



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 3, 2017

Countering Our Culture

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When my children were school age, my husband and I decided to use TV commercials as teaching tools. “What are they trying to sell you?” we’d ask. “How are they trying to get you to want it?” Their answers grew as they did: “They want you to think you’ll be cool.” “They’re showing you that rich people have this and hope you want to be like them.”

I often learned as much as our children did, and I like to think that, as a result, we were a little less vulnerable to the techniques.

A consumer culture like ours depends

on making people want more and better than they have. To support it, manufacturers must convince us that this cereal is better than that, this present will fill the void we have experienced, or that our true happiness depends on a brand name, location, degree, or career.

“Do not conform yourselves to this age,” Paul tells us in today’s reading from Romans. This age tells us we cannot be whole until we’ve achieved or obtained certain things.

In reminding us that our goal is not to be formed with this age, St. Paul states, rather, it lies in changing our form with Christ—actually changing our mind and heart so we can know and love God ever more deeply. So rather than conforming, we are better off transforming.

What does changing form look like for the Christian? It looks like loving the enemy, caring for those who have less, gathering at the eucharistic table, being good stewards of resources and, yes, taking up a cross and following Christ—even to death, if necessary.

There we will find our joy and our freedom. †

Rather than conform, transform.

Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 20:7-9

You seduced me, O LORD, and I let myself be seduced; you were too strong for me, and you prevailed.

Romans 12:1-2

“This is my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 16:21-27

[Jesus said,] “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

A Word From Pope Francis

The devil..., to divert Jesus from the way of the cross, sets before him false messianic hopes: economic well-being...a dramatic and miraculous style...; and lastly, a shortcut to power and dominion, in exchange for an act of adoration to Satan.... Note well how Jesus responds. He does not dialogue with Satan....Jesus is well aware that there can be no dialogue with Satan, for he is cunning. That is why Jesus...chooses to take refuge in the Word of God and responds with the power of this Word.

—Angelus, St. Peter’s Square, March 9, 2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How are you tempted by the enemy of your soul? Are you ever convinced you aren’t being tempted at all?
- How can you, with God’s help, approach those persons, places, or things that normally tempt you?



Winning and Losing for Jesus

By Fr. William H. Shannon

What is this topsy-turvy world Jesus is talking about, this world in which saving means losing and losing means saving? It sounds like telling the Yankees, “If you win a game, you lose; and if you lose a game, you win.” Say that to a baseball fan in the Bronx and see how far you get! What do Jesus’ words really mean?

Well, for starters, note that Jesus is not making the simple equation: save = lose, and lose = save. He is talking about losing one’s life for the sake of Jesus. This would have made perfectly good sense to the early Church martyrs (like Sts. Stephen, Agnes, and others), as it would for modern martyrs (Archbishop Oscar Romero, Jean Donovan, and others). All gave their lives in witness to their faith. For them, losing their mortal lives for Jesus’ sake meant achieving immortal life with him forever.

What does losing our lives for the sake of Jesus mean for us everyday Catholics who are not called upon to witness to our faith with bloodshed?

Taking on New Life

What does it mean for us to lose our lives in order to save our lives? First we

need to realize that the life we lose is not the same as the life we save. Saint Paul tells us that in Christ we become a new creation. We take on a new life in Christ.

Some years ago, a low-budget movie, *Jesus of Montreal*, was made in Canada. It is about the restaging of a passion play by a group of underemployed actors. In the show, an actor named Daniel takes the part of Jesus. At first he appears to be simply playing a role, but as the play progresses the role begins to turn real. He becomes increasingly identified with Jesus in his daily life.

On one occasion he goes into a studio where a sleazy commercial that demeans women is being made. He protests against it. When the producers try to eject him, he overturns their lights in a rage and walks out. The scene is clearly reminiscent of Jesus and the moneychangers in the temple.

This may be seen as a metaphor of our stories. We put on Christ in baptism. But that is only the beginning. At first it’s as if we are play-acting: doing Christian things, yet without full realization of who we have become. We have to grow into Christ in all aspects of our lives—and that takes time. The Apostle Paul writes:

The life we lose for Jesus is not the same as the life we save.

“We should grow in every way into him who is the head [of the body], Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

The Price of Discipleship

All this sounds fine until we read our Gospel reading. Reflecting on it jolts us to the core. It tells us that to grow into Christ, to become his disciples, we have to pay a price. Discipleship may bring joy, peace, and a sense of being grounded in Christ. But it inevitably brings the cross, too. Carrying our own cross will surely be part of our lives if we truly want to follow in the footsteps of a crucified Jesus.

The Scriptures make clear that it was necessary for Jesus to suffer. And Jesus makes clear that suffering applies to his disciples as well as to himself. The invitation to be a disciple is a great but costly grace. And it is an invitation. Jesus always respects our freedom.

Each of us needs only to look into our own lives to find our crosses. We can resent or embrace them. Embracing is the mark of a true disciple. †



Lord, your resurrection conquered sin and death. Give me the strength to overcome pride so I can become a humble servant of your love and peace. Amen.

From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 4–9

Mon. Weekday:
1 Thes 4:13–18 / Lk 4:16–30

Tue. Weekday:
1 Thes 5:1–6, 9–11 / Lk 4:31–37

Wed. Weekday:
Col 1:1–8 / Lk 4:38–44

Thu. Weekday:
Col 1:9–14 / Lk 5:1–11

Fri. Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary:
Mi 5:1–4a or Rom 8:28–30 / Mt 1:1–16, 18–23 or 1:18–23

Sat. St. Peter Claver: Col 1:21–23 / Lk 6:1–5