



Bringing Home the Word

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time | November 12, 2017

Fundamental Planning

By Janel Esker

At first glance, the well-prepared (including me) might take great pride in today’s Gospel. You know who you are—you whose purses contain everything but the kitchen sink, you who stockpile food and fuel just in case “the big one” hits. I rarely leave the house without food, drinks, tissues, and reading materials and am often the one others come to when they’re less than prepared for a long wait, unexpected hunger, or a surprise runny nose. And I’m hardly humble about my planning abilities—it’s perhaps my favorite topic for gloating.

Then how, on a recent weeklong trip, did I forget to pack underwear? My family was shocked that The Planner had forgotten something so basic. No gloating that week!

In gospel times, lamp oil was also a necessity—how would a lamp remain lit without oil? Yet five of the women in the wedding procession left home without it. Did they just forget? Did they think the bridegroom would be on time so there’d be no need for lamps after dark? How did they miss something so fundamental?

We too, in our busy lives, often miss the fundamentals. *Fundamental 1:* Life is short and we will die—at a time we don’t know. *Fundamental 2:* Nothing is more important than our relationship with God.

Today’s Gospel challenges us to think about how we’re preparing ourselves for the end of our lives. We prepare wills, trusts, and health-care directives, but how about spiritual preparations? What are we doing to deepen our relationship with God every day? How are we living our Christian faith more concretely on a daily basis? These are the fundamentals. How prepared are we? †

We sometimes miss the basics.

A Word From Pope Francis

Dear brothers, unless we train ministers capable of warming people’s hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointments, of mending their brokenness, what hope can we have for our present and future journey? It isn’t true that God’s presence has been dimmed in them.

—Address to bishops of Brazil, July 27, 2013



Sunday Readings

Wisdom 6:12–16

Resplendent and unfading is wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 or 13–14

God, through Jesus, [will] bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Matthew 25:1–13

[Jesus said,] “Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I constantly in contact with the mercy of God so I am always ready?
- How am I living now so that I am always prepared for the final encounter with Jesus?



Why Do We Suffer? *By Michael D. Guinan, OFM*

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, the Mexican and Haitian earthquakes, the Indian Ocean tsunami. Accidents, terror attacks, disease, and death. Natural disasters and those produced by humans bring with them so much suffering. Ancient literature from Egypt and Mesopotamia attests that even then people called out, “Why?” In the lament psalms of the Bible, the psalmist cries out, “Why, Lord?” Our voices join an age-old chorus!

The problem of suffering is difficult. How can we understand a benevolent, just God in the face of such human experiences?

Perhaps the best biblical example of this struggle is found in the Book of Job. Job suffers the loss of possessions and family and is afflicted with a terrible disease. Friends hear of his plight and come to console him. After Job’s cry of pain, the discussion begins.

Why is Job suffering? One easy answer that surfaces immediately is that Job deserves it; he is suffering because of his sins. When Job rejects this, his friends counter, in effect, “Don’t give us that! All humans are rotten sinners!” For them, all suffering is somehow a punishment for sin. Sad to say, Job’s friends have vocal descendants even now. While it is true that our sinful actions have consequences, as an all-purpose explanation, this one is too simplistic.

Problem or Mystery?

Even within the Book of Job, the situation is more complicated. As readers, we know from the start that his friends are wrong. Job is righteous, and his suffering is allowed by God to test his virtue. Other answers also appear in the book. Like any good ancient Near Eastern father, God disciplines us through suffering to make us better (5:17–18, 36:15). Or, suffering is mysterious, so who are we to understand God’s ways? (11:7–10, 15:8–9).

Although these responses may give temporary relief, ultimately they are not satisfactory answers to the meaning of suffering. While we seek understanding, perhaps this is not the best approach to the problem. In fact, maybe the problem with suffering is that it is not really a “problem” at all, but a mystery.

What is the difference? A problem is something “out there.” We can see all the pieces, survey its dimensions. The question is, how do we put it together? How do we solve it? Problems are solved intellectually. A mystery is different. It is a situation in which I am so immersed that I can never get far enough away to see it all “out there.” Love and death are mysteries. So is suffering.

Mysteries involve us on the deepest levels of our relationships with ourselves, others, the natural world, and with God. To be human is to be enmeshed in these relationships. When they grow into greater wholeness (through love) or come apart (through suffering), we are in the

presence of mystery. We will never solve the meaning of suffering any more than the meaning of love.

“I Am With You”

At the heart of Christianity is the affirmation that, through the Incarnation, Jesus entered into these relationships too. Jesus fully shared in the human condition. When he faced suffering and death, he also called out, “Why?” His final words from the cross were, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). We know that God did not forsake Jesus but raised him to everlasting life.

Nowhere in Scripture do we read, “Have faith in me, and you will understand everything, including suffering!” But we do read, whatever the suffering, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.” We do not suffer alone. Together, we survive all suffering—even death itself! †

WEEKDAY READINGS

November 13–18

Mon. St. Frances Xavier Cabrini:
Wis 1:1–7 / Lk 17:1–6

Tue. Weekday:
Wis 2:23–3:9 / Lk 17:7–10

Wed. Weekday:
Wis 6:1–11 / Lk 17:11–19

Thu. Weekday:
Wis 7:22b–8:1 / Lk 17:20–25

Fri. St. Elizabeth of Hungary:
Wis 13:1–9 / Lk 17:26–37

Sat. Weekday:
Wis 18:14–16; 19:6–9 / Lk 18:1–8

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Lord, I am grateful for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help me to keep awake to the movement of your Spirit in my life.

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