



Bringing Home the Word

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time | August 20, 2017

Celebrating God's Love for All

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I watched a friend tell a group of children the story of the good shepherd. On the floor in front of him were wooden sheep, a shepherd figurine, and a fenced-in area. He had placed one of the wooden sheep a little bit away from the scene.

Before he got halfway through the story, one child raised her hand and asked why the sheep was by itself. He explained that the sheep was lost and asked what she would do about it. She looked for a minute, then picked up the little figure and returned it to the fenced area with the other sheep. He used that as the basis for his story, pointing out that

Jesus cares for us the same way and will not leave us out of the flock.

In today's readings, we celebrate God's love for all people—including all who raise their voices in claim to the love of God, those who are not like us, and those who are strange, disenfranchised, and annoying.

The woman in the Gospel was not Jewish, and the disciples tried to keep her away. But in her faith, she cried to Jesus—and he heard her.

Matthew says that after her, many Gentiles (non-Jews) came to Jesus. He welcomed and healed them. He also fed them as easily as he fed the 5,000 Jews, whose story we've often heard.

We might see these strangers as unloving and unlovable, but God isn't bound by what we see. Their faith, too, is a conduit for God's grace and compassion.

The little girl who saw a sheep by itself was moved with compassion.

So is God for all who seek him. †

We celebrate God's love for all people—including all who raise their voices in claim to the love of God.

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 56:1, 6–7

...For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Romans 11:13–15, 29–32

For God delivered all to disobedience, that he might have mercy upon all.

Matthew 15:21–28

"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

A Word From Pope Francis

Mutual understanding of our [Catholic and Jewish] spiritual heritage, appreciation for what we have in common and respect in matters on which we disagree: all these can help to guide us to a closer relationship....Together, we can make a great contribution to the cause of peace; together, we can bear witness...to the perennial importance of the divine plan of creation; together, we can firmly oppose every form of anti-Semitism and all other forms of discrimination.

—Address to the two chief rabbis in Israel at Heichal Shlomo Center, Jerusalem, May 26, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How can you become more united with your ancestors in faith?
- How can you strengthen your bond with your brothers and sisters in Christ in your parish and public communities?



Love: Our Truest Vocation

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

Being Catholic is not something that happens to us overnight. It takes

work and practice—a lot more than just an hour a week in church. It’s really the task of a lifetime.

What makes one a Catholic? In one sense, one becomes Catholic by receiving the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist—just as a person becomes married by celebrating the sacrament of matrimony. But as any married person will tell you, the wedding itself doesn’t make a marriage. To really become what one promised in the wedding vows takes time and hard work.

Similarly, one doesn’t take on Catholic identity merely by receiving the sacraments. Like marriage, Catholic identity requires time and effort. Catholic identity, like marriage, is about love. And love is an art.

Years ago, when I was in music school, I would spend hour after hour at the piano learning two pieces required for the end-of-semester recital. After weeks of practice I could play those pieces rather well. But just because I could play two songs didn’t mean I was an artist. A real artist isn’t limited to a couple of pieces. Artists can play *all* the pieces.

Similarly, to be good at the art of Catholic loving you have to be able to love all the pieces. You have to love everyone—even as God loves everyone and invites people of every race, language, and way of life to the great nuptial banquet of the kingdom.

What It’s All About?

Love everybody? While this may seem impossible, it is at the heart of Catholic identity. Our Catholic vocation is essentially a call to be lovers, just as Jesus was. Following Jesus doesn’t mean we have to become carpenters, fishermen, or preachers. Following Jesus means that we have to become great lovers.

Jesus was an artist at loving. He could play all the pieces. He loved rich and poor people, saints and sinners. As a sign of that universal love, he opened his arms on the cross and shed his covenant blood “for you and for all.”

Clearly we don’t arrive at this Catholic, all-embracing level of artistry overnight. When learning to play the piano, one starts with easy pieces and gradually works up to the harder ones. The same is true with the art of loving: We start with the easier pieces (loving our parents, children, friends, neighbors) and slowly

work up to the harder pieces—the people who are not like us.

From Feelings to Action

And this loving goes deeper than surface niceties. The loving that lies at the core of Catholic identity leads to concrete acts: embracing the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the prisoner. It requires working for peace. It involves concern for the earth. It demands justice for the poor.

And because the objects of our loving are human, limited, and sinful, our loving will most certainly entail forgiveness—both forgiving and being forgiven. We who follow Jesus are called to announce the kingdom of God by being ambassadors of reconciliation and instruments of peace.

The Eucharist is the marvelous sign of Catholic identity. The Eucharist takes us into the body of Christ. It fills us with the spirit of Christ so we can truly become Catholic, all-embracing lovers. Love is our vocation. Love is the heart of our Catholic identity. †

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He could play all the pieces.
He loved rich and poor,
saints and sinners.***



Lord, you offered the healing love and compassion of God to the sick and poor. Help me to be an instrument of God’s love and compassion to all people. Amen.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

August 21–26

Mon. St. Pius X:
Jgs 2:11–19 / Mt 19:16–22

Tue. Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary:
Jgs 6:11–24a / Mt 19:23–30

Wed. Weekday:
Jgs 9:6–15 / Mt 20:1–16

Thu. St. Bartholomew:
Rv 21:9b–14 / Jn 1:45–51

Fri. Weekday:
Ru 1:1, 3–6, 14b–16, 22 / Mt 22:34–40

Sat. Weekday:
Ru 2:1–3, 8–11; 4:13–17 / Mt 23:1–12