



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 10, 2017

The Hour of Awakening

By Mary Katharine Deeley

One of my favorite retreat exercises is to ask participants to think of a motto that could guide them for the rest of their lives. What fragment of a prayer, scriptural text, or saint quotation would let people know how you want to live your life?

If nothing comes to mind, I give them Bibles and invite them to skim the epistles and Gospels for possibilities, reminding them that this is their motto for today and that they can change it tomorrow.

Once they have their mottoes, I ask them to reflect on what it would look

like if they lived with the motto always on their mind. The exercise helps focus people on what they do well and on what needs a little work.

Over the years, I've returned frequently to the beginning of the epistle that will be read on this day: "Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another." I remember when I've done that well and when—driven by anger, fear, or ego—I've fallen far short of the ideal. It has always appealed to me as a wonderful motto.

Today, however, I'm struck by Romans 13:11: "It is the hour now for you to wake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

I think there are many times when we're asleep and unaware of how we hurt others by what we say and do.

What if we saw everything as Christ did, touched everyone as Christ touched them?

If we put on Christ, we wouldn't need to tell people which words we hope will guide us. We'd simply become the living example to them. †

*Live your motto.
Live like Christ.*

A Word From Pope Francis

If you are not capable of performing fraternal reproof with love, with charity, in truth and with humility, you will offend, damage that person's heart: you will create an extra tale that wounds and you will become a blind hypocrite, as Jesus says...a sign which perhaps can help us: when one sees something wrong and feels that he should correct it but perceives a certain pleasure in doing so, then it is time to pay attention, because that is not the Lord's way. In the Lord there is always...the difficulty of doing something good.

—Morning meditation, September 12, 2014



Sunday Readings

Ezekiel 33:7-9

You, son of man—I have appointed you as a sentinel for the house of Israel.

Romans 13:8-10

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 18:15-20

[Jesus said,] "...Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Do I find the idea of charitable correction uncomfortable? Why or why not?
- How willing am I to receive correction from my peers? My spouse? My child? My boss?



How Can I Be Expected to Love My Enemies?

By Fr. William H. Shannon

Love my enemies? What in the world is Jesus thinking about: Why, there are times when I have trouble loving some of my *friends*! How can I possibly be expected to love my enemies?

If that's your reaction, you have lots of company. To reflect prayerfully about these strong words of Jesus, let me point out that this command is one of four different love commands in the Gospels.

First, there is the general Christian responsibility to "love God above all and your neighbor as yourself." Then there is the general Christian responsibility in today's second reading to "love your neighbor as yourself." Then there is the command that relates the disciples of Jesus to one another. Jesus says, "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you" (John 15:12). Finally there is the command that calls for a love that includes everybody. It's not enough to love friendly neighbors or other disciples. We must love without limits. For Jesus says: "I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

The first two commands make sense. Peace and harmony in family and society come from loving those we are close to. The disciples' loving of one another, though demanding at times, also makes good sense. For Jesus' disciples are called to imitate him. But the command, "Love your enemies," doesn't seem to make any sense at all. It seems to go against fundamental principles of justice and the duty we have to love ourselves and not allow ourselves to be victimized by others.

No Wiggle Room

The maddening thing is that this central teaching of Jesus is so all-inclusive. It allows us no wiggle room. We cannot choose which enemies we will love and which we will not. Nor can our love be simply an attitude. We have to act. We must do good to them even if they hate us. We must ask God's blessings for them even if they curse us. We have to pray for them even if they mistreat us.

The love Jesus calls us to is unconditional. It brooks no ifs. It's a love that

says, "I love you, no matter what you do or say, for you are the image of God."

Finding Our Sisters and Brothers

There's a story about a rabbi who was discussing with his disciples the difference between day and night: "When," he asked, "does the night end and the day begin?" One disciple replied, "Is it the moment when you can tell the difference between a sheep and a dog?" "No," the rabbi answered, "it isn't that." Then peering deeply into their eyes, he said, "It is the moment when you look into the face you have never seen before and recognize the stranger as a sister or brother. Until that time comes, no matter how bright the day, it is still night for you."

A moving story, but we have to take it a bit further. We have to be able to look into the faces of neighbors we *have* seen and responded to with anger, impatience, ill will. To look into the face of such people and see a sister or brother: This is the kind of unconditional, nonviolent love to which Jesus calls each of us. †

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PRAYER
Lord, I am grateful for your gifts of love, mercy, and forgiveness. Help me to share these gifts with those who have hurt me. Amen.
From *Grateful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 11-16

Mon. Weekday:
Col 1:24-2:3 / Lk 6:6-11
Tue. Weekday:
Col 2:6-15 / Lk 6:12-19
Wed. St. John Chrysostom:
Col 3:1-11 / Lk 6:20-26

Thu. Exaltation of the Holy Cross:
Nm 21:4b-9 / Phil 2:6-11 / Jn 3:13-17
Fri. Our Lady of Sorrows: 1 Tm 1:1-2, 12-14 / Jn 19:25-27 or Lk 2:33-35
Sat. Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian:
1 Tm 1:15-17 / Lk 6:43-49