



Bringing Home the Word

The Epiphany of the Lord | January 7, 2018

Come See the Christ Child

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Mary Chapin Carpenter’s wonderful Christmas carol “Come Darkness, Come Light” calls all people, regardless of their situation or where they are in their faith, to come see the Christ Child. All are welcome to see that love has come to earth and to bring whatever they have to the Child who waits for them in a manger.

Whenever I hear this song, I’m moved to tears by its simplicity. For reasons of which I’m not entirely sure, I’m reminded of the beginning section of John’s Gospel, which lays out so beautifully the coming

of Christ to earth. “Through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race,” John narrates. Later he tells us, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

What is our response? Do we come as the song invites us? Do we hold back, afraid that it’s too late for us? Do we listen to the siren songs of other gods, who whisper that they have the key to our happiness?

Today’s readings are an invitation to know ourselves as children of God, to know the hope of his call to us, and to know that this light cannot be overcome by any darkness the world has to offer.

The rush of the holidays is behind us, and a new year has begun. We have a little breathing space. In our liturgical calendar, though, the Christmas season is still with us.

There is still time to come, by whatever means we’re able, and give our lives over to Christ. +

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 60:1–6

Arise! Shine, for your light has come, the glory of the LORD has dawned upon you.

Ephesians 3:2–3a, 5–6

Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ.

Matthew 2:1–12

Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

*All are welcome
to see that love
has come to earth*

A Word From Pope Francis

Continue to overcome apathy, offering a Christian response to the social and political anxieties, which are arising in various parts of the world. I ask you to be builders of the world, to work for a better world... Don’t be observers, but immerse yourself in the reality of life, as Jesus did.

—Vigil, July 27, 2013



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I trust that Jesus wants to and can reach any soul, no matter how far away?
- Will you renew your prayer and gentle testimony to invite those who are still searching?



By Richard Rohr, OFM

Many of us have been privileged to be present with someone on his or her deathbed. In this setting we are concerned about listening to every word the person is saying—and about choosing our own words carefully. It is with this degree of reverence that we should approach the Bible: with humility.

Biblical language is more poetry than prose. It doesn't so much describe events historically as it seeks to lead us into those experiences. We can change words, but an experience changes us. Good biblical interpretation finds the balance between words that get us started, and encounters that are beyond words.

At the transfiguration (Matthew 17), Jesus appears to several disciples, his face shining "like the sun" and clothes "white as light." Afterward, Jesus cautions them: "Do not tell the vision..." In this example we observe the spiritual tradition balancing darkness and light, presence and absence, speaking and silence, seeing everything so well that we don't need to see anything in particular.

Reverencing the Bible

The Bible repeatedly finds the balance between knowing and not knowing, between using words and having humility about words. To read the Bible well, we should appreciate the balance and allow the Spirit to stir its meaning for us. But for most of us in the contemporary West, it is an uphill struggle. We prefer to read the Bible literally and to turn to it for precise answers to questions.

Need for Grounding

Ours is a time of such change that the human psyche struggles to handle it all. Recent terrorist attacks and political turmoil have shaken us deeply. No wonder many of us look to certitudes for grounding. Subconsciously, we seek to make God our private property by taking the Bible literally, reading it from our own perspective and cultural interpretation. When we do this, we lapse into a kind of rigid time capsule that does not enlighten us. God gives us just enough light for the next faith-filled step, never a blueprint for our lifetime.

The "Jesus Seminar" offers an example. Here scholars combed through New Testament texts in an effort to determine if Jesus said this or that and did or didn't use certain precise words. When we take that approach, more is lost than gained. We risk moving out of sacred space and trivializing what we might have experienced. We risk declaring victory before we have even struggled. We settle the dust by giving

ourselves answers, when the raised dust might have revealed the right questions.

Journey of Faith

Though we often wish it were so, the biblical God is not a cure-all, a cosmic answer man or woman. The God living inside of history uses it and suffers from it, gives us truths on which we can rely. But he doesn't give us all the answers. In fact, God leads us through the dilemma of our lives and invites us into a daring journey of faith. God always comes to us disguised as our lives.

The Bible offers hope, but not an escape from life. It is in life that we meet God. So very little in life is ever resolved or solved, settled or answered. There is only the crisis itself, the struggle. Our need for an answer leads us toward eternal life. God calls us to stay in the struggle—still wanting to know, but as people of faith being willing not to know. All because we can trust the One who knows all. +

PRAYER

Lord, your light gives us strength and shows us the way to God. Remove my blindness that I may see the light of goodness, peace, and love within myself and others.

From Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 8-13

Mon. Baptism of the Lord: Is 42:1-4, 6-7 or Is 55:1-11 / Acts 10:34-38 or 1 Jn 5:1-9 / Mk 1:7-11
Tue. Weekday: 1 Sm 1:9-20 / Mk 1:21-28
Wed. Weekday: 1 Sm 3:1-10, 19-20 / Mk 1:29-39

Thu. Weekday: 1 Sm 4:1-11 / Mk 1:40-45
Fri. Weekday: 1 Sm 8:4-7, 10-22a / Mk 2:1-12
Sat. Weekday: 1 Sm 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1a / Mk 2:13-17



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time | January 14, 2018

Drawn Toward Christ

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When I started in campus ministry, I was fortunate to meet a wonderful priest who had worked with college students for many years. I watched him carefully on Sundays and at student gatherings, picking up valuable information about how to talk to students, conduct myself professionally, and bring out the best in others and in myself.

Over the years we worked together, I observed many campus ministers—all age ranges, lay and ordained—seeking him out for advice and counsel. I referred more than a few. I also enjoyed our

conversations and nearly always left our meetings with more wisdom than when I started.

I wonder what Andrew and the other disciples thought when John called Jesus “the Lamb of God.” Whatever it was, they must have seen in Jesus someone who could answer their questions or give them something they were lacking. Maybe they saw a person their teacher admired and decided to seek his wisdom for themselves.

Whatever it was, something compelled them to follow Jesus, and Jesus’ own invitation to “come and see” whetted their curiosity and desire even more.

Today we might call that the impulse of the Spirit, who draws us to Christ even when we’re not sure why. The challenge for us is to have the courage to follow Jesus, ask where he’s staying, and walk with him even if we can’t see where it will lead us.

Our desire to stay with the Lord is, in itself, our comfort and our joy. +

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A Word From Pope Francis

This is a lesson for each one of us....If we let ourselves be led by the Holy Spirit, if we are able to mortify our selfishness to make room for the Lord’s love and for his will, we will find peace, we will be builders of peace and will spread peace around us.

—Address to pilgrims in Bergamo, Italy,
June 3, 2013



Sunday Readings

1 Samuel 3:3b–10, 19

The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, “Here I am.”

1 Corinthians 6:13c–15a, 17–20

The body...is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.

John 1:35–42

[Jesus said,] “You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Are you named after a saint or someone in particular?
- If so, how does that saint or person inspire you?



Becoming People of Sexual Integrity

By Jim and Susan Vogt

The U.S. statistics on premarital sex (81 to 95 percent), marital infidelity (15 to 80 percent, studies vary widely) and births to single mothers (40 percent) are open to interpretation. They might reflect a loss of morality or be manifestations of searching for how to live as sexual beings. These numbers and their interpretations can disturb Catholics, who have been taught that sex outside of marriage is wrong. A committed Christian can feel like an alien in a foreign land.

Is fidelity in marriage passé? Is chastity a virtue only for priests and vowed religious? In its fullest sense, chastity applies to everyone—not just those who take a vow of chastity—since it means using one’s sexuality according to one’s state in life.

The Church calls single people to chastity because human sexual expression carries with it the power of intimate union and of creating new life. It’s nothing to take lightly. If a man and woman aren’t committed to one another, the bond created by their sexual union isn’t a total gift of self and is thus conditional.

How does a faithful Catholic stay faithful in a culture that seems to minimize or ignore the importance of keeping the sexual expression of love

within marriage? One approach is to rail against those who engage in sex outside of marriage. But that won’t change the reality that there will always be those who can’t connect the dots between sexual intercourse and marriage. We can’t control another’s behavior. We can only love the person.

Does the Church have a message for spouses who are trying to live with sexual integrity? Is it just a matter of not having sexual affairs? After years of working with engaged and married couples, we’ve learned that infidelity usually doesn’t start with sex. It starts with not paying attention—or paying too much attention to someone or something else.

Infidelity may start as an innocent office friendship. It may be fueled by boredom with a spouse. Children naturally divert energy from marriages. But adultery also comes in nonhuman forms. The “mistress” might be excessive dedication to one’s job. Technology becomes the “other woman” when a spouse spends hours on the Internet. It might not be pornography, but it’s still taking the place of time with one’s spouse.

Chastity in marriage isn’t only about what a couple shouldn’t do, but also about what they should do. *Theology of the Body* emphasizes that our God-given gift of sexuality requires a total giving of self to the other. This sacrificial love means keeping love alive through words and deeds: letting my husband have his way even if I think my way is better or giving up a favorite TV program because

my wife wants to talk. It also includes making time to nurture romance so that one’s marriage doesn’t drift toward substitute loves. Focusing on the positive qualities of your spouse builds the relationship. It may sound flip, but a compliment a day keeps divorce away.

If you’re a parent of a teen or young adult, your concern may be the sexual mores of the younger generation. With premarital sex and cohabitation becoming normative, what’s a parent to say? Not much. The time for sharing your values is before they reach the age for these choices. After that, you continue to model wholesome relationships, pray for them, celebrate with them if a relationship grows into a permanent commitment, and stand by to help pick up the pieces if it doesn’t.

The bottom line? Are your human relationships, whether or not they involve sexual expression, life-giving and generous? What must you do to make them so? +



Lord, draw me close to your heart that I may come to know and love you more deeply.

From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 15–20

Mon. Weekday:
1 Sm 15:16–23 / Mk 2:18–22

Tue. Weekday:
1 Sm 16:1–13 / Mk 2:23–28

Wed. St. Anthony:
1 Sm 17:32–33, 37, 40–51 / Mk 3:1–6

Thu. Weekday: 1 Sm 18:6–9; 19:1–7 / Mk 3:7–12

Fri. Weekday: 1 Sm 24:3–21 / Mk 3:13–19

Sat. Weekday: 2 Sm 1:1–4, 11–12, 19, 23–27 / Mk 3:20–21



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time | January 21, 2018

The Power of Christ's Invitation

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Whether he knew it or not, Jonah was one of the most powerful prophets in Israel. He had scarcely started on his journey through Ninevah when the entire city under the direction of the king expressed sorrow for their sins and turned God's judgment to mercy. I think we all hope we might be that effective in our jobs.

If we to continue to read the Book of Jonah, though, we find that he wasn't so happy about this turn of events—he felt it

made him look weak. Did he not predict the destruction of Ninevah if they failed to repent?

But for now, we see a people so moved by the word of God that they immediately change their behavior. In Mark's Gospel, Christ's invitation is just as compelling for the four fishermen who abandon their nets and their father by the sea and immediately change their direction and their lives.

I have a hard time imagining the words that would make me drop everything to follow a completely different path. Certainly I've taken the advice of friends and family or have responded to circumstances that demanded a new direction, but only after reflection and prayer—but it took considerably longer than a single moment.

The power of the good news, however, is unlike any other to those who are open to it. When we really hear God's voice, our hearts yearn to be in his presence and, though not always easily, our souls and minds bend to his will.

How is God's word calling you to change today?+

The power of the good news is unlike any other to those who are open to it.

A Word From Pope Francis

For every Christian, the proclamation and witnessing of the Gospel is never an isolated act. This is important... No evangelizer acts, as Paul VI recalled, "in virtue of a... personal inspiration, but in union with the mission of the Church and in her name."

—Address to International Union of Superiors General, May 8, 2013



Sunday Readings

Jonah 3:1–5, 10

They proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

1 Corinthians 7:29–31

For the world in its present form is passing away.

Mark 1:14–20

Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I understand that putting off the voice of God is also putting off all the good, joy, and peace he wants to bring about by what he is asking?



Seven Divine Works of Art

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

One thing you can say about Catholics: We aren't afraid of things. In fact, it's the opposite. We know that creation is good and that created things can serve as a window through which we see something of God. For us, things are not an obstacle to grace but a means of grace. This is true in those celebrations we call sacraments.

Humans are body, mind, and spirit, and we Catholics come to God with our whole being—not with words alone. We do not simply say, "Jesus is my Savior." We Catholics do more.

We go into the baptismal tomb where we die with Christ, then plunge into the waters of birth in him. We come up from the Church's womb with rebirth and new life to be oiled and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and fed on the Body and Blood of Christ at the Eucharist. Catholicism is an incarnated religion. It uses the ordinary stuff of this world to touch the world beyond.

An artist is always somehow embodied in his or her work. We can look at a painting and say, "That is a Picasso." We hear a piece of music and say, "That's clearly Beethoven."

In a similar way we can look at the sacraments and say, "That's God!" We

see the artist revealed in the work of art. That's what the sacraments are—seven great artworks revealing the Creator.

Portraits of God

Baptism reveals God as the womb and source of all life. When I see a newly baptized infant in his or her parents' arms, I get a glimpse of parental God embracing us—loving us, not because of what we have done, but because we are God's children. Confirmation reveals our destiny; we are to live to make visible in outward signs the "personality" of our Creator God. We are to be signs of wisdom, judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and awe.

Eucharist says it all: We become present to the Lord who died that we might live—who feeds us with his Body and Blood so that we become one body filled with his Spirit.

Reconciliation reveals a God ever ready to forgive and embrace us. Anointing shows us a God who heals, longing for the end of sickness, pain, and disease and calling us—along with all creation—to wholeness. Holy orders provides a glimpse of a God who shepherds the flock, leading and sanctifying all into the kingdom.

And what a powerful sign we have in marriage! In the faithful, total, through-thick-and-thin, for-better-or-worse love the couple promises each other in the rite of marriage, all who witness the sacrament can glimpse how God loves us:

faithfully, totally, through thick and thin, for better or worse. At their wedding, the bride and groom receive many wonderful gifts. But the gifts they receive are not as wonderful as the gift the couple gives us. They give us a sacrament, a sign of who God is.

Seeing More

As Americans, we value efficiency and production. We like getting to the point and getting the job done. Sometimes this can blind us to the symbolic function of things and events.

Sacraments "produce" through symbols. Sacraments help us see more. They help us see God in a baby's smile or in the touch of a loved one; they help us to find God in the "I'm sorry" of someone who has hurt us. The sacraments, and all of creation, reveal the divine Creator artist. +



Lord, you call me to do the work of God in the world. Help me to say yes to your work of peace and reconciliation.

From Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time,

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 22–27

Mon. Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children: 2 Sm 5:1–7, 10 / Mk 3:22–30
 Tue. Weekday: 2 Sm 6:12b–15, 17–19 / Mk 3:31–35
 Wed. St. Francis de Sales: 2 Sm 7:4–17 / Mk 4:1–20

Thu. Conversion of St. Paul: Acts 22:3–16 or Acts 9:1–22 / Mk 16:15–18
 Fri. Sts. Timothy and Titus: 2 Tm 1:1–8 or Ti 1:1–5 / Mk 4:26–34
 Sat. Weekday: 2 Sm 12:1–7a, 10–17 / Mk 4:35–41



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time | January 28, 2018

The Authority of Jesus' Word

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When my children were small, I had the power all mothers have to soothe little cuts, scrapes, and bruises with a single kiss. Mother kisses, and the hurt is lessened or disappears altogether.

It worked wonders until the day my daughter burned her hand when she touched a steam pot. With full confidence, she lifted her fingers to be kissed—and then realized they still hurt. Over and over she lifted them to my lips, and over and over I kissed them until I finally admitted we needed to

try something else. Cold water and a washcloth eventually soothed the pain, and the limits of my magic touch were suddenly apparent.

Jesus' power is of a different magnitude. It's evident when he reads and preaches with authority (from the Greek word *exousia*, which means "out of himself"—as opposed to studying or having a title thrust on him). It's even more manifest when he simply rebukes a demon and the demon leaves his human host—not because he wants to, but because he knows true authority when he sees and hears it.

It's no wonder the people are astonished. They've never seen this kind of immediate response. This is no mother's kiss to heal the little hurts of life, no magician pretending to have power he doesn't. This is the Son of God come to cast out evil itself and open the Scriptures so the people can hear God's word in a new and powerful way.

Today, let us turn to him to heal our wounds and make us whole. +

***This is the Son of God
come to cast out
evil itself.***

A Word From Pope Francis

What an illusion it is when people today shut their eyes in the face of sickness and disability! They fail to understand the real meaning of life...The world does not become better because only apparently "perfect" people live there...but when human solidarity, mutual acceptance, and respect increase.

—Jubilee for the Sick and Persons With Disabilities, June 12, 2016



Sunday Readings

Deuteronomy 18:15–20

[Moses said,] "A prophet like me will the LORD, your God, raise up for you...."

1 Corinthians 7:32–35

I should like you to be free of anxieties.

Mark 1:21–28

Jesus...said, "Quiet! Come out of him!"...He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Am I letting myself be tricked into eating any moral junk food that isn't healthy for my long-term spiritual and moral flourishing?



Why We Need the Church

By Thomas H. Groome

Ever wonder why Catholics emphasize going to church as a way of keeping the Sabbath holy? Of course Protestant Christians are committed to Sunday worship, but we add a note of obligation. For us, participating in Sunday Mass is a privilege but also a serious responsibility. We may not miss Sunday Mass—except for some good reason. And, far more than attending as spectators, we are expected to function as active members in a community.

The sense of Sunday obligation is only one instance of the communal emphasis that is core to Catholicism. Catholic Christian faith is essentially communal; we are disciples in community and a community of disciples. We're convinced that God reaches out to us as community and that we most effectively reach out to God together. So, we may not simply watch Mass on TV or go to a mountaintop for our own religious experience.

It is through Christian community that we access the Scriptures and traditions that forge our identity in faith, to the sacraments that sustain us, to the models of holiness in the saints, to people to pray with us on our journey home to God. Indeed, Catholic spirituality calls us to a personal relationship with God, but through Christian community.

In Our Nature

The Bible highlights the communal nature of faith. Indeed, it seems that God designed our human nature as relational. When God differentiated the lonely Adam into male and female, he made them “companions” to each other. Then, beginning with God’s call of Abraham and Sarah to parent a people, Hebrew faith is lived as community.

Likewise, early Christians favored communal metaphors to describe their shared discipleship to Jesus. Paul’s image of the Church as Body of Christ was the most compelling. Within this body, the hand and foot, the eye and ear, and all individual parts are vitally important; yet all the organs must function together as one (see 1 Corinthians 12:26). By baptism, we are bonded together as one with Christ and each other; “we though many, are one body in Christ (Romans 12:5). And all members must contribute their gifts for “building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

Rooted in History

During the Reformation, Protestant leaders rebelled against the exaggerated power of the Church, charging it with replacing rather than representing God. As a consequence, they de-emphasized the communal nature of Christian faith. When the Catholic Church regrouped at the Council of Trent, it agreed that people must have their own personal relationship with God but that our faith must be realized through Christian community.

Catholicism is so intent on the communal nature of faith as to propose that even death doesn’t break the bond of baptism. So, we can ask those in the eternal presence of God to pray for us—with Mary holding pride of place among this communion of saints. Likewise, we can intercede for departed loved ones who may need “purgation” in order to enter the eternal presence of God. In death, “life is changed, not ended” (Preface, Mass of Resurrection) and certainly not the bond of baptism.

This communal emphasis of Catholicism requires that we be active in a local parish. If we don’t like our assigned one, the 1983 Code of Canon Law gives us permission to “shop around” a bit. It is imperative that we find a local Catholic community to call home and share our time, talents, and treasure to sustain its mission. For Catholics at least, we’re all in this together. +



Lord, you created me to live in the freedom of your love. Give me the courage to share your love with all people.

From Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time,

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 29–February 3

Mon. Weekday: 2 Sm 15:13–14, 30; 16:5–13 / Mk 5:1–20

Tue. Weekday: 2 Sm 18:9–10, 14b, 24–25a, 30—19:3 / Mk 5:21–43

Wed. St. John Bosco, Priest: 2 Sm 24:2, 9–17 / Mk 6:1–6

Thu. Weekday: 1 Kgs 2:1–4, 10–12 / Mk 6:7–13

Fri. Presentation of the Lord: Mal 3:1–4 / Heb 2:14–18 / Lk 2:22–40 or 2:22–32

Sat. Weekday: 1 Kgs 3:4–13 / Mk 6:30–34