



Monthly Reflections

30Dec2017

SIXTH DAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

We all have a role to play

Anna is one of nine female prophets noted in the Bible. She was also a widow who spent most of her life in the work of worship and proclamation at the temple. This was unusual, because in Hebrew tradition, widows were more often looked upon as problems: Who would marry them, support their children, and feed them? In the early church, the fortunes of widows were reversed. The holy office of widows became an honored station in life. Those formally consecrated as widows became ministers of charity, freed from accountability to men as they used their own wealth, traveled, and played a vital public role in the community. How might your station in life be “consecrated”?

Today's readings:

1 John 2:12-17; Luke 2:36-40 ([203](#)).

“There was also a prophet, Anna, who never left the temple.”

31Dec2017

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH

Endings and beginnings

The generations need each other. Young people seek heroes to look up to and aspire toward. Older folk need the fresh eye, courage, and idealism of newcomers at the table of decision-making. When we work together across generations, we take our surest steps into a future of hope. Elders like Simeon and Anna still haunt sacred places, waiting on God to fulfill old promises. Young families continue to present themselves, bearing their joys and uncertainties. This happy intersection is both consolation and challenge. Let’s find out together what it means to be church!

Today's readings:

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 *or* Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3; Colossians 3:12-21 *or* Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2:22-40 ([17](#)).

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace . . . for my eyes have seen your salvation.”

01Jan2018

OCTAVE DAY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD; SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Share the true gift of the season

Christianity is not a new philosophy or new morality, says Pope Benedict XVI. It is an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ: “We ourselves must be personally involved in an intimate and profound relationship with Jesus.” Mary, the Mother of God, whom we honor today, was instrumental in bringing

the person of Jesus to us and showing us how to fully embrace a life in Christ. Resolve to deepen your relationship with Jesus and, like Mary, find ways to bring Christ to others.

Today's readings:

Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21 ([18](#)).

“He was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.”

02Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF BASIL THE GREAT AND GREGORY NAZIANZUS, BISHOPS, DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

Faith begins at home

Several giants of the early church, including today’s Saints Basil and Gregory Nazianzus, were inspired by Basil’s older sister Macrina (whose brothers also included two other saints, Gregory of Nyssa and Peter of Sebaste). Macrina deeply influenced her family with her asceticism. With the help of her younger brother, Peter, Macrina turned the family estate into a monastery and convent, providing a peaceful shelter for study and meditation. What inspiration can you draw from family members as you resolve to deepen your commitment to Christ in this New Year?

Today's readings:

1 John 2:22-28; John 1:19-28 ([205](#)).

“I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord.’ ”

03Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

Dig a little deeper

As Christians, we believe we are called by name to follow Jesus. Do we accept what that belief implies: that Jesus knows us personally and considers us to be an essential part of his ministry? And as we call on Jesus, just how confident are we that we know who he is and what he wants out of the relationship? John the Baptist knew who Jesus was, but such knowledge took rigorous prayer and questioning. Perhaps you need to do the same to discover why Jesus counts you among his friends.

Today's readings:

1 John 2:29—3:6; John 1:29-34 ([206](#)).

“And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

04Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF ELIZABETH ANN SETON, RELIGIOUS

Work with what you have

And you thought you were busy? Consider Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first native-born citizen of the United States to be canonized. Mother Seton founded the first American religious community for women, the Sisters of Charity. She opened the first American parish school, nursed sick and dying family, friends, and neighbors, and established the first American Catholic orphanage—all while raising five children as a widow! Next time your own responsibilities get you down, remember that you don’t have to start out a saint to do some good in the world.

Today's readings:

1 John 3:7-10; John 1:35-42 ([207](#)).

“Let no one deceive you. The person who acts in righteousness is righteous.”

05Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF JOHN NEUMANN, BISHOP

Stick it out for the long haul

Ever feel like you don't really belong—not even in the church? John Neumann (1811-60) must have had days like that. Born in Bohemia, his bishop didn't ordain him after seminary because the Hapsburg Empire had too many priests. So he came to America and was ordained within a month but always felt like an outsider. Later, when he was installed as bishop of Philadelphia, not one bishop showed up to support him. Stick around the church long enough, and you will be rewarded for hanging in there.

Today's readings:

1 John 3:11-21; John 1:43-51 ([208](#)).

“Nathanael said to Philip, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip replied, ‘Come and see.’”

06Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF ANDRÉ BESSETTE, RELIGIOUS

Do the ordinary with extraordinary faith

When Brother André tried to enter his religious community, his superiors thought him too sickly and undereducated to amount to much. So they made him the community doorman. In addition to answering the door, he directed visitors, delivered packages and mail, awakened the community, ran errands, cut hair, sewed, fixed things, maintained the wine cellar, swept up, and—yes—he also did windows. When he died after decades of counseling and bringing God's healing to hundreds of thousands of people, a million mourners attended his funeral. Quite a switch for a person who didn't show much “promise.” We recognize God's presence when we do our everyday tasks with generosity, love, and devotion.

Today's readings:

1 John 5:5-13; Mark 1:7-11 *or* Luke 23-38 ([209](#)).

“The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me.”

07Jan2018

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Bless this threshold

Think of everything that goes on in your home. Whether you live in a studio or on an estate, home is where the action is. Meals eaten, laundry folded, conversations shared, faults confessed, injuries forgiven, promises made, dreams spoken out loud, victories celebrated, defeats laid to rest, births welcomed, wanderers embraced, sickness tended, disappointments endured, deaths grieved—these are the many elements by which the vitality of our homes is measured. Doesn't a space this important deserve a New Year's blessing? Celebrate a ritual for these rooms where love puts down its roots.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12 ([20](#)).

“Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.”

08Jan2018

FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Be prepared

Moments of great insight and personal revelation, such as the experience Jesus had when he emerged from the waters after John baptized him, are a gift from God. But the ground is ours to prepare. It is doubtful that Jesus arrived at this moment of his life, which marked the beginning of his public ministry, without having spent a good deal of time in prayer and quiet reflection. We can do the same. Working with the limitations of time and the circumstances of your life, create a time and space every day for prayer and quiet contemplation or meditation. Many people make it the first thing in their day. That way it doesn't get lost. Prepare the ground, so that when the Spirit “descends like a dove” with a revelation for you, it will find a solid place to perch.

Today's readings:

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7 or 55:1-11; Acts of the Apostles 10:34-38 or 1 John 5:1-9; Mark 1:7-11 ([21](#)).

“One mightier than I is coming after me.”

09Jan2018

FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

What possessed you?

It's worthy to note that the “unclean spirits” in the gospel stories speak in the plural: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” Why is that? The “possessed” person is one who has lost his center, whose soul is divided, split and without grounding or foundation in the “Holy One of God.” He is dominated by one voice, then by another. No wonder he speaks in the plural. Today, we might take a moment to ask ourselves, *What is my center? From where do my thoughts and actions flow?* Then make any necessary adjustments.

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 1:9-20 or 1:1-8; Mark 1:21-28 or 1:14-20 ([306](#) or 305).

“The man with the unclean spirit cried out, ‘I know who you are, the Holy One of God!’ ”

10Jan2018

Healer, heal thyself

You may have heard the expression “wounded healer.” It suggests that you don't have to be perfectly healthy to help others. But you have to be careful not to bring your unresolved problems into helping relationships with others, or you could do a lot of damage. Scripture makes it clear that taking care of your personal spiritual health should come first. Peter's mother-in-law took to her bed when she was ill and only served the apostles after Jesus healed her. You can give of yourself only if you have something to give. Think about some ways you can improve your spiritual health—by doing some spiritual reading, praying more, seeking the sacrament of Reconciliation, or going on a retreat.

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20; Mark 1:29-39 ([307](#)).

“Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up. The fever left her, and she began to serve them.”

11Jan2018

Take in the outcast

In the gospel era, lepers were considered rejects of society. According to the law of Moses, they had to announce their presence to everybody within earshot so they could be avoided. Yet, with a simple choice, a word, and a gesture, Jesus restored a leper to health so he could be around others without being afraid. How many people will we encounter today who, by their appearance or their language, will announce their rejection by society? Part of doing God’s will is choosing to welcome the stranger and include those whom society rejects into our lives.

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 4:1-11; Mark 1:40-45 ([308](#)).

“A leper knelt before Jesus and said to him, ‘If you choose, you can make me clean.’ ”

12Jan2018

Stick with the basics

The Gospel of Mark is the story of Jesus told in simple language for simple folk, without big words or extra commentary. But even without embellishment, extraordinary things happen—friendship so phenomenal that a paralytic makes an unlikely grand entrance followed by a more dramatic exit. It’s plain to see Jesus works wonders, not just forgiving unforgivable sins but proving his right to do so by giving the paralyzed power to walk. If we’re paralyzed today, it’s because we’ve made life more muddled than Mark, wrapped up in rationalizations and fancy phrases when all we really need is “Jesus saves.”

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 8:4-7; Mark 2:1-12 ([309](#)).

“They removed the roof above Jesus, and let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.”

13Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF HILARY, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Make the ask

Saint Hilary of Poitiers (d. 368), a midlife convert, felt great passion for the Christian concept of God—the Trinity—and fought hard against the Arians, who denied the divinity of Christ. For Hilary, Jesus wasn’t simply a holy person; Jesus was the Christ, the second person of the Trinity. Therefore, Hilary argued, it is through Jesus that we find our way to God’s grace: “We have been promised, and he who made the promise is trustworthy: ‘Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.’ ” No matter what you’ve done or failed to do, your sins will be forgiven, if you just ask.

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1a; Mark 2:13-17 ([310](#)).

"All the crowd came to him and he taught them."

14Jan2018

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

It's your call

Most of us are leery about accepting calls from unknown sources. In the happy age of caller ID, it's as if a virtual butler brings each visitor's card on a silver tray into our drawing room. We can decline to be "home" to any undesirable contact. Still, people of faith *do* want to be present when it's God who comes calling. How do we learn to distinguish that special voice from all the internal chatter clamoring for our attention? Veterans in discernment are helpful mentors, including pastors, spiritual directors, and the blueprint stories of past saints. Seekers, take the call!

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19; 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20; John 1:35-42 ([65](#)).

"Here I am. You called me."

15Jan2018

Stick with the routine

How many of us have tried to get in shape for a big event, like a reunion or wedding? We eat less, exercise, and hope to make a good impression. Once the big day arrives, there's little more to do than enjoy ourselves. That's what the apostles were doing while Jesus was in their midst. After years of praying for a savior, Christ finally arrived, so there was nothing more to do than savor the moment. The real challenge is to continue healthy practices once the big event is over so that we're more prepared for the next event. What exercises will help you prepare for the next big spiritual event in your life?

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 15:16-23; Mark 2:18-22 ([311](#)).

"Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"

16Jan2018

Sabbath prayer

While the Pharisees may have overemphasized strict observance of the Sabbath, perhaps we have swung too far in the opposite direction. Look around you on any Sunday afternoon—you'll see people shopping, working, rushing about. And most of us are right in the thick of things. While having options on how to spend our free time is a good thing, what seems to be getting lost is the notion of a qualitative difference in the pace of life, the "quiet Sunday afternoons" of times past. We all need a space in our crowded lives for time apart, time to reconnect with ourselves, our loved ones, and our God. Whatever your own Sunday choices might be, make sure you find a way to "keep holy the Sabbath." After all, as Jesus taught, the Sabbath was designed for our benefit. God doesn't need a day of rest—we do.

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Mark 2:23-28 ([312](#)).

"The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath."

17Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF ANTHONY, ABBOT

Go for broke

At one point in the gospels, Jesus says, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:50). Saint Anthony, the fourth-century Egyptian considered the founder of Christian monasticism, would have easily qualified as Jesus' "family." Sitting one day in church, he heard the gospel passage, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). He immediately sold what he owned, arranged for the financial support of his sister, gave the rest of his money to the poor, and went into the desert to live as a hermit. Sometimes we need a "here I am Lord" faith that gets up and does the will of God before we can talk ourselves out of it.

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51; Mark 3:1-6 ([313](#)).

"Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?"

18Jan2018

Touch the pain

When people are hurting, they seek the healing power of physical touch, just as those who followed Jesus did. Perhaps that is one reason why healing massage is one of the fastest-growing phenomena in our society. We seek to be healed physically, emotionally, and spiritually of what ails us, what causes us "dis-ease," and the power of touch can help in all these areas. Be a healer yourself, by offering a comforting hug or shoulder to cry on, a handshake of praise, a kiss to a loved one. To touch and be touched in healing, healthy ways is as natural and human as to breathe and walk. Reach out and make the connection today!

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 18:6-9; 19:1-7; Mark 3:7-12 ([314](#)).

"He had cured many and, as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him."

19Jan2018

Jesus chooses his teammates

When it comes to Christian unity, Jesus points us in an odd direction by his example. When he calls his 12 closest followers, it's not pretty: Roman collaborators, men smelling of fish, a political agitator, and a thief, among others. Many of these will never distinguish themselves beyond their denial, betrayal, and doubt of the one whom they follow. Why does Jesus make such eccentric choices? We might as well ask why Jesus wants you and me. Jesus calls whom he calls, and if we don't all go to the same church, is that his problem or ours?

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 24:3-21; Mark 3:13-19 ([315](#)).

“Jesus called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him.”

20Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF FABIAN, POPE, MARTYR

Serve when called

Can a layperson be chosen pope? It happened in the year 236, when it is said that those who had gathered to elect a new bishop of Rome saw a dove alight upon the head of Fabian, an unknown layman and farmer who happened to be visiting the city. He was at once proclaimed bishop of Rome by acclamation. Fabian made important contributions to the church, including his decision to send seven bishops to Gaul to evangelize the region we know today as France and Belgium. Be prepared for service both great and small at any time of day or night.

Today's readings:

2 Samuel 1:1-4, 11-12, 19, 23-27; Mark 3:20-21 ([316](#)).

“Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?”

21Jan2018

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

It's not the end of the world

If there's one thing we can use less of, it's negative attitudes. After a brief perusal of daily headlines, we might be forgiven for thinking that the next six wars are preloaded, our food supply is toxic, strangers may be killers, and all leaders are liars. Yet our sacred story declares that human hearts can change. The future can be anything we want it to be. All we have to do is choose. Decide today to walk the road of hope.

Today's readings:

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20 ([68](#)).

“Jonah began his journey . . . announcing, ‘Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed.’ ”

22Jan2018

Change is gonna come

Those first disciples called by Jesus “immediately” left everything and followed him. Often we're inspired by a Sunday sermon or something we read in the paper or hear on the news. Then we feel the need to change our lives in some way in order to become better people. Yet change is hard when so much holds us in place: our families, our jobs—all our responsibilities. Yet there is always a need to leave something behind in order to gain something better. What must you let go of today in order to answer the Lord's call to fulfillment?

Today's readings:

2 Samuel 5:1-7, 10; Mark 3:22-30 ([317](#)).

"Jesus said, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him."

23Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF MARIANNE COPE, VIRGIN

Follow an inspiring example

Many of us have heard of Father Damien, famous for his work with those with leprosy, but Sister Marianne Cope, at the age of 45 likewise volunteered for the Hawaiian mission at Molokai. She served girls and women with leprosy, emphasizing "pride and fun" and dignity in the colony. Soon after her death, a local woman wrote in the *Honolulu Advertiser* that she was "a woman [who devoted] every hour of 30 years to the mothering of people isolated by law from the rest of the world. She risked her own life in all that time, faced everything with unflinching courage, and smiled sweetly through it all." Who can you help today, right at home, to see beyond the harshness of life?

Today's readings:

2 Samuel 6:12b-15, 17-19; Mark 3:31-35 ([318](#)).

"Who are my mother and my brothers?"

24Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF FRANCIS DE SALES, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Be the retiring type

Saint Francis de Sales (1567-1622) led a full life, both before and after his relatively late decision to join the priesthood. In his era, a life of holiness was considered the domain of monks and nuns, certainly not of laypeople. But he believed God could and should be found in everyday life and was one of the first great religious teachers to offer spiritual direction to lay Catholics living and working in the world, such as in his book *Introduction to the Devout Life*. His advice to those busy with the world's affairs is as valid today as it was then: "Retire at various times into the solitude of your own heart, even while outwardly engaged in discussions or transactions with others, and talk to God." Practice a little "early retirement" today!

Today's readings:

2 Samuel 7:4-17; Mark 4:1-20 ([319](#)).

"Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear."

25Jan2018

FEAST OF THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL THE APOSTLE

The impossible is possible

Have you or someone you know ever experienced a conversion? Conversion can take many forms. Someone turns their life around—recovering from an addiction, bouncing back from an illness or a setback and going at life in a whole new way. The amazing thing about Saint Paul's conversion was that he went from persecutor of Christians to a devout Christian himself. The change in him was so incredible not everyone believed it at first. How could this person who was out to imprison and kill

Christians suddenly be one of them? For God all things are possible. With God's help, that makes a lot of things possible for us, too.

Today's readings:

Acts 22:3-16 or 9:1-22; Mark 16:15-18 ([519](#)).

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

26Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF TIMOTHY AND TITUS, BISHOPS

Be a living example

Timothy and Titus were companions and coworkers of the apostle Paul. We call them bishops because Christian tradition sees them as the first leaders of the churches in Ephesus (Greece) and Crete. They carried the gospel to the world in the earliest days of the church. They show us that the best way for our faith to live and grow is to live it. All Christians, not only leaders, bear a responsibility to take part in the mission of the church. To spread the faith, make yourself a living example of it.

Today's readings:

2 Timothy 1:1-8 OR Titus 1:1-5; Mark 4:26-34 ([520](#); Gospel [321](#)).

"To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it?"

27Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF ANGELA MERICI, VIRGIN, RELIGIOUS FOUNDER

Share and share alike

Saint Angela Merici didn't set out to form a typical religious community of women. An orphan herself, she began by simply giving religious instruction to the poor and uneducated children of her neighbors. Before long, other women were attracted to join her. By the time she was 50, prompted by a heavenly vision, she began a community of women called the Ursulines who embraced virginity, poverty, and obedience. But they took no formal vows. They didn't formally congregate as a religious community, either, but stayed at home to evangelize to their family, friends, and neighbors. Evangelism can begin with even the tiniest seed. With whom will you share a bit of the Good News today?

Today's readings:

2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 10-17; Mark 4:35-41 ([322](#)).

"Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?"

28Jan2018

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Deliver us from every evil

Even the best of us harbor within ourselves an unclean spirit or two. "Unclean" simply means not compatible with the holiness of God. This isn't a condition any of us can afford to be in! Consider the garden variety of dirty spirits that routinely board with us: self-absorption, unforgiveness, envy, judgment, arrogance, hard-heartedness, cynicism. Identify your familiar demons, practice their counterpoint virtues, and fill your interior house with grace.

Today's readings:

Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28 ([71](#)).

“Jesus rebuked [the unclean spirit] and said, ‘Quiet! Come out of him!’ ”

29Jan2018

Use your freedom well

The story of Legion in Mark’s gospel is quite sad. Doctors today might diagnose him with multiple personality disorder. To him, it was only apparent that he lived with his demons in torment. He caused such harm to himself and others that he couldn’t live in town but was forced to stay in the cemetery, a man buried alive by his pain. Once Jesus delivered him, his natural desire was to stay with Jesus. But Jesus told him to take his freedom home with him to his family and community. Every person made whole becomes a living, breathing gospel.

Today's readings:

2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30; 16:5-13; Mark 5:1-20 ([323](#)).

“Jesus asked, ‘What is your name?’ The man replied, ‘My name is Legion, for we are many.’ ”

30Jan2018

Have faith

How can a woman be healed from her hemorrhaging by only touching the cloak of Christ? He tells her that the sincerity of her faith had saved her. The church confirms the power of faith through its place as one of the three “theological virtues,” along with hope and charity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that faith is when “a person freely commits his entire self to God,” and by which he or she can accept everything given by God. But unlike the “cardinal virtues,” faith is truly not of our own accord; rather, it is a grace both from God and toward God. How often do we stop to ask for faith?

Today's readings:

2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14b, 24-25a, 30—19:3; Mark 5:21-43 ([324](#)).

“Jesus said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.’ ”

31Jan2018

MEMORIAL OF JOHN BOSCO, PRIEST

Good is the best teacher

With some notable exceptions, throughout much of history the default position for disciplining children was punishing them harshly when they were bad. One of the notable exceptions was the 19th-century Italian priest John Bosco. As a young priest in Turin, he encountered masses of boys the industrial conditions of the city had left out in the cold. In response, he established youth clubs, hostels, and boarding schools. What was especially unique was his “preventive system” of dealing with the boys, which was based on reason, religion, and kindness. It appealed to their intelligence and their desire for God and the good. Saint John Bosco also founded religious orders for men and women, the Salesians, to expand and continue this work. You can try to force the bad out of a person, or you can appeal to the good in them.

Today's readings:

2 Samuel 24:2, 9-17; Mark 6:1-6 ([325](#)).

“Where did this man get all this? Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary?”

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