



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday of Lent (C)

April 7, 2019

Learning from Our Best Teacher

By Mary Katharine Deeley

At the climax of *The Miracle Worker*, the play about deaf and blind Helen Keller and her teacher, Annie Sullivan, Annie spells W-A-T-E-R into Helen's hand while water pours over Helen's other hand. Helen's face changes as she suddenly makes the connection between the signs Annie is making and the reality of the water. Helen starts touching things wildly while Annie signs the letters in her hand at an ever-faster rate. Finally, Helen points to

Annie, who spells T-E-A-C-H-E-R in her hand. The best teacher is not the one who can speak the loudest or the most, but the one who patiently does the same thing over and over until the student makes the connection and finally learns.

Jesus is our teacher, and in the Gospel story today he demonstrates it not with a wordy lecture but by drawing in the dust and inviting his reluctant students to think about what they are doing. We don't know what he wrote, and it isn't important. He neither engaged in the debate nor shamed the woman brought before him. He made the scribes and Pharisees look and wait. Then he asked them to judge themselves first. It's a good lesson for us all. Before we condemn anyone else, we should look at the ways in which we have sinned. The lesson continues for the woman as she is told to go and sin no more.

As Helen was attentive to Annie, let us be attentive to what Jesus spells out for us. His lessons lead us to new life and the knowledge of God. +

Before we condemn anyone else, we should look at the ways in which we have sinned.

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 43:16–21

Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; See, I am doing something new!

Philippians 3:8–14

Forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling.

John 8:1–11

[Jesus asked,] "Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you."

A Word from Pope Francis

Jesus...taught that the true battlefield, where violence and peace meet, is the human heart...When he stopped her accusers from stoning the woman caught in adultery, and when, on the night before he died, he told Peter to put away his sword, Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence.

—World Day of Peace, January 1, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Learning often requires persistence. Am I persistent in practicing the life lessons Jesus teaches me?
- When was the last time I put my sins behind me by participating in the sacrament of reconciliation?

Generosity in Forgiveness

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce

The story of the Dishonest Steward (Luke 16:1–13) is often used to justify operating by the rules of the marketplace. In that parable, Jesus praises the manager for being wise in the ways of the world. After he is caught and about to be fired, the steward begins feathering his own nest by calling the rich man’s debtors and offering them a deal to settle accounts. In this way, the dishonest manager figured—probably correctly—debtors would “welcome me into their homes” after he was terminated.

The lesson seems to be that if you’re caught cheating, you need only figure out a way to come out on top. Jesus even says, “The children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.”

But Jesus wasn’t promoting shady business practices, and his subsequent comments bear this out.

First, notice that the dishonest manager is never praised for his original “squandering” of the master’s property. We’re never told what his crime entailed, but presumably the manager was stealing the owner’s money for his own use. Rather, Jesus commended the manager for his subsequent actions. Let’s take a careful look at what the manager did:



The manager called in the owner’s debtors and got them to pay up by offering them reductions: “To the first he said, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He replied, ‘One hundred measures of olive oil.’ He said to him, ‘Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.’ Then to another he said, ‘And you, how much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘One hundred kors of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.’”

Luke concludes the parable with, “And the master commended the dishonest steward for acting prudently.” So, what the manager was praised for was his industriousness in forgiving some of the debt, not for feathering his own nest.

Generosity Day by Day

This is all part of Jesus’ ongoing description of what the reign of God (his kingdom) is like. Generosity, forgiveness, and industriousness are hallmarks of that kingdom, which Jesus taught us to pray would come “on earth as it is in heaven.”

How does this relate to our lives on our jobs, with our families, and in our communities? We’re called to be industrious about forgiving others their debts and giving away the rich man’s (God’s) things! We’re not to emulate the

dishonest manager’s dishonesty, but to model his generosity.

Whom must we forgive, and what of God’s do we have to give away? One way of looking at it is that everything we have is God’s. He is the ultimate owner. And we are to forgive everyone—ourselves included.

Living God’s Reign Now

Yes, the money that the dishonest manager was forgiving belonged to the master (who clearly symbolizes God the Father in Jesus’ parables). But God is a different kind of owner, one who wants to give everything away. The manager finally “got” what the rich man was all about and started doing what his master had wanted all along. Instead of squandering the master’s money, the manager was expected to forgive and share with others.

If we are going to serve God in this world, then we must operate by God’s rules, which aren’t the rules humans are used to following. In God’s reign we do not squander the owner’s wealth for our own purposes. We are to forgive others’ debts and give away the owner’s wealth. +



*Lord, your grace and love
make me whole. Help me to trust
in the endless possibilities
of the present moment.*

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 8-13

Monday, Lenten Weekday:
Dn 13:1–9, 15–17, 19–30, 33–62 or
Dn 13:41c–62 / Jn 8:12–20

Tuesday, Lenten Weekday:
Nm 21:4–9 / Jn 8:21–30

Wednesday, Lenten Weekday:
Dn 3:14–20, 91–92, 95 / Jn 8:31–42

Thursday, Lenten Weekday:
Gn 17:3–9 / Jn 8:51–59

Friday, Lenten Weekday:
Jer 20:10–13 / Jn 10:31–42

Saturday, Lenten Weekday:
Ez 37:21–28 / Jn 11:45–56



Bringing Home the Word

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (C)

April 14, 2019

Recognizing the Companions We Need

By Mary Katharine Deeley

On Palm Sunday, we gather as a Church to celebrate Jesus' coming into Jerusalem and hear the story of his passion and death. Each Gospel writer tells the story a little differently. Each one lifts up different faces and characters, and through their eyes we watch what unfolds.

Luke's Gospel is the only one that mentions the women who followed Jesus from Galilee (23:55-56). We know nothing about these women other than

where they came from, but two things stand out: These women temporarily set aside their Passover preparations to care for a man who had been publicly condemned as a criminal, and they were willing to look their beloved Jesus' death full in the face. They watched while Joseph of Arimathea laid him in the tomb and made sure that Jesus would be cared for even in death. They saw where he was buried and laid out and then went to prepare the spices and oils that would anoint his body and honor it.

Today, these women are examples of the countless anonymous disciples who quietly challenge culture and politics to follow the Lord's call. We rarely notice them, even now, but they are in our churches and our neighborhoods, willing to do what needs to be done, even if it means suffering, sacrificing, or looking rejection and death in the face. As we enter Holy Week, these people just might be the companions we need. +

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Sunday Readings

Isaiah 50:4-7

The Lord God is my help, therefore I am not disgraced.

Philippians 2:6-11

He humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Luke 22:14-23:56 or Luke 23:1-49

When [the women] had seen the tomb and the way in which his body was laid in it, they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils.

A Word from Pope Francis

Let us ask for the grace to follow Jesus faithfully, not in words but in deeds. Let us also ask for the patience to carry our own cross, not to refuse it or set it aside, but rather, in looking to him, to take it up and to carry it daily.

—Palm Sunday, April 9, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I attempt to identify and assist those who are quietly doing God's work?
- Do I humbly do God's work, rather than seeking recognition or other earthly rewards?

False Piety, True Contrition

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce

There's a joke about a priest and deacon who are peeking out from the vestibule at a man sitting in the back pew of church, beating his breast and saying aloud, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." The priest turns to the deacon saying, "Now look at who thinks he's a sinner!"



margin of this article is justified."

The tax collector wasn't justified simply because he beat his breast and said he was a sinner. He was justified because he was truly contrite.

True contrition, as the Church teaches, has four steps—none of which can be skipped if we're to be "made straight."

we have done. To be justified, the tax collector couldn't simply go out and "sin no more." He also had to try to make right whatever he could—perhaps by giving money back to people he had cheated or, if that was impossible, by donating money, time, or talent to some good cause. If there were no other way to change his sinful behavior, then the tax collector might have to quit his job to be justified.

Beyond "I'm Sorry"

If the tax collector was truly contrite and not just putting on a show of piety, he would have wanted to follow all four of these steps. That's why he would have gone away justified. Otherwise, he would have been no different than the Pharisee. Nor would we.

In this business of asking forgiveness, we have to make sure that we are not exalting ourselves with false piety, for as Jesus said at the end of the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted." This goes for all sinners. +

This joke is based on the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14). Who among us would ever want to see ourselves as the Pharisee in this story, bragging about how holy we are? But the tax collector? Oh, boy! That's me—a sinner and not too proud to admit it to anyone.

This reaction, of course, isn't what Jesus had in mind. He was viscerally opposed to public displays of piety. He advised his disciples: "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you," (Matthew 6:6).

Jesus noted that the tax collector went home "justified," while the Pharisee did not. "Justified" implies that a person is "vindicated," as in "my decision was justified by the fact that everything worked out in the end." But it also means to make something straight, as in "the left

Step by Step

First, we have to admit wrongdoing. This is what the Pharisee (like many of us) was unwilling to do. The tax collector, on the other hand, admitted that he had done many bad things, and he was genuinely sorry for them, which is the second mandatory step of contrition.

The third step is what Catholics call "a firm purpose of amendment." That means we have a plan for how we're going to change our behavior. A vague "I'll try harder to be good" is insufficient. The idea isn't to mimic the tax collector who came back every week to beat his breast and say what a sinner he was. The point of admitting our sins and asking for mercy is that we are supposed to stop sinning!

The final step in true contrition is penance. That is, we must suffer consequences and make up for the harm

PRAYER

Lord, your life teaches the way of peace and nonviolence. Help me to imitate your example in times of conflict.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 15-20

Monday, Holy Weekday:
Is 42:1–7 / Jn 12:1–11

Tuesday, Holy Weekday:
Is 49:1–6 / Jn 13:21–33, 36–38

Wednesday, Holy Weekday:
Is 50:4–9a / Mt 26:14–25

Thursday, Holy Thursday: Ex 12:1–8,
11–14 / 1 Cor 11:23–26 / Jn 13:1–15

Friday, Good Friday: Is 52:13–53:12 /
Heb 4:14–16; 5:7–9 / Jn 18:1–19:42

Saturday, Holy Saturday:
Gn 1:1–2:2 or Gn 1:1, 26–31a /
Gn 22:1–18 or Gn 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18 /
Ex 14:15–15:1 / Is 54:5–14 / Is 55:1–11 /
Bar 3:9–15, 32–4:4 / Ez 36:16–17a, 18–28 /
Rom 6:3–11 / Lk 24:1–12

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April 14, 2019

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Bringing Home the Word

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord (C)

April 21, 2019

Lost...Then Found!

By Mary Katharine Deeley

My daughter was about four when we went to the local department store to do some shopping. I was looking over some item when I turned and realized she wasn't beside me. It was not like her to wander away, and I spent a frantic fifteen minutes before I located her sitting on the floor playing with a doll from a display. I was at once relieved and angry, but more scared than anything else. What if something had happened?

When Mary Magdalene went to the tomb that early Sunday morning, she

Sunday Readings

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

This man God raised (on) the third day and granted that he be visible ...to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance.

Colossians 3:1-4
or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8

When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.

John 20:1-9

Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed.

expected to find Jesus' body and mourn the loss of this man whom they all loved. Not finding him where she expected was an utter shock. I can only imagine there was some fear and anger: "Who took him? Where did he go? How could someone do this?" Her words tumbled out to Peter and the disciple Jesus loved. They, too, were astounded to find his burial cloth and, though they believed, they did not understand what the empty tomb signified.

I can also imagine what they felt when they finally saw Jesus—surely relief and wonder, but there may have been a little anger that he had left them and fear for all that meant. Maybe that's how God feels about us when we wander away. We were lost, and God sent the prophets first and then his only Son to find us and lead us home. Out of love, Jesus gave his life and conquered death itself. In this Easter season, let us take great care neither to wander away nor to lose sight of the Lord. He is the source of our life. We belong to him. +

*In this Easter season,
let us take great care
neither to wander away
nor to lose sight of the Lord.*

A Word from Pope Francis

The growing presence of women in the social, economic, and political life at local, national, and international levels, as well as the ecclesial, therefore, is a healthy process. Women have the full right to be actively included in all areas, and their right must be affirmed and protected, even through legal instruments wherever...necessary.

—Address to pontifical council, June 9, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I keep my sights on the Lord all year, not just during Christmas and Easter?
- Do I take comfort that Jesus became human so that one day I may join him in his resurrection?

Being a Pest—for Good

By Alice Camille

“Here comes trouble!” If you think for a moment, you can probably recall the face of someone who earns this exclamation whenever he or she walks into the room. Sometimes we use this greeting aloud in fun, acknowledging a pal’s rowdy nature. But sometimes we employ these words as a mental note of desperation because the trouble is for real.

When Jesus tells the story of the persistent widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1–8), who do you think will be the troublemaker? The title some give to the parable—Parable of the Unjust Judge—suggests that the source of trouble is the mean old judge.

But traditionally, “troublemaker” was the name given to the woman—are we surprised?—because her insistence on justice makes her a pest in her society. She is sometimes called the importunate widow, the troublesome widow, the one who won’t go away until she gets what she wants. Never mind that what she wants is for justice to be done. She’s the one who’s considered the problem!

We all know this woman, of course. We may even be this person in the eyes of those who know us. The troublemaker is one who clamors for peace during war,



or one who speaks for the poor in an affluent society. Try “speaking for the trees” like Dr. Suess’ *The Lorax*, especially in logging territory, and discover what it means to be seen as a vexation that needs to be solved—or silenced!

These experiments in announcing unpopular truths help us to appreciate why prophets get martyred. Once you publicly acknowledge society’s problems, it won’t be long before you are identified as a problem yourself.

Pushing, Pushing

Seeing how the widow in the parable is traditionally described as troublesome, it’s interesting to consider how Jesus views her. Clearly the story is not about the judge and his response—which is rendered unwillingly in her favor just to get her off his back. The main character in the tale is the widow, and the focus is on what she does. She takes on the system that is cheating her and calls out for justice. Finally, the judge admits he’s scared of her and what she might do next! His heart hasn’t changed, but he reverses his decision to save his own skin.

The point of the story is that we are to model ourselves on the troublemaker. We are to persist in our faith and demand justice no matter how we are perceived

or even mistreated by powerful people and structures. It’s a bold vocation for the followers of Jesus: to be people who rock the boat that society is merrily sailing in. Are we up to it?

Uphill Climb

Naturally, if we disrupt business-as-usual and the American dreams of acquiring stuff, taking care of our own, saving for retirement without concern for today’s responsibilities, and always being correct about what’s best for the rest of the world, then we’re inviting a heap of trouble on our own heads. The more we persist in questioning the way things are, the more people we stand to offend. Who wants to be greeted everywhere as the troublemaker? Even in church we may find ourselves the source of conflict.

Perhaps this is why Jesus tells the story with such amusement, casting God as the heavy and the disciple as the troublemaker. Without a sense of humor, few people would get the irony of what happens to those who are whistle-blowers on society’s problems. So how about it: Wanna stir up some trouble? +

PRAYER

Lord, your resurrection pierces the darkness of doubt and fear. May the power of your resurrection help me to deepen my love for you and all people.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 22-27

Monday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 2:14, 22–33 / Mt 28:8–15

Tuesday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 2:36–41 / Jn 20:11–18

Wednesday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 3:1–10 / Lk 24:13–35

Thursday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 3:11–26 / Lk 24:35–48

Friday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 4:1–12 / Jn 21:1–14

Saturday, Octave of Easter:
Acts 4:13–21 / Mk 16:9–15

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Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Easter, or Sunday of Divine Mercy (C)

April 28, 2019

Encountering Our Teacher and Master

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In our time, seven days have passed since we celebrated Christ's rising. But in the Church's reckoning, it is still Easter. We may have gotten on with our earthly lives, but our spiritual calendar and reality remain steeped in awe, wonder, and gratitude that God incarnate walked among us and gave his life for us. The readings of the Easter octave offer a taste of what it is like to live in God's time—in his presence and kingdom—as he calms our fears,

strengthens our faith, and fills us with the Spirit.

Much happens after Mary Magdalene visits and leaves the tomb. Other women who come to anoint Jesus meet him, embrace him, and obey his command to spread the good news. Mary herself obeyed and ran to tell the apostles—though she mistook the Lord for a gardener until he spoke her name. Two disciples on the road out of town listen to Jesus' teaching and finally know him in the breaking of bread. Jesus eats with others and assures them of the Father's promise. There is another miraculous catch of fish and a breakfast with the disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

Within the scriptural context of this weeklong feast, we realize that the risen Christ is everywhere, with all of us, existing throughout and beyond time. He appears when we least expect him; he is our teacher and our master; he feeds us with heavenly food; and he is there when we break bread together. May this knowledge strengthen our faith that Christ lives and will in time carry us home. +

*Christ is with all of us
at all times,
existing throughout
and beyond time.*

Sunday Readings

Acts 5:12-16

Many signs and wonders were done among the people at the hands of the apostles.

Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19

When I caught sight of him, I fell down at his feet....He touched me with his right hand and said, "Do not be afraid."

John 20:19-31

Jesus said to [Thomas], "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

A Word from Pope Francis

The death penalty is contrary to the meaning of *humanitas* and to divine mercy, which must be models for human justice. It entails cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment, as is the anguish before the moment of execution and the terrible suspense between the issuing of the sentence and the execution of the penalty.

—Letter to International Commission Against the Death Penalty, March 20, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Can I take comfort in times of trial, knowing that Christ will calm my fears and strengthen my faith?
- The risen Christ is everywhere. How has his presence impacted my life?

You Are Hereby Invited

By Alice Camille

I admit to turning down a few dinner invitations in my life, sometimes with white-lie excuses that must have been transparent to the hostess: “Wednesday is my laundry night.” “I promised to call my aging mother (who’s not that old).” Having used the technique of ditching social obligations, I can spot a faker a hundred yards off.

Take the folks in the parable of the Great Feast (Luke 14:15–24). What amateurs! As the story goes, somebody decides to throw a terrific bash and invites everybody who’s anybody to come. But one by one the guests offer their lame regrets.

One person just invested in some real estate and says she has to go look at it. *Go look at it?* You tell me she bought a piece of property sight unseen? The second guest comes up with a similar bit of jive: He has bought some farm animals and has to inspect them—like he didn’t do that *before* he signed the contract. And the last one is the biggest laugher of all. A man recently married; that’s it. So, he can’t leave the house to go to dinner? He can’t bring his wife?

In the story, the host is enraged by these tattered attempts at dodging the party. He reissues his invitation, this



time to the most unlikely folks in town—those too poor or unfortunate to be included on any society A-lists. And even when they arrive, there is still room at his table. So the final invitation goes out, this time to total strangers encountered on the road and sleeping in the bushes.

Just Picture It

Somewhere in the corridors of art history, there must exist a painting of this rollicking, serendipitous feast. I haven’t seen it, but I love to envision it: people with missing teeth, missing limbs, or both; those who’ve ended up on the sad side of violence; folks just out of jail or on their way to it; victims of poor health, demons, and addictions; those without money, luck, or brains; lots of people with a story to tell, just like yours and mine, but for one fatal bend in the road.

Some of the guests at a table like this will make it back on top, with or without help. Some will never see daylight again. But the moral of the story is that somewhere there’s a celestial table to which these folks, by name or en masse, have been invited, and they will be welcomed there as heartily as if they were celebrities. And a lot of people who think of themselves as desirable

dinner companions will not be welcome, because they already had their chance and turned it down.

Make Your Reservations

Someone dining with Jesus on the night he told this story remarked, “Blessed is the one who will dine in the kingdom of God” (Luke 14:15). Absolutely—if you don’t mind rubbing elbows with those who’ve been shunned by the best people in all the finest places.

The only way for us to get a seat at this table is to befriend the second- and third-tier guests right now, and to become comfortable and familiar with their company. Because in all honesty, this is one dinner party we don’t want to miss. No gathering could be more real, no menu more exquisite, and no celebration more compelling than this one. So drop what you’re doing, forget the laundry, get the spouse and kids, and reserve your seats now. +



Risen Lord, your resurrection renewed the face of the earth and gave us hope. Make me eager to use my gifts and talents to rebuild people’s lives and give them hope.

—From *Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

April 29-May 4

Monday, St. Catherine of Siena:
Acts 4:23–31 / Jn 3:1–8

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 4:32–37 / Jn 3:7b–15

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 5:17–26 / Jn 3:16–21

Thursday, St. Athanasius:
Acts 5:27–33 / Jn 3:31–36

Friday, Sts. Philip and James:
1 Cor 15:1–8 / Jn 14:6–14

Saturday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 6:1–7 / Jn 6:16–21