



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 27, 2019

Appreciating God's Word

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In the days of the exile in Babylon, the Jews were unable to practice their religion, to gather as a community, or to hear the words of the Torah, which had so guided them in their lives as a people of God. I have always been taken by the description of this reading of the Law in Nehemiah, which occurs shortly after their return from exile. As Ezra reads, the people weep, rejoicing because they were hearing God's words to them as though for the first time and were overjoyed because God had brought them back home. I can't say I

have ever wept at the beauty and power of Scripture when it is read at Mass, nor have I seen others do so. When we haven't been deprived of a treasure, we sometimes take it for granted and fail to appreciate the gift that it is.

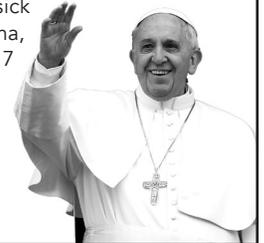
In the Gospel, Jesus reads the words of Isaiah and declares to those in the synagogue that the words have been fulfilled. The people's reaction, which we hear as Luke 4 continues (next week), simply is not the same. Throughout our own lives, we have reacted to the comfort and challenge of the Gospel in different ways at different times. Sometimes we may be touched by what we hear, but I wonder if we often do not allow God's word to affect us as much as it could. Maybe today we can really open ourselves to what the Lord has to say in the sacred stories. Maybe today we can recognize the true value of God's revelation, care, and call to us in the Bible. +

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A Word from Pope Francis

We have before us Jesus hidden yet present in the Eucharist....On the altar, we worship the flesh of Jesus; in these our brothers and sisters, we encounter the wounds of Jesus. The Christian adores Jesus, the Christian seeks Jesus, the Christian can recognize the wounds of Jesus.

—Greeting the sick at Fátima, May 13, 2017



Sunday Readings

Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

[Ezra said,] "Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not lament, do not weep!"

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free.

Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

[Jesus] stood up to read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I make time to read Scripture outside of Mass?
- When I read Scripture, do I take time to contemplate what the Lord is telling me with the words I read?

Becoming Like Children

By Kathy Coffey

[Jesus said,] “Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself... is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3–4).

This scene captures the essence of this Scripture passage: A girl about age three, naked, runs into the surf at a beach. Her parents cheer, the sun spills liquid honey into the sea, the seagulls sweep overhead in graceful arcs. She spreads her arms as if to embrace the ocean and squeals with delight as foam brushes tiny toes.

Huddled on a towel beneath a straw hat, I admire her free abandon. “Become like one of these,” says Jesus. At that moment, I can see why.

When Jesus asks us to become like children, we get a bit queasy. We remember the bullies of our childhood, the sense of powerlessness, our dependence on caregivers who might or might not honor that trust.

When we relive childhood now, it’s not always pleasant. Placing ourselves in situations where we’re clueless restores the pain of the lost child. Being the awkward new kid in the advanced class or maneuvering in a strange vocabulary, we panic. When we’ve never heard of the disease we have or buy a house not knowing an escrow from an easement,



we wobble as insecurely as toddlers.

But by the same token, when we respond to touching music, smell a hyacinth, or notice a cloud castle, we’re in that magic childhood zone.

The Real Deal

One more obstacle to misunderstanding this passage might be the cute

stereotypes of children that abound in the media. Those sweetsy types must be concocted by people who don’t know the genuine article. Contrast the saccharine with the Real Deal. Real children ask excruciating questions that adults deem “impolite.” They get wildly excited about stuff that leaves us blasé.

Jesus knew the Real Deal because he welcomed them. Children must have been instinctively drawn to him. They crawled all over him with snotty noses, grubby shirts, and unedited ramblings. Furthermore, he knew childhood from the inside: his own, direct experience of being heartbreakingly vulnerable.

Jesus came to earth quietly, humbly, as a child, without fanfare or prestige. He matured, as most children do, “in wisdom, age, and grace,” as part of an outwardly ordinary family. In doing so, he blessed all children; all adults who honor the child within; all bumbling, imperfect human families. Knowing that Jesus probably spilled some grape juice,

we can forget the misconception that in family life, holy = perfect.

Parent-Child Bond

In modeling the finest parts of childhood, what we are trying to do is recapture that free abandon, that total trust that comes from knowing God as dear parent. If God loves us and looks out for every need, can’t we throw ourselves into God’s arms?

If we become like children, we can leave behind our adult hesitations, not lugging the laundry list of our wrongs. We know all is forgiven. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux spoke of casting herself on God as she would on her beloved papa: sleeping fearlessly in his arms, hiding her face in his hair.

One of the devastating stories that surfaced following the 2004 tsunami described parents whose children were torn from their arms by the force of the waves. People worldwide could relate to that tragedy and ache for such a loss. Similarly, if we are separated from our childlike selves, we are wrenched from so much: all that is best in us, our proper relationship to God, and our hope for the future. +

PRAYER

*Lord, you created all people equal.
Open my eyes to recognize
the dignity of all people and
my heart to love unconditionally.*

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

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 28–February 2

Monday, St. Thomas Aquinas:
Heb 9:15, 24–28 / Mk 3:22–30

Tuesday, Weekday:
Heb 10:1–10 / Mk 3:31–35

Wednesday, Weekday:
Heb 10:11–18 / Mk 4:1–20

Thursday, St. John Bosco:
Heb 10:19–25 / Mk 4:21–25

Friday, Weekday:
Heb 10:32–39 / Mk 4:26–34

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

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