

Weekday Homily Helps

October 5, 2020

Monday [Bl. Francis Xavier Seelos]

Theme: What Gospel are we following?

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gal 1:6–12 (461)

Dr. Terrance Callan

After greeting the Galatians (1:1–5), Paul begins to rebuke them for forsaking the One who called them and embracing a different Gospel. This rebuke replaces the thanksgiving prayer that ordinarily follows the salutation in Paul's letters. This change probably indicates that Paul thinks the problem he addresses in this letter is particularly severe.

As Paul begins his rebuke, he does not make it clear exactly how the Galatians have embraced a different Gospel. The letter as a whole suggests that Paul preached a Gospel that did not require the gentile Galatians to keep the Jewish law. After Paul left Galatia, otherwise unknown people disturbed those Christians and tried "to pervert the Gospel of Christ" by telling them to keep the Jewish law. Paul totally rejects this, saying that anyone who preaches a Gospel different from what he preached to the Galatians should be accursed. This applies even to himself or to "an angel from heaven."

Paul asks if he is seeking to please people by saying this, obviously expecting the answer "No." Perhaps those disturbing the Galatians have suggested that Paul did not require keeping the law in order to make the Gospel more palatable. Paul then argues that he received the Gospel that he preaches directly from God. Because it is not "of human origin," it cannot be altered.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 10:25–37 (461)

Dr. Terrance Callan

During Lk's account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:51–19:27), a scholar of the law tests Jesus by asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus might be able to answer or might answer incorrectly. Instead of answering directly, Jesus asks the scholar what answer is found in the law. After the scholar quotes Dt 6:5 and Lv 19:18, Jesus affirms that response.

This is somewhat similar to Mk 12:28–34, where a scribe asks Jesus which commandment of the law is first of all. Jesus quotes the same two passages. In Lk the scholar asks Jesus another question to justify himself for asking a question whose answer he already knows. The scholar asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answers by telling the familiar story of the good Samaritan, a uniquely Lukan parable. A man is robbed, beaten, and left half dead along a road. Although a priest and Levite pass by without helping the man, a Samaritan does help. After telling the story, Jesus asks the scholar which of the three was a neighbor to the man who had been robbed. When the scholar answers that it was the one "who treated him with mercy," Jesus tells the scholar to do likewise. One's neighbor is anyone who needs to be treated with mercy.

Homily Suggestion

Leota Roesch

In today's Gospel, Jesus shakes up our normal way of seeing things, giving us a new perspective. Jesus' listeners expected the priest and/or the Levite to tend to the injured man. Only the "untouchable" Samaritan was neighbor to the beaten-up traveler.

The events of this past summer forced us to look at our lives and life in this country in a new way. The arrival of missionaries preaching a "different gospel" surely got Paul's dander up in Galatia, and his displeasure is vehement. Reading the Gospels in a way that subverts the teaching of Jesus and using Scripture to support individual and systemic evil would prompt Paul to cry out today, "I am amazed that you are so quickly forsaking the one who called you by the grace of Christ for a different Gospel."

We have two pandemics, one of the body and one of the soul: COVID-19 and the sin of racism. Somehow the Gospel call to bind up the wounds of our beaten-down and sick neighbors was perverted by those tout-ing "personal freedom" over the paramount care and love we must have for each other. Often such selfishness was spouted by "Christians" and belied the unconditional love the Gospel requires.

The racist murder of George Floyd should have pierced the heart of our nation. "We cannot turn a blind eye to these atrocities and yet still try to profess to respect every human life. We serve a God of love, mercy, and justice" (Bishop Shelton Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana).

Here's the Gospel: Love *everyone* as Christ has loved us. Without exception! Which Gospel do we serve?

For more information about Bl. Francis Xavier Seelos, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 6, 2020

Tuesday [Bruno, Bl. Marie Rose Durocher]

Theme: The both/and of Christian discipleship.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gal 1:13–24 (462)

Dr. Terrance Callan

In the last vv of yesterday's reading, Paul claims that his Gospel is divine in origin; therefore, the Galatians should not abandon it. Paul now supports this claim in two ways. First, he shows how God revealed the Gospel to him (vv 13–16). Then Paul shows how little contact he has had with any human beings from whom he might have received the Gospel (vv 16–24).

Paul recalls his life before receiving the Gospel. He emphasizes that it was the opposite of his present life. His becoming a proclaimer of the Gospel was not an organic development from his former life but rather God's reversal of that life. In Paul's former zeal for Judaism, he tried to destroy the Church of God, presumably as a threat to Judaism. God changed the direction of Paul's life by revealing Jesus to him. This probably refers to the risen Christ's appearance showing Paul that Jesus' followers are right to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

When Paul received this revelation, he did not consult human beings but instead went to Arabia, presumably to begin preaching the Gospel. After that, Paul had only limited contact with other followers of Jesus. Three years after the Gospel was revealed to Paul, he visited Cephas (Peter) for 15 days; the only other apostle he saw then was James, the brother of Jesus. Then Paul left Judea and had no further contact with Jesus' followers there.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 10:38–42 (462)

Dr. Terrance Callan

As Jesus journeys to Jerusalem (9:51–19:27), immediately after the dialogue with the scholar recounted in yesterday's Gospel, Jesus becomes the guest of Martha and Mary, an account unique to Lk. In this pronouncement story, a brief narrative contains a notable saying of Jesus.

He enters an unnamed village where a woman named Martha welcomes him into her home as a guest. Martha's sister, Mary, sits at Jesus' feet, listening to him speak. Mary is pictured as a disciple of Jesus, an unusual role for a woman then. Martha is "burdened with much serving." This may imply that she would rather listen to Jesus but cannot because of the meal she

is preparing. She complains to Jesus that Mary is not helping her and asks Jesus to tell Mary to do so. This leads to the notable saying of Jesus.

Jesus says that Martha is anxious about many things, but only one thing is needed. At first, this might suggest that Martha is preparing too elaborate a meal consisting of many dishes; one dish would be enough. But Jesus goes on to say that Mary has chosen the better part, making it clear that the one thing needed is listening to Jesus. This emphasizes the supreme importance of such listening, but it probably cannot be used as simple, practical advice. Everyone cannot neglect food preparation all the time to listen to Jesus; eating is also necessary.

Homily Suggestion

Leota Roesch

In today's readings, we encounter three disciples: Paul, Martha, and Mary.

In the first reading, Paul gives an honest account of his journey as a disciple. Left to his own devices and inclinations, Saul would never have become Paul. The both/and of his life meant that he had to acknowledge who he was and what he had done (Acts 9:4, 5) before God could work through him to convert gentiles. Paul had to hold in tension the grace he had received and the past that had blinded him. We are always both saint and sinner; "saint" wins out when we own our sinfulness and put our unique life in God's hands.

We see a different both/and in the Gospel story of Martha and Mary. Laying aside all the usual comments, let us consider something else. The Rule of Benedict is based on *Ora et Labora* (both prayer and work)! Prayer first, then work. We can assume that ordinarily Martha and Mary shared the household duties. But *this* day with Christ present in their midst, Martha learns that sitting at the feet of Jesus is most necessary for true discipleship, a both/and lesson we all need to learn.

Yesterday's Gospel was about reversing our vision so that we can see as God sees—not as we are conditioned by culture and inclination to see. The both/and of Christian discipleship can be uncomfortable, but if we are honest and prayerful, all shall be well!

For more information about St. Bruno, priest, and Bl. Marie Rose Durocher, virgin, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 7, 2020

Wednesday—Our Lady of the Rosary

Theme: Easier said than done!

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gal 2:1-2, 7-14 (463)

Dr. Terrance Callan

Paul continues to argue that his Gospel is divine in origin by declaring his minimal contact with other followers of Jesus from whom he might have received it. But Paul also argues that in those contacts he has consistently preached a Gospel not requiring that gentile Christians keep the Jewish law.

Fourteen years after Paul's first visit to Jerusalem (or possibly 14 years after the Gospel was revealed to him), he made a second visit to Jerusalem. He went to present his preaching to James, Cephas (Peter) and John, the leaders of the Jerusalem Church for confirmation that Paul was not running in vain. Disagreement between Paul and these leaders would undermine his preaching. But the Jerusalem leaders agree with Paul that gentile Christians need not keep the Jewish law (2:3-6).

Nevertheless, some questions remained unsettled. The Church in Antioch included Jewish and gentile Christians. The gentile ones did not keep the Jewish law, but what about the Jewish ones? If they kept the Jewish law completely, they would not be able to eat with gentile Christians. Paul clearly thinks Jewish Christians should relax their keeping of the law enough so the two groups can eat together. When Cephas first came to Antioch, he agreed with Paul and ate with the gentile Christians. Cephas later changed his mind, and Paul publicly criticized him for that.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 11:1-4 (463)

Dr. Terrance Callan

As Jesus and his disciples journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:27), he prays in an unnamed place. Lk often presents Jesus as praying (3:21; 6:12; 9:18, 28). When Jesus is finished, his disciples ask him to teach them to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples. Jesus responds by teaching them the prayer we know as the Our Father. This prayer has a parallel in Mt 6:9-13 and so presumably comes from the Q source. The two versions of the prayer differ somewhat; Mt's version is the one we use.

Lk's version begins simply "Father," not specifying that God is "our" father or that he is in heaven. The prayer's first two petitions ("hallowed be your name" and "your kingdom come") are the same in both ver-

sions. Lk's version does not include Mt's third petition, "Your will be done," or the request that these things be done on earth as in heaven.

In Lk, the next three petitions differ slightly from those in Mt; Lk's version does not include Mt's final petition, "deliver us from evil." The most notable difference between the three petitions found in both versions is that Lk's version asks God to forgive us because we forgive others; Mt's version asks God to forgive as we forgive others. As Mt emphasizes, God wants us to forgive in the same way we want God to forgive us.

Homily Suggestion

Leota Roesch

In today's readings, Paul's recounts his journey as a disciple, and Jesus teaches his followers to pray by using the "Our Father" as a model. These words can come off our tongues at varied speeds and with varied degrees of attentiveness.

The events of 2020, a pandemic that killed more than 129,000 in the US and a worldwide outcry against racism and its symbols should give us pause as we pray, "your Kingdom come." Jesus wants more than our words; he wants our commitment to bring about the kingdom with the help of the Holy Spirit. The kingdom "must be understood as a process," (Boff, 1983) It is already emerging in Jesus the Christ, "yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8) That begins with our repentance, prayer, and action. There's the rub: We must act on our prayerful words.

Paul worked tirelessly and suffered much for the kingdom's fulfillment (2 Cor chs 11, 12)—always remembering how systems can oppress people.

Jesus gives the criteria for the arrival of God's kingdom: "The poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Mt 11:5). That means we must take this proclamation to the streets, the barrios, the slums, and the prisons so that justice reaches the poor, the dispossessed, the oppressed, and disenfranchised. When every person's dignity as *imago Dei* is respected, the kingdom of God begins to dawn. So? Do we merely say nice words, or do we work for their fulfillment?

For more information about the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 8, 2020

Thursday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: Life in the Spirit.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gal 3:1-5 (464)

Dr. Terrance Callan

Paul here renews the rebuke that began in 1:6-9. He calls them “stupid,” suggesting that someone has “bewitched” them into departing from the Gospel’s proclamation of Christ’s crucifixion. In 2:19, Paul said that he has died to the law by being crucified with Christ. When the gentile Galatians begin to keep the Jewish law, they reject their crucifixion with Christ, their death to the law.

Paul argues against the Galatians’ decision to keep the Jewish law and asks them to reflect on their experience. He asks whether they received the Spirit by keeping the law or by believing the Gospel. Paul presumes they know they received the Spirit by believing in the Gospel. And if so, why keep the law? In fact, keeping the law means turning away from the Spirit toward the flesh. Paul may be thinking that much of the law concerns physical matters such as circumcision and food.

Paul thinks the Galatians know exactly how and when they received the Spirit. Perhaps they also experienced what happened in Acts 10:44-46. While Peter is speaking to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit falls upon them; they begin speaking in tongues and praising God. Perhaps this also happened to the Galatians when Paul preached to them.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 11:5-13 (464)

Dr. Terrance Callan

After teaching his disciples the Our Father (yesterday’s Gospel), Jesus adds the remarks concerning prayer found in today’s reading. He assures his disciples that prayer will be answered; 11:5-8 is unique to Lk. Verses 9-13 echo Mt 7:7-11, presumably from the Q source.

Jesus describes a man who goes to his friend at midnight, asking for some bread. Jesus says that, even if the friend will not lend the bread for the sake of friendship, he will lend it because of the persistence of the one asking so that the first man will stop asking for it and will leave his friend in peace. Jesus’ point is that God will similarly answer persistent prayer.

Jesus goes on to say explicitly that God will answer prayer “Ask and you will receive.” Jesus supports this by appealing to the way parents treat their children. He asks if anyone whose child asks for a fish or an egg

instead gives that child a snake or a scorpion. He obviously presumes that the answer is “No.” If human parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more is this true of God, the Father in heaven? God will give the holy Spirit to those who ask him. This may imply that God will not answer every prayer, but only prayers for some good gift. The holy Spirit is the greatest of such good gifts.

Homily Suggestion

Leota Roesch

One thing is certain: Paul did not try to win friends and influence people when in Galatians he calls those Christians stupid! Paul seeks to correct their present course, for they have listened to those who have perverted the Gospel. They have been persuaded that they must now accept the ritual and dietary practices of the old law. For Paul, this makes a mockery of the crucifixion of Christ for our salvation. Having received the outpouring the Spirit, how is it that they do not live in that same Spirit?

Just as we cannot simply utter the words of the Our Father and have them bear fruit, neither can we claim a life in the Spirit (poured out on us in Baptism and Confirmation and nourished in the Eucharist) unless the fruits of that Spirit mark our lives. If we embrace some Gospel of prosperity, superiority, and nationalism, then, like the Galatians, we are “now ending with the flesh.” Our beginnings in the Spirit are then reduced to pious words—not real life.

In the Gospel, we learn about persistence in prayer and that God, who is love, will always respond in love when we ask for what we need. However, let’s look at this a little differently: What if our main request in prayer is to ask for the Spirit? That is, a continuous prayer on our part that the Spirit will guide all our thoughts and actions, that living in the Spirit makes us a transforming presence in our world. If that is our prayer, the words of Paul’s hymn make sense (“Then all these things will be added unto you”) because God cannot deny our prayer.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 9, 2020

Friday [*Denis and Companions, John Leonardi*]

Theme: God's kingdom allows no neutrality.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gal 3:7-14 (465)

Dr. Terrance Callan

Paul continues to argue that the Galatians should not start keeping the Jewish law. By discussing God's plan of salvation, Paul focuses on Abraham, who was righteous because of his faith (3:6, quoting Gn 15:6). Fulfillment of God's promise that all nations will be blessed through Abraham requires that they share Abraham's faith. Thus the Galatians need only faith in Jesus; they do not need to keep the law.

Paul further supports this by showing how the law differs from faith. Lv 18:5 (quoted in v 12) promises that whoever obeys the law will have life because of this. Paul, however, presumes that no one does all that the law commands. Consequently, those who try to keep it come under the curse for failing to keep the law (Dt 27:26, quoted in 3:10). The law reveals the human need for salvation; it is not the way God meets that need. Christ, who redeems people from the curse of the law, is the way God saves them. This salvation is accepted through faith in Jesus. That this was God's plan is shown by Hb 2:4 (quoted in v 11): "The one who is righteous by faith will live."

Christ redeems us from the curse of the law by taking that curse on himself and setting us free from it. He did this by undergoing crucifixion. Whoever is crucified ("hung on a tree") is cursed (Dt 21:23, quoted in v 13).

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 11:15-26 (465)

Dr. Terrance Callan

As Jesus journeys to Jerusalem (9:51—19:27), he exorcises a demon that has made a man mute. Once the demon leaves, the man speaks, and the crowds are amazed. When some suggest that Jesus exorcises by the power of Beelzebul, prince of demons, Jesus rejects this suggestion at some length. This episode's parallels in Mt 12:22-30, 43-45 suggest the common Q source.

Jesus first responds that if he exorcises by the power of Beelzebul, then the kingdom of the demons is divided against itself and cannot endure. Jesus next appeals to the activity of other exorcists among the Jews. Jesus asks if they exorcise by the power of Beelzebul; obviously he expects the answer "No." There is no more reason to think Jesus acts by the power of Beelzebul

than there is to think other exorcists do. If Jesus does not exorcise by the power of Beelzebul, then he does so by the power of God; his exorcisms indicate that the kingdom of God is arriving.

Jesus implicitly compares his exorcisms to the defeat of a strong man by a stronger one. Jesus ends by warning that exorcism can be followed by repossession of a person by the expelled unclean spirit—with seven even more wicked spirits. A person guards against this by being with Jesus and gathering with him (v 23).

Homily Suggestion

Leota Roesch

Admittedly, it can be difficult to follow Jesus' argument about what it would mean if the devil rather than Jesus casts out the demon making a poor man mute. What was the crowd to understand by this?

First, evil only adds to evil, deepening it and causing it to spread. Only good can dispel evil, and Christ, who is the light of the world, has come to dispel the darkness of the evil of sin and death. If Jesus' contemporaries do not accept this sign that the kingdom of God is upon them, *they* are the ones in league with the devil. There can be no fence-sitting when it comes to accepting Jesus as the anointed of God: We either follow Christ wholeheartedly, or we don't.

Paul continues to upbraid the Galatians who, rather than relying on their faith in Christ and his Gospel, now try to validate their lives by the old law. Well, good luck! Paul seems to assume that no one can keep all 613 of those laws; thus they are cursed by the law itself. Ransomed by Christ through his death on the cross, the Galatians are blessed by their faith in Christ, for by it they have received the Spirit in whose continued life they must live.

Christ and Paul are making the same point about faith: It is not enough to hear the word of God, to "know" the Gospel; faith must be evident in our lives, as we've heard in our readings this week. We can mouth the words without thought; we can recite rules and regulations; we can be perfectly pious in our pews, but faith demands we cannot be neutral to situations of injustice. If we think we can choose that, then we have already chosen to side with the proponents of evil!

For more information about Sts. Denis and Companions and John Leonardi, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 10, 2020

Saturday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: Blessed are the believers.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gal 3:22–29 (466)

Dr. Terrance Callan

In 3:1–18, Paul argues that gentile Galatians should resist the temptation to keep the Jewish law. In 3:19, he asks: “Why did God give the law if gentile Christians should not keep it?” Today’s reading is part of Paul’s answer to that question.

He says the law sought to confine “all things under the power of sin,” to hold the Jewish people “in custody,” to be their “disciplinarian.” The law did this to prepare for salvation through faith in Jesus. The law set forth God’s will but provided no power to do God’s will. So the law simply made clear the need for salvation from that situation, and that is why God gave the law. If that is the law’s purpose, there is no need for the gentile Galatians, who have already been saved through faith in Jesus, to begin keeping the law.

The Galatians are “children of God in Christ Jesus,” “clothed” with Christ by Baptism. Those who believe in Christ are united with him so closely that what is true of Christ is true of them. Christ is son of God; those who believe in him are likewise children of God. Their union with Christ sets aside the things that distinguish them from Christ in whom there is no Jew or Greek (gentile), slave or free, male or female. There is no reason for gentile Galatians to become Jews by keeping the Jewish law.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 11:27–28 (466)

Dr. Terrance Callan

After Jesus rejects the idea that he exorcises by Beelzebub’s power (yesterday’s Gospel), a woman from the crowd calls out to Jesus, and he responds. This brief exchange occurs only in Lk.

The woman expresses her admiration of Jesus by blessing the womb that bore him and the breasts that nursed him. The woman blesses Jesus’ mother because she has had such a remarkable son. Jesus responds by saying that, instead of blessing his mother, people should bless those who hear the word of God and do it. Jesus speaks the word of God (5:1). It is the spiritual relationship created by accepting the word of God through Jesus that should be blessed, not the biological relationship with his mother.

In 8:19–21 when Jesus learns that his mother and

brothers are outside, he says that his mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. Here Jesus replaces the biological relationship with the spiritual. Lk borrows this earlier account from Mk 3:31–35.

Of course, nothing prevents those who have a biological relationship with Jesus from also having a spiritual relationship. Jesus’ mother may also be one who hears the word of God and does it. And we believe that Jesus’ mother is, in fact, the model disciple of Jesus.

Homily Suggestion

Leota Roesch

Today we encounter a gentler Paul as he explains how faith influences the lives of the Galatians. He says that the law was meant to discipline the people, to keep them focused on and faithful to the Sinai covenant. Paul says the discipline of the old law is no longer needed, for Christ has come; faith in him is all the justification they need. Baptized into Christ, they do not need the law as the exiles from Egypt did, for they are, in Christ, children of God. Christ is in them, and they are in Christ. The law did not win them God’s approval: Christ by his death did that. Because they come to Christ as they are, they don’t have to become something else first.

Jesus has more to say about faith in two very short and dramatic vv. Those are blessed who hear his word and obey, observe, keep it. Our translation uses the word *observe*, but “observe” can have something of a passive meaning—or at least a ritualistic meaning: We do what we should, and that’s that. The word *keep* calls us to abide in that word, allowing it to change us. That’s what faith requires: reflecting on the word of God and then taking it into ourselves so that we are changed, so that we can be agents of change. To “hear” the word requires reflection and action.

What we have heard this week in the readings from Paul and Christ should continue to move us toward action promoting the kingdom of God and not be, as St. Pius X once said, “dumb and silent spectators.” Yes, he was talking about our participation in Eucharist, but Eucharist is the table of justice. If we leave that table unchanged, we are missing the point of our faith.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 12, 2020

Monday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: Motivation and blindness.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gal 4:22–24, 26–27, 31–5:1 (467)

Norman Langenbrunner

In this letter Paul opposes the teaching that followers of the Christ must obey Mosaic law, especially the requirement of circumcision. Paul argues that justification comes not through observance of the law but instead through faith. God's promises to Abraham came before the law; the law was given to discipline the people, but now faith in Christ Jesus sets one free from the law so that she or he can be "Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise" (3:29).

In today's reading Paul is offering proof, by way of allegory, that followers of Christ are free to focus on a faith covenant (like that of Abraham) rather than on a law covenant (like the one given by Moses). Although his argumentation may strike us as fanciful and unconvincing, his use of Scripture and tradition appealed to those attracted to typology by his exegeting an OT text as a prototype of something or someone to come.

Before Christ came, God's people were like Abraham's son Ishmael by the slave girl, Hagar; they were not children of the promise and, therefore, were in slavery to the law. After Christ, however, God's people are children of Sarah, not slaves but free. The covenant of the law gives way to the covenant of faith. Some scholars think Paul's primary opposition to imposing Mosaic law on gentile converts was coercion—he opposed its being required!

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 11:29–32 (467)

Norman Langenbrunner

Earlier in 11:14–16, Lk wrote that Jesus cast out a demon, but some witnesses said Jesus was in cahoots with Beelzebub. Others insisted that he provide a sign from heaven. In today's reading, Jesus answers that he will not comply because they have evil intentions. He implies that they wouldn't recognize heaven's intervention if they saw it.

The only sign Jesus promises is "the sign of Jon," a sign that Lk did not explain. Mt's version of this episode (12:38–42) describes the sign of Jon as Jesus' three days in the tomb prior to his resurrection, similar to Jon's three days in the belly of the whale before being spewed out alive on the shore.

Jesus demonstrates how evil "this generation" is, contrasting the good judgment of the queen of Sheba (who according to 1 Kgs 10:1–6 recognized the wisdom of King Solomon) and the prudence of the Ninevites (who according to Jon 3:5 repented because of Jon's preaching) with the haughty prejudice and stubborn resistance of his own people. In effect, many of Jesus' contemporaries were repudiating their own history and the promises Yahweh had made to their ancestors. Because Jesus did not fit their expectations, they rejected him even though his wisdom surpassed Solomon's, and his prophetic message was more critical than Jon's. Those pagans had more sense than the Jews.

Homily Suggestion

Norman Langenbrunner

Paul is very upset with the Church in Galatia because many of its members were moving away from the Gospel of Jesus and embracing instead the law of Moses. It appears that some Christians of Jewish background were insisting that gentiles had to accept the requirements of Judaism—as well as the Christian Gospel—in order to be saved. Paul asked, "Did the Spirit come to you through your works [obeying Moses] or through your acceptance of Christ?"

In today's reading, Paul uses an analogy about Hagar (Abraham's slave wife) and Sarah (Abraham's freeborn wife). He insists that the gentiles must think of themselves as born not of a slave but of a free woman. They have been born free in Christ!

Jesus is likewise in the midst of a conflict. His own people are blind, rejecting him, trying to manipulate him to prove that he is from God. When he had driven out a demon, the crowd accused him of being aligned with the devil! In frustration he counters that even pagans (for example, the queen of the south or the Assyrians) could see the truth that the Jews were failing to acknowledge.

Today's Liturgy of the Word offers two challenges: 1) Are we trying to "save our souls" through our own good works, or are we doing good works because Christ has already saved us? Motivation makes a great deal of difference! 2) Do we fail to acknowledge the signs of God's presence among us? Blindness can lead us to try to manipulate God, a violation of the second commandment!

Weekday Homily Helps

October 13, 2020

Tuesday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: Do good works *because* you are saved!

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gal 5:1-6 (468)

Norman Langenbrunner

Paul appeals to former pagans who have been set free from spiritual slavery by Christ not to become slaves again by submitting to the demands of the Judaizers, who insist these converts must be circumcised. It was, as Paul put it, “for freedom that Christ set them free.” According to Church father St. John Chrysostom, “They would be convicted of neglect and ingratitude to their benefactor” if they tried to live under the Mosaic law, thereby “despising him who had delivered them while loving him who had enslaved them.”

In Paul’s mind, those who accept circumcision are necessarily accepting the entire law of Moses, an acceptance indicating that they are seeking salvation through Moses rather than through Christ. Circumcision and other requirements of Torah compliance have no power for those who accept Christ; the power in Christ is “faith working through love.”

Paul appeals to his Galatian converts to focus on what is truly important: Christ, faith, and love. Because they are incapable of setting themselves free from slavery, Christ has intervened to free them. These former slaves accept Christ and their newfound freedom by faith by believing in Christ and accepting the freedom/salvation he offers. The most obvious sign of such faith is living a life of love. The law for a Christian is “Love!”

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 11:37-41 (468)

Norman Langenbrunner

If only we were as good on the inside as we seem to be on the outside. In today’s Gospel, Jesus confronts the dichotomy between the exterior appearance (the façade) and the interior reality (the naked truth).

At table in the home of a Pharisee, Jesus apparently rejects a servant’s offer of water and towel, a common courtesy. His host is taken aback and, in some way, must have expressed his disappointment that his guest failed to follow the expected custom. Provoked by the Pharisee’s condemning demeanor, Jesus launches into a disappointment of his own.

This incident sets the stage for Jesus’ rather scathing assessment of “Phariseism,” what the Jewish historian Josephus describes as a leading “school of thought”

in first-century Jewish society. Jesus is very critical of these watchdogs of religious life, those who readily judge others (especially the poor) to be unclean for their failure to fulfill the rules and rituals of Judaism.

In his exegesis of this passage, Anthony J. Saldarini concludes that for Lk uncleanness is “a moral, not ritual, deficiency.” This insight “opens Christianity’s group boundaries to the outcasts, gentiles, and sinners.” For Jesus, the remedy for moral uncleanness and interior purification is almsgiving, or, as St. John Chrysostom explains Jesus’ teaching, “Give alms, not injury. . . . He who resolves to have compassion on the needy will sooner cease from sin.”

Homily Suggestion

Norman Langenbrunner

Decades ago many Catholics heard teachers and preachers talk about the things we must do “in order to save our souls.” Fasting, abstinence, frequent confession, and many other practices were touted as ways to assure our getting into heaven. While there certainly is value in these religious practices, often the message was misunderstood. It sounded to many ears that our salvation was dependent on our good works.

The truth is this: Our salvation is dependent upon God. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has set people free, relieved them of the yoke of the law, and assured them of the Father’s forgiveness and love. Our awareness of and appreciation for the salvation freely offered to us leads us to make sacrifices, to receive the sacraments, and to do good works. We do these things not so we *can be* saved but because we already *have been*. The struggle to be Christian, the cost of discipleship, and the carrying of the cross are the means by which we show our appreciation for the salvation Christ has offered; by them we participate in his rescue.

St. Teresa of Calcutta was fond of saying that God does not expect us to be successful but rather to be faithful. There is great freedom in that insight. Paul’s message did not sound right to people who were accustomed to following all the rules so that God would be good to them. Paul called for a new mindset: Trust in God and do what is right because God’s love has already set you free.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 14, 2020
Wednesday [Callistus I]

Theme: We delight in the Lord's laws and values.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Gal 5:18–25 (469)

Norman Langenbrunner

Paul continues to oppose the teaching that gentile converts to Christ must accept and obey the law of Moses and its customs. He has forcefully argued that "a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (2:16). He explained that his converts were given Christ's Spirit, thereby ransoming them from the law, setting them free (3:13; 5:1). Now he further develops the significance of that Spirit, assuring them that they are under the Spirit's guidance, not that of the law.

There is a danger in all this—namely, that their newfound freedom can be misused and become an opportunity for gratifying the desires of the flesh (5:13, 16). The contrast between faith in Christ and the law of Moses can be compared to the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh. Those who choose to live according to the law as their guiding force can easily fall into the evil works of the flesh; those who choose to live according to the guidance of the Spirit embrace the values of God's kingdom.

Faith/Spirit versus law/flesh are the choices. Paul believes the first choice leads to freedom, the second to slavery; the first fosters the fruits of the Spirit while the second invites the works of the flesh. In fact, although the first choice fulfills all the requirements of the law ("Love your neighbor"), the second choice violates that very law.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 11:42–46 (469)

Norman Langenbrunner

Jesus continues his assessment of and objection to the mindset and practices of an unofficial segment of Jewish society that focused on being "pure" in their interpretation and application of the Torah.

The Pharisees (the name comes from the Aramaic word *peras*, meaning "separate") were the "pious ones," intent on strict observance of the rules and rituals of religion, and consequently separating themselves from the common people, critical of anyone who did not measure up to their standards. Both Mt and Lk include Jesus' woe-filled evaluation of their tendency to emphasize the external and neglect the internal; religious correctness trumped human need or dignity.

The "Woe to you" could be translated "Shame on you." Jesus shamed them for valuing the trivial while ignoring justice and love; he reprimanded them for seeking fame and said that, in fact, they were like unmarked graves, unworthy of respect or deference. And when one of the lawyers cautioned Jesus not to include him and his cohorts in his critique, Jesus replied, "Shame on you, too!" These scribes, who were supposed to be students of God's word, often devoted themselves to study of the Mosaic law to the neglect of the revelation of Yahweh's love and mercy.

Bible teacher Warren W. Wiersbe aptly summarized the error of both the Pharisees and the scribes: "They majored on the minors!" They put reputation above character.

Homily Suggestion

Norman Langenbrunner

Today's readings must be read carefully and interpreted thoughtfully. Paul criticized the Galatian Christians who focused on the Mosaic law while neglecting the freedom and Spirit that the death and resurrection of the Christ offered them. Jesus was critical of Pharisaic attention to details at the cost of neglecting the values that those details were intended to preserve and promote.

Paul did not reject Jewish practices; Jesus did not dismiss the importance of observing the customs and rites of the Jewish religion. Paul insisted that the Gal should focus on the promptings of the Spirit, which encourage positive acts and attitudes, rather than focusing on the law and the flesh, concentrating on negatives and sin. You heard Jesus tell the Pharisees to pay attention to justice and to love God—but without overlooking the details of the Mosaic covenant. It's not either/or but both/and.

Today's readings again remind us that just laws are enacted to preserve values (traffic laws). If the law becomes our exclusive focus, the value can be forgotten. We may have to break a law in order to preserve a value. Jesus wasn't beyond touching the dead or working on the sabbath. The Pharisees were eager to fault him for it although he preserved a value by doing so. And sometimes so must we.

For more information about St. Callistus I, pope and martyr, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 15, 2020
Thursday [Teresa of Jesus]

Theme: Jesus keeps us on track.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 1:1–10 (470)

Norman Langenbrunner

Today's reading emphasizes the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ both in God the Father's plan and in the history and destiny of God's people. Paul affirms his authority as a divinely appointed messenger, and offers "the holy ones" his wish that they enjoy the grace (the favor) and the peace (the well-being) that come from the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

A form of the word *eulogia* (*eu* means "good"; *logos* means "word") appears three times in v 3. When applied to God, "blessed" means the Father is adorable and the source of blessing; applied to humans, it means they have received good things from the source of goodness. Paul maintains that we have been blessed in Christ and that this blessing derives from our being chosen in one who is holy and without blame: Christ.

Paul then develops the central role that the Christ fulfills in bringing the Father's love, redemption, and forgiveness to his adopted children. Christ is the revelation of God's plan; all of humanity's future should be interpreted in terms of Christ's wisdom and teaching. In him, heaven and earth, previously disjointed and alienated, are now brought together—the result of "the riches of his grace lavished upon us." Christ is the epicenter of history and eternity.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 11:47–54 (470)

Norman Langenbrunner

Jesus is speaking like an OT prophet when he lashes out against the mentality and behavior of the Pharisees and, in today's reading, the scribes, the scholars of the law. The Hebrew prophets Is, Jer, Ez, Hos, Am, and Mi all began their denunciation of evil with a Hebrew expression of lamentation or disapproval. The Greek translation draws attention to the severity of the indictment that follows.

Jesus charges the lawyers with hypocrisy for building monuments to the prophets as if they are honoring God's spokespersons and are condemning the previous generations who murdered them. In reality, however, the scholars of the law are as guilty as their predecessors of misinterpreting and misapplying God's word. Jesus knows that these experts in the law will turn against him and his apostles, twisting their mes-

sage and executing them as was done to the prophets of old.

Jesus is fulfilling his role as prophet, and he expects to receive a prophet's reward—namely, the opportunity to die in the service of God. Instead of using their position in the community to promote God's plan, the Pharisees and lawyers plot ways to undermine Jesus and eventually silence him. When the truth hurts, it has probably hit its mark.

Homily Suggestion

Norman Langenbrunner

The bishops at the Second Vatican Council agreed that the Church is "at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification" (LG, 8). Jesus recognized that the Judaism of his day was both holy and in need of reform. He challenged the religious leaders to reconsider how they were interpreting and applying the Mosaic covenant. He recognized that, in their superdedication to the Law (the Torah), they had so multiplied rules and traditions that the average Jew could not live up to their demands. The leaders' concern for externals and their fondness for the appearance of holiness led them to neglect the internal conversion the law of Moses requires.

Jesus pointed to the religious leaders' propensity for quoting the prophets while ignoring the essence of the prophetic message. This hypocritical honoring of the prophets makes the present generation as guilty of murder as the previous generations who persecuted and killed them.

The Letter to the Eph provides direction for the renewal and reform of religion: It points to Jesus the Christ, who has clarified God's will and provided for us another opportunity for forgiveness and conversion. Jesus is the one who reveals God's plan for all creation, a mystery expressed in mystical terms!

The key of knowledge is not knowledge of the law but rather of the cosmic Christ: a lesson for believers 2,000 years ago and today.

For more information about St. Teresa of Avila, virgin and doctor of the Church, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 16, 2020

Friday [*Hedwig, Margaret Mary Alacoque*]

Theme: Should we impress people or please God?

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 1:11–14 (471)

Norman Langenbrunner

Paul assures his readers that both Jews (“we who first hoped in Christ”) and gentiles (“you also who have heard the word of truth”) have been named beneficiaries (the Greek means more than “chosen”) in Christ by God for “the praise of his glory.” Both Jews and now gentiles have been chosen to hear the Gospel (“the word of truth”); both have come to believe in him; both have been branded with the promised Spirit (“the first installment of our inheritance”) to show they belong to God. Both are saved—redeemed for the glory of God!

The author of the letter (not necessarily Paul) recognizes God’s intrusion into human affairs and the benefits that are offered in God’s last will and testament. The author sees the Father’s generosity as: 1) an expression of God’s glory, 2) the fulfillment of the hope the Jews had in the long-awaited coming Christ, 3) the manifestation of the Spirit, which declares that Jews and gentiles are brothers and sisters in Christ.

In both Gal 3:18 and Rom 4:13–14, Paul used inheritance language (well-known to his contemporaries) to clarify the nature of Yahweh’s covenant with Abraham. Behind that metaphor is the concept of adoption (the legal creation of kinship), giving Jews and gentiles the status of God’s sons and daughters. Today’s reading is assurance that God has their future covered!

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 12:1–7 (471)

Norman Langenbrunner

The NT presents a rather intense conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. Some Scripture scholars propose that, although Jesus did verbally cross swords with them, the intensity of the opposition really reflects the post-resurrection strife between the earliest Jewish Christians and the Pharisaic party intent on strict observance of the law. Whatever the actual history of the clashes, Lk’s presentation provides warnings and challenges for later generations of Christians.

Today’s reading appears to be four sayings of Jesus brought together by Lk to hand on Jesus’ teaching about: 1) avoiding hypocrisy, 2) standing up for what is right, 3) not fearing what others may think or do in response to the truth, and 4) being assured that God is with, and is personally concerned about, his people.

Hypocrisy can infect many aspects of life, especially leading a person to think one thing but speak another out of fear about what others may think or say. Hypocrisy can be the effect of intimidation; a Christian must be strong in bearing witness to the truth. Seeking the approval of others over approval from God is a disaster. God loves, knows and accompanies his people. St. Cyril of Alexandria suggested that “the head of a man is his understanding; his hairs are his thoughts.” God knows us intimately (the number of hairs on our head); we have no reason to fear. God knows.

Homily Suggestion

Norman Langenbrunner

The OT term for *hypocrisy* derives from the word for “dirt” or “pollution.” The NT term for *hypocrisy* originally referred to an actor and later implied that one was reading from a script “and not being real.” Wikipedia describes *hypocrisy* as “the contrivance of the false appearance of virtue or goodness.” Islam considers hypocrisy “a serious sickness.” Jesus describes it as leaven because of its ability to affect adversely the whole batch of dough. In short, hypocrisy is a bad thing!

Lk notes that a large crowd had gathered around Jesus, and the sight of the multitude apparently leads him to warn people to avoid the deceitful behavior of the Pharisees. And he goes on to say that their bad behavior will one day be made obvious, for their rigidity or their self-serving appearance—or their lack of compassion—will be seen for what it is.

The Letter to the Eph insists we have been chosen by God through Christ, that we have been given the word of truth and the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our focus is not on what others may think but rather on what God sees and knows to be true. We fear not the opinion of people but instead the judgment of the One who has the power to condemn eternally. Today’s challenge is to review the motivation of our religious practices: to impress people or please God?

For more information about Sts. Hedwig and Margaret Mary Alacoque, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 17, 2020

Saturday—Ignatius of Antioch

Theme: Acknowledging Christ brings salvation.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 1:15–23 (472)

Norman Langenbrunner

Today's reading consists of three sentences packed with very challenging themes and subthemes. 1) The author expresses gratitude and assurance of prayer for his audience's faith and love, asking the Father to give them wisdom, revelation, and knowledge. 2) The author wants his audience to recognize the hope they have in God's call and thus come to appreciate both the Father's power and the honor he has bestowed on Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand. 3) The author celebrates the dominion of Christ over all things and the Father's making him head of the Church.

The challenge must have been overwhelming for this letter's recipients because the message is manifold and mystic with a theological depth recounting the mysteries, secrets, grace, and unfathomable glory of God, all abundantly flowing from the author's mind, heart, and pen.

Some exegetes describe this letter as a presentation of a "cosmic Christology" because of the affirmation that Christ is far above principalities, authority, power, and dominion (terms from Jewish belief about angels in Satan's realm) and above "every name that is named" (the nations of this world). No enemy is stronger than Christ, and with Christ as the head of the Church, God's people have ample reason for confidence.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 12:8–12 (472)

Norman Langenbrunner

Jesus has warned his disciples about upcoming persecution. Today he explains the reward for their giving witness in the face of hostility and the consequences if they fail to acknowledge him. To recognize the Son is to acknowledge both the Father and the salvation the Son has to offer. To deny the Son means denying the Father with the resulting rejection of the salvation the Father offers through his Son. "Angels of God" may be a way of saying that God's messengers will bring to God's through the good news of faithful witness or the bad news of denial.

The word for *deny* in this passage is the same word Lk uses in the story of Peter's threefold denial of Jesus

(22:34). (The Greek term can mean "disown" or "refuse to acknowledge.") Even as Jesus describes the consequences of such denial, he quickly adds that such a sin against him can be forgiven. The "unforgiveable sin" is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains this blasphemy against the Spirit by proposing that "hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss" when one deliberately refuses God's mercy by rejecting his forgiveness and the salvation the Spirit offers (#1864).

Jesus is calling his disciples to be open to the inspiration of the Spirit, a heavenly intervention that will be given when they are brought to trial because of their loyalty to Jesus the Christ.

Homily Suggestion

Norman Langenbrunner

Paul, probably from prison, opens his letter to the Eph with a rather ecstatic, perhaps rapturous, recital of the blessings God bestowed upon Christ and the blessings given to those who believe in him. Most of us describe ourselves as Christians, but that could be in name only if we do not come to personal and intimate knowledge of the One whose name we profess.

In the midst of his incarceration in Rome, Paul has apparently reassessed his life's commitment and makes sense of his many trials by acknowledging once again Christ's central role in his life's vocation. If a person realizes the importance of Christ in God's plan, that person can not only endure but even prosper. The challenge for the Eph—and for us—is to move beyond knowing *about* Christ to *actually knowing* him. Paul prays that God give believers "a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him."

Jesus himself addressed this issue, warning his disciples about the consequences of denying him before others. Although that sin can be forgiven, anyone who rejects conversion and persists in living a "Christian life" that contradicts the Master and his teaching cannot be forgiven! Every day the Spirit urges us to speak of this Christ in word but more importantly in deed. Honesty in and about ourselves is the road to conversion and forgiveness.

For more information about St. Ignatius of Antioch, bishop and martyr, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 19, 2020

Mon.—Jean de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues, and Comp.

Theme: It's all on loan.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 2:1–10 (473)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

Today's first reading from the Letter to the Eph presents a very compact summary of the teaching found in the Letter to the Rom. Humanity's sinful condition is countered by the grace of God, one that, in turn, elicits from the believers good works. Eph 2:1–7 is a single sentence in Greek. The key point is found in vv 4–5. That point is, "By grace you have been saved."

The author begins by describing how Christians were at one time very much caught up in "the age of this world." This ruler of the power of the air hovered somewhere between earth and heaven, thus separating Christians from God. That was the sinful condition everyone has inhabited.

However, God's generous plan of salvation, rooted in God's mercy and love for us, has now made us alive with Christ. This is nothing less than God's grace at work. The author continues to make his main point: Christians by grace have been saved through faith. Faith, however, is not a meritorious work but rather the response to God's grace. The issue here is not about grace versus works of the law. Faith in Christ is not a work that makes us acceptable before God. It is God's act in Christ that brought us from death to life.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 12:13–21 (473)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

In today's Gospel, Jesus is asked to arbitrate a dispute between two brothers regarding inheritance shares. Although the issue is important, the underlying presupposition is misplaced. Is the quality of one's life dependent on how much one possesses? That would have been the assumption of many people living at the time of Jesus. Making a living had to do with material accumulation. Jesus directly challenges that belief.

Jesus considers the issue to be rooted in greed. Real wealth does not consist in having an abundance of possessions. Jesus exemplifies this teaching by telling a story featuring a rich man whose land produced a bountiful harvest. Notice that this person is not portrayed as being a bad character, a cheat, or a perpetrator of injustice. On the contrary, he appears as a wise person caring for his material resources.

Jesus declares the rich man a fool who has miscalcu-

lated what life is all about. The meaning of life cannot be attained by accumulating possessions. Material wealth cannot guarantee life's meaning. At death, all one's material possessions vanish. All that truly matters is a life rooted in acknowledging one's dependence on God and sharing one's possessions with the needy. Knowing this and putting it into practice renders a person wise.

Homily Suggestion

Tim Cronin

Although out of season, Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* captures the heart of today's parable of the rich fool. On Christmas Eve, a haunted, terrified Ebenezer Scrooge flatters Marley's ghost: "You were always a good man of business, Jacob." The ghost wails mournfully: "Business! Mankind was my business! Charity, the common welfare, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business!"

The parable of the rich fool, unique to Lk, is itself unusual as the only Gospel parable with God as a character in the drama. God directly labels the rich man a fool. Let us take note of that.

The rich man is a fool in failing to recognize what truly matters in life. He thinks only in terms of *I*, *me*, and *mine*. He forgets that grain eventually rots in silos, no matter how many silos you have. He denies his mortality. Awareness of death is key in discovering the true value of life. The story presents a vital question: "What makes us rich in the sight of God?"

The parable responds in three ways: generosity with our possessions, stewardship with our possessions, and clarity about what we have. Everything is on loan and is only temporary. The rich man isn't wicked, but he is greedy. He isn't simply "saving for a rainy day" but rather wants more than the surplus he already has. Let us ask, "Lord, grant us wisdom to appreciate what really matters in life." Truly our lives and possessions belong to God.

For more information about Sts. Jean de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues, and Companions, martyrs, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 20, 2020

Tuesday [*Paul of the Cross*]

Theme: Be prepared!

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 2:12–22 (474)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

In today's first reading, the author of the Letter to the Eph is addressing gentiles. He begins by reminding them what their situation was like before they were in Christ. They were not part of Israel's covenants, which rendered them alienated from the community of Israel. This rendered the gentiles without hope of salvation. However, by the blood of Christ, all those things that divided gentiles from Jews have been erased.

The work of Christ, in effect, abolished the law with its commandments and legal claims. This made Jews and gentiles one community or one commonwealth. They are now both held together in peace. Through Christ both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Therefore, the gentiles are no longer considered to be strangers and sojourners. They now share citizenship with the holy ones. This means that they are members of God's household. This is nothing less than the Church, which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself is the capstone. The final series of metaphors ends with the Church seen as a temple sacred in the Lord.

This magnificent dwelling place of God has now incorporated the gentiles with the Jews in the Spirit. The metaphor of the community as God's temple is an image that Paul develops in 1 Cor 3:10–17. The entire body is held together through Christ.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 12:35–38 (474)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

The first-generation followers of Jesus held the strong conviction that Jesus would return very soon, certainly in their lifetime. As time moved on and Jesus did not come again, this conviction was rethought. The later followers of Jesus did not want to give up this belief in the second coming, but it was clear that no one knew when it would take place. The challenge was not to let this belief in the second coming get pushed to the back burner so that it no longer influenced the lives and conduct of Christians.

Today's Gospel has Jesus admonishing his disciples to keep living their lives in a state of preparedness. He illustrates his meaning by telling a story about servants awaiting their master's return from a wedding celebra-

tion. Without knowing exactly when the master might return, the servants are nonetheless vigilant and always ready for his arrival.

What the vigilant servants will discover when the master returns and finds them waiting is a grand reversal. The master will assume the position of the servant as he waits on those servants who were faithfully prepared. The point in all this is not to allow one's Christian conduct to diminish simply because Jesus has not yet come. The conviction is still that it will happen. The challenge is that no one knows when that will occur.

Homily Suggestion

Tim Cronin

Are my loins girt? Are my lamps lit? In life there are many transitions demanding readiness: attending college, marrying, being ordained, awaiting a new baby, starting a new career, retiring, and countless others. Besides these, we must be prepared for life's unexpected events such as illness and job loss.

The best-known reference to "loins girt" occurs in Ex 12:11 as the Hebrews eat the first Passover for a quick exit. The tunic (long, flowing robe) was the basic clothing of the Jew. Cinching a belt or girdle about the waist pulled the hem of the ankle-length tunic up, allowing for easier, faster movement. This was done during physical labor or for battle. It's similar to "rolling up your sleeves" or "having your boots on."

"Lamps lit" after dark indicates readiness, watchfulness, and availability. This echoes the Boy Scout motto: Be prepared! Our preparation is for the Lord who comes. With our spiritual loins girt and lamps lit in faithful readiness, we wait for the Lord. He comes unexpectedly. It was very strange in ancient culture for the master to knock on his own door, awaiting an answer from servants or slaves. Good Middle Eastern servants knew their place, and it wasn't reclining at table while their awaited lord served them. Some commentators have suggested this is Lk's version of Jn's description of Jesus' washing of feet at the Last Supper. What a Master we await! Our stay is fleeting, and his coming is sure!

For more information about St. Paul of the Cross, priest, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 21, 2020

Wednesday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: With great power comes great responsibility.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 3:2–12 (475)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

The author of the Letter to the Eph uses very compact language to talk about his special commission to preach God's plan. Paul's special insight into the mystery of Christ is that the gentiles are full participants in the Church. Some commentators see Col 1:23–29 reflected here. This insight came to Paul through revelation. The author indicates that this is something that his audience already knows.

This mystery of Christ has now been revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Here he repeats the mystery that gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus. The author continues to unfold this mystery in circular fashion, repeating the main point but expressing it in different terms.

Having expressed in various ways this magnificent insight that gentiles have full and equal participation in the Church, the author moves on to declare that by God's grace he has been given the special task of proclaiming the Good News to the gentiles. This divine plan, which has thus far been hidden, will now be unfolded for all to see and hear. This is all part of God's wisdom hidden until now. According to God's eternal purpose, it has been accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. All of this reflects the author's grand insight into the mystery of Christ.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 12:39–48 (475)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

Today's Gospel from Lk continues the theme of being prepared for the parousia, the second coming of Christ. This theme will continue as we get closer to the end of the liturgical year. At issue in Lk's Gospel is the fact that time has passed and Christ has not returned. While the expectation will undergo certain modification, Lk wants to keep it in front of his community. His emphasis will continue to be remaining faithful to the instructions of Jesus in the time before the parousia.

The first example Lk offers stresses the fact that if a master of the house knew when a thief was coming, he would be prepared and the break-in prevented. The problem is that no one knows when Christ will return.

The wise approach is to be constantly prepared.

The second more detailed example makes the same point. A constantly prepared faithful and prudent steward will never be caught off guard, no matter when the master returns. He will be rewarded accordingly. However, if the servant presumes the master will be delayed and begins to behave in harsh and abusive ways—only to get caught by the master's unexpected return—he will be severely punished. No one should ever attempt to second-guess the Lord. A life of discipleship is a life of faithfully following the teachings of Jesus, day by day until that final day of his return.

Homily Suggestion

Tim Cronin

The well-known Gospel passage proclaimed today was a favorite of such a variety of persons as Thérèse of Lisieux, Winston Churchill, and Bill Gates. It inspired the Kennedy and Bush families to public service, and has found its way in more than one presidential State of the Union address. Luke Russert (son of Tim) has it permanently tattooed on his body.

This passage appears on many mugs and posters. And perhaps best known of all, Uncle Ben used a version of it to inspire Peter Parker, aka Spider-Man. No, it's not Jn 3:16. It's Lk 12:48b: "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more." Uncle Ben advised, "With great power comes great responsibility."

We are confronted today with two questions: "What am I entrusted with? And what am I doing with it?" These are sobering questions in our age of entitlement, both intensified and complicated by rampant consumerism and materialism. Covetousness reigns. What can we do?

Pray. Ask God to reveal your gifts, abilities, and talents. These may be physical, material, spiritual, or a combination thereof. Appreciate your gifts as important for the reign of God. Ask for insight, humility, and gratitude. Be patient in prayer and open to what the Spirit of God shows you. Prepare to be surprised and amazed at how our gracious God uses you!

Weekday Homily Helps

October 22, 2020
Thursday [John Paul II]

Theme: Hard sayings.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 3:14–21 (476)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

Today's first reading from Eph is a prayer from the author directed to the readers. Eph 3:14–19 contains the prayer itself while vv 20–21 form a closing doxology. Once again, the language is compact. Keep in mind that the author is attempting to express in words what can only be captured in faith. The intercessory tone of the prayer is set as the author kneels before the Father.

The prayer first of all recognizes the intimate connection between the Father and every family in heaven and on earth. This points to the greatness of God, who created all the families of beings. The desire of the prayer is that believers deepen their understanding of God's plan of salvation in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the divine breath that breathes through the Body of Christ and gives life to the Christian community. This love of Christ that surpasses knowledge is expressed in terms of breadth, length, height, and depth. All of these nouns refer to the same thing: God's plan of salvation in Christ.

The final doxology prays that the believers may perceive the redemptive love Christ has for them. It unites the Church and Christ. Reference to the Church is important because the Church is the visible sign of God's continuing presence. This doxology serves also to summarize the entire prayer. Both the Church and Christ are sources of God's glory.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 12:49–53 (476)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

Today's Gospel seems very much out of place, given how we generally associate Lk with peace and gentleness. However, there is a realism to this Gospel that cannot be overlooked. It called people to conversion, and this requires refinement. At times that refinement will appear like the earth set on fire. There will be no easy way to get through this, and Jesus is well aware of that.

This coming catastrophe is expressed by the term *baptism*, but that is a metaphor to describe the overwhelming experience that lies ahead as God's plan comes to fulfillment. The reality of the Gospel that Jesus came to proclaim contains no feel-good message. It calls for deep-seated change that will certainly upset

the status quo. Peace at any price is not an option here.

The division that will result from Jesus' Gospel message will be felt at the very heart of family life. Family relationships that were considered sacred and fundamental to all aspects of social life will be tested and often found wanting. Son will be pitted against father, mother against daughter, and so on. These experiences are based on what took place in those communities that chose to follow Jesus after his death and resurrection. Being a disciple of Jesus was a costly venture and could involve more than a little danger. It demanded boldness and faith.

Homily Suggestion

Tim Cronin

Our Gospel today is difficult because Jesus of Nazareth unsettles and unnerves us. No "meek and mild" Jesus here! By his hard words, we glimpse the Semitic world of Jesus of Nazareth. Pope Pius XI said that spiritually all Christians are Semites. As a first-century Jew, Jesus would have employed passionate Semitic hyperbole, as we hear today.

He's not nice. Let's be reminded that the word "nice" is nowhere to be found in the NT. Jesus never backed down from confrontation, never sacrificed his principles, or never sought the approval of others. He was unapologetically blunt and expressed righteous anger. He was hard on self-righteous people and called out hypocrites. He died his dreadful death because he was threatening, even scary, to civil and religious leaders—not because he was too nice.

There's a difference between being nice and being compassionate. Sometimes being "nice" is not loving. Jesus knew this. So must we. Nobody likes conflict, but sometimes it is the loving thing to do. Confronting the destructive behavior of others doesn't qualify as "nice." Parents who supposedly out of love rescue their children from the natural consequences of their actions do them a disservice. Do we need the approval of others at the cost of their benefit and our own integrity? Believing ourselves responsible for the feelings of others is playing God. Lord, strengthen us for times of tough love!

For more information about St. John Paul II, pope, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 23, 2020
Friday [John of Capistrano]

Theme: Christ, the humility of God.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 4:1-6 (477)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

Today's first reading from the Letter to the Eph stresses the practical features of being a Church. Most important is to live out in concrete ways the call to be the one Body of Christ and one Church. The very strong emphasis on unity that permeates this passage is a contrast to the recipients' past attraction to many gods, powers, and principalities. That form of diversity has been given up and replaced with a strong sense of unity rooted in humility, gentleness, patience, and love.

Believers must live lives that strive to preserve the unity fashioned through the Spirit into one community. This has been shaped through the bond of peace. Many commentators think that here the Letter to the Eph has been influenced specifically by Col 3:12-15.

Eph 4:4-6 once again stresses the thoroughness of this call to unity. The breadth of that unity is expressed in seven unifying aspects: Body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, Baptism, and God. All point to the same reality but from diverse perspectives. This kind of understanding will eventually be shaped into the doctrine of the Trinity. Christian life is a call to maintain this radical form of unity, a gift from God. This very inclusive view of a Church manifests radical unity in diversity.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 12:54-59 (477)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

In today's Gospel, Lk continues portraying Jesus as astonished at the inability of his disciples and the crowds to grasp the emerging signs that point to the end time. He points out how perceptive and thorough people seem to be in accurately reading weather patterns and future forecasts. These skills and abilities are important for their livelihood. On the other hand, these same people seem to be completely ignorant—or perhaps unwilling—to read the spiritual signs of the time.

Secondly, Jesus challenges how people are willing to learn the ways of civil justice so that they do not get caught unprepared and end up in a terrible state. Yet when it comes to paying attention to signs of judgment at the end of time, little or no concern is given.

The issue here is not that the disciples and the crowds somehow lack knowledge about spiritual mat-

ters, especially those matters that deal with the coming of the end time. The problem is that the disciples and the crowds are not concerned about these things because they do not appear to be quickly coming or of any real significance. The initial urgency has seriously diminished. Whenever the end time may come, it will be way in the future, making the issue not pressing. Much more pressing is how to make one's way in a world that is very dangerous.

Homily Suggestion

Tim Cronin

Our first reading from Eph is one of the most beautiful and efficacious in all Scripture. The Spirit seeks to reconcile and restore all things and people in Christ by means of humility, gentleness, and patience. Indeed, humility is the way of unity while pride is the way of division. "Nothing is as strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle or loving as strength," said St. Francis de Sales. Truly, God loves to bless and raise up the humble. Being humble is an act of submission to God, recognizing that all is grace: All is gift.

Humility isn't exactly upheld as a value in our day and age. For the author of Eph, however, humility is not weakness. How can it be? Christ himself "is the humility of God embodied in human nature; the Eternal Love humbling itself, clothing itself in the garb of meekness and gentleness, to win and serve us" (Andrew Murray).

Humility's opposite is pride. All vice begins with pride. All sin has pride at its base. Pride is the deadliest sin, saying, in effect, that all is not gift, that all is not grace. According to St. John Chrysostom, "Humility is the foundation of all virtue." "Pride makes us artificial, humility makes us real," wrote Thomas Merton. Pride and humility are two poles of the human heart. Approaching the altar of the Eucharist, may we humbly empty ourselves to allow Christ be our food and drink; may it strengthen and guard us against pride, the deadliest sin.

For more information about St. John Capistrano, priest, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 24, 2020

Saturday [Anthony Mary Claret]

Theme: When bad things happen.

Exegesis of the First Reading: Eph 4:7–16 (478)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

In Eph 4:1–6, the author emphasized the diversity of the Church within the context of a strong sense of unity. In today's first reading, the author pushes that further and uses that sense of diversity to account for the diversity of offices within the Church. The author sets the stage by quoting Ps 68:19, here interpreted as Christ's ascension and subsequent bestowal of gifts, a Christological interpretation.

The main point of the passage is the enumeration of Church offices. In earlier listings of gifts (1 Cor ch 12 and Rom ch 12), the focus is on the individual receiving a personal gift. In the Letter to the Eph, the focus is on gifts of ministry given to the Church as a whole, gifts that will equip the Church for ministry. These are the gifts that will build up the Church into a unity of faith.

Underlying this diversity of Church offices is also the sense that this manifests a certain maturity in Christ, experienced by this rich diversity. Behind this is the Church's experience about the need for a more sophisticated employment of Church offices. Although this does not yet include ordained ministry, it is certainly moving in the direction of increased structuring. This will bring about the Body of Christ's growth, building itself up in love.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 13:1–9 (478)

Eugene Hensell, OSB

Today's Gospel consists of two parts. Lk 13:1–5 is a call to repentance by Jesus. Lk 13:6–9 presents a parable about a barren fig tree, emphasizing the contrast between God's patience and the people's slow response to the call for repentance.

Jesus' call to conversion makes very clear that the need for repentance includes everyone. Jesus warns against linking disasters (natural or human) to sin. Tragedies that result in loss of life and property are not the direct result of people's sinfulness. Sinners will be held accountable by God, regardless of how pronounced their sinfulness might be. No one will be exempt from God's judgment. No one is exempt from the need to embrace repentance.

Because the call to repentance is universal, Jesus tells

a parable emphasizing the patience of God. The story focuses on a fig tree that has failed for three years to produce figs. The vineyard owner reasonably concludes that this barren tree deserves to be cut down. The gardener, however, pleads for a one-year extension for the fig tree. If it still produces nothing, then it shall be cut down. There is no certitude here. It may bear fruit in the future, or it may not. Clearly, this is the fig tree's final chance.

Homily Suggestion

Tim Cronin

At Siloam in Jerusalem, devout Jews gathered for purification before entering the temple. It is the site of the pool of Siloam in Jn. This pool was found by workers repairing sewage pipes in 2004 and was confirmed as the pool where Jesus healed the man born blind (Jn 9:7). Lk tells us that a tower at Siloam fell and killed 18 people (13:1). Jesus denies that the victims died because they were being punished by God.

Such a pronouncement would not have been received well within first-century Judaism where many people thought that everything that happened had a reason centered on God's rewarding good people or punishing bad ones. If an obviously righteous person suffered, then his or her parents or grandparents must have angered God. If God is just, they would argue, how could it be otherwise? This was a bedrock belief of the times.

We all know that bad things happen to good people and vice versa. [*Homilist may mention here recent tragedies hurting an innocent/good person.*] Although tragedies reveal the fragility of life, misery and misfortune are not judgments from God. Neither power nor wealth demonstrates approval from God. Naturally, we want good people to be rewarded and the evil ones punished. It demands a tremendous amount of faith to believe that what is good, right, and just will ultimately prevail. The paschal mystery, the heart of our faith, assures us that this is so and that God's justice will have the last word.

For more information about St. Anthony Mary Claret, bishop, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 26, 2020

Monday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: Imitators of Christ.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 4:32—5:8 (479)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

Eph neatly divides itself into doctrine (chs 1–3) and exhortation (chs 4–6). This week the Lectionary provides us with samples of exhortation. Recall some of Paul’s exhortation in his earliest letter, 1 Thes: “At all times give thanks, since this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything. Retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil” (5:18–21). Eph will develop how God and Christ Jesus guide believers’ daily conduct.

The author reminds believers that they have been given a down payment of redemption by the gift of the holy Spirit of God (4:30). Their holy lives are driven by this gift. “They are to be kind and compassionate to one another. They are to forgive one another as God has forgiven them in Christ.” Note that these admonitions are not based on Stoic reason, but rather on what God has done for the believers in Christ. Note also that these exhortations are not solipsistic, but community-oriented.

Rarely do Pauline letters quote specific words or deeds of the historical Jesus—for example, Jesus’ care of the poor and afflicted. The main Christological emphasis is on the meaning of Jesus’ death. Imitate the self-sacrifice of Christ, who handed himself over for us. Thereby you will live in love.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 13:10–17 (479)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

The sabbath celebrated God’s rest after God created the world and God’s liberation of Israel from slavery/bondage. In Lk 4:18, Jesus announced his Gospel: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. . . . He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives.” Notice in this passage the words for liberation: “Woman, you are set free”; “whom Satan has bound for 18 years”; and “Ought not she have been set free on the sabbath from her bondage?” For more than half her life, she has been in bondage and shame.

In Lk 19:9 we will encounter a “son of Abraham”—namely, Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector who promises to give half of his possessions to the poor. In the Lukan way of pairing a woman and a man in his

Gospel, this very ill woman, who is cured and glorified God for her healing, is a “daughter of Abraham.” In both instances, Jesus seeks out these outcasts and offers release.

The bent-over woman may well be a symbol. What she was able to do by Jesus’ power, believers will also do when they stand up straight to greet the Son of Man and their redemption (21:28). St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) and others saw in the bent-over woman those who are curved over to earthly life by sin. Through Jesus they are raised up from the dust, enabling them to see and enjoy the beauty of heavenly wealth.

Homily Suggestion

Jeanne Hunt

Today’s reading from Eph presents a great challenge. Paul calls us to live out our Baptism by acting as if we are Christ. Paul repeats this challenge again and again in his letters. He wants to know how our belonging to Christ makes a difference in how we live. What is essential, in Paul’s mind, is to be imitators of God. Our lives should be a living witness to what we believe.

Paul doesn’t leave us hanging with how we can accomplish this feat of imitating God. He identifies greed, impurity, and similar sins as obstacles. We are called to lives that reflect our status as God’s beloved ones. An attitude change is in order. We need to stop grumbling, start living lives of gratitude, and love others with the heart of Christ.

Our lives are different now. We live in a “me-first” world where loving others as Christ loves us is a great challenge. Each one of us needs to discern personally the content of that challenge as it touches our everyday lives.

The reading today helps clarify that discernment: What do I need to eliminate in my life and what attitudes I should I develop to radiate a grateful, Christian presence? We accomplish that objective by being imitators of God. Our challenge is to *live* that way every day. What begins by seeing God’s overriding graciousness concludes with our thankful receiving and implementing it. With God’s help each of us can be an imitator of Christ.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 27, 2020

Tuesday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: Little seeds and yeast.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 5:21–33 (480)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

Eph was written about 75 CE. The early days of the Spirit's role in Church order as witnessed in 1 Cor chs 11–14 and 1 Thes had largely passed. In the Pauline tradition, "household codes" became prominent. Besides Eph 5:21–6:9, see Col 3:18–4:1 and all of 1–2 Tm and Ti. As "Paul" tells Timothy, "I'm writing you . . . so that you will know how to behave in the household of God, if I'm delayed" (1 Tm 3:15).

This author often Christianizes the relationship between husband and wife that the norms of society urged. He exhorts: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her." "So husbands should love their wives as their own bodies . . . for no one hates his own flesh, but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the Church."

Quite a few years ago I gave a talk on the "household codes" at a summer institute. As the participants were greeting one another afterwards, a layman said to me: "Thanks, Father, for your presentation. I've got to go home and work on our family's household codes." Such updating is what the Church continues to do. What are society's good practices that we can adapt? What about equality in marriages? How do we safeguard our kids from online predators? How do we deal with extended life expectancies?

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 13:18–21 (480)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

For these two parables, I adapt C. H. Dodd's definition: "A parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or human life that captures the mind of the hearer by its vividness or strangeness and teases it into active thought." In brief, parables are puzzling and may have various meanings.

By introducing these parables with the word "therefore" (*oun*), Lk provides one interpretation, referencing the earlier story of how Jesus released from the domination of Satan a woman bent over for 18 years. God's reign, effected by Jesus, is about restoring wholeness.

I highlight several strange things in these parables and thereby attempt to tease our minds to grasp some of their meanings. Jewish expectation anticipated that

God's reign would be like a mighty cedar. Here it is the smallest of seeds. Alone among the Gospels, Lk says that a man planted it in a garden. That is strange, for mustard grows quickly and can soon take over an entire garden. Although a mustard seed grows into a large bush, the parable says "tree." In its branches birds nest. This is a play on the (cedar) tree of Ez 17:23. A woman later hides nasty leaven in costly wheat flour to make bread for 150 people. Think of how surprised her family will be! Rich life flows abundantly from something hidden.

Homily Suggestion

Jeanne Hunt

When Jesus said the kingdom of God is at hand, what do you think people expected? Would everything change? Would there be a new normal? We are still asking those questions. The kingdom is among us, but just what does that mean for our time? Where do we see change and growth in that kingdom?

If you have ever planted a garden, you can see how a mustard seed shows us what the kingdom is like. A little seed that is nurtured produces a great plant. Our little efforts of living the Gospel are more powerful than we can imagine. Things are not always as they appear to be in God's kingdom. God is with us, working in ways we cannot see.

The dough image represents great change. A little warm water and yeast explode, rising to the surface, bubbling up with the promise of becoming bread. Flour and yeast yield a treasured loaf that reminds us that God's work changes dough into bread.

Both images reflect a profound mystery. Little seeds and dough are transformed in spite of our efforts. Our efforts to do good release God's energy to transform the world, the Church. God works within us. God's kingdom is always coming—very slowly in a natural, reliable, awesome way, God continues to help simple people bring his kingdom to life. Our little bit is quite enough.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 28, 2020
Wednesday—Simon and Jude

Theme: Pray first.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 2:19–22 (666)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

The author continues and expands what St. Paul teaches about the Church, especially in 1 Cor. In Eph 4:11–12, he writes, “Christ gave some [in his body] as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers . . . to build up the Church.” Both men and women are prophets (1 Cor 11:4–5). In community worship, “You can all prophesy, one by one, so that all may learn and be encouraged” (1 Cor 14:31). Even though he was writing about OT prophecy, Bruce Vawter years ago hit the nail on the head: Prophets are the conscience of Israel/of the Church. They build up the Church but can also upset it.

In 1 Cor ch 3, Paul teaches: “I planted. Apollos watered. But God brought about the growth” (v 6). Paul continues: “We are God’s coworkers. You are God’s field, God’s building” (v 9). In v 16, Paul asks rhetorically, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” Paul is saying: It’s not my Church. It’s the Holy Spirit’s. Sometimes that’s a painful lesson for us to learn.

Today’s passage highlights the growth of a Church composed of Jews and gentiles “into a temple sacred in the Lord.” This growth does not come about automatically. It is the work of the Spirit, who solidly builds upon the foundation of Christ Jesus himself.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 6:12–16 (666)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

In Acts 1:21–22, Peter addresses the assembly of 120: With God’s intervention we must replace Judas the traitor. Peter continues: The new apostle must have “accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us, beginning with the baptism of John . . . and should become with us a witness to his resurrection.” Matthias was chosen, and thus this potent symbol, 12 (tribes) of the reconstituted Israel was restored. Recall the promises of Israel’s restoration in the hymns of Lk ch 1.

Thus the Twelve are presumed present with Jesus before Lk narrates that Jesus chose them. What they witnessed was Jesus’ ministry of liberating people from sickness, demonic possession, and sin. At the same time, they witnessed how the religious leaders

frequently opposed Jesus and his ministry. In 5:21, Lk writes: “Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to ask themselves: ‘Who is this who blasphemes? Who but God alone can forgive sins?’” When they confront the religious leaders after Pentecost, they will learn for themselves that no one pours new wine into old wineskins (5:36).

Lk often emphasizes prayer. Peter invites prayer from the assembly before Matthias’ selection. Jesus is at prayer before he chooses the Twelve. The apostles install the new “deacons” with prayer.

Homily Suggestion

Jeanne Hunt

This feast of Sts. Simon and Jude emphasizes discipleship. The Gospel recalls the time when Jesus selected the Twelve. These ordinary men who came from robust and brave stock began a movement that spread throughout the world. They planted the beginnings of the Church and changed history forever.

Jesus called these men in the simplest manner. Lk says that “Jesus went up to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God.” Perhaps we need to follow Jesus’ example: Pray first; then make our decisions.

Too many times we worry and get anxious over life’s decisions. We forget to invite God into the discussion. We need to let God be a partner in our decision-making. As we talk to God in prayer, God will not disappoint. God will present both sides of the decision, teaching the consequences of the decision, calming the storm so that we can see clearly. And in this prayer time, God will provide the peace we need in our final decision. How many times have we forgotten to pray over those tough choices?

The saints remind us that our lives are not lived alone. God is right in the thick of it with us. St. Teresa of Avila’s famous bookmark saying offers great advice for all of us: “Let nothing disturb you; let nothing make you afraid. All things are passing. God alone never changes. Patience gains all things. If you have God, you will want for nothing. God alone suffices.”

For more information about Sts. Simon and Jude, apostles, visit saintoftheday.org.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 29, 2020

Thursday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: Faith as a shield.

Exegesis of the First Reading, Eph 6:10–20 (482)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

The author concludes his letter as he began it: praising God's power in Christ Jesus. Eph 1:18–19 prays: "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened that you may know . . . what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accordance with the exercise of his great might which he worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and [putting] all things under his feet." The exhortation of today's v 10 boldly commands: "Draw your strength from the Lord and his mighty power!"

The author most likely drew the military imagery of this passage from the OT, especially Is. See 59:16–17: "So the Lord's own arm brought about the victory. His justice lent him its support. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, salvation as the helmet on his head." Is 52:7 reads: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those bringing glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news." Is 49:2 acclaims: "He made of me a sharp-edged sword . . . made me a polished arrow."

"To be girded in truth" means to rely on God's faithfulness. Feet are to be shod in cleated sandals, which are comfortable for the long haul of preaching the gospel of peaceful unity between Jew and Greek. The sturdy shield is body length and is to be joined to other shields as the Church surges forth.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 13:31–35 (482)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

This passage invites profound reflection on Jesus' mission and his fidelity to God's will despite opposition. Lk has already alluded to what Herod did to a prophet who criticized his conduct: "But Herod said: 'John I beheaded. Who, then, is this about whom I am hearing such things?' And he was trying to see him." During Jesus' passion, Herod will see him (23:6–11) and reveal himself as a "fox," indeed cunning, but eventually powerless in the presence of both Jesus and Pilate.

Jesus is not religiously or politically naive. To his hometown folks, he proclaimed: "Amen, I say to you that no prophet is accepted in his own native place" (4:24). He surely knew of the Jewish tradition that the people always persecuted and murdered the prophets God sent them (Stephen's speech, Acts 7:52). Yet faith-

fully obedient to God's call, Jesus continues his journey as "the one who serves" (22:27).

The image of "the hen" is rare in the Bible, but the image of the protective and caring "wing" of God has swooped through American churches with the very popular song "On Eagle's Wings." See Moses' song in Dt 32:11: "As an eagle incites its nestlings forth by hovering over its brood . . . and bears them up on her wings." Prophet Jesus invites by teaching and miracles, but most people "were unwilling." How sobering!

Homily Suggestion

Jeanne Hunt

Do you talk to yourself? Not necessarily out loud, but those internal conversations that float in and out of your mind as you work, share life with your family, and are challenged by the world news. We do battle with many interior thoughts that spontaneously seem to enter our minds. Looking back, we can see that some of these random thoughts seem to be inspired by the Holy Spirit while the rest lead us far from God and can undermine our faith. So how do we protect ourselves from such negative energy?

In Eph, Paul offers a few bits of advice. We see our battle as requiring armor, like a soldier's. Paul says, "In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield." This means that faith can be held up to protect our mind from temptations and dark thoughts. Faith is not only a thing that we have; it is also a gift to be acted upon. We use it like a shield that can "go against" the darkness of bad thoughts and feelings.

What Paul suggests is that, when our minds are muddled by darkness, call on the name of Jesus to calm the storm. When we are overcome with depression or loneliness, we can say, "I can do all things in Christ who is my strength." Every time we feel distant from our faith and are tempted to disbelieve the Gospel, we can pray, "I believe; help my unbelief!" These very simple words act like a shield that fills our hearts with grace and protection.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 30, 2020

Friday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: What would Jesus say?

Exegesis of the First Reading, Phil 1:1–11 (483)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

Phil describes friendship, partnership, and generosity in the Gospel. Paul is in prison, perhaps in Rome, which is 800 miles from Philippi, an arduous journey of two months each way. His partners and friends in the Gospel in Philippi have seen fit in the Lord to care for him. Read Phil 4:15–20 about the continued generosity of those Christians: “You sent me something for my needs, not only once but more than once.”

Paul may be referring to the Philippians’ generosity by his use of “overseers and ministers” in v 1. Parallels from other organizations then indicate that these terms do not refer to status, but to function. They are most likely the persons who collected and administered the monies that the Church so generously gave to Paul as their share in “the partnership for the Gospel” (v 4).

Slowly read through Paul’s thanksgiving in vv 3–11. Note that he again uses the word *partnership*. Note especially how often he uses the word *love*. See v 8: “God is my witness to how I long for you all with the love of Christ Jesus.” Paul is not a rugged individual, lacking friends and partners in the Gospel.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 14:1–6 (483)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

For the third time, Lk portrays Jesus at a meal with the Pharisees (see 7:36–50 and 11:37–54). Some say: “You’d think that Jesus had learned his lesson that they won’t listen to him!” St. Bonaventure captured Jesus’ intent well: “By eating with the Pharisees, Christ manifested his wonderful kindness, which was great because he associated with mortal human beings. It was greater because he was eating with his persecutors. It was greatest because it took the form of intimate sharing of food” (*Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, p. 1316).

Dropsy or edema is a miserable condition that fills the body with fluid yet leaves the person constantly thirsty. I expand the translation of v 4: Jesus, the physician (5:31), takes hold of the severely sick man and removes his affliction, thereby liberating him and restoring him to a full life in society. Recall Jesus’ liberating/setting free of the woman who had been bent over for 18 years (13:16). Jesus liberates a woman and a man on the sabbath, which celebrates their ancestors’

freedom from Egypt’s slavery.

Jesus’ decisive argument with the Pharisees differs from that of Mt 12:11. Lk has “son” instead of “sheep.” He has “well” instead of “pit.” Jesus argues: You dads wouldn’t abandon your sons to drown in a well’s water on the sabbath, would you? Why shouldn’t I save this poor man from internal drowning?

Homily Suggestion

Jeanne Hunt

Jesus comes to us today as our rabbi. He is here to teach us a new attitude of mercy and compassion as we learn to have great reverence for every person. As Jesus heals the man with dropsy, the Pharisees criticize Jesus for breaking Jewish law.

We want to be responsible members of the world. We stay informed with current events in the Church and our country; we want a balance and truthful report from the media. Yet at the cost of slandering so many people, the media is riddled with nasty and untrue remarks. Just who are these remarks hurting and what would Jesus teach us to do?

Wars ravage our world. We have not yet learned to live in peace. Thousands of people are hurt by war. Will war always plague us? What would Jesus say?

Scandals attack both Church and state. Many individuals feel deceived; many have lost respect for those institutions. We need changes in attitudes and structures. What would Jesus say?

Homeless, poor, or elderly people lack basic resources to sustain their lives, and no one is helping them. This list of hurting people goes on and on. Jesus wants us to be his healers, his heart of compassion. We can change one person at a time. We can join this great work of bringing goodness and mercy to our world.

Weekday Homily Helps

October 31, 2020

Saturday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time

Theme: Who's important?

Exegesis of the First Reading, Phil 1:18b–26 (484)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

Paul is in prison in Rome, awaiting trial and possible death. But while he is on death's doorstep, the Gospel flourishes. Verse 12 is key: "I want you to know that my situation has turned out rather to advance the Gospel." But isn't this the way of the Lord Jesus' Gospel: From death comes life? In 2 Cor 12:9, Paul quotes the Lord Jesus: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

Paul is reflecting on two "salvations" in today's reading. One, of course, is liberation from prison. He references the second one in v 19, which I translate: "I continue to rejoice that the Gospel is being spread. For I know that this progress of the Gospel will result in salvation for me through your prayers and support from the Spirit of Jesus Christ." The faithful perseverance of his converts is Paul's joy and boast when the Lord grants him final salvation. Paul prays that the same Spirit that sustained Jesus during his trial and passion will continue to sustain him as he faces similar mind-numbing circumstances.

Paul confidently acclaims: "To me life is Christ," saying in 3:12: "For I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus." Paul has "the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus." Through humiliation comes exaltation (2:5–11). Supported by his beloved Philippians, Paul will endure.

Exegesis of the Gospel, Lk 14:1, 7–11 (484)

Robert J. Karris, OFM

This passage operates on three levels. First, let's return to the man who's filled with fluid and yet has an insatiable thirst. Think of a bloated man walking around with a gallon of water in each hand. In the Hellenistic thought of Lk's day, this man was a metaphor for greedy people. Even though they have plenty, they want more and more. In the following vv, Jesus will give teachings against such greed, be it for honor or money at the expense of others. In 16:14, Lk says that the Pharisees, who were greedy, sneered at Jesus and his teachings about money. Aren't the Pharisees present at this meal?

On a second level, we might ask: What's unique about Jesus' teaching about high and low places? Isn't

this found already in Israel's Wisdom literature? Prv 25:6–7 urges: "Claim no honor in the king's presence. Do not occupy the place of great people. For it is better that you be told: 'Come up closer' than that you be humbled before the prince." But Jesus probes the depths of table etiquette.

The third level is revealed in a key Lukan theme: "God will humble those who exalt themselves and will exalt the lowly." Mary's Magnificat had proclaimed: "God has lifted up the lowly." We look forward to Jesus' words about his passion through which he is the great benefactor by serving others at table (22:24–27).

Homily Suggestion

Jeanne Hunt

A little bit of humility can be a good thing. Jesus offers a parable today about taking a back row seat. The Gospel describes a wedding guest racing to get a seat of honor—only to be told to go to the back of the hall. Have you ever been in that position? It feels pretty degrading. It is far better to assume the last seat and then be told, "Come on down!"

Jesus is describing our need to see things through the eyes of God, who regards every person as important. Let's say you are at a dinner attended by the mayor. Everyone is trying to shake his or her hand or sit close by. Jesus' position is still radical in our time. The poor, the marginal, the nobodies are all equally precious, says Jesus, as the one in the seat of honor.

While many very good people have worked hard to earn that seat of honor and a special place with God, the banquet hall has many seats. Each place at God's banquet is the seat of honor. Jesus reminds us about the many little hurting people (just like the beggars and prostitutes of his day). We need a change of attitude about who is the honored guest. The average simple guest can be one who has earned a special place with God as well.

Who are *your* little people: the cashier at the grocery store, the parking attendant, the school janitor, the elderly neighbor, or someone else? When we disregard their dignity and put them to the side, we have missed Jesus' message.