



Bringing Home the Word

The Epiphany of the Lord
January 6, 2019

Our Undeserved Inheritance

By Janel Esker

Several years ago, our family’s longtime neighbor died. She had no children. My mom had helped her in her later years, so we weren’t surprised when she received some money from the estate. What was shocking was that a check arrived at my house as well. I hadn’t done anything to deserve this money. I had always been polite and kind to our neighbor and had visited her sometimes, but I was amazed at her generosity. Without knowing it, I had become an heir to this lovely woman.

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise! Shine, for your light has come, the glory of the LORD has dawned upon you.

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Matthew 2:1-12

On entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage.

On this Solemnity of the Epiphany, we celebrate our own unexpected inheritance—the quite undeserved gift of Jesus. Saint Paul writes that the Gentiles are “coheirs” to this great gift, but what have we done to deserve such grace? Our culture tells us how much we “deserve” (clothes and so on). But from the simplest of places—the tiniest of towns, this little hamlet of Bethlehem—comes a gift we could never do enough to deserve. The Magi recognized this; they prostrated themselves in homage and were changed by their encounter with Jesus. They went home “by another way,” not just physically but spiritually.

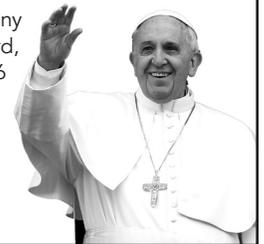
As the Christmas season winds down and the long-awaited gifts are unwrapped and put away, maybe we can look at the gift of Jesus with Epiphany eyes. May we welcome Jesus today like an unexpected inheritance check—with delighted hearts, humble spirits, and grateful souls. +

*From the simplest of places,
this hamlet of Bethlehem,
comes a gift we could never
do enough to deserve.*

A Word from Pope Francis

How many stars there are in the sky! And yet the Magi followed a new and different star, which for them shone all the more brightly....They listened to a voice deep within, which led them to follow that light. It was the voice of the Holy Spirit, who works in all people.

—Homily, Epiphany of the Lord, January 6, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are some of the undeserved gifts that God has given to me?
- Do I remember to thank God for the gift of his Son, and do I share Jesus’ good news with others?



Called to Be Peacemakers

By Kathy Coffey

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9).

Forging peace is an arduous job that takes time. As we know from family squabbles, genuine peacemaking doesn't simply gloss over differences. If those aren't addressed, they will surface again like dandelions on a lawn. Instead, peacemaking explores areas of disagreement and seeks common ground.

We who prefer a quick fix may discover that creating peace is a slow process that some compare to the building of medieval cathedrals. Chartres or Notre Dame took about 400 years, sixteen generations in medieval lifespans. Those who laid the foundations never expected to see the final arches. Yet they knew their children and grandchildren would continue their work. In the same way, peacemakers know they may never see the outcome, but they encourage the next generations to seize the baton.

So we look over the centuries to Jesus our model. He came into a country brutally ruled by Caesar, a world that worshiped the power of the sword. Boldly, he offered two different kinds of power. He told the oppressed they are God's children who will inherit the kingdom. To those who can bring about change, he proposed a way of living that would make them happier than privilege ever had.

He asked them to do what they could for overpowering need, as he did—not run away, as we might be tempted. He suggested they spend time figuring out what was bothering the difficult child—not just ignore him. He wanted them to listen through the family conflict—not turn away because it's so draining. He told them to look at unrest and try to discover the underlying neglect or injustice.

Splendid Balance

Jesus didn't just talk peacemaking; he lived it. He began by making peace with himself. Jesus had the internal tensions we all have. When he wanted to preach, people demanded healing. When he wanted solitude, Peter and his companions interrupted. When he sought time apart with his disciples, the crowds surrounded him.

Yet he never exploded in rage. Despite the turmoil surging around him, he left a legacy of peace. Jesus forged within himself a splendid balance between meeting his own needs and relativizing them for God's work. He took time for prayer. But he could also be so moved by the crowds that he set aside his original intent in order to teach and feed them. While criticizing the Pharisees, he also guided Nicodemus, a member of that group.

Jesus teaches: If you want world peace, begin with yourself. We resist people who attempt leadership but carry loaded guns in their hearts. We respect people who name their grievance, then forget it. If we're honest, we admit we should quit carrying angry burdens best abandoned in high school. We also know that the more time we spend quieting ourselves in prayer, the less we're inclined to furious outbursts.

Step by Step

One step toward making peace might be to find examples that we can admire: skipping the perfect opportunity for a put-down; attempting to understand another person's values; finding ways to resolve conflict without guns; becoming more educated about our "enemies"; voting for candidates who seek alternatives to military solutions.

The way Jesus proposes is no easier than it was in the Roman world. Power and prestige are still enshrined; might is still revered today. We spend billions on destructive weapons. Yet Jesus offers an alternative: a way of living that will make us happy now and ultimately. Beneath the sometimes-weary exterior of the peacemaker, he points to the gleam of God's child. +

PRAYER

Lord, your light gives us strength and shows us the way to God. Remove my blindness that I may see the light of goodness, peace, and love within myself and others.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 7-12

Monday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 3:22—4:6 / Mt 4:12–17, 23–25
Tuesday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 4:7–10 / Mk 6:34–44
Wednesday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 4:11–18 / Mk 6:45–52

Thursday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 4:19—5:4 / Lk 4:14–22a
Friday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 5:5–13 / Lk 5:12–16
Saturday, Christmas Weekday:
1 Jn 5:14–21 / Jn 3:22–30



Bringing Home the Word

The Baptism of the Lord
January 13, 2019

Telling Our Christian Stories

By Mary Katharine Deeley

When we were growing up, my siblings and I would often ask our grandmother to tell us stories about our mother when she was young. We liked listening to our mother tell those same stories from her perspective. The stories varied in some details, but it always felt like a veil was lifted on the past and we had some sense of where we came from along with some insight about our mother's personality.

She, of course, did the same thing for my daughters, making them giggle at the story of my getting into her perfume bottle when I was three. Such

stories connect us with the people we know. Old friends trade stories of shared experiences; young companions learn about the world from the stories of their elders and even from the stories their friends tell them about their lives.

In Acts 10:36, Peter appeals to his listeners by telling the story they know so well. He even appeals to their shared experience as he says, "You know..." Stories connect us to one another and open the door to understanding each other a little more and a little better. In his story, Peter marks the baptism of Jesus as the beginning of his ministry. Our story in the Christian community begins with baptism as well. In verse 38, Peter records that Jesus went on "doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." What would the story of our lives after baptism tell people about us? Would someone like Peter tell people that we went about doing good and loving God and neighbor? +

Stories connect us to one another and open the door to understanding each other a little better.

A Word from Pope Francis

Being holy is not a privilege for the few, as if someone had a large inheritance; in baptism we all have an inheritance to be able to become saints.... Thus we are all called to walk on the path of holiness, and this path has a name and a face: the face of Jesus Christ.

—Angelus, November 1, 2013



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased.

Acts 10:34-38

You know... what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached.

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

A logo for 'Reflection Questions' featuring the word 'REFLECTION' in a stylized font with question marks integrated into the letters.

- Can I proudly tell the story of my Christian life after baptism, or do I feel shame instead?
- If I can't take pride in the story of my life, what can I do to change the narrative?

Just Why Am I Catholic?

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

What is it that makes one Catholic? I admit that I never really thought much about Catholic identity until I was asked to write about it. Why am I a Catholic?

The most honest answer? Because my mom and dad were. That's why I speak English, why I'm an American, why I like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches—and why I'm Catholic. But while I can't change my parents or my mother tongue, there are things (like my religion) that I can change. So why do I stay Catholic?

I'm Catholic and stay Catholic because of the Incarnation. While Jews, Christians, and Muslims all believe in the God of Abraham, Christians believe that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). And while all Christians believe in the Incarnation, for Catholics the Incarnation changes everything.

The Incarnation—God becoming one of us—gives Catholics a special insight into created things. We believe that creation is a window to God. I learn who God is through created things. This is the heart of what we believe about the sacraments.



The Things of Life

We believe that all creation is good. The Incarnation means that the very stuff of this earth has been taken up into the kingdom of God. “Things” are not a hindrance to prayer but are the very instruments of our salvation. We are not afraid to use things in

our worship: bread and wine, water and oil, candles and incense—even dust and ashes! We aren't afraid to drink alcohol at Mass (or at other times, for that matter).

The Incarnation means that God is not far away, shrouded in mystery. If Moses could say: “For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us?” (Deuteronomy 4:7), how much more we who believe in the Incarnation! We have a God who is very close to us, who experienced human pain, joy, work, and good friends.

Because I am a Catholic I am called to develop a spirit of wonder and awe in the presence of the ordinary things of life. Think of the grain of wheat falling into the ground and producing stalk and blade. As St. Augustine said, “Where can you find a greater miracle than that?” Catholics care for creation. Ecology, respect for all created things, saving the planet for our children—these are not peripheral to Catholic identity but at its very heart.

Ongoing Work

I have two parting thoughts. First: Although you might have been baptized Catholic as an infant, being Catholic is not something that happens all at once. We grow into it, and we have to work at it. It's like being married. You get married with the exchange of vows. But being married—growing into a married identity—happens over time. You have to work at it—or else, goodbye marriage! Similarly, we have to work at “being Catholic.”

Second: When I was ten, I decided to become a priest. I asked my pastor, a Franciscan, what I had to do. He directed me to the Franciscan seminary and I became a friar. I was a Franciscan before I even knew there were other kinds of priests: Redemptorist, Jesuit, Benedictine, and so on. Today, I wouldn't trade being a Franciscan for anything. And if I talk about how wonderful the Franciscans are, I don't mean to imply that there is something wrong if one is a Jesuit or a Redemptorist. And while I am proud of being a Catholic, I don't mean to judge others. One thing Catholics believe is that God loves variety. +



Lord, give me a shepherd's heart so that I can show your love and compassion to someone in need.

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 14-19

Monday, Weekday:
Heb 1:1–6 / Mk 1:14–20
Tuesday, Weekday:
Heb 2:5–12 / Mk 1:21–28
Wednesday, Weekday:
Heb 2:14–18 / Mk 1:29–39

Thursday, St. Anthony:
Heb 3:7–14 / Mk 1:40–45
Friday, Weekday:
Heb 4:1–5, 11 / Mk 2:1–12
Saturday, Weekday:
Heb 4:12–16 / Mk 2:13–17



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 20, 2019

Making the Ordinary Extraordinary

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In the legends of the saints in Ireland, it is said that St. Bridget performed a miracle similar to the one Jesus did at Cana. When three beggars came to the monastery, there was nothing to give them to drink. Bridget invited them in anyway and, seeing only the water used for washing clothes, she prayed to God. The wash water turned into beer, which she served to the guests.

While the account of the wedding feast is not a legend, the similarity

between the two stories highlights the way God works in ordinary things (and sometimes in ordinary people) to make them extraordinary. Jesus turns the water at an everyday wedding into wine of such abundance that it reminds us of Isaiah's vision of the Lord's banquet when all will feast at the table. God worked through Bridget, an ordinary person, to turn the water used for washing clothes into beer to satisfy the thirst of three beggars. Though seemingly without, they had as much as they needed, and the generosity was remembered.

Even now, God takes what is mundane and uses it to show forth his glory and satisfy his people. John's Gospel highlights this activity as the first of the signs that Jesus performed. The legend of Bridget and the stories of those who reflect and share the grace of God in their day-to-day living strengthen our faith and hope that God is active still in the world and will bring us all to glory one day. +

***God worked through Bridget
to turn wash water into beer
and satisfy the thirst
of three beggars.***

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 62:1-5

As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord.

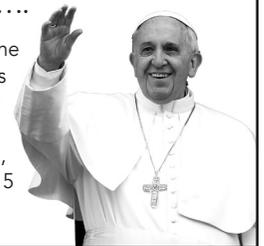
John 2:1-11

"Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now."

A Word from Pope Francis

The common home of all men and women must continue to rise on the foundations of a right understanding of universal fraternity and respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned...

—Address to the
United Nations
General
Assembly,
September 25,
2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Can I think of examples of God working through ordinary people or things to make the extraordinary happen?
- With God's help, how can an ordinary person like me become an extraordinary force for good?

Struggling with Evil

By Richard Rohr, OFM

One of the most difficult biblical themes to explore is how we deal with evil. There is something in our psychology that makes it hard to see, hear, or face evil realistically.

Throughout history, we have viewed the problem of evil similarly: We are forever looking for the enemy and finding him “out there.” Someone else or some other group is almost always the problem, so we feel justified in blaming others. This enables us to live hatefully, even violently, and without guilt. “The hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he is offering worship to God,” says Jesus (John 16:2).

Starting with Cain and Abel, history is an account of who killed whom and who “deserves” to be killed. So much of history is searching for a suitable enemy. In simple terms, he hit me, so I’m free to hit him back. Two millennia after Jesus became history’s forgiving victim we continue to miss his message!

That same dynamic is evident in Leviticus 16, where we read about the scapegoat ritual. On the Day of Atonement, a goat was brought to the Holy of Holies where the priest would lay hands on the animal. All of the sins and failures of the people were ceremoniously laid on the goat, and



they would drive the goat into the desert. Through that ingenious liturgical rite the people distanced themselves from sins by finding an easy target on which to project them. Liturgically, it worked! In fact, it works so well we’ve never stopped creating scapegoats.

Playing Mind Games

We convince ourselves that we’re righteous: Our hatred is moral because the stakes are so high when our country, people, way of life, or religious beliefs are under siege. Finding and dealing with evil “out there” holds us together as a nation as we define ourselves by what we are against.

Jesus shows us another way. Many of his healings are really efforts to reintegrate persons into the community. There’s no room for scapegoating in his teaching. He doesn’t expel sinners but forgives them. He even commands that we love our enemies. There’s no “contaminating element” to expel in Jesus’ teaching. Forgiveness and reconciliation are the opposite of scapegoating, punishing, and excluding the supposed enemy. The great conversion occurs when we see that we’re our own worst enemies.

Saint Paul is another model. He’s a

converted persecutor and accuser who once gloried in his identity as a hater of Christians. No one was “holier” than Saul, the dutiful Pharisee, until the scales fell from his eyes on the road to Damascus. There, for the first time, he recognized that he had become hate in the name of love, evil in the name of goodness.

Seeing with New Eyes

Few of us are likely to see ourselves in the extremes of St. Paul, but through God’s grace, we too can begin to see with new eyes. We can choose the path of transformation that Jesus call us to, rather than take the more comfortable outlet of projecting evil onto others.

Jesus calls us to be reconcilers: to deal with evil by holding it with grace rather than hating it; to be people who cannot hate anymore; to refuse to allow ourselves to be pulled onto one side of every dilemma.

The gospel is destabilizing. It calls us to nonviolence and wisdom. It calls us to see God in every circumstance and person—perhaps most of all in those we’re tempted to reject, fear, or attack. +

PRAYER

Lord, send your Spirit and empower me to use my gifts and talents for the common good of all people.

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 21-26

Monday, St. Agnes:
Heb 5:1–10 / Mk 2:18–22

Tuesday, Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children:
Heb 6:10–20 / Mk 2:23–28

Wednesday, Weekday:
Heb 7:1–3, 15–17 / Mk 3:1–6

Thursday, St. Francis de Sales:
Heb 7:25—8:6 / Mk 3:7–12

Friday, Conversion of St. Paul:
Acts 22:3–16 or Acts 9:1–22 / Mk 16:15–18

Saturday, Sts. Timothy and Titus:
2 Tm 1:1–8 or Ti 1:1–5 / Mk 3:20–21



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 27, 2019

Appreciating God's Word

By Mary Katharine Deeley

In the days of the exile in Babylon, the Jews were unable to practice their religion, to gather as a community, or to hear the words of the Torah, which had so guided them in their lives as a people of God. I have always been taken by the description of this reading of the Law in Nehemiah, which occurs shortly after their return from exile. As Ezra reads, the people weep, rejoicing because they were hearing God's words to them as though for the first time and were overjoyed because God had brought them back home. I can't say I

have ever wept at the beauty and power of Scripture when it is read at Mass, nor have I seen others do so. When we haven't been deprived of a treasure, we sometimes take it for granted and fail to appreciate the gift that it is.

In the Gospel, Jesus reads the words of Isaiah and declares to those in the synagogue that the words have been fulfilled. The people's reaction, which we hear as Luke 4 continues (next week), simply is not the same. Throughout our own lives, we have reacted to the comfort and challenge of the Gospel in different ways at different times. Sometimes we may be touched by what we hear, but I wonder if we often do not allow God's word to affect us as much as it could. Maybe today we can really open ourselves to what the Lord has to say in the sacred stories. Maybe today we can recognize the true value of God's revelation, care, and call to us in the Bible. +

When we haven't been deprived of a treasure, we sometimes take it for granted.

Sunday Readings

Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

[Ezra said,] "Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not lament, do not weep!"

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free.

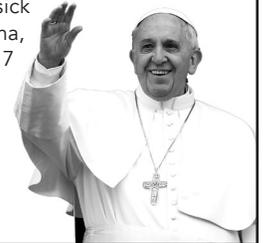
Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

[Jesus] stood up to read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor."

A Word from Pope Francis

We have before us Jesus hidden yet present in the Eucharist....On the altar, we worship the flesh of Jesus; in these our brothers and sisters, we encounter the wounds of Jesus. The Christian adores Jesus, the Christian seeks Jesus, the Christian can recognize the wounds of Jesus.

—Greeting the sick at Fátima, May 13, 2017



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I make time to read Scripture outside of Mass?
- When I read Scripture, do I take time to contemplate what the Lord is telling me with the words I read?

Becoming Like Children

By Kathy Coffey

[Jesus said,] “Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself... is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3–4).

This scene captures the essence of this Scripture passage: A girl about age three, naked, runs into the surf at a beach. Her parents cheer, the sun spills liquid honey into the sea, the seagulls sweep overhead in graceful arcs. She spreads her arms as if to embrace the ocean and squeals with delight as foam brushes tiny toes.

Huddled on a towel beneath a straw hat, I admire her free abandon. “Become like one of these,” says Jesus. At that moment, I can see why.

When Jesus asks us to become like children, we get a bit queasy. We remember the bullies of our childhood, the sense of powerlessness, our dependence on caregivers who might or might not honor that trust.

When we relive childhood now, it’s not always pleasant. Placing ourselves in situations where we’re clueless restores the pain of the lost child. Being the awkward new kid in the advanced class or maneuvering in a strange vocabulary, we panic. When we’ve never heard of the disease we have or buy a house not knowing an escrow from an easement,



we wobble as insecurely as toddlers.

But by the same token, when we respond to touching music, smell a hyacinth, or notice a cloud castle, we’re in that magic childhood zone.

The Real Deal

One more obstacle to misunderstanding this passage might be the cute

stereotypes of children that abound in the media. Those sweetsy types must be concocted by people who don’t know the genuine article. Contrast the saccharine with the Real Deal. Real children ask excruciating questions that adults deem “impolite.” They get wildly excited about stuff that leaves us blasé.

Jesus knew the Real Deal because he welcomed them. Children must have been instinctively drawn to him. They crawled all over him with snotty noses, grubby shirts, and unedited ramblings. Furthermore, he knew childhood from the inside: his own, direct experience of being heartbreakingly vulnerable.

Jesus came to earth quietly, humbly, as a child, without fanfare or prestige. He matured, as most children do, “in wisdom, age, and grace,” as part of an outwardly ordinary family. In doing so, he blessed all children; all adults who honor the child within; all bumbling, imperfect human families. Knowing that Jesus probably spilled some grape juice,

we can forget the misconception that in family life, holy = perfect.

Parent-Child Bond

In modeling the finest parts of childhood, what we are trying to do is recapture that free abandon, that total trust that comes from knowing God as dear parent. If God loves us and looks out for every need, can’t we throw ourselves into God’s arms?

If we become like children, we can leave behind our adult hesitations, not lugging the laundry list of our wrongs. We know all is forgiven. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux spoke of casting herself on God as she would on her beloved papa: sleeping fearlessly in his arms, hiding her face in his hair.

One of the devastating stories that surfaced following the 2004 tsunami described parents whose children were torn from their arms by the force of the waves. People worldwide could relate to that tragedy and ache for such a loss. Similarly, if we are separated from our childlike selves, we are wrenched from so much: all that is best in us, our proper relationship to God, and our hope for the future. +

PRAYER

*Lord, you created all people equal.
Open my eyes to recognize
the dignity of all people and
my heart to love unconditionally.*

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day
in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 28–February 2

Monday, St. Thomas Aquinas:
Heb 9:15, 24–28 / Mk 3:22–30

Tuesday, Weekday:
Heb 10:1–10 / Mk 3:31–35

Wednesday, Weekday:
Heb 10:11–18 / Mk 4:1–20

Thursday, St. John Bosco:
Heb 10:19–25 / Mk 4:21–25

Friday, Weekday:
Heb 10:32–39 / Mk 4:26–34

Saturday, Presentation of the Lord: Mal 3:1–4 /
Heb 2:14–18 / Lk 2:22–40 or Lk 2:22–32

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January 27, 2019

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