



Bringing Home the Word

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ | June 3, 2018

Jesus' Gift of Life

By Janel Esker

I'm a proud, regular blood donor. I don't particularly enjoy needles or the sight of blood, but my mother educated me at a young age that donating blood is one of the most important things you can do to help people. For less than an hour of your time, a momentary stick, and sugar-laden goodies afterward, you can provide a gift that is unequalled in significance—the life-giving force of blood. Truly, donating blood is one of the most prolife actions you can take.

Today we take time to particularly recognize the gift of life we receive each week at the eucharistic table. Jesus is, in

a way, the ultimate blood donor. He gives us all of himself—Body and Blood, the fullness of his life—in our eucharistic meal. Just as blood donations can sustain life for the human family, Jesus' gift of his Body and Blood is our sustaining spiritual life force, a symbol of the covenant between God and humanity that is given to us freely and has no equal.

Though I give blood regularly, I am given a reminder nudge by my blood center after the eight-week waiting period. We come to the eucharistic table each week, but each time we step forward do we remember how significant this gift is? As we receive, are we aware of Jesus' power within us?

This solemnity gives us that reminder to stay attentive to and grateful for God's gift of the Eucharist. +

Sunday Readings

Exodus 24:3-8

[Moses said,] "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you."

Hebrews 9:11-15

...He is mediator of a new covenant: since a death has taken place for deliverance

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

[Jesus said,] "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many."

A Word From Pope Francis

The Lord breaks his Body and pours out his Blood for all. Truly no division can withstand this sacrifice of communion; only the attitude of falsehood, of complicity with the evil one, can exclude one from it. No other indefensible gap can withstand the power of this broken Bread and this shed Blood.

—General audience,
November 11, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How well do I prepare my heart and mind to receive Jesus in the Eucharist?
- Do I take time to visit him in the tabernacle or adoration to show him my love and gratitude?



The Sacraments— and More

By Thomas H. Groome

My mother-in-law had a lovely habit, upon seeing something beautiful, of saying: “I give you that.” The first time it happened to me we were overlooking a harbor at sunset. When she said, “I give you that, Tom,” I felt it was all mine, and I experienced it as total gift. Maryanne, God rest her soul, had a sacramental consciousness. She recognized “the more” in the everyday.

We Catholics tend to associate *sacrament* with the seven we celebrate as communities of faith. But we should be conscious of the continuity between the liturgical sacraments and the sacramental-ity of life.

The Catholic principle of sacramental-ity is that God is ever present and that we respond through the ordinary and everyday. As we come “to find God in all things” (St. Ignatius of Loyola) and experience God’s grace daily, we can readily believe that the seven sacraments “make present...the grace that they signify” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1127).

In the early centuries, Christians celebrated many sacred rituals as having sacramental power. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church gradually established seven—baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony—as our vital sacraments. Because each reflects a central value in Jesus’ ministry, we say that Jesus instituted all seven.

Starting With Baptism

Because baptism begins our initiation into the Church, it’s considered the “first” of the sacraments. Confirmation and Eucharist, then, complete our initiation. Anointing and reconciliation are sacraments of healing, while matrimony and holy orders are sacraments of vocation to serve the community.

While all seven are necessary to the life of the Church, Catholics cherish the Eucharist as the “sacrament of sacraments” (St. Thomas Aquinas). The *Catechism*, echoing Vatican II, describes it as “the source and summit of Christian life” (CCC 1324). Eucharist is our greatest act of thanksgiving and praise to the Father, reoffering the holy sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. In Eucharist, too, we reenact Jesus’ Last Supper with the disciples, so replete with love and peace.

We believe that in doing again what Jesus did at the Last Supper, that “bread and wine...by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of Christ, have become the body and blood of Christ” (CCC 1357). So, in receiving holy Communion we encounter the Real Presence.

The Second Vatican Council of 1962-65 revived for Catholics our awareness that the risen Christ is present to the Christian community assembled for worship as the word of God is proclaimed through Scripture. However, “the mode of Christ’s presence under the

Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as ‘the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend’” (CCC 1374).

How and Why

The favored Catholic way to explain *how* Christ is present in the Eucharist is *transubstantiation*. So while the appearance of bread and wine remain, their substance is changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus.

But as important as *how*, we must remember *why* Jesus is present, and what receiving holy Communion should produce in our lives. He is present as our bread of life to sustain us in daily living as disciples. Eucharist empowers, but also requires our response. Its celebration sends us forth to love and serve the Lord, to live “for the life of the world” (John 6:51).

In their own ways, each sacrament calls and empowers us for such daily discipleship. As we so live, the sacramentality of life and effectiveness of the sacraments become even more important. +



Lord, out of brokenness and weakness you saved my life. Help me to embrace my weakness so I can walk in solidarity with the poor and suffering.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

June 4-9, 2018

Monday, Weekday:
2 Pt 1:2-7 / Mk 12:1-12

Tuesday, Weekday: St. Boniface:
2 Pt 3:12-15a, 17-18 / Mk 12:13-17

Wednesday, Weekday:
2 Tm 1:1-3, 6-12 / Mk 12:18-27

Thursday, Weekday:
2 Tm 2:8-15 / Mk 12:28-34

Friday, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus: Hos 11:1, 3-4, 8c-9 / Eph 3:8-12, 14-19 / Jn 19:31-37

Saturday, Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 2 Tm 4:1-8 / Lk 2:41-51

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Bringing Home the Word

Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | June 10, 2018

Our House United

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I used to dream about the kind of house I would live in when I grew up. I wanted gracious rooms, a large kitchen, a family room and—for reasons beyond understanding—I wanted a stream running through the house with a waterfall somewhere in it. The house I actually live in was more than a hundred years old when we bought it. It needed a boiler, a roof, and a new bathroom within the first year.

The rooms were small; the kitchen had no drawers. There were no closets on the first floor. But it was ours and we

raised our family in it. The smallness of the house did not seem to matter to our children's school friends who regularly visited, knew they could call us if there was an emergency, and could count on a full bowl of fruit salad (strawberries, blueberries, kiwis, and grapes) in the refrigerator.

It would have been easy to complain about the difference between the dream and the reality. My husband and I might have argued about getting a bigger home. But we realized that "home" was not about the building. It was—and is—about the community and relationships inside.

Had the love not been there, we might have even become divided over the flaws. I like to think that our marriage and family were blessed with the grace to see what was important. I know that in a world of poverty, we were privileged. But I believe that having each other and sharing our faith was our strength and our foundation, and would have been even if we had lost everything. +

*Home is about
the relationships
and the community
inside the building.*

Sunday Readings

Genesis 3:9–15

The LORD God then called to the man and asked him: Where are you?

2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1

We have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven.

Mark 3:20–35

[Jesus said,] "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

A Word From Pope Francis

Allow me to call your attention to the value and beauty of marriage....The differences between man and woman are not for opposition or subordination, but for communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God. Without mutual self-giving, neither one can understand the other in depth.

—Address to bishops
in Puerto Rico,
June 8, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Is there any created thing that doesn't lead me back to God or make me believe him?
- Is there a way I hide from God in shame for my choices?



When Spouses Have Different Beliefs

By Donna Erickson Couch

After the romantic dust of my marriage settled, fundamental life questions surfaced when my closest friend died in a car accident. As I grieved, my husband, Dana, comforted me as best he could. When I talked, however, about my need for God and church (I had drifted away from Catholicism), he was silent. Eventually he told me that, while he didn't mind if I wanted religion again, he wouldn't participate.

Ten years into our marriage, I not only forged my way back to my faith alone, but embarked on a life-changing spiritual quest. Through years of confusion, I prayed and suffered in silence as I tried to reconcile my love for God *and* for my nonparticipating husband. I worried about my role in Dana's salvation and agonized over how to raise our children in the faith alone.

Years passed until I finally made peace with my anxieties. I eventually received four transformative insights:

1. After a few years married, it's common to experience a spiritual awakening.

Upon completion of confirmation class or during college, many drift away from their faith. When thoughts turn to marriage, faith is frequently downplayed. We may accept the naïve presumption that "love is all you need."

Later, perhaps after a child or two, it's common to experience a need for church again. Frequently, those who return are surprised to discover a treasury of meaning in their renewed faith. Along with the elation, however, may linger thoughts about the negative effects this may have on a marriage.

2. Authentic spirituality isn't divisive.

As my inner life grew, I felt an increasing distance between Dana and me. When I tried to describe my feelings to a friend, he quoted Jesus: "I have come to bring not peace but the sword...and one's enemies will be those of his household" (Matthew 10:34-36).

Though discouraged, with the help of prayer and a spiritual director, I found deeper meaning in this biblical passage. I learned that, even though our incompatible religious beliefs could feel insurmountable, time quells the fear. Like marriage, when we commit to God for the long haul, it's natural to sometimes experience tension.

3. The inner journey is a solitary one.

In another Scripture passage, Jesus says there is no marriage in heaven (Mark 12:25). If we look at this as a blueprint for our spiritual journey, an important insight is revealed: While there are many companions on the outer journey, no one can walk the inner path with us. While we can try to describe our personal

relationships with God, no one—even our spouse—may share those experiences completely. God calls each of us into a mystical marriage, demanding that we forsake all others.

4. All relationships mirror the divine relationship.

All relationships teach us about God. Can we observe the divine in everyone? Equipped with a bigger vision, we welcome the challenges of living with those who, without words, can teach us about the subtleties of God's presence. Meanwhile, spiritual directors and friends can help us process our complex relationship with God. Frequently, others serve this need better than those with whom we live.

If you're experiencing a spiritual awakening while married to someone on a different page, take heart. The challenge of living a God-centered life provides an opportunity to repeatedly experience what it means to fall in love—with your spouse, your faith, and the Lord. When God means something different to your spouse, it's not the end of the world but rather the beginning of a profound encounter with love's sacred mysteries. +



Lord, you reveal to us the will of God. Help me to know and live out the will of God in my life.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

June 11-16, 2018

Monday, St. Barnabas:
Acts 11:21b-26; 13:1-3 / Mt 5:1-12
Tuesday, Weekday:
1 Kgs 17:7-16 / Mt 5:13-16
Wednesday, St. Anthony of Padua:
1 Kgs 18:20-39 / Mt 5:17-19

Thursday, Weekday:
1 Kgs 18:41-46 / Mt 5:20-26
Friday, Weekday:
1 Kgs 19:9a, 11-16 / Mt 5:27-32
Saturday, Weekday:
1 Kgs 19:19-21 / Mt 5:33-37



Bringing Home the Word

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time | June 17, 2018

God Is Our GPS

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I have a good sense of direction. If I drive by a place, I can usually find my way back, walking or driving as much by instinct that says, “I think it’s over that way a little,” as by any street names or landmarks. I like following unknown paths in the woods just to see where they lead. I almost always find my way back with a minimum of backtracking.

This bothers my husband, who is a firm believer in maps, map apps, and GPS voices telling him when to turn. Often he ignores them to take a different route,

but he is comforted by their presence and reliably gets from point A to point B.

“We walk by faith, not by sight,” St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:7. He may not have had a store in mind, but in a very real way he was talking about getting from point A to point B—from our wandering in this world to our home with God. He was talking about making it out of our spiritual woods into the light of day and making discoveries along the way.

We see as human beings do and not as God does. Paul suggests we find our way through our faith in God, who is light in our darkness, the path on which we walk, our goal and destination.

Our longing to know where we are going is satisfied when we realize we are going to him. Some will take detours and get utterly lost. Others will rely on maps, and still others will follow those who have gone before—the saints who are our examples or Christ himself. Walking by faith isn’t easy, but God will get us to where we are going if we trust in him. +

Sunday Readings

Ezekiel 17:22–24

Every tree of the field will know that I am the LORD. I...wither up the green tree, and make the dry tree bloom.

2 Corinthians 5:6–10

We would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord.

Mark 4:26–34

[Jesus said,] “But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches.”

We need to find our way through faith in God.

A Word From Pope Francis

Evangelization does not consist in proselytizing, for proselytizing is a caricature of evangelization, but rather evangelizing entails attracting by our witness those who are far off. It means humbly drawing near to those who feel distant from God in the Church, drawing near to those who feel judged and condemned.

—Homily at Mass for the Evangelization of Peoples, July 7, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I let the force of my faith multiply into acts of love and service?
- Do I trust in God to lead me in my life to him?



The Tiny Seed of Faith

By Joyce Rupp

It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants (Mark 4:31–32).

A seed lay in the heart of silent soil, so tiny one couldn't dream of its growing into a magnificent plant. Only a sturdy faith could trust that something so seemingly dead would hold the promise of immense growth.

While there is tremendous potential for growth in a seed, it doesn't do the growing unaided. Sun, rain, and soil release energy in the seed, enabling it to awaken and grow.

Today's Gospel parable describes how the reign of God's love grows. The foundation of God's reign is a trusting faith—not faith as an assent to religious doctrines, but a faith that believes we can grow as loving people. This faith is the persistent belief in a gracious divinity, one who empowers us to be spiritually transformed.

This faith lies deep within our spiritual soil. Jesus understood the little mustard seed and its astounding growth. He knew the challenge of believing in something one can't perceive. Jesus urged this faith to believe in God's transforming love, even when our spirits are tired.

Faith means growing in our ability to trust God with the seed of ourselves. We would much rather be in charge of our lives, having things our own way. But our seeds of faith are dependent on the grace of God, much like a mustard seed is

dependent on soil and climate. And like the mustard seed, our tiny beginnings of spiritual awakening are capable of immense growth.

Slow, Deep Growth

This seed of faith usually grows slowly. It requires an assent of our will to God's ability of helping us grow, even though we may not feel him doing so. Faith assures us that the One who plants the seed of faith will be there to care for and nurture it.

I recognized this kind of faith in a story from a friend: "The Catholic Worker House never actually runs out of food," he said. "Meals may be mismatched foods like vegetarian or mostly bread, but there's always food. However, one Saturday night they were completely out of food. Fran and Brad were there alone, talking about what they'd do without food for the Sunday noon meal. They prayed together that somehow food would be there the next day. On Saturday night an unexpected group came to the door with large pans of lasagna, masses of rolls, cookies, and potato chips. Next day at noon more than a hundred guests arrived. Everyone who was hungry got a full plate, including sweets, and bread. No food appeal ever went out—except those prayers."

Hearts of Hope

Did Fran and Brad's faith turn God's hand? Did their prayer cause food to be given? No, the food was already in someone's oven when they entrusted their anxiety to God. Rather, prayer nurtured their seed of faith, and helped their trust to grow larger than their worries. Prayer filled them with peace rather than anxiety, assuring them that what they needed would somehow come.

It is in our moments of uncertainty and need that our seed of faith is able to stretch and grow. It is then that we discover the power of trustful waiting and the beauty of undefeated hope. Even the tiniest of seeds know this wondrous truth. +



Lord, you reveal the kingdom of God to all people. Help me bear witness to God's kingdom of compassion and peace.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

June 18-23, 2018

Monday, Weekday:

1 Kgs 21:1–16 / Mt 5:38–42

Tuesday, Weekday:

1 Kgs 21:17–29 / Mt 5:43–48

Wednesday, Weekday:

2 Kgs 2:1, 6–14 / Mt 6:1–6, 16–18

Thursday, St. Aloysius Gonzaga:

Sir 48:1–14 / Mt 6:7–15

Friday, Weekday:

2 Kgs 11:1–4, 9–18, 20 / Mt 6:19–23

Saturday, Weekday:

2 Chr 24:17–25 / Mt 6:24–34



Bringing Home the Word

Nativity of St. John the Baptist | June 24, 2018

God's Calling for Us

By Janel Esker

Expectant parents the world over have one task in common—naming their newborns. Some mothers-to-be have kept a list of favorite baby names since adolescence. Other parents can't imagine naming their child until they lay eyes on their little one after birth. Some survey friends and family. My four-year-old nephew Alexander proclaimed that if his cousin-to-be was a girl, she should obviously be named Pizzahead. We thanked him and noted we would take his suggestion under, uh, consideration.

People often have much to say, sometimes quite vehemently, about the choice of a baby's name. It was no different for John the Baptist's mother. When Elizabeth announced that his name would be John, the name given him by the angel Gabriel, neighbors protested that this wasn't a family name and it couldn't possibly be appropriate. But his father, Zechariah, confirmed this heavenly chosen name. Word spread quickly of something quite special, even divine, about this child. Everyone wondered what he would become.

We know indeed what John became—the herald of Jesus' coming. Particularly special about John was his willingness to embrace his calling while recognizing that his mission was not about himself; rather, it was to direct others toward Jesus. He confidently claimed his vocation, but he was humble enough to know his life wasn't about himself.

Whether your name is John, Mary, or even Pizzahead, God has a calling for each of us—but it isn't about promoting ourselves or our needs. It's ultimately for the service of the Lord.

Are *we* strong enough to claim our calling—and humble enough to serve? +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 49:1–6

Before birth the LORD called me, from my mother's womb he gave me my name.

Acts 13:22–26

[John said,] "Behold, one is coming after me; I am not worthy to unfasten the sandals of his feet."

Luke 1:57–66, 80

Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God.

A Word From Pope Francis

Our mission [is] to identify the material and immaterial needs of the people and try to meet them as we can. Do you know what *agape* is? It is love of others, as our Lord preached. It is not proselytizing, it is love. Love for one's neighbor, that leavening that serves the common good.

—Interview with *La Repubblica*,
October 1, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Do I have a strong sense of God's mission for my life? What might be some of the elements?
- How have I benefited from other people who have been generous with their own mission?



Ours Is a We Religion

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

One reason I am Catholic is because Catholicism is a healthy corrective to the way I would prefer to live and pray. Catholicism is a *we* religion, about community.

Why do I consider Catholicism a healthy corrective? Here's an example: Three times a week I go to the gym for an aerobics class. When the alarm rings in the morning, I'd much rather stay in bed, but I'm convinced that, even though I don't like it, exercise is more healthy than sitting in front of the computer all day, typing with one hand and eating with the other. And just as the gym is an antidote to my inactivity and overeating, Catholicism is a healthy corrective for my American individualism.

There are many wonderful things about living in America. But besides being the land of the free and home of the brave, America is also the land of the "Lone Ranger." Americans love our individual freedom and independence—not only in the way we live, but also in the way we worship.

Studies show that Americans, regardless of their religious denomination, like to be independent in their beliefs: I decide what I want to believe, and how to pray. Identifying with an established denomination (Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, and so forth) is not important

for most Americans, who tend to move easily from one church to another. Conversion and salvation are understood as deeply personal, individual experiences. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, / That saved a wretch like me! / I once was lost, but now am found; / Was blind but now I see." Yes, American religion is about *I, me, and my*.

Community: The Heart of It

Our religion is a healthy corrective to the excess individualism of American religion because Catholic identity is essentially collective. All of our official Catholic prayers are first-person plural: *we, us, and our*. At Mass we pray: "Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord.... Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ" (Eucharistic Prayer III).

Family and community are at the heart of our Catholic identity because the very God we worship is a triune community of love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The principal petition at every Eucharist is not for some individual gift of grace but for the gift of unity, the grace to become one body, one spirit in Christ. We pray that we become family, community, and Church.

Jesus' Mission—and Ours

As Christ's Body the Church, we together are to continue Christ's mission to the world. It is not about what I want, but what Christ, in his body the Church, wants. Together with the whole Church we pray: *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.*

Personally, I don't always find this community aspect of Catholicism comfortable. Often I would rather pray how I want. I get upset when community needs disturb the way I have always prayed. Why do I have to listen to the Bible proclaimed in Spanish at Mass just because the neighborhood is changing? I like to sing but I am not comfortable singing a hymn in Korean.

But in a deeper place, I want to welcome and be considerate of my sisters and brothers because I know that what is most comfortable for me isn't always what is best for my growth. It's more comfortable to stay in bed than to get up and exercise. I realize when I need a healthy corrective. +



Lord, you are always near.
Deepen my faith in your
goodness and love
so I may be a sign of faith.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

June 25–30, 2018

Monday, Weekday:
2 Kgs 17:5–8, 13–15a, 18 / Mt 7:1–5

Tuesday, Weekday: 2 Kgs 19:9b–11,
14–21, 31–35a, 36 / Mt 7:6, 12–14

Wednesday, Weekday:
2 Kgs 22:8–13; 23:1–3 / Mt 7:15–20

Thursday, St. Irenaeus:
2 Kgs 24:8–17 / Mt 7:21–29

Friday, Sts. Peter and Paul: Acts 12:1–11 /
2 Tm 4:6–8, 17–18 / Mt 16:13–19

Saturday, Weekday:
Lam 2:2, 10–14, 18–19 / Mt 8:5–17