the gifts of God?
- † How do you identify (1) your giftedness and (2) God's purpose for it?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

Solemnity of Christ the King

November 26, 2017

Read:

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

Ps 23:1-3, 5-6

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Matthew 25:31-46

Reflect:

We don't usually think of shepherds as kings, but the scriptures this Sunday describe the kingly powers of the Jesus our Good Shepherd. A good king cares for his subjects the way a shepherd cares for his sheep.

Kings increase the size of their reign and accomplish their work over the whole territory through their subjects. That's why Jesus says, "Whatever you do for one of the least of mine, you do for me."

For example, our Good Shepherd-King wants to distribute food to the hungry, all the way to the farthest reaches of his kingdom. How does he get it done? He gives an abundance of food to some of us and commands us to take it to those who need it.

What happens if we don't fulfill the King's commands? Do the starving people think the King is benevolent? No, they can only see his goodness when we do as he tells us to do.

Look at the people who are around you. Each one is an opportunity to give the King a good name.

What about the people whom you like least of all? What about those who've made you feel angry or intimidated or hurt? Well, ask this: What is he/she hungry for? If the answer's not obvious, ask the Holy Spirit. Observe that person long enough to identify the emptiness or pain or fears that are buried under the surface.

Then ask this: What abundance has God given to me that this "least one" is lacking and needs from Christ



our King? Can I show him/her the King's benevolence despite my feelings?

When we say no to opportunities to share what we have, we are behaving like one of the goats whom the Good Shepherd-King separates from the sheep on the way to heaven. And when we say yes, despite the feelings that could make us goat-like, the King's good reputation spreads, and we are all blessed

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What good things do you have in abundance? How readily do you share them?

† Who is of least importance to you? How can you take your focus off of what you don't like about them so that you can give them blessings from God?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Have you ever done something good to someone who didn't deserve it? How did this affect your relationship with Jesus?

† What abundance do you see in each member of your family or faith sharing community that, when shared, blesses others?

Comments/Prayer Requests: