

01 Jul 2018

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Don't be afraid to ask

Need is all around: a sick child here, a chronically ailing elder there. Meanwhile, multitudes languish with inadequate education, or possibly a simple lack of inspiration. We all wait more desperately than we imagine for healing to come, for a word to rouse our hearts. Hope seems unreasonable, until Jesus passes by. Those who seek his help—even seizing his garments to get it—are the ones who go away satisfied. Will we be among those who reach for what we truly need? Or will we allow the one who can restore us to pass by?

Today's readings: *"If I but touch his clothes, I shall be cured."*

Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24; 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15; Mark 5:21-43 or 5:21-24, 35b-43 (98 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070118.cfm>>).

02 Jul 2018

Keep the light on

Jesus was not the first person, and certainly not the last, to experience homelessness. The problem is persistent and worldwide—an estimated 100 million people lack stable housing. The reasons are many and complex, from chronic unemployment to substance abuse to mental illness to natural disaster. But while none of us may be able to solve homelessness alone, each of us can respond to it with compassion. The website nationalhomeless.org <<http://nationalhomeless.org/>> offers some ideas and opportunities. Find a way to help someone—you are likely to meet Jesus along the way!

Today's readings:

Amos 2:6-10, 13-16; Matthew 8:18-22 (377 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070218.cfm>>).
"The Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head."

03 Jul 2018

FEAST OF THOMAS, APOSTLE

May we see your wounds?

Saint Thomas is famous for his skepticism toward initial reports of Jesus' Resurrection. Truth be told, you might wonder if you'd believe in such fabulous goings-on if they were reported to you today. Good news often seems feeble compared with the magnitude of the bad news that comes daily. Thomas is the patron saint when the reasons for hope appear frail. Early traditions say he died as a martyr in India, pierced by a sword. The one whose faith was bolstered by the wounds of Jesus proved his faith with his own torn body. What has faith cost you, and do you have the scars to prove it?

Today's readings:

Ephesians 2:19-22; John 20:24-29 (593 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070318.cfm>>).
"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands . . . I will not believe."

04 Jul 2018

MASS FOR INDEPENDENCE DAY

Unchain our hearts

Demonizing enemies, including religious and political ones, is one of the unsavory ways in which religious language can be abused. One's opponent becomes not merely wrong but evil incarnate. As we celebrate the nation we love—and that we wish were always right, pure, and honorable above all others—we must acknowledge our government's sometime misuse of our wealth and power. Pray that citizen and government alike may call upon the Lord to free us from whatever possesses us that is not of God.

Today's readings:

Amos 5:14-15, 21-24; Matthew 8:28-34 (379 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070418.cfm>>).

"If you drive us out, send us into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go then!"

05 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF ELIZABETH OF PORTUGAL

From pain to gain

"What a life of bitterness I am leading," said Saint Elizabeth of Portugal (1271-1336). "On whom but God can I depend?" These anguished words came from a woman who was married to the king of Portugal at 12, endured his philandering, watched their son lead an armed revolt against his own father, and was banished for a time by her husband. How did she deal with all these problems? By turning to prayer and works of mercy, including founding a hospital, a house for former prostitutes, an orphanage, and a pilgrim hostel. Elizabeth's example counsels us not to endure abusive situations but to turn our pain into healing, both for others and ourselves.

Today's readings:

Amos 7:10-17; Matthew 9:1-8 (380 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070518.cfm>>).

"Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home."

06 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF MARIA GORETTI, VIRGIN, MARTYR

The power of forgiveness

The story of Maria Goretti, the young virgin and martyr whose feast we celebrate today, is one that generations have read with a mixture of fascination and horror. Maria was only 11 years old when she was murdered by a would-be rapist. That's the horrific part of her story. The fascinating part is Maria's deathbed forgiveness of her attacker and his subsequent conversion. It might seem hard, even impossible at times, but the important thing to remember about forgiveness is that it's good for us. We benefit far more than the person we have forgiven. So, do something nice for yourself today: Forgive someone.

Today's readings:

Amos 8:4-6, 9-12; Matthew 9:9-13 (381 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070618.cfm>>).

"I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

07 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Glorify the mystery

Glory is a funny word. We all use it; many of us want it. But what is it, really? How much does it cost, and what good does it do to have it? The Hebrew word for *glory* means "heaviness." It refers to the importance of a thing: The heavier it is, the more significant or valuable it is, like a gold bar at Fort Knox. God's glory denotes God's overall sovereignty in the world. Could anything be heavier than the authority of a God who can create a world—or destroy one!—at will? Yet God chooses to take that weighty power and use it to transform death into life for the sake of those afflicted by mortality. Pray the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary today and praise the God whose glory brings peace to the world.

Today's readings:

Amos 9:11-15; Matthew 9:14-17 (382 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070718.cfm>>).

"The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

08 Jul 2018

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

No excuses

If only I had more money, more time, more assistance, more talent. We all have a pretty impressive laundry list of why we can't be of more service to God and to others. Even Saint Paul had his "thorn in the flesh," some private difficulty that seemed to hold him back from being the apostle he sought to be. Paul kept praying for its removal so he could be free of this impediment. Finally he reinterpreted the thorn: not an impediment, but an opportunity to let God be God. Maybe it's time to stop protesting and start serving!

Today's readings:

Ezra 2:2-5; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Mark 6:1-6a (101 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070818.cfm>>).

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

09 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF AUGUSTINE ZHAO RONG, PRIEST, AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

The whole world in God's hands

The gospel arrived in China in the fifth century, and Christianity flourished during the T'ang dynasty (618–907). By the 13th century Beijing had its own bishop. In the 1500s missions to China were common, but growing suspicion of the West led to persecutions and the destruction of churches. One hundred and twenty Catholics, including Augustine Zhao Rong (d. 1815), were martyred in China between the years 1648 and 1930. They were children, parents, catechists, laborers, and four priests. Thirty-three were foreign-born missionaries. Pray for the courage of Christians everywhere.

Today's readings:

Hosea 2:16, 17b-18, 21-22; Matthew 9:18-26 (383 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070918.cfm>>).

"Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you."

10 Jul 2018

Think unto others . . .

A woman once refused to extend her hand at the Sign of Peace during Mass. At the time it seemed unfriendly, even rude to the woman next to her. But after Mass, she explained that her arthritis was painning her terribly and shaking hands would have hurt her. The woman sitting next to her felt embarrassed that she had taken offense so wrongly. How often do we, like the Pharisees, leap to a negative assessment of the motivations of another only to find out they meant nothing of the kind? Think gently of others, as you would like them to think of you.

Today's readings:

Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13; Matthew 9:32-38 (384 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071018.cfm>>).

"When the demon was cast out, the Pharisees said, 'By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons.'"

11 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF BENEDICT, ABBOT

Be moderately holy

The main elements of Saint Benedict's famous monastic rule are sleep, prayer, and manual labor. Chapter 48 of the Rule states: "Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading. . . . They must not become distressed if local conditions or their poverty should force them to do the harvesting themselves. When they live by the labor of their hands, as our fathers and the apostles did, then they are really monks. Yet, all things are to be done with moderation on account of the fainthearted." Remember Benedict's concern for moderation. It is the key to all aspects of Christian piety.

Today's readings:

Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12; Matthew 10:1-7 (385 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071118.cfm>>).

"Sow for yourselves justice, reap the fruit of piety."

12 Jul 2018

Love is bigger than hurt

Joseph had it tough as the second youngest in a family of 12 brothers. Picked on and hated because he was his dad Jacob's favorite, Joseph ended up sold into slavery by his brothers. After many years of separation from his family, he again meets his brothers, only this time the tables are turned: Joseph is in a position of power, and his brothers are the vulnerable ones. It wouldn't have taken much for Joseph to tap back into those feelings of hurt, betrayal, and rage and respond measure for measure. But he went beyond that, back to the sibling love he so cherished, and reacted with not only kindness but an outpouring of generosity. We, too, have that capacity and power for a love that is bigger than hurt.

Today's readings:

Hosea 11:1-4, 8e-9; Matthew 10:7-15 (386 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071218.cfm>>).

"But [Joseph's] brothers could give him no answer, so dumbfounded were they at him."

13 Jul 2018

Get smart, but keep it simple

Sometimes it may seem that the gospel's call to simplicity doesn't stand a chance. Popular spiritual writer Henri Nouwen expressed this dilemma well: "So often the problems of the world seem so complex and intricate that your word strikes me as embarrassingly simple," he wrote in a prayer that continued, "but you, O Lord, said, 'Be clever as serpents and innocent as doves.' Let me retain innocence and simplicity in the midst of this complex world." That's a good prayer for all of us as we try to balance spiritual life and daily life.

Today's readings:

Hosea 14:2-10; Matthew 10:16-23 (387 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071318.cfm>>).

"I am sending you out like wolves among sheep."

14 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF KATERI TEKAKWITHA, VIRGIN

Witness respectfully

In his poem "Exploding Chippewas," poet Mark Turcotte writes of his Native American ancestors, "In my bones some of them weep, / strapped with their own braids / to slowly swinging crosses, / their meatless faces tight / with skin, / while others stomp down / the grass in quiet circles, / gripping shards of starry cloth / between their teeth, / dripping / blood, white, and blue." Kateri Tekakwitha is said to have been shunned by her people when she became Christian, but North and South American native peoples have also suffered countless indignities at the hands of well-meaning Christians. Spreading the word depends on profound respect as much as it does on zeal.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 10:24-33 (388 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071418.cfm>>).

"Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known."

15 Jul 2018

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

We're not alone

“Through him, with him, in him.” This phrase from the Eucharistic Prayer we hear at every Mass says a lot with a few well-chosen prepositions. Whatever it is we’re out there doing, we’re never doing it alone. It’s *through* Christ that we serve the needs of our families, friends, and strangers too with our charity. It’s *with* Christ that we suffer burdens of loss, betrayal, sickness, loneliness. It’s *in* Christ that we’re strengthened to speak the truth, seek justice, and promote peace with our words and actions. Take a moment to ground yourself in Christ.

Today's readings:

Amos 7:12-15; Ephesians 1:3-14 or 1:3-10; Mark 6:7-13 (104 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071518.cfm>>).

“In him we have redemption . . . in him we were also chosen . . . in him you also . . . were sealed.”

16 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL

Our Lady of the hour of death

Death has a way of focusing one’s attention. You may intend someday to pay more attention to your faith and “get right with God.” But, as you learned in school, you shouldn’t postpone studying until the night before finals. Today is the Memorial of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, who in 1251 appeared to Saint Simon Stock, an English Carmelite, and bestowed on him the scapular and the promise to intercede at the hour of death for all who wore it in life. The original scapular was the brown sleeveless tunic that is still a part of the Carmelite habit today. The best way to prepare for a good death is to live a better life—starting today.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 1:10-17; Matthew 10:34—11:1 (389 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071618.cfm>>).

“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

17 Jul 2018

Empty the schedule for a while

As you take some time for fun and pleasure this summer, remember that what you are doing is holy. It is our duty to rest, repair, and restore ourselves. Several times a year that actually means vacating our normal routine and residence. The word *vacation* comes from the Latin *vacare*, “to be empty, be free.” Taking a vacation is a separate and very different act from making a retreat (from the Latin for “withdraw”), though that, too, is often a holy act. Without the release a vacation provides, our lives can easily get thrown off balance, which leads to stress, exhaustion, apathy, and eventually hardness of heart—a trait Jesus condemns in today’s gospel.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 7:1-9; Matthew 11:20-24 (390 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071718.cfm>>).

“If the mighty deeds done here had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until now.”

18 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF CAMILLUS DE LELLIS, PRIEST

Using what ails us

A six-foot-six-inch-tall soldier, strong and commanding, Camillus was brought low by pain and disease. His addiction to gambling led him to poverty. Instead of giving up, he worked to heal others and brought others to toil with him. Now he is the patron saint of hospitals and the sick as well as of nurses. He used the limitations, pain, and shortcomings of his own life to bring healing to others and to sanctify himself. What ails us today that we can use to help others and ourselves?

Today's readings:

Isaiah 10:5-7, 13b-16; Matthew 11:25-27 (391 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071818.cfm>>).

“Although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.”

19 Jul 2018

What's in a name?

It makes a difference whether you know someone's name. To be introduced to a person involves learning their name. It puts you on personal terms. It was the same for the ancient Israelites, even when it came to God. When Moses asked God who he should say sent him, God revealed the divine name to Moses to tell the people. In this way they would know the Lord cared for them and would act on their behalf. Call on the Lord by name and ask God to be active in your life.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 26:7-9, 12, 16-19; Matthew 11:28-30 (392 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/071918.cfm>>).
"This is what you shall tell the children of Israel: I AM sent me to you."

20 Jul 2018

Follow the law of love

The Pharisees were a sect that demanded strict interpretation and observance of Mosaic Law. They sometime preferred rules and regulations to thoughtful consideration of circumstances or the larger picture. It's not hard to see why: Laws are neat, impartial, neutral, clear. Moreover, when we simply follow laws, thinking is generally not required! Jesus, however, calls his followers to a higher standard: to *love*, which, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu rightly observed, "is much more demanding than law." Just for today, let's immerse ourselves in the "something greater" that Jesus talked about. Let's immerse ourselves in love. What would your day be like if you did so?

Today's readings:

Isaiah 38:1-6, 21-22, 7-8; Matthew 12:1-8 (393 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072018.cfm>>).
"I say to you, something greater than the temple is here."

21 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF LAWRENCE OF BRINDISI, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

The gift of a broken heart

In his *Personal Narrative*, the early American sermon writer Edward Fitzgerald reveals something important about love when he says, "I have greatly longed of late for a broken heart, and to lie low before God." It is unlikely any of us long for a broken heart. But to consider a broken heart a gift, Fitzgerald must have seen something akin to what Saint Lawrence of Brindisi approached when he wrote, "Love stirs itself from sorrow; and love itself is in equal measure lanced with sorrow." The lower we lie in sorrow, the further we can experience God's sacrificial love that comes down to us. Moreover, the pureness of our emotions when we are steeped in sorrow allows us to offer up to God a supple material for his grace. Instead of fearing your brokenness, use it to open to God's grace.

Today's readings:

Micah 2:1-5; Matthew 12:14-21 (394 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072118.cfm>>).
"Many people followed him, and he cured them all."

22 Jul 2018

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Ease up!

Are you living at one speed all the time: busy, busy, busy? Some of us are overextended, many of us have never learned to say no, and more than a few of us hang our self-worth on the precarious hooks of what we can accomplish. Even Jesus took time out for retreat and recollection. When was the last time

you went on retreat? Do you take the occasional night off, observe a real Sabbath rest, sit for five minutes in a quiet, empty church? Block out time on your calendar not to *do*, but to *be* with God.

Today's readings:

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; Mark 6:30-34 (107 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072218.cfm>>).

"Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."

23 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF BRIDGET, RELIGIOUS

Give God a try

From the moment we're born we face challenges in life. We learn how to walk—and we take some tumbles. We allow ourselves to fall in love—and we experience heartache. We work hard to be better people—and we sometimes fall short. It takes faith to attempt things without knowing how they'll turn out. Fear can tempt us to not try hard at anything. Yet we're all called by God to do and be more than we can envision! We see that in stories of our ancestors in faith, such as Moses, who, by the grace of God and the willingness to try, achieved remarkable things. How have you allowed God to work in and through you today?

Today's readings:

Micah 6:1-4, 6-8; Matthew 12:38-42 (395 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072318.cfm>>).

"Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you."

24 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF SHARBEL MAKHLŪF, PRIEST

Listen up

Saints haven't always done big things like bring the gospel to whole continents or found great religious orders—laudable though those achievements have been. Sometimes they just sat by the door and listened to God and the people who visited them. Many visited Saint Sharbel (1828-98), a Lebanese hermit, for his blessing and counsel. The service he rendered consisted almost entirely of welcoming, listening, and praying with anyone who came to him. Do you have an attentive and welcoming friend who can help you find a way through your troubles? Can you be that attentive friend to others who need some support?

Today's readings:

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20; Matthew 12:46-50 (396 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072418.cfm>>).

"For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

25 Jul 2018

FEAST OF JAMES, APOSTLE

Take a big gulp

Saint James was a disciple of John the Baptist who took up Jesus' call to follow him. Brash, impulsive, and hotheaded (he and his brother John were nicknamed by Jesus the "Sons of Thunder"), James was rebuked on several occasions, but he proved himself when put to the test. He dedicated his life to spreading Jesus' gospel, traveled to Samaria, Judea, and Spain in the name of Christ, and died a martyr's death—the first apostle to do so—in Jerusalem in the year 44. James drank deeply from the cup Jesus passed to him. Prepare yourself each day through small acts of faith to do the same.

Today's readings:

2 Corinthians 4:7-15; Matthew 20:20-28 (605 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072518.cfm>>).

"Jesus asked the sons of Zebedee, 'Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?'"

26 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF JOACHIM AND ANNE, PARENTS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

A grand legacy

Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary, are not mentioned in scripture, but legend says they were childless until they experienced simultaneous annunciations indicating that God had other plans. While Grandparents Day was established in 1979 “to help children become aware of strength, information, and guidance older people can offer,” today’s memorial of Jesus’ grandparents emphasizes handing on the treasure of faith. The affinity that the old and the very young often have for each other in our families is an opportunity to leave grandchildren an inheritance of love.

Today’s readings:

Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13; Matthew 13:10-17 (398 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072618.cfm>>).

“Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear.”

27 Jul 2018

The good earth

To be “honest as dirt” may not seem much of a compliment, but it is. A nicer word might be *humus*, a word taken directly from Latin that means “earth.” And from this root our word *humility* comes. Humility has a bad rep because it is often mistaken for humiliation. But humility has nothing to do with groveling. What it means is “I am who I am before God: nothing more, and nothing less.” That kind of humility (“I need you, Lord!”) is the honest soil in which the word can take hold, take root, take heart, and bloom. Worry less about briars: just need the Seed.

Today’s readings:

Jeremiah 3:14-17; Matthew 13:18-23 (399 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072718.cfm>>).

“The seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it.”

28 Jul 2018

Tough love

In his book *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, psychologist and best-selling author M. Scott Peck takes up one of the most difficult problems human beings face in this mysterious life: the problem of human evil. Why does it exist, and why does a good God permit it? Peck doesn’t provide any simple answers, but he does caution us not to give into the temptation when we are harmed, to return evil with evil and exact revenge. Leave the judgment to Jesus. Weeds eventually are separated from wheat, but that is not your job. Hard as it may be, you are called to return evil with love. Do your best.

Today’s readings:

Jeremiah 7:1-11; Matthew 13:24-30 (400 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072818.cfm>>).

“Let them grow together until harvest.”

29 Jul 2018

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Waste not, want not

The earth is in danger of becoming our garbage can. It’s estimated that U.S. citizens throw out 90 percent of what we buy within the year. A lot of that is packaging, including the double-packaging of cardboard and plastic around many products. Let’s clean up our act! Avoid buying over-packaged items, as well as things you don’t really need. Embrace recycling as an act of love for the planet and its people. Find new homes for books, clothing, furniture, kitchen items, and technology. Shrink your footprint, expand your heart.

Today's readings:

2 Kings 4:42-44; Ephesians 4:1-6; John 6:1-15 (110 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072918.cfm>>).

"Gather the fragments left over, so that nothing will be wasted."

30 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF PETER CHRYSOLOGUS, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Silence is golden

Chrysologus (380-451), whose name in Greek means "golden worded," kept his homilies short and practical. And he sometimes preached with such great emotion that he became speechless with the implications of what he was saying. In one way, the Christian message revealed in scripture and tradition is a complex product of centuries. Yet it is also simple. Preachers like Peter Chrysologus recognized the simplicity of the gospel and knew when to stop talking about it, and live it.

Today's readings:

Jeremiah 13:1-11; Matthew 13:31-35 (401 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/073018.cfm>>).

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field."

31 Jul 2018

MEMORIAL OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, PRIEST

Make a retreat

Ever make a retreat after a busy time in your life? Did you find it hard to slow down and reflect? Picture Ignatius laid up for more than nine months recovering from a broken leg. He had been a soldier, a brawler, a womanizer, and a gambler. Suddenly he was immobile, reading, then praying, and then having mystical experiences. Out of this experience came his Spiritual Exercises, still used on retreats and by the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) today. Schedule a retreat, or at least a day of prayer, and see what changes God has in store for you.

Today's readings:

Jeremiah 14:17-22; Matthew 13:36-43 (402 <<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/073118.cfm>>).

"Jesus dismissed the crowds and went into the house."

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