



# Monthly Reflections

01Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF JUSTIN, MARTYR

Will you testify?

Jesus said there is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends. In the early church, plenty of Christians did just that for the sake of the gospel. Their willingness to die led many who dismissed Christianity to look again. New friends in Christ were born from their courage. So the martyr called Justin came to faith in the second century. A professional philosopher, he was swayed by the “only safe and worthy philosophy” for which people around him were willing to die. As a church apologist, his own life was soon poured out for the sake of the gospel. How can you witness to your faith today?

## Today's readings:

Acts 22:30; 23:6-11; John 17:20-26 ([300](#)).

"I pray not only for these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."

02Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF MARCELLINUS AND PETER, MARTYRS

Love your life away

It's a bit jarring for Catholics to think of Rome, the center of the church, as a hostile place, but it was for many early Christians, such as Marcellinus and Peter, who died in the persecutions perpetrated by Roman emperors. We may have few details of their lives, but we do know the church has always venerated them, and so we remember them, too, as some of the first witnesses to the Christian faith. They testify both to the ancient roots of our faith and to its unbroken tradition. They stand as people who gave themselves entirely to God. You, too, can do the same. Practice turning over your heart to God and you will find yourself not far from God's realm.

## Today's readings:

Acts 25:13b-21; John 21:15-19 ([301](#)).

"Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

03Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF CHARLES LWANGA AND COMPANIONS

Be steadfast

People in power have been known to overstep their bounds and ask for more than is their rightful due. Such demands rarely turn out well—at least in the short run—for anyone who refuses the unfair request. Case in point: Charles Lwanga and hundreds of other Ugandan teens who were tortured and executed in the 19th century after their chieftain grew jealous of their devotion to Christianity and ordered them to denounce their faith. As the young men burned in a massive pyre, their torturers were assured of their

victims' deaths only when the martyrs stopped praying. Pray for the spiritual gifts of fortitude and piety when you are asked to do something that violates your deepest faith.

### **Today's readings:**

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31; John 21:20-25 ([302](#)).

“There are also many other things that Jesus did.”

04Jun2017

SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST

You are gifted

Your Confirmation celebrated the fact that you are being given the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They're not one-time gifts, but rather gifts that keep on giving. They are: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, courage, reverence, and wonder in God's presence. They're yours for the taking, but many of us fail to notice their availability. Watch for them in your life—when you have sudden bursts of wisdom, when you exhibit courage, when you are awestruck by a moment of beauty or love or forgiveness. These are signs that the Holy Spirit is alive in your life. Look for them.

### **Today's readings:**

Acts 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13; Veni Sancte Spiritus; John 20:19-23 ([63](#)).

“He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ ”

05Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF BONIFACE, BISHOP, MARTYR

Confirmed on a daily basis

Confirmation can seem like the odd sacrament out among the seven. Sometimes it's joined to Baptism in the initiation of adults (RCIA) that we recently celebrated at Easter. More commonly it's a teen rite of passage when young people get to embrace personally the faith to which their parents and godparents pledged them. For Saint Boniface (c. 680-754), it was the occasion of his martyrdom as he waited in the open fields for his converts to arrive for the ritual. His enemies' ambush offered its own confirmation of the faith of Boniface and his attendants. How does your faith get “confirmed” day by day?

### **Today's readings:**

Tobit 1:3; 2:1a-8; Mark 12:1-12 ([353](#)).

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

06Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF NORBERT, BISHOP

Faith is more than horseplay

Many think Saint Paul converted to Christianity when he was knocked from his horse on the road to Damascus. Read about it in the Acts of the Apostles, and you'll find a dramatic tale of conversion, but no horse. Fast-forward 1,000 years or so to the young and carefree nobleman Norbert riding an actual horse on a road in Germany. A thunderstorm spooked the animal, which threw Norbert to the ground, knocking him out. When he regained consciousness, he said, “Lord, what would you have me do?” The answer he heard: “Turn away from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.” Keep your heart and mind open to God's call to reorient your life.

**Today's readings:**

Tobit 2:9-14; Mark 12:13-17 ([354](#)).

“Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”

07Jun2017

Here are three good reasons

You may have noticed at Mass as the celebrant says, “A reading from the Holy Gospel according to . . .” that he traces a sign of the cross on the open book. At the same time, people in the congregation make a small sign of the cross on their foreheads, lips, and heart. This practice dates back at least as far as the 11th century. The significance of this threefold signing is to express our desire and intention to hear the gospel with an open mind, proclaim it with our lips, and cherish and safeguard it in our hearts. Make this a conscious habit at Mass and it will help you carry the gospel with you into the world in how you think, what you say, and how you live.

**Today's readings:**

Tobit 3:1-11a, 16-17a; Mark 12:18-27 ([355](#)).

“Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior.”

08Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF EPHREM OF SYRIA, DEACON, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

How can you keep from singing?

Saint Ephrem (fourth century) was not much to look at. Small, shriveled, his clothes in patches and covered with dirt, he lived in a cave and ate barley bread and vegetables. Nutritionists might not have approved of his diet, but everyone, it seemed, loved his music. They called him the “harp of the Holy Ghost” because of the hymns and homilies he composed. Ephrem was one of the first to appreciate the power of sacred song to move the assembly in worship. Take the words of one of your favorite hymns to prayer, and include singing in your personal devotion.

**Today's readings:**

Tobit 6:10-11; 7:1bcde, 9-17; 8:4-9a; Mark 12:28-34 ([356](#)).

“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

09Jun2017

Pray for imperfect leaders

King David was very much a flawed leader. Even so he is acclaimed as a great defender of his people, a gifted musician, and a poet and is revered not only in Jewish culture but by Christians and Muslims as well. The honorific title “Son of David” was often applied to Jesus, proving that good results can indeed come from our leaders, flawed though they are. Today is a good day to pray for all elected leaders, asking God to guide them to faithfully fulfill the duties of their offices and to seek justice, peace, and the common good in all of their efforts.

**Today's readings:**

Tobit 11:5-17; Mark 12:35-37 ([357](#)).

“Blessed be God, and praised be his great name, and blessed be all his holy angels.”

10Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Hail Mary in many ways

Devotion to Mary has a long tradition in the church. Inscriptions and prayers to Mary began appearing early in Christian history, and popular devotion to Our Lady has been a part of Catholic life ever since. A lovely Irish litany from the eighth century captures the flavor of that devotion, as fresh today as it was centuries ago. Perhaps you can recite it a few times today. Mary is honored as: “Mistress of the Heavens, Mother of the Heavenly and Earthly Church, Recreation of Life, Mistress of the Tribes, Mother of the Orphans, Breast of the Infants, Queen of Life, Ladder of Heaven.”

**Today's readings:**

Tobit 12:1, 5-15, 20; Mark 12:38-44 ([358](#)).

“This poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury.”

11Jun2017

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

Circling in on the Trinity

Dante, the writer of *The Divine Comedy*, created images of eternity more enduring than most theology. His description of the Trinity is curious: “In the profound and clear substance of the supreme light, three circles appeared to me; of three different colors and one single dimension.” In our Creed, we affirm the relationship of Jesus to God as “light from light.” Circles represent infinity, and one dimension absolute unity. But the colors? Dante isn’t telling. He does call this unity Knower, Known, and Knowing, as well as Lover, Loved, and Loving. By any other name, our God is One.

**Today's readings:**

Exodus 34:4b-6, 8-9; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; John 3:16-18 ([164](#)).

“The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity.”

12Jun2017

Fear not, Jesus is near

Pope John Paul II called Jesus the “Good Samaritan of the human family.” Jesus comes among us as a stranger yet proves himself to be our best friend in time of need. He dares to come close to us in situations where even those around us draw away in dread and fear. His presence heals the wounds life inflicts, and when he finds us in a fatal hour, he brings us back to his Father’s house. For this reason we are deeply blessed in times of loss and sorrow, persecution and lowliness. There is nothing to fear, because Jesus is with us.

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 1:1-7; Matthew 5:1-12 ([359](#)).

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

13Jun2017

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

Get to it!

You never see a statue of Saint Anthony that's short and fat, but he was. Perhaps we can all expect a makeover with canonization! But when folks looked at Anthony, they saw a radiant holiness that made some drop to their knees. His magnetic personality attracted criminals and heretics alike to conversion. His preaching was greatly in demand, and at the age of 36 he basically died of exhaustion. He was canonized within a year. Anthony wasted no time in giving his gift, and it didn't take the church long to decide what a gift he was to us. What you have to give, offer it today.

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 1:18-22; Matthew 5:13-16 ([360](#)).

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?”

14Jun2017

Heavenly news

The passing away of heaven and earth is not necessarily the literal end of the universe. Rather, heaven and earth were radically changed with Jesus' death and Resurrection. Anyone who hears the Good News of Jesus lives in a new age with a new understanding of universal truths. So for us Christians that means not only must we respect others, we must love them, even our enemies. This is undoubtedly a new concept of heaven and earth.

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 3:4-11; Matthew 5:17-19 ([361](#)).

“Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law.”

15Jun2017

Be a generous giver

Catholic Relief Services, founded in 1943 by the U.S. Catholic bishops, offers emergency assistance where it's most needed around the world. CRS reaches more than 60 million people in 94 countries and territories in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and Latin America. One way we can atone for some of the missteps we've made along the way is to give generously to those in need—that is, after we've reconciled with those we have hurt, whenever possible. So make your amends, and then consider supporting CRS, the second largest distributor of U.S. government relief food in the world ([www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org)).

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 3:15—4:1, 3-6; Matthew 5:20-26 ([362](#)).

“Go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

16Jun2017

God's mercy keeps us from the cutting edge

Imagine if every time we do something wrong, we have to cut off parts of our bodies in order to get to heaven. That's what Jesus suggests to those who think that the only way to avoid hell is to eliminate all sin from their lives. Virtue is good, but it won't get you to heaven. Only God's forgiveness opens those

pearly gates for us. Better to depend on God's faithful love than the shaky prospect that we might be successful in the quest for perfection.

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 4:7-15; Matthew 5:27-32 ([363](#)).

“It is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”

17Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Yes, we can write salvation history

Was there ever a *yes* surrendered to God as graciously and completely as the fiat of Mary of Nazareth? “Let it be done to me,” this sturdy teenager agreed, to the outrageous proposal of an unexpected angel caller. This was a *yes* shouted into the darkness of history, reverberating into an unknown and possibly perilous future. This was a *yes* that affected everyone who ever lived and ever would live. Did Mary know on that ordinary day that salvation history was being made? Or was it that she was always keenly aware—as perhaps we are not—that salvation history is made in every hour, with every human decision?

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Matthew 5:33-37 ([364](#)).

“Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more is from the Evil One.”

18Jun2017

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

Embody your faith

The addition of today's feast to the church calendar was primarily the result of the work of 13th-century Augustinian nun Juliana of Liège. She worked in her convent's hospital nursing the sick. During this time she reported having visions of Christ reminding her that there was no feast for the Holy Sacrament. She persuaded Saint Thomas Aquinas to compose a special prayer to honor the Blessed Sacrament, and in 1264 Pope Urban IV made Corpus Christi a feast day. Today is a fitting day to ponder what it might mean for us to give ourselves “body and soul” to the Good News, as Jesus did.

**Today's readings:**

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Lauda Sion; John 6:51-58 ([167](#)).

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?”

19Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF ROMUALD, ABBOT

Journey inward

Romuald (c. 951-1027) was a man on a mission. Becoming a Benedictine monk in order to atone for a murder his father had committed, he sought ever simpler forms of monastic life, a desire that led him to establish monasteries and hermitages as places of silence and contemplation—known as Camoldolese monastic communities. To his monks he wrote: “Sit in your cell as in paradise. Put the whole world behind you and forget it. Watch your thoughts like a good fisherman watching for fish.” Devote some

time to the journey within, not as something selfish, but as an inner pilgrimage to God. God is yours, and you are God's.

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 6:1-10; Matthew 5:38-42 ([365](#)).

“Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.”

20Jun2017

Grace really is amazing

Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote: “Grace builds upon our nature and does not destroy it.” It’s a way of saying God works through our human nature but also that we need the gift of God’s power—grace—to take us beyond our nature in order to meet the challenges of Christian love. Scripture speaks of that very well. Jesus calls on us to find the strength to go beyond the human tendency to love only those in “our group” by remembering the love of God, which goes out to all. Ask God for abundant grace.

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 8:1-9; Matthew 5:43-48 ([366](#)).

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

21Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF ALOYSIUS GONZAGA, RELIGIOUS

Bloom where you are planted

Today marks the summer solstice. It’s an appropriate moment to honor Saint Aloysius (1568-91), who barely reached the summer of his life. Aloysius was born into a noble family and was entitled to great things. He chose smallness instead, preferring a life of devotion and prayer. His father planned for him to be a great soldier; Aloysius became a Jesuit instead, serving the sick and dying during an epidemic of plague. Always frail in health, his dream of becoming a missionary to India was never realized. But he did what he could where he was. That’s a goal we all can reach.

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 9:6-11; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 ([367](#)).

“Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them.”

22Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF PAULINUS OF NOLA, BISHOP

Loss can lead to gain

Saint Paulinus of Nola (ca. 354-431) was praised by such well-known contemporaries as Saints Augustine, Jerome, and Ambrose. The wealthy and privileged son of the Roman prefect of Gaul, Paulinus seemed to have it all—until he and his wife, Theresa, lost their only child a week after birth. The loss changed them profoundly. They gave much of their property to charity (to the displeasure of their relatives) and turned their residence into a shelter for the wayward poor. For his choice of radical charity, Paulinus was unexpectedly ordained a priest and later made bishop of Nola by popular demand. Reflect on the losses in your own life. Ask God to help you transform your pain into compassionate outreach to others.

**Today's readings:**

2 Corinthians 11:1-11; Matthew 6:7-15 ([368](#)).

“Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye but do not notice the log in your own?”

23Jun2017

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS

Heartfelt communication

When a businessman turned 40, he began to realize he wasn’t really a self-made man, and he sought out his third-grade teacher to thank her for all she’d meant to him. She strained her aging eyes as he approached her in the nursing home, but recognition dawned along with a huge smile. “I’ve kept you in my heart all these years,” she told him. He knew just what she meant. The heart is the symbol of the inner life of a person. Jesus is often depicted with a heart on fire with love—for us! The fire in his heart can become the fire in our own. What’s in your heart today? Is there room for love?

**Today's readings:**

Deuteronomy 7:6-11; 1 John 4:7-16; Matthew 11:25-30 ([170](#)).

“Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

24Jun2017

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Respond to your deepest calling

The name *John* means “God’s gift,” and such was the Baptist. From the moment he came on the preaching scene, he proved himself a powerful, captivating herald of God. His bold, dramatic, austere, and uncompromising style is what many people had in mind when they hoped for a Messiah. But John understood that his role was to prepare the way for the One who was to come. His prophetic witness and commitment to his call are his legacy to us. Share in his gift by being true to your own Christian calling.

**Today's readings:**

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

“They wanted to name the baby after his father. But his mother said, ‘No; he is to be called John.’ ”

25Jun2017

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Count to ten . . . blessings

During those dark moments in your life when you are sure God has forsaken you, follow this simple practice endorsed by Jesus: Count your blessings. Think about all that you’ve been given, the love and mercy that God has shown you and others. Did you demand explanations for those gifts? Wonder at their fairness or equity? Our suffering may never make sense, but it will be redeemed, in fact it has been redeemed many times over. God’s love is stronger than sorrow and death. Abide in that love.

**Today's readings:**

Jeremiah 20:10-13; Romans 5:12-15; Matthew 10:26-33 ([94](#)).

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”



26Jun2017

Drop the judgmental mask

Matthew's gospel quotes Jesus as saying, "Stop judging, that you may not be judged." While you have to make some judgments every day, Jesus forbids judging a person's character, worth, intentions, or standing before God on the basis of what you see. Jesus used the word *hypocrite*, which comes from the Greek word for "actor," someone who wears a mask. The gospel asks that you unmask yourself, be real, and leave it to God to judge.

**Today's readings:**

Genesis 12:1-9; Matthew 7:1-5 ([371](#)).

"You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye."

27Jun2017

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

Can you bear to see the divine?

Cyril of Alexandria (c. 375-444) was a divisive and headstrong leader for much of his life and no great role model for saintly living. He did, however, make one lasting contribution to the teachings of the church. Another bishop, Nestorius, had argued that it was impossible that God could ever become fully human in the weak and vulnerable form of an infant. He argued that Christ's divinity must have come later. Cyril defended Christ's dual nature from the beginning—fully human and fully divine—and defended Mary's title as *Theotokos*, "the bearer of God." The next opportunity you have to gaze upon the face of an infant, see if you can catch a glimpse of the divine. Ask God to give you a touch of the innocence and trust you see reflected in that infant's gaze.

**Today's readings:**

Genesis 13:2, 5-18; Matthew 7:6, 12-14 ([372](#)).

"A scribe approached and said, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.'"

28Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF IRENAEUS, BISHOP, MARTYR

Christ's love is no secret

Irenaeus (second century), a Father of the church, was mentored by people who knew the first disciples, which might explain the confidence he felt to write five treatises on detecting and debunking heresies. Irenaeus tamed the threat of Gnosticism by his sure efforts to "strip the fox," as he put it, so that no one could mistake the Gnostic's claims of secret spiritual knowledge for the real and accessible message of Christ. Irenaeus wrote of God: "He cannot be seen or described in . . . all his greatness . . . Yet he is certainly not unknown. Through his Word the whole creation learns that there is one God . . . who holds all things together and gives them their being."

**Today's readings:**

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Matthew 7:15-20 ([373](#)).

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing."

29Jun2017

## SOLEMNITY OF PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES

Give thanks for the odd couple

Peter and Paul might not have appreciated sharing a feast day. We mean to honor two giants of Christianity, without whom we might not have the church at all. But two more different men would be hard to find. Peter was a Galilean fisherman, impulsive, bull-headed, and rough around the edges. Paul was an educated man of the world, a Pharisee from outside Israel in territory that is now Turkey. These two met rarely and agreed even less frequently. But we value what they taught us about holding the center of orthodoxy (Peter) and pushing the frontier of the Holy Spirit (Paul).

### Today's readings:

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

“Jesus said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ ”

30Jun2017

MEMORIAL OF THE FIRST MARTYRS OF THE CHURCH OF ROME

Don't get burned by prejudice

“Nero fiddled while Rome burned,” goes the old saying. Some blamed him for failing to fight the fire in a kind of ultimate urban renewal project. Nero himself pointed the finger at Rome's Christians and used the fire as an excuse to persecute them. Not everyone really believed the Christians were responsible, yet many were eager to denounce them for the tired old reason of prejudice. Prejudice still exacts its price in a world that doesn't always care for the truth. Don't fall for it.

### Today's readings:

Genesis 17:1, 9-10, 15-22; Matthew 8:1-4 ([375](#)).

“Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean.”

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