



# Monthly Reflections

01May2017

MEMORIAL OF JOSEPH THE WORKER

Let's get to work!

The Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker may have been instituted on May 1 partly for political reasons (to counteract communist influence), but the feast's recognition of the dignity and sanctity of labor has deep roots in Christian tradition. Unfortunately our high-tech culture doesn't honor manual labor as much as it should. E. F. Schumacher, in his book *Small Is Beautiful*, suggests that a "great part of the modern neurosis may be due to this very fact: for the human being . . . enjoys nothing more than to be creatively, usefully, productively engaged with both his hands and his brains." Today, in honor of Saint Joseph, plant a seed, make dinner from scratch, or fix something that's broken.

## Today's readings:

Genesis 1:26—2:3 or Colossians 3:14-15, 17, 23-24; Matthew 13:54-58 (559) or Acts 6:8-15; John 6:22-29 ([273](#)).

"Do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures."

02May2017

MEMORIAL OF ATHANASIUS, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

One and same

Each Sunday we recite the Nicene Creed, which Saint Athanasius was instrumental in formulating and defending at great risk to his life. When the Nicene Creed was originally drawn up in 325, the chief threat was Arianism, which denied that Jesus was fully God. Arius, a priest of the time, preached that God created the Son, which meant the Son was separate from the Father and not divine. Athanasius offered this argument: Consider the sun and the light streaming from it. Are they not of the same substance and the same essence? The physics might be off, but the theology is sound: Jesus and the Father are one in a way that is as inseparable as light from light.

## Today's readings:

Acts 7:51—8:1a; John 6:30-35 ([274](#)).

"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger."

03May2017

FEAST OF PHILIP AND JAMES, APOSTLES

Still don't get it?

How would you like it if someone published an account of your on-the-job training? That's what happened to the apostles, whose gospel appearances usually signal someone about to get Jesus' message wrong. Philip is shown as a hopeless literalist who keeps misunderstanding Jesus. He and his fellow

apostles provide great inspiration for those of us who feel we're slow to "get it" and not in the same league as the "greats" like Mother Teresa or even the local leading lights in our parish. Jesus showed great patience with the apostles, and he's pleased to offer the same to you and me.

**Today's readings:**

1 Corinthians 15:1-8; John 14:6-14 ([561](#)).

"Whatever you ask in my name, I will do."

04May2017

EASTER WEEKDAY

Say what?

Catechesis is one of the essential ministries of the church. We do it formally, for example, in religious education classes and the Rite of Christian Initiation, and informally through daily interactions with others—our children, neighbors, and coworkers. It can, however, be discouraging work. Fortunately Saint Augustine offers some advice, especially for those times when we are feeling ineffective. First, we are not as terrible as we think we are; second, we should persist; and third, we do the best we can and *let God speak through us*—because in truth God is doing the teaching. We are merely God's instrument. What would your day be like if you thought God was trying to speak through you all the time? What would you say? What *wouldn't* you say?

**Today's readings:**

Acts 8:26-40; John 6:44-51 ([276](#)).

"They shall all be taught by God."

05May2017

EASTER WEEKDAY

Speak up for good

Speech is not to be underestimated. It can bring life, and it can bring death. When God speaks, the words result in life: water, animals, human beings, mercy, and compassion! Mary followed in God's footsteps with a single word—*Yes!*—that resulted in her bearing the Christ child in the world. On the other hand, some of our words can be death-dealing. Saul, a persecutor of Jesus' followers before his conversion, "breathed murderous threats" that resulted in much fear, injury, and death. How will you use the power of speech to nurture life?

**Today's readings:**

Acts 9:1-20; John 6:52-59 ([277](#)).

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

06May2017

EASTER WEEKDAY

Lend a hand

In many households, parishes, and workplaces, there is one person without whom things simply couldn't function. Whoever that might be in your environment (maybe it's you!), being the essential person is an exhausting proposition. In the early church, poor Tabitha was deemed so necessary to her community that the widows of her town couldn't let her go even after she died—Saint Peter was obliged to bring her

back to life! The “indispensables” are useful to have around but they could use our help. Let’s offer our assistance with prayers, resources, and kind words of gratitude.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 9:31-42; John 6:60-69 ([278](#)).

“She was completely occupied with good deeds and almsgiving.”

07May2017

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER; GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY

Your calling awaits

Jesus calls us by name to follow him. The question for any Christian then becomes, How? What path will lead me closest to God? What way can I best serve? Determining one’s calling, or “vocation” (from the Latin *vocare*, “to call”), is not always easy. But each of us can take certain helpful steps: 1) pray and reflect on what you feel drawn to and where your talents lie; 2) talk to a pastoral minister or spiritual director; 3) confide in trusted friends or family members who can help you consider your options objectively; 4) commit yourself to various practices (Eucharist, service, establishing and maintaining healthy relationships) that will strengthen your spirit and keep you from becoming self-absorbed.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 2:20b-25; John 10:1-10 ([49](#)).

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

08May2017

EASTER WEEKDAY

Clean up your act

The notion of what is “clean” and “unclean” is important in Judaism, especially among Orthodox Jews. Purification rituals are observed for a variety of occasions, and many of them require the ritual washing of the hands, or at times a full immersion. Some say that Baptism represents a form of ritual purification adapted from Judaism, and that even the dipping of fingertips in holy water upon entering church is part of that tradition. The apostle Peter, however, helped the early church develop a different definition of purity. Spend some time today reflecting on what helps you feel “clean and pure” spiritually, and then practice it.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 11:1-18; John 10:11-18 ([279](#)).

“What God has made clean, you must not call profane.”

09May2017

EASTER WEEKDAY

The good book is also a good read

If you want to focus on what the church is really about, learning a little something about the first decades and centuries of the church can help, such as reading the Acts of Apostles, the book in scripture that tells the early church’s story. Things like preaching and proclaiming the message of Jesus, believing and being faithful, teaching, and gathering together. It’s doing things like these that make people Christians, then and now.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 11:19-26; John 10:22-30 ([280](#)).

"It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians.' "

10May2017  
EASTER WEEKDAY  
Lighten up

Here's a practice you can incorporate into your daily prayer. At the end of your day, recall anything that happened during the day that still troubles you. Rather than carry over the residue of that worry into the next day, try this: Imagine Jesus standing in a beam of light. Now imagine placing your worries into that circle of light—into Jesus' care. This is a way to practice trust and faith. Try this on a daily basis, and more of your life will be brought out of the darkness and into the light of Christ's love and care.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 12:24—13:5a; John 12:44-50 ([281](#)).

"Everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness."

11May2017  
EASTER WEEKDAY  
Add a dash of forgiveness

Home cooking is great, but sometimes we are hurt the worst by the folks who share food at our table. Our spouses, our siblings, our children, and our grandchildren often betray the family trust and cause us pain that's hard to forgive. But just as Jesus forgave his closest disciples, those who betrayed him, denied him, and abandoned him in his hour of need, we have the power to forgive our family members for their offenses against us. Peace, like charity, begins at home.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 13:13-25; John 13:16-20 ([282](#)).

"The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me."

12May2017  
EASTER WEEKDAY  
Listen up

In the gospels Jesus' words are often directed to a particular group of people—to the Pharisees and scribes, the crowd, his disciples. Most of us regularly hear the word of God in a large group, the liturgical assembly where, Vatican II reminds us, the presence of Christ is as real as the Eucharist. But faith can also be enlivened in other gatherings such as Bible study groups, small Christian communities, a men's or women's group, in the family. Paying attention to what Jesus says when we pray with an open Bible, or with a group of believers, can help to assure that we are becoming more transparent to the Christ within.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 13:13-25; John 13:16-20 ([283](#)).

“Whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.”

13May2017  
EASTER WEEKDAY  
Hang in there

Persecution has been part of the life of Christians since the church began. Paul and the first disciples faced beatings, imprisonment, mockery, and derision. Yet something about their experience of God was so compelling that they couldn't help but preach and live the Good News. The early disciples persevered and, as scripture records, they were “filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.” Today we still face emotional and sometimes physical persecution from folks who don't quite get the gospel, including those with “high standing” in our lives. Let us pray for the courage of our foremothers and forefathers to resolutely live the gospel.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 13:44-52; John 14:7-14 ([284](#)).

“[They] . . . stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region.”

14May2017  
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
Meet Jesus once again

At a certain point in every person's life, there comes a time when everything that used to make sense no longer does. Perhaps it comes at a time of major loss—such as losing a job or the death of a loved one. Or maybe it comes at a milestone in your life such as turning 50 or having your youngest child leave the nest. As uncomfortable as this may feel, it can be a great spiritual opportunity, because you have a chance to encounter Jesus as if for the first time.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 6:1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12 ([52](#)).

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

15May2017  
MEMORIAL OF ISIDORE  
Table blessings

The feast of Saint Isidore the Farmer provides us—even city-dwellers—with an opportunity to remember our link to the land and to all those who provide our food. Not only are we in debt to them for endless and often thankless labor but also for most of what we consume to stay alive. Food is for our bodies what the Eucharist is for our spirits: nourishment. It sustains us. In his little poem “Prayer After Eating,” American farmer and poet Wendell Berry makes that connection clear. “I have taken the light / that quickened eye and leaf. / May my brain be bright with praise / of what I eat, in the brief blaze / of motion and of thought. / May I be worthy of my meat.”

**Today's readings:**

Acts 14:5-18; John 14:21-26 ([285](#)).

“He brought them up into his house and provided a meal.”

16May2017  
EASTER WEEKDAY  
Work for justice, peacefully

Jesus promised peace to those who love him. But there has not been a single generation of worldwide peace in recorded history. Why is peace so elusive? Pope Paul VI noted that we are missing the necessary precondition: "Peace is more than the absence of war," he wrote. "If you want peace, work for justice." Until the balance of health, wealth, and opportunity puts the good life within reach of all people, the want that yawns between the powerful and the powerless will continue to brew pain, anger, and violence the world over. Pledge your support to an agency dedicated to providing opportunity to the socially disadvantaged.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 14:19-28; John 14:27-31a ([286](#)).

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

17May2017  
EASTER WEEKDAY  
Time for some personal pruning

Gardeners know the importance of pruning. By cutting away some of a plant, you help it to direct its energy into flowering and fruitful growth. It's the same when it comes to the spirit. Trim from your life what is sapping your connection to the true vine, Jesus Christ. We all have aspects of our personality and character that need to change and develop. Is it a bad habit, a destructive situation, a negative attitude? What's separating you from God and neighbor? Cut it away. Making a clean break and strengthening your soul will let the good and healthy parts of your spirit bear much fruit.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 15:1-6; John 15:1-8 ([287](#)).

"Every branch that bears fruit my Father prunes to make it bear more fruit."

18May2017  
EASTER WEEKDAY  
Follow the joy

Ever wonder if you were born for misery? If so, cancel that concern: Jesus says we are destined for joy. Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (along with love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) that demonstrate how well we are living under the Spirit's guidance. The more we surrender to the wisdom of the indwelling Spirit, the more joy will flower in our lives. If you're looking for a good role model in this, follow people whose joy has no end and is not dependent on their circumstances.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 15:7-21; John 15:9-11 ([288](#)).

"I have said these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete."

19May2017  
EASTER WEEKDAY  
Can you get that call?

There's a lot of holiness in the church, and it's not only leaders or the women and men in consecrated life but all of us. Too often we think that the "chosen" of God are the ones who are in vowed religious life or ministry positions. Yet the gospel truth is that God calls each of us. Every one of us is invited to respond to God in faith and love and to serve God in all that we are and do. Ask yourself how God has been calling you. In what ways have you responded? How might the Spirit be encouraging you to tend to a newly emerging need or possibility?

**Today's readings:**

Acts 15:22-31; John 15:12-17 ([289](#)).

"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you."

20May2017  
MEMORIAL OF BERNARDINE OF SIENA, PRIEST  
Cultivate saintly smarts

No wonder Bernardine (1380-1444) is a patron saint of public relations—professionals who use a positive spin to persuade people. Though he embraced the poverty and humility of Saint Francis of Assisi, he was "sensitive to the demands of secular life, and tried to negotiate between Christian ethics and a conflicting code of honor that stressed retaining face in a public world," says a biographer. A persuasive preacher, he got Italy's warring families to replace their coats of arms with tablets bearing "I.H.M.," the Holy Name of Jesus. When a painter of playing cards went bankrupt because Bernardine turned people off gambling, Bernardine made him wealthy by persuading him to paint I.H.M. tablets. Can we be as savvy, bringing Jesus' way to worldly ways?

**Today's readings:**

Acts 16:1-10; John 15:18-21 ([290](#)).

"You do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world."

21May2017  
SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
Get into the Spirit

When Jesus was saying farewell to his disciples in the Gospel of John—praying that farewell, really, because what he had to say to them he said to God in prayer—he promised he would not leave them alone. He would send his Spirit, an Advocate, to be present to them until he returned. And lo and behold, at Pentecost it happened. Christ did not go away; he remained in a different form. So if you want to know what the Holy Spirit is, just think of it as Jesus' ongoing presence, which is always with you.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; 1 Peter 3:15-18; John 14:15-21 ([55](#)).

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."

22May2017

MEMORIAL OF RITA OF CASCIA, RELIGIOUS

The holiness code, embodied

The life of Saint Rita (1386-1457) reads like a soap opera. She wanted to be a nun, but she was married against her will at the age of 12 to a cruel and unfaithful husband until his violent death 18 years later. Her two sons took after him. As a widow she was rejected three times trying to enter an Augustinian convent. She persisted and was finally accepted. It is fitting that she is the patroness of desperate situations. In spite of and because of life's difficulties, we can all achieve some level of holiness. What has happened to you lately that can bring you closer to God?

**Today's readings:**

Acts 16:11-15; John 15:26—16:4a ([291](#)).

“When the Advocate comes, the Spirit of truth, he will testify on my behalf.”

23May2017

EASTER WEEKDAY

Carry a get-out-of-jail holy card

It's a jail break! Paul and Silas, in the Acts of the Apostles, were arrested, beaten, and thrown into the clink by the authorities. But God caused an earthquake that sprung the doors of the prison and set the apostles free. Their first act was to comfort the jailer who was so upset by the escape that he was ready to kill himself. The jailer, moved by their kindness, brought them home with him, fed them, and bandaged their wounds. We, like the jailer, misjudge others and put them in prisons of our own self-righteousness. Let's not wait for an earthquake to set them free.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 16:22-34; John 16:5-11 ([292](#)).

“When the Advocate comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment.”

24May2017

EASTER WEEKDAY

Mi Espiritu es su Espiritu

Very rarely do we give another person complete access to our lives and possessions. “Mi casa es su casa” is something we say only to a spouse, child, or privileged friend. Otherwise, the access people have to our lives is fairly restricted to what we choose to tell them and how long they can stay until we kick them out. Jesus tells us his relationship to the Advocate he is sending is quite intimate. Listening to the Spirit is as good as hearing it from Jesus himself. Live more thoughtfully attuned to the indwelling Spirit.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 17:15, 22—18:1; John 16:12-15 ([293](#)).

“The Spirit of truth will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”



25May2017

MEMORIAL OF BEDE THE VENERABLE, PRIEST

Venerate lifelong learning

Bede the Venerable was the embodiment of the lifelong learner. In his own words, "I ever took delight in learning and teaching and writing." Apart from his many theological works and scriptural commentaries, he wrote on subjects as varied as history, music, arithmetic, medicine, and science. Living in the Dark Ages, Bede's influence was so great that a century later a Swiss monk would write, "God . . . who raised the Sun from the East on the fourth day of Creation, in the sixth day of the world has made Bede rise from the West as a new Sun to illuminate the whole Earth." Bede's example can inspire each of us to continue our own lifelong learning.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 18:1-8; John 16:16-20 ([294](#)).

"A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me."

26May2017

MEMORIAL OF PHILIP NERI, PRIEST

Smile at your own imperfections

Can you imagine a cheerful saint? Saint Philip Neri was one. Born in 1515 in Italy, Neri was an itinerant scholar who grew weary of knowledge for its own sake. He sold his books, gave the money to the poor, and spent his years tending to the sick. He enthusiastically invited others to join in this holy pursuit. No gloomy Christian, he said, "Cheerfulness strengthens the heart and makes us persevere in a good life. Therefore the servant of God ought always to be in good spirits." He was also realistic about his own imperfections, praying, "Lord, watch Philip, for he will betray you!" A realist with a positive outlook: What a fine holy role model.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 18:9-18; John 16:20-23 ([295](#)).

"I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice."

27May2017

MEMORIAL OF AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY, BISHOP

A Canterbury tale of respect

In the sixth century Pope Gregory I sent Saint Augustine and 40 other Benedictine monks on a daunting journey to bring the gospel to England. As a missionary, Augustine was sensitive to cultural differences and sought not to coerce the English with the Good News, telling the king, Ethelbert, "Do not see us as coming to force upon an unknown people benefits against their will. Be assured that only a great love constrains us to do this." In witnessing to what we believe, we should start where people are at, not where we want them to be, and try to show them that the way of faith will enrich their lives.

**Today's readings:**

Acts 18:23-28; John 16:23b-28 ([296](#)).

"Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you."

28May2017

## SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

What goes up also comes down

Whether your church community celebrates the Ascension of Jesus today or did so last Thursday, it's tempting to think of only half of the meaning of the event, the part about Jesus being exalted to God's right hand where he exercises dominion over everything in heaven and on earth. The Ascension also celebrates what comes *from* God, especially the Spirit Jesus promises before he was lifted up, and the command he gives to make disciples. So we shouldn't be left, as the disciples were in the story of the Ascension, merely staring up toward heaven. We have work to do on earth, the Spirit to strengthen and empower us while we do it, and the return of the Lord to look for when it's all over.

### Today's readings:

Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20 ([58](#)).

“Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?”

29May2017

## EASTER WEEKDAY

Hang in there

So many times in the gospels the disciples fail to understand or believe in Jesus fully that when they finally come out with an unqualified statement of faith, you would think Jesus would be more approving. But instead he counters with a promise that the road ahead will get tougher, not easier, because of their willingness to follow him. His final assurance, though, is that in the end they will return to him, overcome all obstacles, and have peace. Persevering leads to life forever with Christ.

### Today's readings:

Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33 ([297](#)).

“In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.”

30May2017

## EASTER WEEKDAY

Get the job done

The approaching Pentecost is a good time to reflect on Jesus' journey on earth as well as our own. It is a time to think about what we've accomplished and reflect on what we will be leaving others after we're gone. Jesus was confident that he had finished the work he was commissioned to do. Can each of us say the same? What will your legacy be? In what ways have you glorified God during your tenure on earth? Take into account family, community, church, and the world. Are you satisfied with the part you've played in bringing God's message of hope and love to the least of your brothers and sisters? There's still time. There is this moment, and the next, and the next . . .

### Today's readings:

Acts 20:17-27; John 17:1-11a ([298](#)).

“I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.”

31May2017

## FEAST OF THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Need a lift?

In the presence of such good news and so great a mystery as Jesus and his gospel, how, as the hymn goes, can we keep from singing? The meeting of Mary, pregnant with Jesus, and Elizabeth, who is expecting John the Baptist, gives birth to Mary's great song of praise to God, who has done such great things for her and her people: casting down the proud and mighty, lifting up the lowly, feeding the hungry, and showing mercy. When has God lifted you up? What do you have to sing about?

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

Zephaniah 3:14-18a or Romans 12:9-16; Luke 1:39-56 ([572](#)).

“Sing aloud, O daughter Zion . . . Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!”

©2017 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).