



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Easter (C)

May 5, 2019

Showing Our Love

By Mary Katharine Deeley

It has become the habit in our family to say “I love you” at the end of phone calls and e-mails. I love these frequent reminders that I am valued and worthy of love, and I like the opportunity to remind my daughters and husband that they are the same. We underscore these reminders with little acts of love. Our daughters joke that my husband and I are the only parents they know who still date. And when we do go out, we take turns paying for the other’s dinner. My husband once sent me flowers when I didn’t get a job I had hoped for. It was a kind and thoughtful gesture.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me” not once, but three times. When Peter responds positively (though progressively with more irritation), Jesus continues, “Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep.” It isn’t enough to say we love people. We show it by caring for them and for who and what they cherish. The best way that Peter could show his love for Jesus was by caring for the people of God. He could love all the disciples and invite others to follow Jesus as well.

Pope Francis once exhorted priests to “be shepherds with the smell of sheep.” Jesus is telling Peter—and all of us—much the same thing. To love the Lord is to truly live among his people: to touch them, tell them, and show them they are valuable and desired. This is the face of love.

All people deserve to know they are loved, but in our world that is not always the case. How might we respond? +

Sunday Readings

Acts 5:27–32, 40b–41

So they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.

Revelation 5:11–14

And [the angels] cried out in a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.”

John 21:1–19 or John 21:1–14

[Jesus] said to them, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something.”

*It isn’t enough to say
we love people.
We show it by caring for
them and for who and
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A Word from Pope Francis

May the Christian communities be sustained by the intercession and example of our many martyrs and saints who bore courageous witness to Christ and have themselves attained full unity. So what are we waiting for?.... As his disciples, we are called to testify everywhere, with Christian fortitude, to his humble love.

—Address to a commission for theological dialogue, January 27, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I remember to tell family and friends that I love them? They want to know.
- Do my actions show love for all God’s people, indicating that they are valued and respected?

Treasuring God's Creation

By Kathy Coffey

Thou shalt reverence the earth.

If we were to add a commandment reflecting the call to God's people in our century, this might top the list of possibilities. People have long delighted in the beautiful surroundings for the human journey. But for the first time in history, our planet is gravely threatened.

While this commandment isn't one of the official ten, we have a long tradition of respect for God's creation. Genesis 1 shows God lovingly shaping the solar system, oceans, land, vegetation, and animals in a crescendo that leads to humanity. When God gives humans "dominion" over other creatures, the implication is wise stewardship rather than blatant exploitation.

Many psalms are suffused with an appreciation of nature. Psalm 96:11–13 personifies the natural world praising God: "Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice; let the sea and what fills it resound; let the plains be joyful and all that is in them. Then let all the trees of the forest rejoice before the LORD."

Saint Francis' *Canticle of the Sun* is an outburst of joy in sun and moon. Saint Clare reminded her congregation to "praise God" when they saw "beautiful trees, flowers, and bushes..." Both saints traveled lightly; their commitment to poverty translates into the slogan



of environmentally conscious people today: "Buy less stuff."

Receiving Well

Each week, Catholics celebrate the Eucharist, whose root word means "to receive well." Our weekend celebrations should spill into a week of receiving well, especially

the earth's gifts: food that energizes our bodies, the sights of mountains, streams, stars, or sunsets that feed our spirits. As Rachel Carson wrote in *Silent Spring*, the absence of birdsong with all it represents would make our environment eerily quiet and rob the soul of sustenance.

With such a rich tradition of respecting the earth, we Christians should naturally take practical steps to reduce our carbon emissions and, hence, climate change. The scientific community agrees that we can take practical steps to save the planet now, to prevent our grandchildren from asking, "Why didn't they act when they could?"

Warning signs are clear: The polar ice caps are melting fast because dangerous gases trap the sun's heat. The average car driven 10,000 miles a year releases 5.5 tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Barbara Kingsolver points out in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* that our children will have shorter lifespans than ours because of their junk food, obesity, and poor quality of air and water.

We know how to solve this problem. Apologies to those who know these steps, but for those who don't: Use energy-efficient light bulbs and appliances. Drive a hybrid car. Walk or bike when possible. Recycle. Turn down the thermostat. Plant trees.

Actively Saying Thanks

Hopeful signs of community awareness and cooperation abound. More than a thousand US mayors have signed the Climate Protection Agreement to reduce carbon emissions in their cities. Many companies, churches, schools, and homes are committed to "going green." *Oikos*, the Greek word for "household" (the root for *ecology*, *ecumenical*, and *economy*) underscores the link between our individual households and God's house, creation.

In her novel *Animal Dreams*, Barbara Kingsolver records a conversation with a native American who explains that God lets us live in this house, and we should send a note of thanks just as we would after being anyone's guest: "We appreciate the rain, we appreciate the sun....Sorry if we messed up anything. Thanks for letting me sleep on your couch."

Reverencing the earth is an active way to express our thanks. +



Risen Lord, you gave your life to save the world. Help me to be a selfless servant of love and peace in the world.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

May 6-11

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 6:8–15 / Jn 6:22–29

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 7:51—8:1a / Jn 6:30–35

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 8:1b–8 / Jn 6:35–40

Thursday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 8:26–40 / Jn 6:44–51

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 9:1–20 / Jn 6:52–59

Saturday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 9:31–42 / Jn 6:60–69



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Easter (C)
May 12, 2019

Our Life-giving Water

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I love the sound water makes when it is moving in a fast-flowing stream or curling up to the shore in waves. I am mesmerized particularly by waterfalls, small or large. My husband, who enjoys photography as a hobby, has taken pictures of many of the falls we have visited, and they decorate my office as a constant reminder of the power and beauty of God seen through all creation. I even have a crucifix that was designed to show the living water flowing from Christ—a waterfall tumbling down and over the foot of the cross. It is, for

me anyway, one of the most powerful images of God that I can imagine.

Throughout the Easter season, the Scriptures present us with stories of resurrection and life. The preaching of the apostles, the abundance of fish caught in a net, the stirring of hearts in those who see and hear Jesus—they all show what it is like to live in “risen time,” in full knowledge and endless presence of the Lord. Today Jesus talks about God’s closeness, power, and promise. The Father has given the sheep to Jesus and no one can take them away.

But in the reading from Revelation we have a clearer picture of our life with God: “The Lamb...will...lead them to springs of life-giving water.” In Jesus’ desert environment, this was a powerful image. In our world today it remains compelling. Jesus is the Living Water that brings life to our souls. Whether it flows as a gentle stream, restless wave, or waterfall from the throne of God, it is his gift to us. +

Sunday Readings

Acts 13:14, 43–52

When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said.

Revelation 7:9, 14b–17

I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue.

John 10:27–30

[Jesus said,] “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

*Flowing water is
one of the most powerful
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A Word from Pope Francis

The Gentiles, observing the early Christians, said: How they love each other, how they wish one another well! They do not hate, they do not speak against one another. This is the charity, the love of God, that the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts....Our smallest gesture of love benefits everyone!

—General audience, November 6, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Can I picture Jesus as Living Water, as refreshment for my thirsty soul?
- Am I a good steward to the earth that God has entrusted to me—to the water, land, and air?

Mental Illness: A Christian Response

By Fr. Jim Van Vurst, OFM

Early in life, we become aware that humanity is wounded. We learn this from Scripture, observation, and experiences of our own weakened wills and darkened minds. How are we as Christians to look upon mental illness and those who suffer from it?

Just because the United States is a First World nation whose citizens enjoy freedom and material benefits doesn't mean its people are exempt from mental illness. In fact, many contend that vast freedom becomes license and lawlessness, and ends up causing anxiety, depression, and addictions.

News reports speak of economic difficulties, the growing gulf between the "haves" and "have nots," job losses, and the health insurance and student loan crises. Many people are experiencing great stress and worry resulting in increased emotional trauma.

The National Institute of Mental Health's website (nimh.nih.gov) lists statistics for mental illness in the United States. An estimated one in five American adults (44.7 million) lived with mental illness in 2016. This is a statistic of great suffering—not just for the victims, but also for those who care for, live with, and love them.

The Faith Perspective

What is the Christian response to mental illness? We believe that everyone is a



creation of a loving God. Neither mental nor physical illness is a punishment from God, though in times of suffering, it's common to ask, "What did I do to deserve this?" It's a question that has been asked for as long as there has been suffering.

Jesus entered a world of suffering and sickness. In fact, the Gospels reveal a Savior who never shied away from the sick and suffering. He went out to meet them. The Gospels record many miracles, most concerning healing and bringing people back to health. If people couldn't find him, Jesus sought them out. In fact, he seemed most comfortable with outcasts and sinners.

Jesus was quick to share the good news with everybody, reminding them of two things: 1) God loves them regardless of their life circumstances and 2) he, Jesus, will show them God's compassion and heal those who seek his help. Many healings were not just of physical illness, but also of emotional and mental sickness.

Overcoming the Stigma

There is an unfortunate stigma attached to anyone with mental illness. Those who don't understand may say, often in frustration, "Just shape up and pull yourself together." But they don't realize that serious depression is emotionally paralyzing. They can't see that people with deep phobias and anxieties experience such a lack

of control over their emotions that all they can do is hide and hang on for dear life. It's an unfair stigma, to be sure, and such accusations come from individuals who are either frightened of mental illness or just don't know what to say. They may misjudge such persons as weak characters, lacking gumption or self-esteem or people who are just looking for ways to make others take care of them. Nothing is further from the truth.

We should not overlook the burden on individuals and families who love someone who is mentally ill. No one knows what families go through in trying to help their loved ones recover. It hurts terribly to see a loved one suffer mentally and emotionally. Fears, frustrations, and a sense of helplessness tear at their hearts, straining relationships and resources.

What about us? Our attitude toward the physically and mentally ill should be Christlike: respect and compassion. Pray for the ill and their caregivers. The image that comes to mind is that of a person caring for another with Jesus kneeling beside them. Such caregivers are not alone. +

PRAYER

Risen Lord, your resurrection gives me hope and the promise of new life. Open my heart to embrace and share your vision of love and peace with all people.

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

May 13-18

Monday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 11:1–18 / Jn 10:1–10

Tuesday, St. Matthias:

Acts 1:15–17, 20–26 / Jn 15:9–17

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 12:24–13:5a / Jn 12:44–50

Thursday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 13:13–25 / Jn 13:16–20

Friday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 13:26–33 / Jn 14:1–6

Saturday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 13:44–52 / Jn 14:7–14



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday of Easter (C)

May 19, 2019

Sharing God's Word Everywhere

By *Mary Katharine Deeley*

I was fortunate to do my hospital chaplaincy rotation with a young seminarian who was ordained about three years after our summer experience. Tom and I became good friends. He came to my wedding and I went to his ordination. My children forever referred to him as Young Fr. Tom. He has been a blessing to me and my family.

When he was ordained, I tried my hand at writing a song as a gift for him. He was so eager and willing to preach the Gospel wherever he was sent that I wanted to mark that in some way. One

lyric I wrote went like this: "Finding our homes where we can share your word, only to leave again when it's been heard...to be your people." Fr. Tom serves in Africa now, training other seminarians, and I often think of him and of that song because I have come to realize that we're all called to share God's word whether we're in a comfortable place or a strange one. Perhaps part of our challenge is to leave the areas where we're comfortable and welcomed for those where the path is rougher and less clear, but the need for the good news is all the greater.

Today our models are Paul and his companions, who travel from place to place to preach the gospel and move on when they have done what they can. They follow Jesus' command to love and find the glory of the Lord in that work and in whom they serve. If we are to be God's people, we also must spread the hope of God's love to all we meet, even if we have to travel far to do so. +

Sunday Readings

Acts 14:21-27

They...reported what God had done with them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Revelation 21:1-5a

The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

John 13:31-33a, 34-35

[Jesus said,] "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

*We're all called
to share God's word
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A Word from Pope Francis

We must not forget that we celebrate the Eucharist in order to become eucharistic men and women. What does this mean? It means allowing Christ to act within our deeds: that his thoughts may be our thoughts, his feelings our own, his choices our choices too....Doing as Christ did is Christian holiness.

—General audience, April 4, 2018



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do I have the courage to share God's word, not just in the comfort of familiar surroundings, but with strangers?
- No matter where I go, do my actions reflect Christ's example?

Finding Your Own Way to Pray

By Jim and Susan Vogt

Susan isn't comfortable raising her arms in praise. Jim found the Forty Hours devotion less than satisfying. As children, we both learned the rosary but seldom say it now. None of these prayer styles is wrong; it's just that prayer is such a personal experience. What inspires one person bores another. What seems old-fashioned to one connects another with her religious heritage.

Prayer, be it memorized or spontaneous, individual or communal, filled with incense or fragrant pine needles in a forest, is communication with God. On some level it flows from a human yearning that reaches beyond any particular religion. Most people eventually seek answers to life's persistent questions: Is there anything more than what meets the eye? Is there really an afterlife? We may not be aware of these yearnings, but eventually a crisis occurs, a life-changing decision is before us, or we simply marvel at the miracle of a newborn child—and we pray.

But how? And are we holier if we pray more? Conventional wisdom answers the latter question. Yes, prayer puts us in a more conscious relationship with God. This relationship of thankfulness, dependence, trust, and honor makes us better people—more aware of our inner selves and more attentive to others. It's the how that stymies many of us.



Prayer generally falls into the broad categories of verbal or nonverbal, individual or communal, memorized or spontaneous, contemplative or active. Seekers might experiment with many of the following prayer forms, allowing trial and error to lead them into a deeper conversation with God:

- **Familiar prayers:** Revisit the Our Father, Hail Mary, mealtime grace, or the rosary.
- **Weekday Mass**
- **Spiritual reading:** Our favorites include Fr. Ron Rolheiser, Fr. Richard Rohr, and Kathleen Norris.
- **Liturgy of the Hours:** This originated as the way monks set aside seven times daily to “pray without ceasing.”
- **Short spontaneous prayers:** These may range from “Praise God!” to “Lord, give me wisdom to make a good decision.”
- **Meditation:** Try centering prayer, reflecting on one's day, an examination of conscience, or using a prayer prompt like a picture, statue, or guided meditation.
- **Eucharistic adoration:** Many use this to keep reverent company with the Lord.
- **Communal prayer:** Join others for penance, healing services, or group prayer with friends before a meeting or activity.

- **Nature or everyday circumstances as reminders of God's presence:** Take a reflective walk in the woods, pray at stoplights or while waiting in line—instead of being impatient.
- **Prayers of the heart during crisis or joy:** Check out the psalms to find words to express your sorrow, gratitude, awe, or anger.
- **Prayer with children:** Children can lead us back to prayer if we feel awkward about starting. Other times they pull prayer out of us as we desperately try to understand them.

Remember, prayer is essentially conversation with God. Books and organized prayer can help, but if you have a relationship with someone, you want to spend time together. If you can talk, you can pray. Remember, talking isn't even required; just being in each other's presence counts.

But prayer isn't all there is to spirituality. Becoming a more spiritual person includes having an attitude of gratefulness, looking for the good in others, living out the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and doing the dishes or changing diapers as acts of service towards loved ones. Donating money so that others' lives may be better, putting up with annoyances, enduring an illness, sacrificing our wants for the needs of another—all of these make our hearts bigger and deepen our spirituality.

Consider this: If you're too busy to pray, you're too busy. +

WEEKDAY READINGS

May 20-25

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 14:5–18 / Jn 14:21–26

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 14:19–28 / Jn 14:27–31a

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 15:1–6 / Jn 15:1–8

Thursday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 15:7–21 / Jn 15:9–11

Friday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 15:22–31 / Jn 15:12–17

Saturday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 16:1–10 / Jn 15:18–21



Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday of Easter (C)

May 26, 2019

Trust the Spirit for Guidance

By Mary Katharine Deeley

For many Catholics, Vatican Council II was a watershed moment in Church history. I remember the nuns in our school turning on the radio to listen to reports. They shared what St. John XXIII said at the start of the council. The media still follow large Church events, but it's easy to forget that Church leaders have been gathering to talk about the issues of the day since the first century.

In the first reading, we hear about the Council of Jerusalem in fairly abbreviated form. The apostles and other leaders of the Church came together to discuss

whether Gentiles had to be circumcised (a tenet of Jewish Law) before they were baptized. There were legitimate claims on both sides. Remarkably, the leaders prayed, talked, and prayed some more. They spoke from their experience and their faith. They assumed that all the assembled were people of faith, and so they wrestled together to find the answer most in keeping with the commands of Jesus.

In the end, when they decided to admit Gentiles without circumcising them, the whole community recognized that the Holy Spirit was at work, and the letter sent to the various churches began, "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us..." The Council of Jerusalem gives us a model for resolving our differences: pray, dialogue, and pray some more. This week, read all of Acts 15 to see what happens when we trust the Spirit to guide us rightly: arguments fall silent, and we find delight, strength, and peace (see Acts 15:12, 31-32 and John 14:27). +

Sunday Readings

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

"It is the decision of the holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities."

Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23

The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light.

John 14:23-29

[Jesus said,] "The holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you."

The Council of Jerusalem gives a model for resolving our differences: pray, dialogue, and pray some more.

A Word from Pope Francis

Our ideal is not to live without love! A good pastor renounces the love of a family precisely in order to focus all his energies and the grace of his particular vocation on the evangelical blessing of the love of men and women who carry forward God's plan of creation.

—Meeting with bishops, September 27, 2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- When faced with moral decisions, do I research what the Church has to say?
- Do I make an effort to know what the pope or my bishop is teaching?

Just Follow Your Informed Conscience

By Jim and Susan Vogt

Is it really that simple? Yes. No. Maybe!

Yes, it's simple, but not quite *that* simple.

A woman steals food for her family when her unemployment runs out. A man decides not to report cash income on his taxes. When faced with moral decisions, people say you must follow your conscience, and indeed that is what one must do. But how do we hear our consciences, and is it possible to follow one's conscience and still be wrong?

The Catholic Church teaches a principle called "primacy of conscience," which means that conscience is the ultimate authority and we're compelled to follow it: "A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1790). We must also make the effort to have an "informed" conscience: "The education of the conscience is a lifelong task" (CCC 1784). In other words, it's not just doing what feels good.

So how does a person develop a well-formed conscience? Here are some traps to consider in coming to decisions of conscience.

Traps to Conscience Formation

1. Rationalization. When faced with paying income taxes, it's tempting to think, "Hey, rich people get big tax breaks. Is it really so wrong for me to fudge a little on my income tax return?"

2. Scrupulosity. Another trap is being scrupulous about the letter of the law while missing its spirit. When Susan was young, her godparents took her out for lobster every Good Friday. Technically, they kept the law of abstaining from meat, but a lobster dinner was hardly the sacrifice the law intended.

3. Going along with the crowd. How could so many people be wrong? For years, most adults didn't think twice about driving after drinking. Just because it's common doesn't make it right.

4. If it feels good, do it. Conscience shouldn't be guided



solely by emotion. Following it may not coincide with happiness—at least not fleeting feelings of bliss. Eating half a dozen doughnuts may feel good—temporarily—but this affects one's long-term health.

5. It's my body; it's my business. Just because I'm not directly harming another person doesn't mean my action is good. Drug addiction or pornography may seem like victimless crimes, but they not only hurt the doer, they also weaken the moral fabric of society.

Steps to Forming a Christian Conscience

The STOP method is an easy framework for checking one's conscience.

S—Study. Decisions of conscience begin with knowledge. It's not a matter of being smart, but of making serious efforts to learn the facts from credible sources, such as reading what the Church teaches and consulting experts.

T—Think Together. It's best not to make decisions in isolation. A married couple shouldn't make an important moral decision without discussing it and coming to something mutually agreeable. In faith communities, this means testing out the options with other believers and seeking consensus.

O—Others' Experiences. Wisdom is also carried by others who have experienced an issue. Don't listen only to people with whom you agree. Consult with others whose experience has led them to different conclusions.

P—Pray. Important decisions should always be brought to prayer so that we can check our rationalizations and be honest before God. Prayer provides us time to listen and sort.

Done all the steps? Still unsure? This quick version of conscience formation could be summed up by asking two other questions: Is my contemplated decision life-giving? Is it generous? A well-formed conscience doesn't simply apply rules but brings the whole self to the decision and weighs how each decision will affect the common good. +

WEEKDAY READINGS

May 27-June 1

Monday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 16:11–15 / Jn 15:26–16:4a

Tuesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 16:22–34 / Jn 16:5–11

Wednesday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 17:15, 22–18:1 / Jn 16:12–15

Thursday, Easter Weekday:
Acts 18:1–8 / Jn 16:16–20

Friday, Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary:
Zep 3:14–18a or Rom 12:9–16 / Lk 1:39–56

Saturday, St. Justin:
Acts 18:23–28 / Jn 16:23b–28