



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
January 19, 2020

New Life

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

An elaborate fresco titled *Baptism of Christ* by Perugino, Michelangelo's art teacher, is found on the wall of the Sistine Chapel. Like the other frescoes in this sacred space, this panel contains multiple scenes. The central scene is the baptism of Jesus. The viewer clearly sees Jesus standing in the water, with John the Baptist next to him, pouring water over his head.

God the Father is above, ready to declare that this is his beloved Son. The Holy Spirit comes down upon Jesus in the form of a dove. It was the Spirit

who helped John know that this was the Messiah, the one sent by God to baptize with the Holy Spirit.

After his baptism, Jesus is sent out to preach and teach. The fresco reveals that Perugino has read his Bible: in the scene to the right Jesus is shown preaching to the multitudes. John the Baptist's mission changes, too. He goes from preparing for the coming of the Messiah to following and testifying about him. This is what the baptized do: the new life we are given calls and strengthens us to offer that new life to others.

At our baptism, we were sanctified, forgiven our sins, incorporated into the body of Christ, and given a mission to share this baptism with others. In fact, the last words of Jesus before his ascension were, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20). +

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A Word from Pope Francis

"What about you?" It is significant that these words of the elderly Pope [Leo XIII] were also addressed to a laywoman [Katharine Drexel]. We know that the future of the Church in a rapidly changing society will call, and even now calls, for a much more active engagement on the part of the laity.

—Mass with bishops, clergy,
and religious of Pennsylvania,
September 26, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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- How willing am I to share about Jesus and what he means to me?
- Do I have family or friends in doubt about baptizing their child? How can I kindly encourage them?

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 49:3, 5–6

I will make you a light to the nations,
/ that my salvation may reach to the
ends of the earth.

1 Corinthians 1:1–3

Grace to you and peace from God
our Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ.

John 1:29–34

[John the Baptist said,] "Now I have
seen and testified that he is the Son
of God."

Fairness vs. Generosity

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce

My three children, now teenagers, have always insisted that my wife and I be fair in our dealings with them. By fair, of course, they mean that we treat them absolutely equally.

“That’s not fair,” they point out with great regularity when one of them gets something the others didn’t: “He got to eat out and I didn’t. She got to stay out late and I had to come home early.” These minor injustices seem to be the ultimate in unfairness to them.

“Which would you rather have, fairness or generosity?” I often ask them. For many years they consistently chose fairness, but lately they have begun to consider the positive aspects of generosity.

There are many. For one thing, fairness implies a minimal, lowest-common-denominator kind of arrangement. If each child has to have exactly the same amount of everything—money, time, attention—then it seems that all parents can do is dole out their resources with one eye on the balance scale and the other on the bottom line.

Generosity, on the other hand, allows for the spontaneous gesture, the extravagant expenditure, the once-in-a-lifetime experience. Generosity is more fun, exciting, and unexpected

than fairness—and therefore more interesting. Fairness, on the other hand, is predictable, uninspiring, and subject to a lot of boring recordkeeping.

At work, too, most of us would settle for simple fairness. There is so much injustice, inequality, lying, and cheating in the workplace that the idea of a fair wage or an evenhanded employer has great appeal.

Operating by New Rules

Consider a job where fairness was assumed

and generosity was the goal. In such an environment, “How generous can we afford to be?” would be the driving force. Rather than minimizing salaries or benefits, employers would try to find ways to share with employees whatever wealth or profit was available. Customers would not be asked to pay the maximum the market would bear for minimum-quality products. Parties in negotiation would not try to win the best deal possible for themselves but would attempt to fashion win-win situations for all involved.

“That’s ridiculous,” you might say. “That’s not the way the world works.” But today’s parable of the workers in the vineyard suggests that generosity is the way God would have things. In



describing God’s reign, Jesus told the story of the workers who were hired at various times of the day and yet were paid the same.

Just as my children did earlier, the workers who were hired early in the day complained that the owner was not being fair. He pointed out, however, that each of them had been paid a just wage—one they had agreed to—but that he was free to be generous. “Are you envious because I am generous?” he asked.

Exactly. Many of us think that fairness is the best that we can get, and we’re not eager to give generosity a try.

Living the Kingdom—Now

But God’s reign is supposed to be “on earth as it is in heaven,” as Jesus prayed in the Our Father. That means that the way things are in heaven—in this case, generosity over fairness—is the way things should also be on earth. If we want the reign of God in our families and workplaces, then we must at least try to operate this world by the rules of the next, where “the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

That’s lucky for all of us because, as my friend, Fr. Bill Burke, has observed, “We were all hired at 5 in the afternoon.” +



Lord, may your light of love and peace shine brightly in my heart so that others may come to know of your goodness.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 20–25

Monday, Weekday:
1 Sm 15:16–23 / Mk 2:18–22

Tuesday, St. Agnes:
1 Sm 16:1–13 / Mk 2:23–28

Wednesday, Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children:
1 Sm 17:32–33, 37, 40–51 / Mk 3:1–6

Thursday, Weekday:
1 Sm 18:6–9; 19:1–7 / Mk 3:7–12

Friday, St. Francis de Sales:
1 Sm 24:3–21 / Mk 3:13–19

Saturday, Conversion of St. Paul:
Acts 22:3–16 or Acts 9:1–22 / Mk 16:15–18