

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
June 7, 2020 – The Most Holy Trinity
John 3:116-18

Our faith and trust in God are tested in difficult times - like what we are living through these days. We are all growing restless and tired as we continue to live during the limitations placed on us during the Covid-19 pandemic. We mourn for those who have been taken from our midst. We worry about our own health and that of others, particularly those we know who are frail. Many of us are also struggling because of lost jobs or reduced employment. We are not accustomed to the many limits imposed on us these days. Still, we try to do our best.

Further, there is the widespread concern and public unrest brought on by the brutal murder of George Floyd. Unaddressed issues related to racism have come to the surface. We all want justice but don't like being reminded that we still have a way to go to achieve justice for all. Our country remains flawed in too many ways.

Under these circumstances the second reading for this Sunday, however, might cause us a second thought. We are called to *rejoice* and to live in peace. Certainly, these are worthwhile goals, but in these times the challenge of rejoicing and being peaceful in mind and heart? How can we be so right now?

For an answer to this, we may have to look deeper into our faith and one place to start is to be reminded of the opening words of today's gospel: "God so loved the world" John's Gospel was written many years after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In that gospel we are told that the life of Jesus was not without its challenges. His closest friends and followers often failed to understand him. Eventually, many distanced themselves from him. The authorities eventually killed him. Still, through it all Jesus remained constant in his connection with his God whom he always addressed as "Abba." As a loving parent.

And he introduced "his" God to us, as one who was always concerned and merciful toward us. Toward everyone. So even while enduring many difficulties, Jesus still held to his conviction that he was loved by Abba and that we too are all loved by God. Through good times and those that are not. God remains close because God desires our closeness.

So, we can rejoice and be grateful for God having created us and remaining with us to strengthen us to deal with whatever comes our way. Even those things that are uninvited by us. Like right now.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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A gospel meditation for your home
June 14, 2020 – Corpus Christi (Body of Christ)
John 6:51-58

Much of the bread I ate as a youngster was store-bought. It was white and soft and tasteless. Mostly it was used to hold a slice or two of American cheese or baloney. It was not considered unhealthy, although it wasn't sold as a health food either. To call bread "the staff of life" would raise eyebrows. Such a designation would be considered inaccurate to say the least.

Yet historians often note that civilization was partly based on the invention of bread. That's because humans needed the nourishment of grains and one of the best ways to preserve grain was to bake it into bread. In that sense, for many cultures bread was not only nutritious, it also kept people healthy and alive.

And that's how it was at the time when Jesus lived. So, when he talked about how he would use bread to connect believers with him, they easily understood his point. They knew that the eating of bread was directly related to their personal survival.

At the Last Supper, he took bread, broke it and said that *this* bread that he was giving to them was his body. Their immediate response might have been surprise or wonder, but given the nature of that meal, they eventually believed and saw that the bread that Jesus blessed was a way that Jesus would remain present to them in the future. They saw it as a continuation of his presence even after his resurrection and ascension. And for the next two-thousand years Christians around the world, in remembrance of him, have continued to connect with Jesus in the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic bread and wine bring into our midst Jesus himself. And Jesus comes to us giving us life with God. He wants not only to be a major part of our lives, but he also wants to remind us that through him, we can bring his presence and message to others.

Many who read this have had the experience of receiving Jesus in the Eucharistic bread for most of their lives. Yet such repetition might create a problem. Receiving communion can become merely a routine act, a habit that we don't think much about. Each year the Catholic Church devotes one Sunday as a reminder of the great significance of celebrating and receiving the Eucharist. It's a time to recall the importance of our personally meeting Jesus, conversing with him and taking him into our daily lives, as necessary food for our sacred journey.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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June 21, 2020 – Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 10:26-33

In my early twenties I noticed that my forehead seemed to be growing. Friends might comment that I should do something. I was unconcerned about this, mostly because I didn't think I could fight the forces of nature. I had uncles who were mostly bald, so I figured I likely shared some of their genes. And sure enough, as I approached middle age, I became part of those very good-looking bald men in the world.

I would smile whenever I heard this Sunday's gospel when it mentioned that God knew the number of hairs on our heads. I thought that in my case this was no great accomplishment. It was my private joke with God.

Of course, Matthew was quite serious about noting this fact because he was writing to early Christians, many of whom knew persecution first-hand. They might wonder if God really knew the difficulties they faced. The gospel wanted to ensure them that God clearly did. God knew each of them along with all the details of their lives. Even the number of hairs on their head. If God knew that, well, God certainly knew all that we did, all that we faced, even our thoughts. And God cared about all of it.

We take comfort when we know that others care about us. Family life is strengthened when family members share their trials and troubles with each other. The same is true between friends. This kind of interpersonal knowledge - all the details of our lives shared - is the cement that keeps us together in good times and especially during difficult times.

God knows each of us intimately. Likely much more so than we realize. This is a good gospel to remind us that God is always with us, always wanting what is best for us, always available to help us through difficult times. And with us during the happy times too.

I like to recall that when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana, his gesture of care (recall that it was at his mother's urging) kept the party going. Jesus helped to not only prevent what might have been an embarrassment to the newly married couple, but also contributed to the celebration by creating "the best wine."

Too easily we slip into feeling we are alone or misunderstood. That nobody cares about us. The underlying message of this Sunday's gospel is that God is always with us and is lovingly concerned about us in every detail - nothing is too small to be overlooked.

David. M. Thomas, PhD

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
June 28, 2020 – Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 10:37-42

Today's gospel is complicated and one that I think is easily misunderstood. Some might think it is anti-family because it seems to say that our love for God (and Jesus) is in competition with our love of family. Or even that love of family is not important.

I write these gospel reflections to help readers appreciate the importance of interpersonal life, especially as it exists in marriage, family life and friendship. I want to place those important relationships in the context of a vital Christian life. I try to show the importance of connecting our love of God with our love of neighbor.

In one of John's epistles it states that if you claim that you love God, but don't love your neighbor, you are a liar. I take that as one of the most important truths of our faith. Further, at the Last Supper Jesus stated that we are to love one another as he loves us. Neighbor love is placed at the heart of our lives as followers of Jesus.

Based on this gospel (and other teachings of the church) we learn that there is to be a certain priority of values in our life. Because we are created by God, loved by God and will be with God forever (our deepest hope), God should be first in our lives. Not because God needs us, but rather because we need God.

All our personal life ultimately comes from God. Thus, God should be our first and primary consideration. Once we do that, all else in our lives can be placed in proper order. All the other parts of our life, all that we love here on earth, can be expressions of our love for God.

Because we are loved by God and love God before all else (the First Commandment) we can love very fully all that God has created. That even includes loving ourselves. But also, those with whom we share life during our earthly lives. Because so much of that life is rooted in family relationships, family relationships play an important role in our life with God. So too do friendships, relationships with neighbors, co-workers, even strangers. In that sense, every other person on earth with us are our neighbors.

In recent months, because of the perils associated with Covid-19 and the many issues related to racial injustice, we are reminded that we are all neighbors to each other and that we have responsibilities for each other. Out of our love for God, we love all others too.

David M. Thomas, PhD