

***ctkAlive!* Scripture Study**

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020—A Cycle Readings



*"Fisherman on boat casting net
on the lake at sunset"*

Source: [freepik.com](https://www.freepik.com)

Note: For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, we have added links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.

Caution: *Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Leave the reflection and chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links. Exception: In the course of the lesson, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.*

Opening Prayer

"The Year We've Been Waiting For" by [Leslie Dwight](#)

What if 2020 isn't cancelled?

What if 2020 is the year we've been waiting for?

A year so uncomfortable, so painful, so scary, so raw —
that it finally forces us to grow.

A year that screams so loud, finally awakening us
from our ignorant slumber.

A year we finally accept the need for change.
Declare change. Work for change. Become the change.

A year we finally band together,
instead of pushing each other further apart.

2020 isn't cancelled, but rather
the most important year of them all.

Introduction to the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time Scriptures

Americans, including Catholics, do not like taking orders from anyone, not even the Lord. We prefer to think we are in charge and can do quite well on our own, thank you. In Psalm 119, we hear a different message, “Lord, I *love* your commands.” At 176 verses, Psalm 119 is one of the longest in the entire psalter. Catholic liturgists have chosen just a few verses to accompany this weekend’s readings.

I Kings 3: 5, 7-12— “Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, ‘Ask what you want me to give you.’” This wonderful line, one of hundreds like it in the Hebrew Scriptures (OT), offers an open-ended invitation to ask our God for *anything*. Most of us, instead of asking for “the moon,” sometimes ask too little. Yahweh says, in effect, “Go head. Ask for the moon and leave it up to me to deliver it in the way I know is best for you and the world. So, come on. Give it a try.”
Note: Authorship of the Books of Kings is in dispute. The timing seems fairly certain—around the year 600, several centuries after Solomon’s lifetime. Some scholars hold that Jeremiah, the prophet, wrote the books during the period of the Babylonian exile (500s BCE/BC). (Recall that Jeremiah was one of those Jews “left behind” in Jerusalem.)

Romans 8: 28-30—“We know that in everything, God works for the *good* of those who love him, whom he has called according to his plan.” Nice words from St. Paul, but sometimes they don’t seem to match my real-life story. Yet, the liturgy calls me to believe exactly that. No matter what happens, God wants me to believe it is somehow “good.”
(Paul addresses this letter to the mixed Jewish/pagan converts in Rome. In fact, Romans is a comprehensive catechism for all believers everywhere, living . . . and yet to be born.)

Matthew 13: 44-52—“The kingdom of heaven is **like** a treasure hidden in a field . . . a trader looking for fine pearls . . . a householder, who can produce from his store things both new and old. . . .” Parables. *Always* parables! They sound nice, even poetic, but . . .

First Reading from the First Book of Kings (3: 5, 7-12)

“It was in Gibeon, during the night, that Yahweh appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, “Ask what you want me to give you.’

“(Solomon replied) ‘And now, O Yahweh my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a young boy who does not know how to undertake *anything*. Meantime, your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen—a people so great that they can neither be numbered nor counted. Give me, therefore, an understanding mind in governing your people that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to govern this multitude of people of yours?’

“Yahweh was pleased that Solomon had made this request. And he told him, ‘Because you have requested this, rather than long life or wealth or even vengeance on your enemies; indeed, because you have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I shall grant you your request. I now give you a wise and discerning mind, such as no one has had before you nor anyone after you shall ever have.’”

Personal Reflection

— *How strange does it seem that God would say to a young man who already “had everything” (power, money, land, servants, an army, a beautiful Temple . . .), “Ask what you want me to give you”? Does that even seem fair (“why do the rich get richer”)?*

— *So, again, what was that one thing Solomon asked for that he realized as still missing in his life?*

— *Today, God asks me what I need. What “one thing” am still missing in my life? What one thing would make me a better, more complete person? Dare I ask for it?*

Antiphon: Psalm 119 (57, 72, 76-77, 127-30)

Love of God’s law: an alphabetical psalm (in the *original Hebrew*).

Lord, you are good and forgiving.

You are my portion, O Yahweh;
I have promised to obey your word.
Give me insight to know your commands,
since I have been formed by your hands.

Lord, you are good and forgiving.

Comfort me, then, with your unfailing love,
as you promised your servant.
Let your mercy come, to give me life;
for your law is my delight.

Lord, you are good and forgiving.

I love your commandments
more than gold—the finest gold.
My steps are guided by your precepts;
I hate all false ways.

Lord, you are good and forgiving.

Wonderful are your decrees;
my soul cannot but keep them.
As your words unfold, light is shed,
and the simple-hearted understand.

Lord, you are good and forgiving.

Personal Reflection

— *Like Solomon, the psalmist asks for “insight,” “life,” “simple-hearted understanding.” What is my list of wants and needs today. Let me rewrite those same verses filling in my own personal needs in their place:*

Lord, give me _____.

Give me _____.

and _____.

Next, I will read the antiphon again but, this time, as if I were the original psalmist.

— *Do the words I have written (my “asks”) flow easily from my heart? If not, what do I balk at. Which words/phrases are hard for me to say/sing with full spiritual honesty?*

Second Reading: From St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans (8: 28-30)

“We know that, in everything, God works for the good of those who love him, whom he has called, according to his plan. Those whom he knew beforehand, he has also predestined, to be like his Son, similar to him, so, that, he may be the Firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And so, those whom God predestined, he called; and those whom he called, he makes righteous; and to those whom he makes righteous, he will give his glory.”

Personal Reflection

“We know that, in everything, God works for the good of those who love him, whom he has called, according to his plan.”

— *How strongly do I believe these words? To put it another way, how convinced am I that everything that has ever happened to me—in the past, now in the present, or will happen in the future—was/is/will be “good for me?”*

“And so, those whom God predestined, he called; and those whom he called, he makes righteous.”

Predestination stands as one of the most mysterious concepts in our spiritual vocabulary. Nonetheless, St. Paul had no trouble using it in his letter to a community of Christians he has never met.

— *What do I believe Paul intended by using the word, “predestination”? How can I possibly harmonize my God-given free will and the concept of predestination?*

FYI—Read Franciscan theologian Fr. [Richard Rohr’s take on predestination](#).

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Matthew (13: 44-52)

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure, hidden in a field. The one who finds it, buries it again; and so happy is he, that he goes and sells everything he has, in order to buy that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a trader, who is looking for fine pearls. Once he has found a pearl of exceptional quality, he goes away, sells everything he has and buys it.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a big fishing net let down into the sea, in which every kind of fish has been caught. When the net is full, it is dragged ashore. Then they sit down and gather the good fish into buckets but throw the bad away. That is how it will be at the end of time; the angels will go out to separate the wicked from the just, and to throw the wicked into the blazing furnace, where they will weep and gnash their teeth.’

“Jesus asked, ‘Have you understood all these things?’

“‘Yes,’ they answered.’

“So he said to them, ‘Therefore, every teacher of the law, who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven, is like a householder, who can produce from his store things both new and old.’”

Personal Reflection

“The kingdom of heaven is *like*. . .” Jesus must have wished he could do better than use earthbound examples to describe what he knew in his heart of hearts. The fact is, we are “stuck” with building our faith on slippery “imagination” and “hope” as the steps involved in coming to “faith” (“I *do* believe”).

— *I may be a lifelong Catholic or a later covert, no matter. At what point/moment in my life did I trust my imagination and hope enough to affirm—for myself—that I did believe in the God of Scripture, in the Risen Christ as Lord of my life (body and spirit)?*

— *How do I understand Jesus’ use of the graphic metaphor of the “blazing furnace”? Is he speaking literally? Figuratively? What do I believe happens to those who, like Adolph Hitler, for example, take their own lives, seemingly without repentance for their innumerable sins?*

Shelter-in-Place

We are all discouraged by the expanding growth of the corona virus in California and dozens of other states. None of us foresaw an extended need to shelter-in-place and take extraordinary precautions.

— *How would I describe my interior mood this week, when I contemplate the ongoing restrictions on my freedom to move about, congregate, and socialize? What do I miss most about my life as it "used to be" (before my covid-19 days)?*

— *This week's news about the virus warns that our current lifestyle may last longer than any of us expected, even into 2021. How am I dealing with that prospect?*

— *To what extent do I believe that the worldwide pandemic is God's punishment for humanity's Godlessness and sinfulness? What do I hear in this week's readings that goes counter to a "punisher-God" image?*

Write about your feelings and your lived experience during your journaling time (below).

Journaling Prompts

What insights have I gained from reflecting on the parable-laden readings for the 17th Sunday of Ordinary Time and my current social demands and restrictions. Suggested prompts:

— *What is the first thought that comes to mind?*

We mustn't simply be grateful "recipients" of God's good gifts. We need to be "givers," too.

— *How will this week's Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love—and "give back"—during the week ahead?*

Preview of Next Session

Readings for the 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55: 1-3 "Come all you who are thirsty, come to the water!"

Psalms 145: 8-9, 15-18 "The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our need."

Romans 8: 35, 37-39 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

Matthew 14: 13-21 “Jesus said to the apostles, ‘You give (the crowd) something to eat.’ They said, ‘We have nothing here but five loaves and two fishes.’”

For Inspirational Reading / Listening

Meditation

Maybe it’s time to revisit an old standby that never lets us down. Click on “[A Grateful Day](#)” and enjoy this quiet, but ever timely, 5-minute meditation on YouTube.

Led by [Brother David Steindl-Rast](#), OSB — See also [Gratefulness.org](#)

Prayer-Song

Living for the past months in the shadow of covid-19 has reminded us of the fragility of our life force. We are indeed “earthen vessels,” which calls us to sing and pray along with composer/vocalist [John Foley](#), S.J., as we listen to his beautiful hymn, “[Earthen Vessels](#).” See also the GIA Publications, Inc.’s [John Foley](#) page

Book

[The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully](#) by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. A “must-read” on discernment for “senior citizens” (92% 4-5 star reviews on Amazon).

Note: I have read this book and found it enormously helpful and inspiring for wrapping my head around the possibilities awaiting those of us who deal with our own aging process on a day-to-day basis. — AJG

Closing Prayer

(abridged for use here)

A Prayer for Guidance When Life is Challenging

by [Charles Stanley](#)

Lord, I’m here today with open hands and an open heart,
ready to depend on you to help me through the day
and all it will bring my way.

Help me come to you for guidance, strength, provision, and protection.

As I face tough choices and hard situations,
help me remember that you love me.

Help me remember that I am your child
and your representative to the world around me.
Help me live today in a way
that brings honor to Your holy name.
In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net
Note: If you would like more information about spiritual discernment, I will be happy to send you files from my collection—AJG

The Sunday readings are from [Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition](#)
© 1999, Bernardo Hurault and Patricia Grogan, FCJ. Imprimatur:
Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

Questions and Commentaries © [Alfred J. Garrotto](#)
(follow the link above to the novel *Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words*)