



Bringing Home the Word

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | July 8, 2018

Overcoming Our Stubbornness

By Mary Katharine Deeley

My mother always thought I was a little bit stubborn. “Not stubborn,” I said, “but sometimes, I think things should be done a different way.” What I usually meant by that was that things should be done my way. “I know,” she said, “stubborn.” I recalled that conversation when my daughters reached the same age that I was when I thought my mother was dumb and didn’t know anything and my desire was to do always what I thought best. They have since conceded that I might know a little, just as I gave my mother that same credit

as I got older. We all have our periods of stubbornness. Sometimes we are right; sometimes we can be persuaded differently, and sometimes we have to persist until our mistakes become evident even to us, even if that means we suffer the consequences of our folly.

The people of Nazareth were astonished at Jesus’ teaching and wisdom. Their stubborn refusal to believe in him grew out of their familiarity. “We know him and his family,” they thought. “He can’t possibly have this power.” Stubbornness is a hard thing to overcome. Mark records that Jesus was amazed at their refusal to believe. Their very refusal made it difficult for him to perform mighty deeds (a phrase used of God in the Old Testament), and so he did what he could: He healed a few sick people. Some of us still have a stubborn streak. Has that ever interfered in our recognition of God’s power? Do we hang on to our belief that our way is best even if that hurts us? Reflect on that. +

Sunday Readings

Ezekiel 2:2–5

Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites.

2 Corinthians 12:7–10

I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ.

Mark 6:1–6

Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary? ...He was amazed at their lack of faith.

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A Word From Pope Francis

Some of you might ask me: “Don’t you ever have doubts?” I have many....Of course, everyone has doubts at times! Doubts which touch the faith, in a positive way, are a sign that we want to know better and more fully God, Jesus, and the mystery of his love for us.

—General Audience,
November 23, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Does my familiarity with Jesus lead me to routine and lack of faith?
- What ways have I seen Jesus work and answer prayers?



To Serve as Jesus Did

By Kathy Coffey

[Jesus said,] "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

Who in his right mind really wants to be a servant? Uneasily, we picture a butler in a British movie holding a tuxedo jacket for a wealthy, pampered boss. Is *this* what Jesus asks?

Perhaps our aversion to servanthood springs from the spunky independence of Americans. Descendants of bold pioneers who broke away from an entrenched system of servitude, we stoop to no one. We serve no master!

Maybe we need to wrestle with what Jesus' words mean today. Like conversing with a friend, we pose objections and he expands upon his original idea:

We might protest that we dread feeling vulnerable. When our livelihood, our schedule, and our work depends on the whim of another, we feel diminished. We're used to being independent adults—staying in charge, controlling our lives, setting our agendas. Then Jesus, with his startling one-liners and his heartbreaking humility, challenges us to rethink those easy assumptions.

He might gently point out that, bluster aside, we *do* serve others most days. Even the millionaire dad might chauffeur his kids to soccer games; the mom with the advanced degree still cooks the family breakfast—at least occasionally. Every time we fold laundry, weed the garden, or check homework, we are serving someone.

Quiet, Simple Sanctity

Jesus might remind us how our tradition has always honored quiet, ordinary service. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote of the lay brother Alphonsus Rodríguez, contrasting the glorious deeds of warriors or martyrs with the simple dailiness of Alphonsus' job: Today we'd call it being a receptionist at a Jesuit institution. Years of upheavals passed while, uneventfully, "Alfonso watched the door."

Yet his name is preceded by a revered abbreviation: "St." The fact that Alphonsus achieved sainthood with little drama is good news for us. Perhaps we don't need to found religious orders, travel to remote missions, or perform great exploits, either. Perhaps sanctity is as close as the kitchen door, the math homework, the soup shared in kindness, the clean laundry, the offer of friendship.

As our imagined dialogue continues, Jesus gives not only his words, but also his life to help us understand. He directly experienced what he describes: total vulnerability. He who could have come into our world as a political ruler, military general, or respected scholar comes as a defenseless child. We all begin as infants, so perhaps that's not extraordinary. Then the surprise: He grows not into adult power but into

servanthood. He who made the universe washes feet, serves meals, and does "women's work."

Servants and Friends

Jesus' example of the great one becoming a servant begins radical reform of a social order built on superiority/inferiority, domination/subordination. He replaces that rickety social ladder with a paradigm where *all* serve each other. In Jesus' community, the distinctions are irrelevant because all belong to one mystical body.

God, then, is not distant dictator, but intimate friend. Furthermore, God not only befriends, but also serves. Any stigma attaching to serving is removed because it is done lovingly.

Through his words, actions, and vision, Jesus shows us that human life can sometimes seem as defenseless as a servant at the whim of an arbitrary master. But here's the difference: Our childlike vulnerability places us squarely in the hands of a compassionate God who never abandons and keeps us wholly secure. Our every breath depends on a creator who desires only good for us, loving us for all eternity. That is, indeed, a mercy. +

PRAYER

Lord, you accept everyone
with unconditional love.
Help me overcome my fear
of others so I can love and
accept them as you do.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

July 9–14, 2018

Monday, Weekday:
Hos 2:16, 17b–18, 21–22 / Mt 9:18–26

Tuesday, Weekday:
Hos 8:4–7, 11–13 / Mt 9:32–38

Wednesday, St. Benedict:
Hos 10:1–3, 7–8, 12 / Mt 10:1–7

Thursday, Weekday:
Hos 11:1–4, 8e–9 / Mt 10:7–15

Friday, Weekday:
Hos 14:2–10 / Mt 10:16–23

Saturday, Weekday:
Is 6:1–8 / Mt 10:24–33

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