



# Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 5, 2017

## Solidarity

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**W**hen my daughter got her first job after college, I handed her a copy of Isaiah 57 so she would always remember she was blessed to have work and that she had a responsibility to care for those who were not as fortunate as she. Without a word, she took the piece of paper, folded it, and put it in her wallet. Years later, she still hasn't forgotten. When she was looking for a position as a lawyer, she sought a firm that would take clients regardless of their ability to pay and that counted

hours of volunteer legal counsel (*pro bono*) in calculating her work hours. I was so proud. It reminded me that honoring our solidarity with the poor is a lifelong discipline.

We've been taught that calling attention to ourselves is a little suspect. Our parents and good friends can call attention to our achievements, but we can't. And yet today's readings include the part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that calls us "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."

This isn't the kind of thing we're supposed to hide. But Jesus doesn't mean we should brag or be prideful. Rather, we're to do what Isaiah tells us and honor God by caring for the least among us. We're to follow Paul's example and strive only to "know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). The example of our lives should be such that those who see us will know God is working through his people. Our love and service to others is not for our glory, but for God's. †

## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 58:7-10

"If you remove the yoke from among you, the accusing finger, and malicious speech...then your light shall rise in the darkness."

### 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

"I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling... so that your faith might rest... on the power of God."

### Matthew 5:13-16

"A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden...Just so, your light must shine before others."

*Jesus says you are  
"the salt of the earth."*

## A Word From Pope Francis

**Jesus was not indecisive;** he was not indifferent. He made a decision and followed it through until the end. He decided to become man and as a man to become a servant until his death on the cross. This is the way of love, there is no other. Therefore we see that love is not simply social assistance and not in the least social assistance to reassure consciences. No, that is not love, that is business, those are transactions. Love is free. Charity, love is life choice, it is a way of being...a path of humility and of solidarity.

—Meeting with the poor and prison inmates, pastoral visit to Caligari, September 22, 2013



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How do you let God's light shine through you?
- How can you use that light to help those around you?



# Human Dignity, Rights, and Responsibilities

By Marie D. Hoff, PhD

**B**ecause we believe in community, the Church takes a distinctive approach to human rights by stressing a balance between rights and responsibilities. We have a duty to respect and exercise our own rights in a positive way. Reciprocally, we have a duty to defend and foster the full attainment of human rights by other people.

Our right to bodily respect and integrity means we have a duty to treat our own bodies with dignity. We should assert ourselves in a nonviolent manner if others violate our dignity through abusive or exploitative behavior. We

are also bound to help ensure other people's bodily rights are respected. Our right to participate in political decision-making is accompanied by our duty to vote and practice other forms of civic engagement within our personal capabilities and skills. We have a duty to support and promote the participation rights of others, especially those most disadvantaged or powerless.

Our economic rights to work and fair wages or profits are balanced by our duty to work to produce goods or services of genuine value for others and to use our gifts to make a positive contribution to

society. Our duties to others also include supporting laws that set fair wages and taxes, as well as educational and training opportunities that enable everyone to contribute to society through useful work.

Supporting others' rights may require being supportive of taxation for improved school systems or special job programs. Respecting human dignity requires more than merely being able to say, "Well, I didn't get drunk, steal, or yell at anyone today, so I must be a pretty decent person." We must exercise our own rights and responsibilities in proactive ways and join with others to ensure that human beings everywhere have their human rights and needs met so that all people can become the fully developed person in body, mind, and soul God meant them to be. In this way, we are going to God together. †

Source: *Happy the People*, © 2013, Liguori Publications

## An Experience of Race and Faith

By Andrew Lyke

**I**n the mid-1990s, my parish conducted a program to help facilitate talks among parishioners about race and racism. In the beginning, a tentativeness in our discussion undermined honest dialogue. A young man broke the ice by stating that because of his background, he feared he might say something that would offend me. I sensed others in the small group felt similarly. As the only person of color in my small group, I was concerned that sharing painful memories might bring to the surface the underlying anger in me, shutting down civil discourse.

I thought about other situations in which honest conversation can be difficult:

family discussions with my wife, my children, my siblings; tough exchanges with my friends. What helps me address issues honestly in those situations is the knowledge that no matter what happens, our relationship will remain intact. The lesson here is that our relationships can't be on the chopping block if we are to have honest dialogue. I blurted out that no matter what anyone said, even if it was offensive, I would stay. We all made a commitment to the group.

While this didn't eliminate the apprehension, it did give helpful boundaries to our discussion. In short, we loved one

another. It was love given out of concern for others. Only then were we free enough to have honest discussion. †

Source: *Liguorian*, February 2011, © Liguori Publications



Lord, you have blessed the world with goodness and love. Help me use my gifts and talents in accordance with your will.

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

### WEEKDAY READINGS

February 6–11

Mon. St. Paul Miki and Companions:  
Gn 1:1–19 / Mk 6:53–56

Tues. Weekday: Gn 1:20–2:4a /  
Mk 7:1–13

Wed. Weekday: Gn 2:4b–9, 15–17 /  
Mk 7:14–23

Thurs. Weekday:  
Gn 2:18–25 / Mk 7:24–30

Fri. St. Scholastica:  
Gn 3:1–8 / Mk 7:31–37

Sat. Weekday:  
Gn 3:9–24 / Mk 8:1–10



# Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 12, 2017

## Life Without Sin

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In 1973, psychiatrist Karl Menninger wrote a book called *Whatever Became of Sin?* (Hawthorne Books). It seems that in the backlash against feelings of excessive guilt, many people embraced the notion that they weren't responsible for what they did. Their parents, or the way they were raised, or other people made them do evil things. The popular phrase "the devil made me do it" captures the sentiment of the era. Menninger wondered about the impact of a world without sin.

Therapists were right about the danger of feeling guilty all the time, and our reactions to past hurts and behaviors are a normal part of growing up. But mature adults also know that reactions come in many forms. When we choose to react to events or people with behaviors or words that hurt others or ourselves, we are responsible and have sinned. When we choose to do something that is wrong simply because it's easier than doing what's right, we've sinned—however mild or unnoticeable we think sin is.

In today's readings, Sirach and Jesus hold us accountable for our actions and our thoughts in no uncertain terms. These Scriptures are part of the underpinnings of the Church's theology of sin, which is not meant to make us crazy—it's meant to make us free to love others and ourselves in spite of their brokenness and ours. Can we be perfect? Well, that's a long road. But God wants to help us walk that road. We can begin by examining our own conscience for the places and times we've fallen short of the call to love. †

***When we choose  
to hurt others...  
we are responsible  
and have sinned.***

## A Word From Pope Francis

The story of Cain and Abel teaches that we have an inherent calling to fraternity, but also the tragic capacity to betray that calling. This is witnessed by our daily acts of selfishness, which are at the root of so many wars and so much injustice....The question naturally arises: Can the men and women of this world ever fully respond to the longing for fraternity placed within them by God the Father? Will they ever manage by their power alone to overcome indifference, egoism and hatred, and to accept the legitimate differences typical of brothers and sisters?

—Morning  
meditation, chapel  
of *Domus Sanctae  
Marthae*, May 15, 2015



## Sunday Readings

### Sirach 15:15–20

"Before everyone are life and death, whichever they choose will be given them."

### 1 Corinthians 2:6–10

"We speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden...and which none of the rulers of this age knew."

### Matthew 5:17–37

"Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Anything more is from the evil one."

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- How do you handle feelings of guilt when they come to you?
- What can you do this week to stay accountable for your actions, while moving away from sin?



# Reconciliation: Coming Home to God

By Fr. Kenneth Brown

**W**hen was the last time you celebrated the sacrament of reconciliation? The Pew Research Center reported in 2015 that only four in ten Catholics go to confession at least once a year. Is this because we don't need forgiveness? Have we come to believe that forgiveness doesn't matter any more? I suspect most of us can think of at least one moment where we wish for the chance to either forgive or receive forgiveness.

Many rightly ask: "Can't we receive

forgiveness without confessing to some person, to some priest?" Of course we can, and we do. Think of how we begin Mass. We're all invited to call to mind our sins and ask for forgiveness. And there are many other times when we can seek and receive forgiveness by simply taking a moment of reflection, reading a passage in Scripture, or writing someone a note to ask for forgiveness. But there are times when we really need and desire the sacrament in this divinely human form.

There are two responses we may have

when we stand before the mercy of God, especially if we've been away from this sacrament: tears or silence. We should not be surprised if our experience of God's love and forgiveness brings us to tears. The tears should remind us of the original cleansing we received at baptism.

The sacrament of reconciliation is a sacrament of both human and divine dimensions. All of us sin and all of us stand in need of forgiveness. Ours is a God who heals, a physician who binds up our wounded hearts, a loving parent who forgives and embraces the child who has wandered off. How could we not want this for ourselves, for our children, and all those we love? †

Source: *Catholic Update*,  
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## Becoming Peacemakers

By Bishop Anthony B. Taylor

**T**he biblical understanding of peace involves far more than our usual American way of thinking of peace as having to do with the absence of conflict. We usually translate the Hebrew word *shalom* as "peace," but it actually means "everything that contributes to a person's well-being." So "peace" in the Bible has a nuance of wholeness, integrity, unity, and concord.

Notice that Jesus' eighth beatitude is about peacemaking, not peace *loving*. Sometimes out of love of peace, people are unwilling to ruffle feathers to confront threatening situations early on while the problem is still manageable. Here are four strategies for peacemaking:

1. *Preventative peacemaking.* Avoid hurtful or offensive things and seek to increase understanding and connect people.
2. *Break the cycle of hatred.* When injured, respond with nonviolent resistance and a willingness to endure and respond with love.
3. *Eliminate injustice.* Peace can't exist in a society that denies basic human rights or exploits the disadvantaged.
4. *Conquer evil with good.* Touch and soften the heart of the adversary—especially when the issue is personal.

If we limit ourselves to what we learn about other people from the news, it becomes easy to conclude that people are corrupt, violent, or greedy. But the truth is almost always more complex than what we

see in the news. We become peacemakers when we do God's work in bridging differences, healing wounds, eliminating injustice, and bringing people together. †

Source: *Liguorian*,  
© January 2013, Liguori Publications



Lord, you reveal the mercy of God in the world. Forgive me for the times I've hurt others out of anger and resentment.

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

### WEEKDAY READINGS

February 13–18

Mon. Weekday:  
Gn 4:1–15, 25 / Mk 8:11–13

Tues. Sts. Cyril and Methodius:  
Gn 6:5–8; 7:1–5, 10 / Mk 8:14–21

Wed. Weekday:  
Gn 8:6–13, 20–22 / Mk 8:22–26

Thurs. Weekday:  
Gn 9:1–13 / Mk 8:27–33

Fri. Weekday:  
Gn 11:1–9 / Mk 8:34–9:1

Sat. Weekday:  
Heb 11:1–7 / Mk 9:2–13

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February 12, 2017

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# Bringing Home the Word

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time February 19, 2017

## Love Your Neighbor

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I've never met a person who found the title of this article easy to follow. Some people practice every day and are better at it than others. I've been fortunate to know one or two of them. Most of us are good at loving in the abstract. As an Irish Catholic, I love the people who continue the troubles in Ireland. As an American, I love those who have attacked our country and those who embrace a different political view.

It's pretty easy to love people you don't know. Where I fall down is in the concrete, day-to-day loving. I find it really hard to love the people who don't love or even like me. I find it even harder to love those who have hurt me or members of my family. The difficulty of Jesus' words strike home when they become personal. We come face to face with our own unloving ways and unloving hearts. This is precisely where the grace of baptism comes into play. It's natural to feel hurt and anger when someone wounds us deeply. It's human to want to return hurt for hurt with words, behaviors, or even fists.

Jesus invites us into a different path—one from which we can love others in their woundedness and receive the love and healing of God for our own wounds. Jesus knows that only the path of love leads to life. Any other path will lead to our eventual destruction.

Who do you need to love today? †

*It's pretty easy  
to love people  
you don't know.*

## Sunday Readings

### Leviticus 19:1–2, 17–18

"Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your own people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

### 1 Corinthians 3:16–23

"If any one among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool so as to become wise."

### Matthew 5:38–48

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

## A Word From Pope Francis

**Today we are living** in a world which is growing ever "smaller" and where, as a result, it would seem to be easier for all of us to be neighbors....Nonetheless, divisions, which are sometimes quite deep, continue to exist within our human family....In a world like this, media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all....The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another.

—Communication at the service of an authentic culture of encounter, June 1, 2014



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Who do you struggle to love?
- In what ways can you show you love your neighbor in your day-to-day life?



# The Body of Christ

By Jeffery D. VonLehmen

There is no doubt that a body-and-blood relationship exists between a mother and her child. But they don't think of each other as body and blood. They think about the human relationship between them, whether or not it is mutually loving. It's the same way in the eucharistic celebration. We have body-and-blood relationship with God in Christ. In this encounter, we no longer get stuck on elements of

bread and wine, body and blood. This is because we experience persons instead of things, relationships instead of magic. Real reverence has to be for the person of Christ and for all people for whom he died—the two are inseparable.

We cannot have reverence for the Body and Blood of Christ—the person of Christ—if we knock down those for whom he died out of love. For this reason, people are the body of Christ.

Scripture says it so well. "What you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me" (Matthew 25:45).

In speaking of the condemnation of the unjust steward, Matthew's Gospel says, "So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart" (Matthew 18:35).

It is simple: we must have reverence for one another. We cannot help but want a community of compassion, mercy, peace, and justice if we recognize that we all come from the same womb of God, the love of God poured out into our hearts through the outpouring of the Spirit, signed and sealed in the body-and-blood relationship we have in Christ. †

Source: *Catholic Update*,  
© September 1996, Liguori Publications

## Compassion and Companions

By Fr. John Bartunek, LC, SThD

Eating together brings people into a basic common space and activity that serves as a catalyst for mutual knowledge and growth in intimacy. When we share a meal, we share our presence and our vulnerability. There is no perfect person. We are all incomplete. And that's OK. It's how we are designed.

While our family gatherings during the holiday season are filled with shared meals, we also know that family get-togethers are not always characterized by unadulterated joy. The dysfunctions at work in our relationships can't hide so well during those times of companionship. The wounds and the unresolved misunderstandings are often exposed when we come together to share a common table.

As children we often experience only the good side of those family gatherings. That's how I remember it. Every year, a member of my family would host everyone. How I used to look forward to each gathering! Seeing my cousins, playing games, sitting around with the adults while they talked and laughed, exploring my uncle's house or Grandmother's apartment building with my sisters. The food was a big attraction, too.

I vividly remember sitting at the grownups' table and gazing with fond affection at everyone. I really didn't understand everything they were talking about, but there was my grandmother's wise face, my aunt's sparkling eyes, my uncle's mischievous smile, and my dad's tough but somehow comforting solemnity. It didn't occur to me to criticize them. I accepted them and they accepted me. We

were unique, companions on a special day. And that was delightful. This is the attitude we should take with us into the world. An acceptance, not necessarily of others' actions, but of their being members of our family.

Source: *Winter Meditations*,  
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Lord, you command me to love my neighbor. May your love dispel the hatred and resentment in my heart so that I may love all people unconditionally.

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

### WEEKDAY READINGS

February 20–25

Mon. Weekday:  
Sir 1:1–10 / Mk 9:14–29  
Tues. Weekday:  
Sir 2:1–11 / Mk 9:30–37  
Wed. Feast of the Chair of St. Peter:  
1 Pt 5:1–4 / Mt 16:13–19

Thurs. St. Polycarp:  
Sir 5:1–8 / Mk 9:41–50  
Fri. Weekday:  
Sir 6:5–17 / Mk 10:1–12  
Sat. Weekday:  
Sir 17:1–15 / Mk 10:13–16

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# Bringing Home the Word

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 26, 2017

## God Simply Loves

By Mary Katharine Deeley

**W**e nod our heads when asked whether God loves us, but what would you say if you were asked, “Does God *like* you?”

God’s love is often difficult to fathom. Some of us are rational: “God loves everyone”—the unspoken thought being, “It’s his job to love me.” We say this about parents as well: “She’s my mom, she has to say that.” This idea of God’s love never moves further than the head. Other people compartmentalize the love: “God loves me, but only when I’m good,” or

### Sunday Readings

#### Isaiah 49:14–15

“Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb?”

#### 1 Corinthians 4:1–5

“[The Lord] will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will manifest the motives of our hearts.”

#### Matthew 6:24–34

Jesus said to his disciples: “No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and mammon.”

“God loves only the good parts of me.” Still others use God’s love as a shield against responsibility: “God forgives me no matter what I do and would never judge me harshly.” God becomes a marshmallow—all sugar, no nutrition.

In reality, God’s love holds us in delight as parents delight in their children. God’s love rejoices in us as the Creator rejoices in endless variety and hidden mystery. God’s love doesn’t come out of necessity. Rather, it springs out of the nature of God. Out of love, God holds us accountable for our actions, forgives us when we ask, and is an abiding presence, whether we recognize it or not. When we turn away, God is there. When we suffer, God walks with us. When we sin, God is the source of our conversion.

God grounds us in peace and joy. God doesn’t love us because we’re the greatest and best. If that were the case, none of us would be worthy. God simply loves. We have only to seek his righteousness to know that and believe it. †

***God doesn’t love us because we are the greatest and best.***

## A Word From Pope Francis

**God prepares our path**, he prepares our lives over time....It seems that Simon, Andrew, James, and John were definitively chosen, but that does not mean that from that moment on they were definitively faithful. In reality, they made mistakes; they made non-Christian suggestions to the Lord and in fact they denied him....In Jesus’ own genealogy, there are men and women who were sinners. But what did the Lord do? He entered into their affairs, he corrected the path, he set things aright....The Lord knows. When the Lord tells us: with eternal love have I loved you, he is referring to this.

—Morning meditation, chapel of *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, January 13, 2014



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What about your life would cause God to rejoice in you as God’s child?
- What about your life would God lovingly ask you to correct?



# Christian View of Happiness

By Mario Paredes

Some say the only thing that counts as success or happiness is pleasure gained from whatever is quick and easy. This leads us to a vision of happiness in which there is no place for anything other than pleasure. Pain, suffering, old age, loneliness, as well as the difficult yet joyful experiences of solidarity, commitment, and serving others have no place in today's world. In our search for happiness, we have failed to integrate

the very human experience of suffering and hardship into our understanding of daily life. The experience of anything difficult or unpleasant has been set against the view of success and happiness as originating from pleasure.

A denial of that less enjoyable yet meaningful side of life leaves us depressed and anxious when we face hardship. In the midst of so many ways of life from which to choose, we have no sense of

direction and no way of understanding how we could be happy even in the midst of suffering. Yet as Christians, we are called to live each day with life in Christ as the true measure of our earthly success and of our eternal happiness.

It isn't always easy to follow this call or see our true source of happiness in Christ. As people living in the world, we still see a distinction between the happiness that comes from salvation and worldly happiness. It is our responsibility to demonstrate through our lives that Christ saves us. In other words, Christ makes us happy and gives us the abundant life for which we long. If the way in which we live our daily lives does not make this message clear, then the Church's proclamation of salvation becomes one that no one understands or finds convincing. †

Source: *Liguorian*,

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## Wistful Longing

By Jeanne McNulty

God is love, and we are made in his image and likeness. Nonetheless, God lives in light inaccessible and is blinding to the naked eye. We yearn to see him, but if we did we could no longer exist on the earth.

Many spiritual masters make it abundantly clear that there is some groundwork that has to be done for us to obtain the union with God we yearn for. With mass and instant communication, it is easy to get caught up in a whirlwind of communicating with everyone except God. We go so fast there rarely is a

moment within a day where we can just be. We have to make time. We have to carve the way for space to breathe deeply and slowly and rest in the Almighty. A soul that is in a constant state of agitation will find it very difficult to center itself in God.

All that being said, no one can deserve or be worthy of a state of intimate union with God. It is pure gift. It cannot be earned, but we can be disposed to it by the way we live. The Lord sees our desire for union and, since he is love, will he not give us what is best for us if we entreat him with all our hearts? Is this the aim of our lives: to be totally caught up and

transformed in the warmth and light of God? †

Source: *Liguorian*,

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Lord, you are the source and center of my life. Give me the grace to love you with all my mind, heart, soul, and strength.

— From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,

Rev. Warren J. Savage  
and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

February 27–March 4

Mon. Weekday:  
Sir 17:20–24 / Mk 10:17–27

Tues. Weekday:  
Sir 35:1–12 / Mk 10:28–31

Ash Wednesday: Jl 2:12–18 / 2 Cor 5:20–6:2 / Mt 6:1–6, 16–18

Thurs. After Ash Wednesday:  
Dt 30:15–20 / Lk 9:22–25

Fri. After Ash Wednesday:  
Is 58:1–9a / Mt 9:14–15

Sat. After Ash Wednesday:  
Is 58:9b–14 / Lk 5:27–32

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