



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

September 1, 2019

Christ at the Head of the Table

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In a commencement address at Northwestern University, comedian and talk-show host Stephen Colbert recalled what he learned from his experience as a member of an improvisation group. “One of the things I was taught early on,” he said, “is that you are not the most important person in the scene.” He said the best improvisation comes from a team that listens and responds to each other to “serve a common idea.” When someone

demands attention or tries to force a skit in a certain direction, the comedy falls apart. I never forgot his advice. It is appropriate in families, in workplaces, and among friends. And I confess I have had to apply it to myself on more than a few occasions.

Jesus’ parable on humility, using a wedding reception as his setting, is a caution against presuming that we know best or that we—our goals and talents—are most important. He is not advocating false modesty or a refusal to use the gifts God gives us. Rather, Jesus asks that we start from a place of humility and service. He wants us to allow others to say what they need and how we can help before we presume to know the solution or how the situation should unfold.

First and foremost, the figurative head of the table belongs to Christ, and it’s up to us to obediently go where he tells us. He will give us our place. It’s worthy to note that at the table of the Lord, every place has the same significance and everyone is a welcome guest. The important one is Christ. After that, we are all equals, regardless of who we think we are. +

Jesus’ parable is a caution against presuming that we know best.

A Word from Pope Francis

One must not exaggerate the mystique of work. The person is not only work; there are other human needs that we must cultivate and consider, such as family, friends, and rest. It is important, therefore, to remember that any work must be at the service of the person, not the person in the service of work.

—Letter to conference on human development, November 23, 2017



Sunday Readings

Sirach 3:17–18, 20, 28–29

My son, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.

Hebrews 12:18–19, 22–24a

No, you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering.

Luke 14:1, 7–14

[Jesus said,] “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Rather than practicing one-upmanship, when I am with a braggart am I able to remain humble?
- Do I allow my actions, such as kindness and generosity, to speak louder than words?

The Spirituality of Work

By Kathy Coffey

Monday is the day of the week many people dread. After the weekend, a collective sigh wafts across the world: “Ugh. Back to work.” The drill can be tedious, the routine exhausting, and the boss stupid. Work may appear to be a grubby girl cleaning the sooty fireplace, but beneath the ragged camouflage hides the beautiful Cinderella. How can we learn to see work as a productive outlet, a means of support, and God’s gift?

The problem may come from compartmentalizing our prayer and our work. Is Sunday the tidy hour given to God, separate from anything else we do? Or does our faith permeate every minute of every day, especially endless hours spent working?

To resolve this dilemma, let’s look at our model, Jesus. He was surrounded by people who worked: fishermen, farmers, tax collectors, shepherds, and soldiers. He drew his images from a woman baking, a farmer pruning vines. He worked hard, too.

Jesus’ first followers continued along that path. Paul the tentmaker wrote: “You know well that these very hands have served my needs and my companions. In every way I have shown you that by hard work of that sort we must help the weak” (Acts 20:34–35). The Benedictine



abbeys of the Middle Ages were founded on two cornerstones: *ora et labora*, prayer and work. The Franciscan missions in California were beehives of activity: crops were grown, grain milled, wine made, furniture carved, cloth woven, paintings and sculptures created. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux fell asleep during

formal prayer, but she found God in routine, daily occupations—her “little way.”

These examples show that we’ve always respected work, considering it essential to a full life. A subtle pecking order undercuts this respect, distinguishing “loftier” work (done with clean hands) from “lower” work (grubbier). But healthy folks relax those distinctions. An “earthy” pastor drew protests when he pitched in to wash dishes after a potluck dinner. He pleaded with those who tried to take over, “Please let me finish. It’s the only tangible thing I’ve accomplished all day.”

A local physician delights in her garden. Mucking in the dirt relieves her stress. Like many whose work is primarily mental, she finds that physical labor helps her feel whole.

More dangerous than the hierarchy of work is the suggestion that somehow we taint our spirituality with drudgery. The teaching of Jesus about the lilies of

the field (Matthew 6:28–29) prompts criticism of overwork and consumerism.

We need to understand that the paycheck fills legitimate needs, providing education, shelter, and medical care for ourselves and our children. Furthermore, work provides creativity, a social dimension, and a step beyond the self.

Anyone who has ever questioned work’s importance to the human spirit should watch preschoolers at play. Many pretend to be firefighters, parents, doctors, or truck drivers, modeling mysterious adult responsibilities. In Montessori schools, children wash dishes that aren’t dirty for the sensuous joy of the task: clean scent, warm water, popping bubbles.

We may have lost that first fascination with work through numbing repetition. But many recapture it through hobbies: working on a toy railroad or a pottery wheel seems more fun if it’s not for a paycheck.

Our outlook thus colors our work. Seeing the potential to encounter God at every turn of the page or pour of the coffeepot enlivens repetitive processes. And, if we see a job done well as an opportunity to glorify God, this attitude will add meaning to our work. +

PRAYER

Lord, you came to be the humble Servant of God to all people. Give me a humble heart so I may be a selfless, compassionate servant to the poor and vulnerable.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 2–7

Monday, Weekday:

1 Thes 4:13–18 / Lk 4:16–30

Tuesday, St. Gregory the Great,

1 Thes 5:1–6, 9–11 / Lk 4:31–37

Wednesday, Weekday:

Col 1:1–8 / Lk 4:38–44

Thursday, Weekday:

Col 1:9–14 / Lk 5:1–11

Friday, Weekday:

Col 1:15–20 / Lk 5:33–39

Saturday, Weekday:

Col 1:21–23 / Lk 6:1–5

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Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
September 8, 2019

Planning, Flexibility, and Discipleship

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In my family, three members like to plan for what's ahead: What are we going to do? How will it get done? How are we going to get there? What will happen when we do? I can tolerate certain changes up until the day we leave, but after that, change is difficult for me. My daughter hates change at any point and doesn't rest until a revised plan is made. My husband lies somewhere in between. Our other daughter is a much more freewheeling spirit. "I never make plans that far in

advance," she would say when I asked her what she was doing that evening. We would often just stare at each other in wonder. After thirty years, we have also rubbed off on each other in some ways.

Becoming a disciple of Christ takes both planning and flexibility. The planning comes in preparing ourselves to let go of anything that gets in the way of our service to the Lord. For most of us, that will not be our parents, but it might be something or someone in our society or culture. Jesus' challenge comes in the realization that nothing can come between Christ and us—not even our parents—and if they did, we would need to turn from them in order to follow him. The flexibility comes in the understanding that we don't know what or who we might have to give up, or the moment and manner in which Christ will ask us to pick up our cross and follow in his footsteps. All we can do is pray for the grace and courage to do what he asks when he asks it. +

Sunday Readings

Wisdom 9:13–18

For who knows God's counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends?

Philemon 9–10, 12–17

I rather urge you out of love, being as I am, Paul, an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus.

Luke 14:25–33

[Jesus said,] "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

*We don't know what,
or who, we might have
to give up to follow
in Christ's footsteps.*

A Word from Pope Francis

I would like to reflect on nonviolence as a style of politics for peace....May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life. When victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promoters of nonviolent peacemaking.

—Fiftieth World
Day of Peace,
January 1, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Am I prepared to give up anything that interferes with my service to the Lord?
- Am I flexible enough to follow God's call when I hear it?

Why Do We Talk to God?

By Phyllis Zagano

First we need to believe that prayer—any type of prayer—is real, and that God knows our needs and always answers our prayers. Usually when we think of prayer, the prayer of petition comes to mind. It's common to say that sometimes God's answer to our prayerful pleas is no but that, come to think of it, the no we hear is actually a yes. God always affirms who we are as humans. That is, when we pray in petition for things we want, God kindly teaches us who we are by supplying what we truly need. In other words, we may want a new car to impress others, but what we need is secure knowledge that we are God's beloved. Once we accept that gift, then the rest becomes easy.

So the first petition we must present to the Lord is a petition to see ourselves as God sees us. And God always sees us as perfect for what we do and how we are, so long as we cooperate in God's plan.

Often, people want to know what is the best type of prayer. I don't believe there is any "best" prayer, provided that every prayer is rooted in an understanding of our dependence on God and his unconditional love for us.

There are four essential movements of the heart that follow our acceptance of God's existence and love for us.



They are adoration, petition, contrition, and thanksgiving. Each is a separate movement of the heart and mind, and each is "best" for certain times.

Loving and Being Loved

Adoration is the easiest and the hardest type of prayer, requiring that we do nothing but love and

be loved. That means giving up control, which most of us don't like. But think of the wonder in a baby's eyes as she looks at you. Think of the wonder in your eyes as you look at her. This is how you are with God, and God with you, in the prayer of adoration. Few words—just a sharing of love between two beings for whom there is nothing and no one else in the world at that moment.

Contrition is another familiar type of prayer. With contrition we acknowledge we have made mistakes, denied God's perfect creation of us, and tried to remedy the pain of that denial.

Sometimes we do this with excessive alcohol or food. Sometimes we misuse our sexual faculties. Sometimes our insecurities cause us to lie, cheat, or steal. These are real forces in everyone's life, and we need to apologize to God for denying who we are and forgetting that our real security is with God—not with worldly comforts. So we sincerely say "sorry" and move on.

Answered in Love

Petition, as stated earlier, involves simply asking God a favor. Sometimes the favor can't be granted—the loved one dies, the job ends, the illness returns. We can feel angry with God. That is actually very healthy, for we have the right as God's beloved to complain—and loudly. As we do, we may hear more clearly how God has answered our prayers in love (albeit in the negative), and how God wants us to have lives that mirror his love for the world.

Thanksgiving is the final prayer mode, one deserving more attention. Thanksgiving is more than simple manners, like thank-you notes after birthdays and Christmas. Thanksgiving is a minute-by-minute attitude that brings us to a place of conscious dependence upon the Lord and joyful acceptance of God's will. "Thank you" must always be in our hearts.

This attitude of gratitude makes sense of adoration, petition, contrition, and thanksgiving, and brings us to joyful understanding that everything we have is given by God in love. So, when we pray, we find God's gift of joy in life—without even asking for it. +



Lord, I am grateful for your call to discipleship. Give me the grace to respond to your call with courage, love, and humility.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 9–14

Monday, St. Peter Claver:

Col 1:24–2:3 / Lk 6:6–11

Tuesday, Weekday:

Col 2:6–15 / Lk 6:12–19

Wednesday, Weekday:

Col 3:1–11 / Lk 6:20–26

Thursday, Weekday:

Col 3:12–17 / Lk 6:27–38

Friday, St. John Chrysostom:

1 Tm 1:1–2, 12–14 / Lk 6:39–42

Saturday, Exaltation of the Holy Cross:

Nm 21:4b–9 / Phil 2:6–11 / Jn 3:13–17



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
September 15, 2019

Are We "Older Sons"?

By Mary Katharine Deeley

A preacher at a prayer service read the story of the Prodigal Son. The story was so familiar, I tuned out until he reached the part about the reaction of the elder son complaining about his brother's treatment. The preacher continued, "So the father responded, 'You are absolutely right: Let's send him away again.'" The congregation looked startled as this unfamiliar version rang in our ears. The preacher said, "That's the way I always thought the story should have gone." He continued to reflect on the passage and our all-too-

human reaction to a father who seems to spoil his younger kid rotten. The more he talked, the more I realized that there is a little of the elder son in all of us. We want to be rewarded, and we want those who are wrong to be punished.

I think today's account in Exodus was written from that perspective. God, as we understand him, wants to strike down all those who made the golden calf—and rightfully so. But Moses reminds God of his promise to Abraham, a memory of love so powerful that God cannot destroy his children regardless of his anger. We don't see how the Prodigal's father responded when his younger son first left. Maybe he was angry or disappointed as we might have been. Rather, we see that his love was so powerful that the son is welcomed back and falls to his knees in relief and contrition.

"It's pure grace that the father didn't react as we might have," said the preacher, "Thank God." And he read the rest of the passage as it had been written. +

There's some of the elder son in all of us. We want to be rewarded and those who are wrong to be punished.

A Word from Pope Francis

Emails, text messages, social networks, and chats can be fully human forms of communication....Social networks can facilitate relationships and promote the good of society, but they can also lead to further polarization and division between individuals and groups. The digital world is a public square...where we can either encourage or demean one another.

—Fiftieth World Communications Day, January 24, 2016



Sunday Readings

Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14

So the LORD changed his mind about the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these I am the foremost.

Luke 15:1-32 or 15:1-10

[Jesus said,] "We must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I too eager to advocate punishment instead of forgiveness?
- Before meting out punishment, do I pause to recall my own sins and failings?

Why Wait for Marriage (or Marry at All)?

Couples who live together before marriage generally divorce at higher rates than couples who don't.

By Jim Healy, PhD

My parents were married in 1960. They said, “We didn’t know anybody living together, and our friends didn’t either.” Few could claim that today. There are now millions of cohabiting opposite-sex couples in America, and most who marry this year (including Catholics) will have lived together first.

As a Church, how do we make sense of this? More personally, how do we respond if our children or acquaintances choose to cohabit? When we listen to cohabiting couples, they offer multiple reasons for living together. These range from wanting to be together more, sexual accessibility, economic necessity, wanting to “take the next step” in commitment, testing for compatibility, and reducing the possibility of divorce. So it’s important not to assume that we know why a couple is living together until we ask.

Implicit in the reasons given by many couples are questions about commitment. In a country where the divorce rate for first marriages hovers between 40 and 50 percent, cohabitation seems like a perfect way to test if a relationship is “marriage-



worthy.” The social sciences, though, clearly tell us that cohabitation actually has the opposite effect.

After years of research, it still appears that couples who live together before marriage generally divorce at higher rates than couples who don’t. Why? Because cohabiting couples blend their lives

in such a way that it’s difficult to leave, even if it’s clear that one should. When, as often happens, an ultimatum is offered (“Either we marry or somebody needs to move out”), the path of least resistance is to marry. Moving in with somebody you’re not sure you want to marry makes it more likely, not less, that you’ll marry the person against your better judgment.

If that research isn’t convincing, the theological arguments may be more compelling. We Catholics believe that marriage is a sacrament—a primary way of showing God’s faithful, creative love to the world. We believe that, when we make love, we are offering each other not just an action or a moment, but our entire lives, in imitation of the way Jesus offered his life for us. The Catholic Church says cohabitation is wrong, not because it increases human happiness, but because it limits it.

So how do we treat cohabiting couples who come to the Church requesting marriage? In St. John Paul II’s words

about cohabiting couples, we are to “make tactful and respectful contact with the couples concerned, and enlighten them patiently, correct them charitably and show them the witness of Christian family life, in such a way as to smooth the path for them to regularize their situation” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 81).

In other words, we welcome them. We help them assess their readiness for marriage. We offer them the richness of our teaching on sexuality and marriage, and we challenge them with it—as we do with anyone preparing for marriage. We allow them to marry in the Church, inviting them into ongoing evangelization within our parishes.

What about parents, who are torn on how to react when their adult children choose cohabitation? Many parents who have navigated this challenge offer this advice: Be clear about your own beliefs and why you hold them, “living the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

And stay emotionally connected with your children. Tell them what you believe without repeating it whenever you see them. Your willingness to consider their viewpoints will win you the right to share your own perspectives. +

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for your gentle, guiding ways. Save me from losing myself in the things of the world.

Help me to find my way to your heart of goodness.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 16–21

Monday, Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian:
1 Tm 2:1–8 / Lk 7:1–10


Tuesday, Weekday:
1 Tm 3:1–13 / Lk 7:11–17

Wednesday, Weekday:
1 Tm 3:14–16 / Lk 7:31–35

Thursday, Weekday: 1 Tm 4:12–16 / Lk 7:36–50

Friday, Sts. Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn,
Paul Chŏng Ha-sang, and Companions:
1 Tm 6:2c–12 / Lk 8:1–3

Saturday, St. Matthew:
Eph 4:1–7, 11–13 / Mt 9:9–13

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Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
September 22, 2019

How Do We Treat the Poor?

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When Pope Francis was elected, Catholics were inspired by his humility and simplicity. When he bowed before the people in St. Peter's Square and asked for their prayers, the little crowd gathered around the TV in the basement of the Catholic Center was moved to tears. When he announced that he would continue living in the guesthouse rather than the papal apartments and eat in the cafeteria, we cheered. But Pope Francis also challenged us. He wanted us to examine how we treated the poor and marginalized of the world. In his

encyclical *Laudato Si'*, he confronted us with the understanding that our misuse of the environment impacted the poor first of all and that we could no longer continue to consume our natural resources in a reckless and greedy fashion.

The prophet Amos has some harsh words for those who exploit the poor. In the Old Testament, care for the widow, orphan, and stranger—the poorest of the poor—were among the most righteous things a person could do. Many prophets pointed to the failure to do so as a sign that the people had turned from the Lord and, in their sin, cared only for themselves. More recent figures who also have indicated that the measure of a society is the way they treat their poorest members include Ghandi, St. John Paul II, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Christ commanded us to love one another. Surely this includes seeing that all have the basic necessities of life, even if that means we don't get everything we want. +

Pope Francis wants us to examine how we treat the poor and the marginalized.

Sunday Readings

Amos 8:4-7

The LORD has sworn: ...Never will I forget a thing [the evildoers] have done!

1 Timothy 2:1-8

There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human.

Luke 16:1-13 or 16:10-13

[Jesus said,] "The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones."

A Word from Pope Francis

The level of progress in a society is measured by its capacity to safeguard life.... Death from malnutrition is an attack on life. Terrorism, war, violence; so is euthanasia. Loving life means always taking care of the other, wanting the best for him, cultivating and respecting her transcendent dignity.

—Address to Science and Life Association, May 30, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- "No servant can serve two masters." What are some of the "masters" in my life?
- Do I gloss over small misdeeds and white lies instead of being "trustworthy in very small matters"?

Exploring Our Roots

By Richard Rohr, OFM

How often have we heard or read the words over the years: “God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). We’re created in God’s image. In other words, our family of origin is divine.

Perhaps we’ve heard those words so often that we don’t receive an existential shock anymore. Beginning with the opening lines of the Old Testament, God tells us that we are fundamentally good and that we have a foundational identity with God. This is nothing less than extraordinary!

To put it differently, God extends an invitation to us. God seeks to give away God, but it is with great difficulty! You would think the invitation would be readily accepted, but not so. One of the common responses to God’s offering of self is, “Lord, I am not worthy.” It may sound humble, even respectful. But it can also be the way we avoid God’s call.

Not so the young virgin from Nazareth. When the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is to be the Mother of God, this humble teenager from a backwater town doesn’t run away from God by protesting unworthiness. No, Mary just wants to understand how she can bear a son under such unlikely circumstances. Once she realizes how God plans to work through



her, her openness to the invitation is extraordinary. She becomes the archetype of receptivity. Mary is the one perfect vessel who knows how to say an unquestioning yes to God’s invitation.

Trusting God’s Goodness

Most of us don’t accept God’s invitations so readily. Unlike Mary, we question our unworthiness, refusing to believe that God is speaking to us. Meanwhile, God is trying to tell us that there is nothing we need to earn, nothing we can attain or accomplish, nothing to work up to. We’ve already “got it” by being a part of the family of God. Our relationship with God is about awakening rather than accomplishing, realizing rather than performing. Trust is the issue, and that becomes the biblical concept of faith. It’s all about confidence that God could love us enough. It’s all about confidence in God’s goodness.

This sense of being inadequate, of not being enough is what I call Original Shame, rather than the familiar Original Sin. As God’s creatures we’re a mixed blessing. We’re filled with contradictions and mystery, darkness and light. But God, who has taken the risk of creating freedom inside us, is always gracious. God persists in loving us—mixed blessings that we are—in all our unworthiness.

New Kind of Fame

What is God seeking from us? God isn’t looking for servants, slaves, or workers, for contestants to play the game or jump through hoops. God is simply looking for images that can bear the mystery of the glory and the darkness of life. God invites us, his creatures, to a relationship of love. What God wants are icons who will communicate who God is, what God is about.

Once we accept and believe that we’re made in God’s image, we have found our identity. We don’t have to be so preoccupied with roles and titles, with clothing, cars, and all the things the world holds up as ideals. We don’t need material things to assure us that we’re special.

We know we’re radically significant by being children of the Lord. We have less need to be visible or showy, to make a name for ourselves, to take our place in history. We no longer need our fifteen minutes of fame—because we know we’re famous! Our family of origin is divine. You don’t get much better than that. +



Lord, I am grateful for the gift of life. Help me to be a wise and responsible person in the world.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 23–28

Monday, St. Pius of Pietrelcina:
Ezr 1:1–6 / Lk 8:16–18

Tuesday, Weekday:
Ezr 6:7–8, 12b, 14–20 / Lk 8:19–21

Wednesday, Weekday:
Ezr 9:5–9 / Lk 9:1–6

Thursday, Weekday:
Hg 1:1–8 / Lk 9:7–9

Friday, St. Vincent de Paul:
Hg 2:1–9 / Lk 9:18–22

Saturday, Weekday:
Zec 2:5–9, 14–15a / Lk 9:43b–45



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
September 29, 2019

Learning How to Love

By Mary Katharine Deeley

How do we best love God and one another? A student, wanting to become more like Christ in welcoming all people, decided that he would greet every one of his fraternity brothers every week and ask how they were and that he would say hello to the man who sat in front of the drugstore in town begging for change and invite him to lunch. In May, when it came time to see how he did, the student had indeed talked to his fraternity brothers every week and greeted the beggar, but he never did invite him to lunch. “I just couldn’t do

it,” he said. “I was a little afraid of what it would mean. Would I be responsible to help him again?” We talked about it a little, and I invited him to put that question to God in prayer.

I’m not sure we have an easy answer to what it means to look someone in the face and invite him to share a meal. And I daresay not many of us would do what that student set out to do. But St. Paul urges us to “pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11). That’s a lifetime’s work and possible only with the grace of God. Surely, as we grow in those virtues, we will come to see all people as worthy of our time and care without worrying about what might happen in the future. It may not be practical and it certainly won’t be easy. But the demands of God’s love compel us to try. And if we do so, we might not share the fate of the rich man in Luke’s Gospel who learned too late how best to love. +

Sunday Readings

Amos 6:1a, 4–7

Now they shall be the first to go into exile, and the carousing of those who lounged shall cease.

1 Timothy 6:11–16

The blessed and only ruler will make manifest at the proper time, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Luke 16:19–31

“Abraham said, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.’”

*As we grow in virtue,
we will come to see all people
as worthy of our time
and care.*

A Word from Pope Francis

More than a place, [heaven] is a “state” of soul in which our deepest hopes are fulfilled in superabundance and our being, as creatures and as children of God, reach their full maturity. We will finally be clothed in the joy, peace and love of God, completely, without any limit, and we will come face to face with him!

—General audience,
November 26,
2014



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I ever reach out to a stranger in need, or am I too busy or fearful to get involved?
- Do I direct a large portion of my wealth and material blessings to those in need?

Facing Life's End with Faith

By Mary Jo Dangel

Twice in eight years, I've been involved in making end-of-life decisions about my two adult sons, Tim and Ritch, who were born with cystic fibrosis (CF), an incurable hereditary disease. While the decisions were the most difficult I've ever made, knowing their wishes and the Church's teachings, as well as having faith in the promise of eternal life, made it easier.

In 2011, while awaiting a lung transplant, Tim, age thirty-three, was admitted to the intensive care unit (ICU) with life-threatening problems. Initially, his condition was serious but hopeful. He was receiving nutrition and medications, and was attached to a ventilator and other life support. His treatment fell under what the Church calls "ordinary" means: efforts that offer more realistic hope of benefit to the patient than burden. The Church teaches that such ordinary means must be used.

Soon Tim took a turn for the worse. He became unconscious, and his vital signs deteriorated. I prayed for healing but knew Tim's situation was hopeless. As I looked at him, hooked to tubes and machines, I thought of Mary watching Jesus on the cross and wondered, *How long will Tim hang on his cross?*

I wasn't surprised when the CF specialist who had been treating Tim and Ritch explained why the medical team was



recommending we sign a do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order. Through tears, she said that, if they tried to resuscitate him, broken ribs could puncture his diseased lungs. Also, Tim's weak heart would likely stop again.

Resuscitating Tim under such hopeless conditions falls under what the Church calls "extraordinary" means: efforts whose potential benefits do not outweigh the burdens they impose. The Church allows death to happen by withholding extraordinary means, but it condemns the willful taking of life through euthanasia or assisted suicide.

Thankfully, our family agreed that the only thing more painful than signing the DNR order would've been making Tim endure more suffering without any benefit. Tim wanted to be an organ and tissue donor, but the condition of his body made him an unsuitable candidate.

Tim's death convinced Ritch to get his own legal affairs in order. Ritch, age thirty-six, had a rare liver condition associated with CF. In 2016, he passed out due to internal bleeding and was admitted to the same ICU where Tim had died. Ritch's condition soon became hopeless. He clung to life despite blood transfusions and other efforts. Fortunately, our priest came and said that discontinuing Ritch's life support was compatible with Church teaching.

Ritch had signed his organ-donor card but, like Tim, his organs were unsuitable for transplantation. However, some tissues (skin, bones, tendons, for example) could be used to save and improve the lives of many people. We said yes.

The same CF specialist who had been at the hospital when Tim died rushed to be there when Ritch's life-support systems were discontinued. Again, we cried together and I thanked her for caring for my boys. Our immediate family stayed with Ritch until his heart stopped.

I can only imagine the difficulty of making these decisions if we hadn't known Tim's and Ritch's wishes or if there had been disagreements. It's critical to have your legal affairs in order, understand Church teaching, and discuss your wishes with loved ones and doctors.

Guiding Wishes

The American Bar Association (americanbar.org) has resources on health-care advance directives and related legal issues, and the prolife pages of the Catholic bishops' site (uscbb.org/prolife) has a comprehensive explanation of Church teaching on end-of-life issues.

Making end-of-life arrangements in advance reminds us of the dignity and value of our earthly lives and the eternal reward that awaits us in the next. +



*Lord, help me to be generous
in showing your love and
compassion to those in need.*

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 30–
October 5

Monday, St. Jerome:
Zec 8:1–8 / Lk 9:46–50

Tuesday, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus:
Zec 8:20–23 / Lk 9:51–56

Wednesday, Holy Guardian Angels:
Neh 2:1–8 / Mt 18:1–5, 10

Thursday, Weekday:
Neh 1:1–4a, 5–6, 7b–12 / Lk 10:1–12

Friday, St. Francis of Assisi:
Bar 1:15–22 / Lk 10:13–16

Saturday, Weekday:
Bar 4:5–12, 27–29 / Lk 10:17–24