



# Bringing Home the Word

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | July 22, 2018

## Jesus Gathers His Flock

By Mary Katharine Deeley

At the ranch where my mother lived in her adolescence, sheep wandered through pastures of grass and shrubs. When it came time to gather them into the corral at night, the ranch hands would get the dogs out and set them to work running around and behind the sheep to keep them together while the hands drove them in the right direction. Occasionally a young lamb or an injured ewe would fall, and the man closest would pick the animal up with a tenderness that seemed out of character with callouses and sunburned, weathered skin. When we visited the

ranch, I remember vividly the look and smell of the sheep and that the ranch hands thought they were dumb.

While the sheep may not have been the smartest of animals, they knew the men, and the promise of a safe pen and water at the end of the hot day undoubtedly made the job easier. From my mother's stories, I remember most the way she described the shepherders. They did not lead the sheep so much as walk with or behind them. They became part of the procession, rather than the head of it. This kept the sheep calm and moved them faster. When Jesus looked at the crowd, he saw a people that needed someone to walk with them and show them the way to go. They needed someone occasionally to go behind them to pick up the strays and the wounded and carry them tenderly home. This is what Jesus does for us. In his compassion, he brings us to pasture and, at the end, he gathers all people into his one flock and guides them home. +

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## A Word From Pope Francis

The family is where we daily experience our own limits and those of others...The family, where we keep loving one another despite our limits and sins, thus becomes a school of forgiveness. Forgiveness is itself a process of communication. When contrition is expressed and accepted, it becomes possible to restore and rebuild the communication which broke down.

—Forty-ninth World Communications Day, January 23, 2015



## Sunday Readings

### Jeremiah 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the flock.

### Ephesians 2:13-18

For he is our peace, he who made both one.

### Mark 6:30-34

[Jesus'] heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I humble enough to admit my faults to myself and others?
- How often do I ask forgiveness from my loved ones and in confession?



# Celebrating Faithfulness

By Kathy Coffey

*You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).*

Of all the commandments, this is one of the most ignored in the Old Testament. Just consider Solomon's seven hundred wives! Another story shows the web of deceit and unintended consequences that adultery can provoke. David's desire for Bathsheba is so intense, he arranges the murder of her husband, Uriah. The union of the king with the beautiful woman (*before* Uriah's death) leads to the illness of their first child, David's intense fasting and prayer, and then the child's death. The affair's cost is terrible.

If the story ended there, it would be a cautionary tale, sending a loud message about adultery's evils. But the plot twist comes through the surprising mercy of God. The second child this couple conceives is Solomon, Israel's revered king and Jesus' great-great-grandfather. When the crowd waved palm branches, hailing Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, they called him "Son of David"—David the adulterer.

Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man blends two natures: the divine, which is splendid beyond understanding, and the human, which can get us snarled in lies, infidelity, and murder. Because Jesus is our brother, we too carry the same tension: At times we're lofty and transcendent, then low and deceitful.

The Sixth Commandment calls us to

be the best we can be: loyal, committed, upright.

We have been criticized as a "tissue culture," in which everything, including a spouse, gets easily discarded. We work harder at our careers than our marriages and then wonder why couples eventually become disposable strangers. Adultery usually occurs only after the marriage has begun to disintegrate.

## Shelter for Each Other

Remaining faithful and loving throughout a long marriage is one of humanity's finest accomplishments. We can get dewy-eyed and romantic about a wedding. We want the couple's happiness, give them lavishly gifts, and pray for abundant blessings.

We should celebrate a silver or golden anniversary with the same vigor. The couple may be bent and pudgy, but they have woven a life together, composed of countless stresses, joys, failures, delights, arguments, illnesses, laughter, and achievements. They have talked through many issues and survived innumerable crises. They have negotiated finances, lifestyles, household duties, and parenting. The tie that binds them is a strong fabric made of tiny threads. As the Irish say, they become "the shelter for each other." In a chaotic world of change, people need such permanent anchors.

Adultery short-circuits this learning curve. People who flee at the first serious argument don't learn that there is more to their union than one disagreement. A fresh face may first seem to carry less baggage than the spouse, but adultery misses the chance to grow old with the same person who intimately knows and accepts *our* baggage.

## Models of God's Presence

Marriage experts say that when we make a vow, we offer ourselves the way we cup water in our hands. Adultery not only harms the other person but also undermines the best we are: When the vow is broken, the water spills out of our hands. Remaining faithful enables us to be like God, whose compassion never wavers and whose presence weathers all storms.

A story about an Alzheimer's patient in a care center ties the bow to complete this consideration of fidelity. A nurse said compassionately to a husband who traveled a great distance to visit his wife, the patient: "You really don't need to come every day. She doesn't know you." "Ah," replied the husband. "But I know her."

May our following of this commandment give us all that kind of commitment. +



Lord, you are the Good Shepherd who cares for all people. Help me be a good shepherd of love and compassion.

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

July 23–28, 2018

Monday, Weekday:

Mi 6:1–4, 6–8 / Mt 12:38–42

Tuesday, Weekday:

Mi 7:14–15, 18–20 / Mt 12:46–50

Wednesday, St. James:

2 Cor 4:7–15 / Mt 20:20–28

Thursday, Sts. Joachim and Anne:

Jer 2:1–3, 7–8, 12–13 / Mt 13:10–17

Friday, Weekday:

Jer 3:14–17 / Mt 13:18–23

Saturday, Weekday:

Jer 7:1–11 / Mt 13:24–30