

Good News Daily

OCTOBER 1- NOVEMBER 4, 2017

Volume XVII

October 1-7, 2017

Number 40

Sunday, October 1

2 Kings 17:1-18 *The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers... (v.13a)*

The little girl's lower lip quivered as she stomped her foot. "No fair."

Her wise mom responded in a quiet, even voice. "I warned you twice. If you didn't clean your room you couldn't go to the birthday party. Did you clean your room?"

"No." She scraped her toe across the carpet. "I didn't think you'd really mean it. I thought you loved me."

God, like any good parent, warns us. He doesn't punish us without cause. But He does enforce disciplinary actions. Nowadays, many believe in a Santa Claus God who will love them no matter what and will give them their "heart's desire." There is some truth in that, but our Lord cares about us too much not to discipline us. If we fall into sin, there are consequences.

Today, we are blessed to have not only Christ's intercession for us but the Holy Spirit's promptings to guide us. We have Scripture to teach us and the ability to go to our Heavenly Father in prayer. And yet, often like the little girl, we don't clean up our act and then wonder why we are not being blessed as others are. Doesn't God love us?

The answer is yes, more than we can fathom. Which is why He may say no on occasion.

Psalms 66, 67; Acts 9:36-43; Luke 5:1-11

Monday, October 2

Psalms 89:1-18 *Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you; who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD. (v.15)*

Have you ever stumbled out of bed in the middle of the night and stubbed your toe? In the darkness it is hard to see obstacles in your path. You can either pick it up, or trust your groggy memory that it is still there the next time. You could wait for your eyes to adjust, but even then you are peering into shadows. How much easier to grab the flashlight?

Often times, isn't that what we do in our walk on this earth? We stumble on our own without asking for God's guidance...until we stub our toe.

Then we have a choice. Proceed with caution, trusting our own instincts, or turn around and go back for His light.

Repent means more than to ask forgiveness. It is to turn around, to reverse one's course. It is a conscious effort to not proceed in the direction one is headed. It is seeking guidance before continuing down a certain path.

Over the years, I have slowly learned to reach for God's light when I can't see the way I should go. My toes hurt a lot less. And the amazing thing? In the presence of His light, I not only see obstacles to avoid but His blessings along the path as well.

2 Kings 17:24-41; 1 Corinthians 7:25-31; Matthew 6:25-34

Tuesday, October 3

Matthew 7:1-12 *"Do not judge, or you, too, will be judged."* (v.1)

Our nation thrives on judge-mentalism. One cannot disagree with the philosophy of another without it being interpreted that they condemn them, hate them, or disregard their human dignity. Thus, often Christians who refuse to waiver in their beliefs are seen as hate mongers, hypocrites, and haughty.

Jesus claimed we have to exist in this world even though we believers are no longer a part of it. He also explained that because the world hated him, it will hate us (John 15). However, Jesus reserved judgement. Why?

As soon as we judge we shut doors. It is hard to lead someone through a closed door, isn't it? A priest I know states, "I love everyone, all the way to repentance." When someone's behavior doesn't measure up, how much better to show them a new way rather than to just condemn the path they are on. Jesus loved people in the messy state they were in, then encouraged them to repent.

Our churches should be open doors so the sick can enter to be healed. After all, aren't we still in need of healing ourselves? Would we want the door slammed in our faces when we slip into sins of anger, pride, or anxiety?

2 Chronicles 29:1-3, 30:1-27; Psalms 97, 99, 100; 1 Corinthians 7:32-40

Wednesday, October 4

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 *Now about food sacrificed to idols...* (v.1a)

When you read this passage today did your eyes glaze over? What does this have to do with me? A great deal, actually. We can apply Paul's wisdom to us living in the twenty-first century by examining what our idols are today and how we are feeding them.

I see two that are prevalent in our society—sexuality and physicality. They are two sides of the same coin. Everywhere we look we are bombarded by sex. It seems you can't watch a movie or TV program without it sneaking in. Newspapers, magazines, commercials, even tweets and posts on social media are all about our physical natures and desires. Clothes, diets, pills, and creams are designed to make us sexier. Everything is carnal. Feed the flesh. Spirituality is rarely mentioned in the media, unless it is to ridicule it.

While how we treat and see our bodies is important, it is what is in our hearts and souls that should be our emphasis. For example, it is easy to make losing weight an idol, i.e., our entire focus 24/7. Or having tight abs, youthful skin, or an enhanced sex drive no matter our age. Eating healthy and exercise is great, but some turn it into an obsession, an idol. And the media encourages us to do just that because their profit lines depend on feeding our appetites to look and feel great.

In our Christian walk, let's make sure our priorities are straight and we are not leading others astray by focusing on the idols in our own lives.

2 Kings 18:9-25; Psalms 101, 109; Matthew 7:13-21

Thursday, October 5

Psalm 105:1-22 *They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, until what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true.* (vv.18-19)

The story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis is one of faithful tenacity. But it is also one of surrender and growth. A proud, haughty boy is brought low and humbled so God can then raise him up. Through Joseph's experiences, he learns to listen and obey God as well as to thank Him for His blessings, even when they are hidden.

Perhaps at this moment you are feeling a bit persecuted. Hopefully not to the extent other Christians around the world are, but the lashes of tongues strike across your soul as much as a whip on someone's back. You see your ideals being burned down and destroyed like others' houses and villages are. The "Christian way of life" is being toppled. You feel shackled by the worldliness of our culture and recent legislations. Freedom of religion seems to apply to everyone else except believers in Jesus.

In spite of it all, realize, like Joseph, who is in control. Hang tough, do not waiver and keep the faith. In the end, the word of the Lord will prove out. It might not be in our lifetime, but it will happen. As Paul states in Philippians 2:10-11, one day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

2 Kings 18:28-37; 1 Corinthians 9:1-15; Matthew 7:22-29

Friday, October 6

2 Kings 19:1-20 *Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see...* (v.16a)

King Hezekiah pleaded for God to make things right, to bring just punishment to the Assyrians who blasphemed His people and His omnipotence. Isaiah prophesized it would happen, and the king prayed for it to begin. He wanted things to happen right then.

Sound familiar? It does to me. Oh, how I'd love a revival of Christian beliefs to sweep our culture. I want God to intervene and set things right. May

the Assyrians of our time who wish to destroy anything faith-based be dealt with mightily and brought to their knees!

However, I need to acknowledge that God does see and hear. He knows not only what is happening today but what will happen tomorrow. He has not clucked His tongue and turned His back. Why? Because you and I are remaining steadfast.

At first glimpse, the Assyrians won. The Israelites were defeated and taken into exile. But God never forgot them. He stayed with the remnant and protected the faithful. Eventually the Assyrians were defeated as well by the Babylonians, who were in turn defeated by the Persians. God returned the people to the land, and their hearts to Him. And when things slid backwards, then He sent His Son to die for their sins, and His Spirit to guide them into truth.

Should we not be assured He continues to do the same in our time?

Psalms 102; 1 Corinthians 9:16-27; Matthew 8:1-17

Saturday, October 7

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 ...*but when you are tempted, he[God] will provide a way out so you can stand up under it.* (v.13b)

As often with our Lectionary, this week's holds a theme. Things may appear to be going to you-know-what in a handbasket, but God is in control. He is in control of the universe, the direction our society is headed and, when we allow Him into our hearts, of us.

If we truly trust our Lord, then we know that even in discipline, He loves us, protects us, and cares about what happens to us. Just as a child trusts his loving parents' actions are for his or her benefit, even when they seem harsh, so we as children of the King should trust that He's got this. He knows more than we do. Our role is to humbly obey, learn, and follow.

Yes, that is easier said than done. But as long as we reach for His light to guide us, He will direct our paths. Try on our own, and we'll stumble. We know how this story ends, right? So, dear believer, stay the course. Remain positive and hopeful. As the old hymn says, trust and obey because, when all is said and done, there truly is no other way. Amen?

2 Kings 19:21-36; Psalms 107:33-43, 108; Matthew 8:18-27

by Julie B Cosgrove

Volume XVII

October 8-14, 2017

Number 41

Sunday, October 8

Acts 12:1-17 "*The Lord has sent his angel and saved me.*" (v.11c NLT)

Peter has been imprisoned by King Agrippa, who placed four squads of four soldiers each (16 armed men!) to keep him in jail. The plan was to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

The Christians were gathered in earnest prayer for Peter, when an angel wakes him and says “Quick, get up.” The chains fall off his wrists and he walks out of prison with the angel past all the sleeping soldiers.

When Peter realizes that it is not a dream, he goes to where the Christians are praying. At first, the servant girl who answers Peter’s knock on the door leaves him standing in the street; but he keeps knocking and they quickly let him in.

So many times, we can look back on the events of our lives and say, with Peter, “The Lord sent His angel and saved me.” Praise the Lord and give thanks!

Thanks, Lord, for giving Your angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways (Psalm 91:11).

2 Kings 20:1-21; Psalm 118; Luke 7:11-17

Monday, October 9

1 Corinthians 10:14—11:1 *For, “the earth is the LORD’s and everything in it.”* (v.26)

Yes, God has created a beautiful planet for us to enjoy, with many lovely foods, fruits, flowers, and animals for our pleasure, as well as mountains, valleys, rivers, streams, and oceans. We have such a variety of flora and fauna.

Are we good stewards of what He has given us or do we waste food and water, destroy wildlife, and allow erosion? Are we recycling or adding to landfills?

God has blessed us so mightily. Can we put more effort into saving our planet instead of wasting its resources?

Thank You, Lord, for our beautiful earth. Help us take good care of it.

2 Kings 21:1-18; Psalm 106:1-18; Matthew 8:28-34

Tuesday, October 10

Matthew 9:1-8 *Some people brought to Jesus a paralyzed man on a mat.* (v.2)

Some caring friends bring the paralyzed man to Jesus for healing. What would we do without our wonderful friends? Our priest recently preached about being angels to our friends. He said we don’t need to do miraculous things, just helpful things.

After the friends brought the paralyzed man, Jesus tells him, “Stand up, take your mat and go home!” because he was healed, and the man jumped up and went home! (vv.6-7)

We too can bring our friends to Jesus on Sunday mornings (and in my church to our Tuesday evening Healing Service) where they can be prayed for

and anointed with holy oil for Jesus' healing love and resurrection power to make them well again.

Lord, help us be angels to our friends.

2 Kings 22:1-13; Psalms 120, 121, 122, 123; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 17-22

Wednesday, October 11

Matthew 9:9-17 *When Jesus heard this, he said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." Then he added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."* (vv.12-13)

Matthew has just accepted Jesus' invitation to be his disciple. That evening, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many notorious sinners. The religious leaders are indignant, but Jesus reminds them, "Healthy people do not need a doctor—sick people do."

We are all sick with sin, but we can come to God's "healing center" each time we worship, to be forgiven and cleaned and made well again. We partake of Jesus' body and blood in the Holy Eucharist—which we do in remembrance of him and to remind ourselves of his great forgiving love. After partaking of the heavenly banquet, we are sent back into the world to love and serve.

Thanks, Jesus, that you came to heal us and equip us to serve you and others.

2 Kings 22:14—23:3; Psalm 119:145-176; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34

Thursday, October 12

1 Corinthians 12:1-11 *There are different kinds of service in the Church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives but it is the same God who does the work through all of us.* (vv.5-6)

In the passage about spiritual gifts the apostle Paul tells us that some are teachers, some give wise advice, some are helpers, and some get others to work together. And it is the same Holy Spirit who inspires each of us.

We see the different gifts given to Lazarus's two sisters. Mary had the gift of worshipping Jesus and listening to his teaching (sitting at his feet and later bathing them with expensive perfume and wiping them with her hair). Martha had the gift of hospitality and saw that the meal was prepared and served.

In our church, we see the Choir practicing their music, the Flower Guild arranging the flowers that grace the altar, the Altar Guild preparing the linens and vestments, the ushers greeting the worshippers, the Sunday School teachers preparing their lessons for the children, the clergy studying God's

Word to give us their sermons. Just as the body has many parts so the Body of Christ (the Church) uses all our gifts.

Thanks, Lord, for giving us the many abilities that make Your Church complete.

2 Kings 23:4-25; Psalms 131, 132, 133; Matthew 9:18-26

Friday, October 13

Psalm 142 *I pray to you, O LORD. I say “You are my place of refuge. You are all I really want in life.”* (v.5)

Amid all the tumult of our daily lives—the wars and terrorists, the fighting and natural disasters, I often feel like the psalmist who said, “I cry out to the LORD; I plead for the LORD’s mercy” (v.1).

Watching the news or reading the newspaper just give me more cause for concern. Only as I read my Bible and pray, do I find comfort and hope for the future. Only knowing that I rest in God’s mighty protection, do I find any consolation. Even though today is Friday the 13th, I know that God is in control!

Thank You, Lord, that You hold us in the hollow of Your hand (the Irish blessing).

2 Kings 23:36—24:17; Psalm 140; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Matthew 9:27-34

Saturday, October 14

Matthew 9:35—10:4 *He said to his disciples, “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields.”* (vv.37-38)

I have been reading the reports of The Jesus Film Project workers who go into remote villages, hang up a sheet at sundown, and use generators to show this wonderful film in the “heart languages” of citizens of the so-called “third world.” Many people are coming to faith through this dramatic telling of Jesus’ life and death for us.

The American Bible Society reports the great need for Bibles in China where many are coming to faith. Are you supporting any missionary work? If we cannot go to a mission field, we can certainly support the work with our prayers and our money.

Lord, I pray for more workers in Your harvest.

Jeremiah 35:1-19; Psalms 137, 144; 1 Corinthians 12:27—13:3

by Jacqueline Littleford

Sunday, October 15

Acts 14:8-18 *Men, why are you doing this?* (v.15a NIV)

I just attended my first stock car race. After five minutes of engines roaring, I understood the process. I spent the rest of the time searching the faces and hearts of the spectators, wondering why they came. I was searching for Jesus, too.

Why did 3,000 people pay more than \$25 each to watch cars race around a small oval track? What did they expect to see, feel, enjoy, or be thrilled by? There was little cheering and only scattered applause at the end of each race. All I saw was despair, boredom, and emptiness. Was this an escape from unfulfilled lives or dead-end jobs? What would bring new life and excitement to this crowd?

Just then, two cars crashed and careened into the center of the oval. The drivers climbed out of their wrecked cars and began a violent fistfight. The crowd came wildly alive. They screamed, cheered, and hollered. Violence aroused them.

Violence can only be overcome by the love of Jesus Christ and even though Jesus wasn't visible at that race, I know that his love will prevail over this violent world.

Jeremiah 36:1-10; Psalms 146, 147; Luke 7:36-50

Monday, October 16

Jeremiah 36:11-26 *"Yes," Baruch replied, "he dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them in ink on the scroll."* (v.18)

Danny was convicted of selling drugs and sentenced to seven years in prison. His mother's truthful, tearful testimony at the trial sealed his fate. As the guards dragged Danny from the courtroom, he shrieked at his mother, "I hope you die screaming of cancer."

With only two years left to serve, the prison chaplain placed Danny in a four-day Kairos Prison Ministry retreat to reduce his hatred. Tough, hardened prisoners learned about the Christian life, studied, sang, prayed, and enjoyed fellowship with 42 civilian volunteers.

On Saturday night a healing and forgiveness service was held. Each man wrote the names of people he hated on a piece of paper. They placed that paper in a pan of water on the altar and watched as the names disappeared. Danny listed only one name: Mother. Later that night, he wrote to his mother, told her what he just did, and asked her to forgive him. She wrote back two words; "Why now?" It was a question Danny could now answer with God's help. They wrote, phoned, prayed, and visited. When Danny's time was up, he went home to live with his mother. All things are possible with God.

Psalms 1, 2, 3; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Matthew 10:5-15

Tuesday, October 17

Matthew 10:16-23 *“When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it.”* (v.19)

Richard, a prisoner at the jail, said, “I gotta get out of jail next Thursday, please pray for me.” I cautioned him about not setting God up, and about the possibility that God may want him to say in jail longer. I prayed that Richard would open his heart to receive God. Thursday came and went. Richard was still in jail. God doesn’t “gotta” answer prayers.

Many years ago my prayer life began like Richard’s. However, as a sense of thankfulness to God flooded my life, I developed a second prayer posture: “Please God. Thank You God.” I wanted to be sure God knew how much I appreciated His grace in the past, and I wanted Him to know I would (hopefully) anticipate showers of blessings in the (near) future.

About a decade ago, with an aging mind and body and a heart filled with gratitude to God, I rolled into my third prayer posture: “What is Your will for me, Lord? Give me grace and strength to follow Your plan for me.” The Lord sent me into the prison. Richard is still working on his “gotta” plan for God, and has spent almost 200 Thursdays in jail since we first prayed together. And I am thankful that God has revealed His will for me.

Jeremiah 36:27—37:2; Psalms 5, 6; 1 Corinthians 14:1-12

Wednesday, October 18

Matthew 10:24-33 *“So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”* (v.31)

Self-esteem is one of the least talked about, but most vital of God’s gifts. Low self-esteem leads to despair, depression, and suicide. Most prisoners, especially women, suffer low self-esteem.

The prison system wastes an average of around \$35,000 per year to lock up a prisoner, dehumanize them, and lower their already low self-esteem. Christian prison ministries do the job right for about \$100, because they bring Christ behind bars.

Over the past three years I have seen women who have committed terrible crimes experience a giant increase in self-esteem. Once they know that God forgives them and He loves them with a passion they never knew in the outside world, they become new women, and stand out in the prison population.

Even though they will never get out of prison, they have a loving attitude towards guards as well as other prisoners. They take better care of their grooming, support one another in prayer and fellowship, and stay out of trouble. They are now the “somebody” they never were in the outside world. Jesus Christ in their lives has made the difference.

Jeremiah 37:3-21; Psalm 119:1-24; 1 Corinthians 14:13-25

Thursday, October 19

Matthew 10:34-42 *“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”* (v.39)

A priest friend of mine just phoned with good news. Three years ago he was ejected, under a cloud, as the rector of a large church. His wife left him. His sons broke off contact. He was financially and spiritually bankrupt. For three years he has been under daily psychiatric care.

He has made slow, steady progress, living on his own, working in a secular job and meeting with his sons. I have prayed for him. He phoned to say the bishop is giving him a trial chance to return to ministry in a small, vacant church for the next four Sundays. It is a hurting and divided church. The former rector left under unpleasant circumstances. What a wonderful place for a wounded healer to re-enter ministry.

He will preach and pray in terms the people can understand. As he tells his story he will lose his old life by giving it away so he and the church will find new life.

Isn't this what Jesus did for us?

Jeremiah 38:1-13; Psalm 18:1-20; 1 Corinthians 14:26-33a, 37-40

Friday, October 20

Matthew 11:1-6 *“The good news is preached to the poor.”* (v.5c)

In school I never liked laboratory science; I never understood the material or notebooks and I hated the smells. However, I have been happily working in an experimental lab for the past ten years and loving it. Sometimes the smells are awful. At least I can understand the material. My lab is prison.

There are no test tubes. It's a spirituality lab. I prepare my experiments at home and rush to my prison lab to try them out. Then I rush home to refine my data and then back to my lab.

I am always experimenting to find ways to present Christ to the prisoners. Many are drug addicts who see and hear things far different than you or I. Some are schizophrenic, and there are murderers, thieves, and sexual deviates. The population changes rapidly, so I have to keep updating my lab notes.

Sometimes I ask the prisoners, “Where is the kingdom of God?” Other times I ask “Who is Jesus?” I get a variety of interesting answers to add to my notes. Their theology ranges from orthodox to witchcraft. Not all my attempts to reach them succeed.

At the end, however, prayer always succeeds with every man in the group who honestly turns to God. So, technically, no experiment in my spirituality lab fails.

Jeremiah 38:14-28; Psalms 16, 17; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Saturday, October 21

Matthew 11:7-15 “*What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see?*” (vv.7b-8a)

My Jewish doctor gave me some pills. They helped me a lot but there were unwanted side effects. He compared and contrasted my obvious earlier condition to my present, improved one. He concluded that since I made great progress with the medication, I should continue—until something new comes along!

I went away hopeful, accepting the side effects, awaiting a possible new medication being developed soon. My life has been enriched by the ageless wisdom of many Jewish advisers in business, legal, and medical situations. Classic Jewish wisdom is based on perpetual questioning, contrasting, opposing, and debating the various options and circumstances between God and man. Nothing ever seems to end in final certainty with them. It always ends hoping for good or at least improved results in the future as they prepare for more wrestling with both God and man.

They call it wisdom. I call it prayer. I am thankful for both.

2 Kings 25:8-12, 22-26; Psalms 20, 21; 1 Corinthians 15:12-29

by Laird Mortimer

Volume XVII

October 22-28, 2017

Number 43

Sunday, October 22

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20 “*Yet know this, the kingdom of God has come near.*” (v.11b NRSV)

As I write this, we are still trying to recover from one of the largest mass killings in American history. The internet is full of desperate, tear stained faces in the night. I feel empty, helpless and lost. “Where,” I mutter, “is the kingdom of God tonight?” Slowly...over time...I find it in the healing touch of a crucified God: a nobody executed as a terrorist. Not a God appearing on heavenly clouds ready to destroy God’s enemies, but rather, in the resurrected Christ feeding friends breakfast in the backwaters of the Roman Empire. It is this God that saves me from despair, *not* the powerful, military Messiah that many have been expecting to return throughout history. This seemingly powerless God suffers with me and, by so doing, opens the door for me to live each moment into everlasting life. No wonder I was *still* waiting for the kingdom: my view and Jesus’ demonstration of God’s kingdom were not the same. Did Jesus get it right? I will bet my life on it.

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14; Psalms 148, 149, 150; Acts 16:6-15

Monday, October 23

Psalm 25 *Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.* (v.5)

I sit in the balcony soaked in the blackness of a moonless night. I can barely see my hands. Eight stories beneath me, the ocean murmurs as it unfolds endlessly onto the sandy shore. A breeze murmurs in my ear and sends a chill down my neck. I shrug into the prickly warmth of my woolen sweater. I breathe slowly...deeply...intentionally. The cool air caresses its way into my lungs. I relax into stillness. The internal dialogue is muted. Desire becomes irrelevant. I wait in simple silence. The first hint of orange seeps out of the purple horizon. Like the brush of a butterfly's wing, joy caresses my soul. An "Is-ness" emerges out of an unspectacular union with reality itself. I experience salvation: an invitation to live into a Divine Love that transcends consequences. An invitation offered by a Presence that is relational and seeks me. Not a free ticket out of the painful vagaries of life; but rather, an invitation to Love.

Jeremiah 44:1-14; 1 Corinthians 15:30-41; Matthew 11:16-24

Tuesday, October 24

Matthew 11:25-30 *Come to me, all you that are weary...and you will find rest for your souls.* (vv.28a, 29b)

A half century later, I can still see the rejection letter in my hand. I can feel the dryness in my throat. With a few, well-crafted sentences, it politely shuts the door to the dream that has defined me. How will I bear the humiliation when everyone knows? Will they see me as a failure...as a fraud? How about the one I love the most? Will the wedding still be on? I can't bring myself to tell her. I default into living with a ticking time bomb. The longer I wait, the worse it becomes. I turn to alcohol; but, being on a college campus, that signal is lost on all. Finally, I tell her. I can see that she is deeply hurt. She tears up...for me...a stream in the dessert of my affliction...rest for my weary soul. At times, life rips a hole in our dreams, and then slowly grinds us to our knees. At such times, rest within sorrow is a rare and precious gift.

Lamentations 1:1-12; Psalms 26, 28; 1 Corinthians 15:41-50

Wednesday, October 25

1 Corinthians 15:51-58 *But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (v.57)

The phone rings. "It's happening. The doctor says forty-eight hours...max." The next morning, I am standing at my brother's bedside. He lays unconscious. His breathing sounds shallow...labored. His hands feel clammy...stiff. His face looks ashen. His discomfort increases. His son gently squeezes another eyedropper full of peace under his tongue. I am surprised I feel so numb. It's like I am disconnected to what is going on. The wasting body on the bed was so beautiful and powerful when young. "This is Eddy. He is

dying!” I remind myself as my brother’s life fades like twilight sinking into night’s embrace. Is there anything as threatening as death? Will it be the end of all I have been...an uncontrollable descent into the most dangerous situation I have ever lived? Will life be stronger than death? I experience the answer in the unfathomable peace that overwhelms me as Eddy’s left hand lays in mine and he rattles his last breath: in Christ, *both life and death* are precious gifts. Hallelujah!

Lamentations 2:8-15; Psalm 38; Matthew 12:1-14

Thursday, October 26

Psalm 37:1-18 *Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him* (v.7a)

The wind howls. I struggle up the trail. It must be 10 below. At 12,400 feet, I gasp for air. Grey clouds threaten. It feels like slow suffocation. “No,” I remind myself, “It isn’t...really. Relax, concentrate on the breathing.” Finally, I’m on the ridge! My heart pounds its complaint against my chest. My helmet fills with the sounds of heavy breathing. Like life, Whale’s Tail Ridge lies majestically before me: threatening and glorious. I “slip and slide” my way down the icy ridge to the cornice. My ski tips peer over the steep embankment. It’s like jumping off a ten-foot wall! My gut tightens. I *really* regret being here! Hundreds of runs, and more than my fair share of scary falls, have taught me that keeping my vision up while patiently waiting for the skis to carve my turns is the only way off this cliff. So it is with life...and with God. Sometimes, the only thing to do is wait patiently...trusting...with eyes up...for the dance to unfold.

Ezra 1:1-11; 1 Corinthians 16:1-9; Matthew 12:15-21

Friday, October 27

1 Corinthians 16:10-24 *Let all that you do be done in love* (v.14)

It is early Saturday morning. The Florida sun is already bright and warm. The weekend snorts impatiently before me like a colt edgy to get out of his stall. The old man sits quietly beside me, his thick white hair clipped very short. Beautiful blue eyes, distorted behind thick glasses, peer into glaucoma’s empty sight. His light brown bamboo cane rests lightly by his side. We spend most Saturdays together since his wife died. When I was young, he seemed like Superman. Then, as time passed, I didn’t respect him very much. In fact, he embarrassed me. But now in my forties, with children of my own, I see him in a different light. I see that, like a cowboy and his saddle, we have grown comfortably together through life’s many rides. I realize the one thing that I never doubt, the one thing that I take for granted, is that my father loves me. Completely. Unconditionally. All he has done for me...I am convinced...to the best of his ability...he has done in love.

Ezra 3:1-13; Psalm 31; Matthew 12:22-32

Saturday, October 28

Psalm 30 *Weeping may linger through the night, but joy comes with the morning.* (v.5b)

Life, when fed only by the bread of the anxious toil for happiness, is shot through with the poignancy of emptiness. The deepest challenges to my faith have not come from having to believe the unbelievable, but rather, from having to find the courage to live fully through the unbearable dullness of being. Day after day is filled with the relentless pounding of life. The delicious morsels of living become stale crackers on my tongue. Shouts of victory turn into yawns. The future is empty. The only song I can sing is, “Is this all there is to life?” Then...Miracle happens: not so much witnessing the impossible as it is an awakening. I experience a gentle Wonder: the healing Presence that permeates every aspect, of every moment, of my very ordinary life. I experience the “spirituality of imperfection”: coming to God in my ingratitude, powerlessness, insecurity, and low self-esteem. The unacceptable is reconciled and thus made whole. Joy dawns out of the night.

Ezra 4:7, 11-24; Psalm 32; Philemon 1-25; Matthew 12:33-42

by Nestor de Armas

Volume XVII

October 29-November 4, 2017

Number 44

Sunday, October 29

Luke 10:25-37 *Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”* (v.37b NRSV)

I remember once hearing a retreat conductor express a very beautiful thought about God’s love for us, so beautiful that I have never forgotten it. He said that if we could lump together all the combined love of the world—all that has been or will be of love of parents for children, of spouse for spouse, of friend for friend—it would be as a drop of water to the ocean compared to the love of God for each of us. A Sister of mine once said that Christ shows his love for us most of all by schooling us in his way of loving. His way of loving seems difficult to us mortals, for we know that his love for his Father led him to death on a Cross.

If our relationship with Jesus Christ is what it should be, then our relationship with every other human being on earth will gradually become what Christ wants it to be, regardless of the cost to our selfish needs and desires. And what does he want it to be? He tells us how that love should be expressed in today’s parable of the Good Samaritan. Can we go and do likewise?

Haggai 1:1—2:9; Psalms 63, 98; Acts 18:24—19:7

Monday, October 30

Matthew 12:43-50 *“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”* (v.50)

During our prayer times, Christ teaches us that the most precious gift we can ever offer him is our life, our total life—all the moments of all our days. And the most good we can ever do for him, for others, and for ourselves, can best be done in obedience to his Father’s will.

We mortals tend to think of doing God’s will as something required of us as our duty and as something which will be painful and difficult. But as Frank Griswold wrote in *Going Home*, “God’s will for us is for our deepest well-being. Our identity, our true identity, is that we are deeply, profligately, and irresponsibly loved by God.” He created each of us to have fullness of life and love and joy.

As our knowledge of and our love for Him grows, we shall yearn to do all, and only all, which would be pleasing to Him. “In Jesu joying. This is full joy. This is endless joy. This is glorious joy. And it is found wherever Jesus is found” (Richard Rolle).

Zechariah 1:7-17; Psalms 41, 52; Revelation 1:4-20

Tuesday, October 31

Matthew 13:1-9 *“Let anyone with ears listen!”* (v.9)

Bishop Richard Holloway of Scotland once wrote that God is speaking to each one of us all the time. God is continually urging us to obey some command or offering us the grace needed at the moment. I think from my own experience that the devil is, at the same time, tempting us to give in to negative, fearful, sinful thoughts, words, and acts.

C. S. Lewis, a great favorite of mine, once expressed his opinion that the devil’s greatest triumph in our day has been to get us to doubt the reality of his existence, and he said he believed, “There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.”

However powerful the devil and his alluring temptations may be, our Savior, whose great love longs only for our greatest good and our greatest growth, is more powerful. “The One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). We have only to respond to this great love of Christ’s and to train ourselves to listen carefully for his voice.

It’s a lifetime struggle to overcome our self-centeredness, but our daily times of silent listening, meditation, and prayer, and our growing faith, trust, and love for our Lord Jesus and our surrender to him and his way will gradually enable us to discern the difference between the voice of our Beloved and that of others.

Ezra 5:1-17; Psalm 45; Revelation 4:1-11

Wednesday, November 1

Matthew 13:10-17 *“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.”* (v.16)

Paul once wrote to the Philippians that everything on earth is worth absolutely nothing compared to the joy of knowing, loving, and serving Christ and of being loved by him. The infinite blessings we have been given—the Holy Eucharist, the Scriptures, the Church, Communion with prayer, membership in the Body of Christ here on earth, and eternal life begun here and now—begs the question: what else ultimately matters in life at all? When Christ was here on earth he told his closest friends how blessed they were to see the things they had seen and to hear the things they had heard.

However great the blessings of those disciples, we present-day followers of God in Christ can know him even more clearly than they were able to. We can see him in our Scriptures as the longed-for Messiah, the Son of the Living God—our Savior, Redeemer, and Friend.

Ordinary sinners like us have been transformed into great saints in every generation in response to Christ’s love, forgiveness, acceptance, and trust. We have hope that we, too, can become all that Christ would have us be.

Ezra 6:1-22; Psalm 119:49-72; Revelation 5:1-10

Thursday, November 2

Revelation 5:11—6:11 *They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.* (6:11)

When I read something in Scripture telling about our forebears who “were stoned to death, sawn in two, killed by the sword...destitute, persecuted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:37-38), I am reminded of all the martyrs of the Church since then who have gone before us, who have paid with their lives for their faith in the living God. They were so strong in their faith, so courageous in their stand, and so blessed by their love for God.

In Hebrews 12:1, the author tells us that we—you and I—are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who remind us that we are by no means alone in our journeying home and of how vast, how tremendous, how infinitely great are the resources of the power available to those of us who believe in and trust in God (Ephesians 1:19).

Paul assures us that our Savior has promised that he will never leave us or forsake us and that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). What wondrous, awesome Good News!

Nehemiah 1:1-11; Psalm 50; Matthew 13:18-23

Friday, November 3

Psalm 40 *He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.* (v.3a)

Years ago, I suffered a good deal from depression because of various family sorrows and because of my own inordinate self-centeredness. I was, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:12, without God and without hope. Today the third verse of Psalm 40: “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God,” speaks very powerfully to me because I feel that is exactly what our Lord has done for me.

After having had some psychiatric help for depression—psychiatry played the role of St. John the Baptist in my life, the role of forerunner—I landed at the Church of the Advent in Boston. First, it was the music, then it was the preaching, and last of all, and perhaps by far the most important, it was the profound reverence and deep devotion of the parishioners, which drew me back week after week.

Some ten years later I was drawn to our Convent, that was then at Louisburg Square on Beacon Hill in Boston. There I finally found what I had been looking for all my life: a community of loving, joyous, dedicated people who are struggling to have their first thoughts be always of Christ and then of others. I have spent by far the happiest years of my life in the Convent where our Lord has indeed “put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.”

Nehemiah 2:1-20; Psalm 54; Revelation 6:12—7:4; Matthew 13:24-30

Saturday, November 4

Matthew 13:31-35 *“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...the smallest of all seeds.”* (vv.31-32)

Thinking about yesterday’s meditation and the new song, the song of praise to our God that our Lord has put in my mouth, I realized that a tiny little mustard seed of faith was sown in my heart the day I was baptized. It has been fed and nourished over the years by all of our Lord’s words in Scripture, by every Holy Communion service, every confession, every prayer. The visible devotion and reverence of the clergy and parishioners of the Church of the Advent and, above all, the love and prayers of my Sisters have been among the greatest blessings of my life.

My most frequent and fervent prayer these days is from a little book of prayers written by Jesuits and given me by a dear friend. In it Karl Rahner, a Jesuit priest, implores Christ: “O God, give me the courage and strength to be worthy of being called a Christian.” Our Lord has indeed put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise, thanksgiving, and joy.

Nehemiah 4:1-23; Psalm 55; Revelation 7:4-17

by Sister Mary Michael

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