



Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

November 24, 2019

Readings

This week:

2 Samuel 5:1–3

2 Colossians 1:12–20

Luke 23:35–43

Next week:

Isaiah 2:1–5

Romans 13:11–14

Matthew 24: 37–44

Psalm

Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord. (*Psalm 122*)

Today

Today's presider is Fr. Kevin Ballard, S.J.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Waverley and Homer Streets, Palo Alto. Members of the Thomas Merton community participate in planning these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to “full, active and conscious participation” in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate, there are return envelopes in the bulletin on the last Sunday of each month for your convenience (donations by check or cash are welcome). The donation basket is in the back of church after Mass or available by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope to mail your donation. **Please do not put your TMC envelope in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).**

Calendar

Thursday, November 28

Happy Thanksgiving!

From Thomas Merton

Behind the horsebarn after dinner, I made my thanksgiving. The little clouds were beautiful. The sun on the grass was beautiful. Even the ground seemed alive.

Walking along the fence of the new vineyard after Benediction, I looked at the dim full moon and the bare brown woods on the far side of the bottoms, where our neighbor built that little wooden house last summer. It is the only house we can see in that direction, or, in fact, in any other. But what I wanted to say was that I don't think I like to walk in the fields with clothes smelling of incense.

--*The Sign of Jonas*

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy, to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality, and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development. Visit: www.thomasmerton.org.

COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

Advent Morning with Fr. Percell December 7:

Advent:
A time
for
peace,
a time
for hope,
a time
for
sanity.

Please join us for a morning of prayer, reflections, and discussion as we explore the graces we need this Advent during these troubling times in our Church, our country and our world.

Our guide will be Father Larry Percell, a retired priest of the Diocese of San Jose, former pastor of St. Nicholas Parish in Los Altos, and former spiritual director at the Jesuit Retreat Center in Los Altos.

The retreat will be on Saturday, December 7th, at St. Albert the Great Hospitality Center, 1095 Channing Avenue, Palo Alto. It begins at 9:00 am and finishes by noon.

Refreshments will be available. All are welcome. No fee, but donations gratefully accepted. [Info: Kay Williams, kaywill@pacbell.net, 650-270-4188.]

November Food Drive continues:

St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Confirmants and Youth Groups and the St. Vincent de Paul Parish Conference are seeking non-perishable foods for the annual November Food Drive.

Some people in our parish and in our neighborhoods face emergencies or adversity. Your gift of non-perishable food is an ideal opportunity to provide them the strength to overcome these challenges. The foods will be packaged up for distribution by St. Vincent de Paul volunteers.

For homeless clientele:

Vienna sausage/any flip-top canned meat, chicken, fish
Hearty soups with meat (flip-top)
Ready-to-eat meals (flip-top, e.g. chili)
High-protein snack bars
8-12 oz bottled water
Crackers (in sleeves)

For housed clientele:

Hearty soups (with meat or beans)
Chili & other ready-to-eat meals
Canned tomatoes, pasta sauce, salsa
Canned meat, chicken, tuna
Mayonnaise, condiments
Cooking oil
Cereal--hot & cold
Peanut butter & jelly
Crackers & Pasta

Altar of Remembrance comes down Nov. 30:

The Advent altar will be put up on Saturday, Nov. 30. So please remove your family pictures from the Altar of Remembrance today or during this coming week. Pictures still in place on November 30 will be reserved in a box in the church vestibule for you to retrieve.

Please join us after Mass in the Thomas House for coffee and donuts. We especially encourage newcomers or those passing through town to stop by for food and fellowship.

Adopt-a-Family continues today:

Before and after the 8:45 Mass today, information and gift tags for students and families chosen from St. Elizabeth Seton School will be available. You may choose to purchase a child's or family's specific gift request or purchase a gift certificate from Target or similar store for a child to purchase a second gift. We are suggesting approximately a \$40 value per gift this year. [This is a separate initiative from the tags on The Giving Tree displayed at the back of church each year.] All



gifts are to be wrapped, tagged and returned to the TMC table at church by Sunday, Dec. 8 or 15. Contact Barbara Kent 650- 323-0879 with questions. Please stop by our table to sign up for a tag.

Heart & Home Shelter opens December 1:

If you know a single adult woman who would be a good fit for the Heart & Home program, please refer her by filling out an online form at www.hhcollab.org.

If there's space at the shelter, Heart and Home's team will contact client within 24 hours to have:

- A phone call to assess whether the program is a fit.
- An in-person meeting near the shelter for intake.

A client who is responsive to H&H communications and a good fit for the program can start staying when the shelter opens.

Contact Info:

Lori Mills and Monique Norte
Shelter Directors,
650-600-1555 (call/text/voicemail)
shelter@hhcollab.org

PRAY FOR US: Please remember in your prayers this week Denise Alongi, Rudy Bahr, Tom Carmody, Kerry Carmody, George Chippendale, Mary Connors, Mike Cummings, Jim Davis, Ken Dias, Pat Dietrich, Dick Freeman, Deonna Gill, Emily Gill, Joanne Hasegawa, Fr. John Hester, Dean Judd, Hunter Kubit, Dick Jackman, Alicia Kot, Fr. Bill Leininger, Andre and Alyssa Lippard, Deacon Ysidro and Dolores Madrigal, Patricia Markee, Nancy Marty, Maureen Mooney, Hayden Pastorini, Alicia Placone-Combetta, Paul Prochaska, Anne Rush, Priya Smith, Bernice Sullivan, Jean Vistica, Dolores Walsh, and T. J. Wooten.

[Add/subtract names by e-mailing Kay Williams, kaywill@pacbell.net.]

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SpeakOut Committee: Diana Diamond, dianaldiamond@gmail.com

COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

The Way of Surrender:

[By Ron Rolheiser, OMI]

The Gospel is not as much about worthiness as it is about surrender.

What God wants from us is not a million acts of virtue, but a million acts of surrender, culminating in one massive surrender of soul, mind, and body. When we have given up everything and are completely helpless to give ourselves anything, as we will all eventually be when we face death, then salvation can be given us.

Salvation can never be taken, earned, or possessed by right. Hence nothing we have or can accumulate in this life – fame, fortune, health, good looks, a good name, or even moral virtue, religious fidelity, personal sanctity, or the practice of social justice – tips God’s hand towards us. What tips God’s hands is helplessness, surrender in grace.

C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce* makes this point in a very simple way. He has a fantasy of some (ten) interviews between someone in heaven trying to coax someone not there to come to heaven. Each of the ten persons seeking entrance into heaven is blocked by some major flaw, pride, anger, idolatry, the incapacity to forgive, shame, lust, and the like. In each case, irrespective of the flaw, the person in heaven keeps telling the other: “All you have to do is to give me your hand and let me lead you there. All you have to do is surrender!”

In the ideal order of things, surrender is for the mature, for the flower that has come to bloom and needs to give off its seed. That is less true of us during the first half of our lives, for we are still building, but it becomes the deepest truth of the second half of life. After forty, understood religiously, life is not about claiming worthiness, or about building things, especially our own egos, but about getting in touch with helplessness.

Age brings us physically to our knees and more and more everything we have so painstakingly built up begins to mean less and less. But that is the order of things: Salvation is not about great achievements, but about a great embrace and, as C.S. Lewis puts it, all we have to do is surrender.

[Ronald Rolheiser, a Roman Catholic priest and member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He is a community-builder, lecturer and writer. His books are popular throughout the English-speaking world and his weekly column is carried by more than seventy newspapers worldwide.]

Small Earth stories from NCR’s EarthBeat:

Carbon (revenue) to the people!

[By James K. Boyce, NCR, 11/20/19]

As an economist I’ve pondered how to tackle climate change effectively and fairly. We can take many steps as individuals, communities and society. But there’s only one way to cut carbon emissions enough to meet the Paris Agreement goals: A hard ceiling on the quantity of fossil fuels that we let into our economy, ratcheting it down as we transition to a clean energy future.

But such a limit on the supply of fossil fuels will raise their price. This risks a public backlash like France’s “yellow vest” movement.

In my book, *The Case for Carbon Dividends*, I propose we return carbon revenue to the people as equal dividends per person. Economically, this would reduce inequality while giving everyone an incentive to cut their carbon footprints. Politically, it would help ensure a durable policy. Philosophically, it would support the principle that the gifts of nature belong equally to all.

[James K. Boyce is an author, economist, and emeritus professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where he is also a senior fellow at the Political Economy Research Institute.]

Reducing carbon footprint year by year:

[By Phil Sakamoto, NCR, 11/6/19]

Each year I make one major investment or lifestyle change to reduce my carbon footprint. First it was replacing my furnace, air conditioner and water heater with the highest efficiency models available.

Then it was buying the highest mpg car on the market: a very affordable used Prius C that routinely gets 50 to 60 mpg around town. But I kept my SUV for the few times I actually need that cargo capacity. Next it was getting solar panels, and sourcing the rest of my electricity from wind farms through Arcadia Power. Now it is working on an increasingly plant-based, organic diet. Next year it will be reducing natural gas usage.

The point is that by making such deliberate consumer choices, you can easily reduce your carbon footprint by more than half.



Phil Sakamoto's license plate on his used Prius

Bishops' focus on abortion hasn't worked:

[By Stephen P. Millies, *America*, 11/21/19]

When the U.S. bishops approved a guide to U.S. voters describing abortion as a “preeminent priority” at their fall meeting in Baltimore, the organization only continued saying what many of them have been saying for 43 years. U.S. bishops have been describing abortion as a “crucial” issue with which they are “particularly concerned” at least since the conference’s president, then-Archbishop Joseph Bernardin, said so in a statement in 1976. (His testimony to the U.S. House Judiciary Committee that year was similar.) Of course, that is the problem.

Some other things are the same today. For example, the Gallup organization reports that in 1977, 22 percent of Americans supported legal access to abortion in any circumstances, while 25 percent hold that opinion in 2019. Almost 50 years of activism against the *Roe v. Wade* ruling has yielded no statistically significant difference. We can glimpse the same problem in Archbishop Joseph Naumann’s presentation on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Pro-Life Activities. Archbishop Naumann described how 24 percent of U.S. women seeking abortions identify as Catholic, a number that tracks with the percentage of the whole U.S. population that identifies as Catholic. Again, after almost 50 years of the bishops’ pro-life activities, being Catholic appears to make no difference among women seeking abortions.

These facts should give those of us who are concerned about abortion reasons to wonder whether we have been going about this all wrong. Maybe it is time to rethink our approach? Yet, it seems, the U.S. Catholic bishops cannot agree to a change even amid changed circumstances. Though some bishops at the meeting wanted to increase the emphasis on Pope Francis’ focus on other issues in addition to abortion, the majority were committed to “preeminent priority” as the best description of the Catholic approach.

Consider one important changed circumstance. President Trump and the Republican majority in the U.S. Senate have confirmed more than 150 judges to the federal bench. Those judges have been screened by The Federalist Society, a conservative judicial advocacy organization, to ensure that they are committed to reversing the *Roe* jurisprudence. The cases that could reverse *Roe* have not worked their way through the federal courts yet, but almost every observer agrees it is now only a matter of time. *Roe* will be limited or reversed in the near future.

Based on what I heard from the U.S. bishops’ meeting, many church leaders also believe that *Roe* will soon be limited or reversed, and abortion will be under the jurisdiction of state governments as it was before *Roe*. The pro-life movement thus stands on the threshold of

an achievement dreamed of since 1973. And now, as we prepare to return to the pre-*Roe* world, how does the U.S.C.C.B. officially regard abortion?

Abortion is the “preeminent priority” facing Catholics as citizens and voters. Seemingly nothing has changed. And this should seem a little odd because it is a little odd.

In fact, some states have their own laws protecting legal abortion, and so abortions will definitely continue in 13 of them even after *Roe* is reversed. It is worth pointing out that one of them, Washington, legalized abortion in 1970, three years before *Roe* and before abortion became “crucial” or “preeminent.”

So what is going on here?

I fear that the U.S. bishops have started something they do not know how to stop. Once the goal was to return the question to the states, reversing *Roe*. (That was Judge Robert Bork’s position in the 1980s.) Now, as that appears to be happening soon, it seems that the bishops want to go further, down to the state level, with undiminished zeal until all 50 states have enacted laws against abortion. But what then? Is there any point where opposition to abortion can share priority with other issues important to Catholics? We know from our long history that even when they are illegal, some abortions will still occur. Will the U.S.C.C.B. then seek even stricter laws? Will they lobby licensure boards to act against medical professionals who still perform the procedure? Will they turn our attention beyond U.S. borders? Just how far must U.S. Catholics go?

The goalposts keep moving because decades of binary cultural and political argument means that reversing *Roe* is no longer enough. But this creates a strange situation. As in the “war on terror,” the moral test of whether one opposes abortion strongly enough has become perhaps more significant than any outcomes that can reasonably be expected or achieved by that opposition.

For 50 years we have tried to change laws. We have preferred legal and political solutions to changing hearts and minds. Sometimes we have been harsh, and we have made our voice harder to hear outside the church and inside. The results are plain. *Roe* will be reversed, and nothing else has changed.

Imagine, instead, if we had set about to “restore respect for human life” by educating, appealing to and converting our fellow citizens while focusing on the whole range of threats to human life, as Cardinal Bernardin suggested.

We might, by now, be able to focus on one or two other issues, too.

[Stephen P. Millies is associate professor of public theology and director of The Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. His most recent book is *Good Intentions: A History of Catholic Voters' Road from Roe to Trump* (Liturgical Press, 2018).]