



Monthly Reflections

(By clicking on the [blue](#) numbers in the parentheses, it will bring you to the full readings on the USCCB website)

JUNE

01Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF JUSTIN, MARTYR

Life lessons

“There are three kinds of people,” wrote Blaise Pascal, the famous religious philosopher: “Those who have sought God and found him . . . these are reasonable and happy. Those who seek God and have not yet found him . . . these are reasonable and unhappy. And those who neither seek God nor find him . . . these are unreasonable and unhappy.” Justin Martyr appealed to reason, trying to persuade Roman rulers that it was pointless to persecute early Christians. He kept stressing the lessons of Jesus, most notably: “Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you.” Which of Jesus’ lessons do you quote the most?

Today's readings:

1 Peter 4:7-13; Mark 11:11-26 ([351](#)).

“Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours.”

02Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF MARCELLINUS AND PETER, MARTYRS

Gone but not forgotten

We hardly know the names of Marcellinus and Peter from the early fourth century (d.304), who were persecuted during the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian. But in their day, these men were honored by poems and feast days, and over their tombs a church was built. Their bones were prized relics as late as the ninth century and miracles were attributed to them. The gift of our lives is the greatest gift we can offer to God. Though our names may be all but forgotten on earth, our fidelity is eternally rewarded.

Today's readings:

Jude 17, 20b-25; Mark 11:27-33 ([352](#)).

“Was John's Baptism of heavenly or of human origin? Answer me.”

03Jun2018

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST (CORPUS CHRISTI)

I give myself to you

It’s pleasant to enjoy the affection of neighbors, friends, and assorted relatives. But some forms of love go beyond congenial, all the way to profound. Take the love between two people that compels them to vow a lifelong bond. How about the devotion of parents for their children that makes no sacrifice seem too great, no burden too much to bear? Men and women alike pledge their lives to the church, and many

others dedicate themselves to serving the common good by means of their professions. To whom or to what do you say: “Take it, this is my life”?

Today's readings:

Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrews 9:11-15; Mark 14:12-16, 22-26 ([168](#)).

“He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ ”

04Jun2018

Is that you?

“That’s me,” one 10-year-old insists to another as they watch an action movie, choosing to be the character who is the most powerful, the most beautiful, or even the goofiest. A good storyteller knows that listeners need to identify with the characters, but it can be a shock if *your* character turns out to be the villain, as when the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders realize that Jesus’ upside-down parables are calling them out. Jesus faced opposition—even violence—when his critics realized they were being challenged. That’s what Jesus does—he challenges your assumptions about yourself. When by your own lack of compassion, your injustice, you are confronted by the hard truth of the gospel, you still have to say, “That’s me.”

Today's readings:

2 Peter 1:2-7; Mark 12:1-12 ([353](#)).

“They were seeking to arrest him . . . for they realized that he had addressed the parable to them.”

05Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF BONIFACE, BISHOP, MARTYR

A gospel for hungry hearts and minds

As Christians we’ve not always done evangelization well. Saint Boniface (c. 680-754), a Benedictine monk and bishop, had a mixed history in this regard. There are stories about him literally trampling the religious traditions of other cultures but also about him embracing the customs of people and inviting them to see their own lives in light of the gospel. What’s your take on evangelization? Hammer or gospel in hand? Consider the words of the U.S. bishops in their statement [Go and Make Disciples](#): “Evangelization happens when the word of Jesus speaks to people’s hearts and minds. Needing no trickery or manipulation, evangelization can happen only when people accept the gospel freely, as the ‘good news’ it is meant to be, because of the power of the gospel message and the accompanying grace of God.”

Today's readings:

2 Peter 3:12-15a, 17-18; Mark 12:13-17 ([354](#)).

“Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord”

06Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF NORBERT, BISHOP

Encounters of the third kind

Did you know there are members of Catholic religious orders who are laypeople? Some of them belong to what are called third, or tertiary, orders, and most major religious orders include them. Members are men and women who do not necessarily live in community but nonetheless participate in the good works

of the larger order to which they belong. Saint Norbert was one of the first church figures to initiate a third order. He prepared a set of religious practices that those in secular life could follow. If you feel yourself drawn to a religious lifestyle despite being firmly anchored in a secular life, explore the possibilities third orders offer.

Today's readings:

2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12; Mark 12:18-27 ([355](#)).

“He is not God of the dead but of the living.”

07Jun2018

Work on your sainthood

Lots of saints walked the earth who haven't yet claimed a date on the church calendar. Even if they never do, that doesn't take away from their brilliant witness. Consider Anna Dengal, who graduated from medical school in England in 1919. Convinced that her skills could be better used in India, she became the only doctor serving 10,000 sick and dying women and children. Realizing she could “love her neighbor” better with a little help, she established the Medical Mission Sisters. Their goal remains “to be a healing presence at the heart of a wounded world.” Share the mission: Visit the sick.

Today's readings:

2 Timothy 2:8-15; Mark 12:28-34 ([356](#)).

“To love your neighbor as yourself” is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

08Jun2018

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS

The heart of the matter

If you were raised in a Catholic home, you probably have a memory of a statue or picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. You may have looked at it a thousand times without really “seeing” it. Take a moment today to recollect the image as vividly as possible. Recall that the heart is the symbol for, among other things, love, charity, understanding, compassion, and courage. Remember that it is a key organ in the human body, connecting the spiritual with the material, the mind with the body, the intellect with emotions. Then reflect on the ways that the love of Jesus has sustained you every day of your life.

Today's readings:

Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8c-9; Ephesians 3:8-12, 14-19; John 19:31-37 ([171](#)).

“One soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out.”

09Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Love with no strings attached

What would it be like to have an “immaculate heart”? Might it be to have a heart that loved unconditionally? When we are honest about it, much of what we call “love” is actually a sort of *quid pro quo*, this-for-that exchange of affection. We love those who love us in return, who treat us well, who respect us. There's nothing wrong with that, but can we open our hearts a bit more to embrace those who do not return our love in equal measure? Can we go so far as to love our enemies? A tall order but one

worth striving for—an immaculate heart that loves unconditionally, as a mother loves her child, as Mary loved her son. Practice loving without conditions. When you pray today, ask for an immaculate heart.

Today's readings:

2 Timothy 4:1-8 (358); Luke 2:41-51 ([573](#)).

“His mother kept all these things in her heart.”

10Jun2018

TENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Why we hide

A psychologist explained something fascinating about shame: No one can put it inside us without our consent. Shame doesn't enter from the outside but responds from the inside. Those seeking to embarrass us are frustrated if we refuse their attempt to impart shame with the slap of a hand or a word. If we accept shame, it's because deep down we're already carrying it. So Adam, guilty of disloyalty to God, is shamed by his newfound nakedness. Yet Jesus, insulted, beaten, stripped, and humiliated, remains clothed in honor at the cross. Got shame? We've got a sacrament for that.

Today's readings:

Genesis 3:9-15; 2 Corinthians 4:13—5:1; Mark 3:20-35 ([89](#)).

“I heard you in the garden, but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.”

11Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF BARNABAS, APOSTLE

A stand-up guy

Do you have trouble standing up to peer pressure? Learn from Saint Barnabas. Though he wasn't one of the original apostles, he stood up to Peter and James and others in defense of Paul, who had once persecuted Christians but then wanted to be one. And when even Peter was reluctant to fraternize with converted gentiles, Barnabas held that Jesus' message was meant for everyone. He was a man whose word was good, not only to be relied on but—because he was a great preacher—to be inspired by. Next time you're feeling peer pressure, pray for the help of Barnabas.

Today's readings:

Acts 11:21b-26; 13:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12 ([580](#); Gospel [359](#)).

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

12Jun2018

You are the salt of the earth

Salt is such an ordinary, inexpensive, and easily found substance in most cases nowadays that you can fail to fully grasp the profound meaning of Jesus' famous metaphor. Consider these facts. Once known as “white gold,” salt is necessary for human life. It preserves, purifies, and enhances the flavor of food. It made civilization possible. Wars have been waged over supplies of salt; it has been taxed, hoarded, traded, and used as currency; and it helped galvanize Mohandas Gandhi's nonviolent movement for India's independence from Britain. When Jesus compares his disciples to salt of the earth, he is really saying: “Your life and presence matter. In fact, you are more than valuable—you are essential.” Be alert for opportunities to be salt for the world today.

Today's readings:

1 Kings 17:7-16; Matthew 5:13-16 ([360](#)).

"If salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?"

13Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF ANTHONY OF PADUA, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Give what you receive

Saint Francis of Assisi had a healthy skepticism about academic pursuits. In the Middle Ages the accolades a noted scholar might enjoy could leave gospel poverty in the dust. When Anthony of Padua asked to join Francis' new "Order of Penance," however, Francis saw that Anthony was able to combine brilliance and oratorical power with fidelity to the gospel and simplicity. Francis even welcomed Anthony to bring his precious books with him—they were the tools of his trade—and entrusted to his care the training of brothers seeking to become priests. You may find yourself juggling values that seem at odds with each other, like being a bread-earner *and* a caring mom or dad. Saint Anthony knew that the gifts of God—even those most esteemed like intelligence, power, and wealth—are still gifts as long as they're balanced with humility.

Today's readings:

1 Kings 18:20-39; Matthew 5:17-19 ([361](#)).

"Let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant."

14Jun2018

Carry on the flag

The American flag was adopted on this day in 1777, and ever since it has been a cherished symbol of everything this country holds dear. As President Calvin Coolidge observed, "It represents our peace and security, our civil and political liberty, our freedom of religious worship, our family, our friends, our home." But, he noted, it is equally a symbol of responsibility. As a nation the United States has its share of problems, disagreements, and failures. Today is a good day to reflect on the sacrifices your ancestors made and consider how you might carry on their work so that your grandchildren may live in the freedom the Stars and Stripes proclaim.

Today's readings:

1 Kings 18:41-46; Matthew 5:20-26 ([362](#)).

"Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny."

15Jun2018

Hearing a who

The prophet Elijah had a lot on his plate. Defending the one true God, battling kings and even other prophets, and going through quite a bit of hardship in the process. And when he went to talk with God on God's own mountain, conditions were not calm. The wind blew strong enough to split rocks. Then an earthquake rolled the ground. Oh, and there was fire, too—did we mention that? But God was not "in" the wind, the quake, or the fire. Rather God was in a "tiny whispering sound." *That* was what awed Elijah and led him to cover his face. Sometimes the voice of God isn't found in spectacular special effects but in the smallest, quietest way. Can you hear it?

Today's readings:

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-16; Matthew 5:27-32 ([363](#)).

“After the fire was a sound of sheer silence.”

16Jun2018

Truth or consequences

The taking of an oath has a long history and some curious customs, such as an ancient Jewish practice of placing one's hand under the thigh of the person to whom one swears the oath. Today you raise your hand or place it on a sacred book. But as Jesus pointed out, no oaths should be necessary. All your words should be trustworthy. Be a person who keeps your word; the confidence, trust, and respect of others will follow. And as Mark Twain pointed out: “Tell the truth and you don't have to remember anything.”

Today's readings:

1 Kings 19:19-21; Matthew 5:33-37 ([364](#)).

“Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ ”

17Jun2018

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

God gambles the farm

Imagine a farmer sowing a field, and then going about his life, not bothering about the progress of his crop. When it's harvest time, the happy farmer takes in an incredible return of grain. Crazy, right? What farmer has ever been that clueless and that lucky? God's realm operates pretty much this way. God offers the gift of life in seed form. We're on our own to take it as far as we want to go. God won't force our fruitfulness; we're free to waste our time and produce nothing. Is God betting the farm wisely on you?

Today's readings:

Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; Mark 4:26-34 ([92](#)).

“It is as if a man were to scatter seed . . . and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how.”

18Jun2018

Words to the wise about scripture

To encounter scripture is to encounter the word of God, but sometimes you need help in understanding how God is speaking to you right now. When you are attracted to a passage of scripture but not sure what to do with it, find some saints, poets, or theologians who have meditated on and written about the passage. Their words might be the springboard you need to gain greater understanding. For example, Jesus' enigmatic command to turn the other cheek? Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement sets it in the context of living nonviolently. “To be truly nonviolent,” she writes, “is to . . . turn the other cheek, put aside all power, walk another mile, give up coat and cloak, too.”

Today's readings:

1 Kings 21:1-16; Matthew 5:38-42 ([365](#)).

“When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.”

19Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF ROMUALD, ABBOT

One in community

It's natural when something bad happens to want to run in the other direction. For that reason, 1,000 years ago Saint Romuald went into a monastery after his father had committed a terrible crime. The desire to escape evil and do penance might have been strong motivations for him. Perhaps, though, there was something else: a deep need to encounter God in solitude. Though his brother monks made him abbot—their leader—Romuald sought greater separation and established a new monastic community where daily contact with others was kept to an absolute minimum and each monk spent considerable time alone and in prayer and study. Romuald's example points to the importance of solitude and serves as a reminder that God is with you always.

Today's readings:

1 Kings 21:17-29; Matthew 5:43-48 ([366](#)).

“Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

20Jun2018

Fast times

When applied to food, *fasting* and *abstinence* have different meanings in Catholic tradition. Fasting involves the reduction of one's intake of food, while abstinence means refraining from eating a certain kind of food. With exceptions for age and health reasons, Catholics are asked to engage in some kind of penitential activity, like abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent and fasting on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday by consuming only one full meal. Prayer and works of charity are also encouraged as ways of fasting. When practiced for the right reasons—spiritual focus, self-discipline, awareness of dependence on God, and imitation of Christ—these practices can be very powerful. Give them a chance to work for you.

Today's readings:

2 Kings 2:1, 6-14; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 ([367](#)).

“When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to others to be fasting.”

21Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF ALOYSIUS GONZAGA, RELIGIOUS

Lead by example

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga was a young Italian Jesuit who devoted much of his life to prayer and fasting. As an advocate of the poor, he would also roam the streets during the plague to pray for and take care of those who were infected. While in Rome, his spiritual director Saint Robert Bellarmine encouraged him to spend more time befriending and teaching his companions about the importance of prayer. Aloysius' love of prayer and pious reading, his great devotion to Jesus and Mary, and his constancy in his vocation

were all ways he influenced those around him to be devoted followers of Christ and his message. Today be inspired by the power of prayer in your own life and like Aloysius be faithful in all you do.

Today's readings:

Sirach 48:1-14; Matthew 6:7-15 ([368](#)).

"In life he performed wonders."

22Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF PAULINUS OF NOLA, BISHOP

How well do we see ourselves?

Self-knowledge isn't always welcome. We prefer to think well of ourselves, so if that requires a little trip to denial-land now and again, it can't be helped. Or can it? In the fourth century, when future saint Paulinus was a pen pal to Saints Augustine, Jerome, and Martin of Tours, clear-eyed self-awareness was considered a prerequisite to Christian life. These men threw off all pretense of self-importance in favor of the truth. "Truth will reveal its face to you and unlock to you your own person," Paulinus wrote. Abandon the mask. Become who you were born to be.

Today's readings:

2 Kings 11:1-4, 9-18, 20; Matthew 6:19-23 ([369](#)).

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light."

23Jun2018

Protect us from all anxiety

Fifty-one percent of our annual household spending goes toward shelter and transportation, according to a U.S. Department of Labor report, and another 18 percent goes to food, drink, and clothes. That amounts to many thousands of dollars for most Americans—cash outlays that undoubtedly cause anxiety for most of us, despite Jesus' admonition not to worry about such things. Like it or not, wealth has an impact on our lives and can too easily consume us. That is what Jesus tries to warn us against. Yes, we need things to live, but what we don't need is to compare, judge, and rank. Our time is best spent unconcerned about what we don't have and focused on what we do have in abundance: the love of God and the glory of all creation.

Today's readings:

2 Chronicles 24:17-25; Matthew 6:24-34 ([370](#)).

"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear."

24Jun2018

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

Discovering the mystery of you

Each newborn child is a mystery about to unfold in the world. Always there is the potential for joy and pain, great good or tremendous misery. A good bit of what the child becomes is contained in the context of the family: its resources, stability, and capacity to nurture. Parents and children together become what they would never have been without the challenge and the privilege of their relationship. John might never have become the Baptist without Elizabeth and Zechariah. What parts of yourself do you owe to those who took that journey of trust with you?

Today's readings:

Day: Isaiah 49:1-6; Acts 13:22-26; Luke 1:57-66, 80 ([587](#)).

“All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, ‘What, then, will this child be?’ ”

25Jun2018

Judge not

It's a well-known part of Christian faith that you shouldn't judge (though of course that hasn't stopped many Christians from doing just that!). Most people understand the command not to judge others as a moral issue: Unless you've never done anything deserving of judgment, don't dole it out to others. But it's also a theological issue—about God. Judgment belongs to God, so not judging becomes a matter of faith: If you believe in and respect God, then don't judge.

Today's readings:

2 Kings 17:5-8, 13-15a, 18; Matthew 7:1-5 ([371](#)).

“Remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye.”

26Jun2018

Show yourself the door

During a tour of San Francesco Basilica in Assisi, Italy, a friar took a group of pilgrims through the upper and lower churches and to the crypt where Saint Francis and his companions were buried. Throughout the tour he talked about the life of Francis and the architecture, art, and history connected to him. At the end the friar brought the group back to the upper church and showed them the stunning frescoes attributed to Giotto illustrating scenes from scripture and Francis' life. As he guided the group to the exit he explained that on this wall was the most important scene yet: the door! The exit, he said, is a reminder to go through the doors and spread the Good News to the whole world. Something to think about next time you exit a church!

Today's readings:

2 Kings 19:9b-11, 14-21, 31-35a, 36; Matthew 7:6, 12-14 ([372](#)).

“Enter through the narrow gate.”

27Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

The mother of all role models

Bishop Cyril (c. 374-444) was a scholar and writer who promoted the use of the title *Theotokos* (“God-bearer”) for Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Council of Ephesus in 431 approved the name, which is used to this day in the Eastern and Orthodox Catholic traditions. In the West, “Mother of God” is more common, but religious historian Jaroslav Pelikan offered a translation that comes closer to the original meaning: “The one who gives birth to the one who is God.” However you choose to address the courageous woman who dared to say, “Thy will be done,” you honor her most by responding in the same way to God's invitation in your life.

Today's readings:

2 Kings 22:8-13; 23:1-3; Matthew 7:15-20 ([373](#)).

“Every good tree bears good fruit.”

28Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF IRENAEUS, BISHOP, MARTYR

Think before you act

The church calendar identifies the second-century saint Irenaeus as a “bishop and martyr.” He was certainly a bishop (of Lyons in France), but his martyrdom may be more legendary. He is remembered primarily, though, not for his death but for what he did in life. His era was a time when Christian doctrine was a boiling cauldron of sometimes wildly conflicting ideas, and it was not clear what would rise to the top. As a theologian, Irenaeus’ efforts to defend what was emerging as orthodox dogma made him one of the first people to think about Christianity systematically. Irenaeus teaches us that before we condemn a position we should seek to understand it.

Today's readings:

2 Kings 24:8-17; Matthew 7:21-29 ([374](#)).

“The crowds were astonished at Jesus’ teaching, for he taught them as one having authority.”

29Jun2018

SOLEMNITY OF PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES

Rock of ages

The *pallium* is an ancient liturgical vestment worn only by the pope and a very few other high church officials on whom the pope bestows it as a symbol of the jurisdiction delegated to them. In honor of Saints Peter and Paul, today is the day of the liturgical year on which these officials receive this symbol of their office. In its current form it is a narrow band of white lamb’s wool from sheep raised by Trappist monks, looped and draped over other liturgical vestments. The pallium is a reminder of the serious duty placed on the shoulders of the highest church leaders. Pray today that they may fulfill their offices wisely, faithfully, and with compassion.

Today's readings:

Day: Acts 12:1-11; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18; Matthew 16:13-19 ([591](#)).

“You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”

30Jun2018

MEMORIAL OF THE FIRST MARTYRS OF THE CHURCH IN ROME

Don’t fan the flames

In the summer of A.D. 64 a terrible fire swept through the city of Rome. Emperor Nero found himself both praised for his efforts to help the victims and also accused of setting the fire. To deflect the criticism, he blamed the city’s Christian community, whom many Romans disliked already because they felt Christians set themselves apart from the rest of society. But Nero’s move backfired, so to speak. The hideous executions he inflicted on Christians actually aroused the pity of many Romans. The victims continue to witness (*martyr* in Greek) both to the power of faith and to the dangers of prejudice and hate.

Today's readings:

Lamentations 2:2, 10-14, 18-19; Matthew 8:5-17 ([376](#)).

“They faint away like the wounded in the streets of the city.”

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