

Wednesday, August 1, 2018

Jer 15:10, 16-21; Mt 13:44-46

St. Alphonsus Liguori, bishop and doctor of the church

Paige Byrne Shortal

The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field ... and out of joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

One of the books that formed me into the person I am is Judith Viorst's Necessary Losses. Its premise is simple, yet life-changing: to gain one must lose. We lose the womb to gain life in this world; the safety of enfolding arms to walk on our own; potential of "anyone" for the companionship of one "someone." And so on. These are real losses, but usually experienced in anticipation of something so much better that the sacrifice may not be noticed. And that, says Jesus, is what the kingdom is like: We sacrifice, but out of joy. What keeps people from enduring the loss in order to receive so much? We see it more and more among young people for whom "adult" has become a verb, as in, "Please don't make me adult today." (Shudder.) Sometimes, we cling to the lesser good we know instead of taking the risk and investing in that field where the treasure is buried.

Please God, help me to choose you and the life you promise.

Thursday, August 2, 2018

Jer 18:1-6; Mt 13:47-53

Paige Byrne Shortal

Then the word of the LORD came to me ... like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel.

I must confess, I am of a certain age and much of my ability to pray the Scriptures is due to the music of the 70s. Before you scoff, realize that this music is largely responsible for our sense of intimacy with the Divine and the language we use to address God as we sing "Abba Father," "Here I Am, Lord," and "Only This I Want." It is much like that intimacy known by Jeremiah, who experienced God as close as an unwashed loincloth or in today's first reading, the potter molding and forming the clay. God the Almighty is true, and so is God who lives in our hearts. Jesus at the right hand of the Father is true, and so is brother Jesus who walked among us. I like to think that we needn't choose.

In the words of the song, "Mold us and fashion us into the image of Jesus your Son."

Friday, August 3, 2018

Jer 26:1-9; Mt 13:54-58

Paige Byrne Shortal

A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house. And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.

Both readings today are about love and frustration. Jeremiah is a man of vision, albeit reluctant, who must speak the words God has given him. This act of love, for that is what it is, is greeted with threats of violence. Jesus tries to reach the people he knew best in this world, his family and neighbors, only to be turned away. That he could not heal or touch the hearts of his nearest

and dearest is one of the saddest moments in the Gospels and should be reassurance that Jesus understands. He knows the frustration of a preacher whose congregation will not be moved. He sits beside the counselor or teacher or coach when someone in their charge is bent on self-destruction. He's on the hotline with the crisis worker; in the heart of every friend who feels helpless as someone dear follows the wrong path; weeps with parents who cannot reach their children. Jesus understands.

Jesus, friend of the suffering, give us what we need to do what we can for others and, when our efforts seem ineffective, help us to continue to love.

Saturday, August 4, 2018

Jer 26:11-16, 24; Mt 14:1-12

St. John Vianney, priest

Paige Byrne Shortal

This man deserves death; he has prophesied against this city as you have heard with your own ears.

“Speaking truth to power” is the focus of both of today’s readings. The phrase might be on the edge of becoming a cliché; nevertheless, the act of simply telling the truth to someone who is threatened by that truth is often a dangerous business. A friend told me recently that she didn’t put out a yard sign for her candidate because she was afraid of being vandalized. Another said he didn’t display bumper-stickers after finding his car “keyed.” Some find themselves unwelcome at family gatherings or ostracized in church. But most remain silent because life is easier and I get it. The truth will always offend someone. Perhaps the first task is to find inoffensive ways of telling that truth. Reduce profanity, accusations, exaggeration, and above all, self-righteousness. Calm, reasoned truth-telling is what is needed.

Lord, teach me your ways, guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior.

Sunday, August 5, 2018

Daily Bread for August 5, 2018

Mark Bartholomew



When the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus. - *John 6:24*

Monday, August 6, 2018

Dn 7:9-10, 13-14; 2 Pt 1:16-19; Mk 9:2-10

Transfiguration of the Lord

Jeanne Lischer

And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white.

What a moment! First Jesus is transformed in some eye-popping, dazzling way. The disciples see him talking to Moses and Elijah, Hebrew leaders who'd been dead for hundreds of years. And then the cloud came. It enveloped them. It surrounded them. And it spoke to them, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." What an amazing, inspiring, frightening moment! And just like that, it's over. Such moments don't last. Such glimpses of glory come and go. Maybe it's a starry sky or the first crocus of spring. Maybe it's the moment you held your son or daughter for the first time. Maybe it's a loved one's final moments. It's hard to describe, but you're aware of God's presence and you know you'll never be the same.

Open our eyes, mysterious God, to the many moments of glory all around us.

Tuesday, August 7, 2018

Jer 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22; Mt 14:22-36

Jeanne Lischer

When [Peter] saw how strong the wind was he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Most of our fears are grounded in the unfamiliar, the unknown, all the "what ifs" we cannot possibly answer. What if I've made the wrong decision about this job? What if my baby has a serious health problem? What if my marriage falls apart? Our fears can also be things we know and simply don't like: spiders, snakes, heights, the dark, flying. Peter apparently wasn't afraid to leave the boat; it's only when the winds began to blow that he panicked. Jesus reached out to him and reassured him that he would not sink. Like Peter, we are always moving between trusting confidence and fearful despair. Faith in God's presence doesn't take away our fears or make us immune to the storms of life, but God is always there to calm our fears.

Be our sure foundation when we are afraid, O God Most Holy.

Wednesday, August 8, 2018

Jer 31:1-7; Mt 15:21-28

St. Dominic, priest

Jeanne Lischer

It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.

This is one of those passages I would have left out of the Bible if I'd been the one in charge of making such decisions. This Jesus does not sound like the Jesus we sing about when we sing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Jesus' first reaction to this Canaanite woman's desperate pleas is to say he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In other words, this Gentile, foreign woman is beyond the scope of Jesus' ministry. When she refuses to leave, Jesus ignores her. And then he insults her by essentially calling her a dog. Brave and fierce, the woman then challenges Jesus, saying that even dogs get crumbs. Finally, Jesus commends her faith and assures her that her daughter has been healed.

For faith that makes us courageous and open to all your people, we pray.

Thursday, August 9, 2018

Jer 31:31-34; Mt 16:13-23

Jeanne Lischer

But who do you say that I am?

"But who do you say that I am?" It's not an easy question to answer, is it? The Jesus I know fed thousands on a hillside, not because they believed all the "right" things, but because they were hungry. The Jesus I know didn't mince words when it came to injustice or corruption or religious hypocrisy. The Jesus I know reached out to the outcasts of his day — even if it meant breaking the rules of purity and religious tradition. The Jesus I know modeled extravagant grace and radical compassion, mercy and love for the least and the lost. The Jesus I know challenged bigotry and hatred in the name of religion and expands my understanding of who God loves.

"Who do you say that I am?" For those of us who claim to follow Jesus, this is the question we are challenged to keep answering throughout our lives.

Lord Jesus, help us to know and follow you.

Friday, August 10, 2018
2 Cor 9:6-10; Jn 12:24-26
St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr
Jeanne Lischer

Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

In the Bible, God is described in many ways: Lord, Rock, Refuge, Shepherd, Judge. But first and foremost, God is a Giver, a giver who gives us the gift of life. As creatures created in God's image, we are therefore created to be givers. And so the people of God are commanded, admonished and encouraged to give. Give of the abundance God gives us — time, skills, talents and yes, money. For Paul, generosity is not a choice to be made; generosity is a mark of our identity in Christ. Generosity becomes who we are, not what we do.

Great giving God, grant us a spirit of cheerful generosity as we grow in our giving.

Saturday, August 11, 2018
Hb 1:12—2:4; Mt 17:14-20
St. Clare, religious
Jeanne Lischer

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move.

Really, Jesus? A teeny tiny bit of faith can move a mountain? Okay, so maybe Jesus is exaggerating a little here. We usually hear his words as criticism, because we know all too well that many things we work and hope and pray for never happen. Illnesses are not cured, relationships falter, people are still hungry, and peace seems impossible. It seems that Jesus is telling us our faith is not strong enough. But perhaps Jesus' response to his disciples is not meant to imply that they are lacking. Is it possible that Jesus is suggesting that they already have the faith they seek? Maybe Jesus could see something in them that they could not see: faith enough to move mountains.

For faith, trust and confidence, O God, we pray.

Sunday, August 12, 2018
Daily Bread for August 12, 2018

Mark Bartholomew



... and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother?" - *John 6:42*

Monday, August 13, 2018

Ez 1:2-5, 24-28c; Mt 17:22-27

Mary Joshi

But that we may not offend [temple officials], give [the coin] to them for me and for you. Jesus advises Peter to pay the temple tax even though they were not obliged to pay it as sometimes it is more important to maintain good relations than it is to be correct. Several years ago, there was a popular little book entitled Don't Sweat the Small Stuff. It was filled with tidbits of advice on how to avoid daily stress by maintaining a healthy perspective on life's bigger picture. The well-being of marriages, families and faith communities could benefit from this perspective. Like Peter's convoluted quest to acquire the tax coin, sometimes compromising individual desires for the common good may be inconvenient and require patience, but the end result is worth it.

May I discern when the need for peace is more important than my need to be right.

Tuesday, August 14, 2018

Ez 2:8—3:4; Mt 18:1-5, 10, 12-14

St. Maximilian Kolbe, priest and martyr

Mary Joshi

Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.

I can't help but smile when I see a hungry baby being fed. Long before the spoon reaches their

mouth, the baby's mouth opens wide in excited anticipation trusting that, not only will it taste good, but that it will satisfy their hunger. My mind kept seeing this image when I reflected upon both Ezekiel's vision of savoring the written scroll placed before him by God, and Jesus' explanation that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven must become humble like a child. Do I approach the word of God with the same open-mouthed eagerness and trust of a child? Do I savor God's message with that single-minded focus that will allow it to guide my directions and choices?

You invite us, Lord, to take and eat. May we taste and see the goodness you have to offer.

Wednesday, August 15, 2018

Rv 11:19, 12:1-6a, 10ab; 1 Cor 15:20-27; Lk 1:39-56

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Mary Joshi

From this day all generations will call me blessed.

I've never met anyone who considered themselves too rich. Most of us dream of what we could do if we were only a bit wealthier. No matter how much we have, it is part of human nature to occasionally desire either more or something different than what we already possess: bigger savings, a more perfect spouse, a better boss, a slimmer body. Is this why "God sends the rich away empty?" Not because God has failed to bless them, but because they have failed to recognize the blessings they have been given. Mary's position was not an enviable one at this stage of her life and pregnancy, yet she was overwhelmed with joy at what God had done for her — a lowly servant! How incredibly rich I am when I stop to appreciate what is already before me!

My spirit rejoices in God my Savior...the Almighty has done great things for me.

Thursday, August 16, 2018

Ez 12:1-12; Mt 18:21—19:1

Mary Joshi

How often must I forgive? ...not seven times but seventy-seven times.

Someone once compared the effects of sin to the effects put upon our bodies by extreme physical exertion. It takes a while to feel its full impact, but when it does, the resulting pain and anger stiffen our hearts and even the most mundane actions remind us of the offense in minute detail. Anger and pride prevent us from being the person we want to be — restricting our ability to enjoy life in a way we once did. Only mercy and compassion can loosen the grip of the hardened heart, but with a committed effort the forgiveness needed to make us feel like ourselves again is possible. Forgiveness takes time, patience and practice, but without it we cannot renew our sense of joy and peace.

Divine Healer, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Friday, August 17, 2018

Ez 16:1-15, 60, 63

Mary Joshi

A man shall ... be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

Once again, the Pharisees test Jesus in hopes that he will cross that punishable line of rejecting the law of Moses. A controversy was playing out within the Jewish hierarchy of Jesus' time, between the liberal and conservative theologians concerning the grounds for divorce. Instead of falling for their trap and arguing about the technical aspects of divorce, Jesus speaks of the ideals of sacred marriage — knowing full well that human nature will sometimes fall short. Taken together with the wonderful story of Ezekiel, marriage — like all sacred relationships — is to be built on faithfulness, respect and compassion for each other. In other words, it is to be modeled on God's own steadfast love and mercy for us.

Lord of life, may we treat those you have placed in our lives with the love and mercy you have shown to us.

Saturday, August 18, 2018

Ez 18:1-10, 13b, 30-32; Mt 19:13-15

Mary Joshi

Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them.

A friend once sent me a photo of a sign outside a Vancouver church, "If you are more fortunate than others, build a longer table not a taller fence." The disciples try to shoo the children away not because they dislike children, but probably because they felt Jesus was too important and too busy to be bothered by their pesky questions and behaviors. Jesus, however, acknowledges and blesses them. He corrects the disciples' sense of worthiness by saying that God's kingdom belongs to those without status, authority or pretention — to those who do not expect privilege but recognize it as gift. How often do I see people as unworthy of my time or attention, or whom I avoid because they annoy me or try my patience? Would Jesus admonish me for wanting to shoo them away?

Where there is impatience and intolerance, Lord, let me sow your love.

Sunday, August 19, 2018

Daily Bread for August 19, 2018

Mark Bartholomew



"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever." - *John 6:51*

Monday, August 20, 2018

Ez 24:15-24; Mt 19:16-22

St. Bernard, abbot and doctor of the church

Miguel Dulick

You shall rot away because of your sins and groan one to another!

Ezekiel was not the last prophet, but he sure sounds like it! His book is a massive text, almost a Bible in itself. The "minor prophets" followed, a trickle-down effect till God falls silent for 400 years, when John the Baptist burst upon the scene, prepping for Jesus, who adopted Ezekiel's title "Son of man" as his own. Ezekiel's message is nothing if not dreadful, the utter destruction of Israel. The rich young man in today's Gospel faces a similar catastrophe, at the personal level. Invited by Jesus to "sell what you have and give to the poor," the man collapses: "He went away sad, for he had many possessions." Sad we are, when "mine" trumps "thine."

Keep us mindful of you, O God, who gave us birth!

Tuesday, August 21, 2018

Ez 28:1-10; Mt 19:23-30

St. Pius X, pope

Miguel Dulick

And yet you are a man, and not a god, however you may think yourself like a god.

The prince of Tyre makes a mistake common to many politicians: he thinks he's God! Ezekiel calls him out on it, and you would not want to be on the receiving end of that tongue-lashing.

“Foreigners ... shall draw their swords against your beautiful wisdom, they shall run them through your splendid apparel.” Jesus’ message is basically the same: “It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.” His disciples are “greatly astonished” at this. But no, you rich are not God’s “mini-me;” you’re swollen, sweaty, stinky beasts of burden!

O Lord, surely you shall do justice for your people and have pity on your servants.

Wednesday, August 22, 2018

Ez 34:1-11; Mt 20:1-16

Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Miguel Dulick

I swear I am coming against these shepherds!

Foreigners are always a concern, but the real problem is home-grown. The shepherds of Israel are not pasturing their flock, they’re eating them! Item: “You did not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured.” Item: “You did not bring back the strayed nor seek the lost.” God’s solution? “I myself will look after and tend my sheep.” Jesus gives a concrete example of our Shepherd-Lord in his parable of a man who hires workers for his vineyard all day long and pays each one a full day’s wage, including those who worked only one hour. God believes in sheep-equality! Love is what God gives, not what we earn. Can we be as generous in our measure of others’ worth?

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Thursday, August 23, 2018

Ez 36:23-28; Mt 22:1-14

Miguel Dulick

I will prove the holiness of my great name.

Ezekiel proclaims the news Israel has been waiting for: “I will ... bring you back to your own land,” says the Lord God. But wait, it gets better: “I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts.” Beautiful! But what if the people don’t want to go back home, like the dilemma a king faces in Jesus’ parable when wedding guests refuse to come to the feast? They even kill the messengers! So the king updates his guest list and, in a detail Matthew makes sure we see, he invites everyone “bad and good alike.”

A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.

Friday, August 24, 2018

Rv 21:9b-14; Jn 1:45-51

St. Bartholomew, apostle

Miguel Dulick

Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!

Some scholars say Nazareth never existed since they can’t find it on any map from Jesus’ time. It seems as if Bartholomew (the apostle honored today) dubbed “Nathanael” in John’s Gospel, agrees with the skeptics. When told that the Messiah is right here, right now, fresh from

Nazareth, our saint responds, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” For Nathanael, Nazareth is nothing. But he quickly changes his mind when he actually meets Jesus, who loves Nathanael’s candor: “Here is a true child of Israel. There is no duplicity in him!” A year ago, some folks thought an eclipse would be no big deal — till they saw it! Sometimes, the news is true.

O Lord, you are near to all who call upon you, who call upon you in truth

Saturday, August 25, 2018

Ez 43:1-7ab; Mt 23:1-12

Miguel Dulick

I saw the temple was filled with the glory of the Lord.

My hometown is named for today’s saint, King Louis IX of France. An iconic statue in front of our art museum shows his sword upraised. Is that a problem? A humble Franciscan tertiary, but also a warrior who led two Crusades. A student of Thomas Aquinas at the University of Paris, yet he died stranded in Carthage at age 56. Did he have a vision like Ezekiel’s gorgeous apocalypse? “The angel led me to the gate which faces the east, and there I saw the glory of the God of Israel.” King Louis always knew his throne was just a placeholder. As the “voice” tells Ezekiel, “This is where my throne shall be ... forever.” A saint can be anyone.

I will hear what God proclaims; for you, O Lord, proclaim peace!

Sunday, August 26, 2018

Daily Bread for August 26, 2018

Mark Bartholomew



"Master, to whom shall we go?" - *John 6:68*

Monday, August 27, 2018

2 Thes 1:1-5, 11-12; Mt 23:13-22

St. Monica

Patricia Russell

We always pray for you.

When tragedy strikes, people of faith are quick to offer "thoughts and prayers," and more cynical folks are equally fast at scoffing at what they see as an empty gesture, instead calling for swift action and not "just words." As a people of God, however, our actions must come from reflective discernment rooted in and buoyed by a rich prayer life. We lack a vital piece of who we are as church if we don't immediately turn to God for consolation, inspiration and guidance. Prayers were continually offered for the community of the Thessalonians to help them endure persecutions and afflictions and to support their faith, but it wasn't just a hollow or ceremonial gesture. It was the foundation of their relationship of solidarity with others building the church, and it remains equally vital today in leading us in how to support one another.

Hear our prayers, loving Father, and guide us to effect change that benefits all your children.

Tuesday, August 28, 2018

2 Thes 2:1-3a, 14-17; Mt 23:23-26

St. Augustine, bishop and doctor of the church

Patricia Russell

Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel!

We offer charity when seeking justice is too complicated and divisive. The safe path sidesteps the backlash of addressing the roots of injustice. Demanding that society change its practices, policies and prejudices opens us to examining our own complicity in allowing unjust systems to remain. We submerge ourselves in trifles to avoid the difficult bigger picture. St. Augustine in *The Confessions* detailed his conversion which included an agonizing examination of his once profoundly flawed character and the development of a deeply Christian conscience. He wrote, "When my most searching scrutiny had drawn up all my vileness from the secret depths of my soul and heaped it in my heart's sight, a mighty storm arose in me, bringing a mighty rain of tears." May we have the courage of Augustine to always be honest seekers despite the size of the struggle.

Help me, gentle Father, to examine my shortcomings, to persist in the struggle of self-discovery, and to transform into who you know I can be.

Wednesday, August 29, 2018

2 Thes 3:6-10, 16-18; Mk 6:17-29

Passion of St. John the Baptist

Patricia Russell

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

Paul begins and ends all of his letters with an offering of God's grace. Every time he blesses the Christian communities with which he corresponds, he both greets and closes with an outpouring of God's precious, unmerited gift. It isn't Paul's own blessing or his own possession. He's the

messenger. He simply relays the awesomeness of God's gift of grace to all those who read his letters. In spreading the word about something which we've all freely received from God, Paul demonstrates that the gift of grace is not exclusively for the recipient; it's not intended for our own keeping. God's overflowing treasure is designed to be shared. We have nothing that isn't from him and through him. How blessed we are when we can be an avenue of God's grace for others.

Almighty Lord, grant me the generosity of your abundant grace to lavishly share it with everyone I encounter.

Thursday, August 30, 2018

1 Cor 1:1-9; Mt 24:42-51

Patricia Russell

"Stay awake!"

Jesus emphasized the importance of awareness and always being ready. He was often passionate and radical regarding inclusion and justice. This awareness and commitment to justice is implied in the modern-day use of the word "woke." Woke is an adjective that has entered mainstream usage with the Black Lives Matter movement, though it's been part of black culture for decades. It relates to an attitude of questioning the mainstream narrative and personally staying informed and involved. Many in our society are in the process of waking up and standing up to a variety of social injustices. Often awareness of one form of discrimination or oppression opens our eyes to many others, and we become determined to "stay woke." We who are ashamed of falling asleep while a plague of "isms" infected our communities are now hyper-vigilant and hopeful that it's not too late to change corrupt and unfair attitudes and practices.

Awaken me, God of justice, to the urgency of your message of human dignity and the common good.

Friday, August 31, 2018

1 Cor 1:17-25; Mt 25:1-13

Patricia Russell

Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the Gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

Paul was an effective preacher and won many converts; so did Cephas and Apollos. This caused division as followers boasted of belonging to one teacher or another. When Paul states that he did not come to baptize, this isn't to diminish the significance of baptism. He was baptized and often baptized; however, others could baptize while he preached. Into whom one is baptized is what's important, not by whom. Paul proclaimed the Gospel without promoting himself.

Christ's cross was central. Jesus alone saves. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross by itself relates its full, saving effect. Paul demands that our evangelizing puts things in proper perspective. We cannot let the method, the speaker or the fear of offending others cloud the message or meaning.

Merciful Savior, guide me in simplicity and truth.