



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 23, 2015

Taking a Leap of Faith

By Janel Esker

It's true confession time: I'm a returner.

I prefer to make decisions about clothes, shoes, and decor at home. Even though I thoroughly research quality, user reviews, and price, I usually still need to bring the item home. If it's not right, I readily return it—unused, of course. I'm ruthlessly teased about my compulsion by my husband, friends, and even my mother (from whom I inherited this trait, though she flatly denies it).

Today's first reading and Gospel are all about decision-making, but the choices they describe aren't easily undone with a return to the store. These choices are life-changing: Which god are you going to serve? Are you going to stay with Jesus, or leave?

Major decisions—changing jobs,

marrying, beginning a family, pursuing medical treatment—involve a leap of faith in addition to studious research.

Sure, you can explore a particular company, do thorough marriage preparation, or research a particular treatment. But we can never know with certainty how the job will suit us, how the marriage will evolve, or how this treatment will affect our body. The biggest decisions involve big trust and big faith.

It's no different in our choice about God. We shouldn't base our faith on what others have to say about God on the internet, nor can we return our trust in the Lord at the customer-service counter. We have to decide here and now whether we're going to put our faith in the Lord. Peter claimed, "You have the words of eternal life." Not "the words of complete happiness" or "utter prosperity," but "eternal life." †

A Word From Pope Francis

We continue the catechesis on the family, and in this catechesis I would like to touch



upon a condition common to all families, namely, illness. It is an experience of our own fragility, which we experience most of all at home, beginning in childhood, and then especially in the aches and pains of old age. Within the realm of family bonds, the illness of our loved ones is endured with an "excess" of suffering and anguish. It is love that makes us feel this "excess." So often for a father or a mother, it is more difficult to bear a son or daughter's pain than one's own. The family, we can say, has always been the nearest "hospital." Still today, in so many parts of the world, a hospital is for the privileged few, and is often far away. It is the mother, the father, brothers, sisters and grandparents who guarantee care and help one to heal.

General Audience, June 10, 2015

Sunday Readings

Joshua 24:1–2, 15–18

"Decide today whom you will serve."

Ephesians 5:21–32

"No one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it."

John 6:60–69

"Master, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life."



Lord, you have the words of eternal life. Help me to believe and trust in the power of your Word.

Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

True Christianity Has Eyes of Compassion

Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR

In Catholic school I learned to repeat the phrase, “There but for the grace of God go I.” It expresses gratitude for having been spared the sufferings we see others endure. It arouses compassion, moving us to help others shoulder their burdens. If the suffering of others is the result of their own wrong behavior, it teaches humility and solidarity, reminding us that were it not for God’s help, we might have fallen into the same wrong patterns of life, bringing similar disgrace upon ourselves. Lately it seems this phrase has been replaced by a more pernicious one: “Thank God they got what was coming to them.”

Moral psychology has studied when people help others in need and when they don’t. Results show that we tend not to help others if we believe they have been the cause of their own suffering. In responding to those ravaged by alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, poverty, hunger, AIDS, rape, violent crime, and murder, it matters a great deal to almost everyone whether we see that person as “deserving” or “undeserving” of their fate. When we believe someone has been innocently harmed, it elicits sympathy, which motivates us to help. When we believe that one’s plight is the result of something he or she did, the emotion elicited is righteous indignation—even satisfaction—at seeing cosmic justice occur, and we are motivated to deliberately withhold assistance. This tendency seems to be



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What do my words and actions say about me?
- What leap of faith in God can I make today?

universally hard-wired into human nature.

Turning away from another’s pain, regardless of its causes, is hardly the moral response to the Gospel. Sooner or later we all make wrong choices. Sometimes our decisions flow from an inner flaw; sometimes we are overwhelmed by a situation; sometimes we just want something so much that we are willing to do whatever it takes. Saint Paul reminds his readers constantly that

all are sinners, all deserve condemnation, all stand in need of forgiveness, and all need Christ. If God treated us the way we are tempted to treat one another, there would be no hope for anyone.

God’s justice is mercy. Grace is offered to the sinner *precisely as a sinner*: one who *deserves* condemnation and punishment but who receives compassion and forgiveness instead. The sinner who returns causes rejoicing in heaven. It is precisely *when* we have been the cause of our own mess, and *because* we have been the cause of our own mess, that God draws near to us most powerfully and most lovingly in Christ, who is help for the helpless.

Jesus tells his followers to be compassionate and merciful if they wish to be children of the Father. The phrase, “There but for the grace of God go I,” should help Christians to understand that when we see others in need or in pain, our reaction should not be to ask whether they “deserve” it. Rather, we should ask, “Who am I as a follower of Christ if I fail to show compassion to this brother or sister?” Perhaps the initial response can be a prayer:

O Lord, show me how I can be a tangible sign of your love and mercy for this person, for without your grace, there, too, I might have gone.

WEEKDAY READINGS

August 24–29

Mon. St. Bartholomew:
Revelation 21:9–14 / John 1:45–51

Tue. Weekday: 1 Thessalonians 2:1–8 /
Matthew 23:23–26

Wed. Weekday: 1 Thessalonians 2:9–13 /
Matthew 23:27–32

Thu. St. Monica: 1 Thessalonians 3:7–13 /
Matthew 24:42–51

Fri. St. Augustine: 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8 /
Matthew 25:1–13

Sat. The Passion of St. John the Baptist: 1
Thessalonians 4:9–11 / Mark 6:17–29