



Monthly Reflections

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

FEBRUARY

01Feb2019

Whose stuff is this?

Christians commonly suffered the confiscation of their property during the persecutions of the early church, and church property has been confiscated by hostile governments ever since. Perhaps that is why the Catholic Church defends the right to private property. Yet the church also says that this right is not absolute; it is limited by the concept of the “social mortgage,” our mutual obligations to one another and to a just distribution of wealth. You can read about church teaching on property and other social issues in the first “social encyclical,” *Rerum novarum* (“On the Condition of Labor”), written by Pope Leo XIII and issued in 1891. Take a look at it on the [Vatican website](#).

Today's readings:

Hebrews 10:32-39; Mark 4:26-34 ([321](#)).

“You cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting.”

02Feb2019

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

Your loving kindness shall not be in vain

There is a lot going on for our prayerful consideration today. It is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, the ancient story of faithful parents presenting their baby at the Temple. It is also a day of prayer for men and women who have consecrated their lives with vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity in service to the church. And it was on February 2, 1945 that the Nazis hung the Jesuit priest, Alfred Delp. Delp’s final message to friends was this: “If through one man’s life there is a little more love and kindness . . . then he will not have lived in vain.” Parents, vowed religious, and every one of us can do our best to not live in vain.

Today's readings:

Malachi 3:1-4; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40 ([524](#)).

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace.”

03Feb2019

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Take the leap of truth

In one guidebook, the place was oddly listed as the “Mount of Hurling.” While that sounds like a site for over eager partygoers, Mount Precipice, as it’s more widely known, is a hill overlooking Nazareth where Jesus almost met an early end. Citizens of his hometown loved having a celebrity to claim as their own, but when Jesus suggested that God might claim foreigners ahead of Israelites because of their welcome to prophets, the Nazoreans proved his point by attempting to run him off a cliff. Telling the truth rarely makes us popular. It can even be dangerous. Take the plunge!

Today's readings:

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 12:31—13:13; Luke 4:21-30 ([72](#)).

“They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill . . . to hurl him down headlong.”

[Sunday Spanish Translation](#)

CUARTO DOMINGO DEL TIEMPO ORDINARIO

Ten un acto de sinceridad

En una guía, el lugar estaba curiosamente listado como el “Monte de Arrojar.” Si bien eso suena como un sitio para gente muy entusiasta por las fiestas, el Monte Precipicio, como es más ampliamente conocido, es una colina con vista a Nazaret, donde Jesús casi encuentra la muerte temprana. A los nativos de su ciudad natal les encantaba tener una celebridad propia, pero cuando Jesús sugirió que Dios reclamaría a los extranjeros antes que a los israelitas, porque ellos acogían a los profetas, la gente de Nazaret probó su razón intentando arrojarlo de un acantilado. Decir la verdad difícilmente nos haga populares. Hasta puede resultar peligroso. ¡Aventúrate!

Lecturas del día:

Jeremías 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 Corintios 12:31—13:13; Lucas 4:21-30 ([72](#)).

“Se levantaron, lo guiaron fuera de la ciudad, y lo condujeron a la cima de la colina . . . para arrojarlo de cabeza hacia abajo.”

04Feb2019

Reach out for assistance

The expression “inner demons” captures something of the helplessness that those in the grip of negative behaviors feel. The ancients took that phrase literally, believing that illness was due to divine punishment for sin or demons taking up temporary residence in a person. The remedy was to seek forgiveness or a healer who could rid you of the bad spirits. While most people nowadays don’t believe that sicknesses and personality problems come from evil spirits or God’s wrath, there is still the need for reaching out to others for help when you cannot help yourself. Medical and other professionals, counselors, family, friends, and especially Jesus the Healer in prayer provide that assistance.

Today's readings:

Hebrews 11:32-40; Mark 5:1-20 ([323](#)).

“Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you.”

05Feb2019

MEMORIAL OF AGATHA, VIRGIN, MARTYR

Torture is intolerable

The details of Saint Agatha's life are not for the faint of heart. Born in Sicily during the third-century Christian persecutions, Agatha was continuously harassed and abused for her religious convictions. She was imprisoned in a brothel, but when she refused to serve customers, she was sent to jail, where she was repeatedly beaten and mutilated. She finally succumbed to death. Not surprisingly Agatha is the patron of torture victims. The church condemns torture as contrary to the Christian tenets of respect for life and human dignity. In honor of Saint Agatha and the countless victims of torture through the centuries, take time today to review the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' online instruction: "[Torture Is a Moral Issue: A Catholic Study Guide](#)."

Today's readings:

Hebrews 12:1-4; Mark 5:21-43 ([324](#)).

"Jesus said to the hemorrhaging woman, 'Daughter, your faith has saved you.' "

06Feb2019

MEMORIAL OF PAUL MIKI AND COMPANIONS, MARTYRS

Citizens of two worlds

Imagine the trouble 16th-century missionaries had presenting Western Christianity to the Far East. Paul Miki was a Christian from Kyoto, Japan. He understood local religion and culture well enough to argue for Christianity to the point where he made enemies. Religious and political leaders ran the missionaries out and burned down churches. Miki and his friends stayed and were put to death in 1597. His final Christian witness was to forgive his executioners before he died. Today we can consider ourselves Christian missionaries even in this culture, living our faith in a sometimes hostile environment.

Today's readings:

Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15; Mark 6:1-6 ([325](#)).

"He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick—no food, no sack, no money in their belts."

07Feb2019

All will be provided

Can you imagine starting out on a work trip and your boss insists that you must leave your money and food at home? But the message of today's gospel is that just as Jesus was sent by the Father to preach the Good News, so he sent his disciples (and eventually that means us) to continue this mission. The clothes the disciples wore and the food they ate were not to be a source of worry. What mattered was trust that God would give them what they needed to preach repentance and minister to the sick.

Today's readings:

Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24; Mark 6:7-13 ([326](#)).

"He instructed them to take nothing for the journey."

08Feb2019

MEMORIAL OF JOSEPHINE BAKHITA, VIRGIN

Stop the traffic

Bakhita: "Fortunate One." A slave owner gave this ironic name to a young girl kidnapped in Sudan in the 1800s. She was bought and sold many times. It was said that she forgot her birth name because of

the great suffering she endured. Eventually she was transported to Italy and there gained her freedom. She joined the Canossian Sisters and was revered for her deep faith in God. Her name, once a symbol of oppression, became a symbol of hope. With Saint Josephine Bakhita, pray for freedom for the many people oppressed by human trafficking in the world today.

Today's readings:

Hebrews 13:1-8; Mark 6:14-29 ([327](#)).

“Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody.”

09Feb2019

MEMORIAL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Give yourself a break

Are you overwhelmed with things to do and deadlines to meet? Do you need a break? When *did* you last take time to “rest” and to “be refreshed”? Though we sometimes ignore it, faith binds us to the practice of taking a break to ensure the “proper relaxation of mind and body,” as the [Catechism of the Catholic Church \(2193\)](#) puts it. God rested while immersed in the work of creation. Jesus and the disciples took time to get away. Mary reflected in her heart. Find a way to take your own spiritual snow day: Do your best to find a way to allow everyday work to come to a halt and seek a bit of a respite.

Today's readings:

Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21; Mark 6:30-34 ([328](#)).

“Come away . . . to a deserted place and rest awhile.”

10Feb2019

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

An invitation to go deeper

Who’s willing to embrace a calling that requires boundless courage, oceans of trust, the skills of a diplomat, and the capacity to forgive 70 times seven times—weekly? That calling is marriage, which we celebrate this World Marriage Day. A brief romance can be like doggy-paddling around the matter of commitment before getting out and toweling off, whereas getting married is like diving into the deep end of the pool of love. We have to be all in, knot-tied and fortunes joined, before the genuine work of love can begin. Take time to salute the boldly married today.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 6:1-2a, 3-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11 ([75](#)).

“Put out into deep water, and lower your nets for a catch.”

[Sunday Spanish Translation](#)

QUINTO DOMINGO DEL TIEMPO ORDINARIO

Una invitación a profundizar

¿Quién quiere abrazar una vocación que requiere valentía ilimitada, océanos de confianza, la habilidad de un diplomático, y la capacidad de perdonar 70 veces siete—cada semana? Esa vocación es el matrimonio, que celebramos en este Día Mundial del Matrimonio. Un breve romance puede ser como nadar estilo perrito alrededor de la cuestión del compromiso antes de salir y secarse, mientras casarse es como zambullirse en el extremo profundo de la alberca del amor. Debemos estar totalmente

comprometidos, el lazo amarrado y las fortunas unidas, antes de que el genuino trabajo del amor pueda comenzar. Toma tiempo para saludar a los audazmente casados hoy.

Lecturas del día:

Isaías 6:1-2a, 3-8; 1 Corintios 15:1-11; Lucas 5:1-11 ([75](#)).

“Dirígete a las aguas profundas, y baja tus redes para una buena pesca.”

11Feb2019

MEMORIAL OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES

United in compassion

Today is World Day of the Sick, a feast day instituted in 1992 by Pope John Paul II, shortly after he himself was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease. He chose this date to coincide with the Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, who is said to have appeared to a peasant girl in a small town in France. Millions of pilgrims have since gone there to seek healing and comfort in its waters. Join with all believers today in prayer for those struggling with illness, and offer up your own suffering in union with Christ on the cross.

Today's readings:

Genesis 1:1-19; Mark 6:53-56 ([329](#)).

“They laid the sick in the marketplace.”

12Feb2019

Give it your all

Jesus had a lot of criticism for hypocritical Pharisees, who followed the letter but not the spirit of the law. Going through the motions won’t cut it with Christ! But he understands, too, that following him can’t possibly be a sustained spiritual high—there are periods of dryness and things to be learned from those, too. Enlivening your relationship with God takes effort. There are lots of tools for shaking up your routine: volunteer, join a Bible study group, make a votive offering, or even go on a pilgrimage to a holy site. And whatever you do, put your heart into it!

Today's readings:

Genesis 1:20—2:4a; Mark 7:1-13 ([330](#)).

“You disregard God’s commandment but cling to human tradition.”

13Feb2019

Heartfelt reflections

In his book *Immortal Diamond*, Franciscan friar Richard Rohr suggests moving your negative thinking “from your head to your heart.” When you feel animosity toward someone, he says, imagine them literally inside your beating heart, surrounded by your flowing blood, until it’s impossible for you to remain antagonistic. “Do it in an almost physical sense, and you will see how calmly and quickly it works,” he says. “Now the Sacred Heart [of Jesus] and the Immaculate Heart [of Mary] have been transferred to you. . . . The ‘sacred heart’ is then your heart, too.”

Today's readings:

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17; Mark 7:14-23 ([331](#)).

“The things that come out from within are what defile.”

14Feb2019

MEMORIAL OF CYRIL, MONK, AND METHODIUS, BISHOP

Be a loving sibling

Many Bible stories about brothers take a bad turn. Think Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and, well, everybody. Other brothers fare better: Peter and Andrew, or Zebedee's inseparable sons James and John. In the lives of the saints, siblings often turn out to be allies. Take these two ninth-century brothers of Thessalonica in Greece: Cyril was the brilliant one, and Methodius the contemplative. That could have caused conflict, but it didn't. Cyril went to the missions in Slovenia, inventing the “Cyrillic” alphabet to assist his new flock in learning their faith. Methodius joined him later and carried on the work after Cyril's death. Send your sibling—or a spiritual brother or sister—a Valentine's note!

Today's readings:

Genesis 2:18-25; Mark 7:24-30 ([332](#)).

“He said to her, ‘Let the children be fed first.’ ”

15Feb2019

Chew your food thoughtfully

“Knowledge is power,” said Ben Franklin. The serpent said the same thing to Eve, and she bought it. Although knowledge often does give us access to power, it doesn't guarantee us wisdom. An attribute of God, wisdom is acquired only through the indwelling Holy Spirit. In the Bible knowledge is imagined sometimes as tantalizing fruit dangling from a forbidden tree. Wisdom, however, sets a lavish table at which her guests may dine by accepting her invitation. When faced with the choice between fast food and fine dining, take the opportunity to savor the meal that lasts to eternity.

Today's readings:

Genesis 3:1-8; Mark 7:31-37 ([333](#)).

“But the serpent said to the woman, ‘God knows well that the moment you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods.’ ”

16Feb2019

MEMORIAL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Don't leave hungry

Some folks will always set out food when you visit their homes no matter what time of day it is. If you're smart you learn to drop by when you're good and hungry! Jesus never let anyone walk away hungry either—even if it meant setting the table for 5,000. His mother foretold that fact in her great song, the Magnificat: “He has filled the hungry with good things.” When tired of the junk food the world has to offer, pray Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:47-55) in faith that God will fill you with good things.

Today's readings:

Genesis 3:9-24; Mark 8:1-10 ([334](#)).

"If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way."

17Feb2019

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Good news in bad times

Forget the headlines for a blessed minute. Stop attending to pop-up dramas of breaking stories, and avert your eyes from news flashes that dazzle with the world's misery and villainy. We know human nature like the back of our hands, because we know the contents of our own hearts: how petty we can be, how self-serving and critical. The difference between the evil geniuses of the globe and us is often a matter of reach and opportunity, or one too many grievances that finally topple our humanity and make the descent to darkness all the more compelling. Resist self-righteousness!

Today's readings:

Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20; Luke 6:17, 20-26 ([78](#)).

"Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh."

[Sunday Spanish Translation](#)

SEXTO DOMINGO DEL TIEMPO ORDINARIO

Buenas noticias en malos tiempos

Olvida los titulares por un bendito minuto. Deja de prestar atención a los dramas de las noticias de último momento, y desvía tu mirada de los flashes de noticias que deslumbran con la miseria y villanía del mundo. Conocemos la naturaleza humana como el dorso de nuestras manos, porque conocemos el contenido de nuestros propios corazones: cuán mezquinos podemos ser, cuán egoístas y críticos. La diferencia entre los genios malvados del mundo y nosotros es a menudo una cuestión de alcance y oportunidad, o demasiadas injusticias que finalmente derriban nuestra humanidad y hacen el descenso a la oscuridad más apremiante. ¡Resiste la autocomplacencia!

Lecturas del día:

Jeremías 17:5-8; 1 Corintios 15:12, 16-20; Lucas 6:17, 20-26 ([78](#)).

"Bienaventurados los que ahora lloráis, porque reiréis."

18Feb2019

Seek signs of mercy

Generations still seek a sign. But sometimes we look for signs in the wrong places. Jesus must still heave a sigh whenever we're blind to the divine inklings all around us. When the brokenhearted take heart and the hard-hearted show some mercy—those are signs that God has gotten through. Let's give God—and each other—the benefit of the doubt.

Today's readings:

Genesis 4:1-15, 25; Mark 8:11-13 ([335](#)).

"The Pharisees came and began to argue with Jesus, asking him for sign from heaven, to test him."

19Feb2019

Looks like rain

Big floods tend to produce stories. Folks can recall much about the “flood of 2008 or 1996 or 1956” People in biblical times had heard flood stories, too. But the flood Genesis described was the Big One, the flood to end all floods—almost. God was angry and decided all of creation was pretty much corrupt and the only solution was to wipe it all out. But in an almost human way God left the door open a crack. Noah got to be the ark that preserved a righteous few, including handy mating pairs of all creatures in order to repopulate the earth once the waters receded. So God’s wrath was not final. There’s always the possibility of return to God, constantly offered. When the waters of despair, regret, and cynicism threaten to inundate you, remember there’s a dove on the way.

Today's readings:

Today’s readings: Genesis 6:5-8; 7:1-5, 10; Mark 8:14-21 ([336](#)).

“Then the Lord said to Noah, ‘Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation.’ ”

20Feb2019

It’s all part of the process

Our journey toward health, wholeness, and conversion stretches across the span of our lives and, ironically, doesn’t prevent our deaths. But the more fully we embrace life and live in God’s Spirit, the less significant our deaths become. Dying is just part of the process toward life in Christ. For a time we will see as in a mirror—through a glass darkly. But if we follow Jesus’ instruction of forgiveness and love, we will eventually see clearly—even with our eyes closed and even beyond our deaths.

Today's readings:

Genesis 8:6-13, 20-22; Mark 8:22-26 ([337](#)).

“The man looked up and said, ‘I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.’ ”

21Feb2019

MEMORIAL OF PETER DAMIAN, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Courage to do what is right

Peter Damian was a Benedictine 11th-century monk who is frequently described as an austere and holy man. He loved the study of scripture and was extremely devoted to his monastic life. But his holiness and moral clarity brought him to the attention of more than one pope and he often was called upon to settle contentious debates within the church. With great courage, Peter called the church to moral reform, confronting issues of simony (buying or selling of church jobs) and clerical abuse of power. Though he was never officially canonized, most people of his time considered him a saint and he was named a doctor of the church in 1828. Let him inspire your study and devotion today.

Today's readings:

Genesis 9:1-13; Mark 8:27-33 ([338](#)).

“You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

22Feb2019

FEAST OF THE CHAIR OF PETER THE APOSTLE

The chair has the floor

For a chair to get its own feast day, it's got to be a pretty special chair. Today's is just that, because Saint Peter himself, the very first pope, sat upon it. The relic in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City is a wooden throne, which Pope Benedict XVI described as a "symbol of the special mission of Peter and his successors to tend Christ's flock, keeping it united in faith and in charity." Ponder that our church's leaders stand in a line going all the way back to the apostles, and pray for each one who holds this esteemed position.

Today's readings:

1 Peter 5:1-4; Matthew 16:13-19 ([535](#)).

"Upon this rock I will build my church."

23Feb2019

MEMORIAL OF POLYCARP, BISHOP AND MARTYR

Living memory

We can be sure that the practice of venerating the relics of saints began very early in the church. The first evidence for it comes from a letter dated around 150 A.D. concerning the martyrdom of Polycarp. The letter relates that following Polycarp's execution the Romans refused the Christians his body, deciding rather to burn it. The Christians then gathered together his bones, church fathers related, "being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold." They put these bones in a place of distinction where they would gather together and revere them, especially on the anniversary of Polycarp's martyrdom. Remember the sacrifices of Christian martyrs and give yourself wholeheartedly to a life of faith.

Today's readings:

Hebrews 11:1-7; Mark 9:2-13 ([340](#)).

"They kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant."

24Feb2019

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Love without distinction

An enemy is defined as someone who's against you. The word springs from the Latin "*inamicus*"—literally, "not friend." If someone's not interested in being your *amigo*, why should you be amicable in return? While contrary to instinct, loving enemies is one of the hallmarks of following Jesus, who chooses to lay down his life even for the sake of those who are killing him. Is it risky to open your arms to an enemy? Yes: see crucifixion, above. But if we refuse to love those who hate us, what makes us any different from those who hate?

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49; Luke 6:27-38 ([81](#)).

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."

[Sunday Spanish Translation](#)

SÉPTIMO DOMINGO DEL TIEMPO ORDINARIO

Ama sin distinciones

Se define a un enemigo como alguien que está en tu contra. La palabra surge del Latín “*inamicus*”— literalmente, “no amigo.” Si una persona no está interesada en ser tu amiga, ¿por qué deberías ser amistoso a cambio? Si bien es lo opuesto a lo instintivo, amar a los enemigos es una de las características distintivas de seguir a Jesús, que elige ofrecer su vida por aquellos que lo están matando. ¿Es arriesgado abrir tus brazos a un enemigo? Sí: ver crucifixión, arriba. Pero si nos negamos a amar a aquellos que nos odian, ¿qué nos hace diferentes de aquellos que odian?

Lecturas del día:

1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; 1 Corintios 15:45-49; Lucas 6:27-38 ([81](#)).

"Ama a tus enemigos y haz el bien a aquellos que te odian."

25Feb2019

Clean from the inside out

Most people may think they've left behind those old-fashioned notions of “unclean spirits” found in the Bible and religious texts of an earlier age, but have they really? Researchers have found that a lot of ancient associations about “clean” and “unclean” are still with us, only now we have translated them into the realm of science, health, or nutrition. Think of how concerned people are about the purity of their food and whether their environment is antiseptically clean. It's all well and good to promote health and guard against disease, but don't forget Jesus taught that purity and impurity ultimately are questions of the heart.

Today's readings:

Sirach 1:1-10; Mark 9:14-29 ([341](#)).

"Everything is possible to one who has faith."

26Feb2019

The last will be first

"Will you let me be your servant? Let me be as Christ to you." The Richard Gillard hymn with this line has become familiar to many Catholics. Sung at funerals, weddings, Holy Thursday foot washings, and Sunday Mass, the lyrics touch human hearts in their eloquent call to humbly serve the needs of others. Pope Francis, who serves the poor in word and deed, calls us to share in this journey. How can I surrender my need for recognition? How can I serve the needs of others?

Today's readings:

Sirach 2:1-11; Mark 9:30-37 ([342](#)).

"They had been arguing about who was the most important."

27Feb2019

Respond to the need, not the creed

In a [commentary](#) a few years back, prelate Gerald Kicanas, former bishop of the Diocese of Tucson, addressed the question of whether Catholic organizations are still actually “Catholic” if they provide services to all people, Catholic or not. His response was clear and pastoral: “The heart of Catholic outreach and social doctrine has been that we are here to serve all, and don't make distinctions. So in our Catholic schools there are young people who are non-Catholic. In our Catholic charities, we serve people who are in need.” May the measure of your service and outreach always be love.

Today's readings:

Sirach 4:11-19; Mark 9:38-40 ([343](#)).

“There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me.”

28Feb2019

Gone but not forgotten?

One of the most significant documents the American Roman Catholic bishops issued in the 20th century was [Economic Justice for All](#). Issued in 1986, it calls fulfilling the needs of the poor the “highest priority” of economic policy and employment the “most urgent priority for domestic economic policy.” Economic rights are fundamental human rights, as much as freedom of speech and religion. Some on Wall Street responded: What can a group of bishops know of high finance? A living Christianity, however, will always speak economic justice to economic power. Speak up for human values as expressed in public budgets.

Today's readings:

Sirach 5:1-8; Mark 9:41-50 ([344](#)).

“Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ . . . will surely not lose his reward.”

©2019 by TrueQuest Communications, LLC. TakeFiveForFaith.com; 800-942-2811 ; mail@takefiveforfaith.com. All rights reserved. Daily email sign-up and App available online. Scripture citations from the New American Bible Revised Edition. Noncommercial reprints permitted with the following credit: Reprinted with permission from TakeFiveForFaith.com (©2017/2018).