



Bringing Home the Word



22ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 31, 2014

Facing the Inevitable

By Janel Esker

Jesus' words today are hardly warm and fuzzy. In fact, his startling prediction of his suffering and death leads Peter to fervently object. Jesus was trying to prepare his disciples for his passion, but I imagine he was also talking to himself. Jesus was fully human and must have felt afraid to lose his life. Perhaps he was trying to build up his courage to face the inevitable. He didn't want to die, but

he knew God sometimes calls us to do what we don't want to do.

In today's first reading, Jeremiah shared Jesus' experience. With the difficult task of proclaiming God's judgment to the people of Judah, Jeremiah was regularly mocked and derided. He tried to keep from announcing God's word but found himself unable to resist. God's word became "like fire burning in [his] heart." He was called to do what he did not want to do.

I felt the same way when I decided to study theology. My undergraduate major, speech pathology, prepared me for a well-paying, in-demand career. But theology and ministry tugged at my heart. They didn't promise a high salary, job security, or career advancement. For those reasons I resisted, but God's persistence won. I didn't want to study theology—I felt compelled to do so.

Taking up our crosses as Jesus instructs is rarely something we want to do. Doing so can mean sacrificing to care for elderly parents, speaking up against injustice, or seeking help for addiction. But we know the call is from God if we are compelled to pick up this cross and follow Jesus, even if we initially don't want to. And because he carried his own, Jesus helps shoulder our cross, too. †

SUNDAY READINGS

Jeremiah 20:7-9

The prophet laments his being "duped" into proclaiming the gospel. While his words bring derision and destruction, he is unable to avoid the Spirit's promptings.

Romans 12:1-2

Paul urges Christians to offer themselves "as a living sacrifice" to God. He calls for conversion, right judgment, and good works.

Matthew 16:21-27

Jesus reveals his impending suffering, death, and resurrection to the disciples. Rejecting the idea, Peter denies it but is promptly scolded. Jesus says his followers must deny themselves, for there is no profit in worldly gain or in saving one's own life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What do you find to be the hardest part of living your faith?
- How do you reconcile Christ's and the Church's teachings about love and mercy with those of suffering and sacrifice?



Lord,
Your resurrection
conquered sin and death.
Give me the strength
to overcome pride
so I can become a
humble servant of your
love and peace.



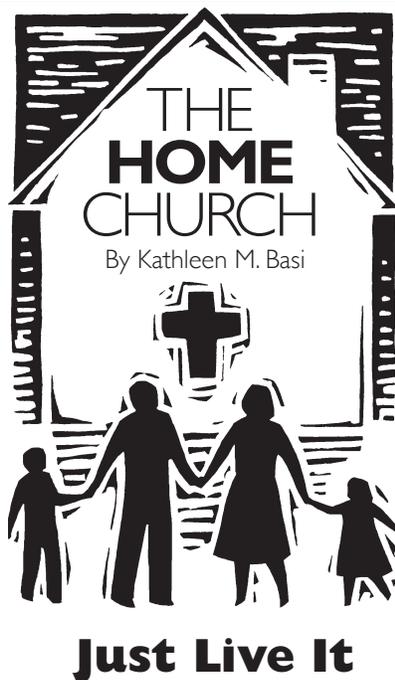
From *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,
by Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

The Church's Best Defense

No doubt about it: The Church is in a tough spot. On any given day, the Catholic Church is called repressive, out of touch, hypocritical, and obsessed with sex. It can be incredibly frustrating when even Catholic friends and family criticize the Church—or worse, leave altogether.

Of course the Church isn't perfect. Mistakes have been and continue to be made, some of them huge. Still, for every problem that plagues humanity, the Church has a solution. Why is that so hard to accept? In part, it's because Catholic teaching is intellectual and nuanced, which don't translate well into sound bites. It's inevitable that the Church will be treated with scorn, especially when individual members—lay and ordained alike—prove that mere membership doesn't make us perfect.

Life in Christ comes with a price tag: "Whoever wishes to come after me," Jesus warned, "must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Sooner or later, each of us must face the reality that Gospel values are intrinsically at odds with our cultural prizes: consumption and self-gratification. Choosing to live the faith is like wearing a target. We have two instinctive reactions: One is to go under the radar, becoming "camouflage Catholics" who go to Mass on Sunday and keep their heads down the rest of the week. The other is to come out with theological guns blazing to try to force everyone to see things our way. Neither serves the



kingdom of God. Running away removes all chance of cooperating with God to make the world better, but going on the offensive tends to divide, not invite.

The best defense for the Church is to live what the Church teaches. Live it quietly, without camouflage or compromise. When we refrain from using bad language and expressing crass disrespect for others, people notice. When we refrain from gossip and judging, people notice. When people of faith care for the poor, when they volunteer at crisis-pregnancy centers and soup kitchens, when they welcome the outcast, when they model joyful vocation in all its forms—people notice. It's not an easy fix. In fact, it's perhaps the hardest thing we can be asked to do. But if Christians dare to live their faith—*really live it*—the world will notice. †

The Redeemer, Mary, and You

By Fr. Matthew Allman, CSsR

Devotees of Our Mother of Perpetual Help have invested much research into discovering the history and origins of the beloved Our Mother of Perpetual Help icon. Scholars say the icon belongs to a class of icons known as "Hodegetria." This Greek term means, "She who shows the way." In icons of this type, we always see Mary pointing to Christ as the way to our salvation. Our Mother holds her Child, Jesus, in one arm and points to him with the other.

In the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, the Mother of God is pointing us toward her Son with her right hand. What is interesting about the pointing in this icon is that if we follow the axis drawn by Mary's right hand, and then "travel" by the eyes of Jesus, we discover that both she and her Son are pointing us toward the cross. As we pray with Our Mother of Perpetual Help, we might ask that she truly be for us Our Lady of the Way. We might pray that, as in her icon, she points us toward her Son and his passion as the source of our life and salvation, and that we might have a share of her courage to make the same journey that she did in her own time. By following Christ's lead in every situation and trusting that even when Christ leads us to share in his suffering, it is so that our final destination might be a share in his glory. †

WEEKDAY READINGS

September 1-6

Mon. I Corinthians 2:1-5 /
Luke 4:16-30

Tues. I Corinthians 2:10-16 /
Luke 4:31-37

Wed. *St. Gregory the Great:*
I Corinthians 3:1-9 /
Luke 4:38-44

Thu. I Corinthians 3:18-23 /
Luke 5:1-11

Fri. I Corinthians 4:1-5 /
Luke 5:33-39

Sat. I Corinthians 4:6-15 /
Luke 6:1-5