



# Bringing Home the Word

Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time  
November 4, 2018

## Falling in Love with God

By Janel Esker

At the staff meetings of a religious institution I once worked for, we took turns leading an opening prayer. Many of us prepared prayers with detailed language, noting the day's feast or particular intentions drawn from the day's headlines. However, the only prayer I remember was led by a laywoman who began by saying, "God, we love you." I don't remember the rest of the prayer, but I've never forgotten her basic but profound beginning: "God, we love you."

We ask God for a lot of things, we

### Sunday Readings

#### Deuteronomy 6:2–6

Hear then, Israel, and be careful to observe [the commandments], that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly.

#### Hebrews 7:23–28

It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens.

#### Mark 12:28b–34

[Jesus said,] "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

probably do plenty of complaining to God, and we do a good amount of thanking God. But how much time do we spend loving God?

Jesus upholds the centrality of loving God in his answer to the scribe in today's Gospel. Instead of naming one of the 613 commandments of the Judaic Law as the "first," he quotes the central Jewish prayer, the Shema, and its injunction to love God with our whole being. This, for Jesus, is the most essential commandment.

When was the last time you prayed, "God, I love you"? Loving God is different than loving a person you can actually see, touch, and hear—yet it's so fundamental to the spiritual life. Maybe, like couples who have been married a long time, we just assume God knows we love him. "We've been together so long, we don't even need to say it anymore."

But even long-married couples renew their marriage vows and fall in love all over again. God is always reaching out in love to us, and Jesus challenges us today to recommit ourselves to God.

Can we continue to fall in love with God? +

*We ask God for things,  
but how much time do we  
spend loving God?*

## A Word from Pope Francis

A Church without women is like the college of the Apostles without Mary. The role of women in the Church is not simply that of maternity, being mothers, but much greater: it is precisely to be the icon of the Virgin, of Our Lady; what helps make the Church grow!

—Press conference, July 28, 2013



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I remember to tell God I love him? He wants to know.
- How can my actions also express love for God?



# To Vote or Not to Vote

By Jim and Susan Vogt

Although our country was founded as a constitutional representative

democracy and many fought for the right to vote, some wonder if voting is still worth it. With some campaigns extending for more than a year and large amounts of money devoted to advertising, people wonder if our electoral system is obsolete. It sometimes seems like back-room dealing really determines election outcomes. Who would know if I didn't vote?

Let's examine some arguments nonvoters use and consider why you should vote.

• **I can't fully support any candidate on the ballot.** Politics is compromise, and that means sacrificing the perfect for the possible. It's hard to follow one's conscience when no candidate completely reflects our values.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops publishes a voting guide called *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. The Church can't mandate which candidate to choose, but it can remind us of principles and values consistent with Catholicism. We can use this information to choose candidates who support Christian values.

• **My vote won't make a difference.** Few elections are decided by one vote, but a politically active person can have a multiplier effect, like a video going viral on the internet. Sure, one person seldom makes a difference, but Jesus showed how one person can sometimes change the world.

• **You can't trust politicians.** Many people believe politicians are corrupt and power hungry, thinking, "*They lie to please you, then sell you out.*"

Recent scandals verify this notion. But an Edmund Burke quote still rings true: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

• **The election doesn't impact my life.** You might say, "In my corner of the world, I just focus on keeping my job and feeding my family." So when the economy collapses because a hands-off governmental approach to financial regulations leads to a recession, you can just move in with your parents. That is, if they can afford to welcome you and share their Social Security benefits. Elections *do* affect our lives.

• **If your candidate wins, the opposing party can block the president or your members of Congress from enacting the will of the majority.** Are you fed up with a broken government? Fix it! One can wail about problems and wallow in helplessness, but a successful democracy works when people strive to fix dysfunctional laws and procedures.

• **Voting doesn't help "the least of my brothers."** Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9), and God punished him for not valuing his brother's life. Voting is a way of being responsible for the common good. Jesus taught that if we neglect to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, we will "go off to eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:46).

• **It's inconvenient.** One young adult said, "Many of my friends don't care


about local politics because they don't know much about their community. Besides, it's a hassle to figure out how to register."

Would these folks have the same trouble renewing their driver's licenses? Oh, maybe voter-registration information should be freely available on the internet and at civic gatherings. Oh, wait—it is!

## Why You Should Vote

It's the right thing to do.

"A basic moral test for any society is how it treats those who are most vulnerable" (FCFC 53). Voting is how citizens move the government to accomplish this. The US bishops confirm this when they teach, "In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation... It is necessary that all participate... in promoting the common good" (FCFC 13, quoting from the *Catechism*, 1913–1915). After all, freedom isn't free. +



*Lord, I am grateful for your love and guidance. Show me how to love you, myself, and my neighbors genuinely and generously.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

November 5-10

**Monday** Weekday: Phil 2:1–4 / Lk 14:12–14

**Tuesday** Weekday: Phil 2:5–11 / Lk 14:15–24

**Wednesday** Weekday: Phil 2:12–18 / Lk 14:25–33

**Thursday** Weekday: Phil 3:3–8a / Lk 15:1–10

**Friday** *Dedication of the Lateran Basilica (Rome):* Ez 47:1–2, 8–9, 12 / 1 Cor 3:9c–11, 16–17 / Jn 2:13–22

**Saturday** *Pope Leo the Great:* Phil 4:10–19 / Lk 16:9–15



# Bringing Home the Word

Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time  
November 11, 2018

## What Shall We Give?

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When my husband and I were first married, we didn't have much money. I took the bus to work, and he ate peanut butter-and-honey sandwiches nearly every day. Chunky soup with rice was frequently on our dinner menu. Like many young couples, we struggled to make ends meet. One result of that experience was that we became very careful about how we spent money. Could we afford lunch at a restaurant once a month? How would we save for the future or budget for a growing family?

Also of concern was the amount we would donate to our church. Clearly, large contributions were out of the question, but because income and expenses often varied, we even avoided pledging a set amount per week. Instead, we agreed to give something every week—as much as we thought we could afford. Some weeks it was a dollar; in weeks of plenty or good fortune, we gave a little more. Our children took great pride in putting whatever amount we had in the basket each Sunday.

Our finances are much less stressful these days. Our careers and income have been blessed, and we still support our church, serve the poor, pay our ministers a living wage, and strive to make our parish a welcoming place for all. But whenever I read this Gospel passage I wonder, "Are we simply giving out of our surplus, or are we pushing ourselves to let go of some of our desires and dreams to help others in our midst?" We all should ask ourselves this question weekly, as my family did years ago. +

## Sunday Readings

### 1 Kings 17:10–16

For the LORD, the God of Israel, says: The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry.

### Hebrews 9:24–28

Christ...will appear a second time, not to take away sin but to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him.

### Mark 12:38-44 or Mark 12:41-44

[Jesus said,] "They have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she...has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."

## A Word from Pope Francis

How many people have distanced themselves...from some parish or community because of the environment of gossip, jealousy, and envy they found there? Even for a Christian, knowing how to love is never a thing acquired once and for all. We must begin anew every day.

—Regina Caeli, May 21, 2017



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Is my piety and religiosity also expressed in charity and service?
- Am I doing what I can do to help the poor?

*We agreed to give  
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# Surviving Hard Economic Times

By Jim and Susan Vogt

For some, economic hardship means belt-tightening: eating out less, skipping vacation, going from two cars to one. For others, it's much more: losing a job, house, or health care. Both groups feel pain, but to those for whom it's the difference between eating and hunger, complaints about giving up cable TV can seem insensitive and frivolous. So how should Catholics respond to economic difficulties?

## What NOT to Do

- **DON'T view adversity as God's punishment.** In some theologies, wealth signifies God's favor and poverty indicates sin. Although Catholicism doesn't support these views, the wealthy may be tempted to attribute bounty to hard work and virtuous living. Sometimes these go together but, just as there are innocent people born into poverty, there are wealthy people who didn't achieve success through virtuous living. Remember that we're all God's beloved children.
- **DON'T hoard what you have.** It's tempting to cling tightly to what we have. If we're in survival mode, we naturally focus on caring for ourselves first. If I barely have enough food, why should I share? This all makes human sense, but it's not what Jesus did. When Jesus fed the multitudes, a few generous followers offered their bread

and fish which, when blessed, fed all.

- **DON'T complain, act illegally or immorally.** In hard economic times it's natural to feel angry and complain. Venting and crying out to God in pain and fear are common in the psalms.
- Still, a time comes when these attitudes rob us of energy to find positive solutions. We might understand why a desperate person feels driven to illegal or immoral acts to survive. That doesn't make it right. Job's trials included both economic and physical pain. His uprightness in the face of adversity is why he's such a compelling model.

## Embracing Christian Simplicity

Although some Christians choose poverty as a means to holiness, too many people find themselves living in a poverty that is neither willed nor holy.

In the last recession, many of us were being pushed to simplify our lifestyles. This is consistent with Church teaching that calls us to "practice poverty of spirit and generosity of heart" (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*). Jesus said, "Do not worry and say... 'What are we to wear... Your heavenly Father knows [what] you need...'" (Matthew 6:31-32). For many of us, the simple lifestyle that is thrust upon us is one we should aspire to anyway.

## Deepening Our Spirituality

- **DO steward resources with care.** Although we may already be good stewards of our money and

possessions, hard times force us to do even more: *Where am I wasteful? Do I conserve electricity, gas, food, water? Do I wear practical clothes or am I a slave to fashion? Do I repair broken things instead of replacing them?*

Keeping a budget may be bothersome, but it can help us become responsible stewards.

- **DO practice generosity.** It sounds counterintuitive to give things away when money is tight, but Christians are called to be generous. Does everyone on your block really need their own lawn mower, camping gear, or basketball hoop? It's convenient to have your own, but sharing reduces cost and builds community.
- **DO stay spiritually centered.** Few people welcome hardships, but when they arrive, God may be pricking our consciences or opening untried doors. Hardships may drive us to deeper prayer. They give us solidarity with those who regularly go without. In the end, we place our lives in God's hands, remembering that the same God who created the lilies of the fields loves and watches over us. +

## PRAYER

*Lord, I am grateful for your abundant gifts. Open my hands and heart that I may give my all in sharing your peace and love with the world.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

November 12-17

<b>Monday</b>	<i>St. Josaphat:</i> Ti 1:1-9 / Lk 17:1-6
<b>Tuesday</b>	<i>St. Frances Xavier Cabrini:</i> Ti 2:1-8, 11-14 / Lk 17:7-10
<b>Wednesday</b>	<i>Weekday:</i> Ti 3:1-7 / Lk 17:11-19

<b>Thursday</b>	<i>Weekday:</i> Phlm 7-20 / Lk 17:20-25
<b>Friday</b>	<i>Weekday:</i> 2 Jn 4-9 / Lk 17:26-37
<b>Saturday</b>	<i>St. Elizabeth of Hungary:</i> 3 Jn 5-8 / Lk 18:1-8



# Bringing Home the Word

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
November 18, 2018

## Looking for God's Signs

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I used to work with someone who was very patient with those he met and rarely expressed anger in public. But as I got to know him better, I began to recognize the small signs he gave off when he was irritated. His lips tightened. He would start drumming his fingers or moving his foot when seated. When that happened, we all knew to leave him alone as he worked out what he wanted to do. We also could act as sounding boards, helping him see different ways of looking at things. I thought this sign-seeing only went one way until one day he so accurately described what I do

when I start feeling stressed out that it made me laugh. I thought I hid my stress very well, and I probably did to those who didn't work with me every day.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus talks about the signs that will precede the coming of the Son of Man. He quotes the prophet Daniel, and the signs are disturbing: the sun will darken and the stars will fall. Such apocalyptic images (referring to the end times) are often found in times of persecution. This passage was written close to the destruction of the Temple by the Romans and encourages readers to remain faithful in what seems like end times because Christ will come again.

Of course, not everyone has faith or finds hope in what they see. The question posed to us—to all—is this: "Have we been with Christ long enough to know and see the signs that he will come again, or do we need to pay closer attention to him?" +

*Jesus quotes the prophet Daniel, and the signs are disturbing: the sun will darken, the stars will fall.*

## Sunday Readings

### Daniel 12:1-3

Those with insight shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament.

### Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God.

### Mark 13:24-32

[Jesus said,] "And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory."

## A Word from Pope Francis

If in the course of the liturgical year a parish priest speaks about temperance ten times but only mentions charity or justice two or three times, an imbalance results....The same thing happens when we speak more about law than about grace, more about the Church than about Christ.

—*Evangelii Gaudium*,  
November 24, 2013



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Are you paying attention to the signs of God at work in your life?
- What are some of those signs that God is in our midst?



# Fixing Our Eyes on God

By Kathy Coffey

*Blessed are the  
clean of heart,  
for they will see God  
(Matthew 5:8).*

Let's use comparisons to better understand this beatitude. For instance, think of what's within a seed: sprout, stem, and flower. As the nineteenth-century Indian poet Mirza Ghalib writes: "Hidden in this image is also its end." The final act is there at the beginning: the overture contains all the musical themes; the process unfolds with a mysterious but natural logic to a predictable conclusion.

One example comes from the life of Dorothy Day. Pushing her baby brother in his carriage through the Chicago tenements, she discovered the major theme of her life: compassion for the poor. Despite an obstacle course that might make lesser souls waver, she persisted in establishing the Catholic Worker movement and its hospitality houses. She suffered jail time for her insistence on nonviolence, remaining faithful to unpopular stands. Always her closeness to Christ was the foundation for her passionate commitments to justice and peace.

In just such a natural unfolding, the clean of heart will some day look with joy into the face of God. Throughout their lives, they have cherished this hope and put other things aside because they have set their sights on God. With eyes fixed on what matters most, they forget to fret about themselves.

## Our Shining Model

During this process, which is often costly, their shining model is Jesus. At the heart of his being, the core of consciousness was Abba. The image of his Father brought him such joy that he could endure a difficult life and a tortured death. When the disciples misunderstood him, the people hounded him, the religious authorities tormented him, and the Roman soldiers beat him, he held fast to one thing that sustained him: union with God.

If we want a picture of the clean of heart, we need look no further than Jesus. He had an inner freedom from the self-defensive, clinging postures that often define us. When we feel insecure, we act out of fear or a sense of scarcity. "Better grab my slice of the pie," we reason. "There's not enough to go around." As long as we're shoring up our shaky egos, we don't much care about others we're pushing around or ignoring in the process.


But Jesus acts always from the clean center, the sure knowledge given to the loyal son in the Prodigal Son parable: "Everything I have is yours" (Luke 15:31).

The good news is, he wants us to share his experience. He wants us to have his clean heart and interior serenity. "I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me" (John 17:24). He wants us to soar, to shine.

## Clarity of Vision

If you meet people who are clean of heart, you'll recognize the attributes of Jesus. They can shrug off assaults on their turf; they don't get angry about trivia. Often they have a marvelous sense of humor. They can be relaxed about things that don't matter because they know what does matter. They are firmly focused on the pursuit of God's reign. Serving God is so important that they toss aside things the rest of us clutch: personal comfort, career success, financial security.

And we who are saddled with obligations and cluttered with possessions: How do we become clean of heart? We could start by looking at two modern barometers of commitment: the calendar and the checkbook. Where have we placed our time and treasure? Where have we channeled our energies? Do our gifts serve God's mission? +



**PRAYER**

*Lord, I am grateful you keep  
me safe in your love.  
You are my hope.  
Help me to trust you.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

November 19-24

**Monday** Weekday: Rv 1:1-4; 2:1-5 / Lk 18:35-43

**Tuesday** Weekday: Rv 3:1-6, 14-22 / Lk 19:1-10

**Wednesday** *Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary:*  
Rv 4:1-11 / Lk 19:11-28

**Thursday** *St. Cecilia:*  
Rv 5:1-10 / Lk 19:41-44

**Friday** Weekday:  
Rv 10:8-11 / Lk 19:45-48

**Saturday** *St. Andrew Dũng-Lạc and Companions:*  
Rv 11:4-12 / Lk 20:27-40



# Bringing Home the Word

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe  
November 25, 2018

## Honoring Our King

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Like many people, when I hear the words *king* and *queen*, I have an image formed by fairy tales and historical novels. The rulers of countries live in castles. They wear crowns and long capes and sit on thrones while their loyal subjects pay them homage. While I'm aware that modern kings and queens wear regular clothes unless tradition dictates otherwise and that castles have become more contemporary, I still watch royal weddings for a glimpse of the pageantry that fed my childhood fantasies.

Pilate had an idea of what kings were like, too. In the first century, kings made laws and led people into battle. They had great armies and were a danger to another country's way of life. The Jews kept talking about a Messiah who would become king and destroy Israel's enemies. Pilate wasn't taking any chances. For Rome's sake, he would get rid of anyone who seemed a threat.

What Pilate failed to realize was that Israel's king had a very specific function, and it was not to make laws or lead armies. Instead, the king was to study and obey the Law of God and become himself the example of obedience (see Deuteronomy 17:18–20). When Pilate called Jesus "the King of the Jews," his words were truer than he knew, for Jesus was obedient to his Father, even unto accepting death for our sake. But Pilate had no idea why he was right because he was thinking in human terms.

Today we honor Christ, the king of the Jews, of all of us, and of the whole universe. Let us see him as he is and do as he does. +

*Pilate had an idea of what kings were like.*

*They made laws and led people into battle.*

## Sunday Readings

### Daniel 7:13–14

His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, his kingship, one that shall not be destroyed.

### Revelation 1:5–8

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty."

### John 18:33b–37

Jesus answered [Pilate], "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world."

## A Word from Pope Francis

The Lord says: it is not important to me that you do this or that, it is important to me that the orphan is cared for, that the widow is cared for, that the outcast person is heard, that creation is protected. This is the kingdom of God!

—Homily, July 26, 2014



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do we express thanks to Jesus for giving us the means to share in his kingdom?
- Do we see Christ as our king, or do we instead pay homage to material things?



# Thank You, God!

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

If I ask why you attend church, would you offer any of the following replies? “I go to pray.” “I like to hear sermons that help me know how to live.” “I go to ask God to bless my family.” “I like the music.” “I go to receive the Lord in holy Communion.”

These are all good answers, but the most *Catholic* answer is, “I go to Mass to say thank you to God.”

*Eucharist* comes from the Greek for “giving thanks.” And at each Eucharist, as we begin the central act of the Mass, which we call the Eucharistic Prayer—our great thanksgiving prayer—the priest invites: “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” And we all respond, “It is right and just.” It is the right thing to do to give God thanks and praise. And why?

Because to say “thank you” is what one does when receiving a gift. From childhood your parents taught you that whenever someone gives you something, you are to say, “Thank you.” And once you were old enough to write, they encouraged you to write a thank-you note to those who gave you gifts on your birthday or at Christmas. “Thank you” is the proper, human response to a gift. It indicates gratitude and appreciation for something freely given, something we did not merit or earn.

## What a Gift!

Catholics celebrate the Eucharist because

we know we’ve been given a gift. Our very existence is a gift; God didn’t have to create us. And not only do we exist. We live redeemed—saved from sin by the death of Jesus on the cross and destined for eternal happiness. It that isn’t a gift, I don’t know what is!

Each time we celebrate the Eucharist we gather with other grateful Catholics and listen as the Scriptures are proclaimed. We hear repeatedly of God’s gifts: creation, freedom, salvation, healing, redemption, and everlasting life. Filled with gratitude for so great a gift, we in turn want to give a gift to God. We bring forward bread and wine, our food and drink, the symbols of our lives, and place them on the altar, God’s banquet table. And we say, “Thank you, God!” in our Eucharistic Prayer. And in the course of that prayer we remember how—at that first Eucharist—Jesus himself took bread and wine and *gave God thanks*.

Then something wonderful happens. God changes our gifts and gives them back to us as a gift more wonderful than we ever could have imagined: the very Body and Blood of Christ. And we joyfully process to the altar a second time—this time not to *give* a gift of bread and wine, but to *receive* a divine, transforming gift.


## Creating a New World

The same Holy Spirit whose power changed the bread and wine now changes us. “We, though many, are one body, for

we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

We Catholics believe that at the Eucharist we really receive the Body of Christ. This belief is central to our Catholic identity. But if we believe that we really receive Christ’s Body and that we really become Christ’s Body, then we have to act accordingly.

At the conclusion of each Eucharist we are sent forth, commissioned to go into the world and bring Christ’s Spirit to everyone we meet and everything we do. We become ambassadors of encouragement, compassion, generosity, healing, understanding, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The gift of the Eucharist is the insight that, in living for others, we find life’s true meaning. Thank you, God! +



*Lord, I am grateful that you are the way, the truth, and the life. Help me to be faithful to the truth of the gospel.*

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

## WEEKDAY READINGS

November 26-  
December 1

**Monday** Weekday: Rv 14:1–3, 4b–5 / Lk 21:1–4

**Tuesday** Weekday: Rv 14:14–19 / Lk 21:5–11

**Wednesday** Weekday: Rv 15:1–4 / Lk 21:12–19

**Thursday** Weekday: Rv 18:1–2, 21–23; 19:1–3, 9a / Lk 21:20–28

**Friday** St. Andrew: Rom 10:9–18 / Mt 4:18–22

**Saturday** Weekday: Rv 22:1–7 / Lk 21:34–36