

## THE DAILY GOSPEL

**Tuesday, June 1, 2004**  
**9th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 P 3:12-15, 17-18**

**Gospel: Mk 12:13-17**

Jewish leaders sent to Jesus some Pharisees with members of Herod's party, with the purpose of trapping him in his own words. They came and said to Jesus, Master, we know that you are true; you are not influenced by anyone, and your answers do not vary according to who is listening to you but you truly teach God's way. Tell us, is it against the Law to pay taxes to Caesar? Should we pay them or not?

But Jesus saw through their trick and answered, Why are you testing me? Bring me a silver coin and let me see it. They brought him one and Jesus asked, Whose head is this, and whose name? They answered, Caesar's. Then Jesus said, Return to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.

And they were greatly astonished.

### **Commentary**

*BECAUSE Judea and Samaria were troublesome areas the Romans imposed direct rule on them and as part of the program, this census tax. This was the cause of deep anger and resentment among the people. Judas the Gaulonite, for example, had proclaimed that taxation was a form of slavery, and he called for violent resistance. His rhetoric is familiar in our age too: God is the only ruler and they would die for the purity of their faith. This rhetoric influenced many, and taxation was a burning question.*

*The question they asked Jesus was a trap, concealed under a layer of flattery. If he said it was right to pay the tax, he would incur the anger of the people; and if he said it was not right, he would be reported to the Romans as a revolutionary. There seemed to be no way out of the dilemma.*

*In the ancient world, coinage was considered the property of the ruler, since it had his image on it. Jesus asked them to show him a coin. This was clever, because by possessing a Roman coin they were already showing themselves to be collaborators with the Romans. This was a sore point, especially for Pharisees. He only had to say, Give back to Caesar this worthless thing that belongs to him in any case. Then he added,*

*Give back to God what belongs to God, as if to say, You were made in God's image: you have his image stamped on you, just as this coin has Caesar's image stamped on it. You don't owe your souls to Caesar.*

*This principle has served societies well, when it has been observed.*

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**Wednesday, June 2, 2004**  
**9th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 Tim 1:1-3, 6-12**

**Gospel: Mk 12:18-27**

The Sadducees came to Jesus. Since they claim that there is no resurrection, they questioned him in this way, Master, in the Scriptures Moses gave us this law: If anyone dies and leaves a wife but no children, his brother must take the wife and give her a child who will be considered the child of his deceased brother. Now, there were seven brothers. The first married a wife, but he died without leaving any children. The second took the wife and he, too, died leaving no children. The same thing happened to

the third. Finally the seven died leaving no children. Last of all the woman died. Now, in the resurrection, to which of them will she be wife? For the seven had her as wife.

Jesus replied, You could be wrong in this regard because you understand neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. When they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry but are like the angels in heaven.

Now, about the resurrection of the dead, have you never reflected on the chapter of the burning bush in the book of Moses? God said to him: *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.* Now, he is the God, not of the dead but of the living. You are totally wrong.

#### **Commentary**

*YESTERDAY* it was the Pharisees and Herodians, today it is the Sadducees trying to trap him. These Sadducees, however, are more worldly and relaxed; they only want to make fun of the idea of a next life. They were a minority group in the country, wealthy landowners and merchants, collaborators with Rome, minimalist in religion, rejecting the teaching about angels and spirits, accepting as the word of God only the first five books of the Scriptures. No rabbi had ever produced evidence of a next life from those first five books. But Jesus managed to do so! In this way: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the most prominent figures in those first books. In the second of those books God had proclaimed himself the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (Ex 3:6). If these men are just dead, said Jesus, then God is reigning over a kingdom of death, not a kingdom of life!

If you believe only in death you see only death everywhere. Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life, calls us to believe in life. As far as I know, no Sadducee is known by name in the New Testament; and the whole group died out after 70 AD. It was consistent with their belief in death. Like diet, it is important to pay attention to your beliefs, because you are what you believe.

**Thursday, June 3, 2004**  
**9th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 Tim 2:8-15**

**Gospel: Mk 12:28-34**

A teacher of the Law had been listening to this discussion and admired how Jesus answered them. So he came up and asked him, Which commandment is the first of all?

Jesus answered, The first is: *Hear, Israel! The Lord, our God, is One Lord; and you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.* And after this comes another one: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* There is no commandment greater than these two.

The teacher of the Law said to him, Well spoken, Master; you are right when you say that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all our heart, with all our understanding and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.

Jesus approved this answer and said, You are not far from the kingdom of God. But after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

#### **Commentary**

*A young man went to a rabbi and said, I know that we are commanded to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength. But I know that my heart and soul and mind and strength have bad parts in them. So how can I love God? After a pause the rabbi replied, It seems you will just have to love God with the bad parts too.*

*I know a woman who treasures a scrawled note from her wayward son. The father of the Prodigal Son would have done the same. Love is like that. In fiction, said Oscar Wilde, good people do good things and bad people do bad: that's why it is called fiction! In real life bad people can do good things and good people can do bad things. That is what makes it an astonishing adventure rather than a project. The wonder, as Kavanagh put it, is to get a true note from a dead flat string.*

**Friday, June 4, 2004**  
**9th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 Tim 3:10-17**

**Gospel: Mk 12:35-37**

As Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he said, The teachers of the Law say that the Messiah is the son of David. How can that be? For David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit declared: *The Lord said to my Lord: sit at my right until I put your enemies under your feet.* If David himself calls him Lord, in what way can he be his son?

Many people came to Jesus and listened to him gladly.

**Commentary**

*TODAY'S* passage puzzles the scholars greatly. It could bear several interpretations. The people who were listening to Jesus were clear in their minds that the Messiah would be a descendent of King David because of a text in their Scriptures, *I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever* (2S 7:13). They were clear: they knew the kind of Messiah they wanted. Whatever interpretation his saying is to bear, it is obvious that he is ruining their clarity. He is either saying that the Messiah will not be a descendent of David, or that he will be much more than a descendent of David.

There are people who insist on clarity above all else, thinking that clarity is a proof of truth. But there are many things that are clear and false. When we think we have understood something we say *I have it!* We use the words *having, grasping, holding, and the like.* Even the word *concept* (from Latin *capio*) means *to seize*. These words should make us pause, because fundamentally it is not we who seize the truth, it is the truth that should seize us. As Chesterton put it, we are not here to get the skies into our heads, but to get our heads into the skies. To promote false clarity is to be an enemy of the truth.

**Saturday, June 5, 2004**  
**9th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 Tim 4:1-8**

**Gospel: Mk 12:38-44**

As Jesus was teaching, he also said to them, Beware of those teachers of the Law who enjoy walking around in long robes and being greeted in the marketplace, and who like to occupy reserved seats in the synagogues and the first places at feasts. They even devour the widows and the orphans goods while making a show of long prayers. How severe a sentence they will receive!

Jesus sat down opposite the Temple treasury and watched the people dropping money into the treasury box; and many rich people put in large offerings. But a poor widow also came and dropped in two small coins.

Then Jesus called his disciples and said to them, Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all those who gave offerings. For all of them gave from their plenty, but she gave from her poverty and put in everything she had, her very living.

**Commentary**

*CLOTHES* are for warmth and protection, but the layers accumulate layers of meaning! Clothes become an assertion of one's self-image, one's identity. Clothes say, *This is who I am.* Clothes are a language. Uniforms assert membership of a particular class: the army, the police, the clergy .

The Scribes loved to walk about in long robes and be greeted obsequiously in the marketplace . A language is an agreement; there is no private language. What use is a special hat if no one knows what it is saying? One gets the feeling that people who depend on robes and uniforms and badges and insignia must be very unsure of themselves and are craving recognition from others. The Scribes believed that their knowledge of the Law was the sum of all wisdom and the only knowledge worth having. But that belief was insecure while there was even one person who disagreed. How Jesus threatened their identity! He

challenged them and beat them in argument, though he had never been to rabbinical school. He earned their unremitting hostility.

In today's passage he pointed out a casualty of the Temple system: the poor. A widow at that time was a very symbol of poverty and helplessness. In that world, to lose one's husband was to lose one's identity. This poor widow of no identity was being exploited by people who clung desperately to a false identity. It's the tragic story of the world.

**Sunday, June 6, 2004**  
**Trinity Sunday**

**1st Reading: Pro 8:22-31**

Yahweh created me first, at the beginning of his works. He formed me from of old, from eternity, even before the earth. The abyss did not exist when I was born, the springs of the sea had not gushed forth, the mountains were still not set in their place nor the hills, when I was born before he made the earth or countryside, or the first grains of the world's dust. I was there when he made the skies and drew the earth's compass on the abyss, when he formed the clouds above and when the springs of the ocean emerged; when he made the sea with its limits, that it might not overflow. When he laid the foundations of the earth, I was close beside him, the designer of his works, and I was his daily delight, forever playing in his presence, playing throughout the world and delighting to be with the sons of men.

**2nd Reading: Rom 5:1-5**

By faith we have received true righteousness, and we are at peace with God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Through him we obtain this favor in which we remain and we even boast to expect the Glory of God.

Not only that, we also boast even in trials, knowing that trials produce patience, from patience comes merit, merit is the source of hope, and hope does not disappoint us because the Holy Spirit has been given to us, pouring into our hearts the love of God.

**Gospel: Jn 16:12-15**

Jesus said to his disciples, I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. When he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the whole truth.

He has nothing to say of himself but he will speak of what he hears, and he will tell you of the things to come. He will take what is mine and make it known to you; in doing this, he will glorify me. All that the Father has is mine; because of this I have just told you, that the Spirit will take what is mine and make it known to you.

**Commentary**

*ALMOST* the whole world, it seems, is now familiar with Roublev's famous icon of the Trinity. I already quoted a short passage from Evdokimov's meditation on this icon. Here is another:

*Gazing at the three faces raises the question, Who are they? What are they saying? and we, in our silence, can perceive something of this secret. The heads leaning towards one another can be seen from a distance it looks as if they cannot abide being apart at all each one is there only for the other. Each one of them is giving himself to the others, defenseless before the other. That is why their faces are full of an infinite tenderness, the tenderness that is without resistance before what the other offers or asks.*

*And what if in face of humankind they are in this same attitude of total non-resistance, vulnerability and defenseless tenderness ?*

*In the background, shapes can only just be seen, as if hidden in the golden light: a mountain, a tree, a house. Why not just the three Persons alone? The great wind which returns from the Spirit to the Father through the Son is drawing the landscape after it by its irresistible force. The mountain and the trees are bent in same wind. The great Liturgy which they celebrate among themselves eternally and for evermore, sweeps all creation up in the rhythm of its dance.*

**Monday, June 7, 2004**

## 10<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: 1 K 17:1-7**

**Gospel: Mt 5:1-12**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. He sat down and his disciples gathered around him. Then he spoke and began to teach them:

Fortunate are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Fortunate are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.

Fortunate are the gentle, they shall possess the land.

Fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.

Fortunate are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.

Fortunate are those with a pure heart, for they shall see God.

Fortunate are those who work for peace, they shall be called children of God.

Fortunate are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Fortunate are you, when people insult you and persecute you and speak all kinds of evil against you because you are my followers. Be glad and joyful, for a great reward is kept for you in God. This is how this people persecuted the prophets who lived before you.

### **Commentary**

*If the sermon on the mount is a summary of all Christian doctrine, the beatitudes are a summary of the sermon on the mount. Here, then, if anywhere, we have the essence of the Gospel. If you went to school around the same time as me, you can still remember the answers to questions like What else is forbidden by the eighth commandment? But we were never told what was forbidden or commanded or even recommended by the eight beatitudes! The ten commandments are basic rules of morality, but the beatitudes are a measure of how far beyond this the Gospel calls us.*

*The morality of the ten commandments is a morality that can be measured: it is possible to say exactly where you are with them, ticking the ones you broke and the degree of the breach. Christians may come to believe that they have no sin just because they haven't been in breach of the commandments. The morality of the beatitudes is harder to quantify: how poor in spirit are you? How meek, gentle, merciful? You can never say: I've reached it! You can never be self-righteous. And you can never even begin to think that you are better than another because you can't compare.*

*In addition, as Simon Tugwell wrote, St. Paul learned to talk even about the weakness of God (1Cor 1:25). There is something about God which is better expressed in weakness than in strength, in foolishness than in wisdom, in poverty than in richness.*

**Tuesday, June 8, 2004**

**10<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: 1 K 17:7-16**

**Gospel: Mt 5:13-16**

Jesus said to his disciples, You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its strength, how can it be made salty again? It has become useless. It can only be thrown away and people will trample on it.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and covers it; instead it is put on a lampstand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine before others, so that they may see the good you do and praise your Father in heaven.

### **Commentary**

*If we are ever at rights with God it is not because of anything we have done, but because of God's goodness and mercy. Success stories are nearly always riddled with ambiguity and hidden compromise; they are the ego's work. The only success story that holds any interest for us is that of Jesus and he was a failure! On the level of ordinary wisdom, yes, he failed. He saved others but he cannot save himself, the*

onlookers said as he died: the three gospels record it (Mt 27:42; Mk 15:31; Lk 23:35). This tremendous failure is the revelation of God in human terms. And (to quote Tugwell again) we who are followers of Jesus Christ are called to be imitators of him, and so should not be at all surprised to find that one of the arts we have to learn is the sublime art of weakness.

When I am weak then I am strong, wrote St. Paul (2Cor 12:10). It is fatal (for oneself and for others) to have the wrong kind of strength. The strong are always the same, wrote Hemingway, they face the truth with a bull-whip. Such people will never be the salt of the earth; they may well set the world on fire, but they will never be the light of the world.

**Wednesday, June 9, 2004**  
**10th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 1 K 18:20-39**

**Gospel: Mt 5:17-19**

Jesus said to his disciples, Do not think that I have come to remove the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to remove but to fulfill them. I tell you this: as long as heaven and earth last, not the smallest letter or stroke of the Law will change until all is fulfilled.

So then, whoever breaks the least important of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be the least in the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, whoever obeys them and teaches others to do the same will be great in the kingdom of heaven.

**Commentary**

*I once heard a lawyer say in defense of a patently unjust decision, The courts are not courts of justice, they are courts of law. One wonders then what they are for. What justifies the existence of a law, if not that it should be in the service of justice? But justice is a difficult search, and life has to go on quickly, so we settle for law.*

*We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die (Jn 19:7). It was this same law that Jesus said he came to fulfill. What could he have meant by fulfilling the law? Not its observance to the letter: he defiantly broke the law on many occasions certainly, as it was understood in his time. By fulfilling the law he meant fulfilling the purpose for which it was made: that is, justice (or righteousness, as the Scriptures calls it: that includes a just relationship with God). He may have been thinking of the text in Isaiah (55:11), My word that goes out from my mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

*But why then does he say that not the smallest letter or stroke of the law will change until all is fulfilled? It is not the law that is wrong, but its separation from justice. Clever people can even make the law an enemy of justice. This happens daily in the wide world, and sadly, also in the Church.*

**Thursday, June 10, 2004**  
**10th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 1 K 18:41-46**

**Gospel: Mt 5:20-26**

Jesus said to the crowds, I tell you, then, that if you are not righteous in a much broader way than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

You have heard that it was said to our people in the past: *Do not commit murder; anyone who does kill will have to face trial.* But now I tell you: whoever gets angry with a brother or sister will have to face trial. Whoever insults a brother or sister deserves to be brought before the council; whoever calls a brother or a sister Fool deserves to be thrown into the fire of hell. So, if you are about to offer your gift at the altar and you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with him, and then come back and offer your gift to God.

Don't forget this: be reconciled with your opponent quickly when you are together on the way to court. Otherwise he will turn you over to the judge, who will hand you over to the police, who will put you in jail. There you will stay, until you have paid the last penny.

#### **Commentary**

*TODAY'S reading follows directly on yesterday's. Law without justice is superficial; it is only about words and appearances of justice. We use all kinds of substitutes for wisdom. If a court doesn't know how to decide, it consults precedent. But that precedent was either based on another precedent, or it was someone's guess at justice in a particular case in the past. Yesterday's guess, then, becomes today's justice.*

*The scribes and Pharisees loved to quote other scribes and Pharisees. If you are not righteous in a better way than the scribes and the Pharisees... Jesus said. Another translation says, Unless your virtue goes deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees.... Better is a rather neutral word; deeper says more. It is clearly the sense of the passage. The law doesn't go down to the roots of things: to the mind and heart. It is in the mind and heart that all our actions are conceived and born. Murder is the ultimate flowering of an anger that grew unchecked in the mind and heart. If we never look into those sometimes dark places, we could find later that we have been breeding monsters there.*

**Friday, June 11, 2004**

**St. Barnabas, Apostle**

**1st Reading: Acts 11:21-26; 13:1-3**

**Gospel: Mt 10:7-13**

Jesus said to his disciples, Go and proclaim this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, bring the dead back to life, cleanse the lepers, and drive out demons. You received this as a gift, so give it as a gift. Do not carry any gold, silver or copper in your purses. Do not carry a traveler's bag, or an extra shirt, or sandals, or walking-stick: workers deserve their living.

When you come to a town or a village, look for a worthy person and stay there until you leave.

As you enter the house, wish it peace. If the people in the house deserve it, your peace will be on them; if they do not deserve it, your blessing will come back to you.

#### **Commentary**

*MONEY, a bag, an extra shirt . These things are for my future needs. Luggage is always for the future. In the present it's only a burden; we carry the burden for the sake of the future. To carry luggage with me, then, is to live, to some degree, in the future. The same is true of money: my hunger may be satisfied now, but I take money with me so that I can satisfy it again tomorrow.*

*It's a severe criticism to be told that you are living in the past. But strangely we think it's the highest praise to be told that you are living in the future. It's hard to see why we make such a difference between them, for one is just as unreal as the other. I knew a businessman who always went about with a ballpoint pen in his mouth, so involved was he with his work. But even in his home he still carried that pen in his mouth! Some of us cheat ourselves of life by living in the past; the rest of us do it by living in the future! (I exaggerate, I know!) Many people almost kill themselves amassing wealth; even in their old age they still want to be turning a profit. It's an endless deferral of life. But the Gospel challenges us to face it now or never.*

**Saturday, June 12 2004**

**10th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 1 K 19:19-21**

**Gospel: Mt 5:33-37**

Jesus said to his disciples, You have also heard that people were told in the past: *Do not break your oath; an oath sworn to the Lord must be kept.* But I tell you this: do not take oaths. Do not swear by the heavens, for they are God's throne, nor by the earth, because it is his footstool, nor by Jerusalem because

it is the city of the great king. Do not even swear by your head, because you cannot make a single hair white or black. Say *yes* when you mean *yes* and say *no* when you mean *no*. Anything else you say comes from the devil.

#### **Commentary**

*SHAKESPEARE* mentioned a good mouth-filling oath. And as far as I remember he says elsewhere that a terrible oath, spoken in the right way, makes you seem more a man than any action could. Perhaps this is just the point: swearing is language pretending to do more than language can do. But something said with the emphasis of an oath isn't more true than it would have been without the oath. The oath doesn't change anything, it doesn't fill the horizon—it only fills the mouth. Far from bolstering the truth, it weakens it. It has often been remarked that the more swearing of oaths, the more lying.

Let your *yes* be *yes* and your *no* be *no*, said Jesus. If the truth cannot stand by itself, nothing can. In fact other things are meant to stand only by virtue of the truth that is in them. In an age of advertising, when every wavelength is full of exaggerated claim and lying persuasion, we have to protect a space in which to say *yes* when we mean *yes*, *no* when we mean *no*.

**Sunday, June 13, 2004**

**Body and Blood of Christ**

#### **1st Reading: Gen 14:18-20**

Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram saying, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth! And blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hands!

And Abram gave him a tenth part of everything.

#### **2nd Reading: 1 Cor 11:23-26**

This is the tradition of the Lord that I received and that in my turn I have handed on to you; the Lord Jesus, on the night that he was delivered up, took bread and, after giving thanks, broke it, saying, This is my body which is broken for you; do this in memory of me. In the same manner, taking the cup after the supper, he said, This cup is the new Covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do it in memory of me. So, then, whenever you eat of this bread and drink from this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes.

#### **Gospel: Lk 9:11-17**

When the crowd caught up with Jesus in Bethsaida, he welcomed them and began speaking about the kingdom of God, curing those who needed healing.

The day was drawing to a close and the Twelve drew near to tell him, Send the crowd away and let them go into the villages and farms around, to find lodging and food, for we are here in a lonely place. But Jesus replied, You yourselves give them something to eat. They answered, We have only five loaves and two fish; do you want us to go and buy food enough for all this crowd? For there were about five thousand men. Then Jesus said to his disciples, Make people sit down in groups of fifties.

So they made all of them settle down. Jesus then took the five loaves and two fish, and raising his eyes to heaven, pronounced a blessing over them; he broke them and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the crowd. They ate and everyone had enough; and when they gathered up what was left, twelve baskets were filled with broken pieces.

#### **Commentary**

*RECENTLY* in a church I noticed that the resident religious community were all sitting as far removed from one another as the architecture and furniture allowed. Since then I've noticed it in many other places. We need space, it's true; but if that's the only thing we need, it's the end of community. Children sit away from one another only when there has been a fight. But they soon make it up again. There must be something permanently wrong with adults who do it instinctively and always. The Eucharist is an assembly of the faithful. It brings us together, expressing our union in Christ and our eternal union with God. How can we

*say these things and still go on sitting far apart? I often think that the farther from the mouth, the more truthful our language. We tell lies with our mouth, we tell the truth with our feet.*

*The Eucharist is bodily: the truth stands out in it more clearly and powerfully than anywhere else so powerfully that it is expected to affect our whole subsequent life. But what if it doesn't affect us even while we are present at it? The feast of the Body and Blood of Christ is a day for meditating on the bodily truth our own, and that of the Eucharist.*

**Monday, June 14, 2004**  
**11th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 1 K 21:1-16**

**Gospel: Mt 5:38-42**

Jesus said to his disciples, You have heard that it was said: *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.* But I tell you this: do not oppose evil with evil; if someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn and offer the other. If someone sues you in court for your shirt, give your coat as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give when asked and do not turn your back on anyone who wants to borrow from you.

**Commentary**

*If today's reading were put into practice, all war would cease immediately; and not only war but every kind of conflict, even minor domestic squabbles. It is highly improbable, to say the least, that that will ever happen. François Mauriac, the great French all-round man of letters, wrote that society always remains criminal even while many saints live within it. [Society] cannot be excused because in every age there has been a Vincent de Paul or a Francis of Assisi to remind them of it not so much by their words as by their lives of sacrifice. But the course of history has not been influenced by the saints. They have acted upon hearts and souls; but history has remained criminal. It would not do to make too clear a distinction between the individual and society: individuals are part of society. But still we know what Mauriac meant. Society will never be improved by everyone telling everyone else to improve. A wise friend said to me once, Let's not waste our energy criticizing what is wrong; let's just do our own work to the very best of our ability. If it's any good it will displace what is bad. This must be true not only of work but of everything!*

**Tuesday, June 15, 2004**  
**11th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 1 K 21:17-29**

**Gospel: Mt 5:43-48**

Jesus said to his disciples, You have heard that it was said: *Love your neighbor and do not do good to your enemy.* But this I tell you: Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in Heaven. For he makes his sun rise on both the wicked and the good, and he gives rain to both the just and the unjust.

If you love those who love you, what is special about that? Do not even tax collectors do as much? And if you are friendly only to your friends, what is so exceptional about that? Do not even the pagans do as much? For your part you shall be righteous and perfect in the way your heavenly Father is righteous and perfect.

**Commentary**

*A book to recommend: C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves. His lucid writing clears up the mess that is the word love. This word has come to mean just anything, and therefore nothing. Lewis expounds the classic fourfold distinction of love: The Greek names are storge (family love), philia (friendship), eros (passionate love), and agapè (Christian love). Today's reading is the most perfect formulation of Christian love. Love your enemies is the summit of love. But ideally all other forms of love are on their way towards it. Friendship is often very close.*

In The Prophet Kahlil Gibran does not have a section on *agapè*, but here is a little of what he says about friendship:

*Let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit.  
For love that seeks aught but the disclosure of its own mystery is not love but a net cast forth: and only the unprofitable is caught.  
And let your best be for your friend .  
For what is your friend that you should seek him with hours to kill?  
Seek him always with hours to live.  
For it is his to fill your need, but not your emptiness .  
When you part from your friend, you grieve not;  
For that which you love most in him may be clearer in his absence, as the mountains to the climber is clearer from the plain.*

**Wednesday, June 16, 2004**  
**11th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 K 2:1, 6-14**

**Gospel: Mt 6:1-6, 16-18**

Jesus said to his disciples, Be careful not to make a show of your righteousness before people. If you do so, you do not gain anything from your Father in heaven. When you give something to the poor, do not have it trumpeted before you, as do those who want to be seen in the synagogues and in the streets in order to be praised by the people. I assure you, they have been already paid in full.

If you give something to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your gift remains really secret. Your Father who sees what is kept secret, will reward you.

When you pray, do not be like those who want to be seen. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues or on street corners to be seen by everyone. I assure you, they have already been paid in full. When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is with you in secret; and your Father who sees what is kept secret will reward you.

When you fast, do not put on a miserable face as do the hypocrites. They put on a gloomy face, so people can see they are fasting. I tell you this: they have been paid in full already. When you fast, wash your face and make yourself look cheerful, because you are not fasting for appearance or for people, but for your Father who sees beyond appearances. And your Father, who sees what is kept secret will reward you.

#### **Commentary**

*SOME ancient rabbis used to say that the most perfect form of almsgiving is when you do not know to whom you are giving, and the receiver does not know from whom he or she is receiving. Such an act would have no anchor in the ego; it would be like a pure sound, with no echo. If you do something good and another gets the credit, enjoy the pure sound (it may take a little getting used to)! You have an opportunity to experience and study the pure essence of an act in itself, without the fog that usually surrounds it. This is what goodness feels like in itself when it is separated from the ego's demands (gratitude, recognition, looking good, etc.). At first you may be more conscious of other things: you may have a feeling of injustice or disappointment. But don't throw away the pure essence for such slight things. Goodness has a more subtle music than these. If your ear is attuned to heavy rock, other music may seem like nothing at first; but wait!*

*There was a medieval mystic who used to pray only two words, O bonitas! Oh Goodness! (That was his name for God.) He used to breathe it over and over; today it would be called his mantra. The mediae Grüss Gott vals had an axiom, It is the nature of goodness to pour itself out (bonum est diffusivum sui). This is why God created the world, they said. When you do something because it is good and for no egocentric motive, you almost know what God is like.*

**Thursday, June 17, 2004**

## 11th Week in Ordinary Time

**1st Reading: Sir 48:1-14**

**Gospel: Mt 6:7-15**

Jesus said to his disciples, When you pray, do not use a lot of words, as the pagans do, for they hold that the more they say, the more chance they have of being heard. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need, even before you ask him.

This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven,

holy be your name,

your kingdom come

and your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts

just as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us.

Do not bring us to the test

but deliver us from the evil one.

If you forgive others their wrongs, your Father in heaven will also forgive yours. If you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive you either.

### **Commentary**

*THE Our Father is the prayer that draws all Christians together. It reaches even further: there is not a phrase in it that Jews too could not pray. If the Father was not the Lord of heaven and earth but only a tribal deity, the our in question would be a tribal identity. The greater the Father, the wider the our. How could anyone be excluded?*

*In services of Church unity, the Our Father is the safe ground on which everyone begins. But it is not only a beginning; it is a path that goes all the way. It is the distinctive prayer of a disciple of Jesus, who reached out to the weak, the sick, the wounded, the strayed, the lost (Ezk 34), without enquiring what their faith credentials were. He even praised the faith of pagans! (e.g., Mt 15:28; Lk 7:9).*

*Sometimes when Christians talk about unity they mean only sameness. And what is sameness but same as me! Sameness is built on exclusion (Hitler wanted sameness, and his way was to exterminate difference). But unity is unity in diversity. There is a Peacemakers Order, founded by the zen master Roshi Glassman, in which members take the following initial vows: I vow to be oneness. I vow to be diversity. I vow to be harmony. You can read about it in his book, Bearing Witness. Christians could take a leaf out of it!*

**Friday, June 18, 2004**

**Sacred Heart of Jesus**

**1st Reading: Ezk 34:11-16**

**2nd Reading: Rom 5:5-11**

**Gospel: Lk 15:3-7**

Jesus told them this parable, Who among you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, will not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and seek out the lost one till he finds it? And finding it, will he not joyfully carry it home on his shoulders? Then he will call his friends and neighbors together and say: Celebrate with me for I have found my lost sheep. I tell you, just so, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine upright who do not need to repent.

### **Commentary**

*I knew a gentle Indian nun who had lived a year in Europe and was beginning to get courage to comment on things. Europeans are always asking Why?, she said, and How much? and What time is it? It was one of the best lessons I ever had, and like all the best lessons it wasn't intended as a lesson at all.*

*The head makes distinctions and oppositions; it thinks in numbers and percentages; it would mince everything down to a featureless sameness like chipboard. In Samuel Beckett's play, Waiting for Godot, one of the characters, on hearing that one of the two thieves crucified with Jesus was saved, remarked, It was a fair percentage! The shepherd in today's Gospel passage, had he been working only with his head, would have found 99% quite satisfactory. But he was working from his heart, which knows nothing about percentages, and he went searching for the one that was lost. That's the nature of the heart.*

*How do we see the outsider, the marginal person, the failure? That is the surest way of checking whether we live out of our head or out of our heart.*

**Saturday, June 19, 2004**  
**Immaculate Heart of Mary**

**1st Reading: Jdt 13:17-20; 15:9**

**Gospel: Lk 2:41-51**

Every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover, as was customary. And when Jesus was twelve years old, he went up with them according to the custom for this feast. After the festival was over, they returned, but the boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem and his parents did not know it.

They thought he was in the company and after walking the whole day they looked for him among their relatives and friends. As they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem searching for him, and on the third day they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. And all the people were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

His parents were very surprised when they saw him and his mother said to him, Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I were very worried while searching for you. Then he said to them, Why were you looking for me? Do you not know that I must be in my Father's house? But they did not understand this answer.

Jesus went down with them, returning to Nazareth, and he continued to be subject to them. As for his mother, she kept all these things in her heart.

**Commentary**

*MARY'S pondering in her heart is surely the headline for Christian contemplation. Therefore it may be appropriate to let Meister Eckhart interpret today's gospel passage for us in his distinctive way.*

*They had lost the child Jesus in the crowd. And so they had to go back to where they had come from. And when they got back to their starting point, the Temple, they found him.*

*And so in truth, if you would find this noble birth [of God in the soul] you must leave the crowd and return to the source and ground whence you came. All the powers of the soul, and all their works these are the crowd. Memory, understanding and will, they all diversify you, and therefore you must leave them all: sense perceptions, imagination, or whatever it may be that in which you find or seek to find yourself. After that, you may find this birth but not otherwise believe me!*

*All must well up from within, out of God, if this birth is to shine forth truly and clearly, and all your activity must cease, and all your powers must serve His ends, not your own. If this work is to be done, God alone must do it, and you must just allow it to be. Where you truly go out from your will and your knowledge, God with His knowledge surely and willingly goes in and shines there clearly.*

**Sunday, June 20, 2004**  
**12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Father's Day**

**1st Reading: Zec 12:10-11**

I will pour out on the family of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of love and supplication. They will look at the one who was pierced and mourn for him as for an only child, weeping

bitterly as for a firstborn. The mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning of Haddadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Gal 3:26-29**

Now, in Christ Jesus, all of you are sons and daughters of God through faith. All of you who were given to Christ through baptism, have put on Christ. Here there is no longer any difference between Jew or Greek, or between slave or freed, or between man and woman: but all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And because you belong to Christ, you are of Abraham's race and you are to inherit God's promise.

**Gospel: Lk 9:18-24**

One day when Jesus was praying alone, not far from his disciples, he asked them, What do people say about me? And they answered, Some say that you are John the Baptist; others say that you are Elijah, and still others that you are one of the former prophets risen from the dead. Again Jesus asked them, Who then do you say I am? Peter answered, The Messiah of God. Then Jesus spoke to them, giving them strict orders not to tell this to anyone.

And he added, The Son of Man must suffer many things. He will be rejected by the elders and chief priests and teachers of the Law, and put to death. Then after three days he will be raised to life.

Jesus also said to all the people, If you wish to be a follower of mine, deny yourself and take up your cross each day, and follow me. For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it, and if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it.

**Commentary**

*Today is Father's Day. Let's think about fathers. Fathers are not what they used to be. A study conducted in some U.S. cities some years ago revealed that fathers spend an average of eight minutes a day talking with their children. In industrial society the home is becoming a dormitory, and the father does not work there. His place in the lives of his children is becoming less and less. He brings home the money, but his children have no knowledge of or enthusiasm for his work. Novels, T.V. and cartoons frequently portray him as an incompetent clown. Add to this the vogue in psychology for blaming all one's own ills on one's parents, and the father is exiled even further.*

*In the New Testament the image of father is far removed both from the stern Victorian father and the absentee father of today. It is full of tenderness and affection. In the story of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15), for example, the father rushed out to greet his wayward son, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Jesus knew himself totally loved by his Father, As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you (Jn 15:9). The fact that we can even imagine what this was like means that the image of father is not dead in us.*

**Monday, June 21, 2004**  
**12th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 K 17:5-8, 13-15, 18**

**Gospel: Mt 7:1-5**

Jesus said to his disciples, Do not judge and you will not be judged. In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and the measure you use for others will be used for you. Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye and not see the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother: Come, let me take the speck from your eye, as long as that plank is in your own? Hypocrite, take first the plank out of your own eye, then you will see clear enough to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

**Commentary**

*WHAT the sayer of praise is really praising is himself, by saying implicitly, My eyes are clear. Likewise, someone who criticizes is criticizing himself, saying implicitly, I can't see very well with my eyes so inflamed.*  
*Jelaluddin Rumi (1207-1273)*

So, in effect, all our judging positive and negative alike is about ourselves! It has become a commonplace in the interpretation of dreams to say that every element in the dream represents something in oneself. This is easy enough to accept. But it is harder to accept when someone wants to apply it to our waking life too! I feel attacked if I'm asked to believe that everything I'm saying is only about myself.

But just because it may not be true 100% of the time, nor to the full degree, I should not reject the truth in it. It may be true 50% of the time, or 80% or even more! Isn't that enough to make it a useful insight and a useful check on my tendency to judge everything?

Do not judge and you will not be judged, said Jesus. The measure you give is the measure you get. This already puts the spotlight on the judge in each of us, suggesting like Rumi that our judging has more to do with ourselves than with the truth of things.

What or whom do you hate? Look again now. This time don't look at the object or the person you hate, but at the hate itself. What is it about? And what are the things and who are the people you approve of? What are you really approving of? What is it about?

**Tuesday, June 22, 2004**  
**12th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 K 19:9-11, 14-21, 31-35, 36**

**Gospel: Mt 7:6, 12-14**

Jesus said to his disciples, Do not give what is holy to the dogs, or throw your pearls to the pigs: they might trample on them and even turn on you and tear you to pieces.

So, do to others whatever you would that others do to you: there you have the Law and the Prophets.

Enter through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many go that way. How narrow is the gate that leads to life and how rough the road; few there are who find it.

**Commentary**

*Do to others whatever you would that others do to you. This rule is considered a summary of the Christian's duty to others. It occurs in its negative form ( Do not do to others what you would not like done to yourselves ) in the 2nd-century documents the Didachè and the Apology of Aristides. Scholars believe it may have formed part of an early catechism. It recalls the command in Deuteronomy, You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (10:19). It is not, however, peculiar to Christianity. Its negative form is to be found in Tobit 4:15, in the writings of the two great Jewish scholars Hillel (1st century BC) and Philo of Alexandria (1st centuries BC and AD), and in the Analects of Confucius (6th and 5th centuries BC). It also appears in one form or another in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Seneca all but the last of whom predate Jesus; Seneca was his contemporary.*

*But I often wonder if this golden rule should be considered the peak of Christian perfection. It makes the self the measure, and therefore cannot carry very far (see yesterday's commentary). Jesus said Love one another as I have loved you (Jn 15:12). There is a wide world of difference between the way Jesus loves you and the way that you would wish others to love you.*

**Wednesday, June 23, 2004**  
**12th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 K 22:8-13, 23:1-3**

**Gospel: Mt 7:15-20**

Jesus said to his disciples, Beware of false prophets: they come to you in sheep's clothing but inside they are wild wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Do you ever pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

A good tree always produces good fruit, a rotten tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit and a rotten tree cannot bear good fruit. Any tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire. So you will know them by their fruit.

#### **Commentary**

*THERE is nothing hidden but it must be disclosed, nothing kept secret except to be brought to light (Mk 4:22). Today's reading is saying the same thing. The fruit is the plain truth about the tree, and everyone can not only see it but test it and taste it for themselves. Likewise human action. Everything becomes visible sooner or later. I feel that the word depth can hold us too much in thrall. When we talk too much about depth we give ourselves the impression that it's a whole inner separate world, sufficient unto itself. Wittgenstein, one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, said once, The depth is on the surface! He, of all people, could not be accused of superficiality. There is a very radical truth here: the depth and the surface are one, the inside and the outside are one. There is an early Christian writing (end of the 1st century) attributed to St. Clement of Rome; quoting the apocryphal Gospel of the Egyptians, Clement writes: When the Lord himself was asked by someone when his kingdom would come, he said: When the two shall be one, and the outside as the inside.... By the outside as the inside he means this, that the inside is the soul, and the outside is the body. [*

**Thursday, June 24, 2004**

**Birth of John the Baptist**

**1st Reading: Is 49:1-6**

**2nd Reading: Acts 13:22-26**

**Gospel: Lk 1:57-66, 80**

When the time came for Elizabeth, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the merciful Lord had done a wonderful thing for her and they rejoiced with her.

When on the eighth day they came to attend the circumcision of the child, they wanted to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, Not so; he shall be called John. They said to her, No one in your family has that name; and they asked the father by means of signs for the name he wanted to give. Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote on it, His name is John, and they were very surprised. Immediately Zechariah could speak again and his first words were in praise of God.

A holy fear came on all in the neighborhood, and throughout the Hills of Judea the people talked about these events. All who heard of it pondered in their minds and wondered, What will this child be? For they understood that the hand of the Lord was with him.

As the child grew up, he was seen to be strong in the Spirit; he lived in the desert till the day when he appeared openly in Israel.

#### **Commentary**

*JOHN the Baptist is like a first draft for Jesus. They were alike in some ways: they were cousins, almost the same age; both came from the desert, urging people to a different way of life; both announced that events were coming to a head. Jesus had called John the greatest man that ever lived (Lk 7:28), and had queued up with the crowds to be baptized by him. Yet they were different. Despite all his fire, John's message in the end was rather conventional. Tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, Teacher, what should we do? He said to them, Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you. Soldiers also asked him, And we, what should we do? He said to them, Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages. (Lk 3:12-14). He was, you might say, a moralist. Though there are still disciples of John the Baptist in Israel, the impact of Jesus on history has been infinitely greater.*

*Jesus is more than a moralist. If he were only a moralist, he would be a very poor one, for his claims exceeded those of any moralist. He claimed that he and the Father were one. Any mere moralist making such a claim would not be credible for a moment. We sometimes reduce him to a moralist. But he alone was able to say, The Kingdom (the Presence) of God is among you. This is much more powerful than all the moralism in the world. An ounce of is is better than a ton of ought .*

**Friday, June 25, 2004**  
**11<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: 2 K 25:1-12**

**Gospel: Mt 8:1-4**

When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.

Then a leper came forward. He knelt before him and said, Sir, if you want to, you can make me clean. Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, I want to, be clean again. At that very moment the man was cleansed from his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, See that you do not tell anyone, but go to the priest, have yourself declared clean, and offer the gift that Moses ordered as proof of it.

**Commentary**

*WHAT* are the contrasting phrases in this short reading? *Large crowds followed him, and Do not tell anyone.*

*Talk (and especially gossipy talk!) creates a crowd. Talk is itself a kind of crowd a crowd of words. Talk is endless, like the sand on the seashore. Like the sand, it drifts and blows here and there. Living today is like walking in a sandstorm of words (and here am I adding more!).*

*But Jesus told the healed leper to tell no one about his healing. In another passage he took a deaf man aside in private, away from the crowd (Mk 7:33). This tells us that sometimes it is necessary to stand in from the storm. Sometimes it is necessary to be alone and think one's own thoughts. (That is why there are also blank spaces on this page!) He himself frequently went away by himself to pray: Lk 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; Mk 1:35; etc. And there are moments when he tells others to keep silent about him: Mk 1:44; 8:30; Lk 9:21, and today's passage. And read the wonderful passage, Mt 6, in which everything is divided, so to speak, into two columns, headed in secret and to be seen by others. Why not meditate on this today: the silence of Jesus?*

**Saturday, June 26, 2004**  
**12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Lm 2:2, 10-14, 18-19**

**Gospel: Mt 8:5-17**

When Jesus entered Capernaum, an army captain approached him to ask his help, Sir, my servant lies sick at home. He is paralyzed and suffers terribly. Jesus said to him, I will come and heal him.

The captain answered, I am not worthy to have you under my roof. Just give an order and my boy will be healed. For I myself, a junior officer, give orders to my soldiers. And if I say to one: Go, he goes, and if I say to another: Come, he comes, and to my servant: Do this, he does it.

When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those who were following him, I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel. I say to you, many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven; but the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness; there they will wail and grind their teeth.

Then Jesus said to the captain, Go home now. As you believed, so let it be. And at that moment his servant was healed.

Jesus went to Peter's house and found Peter's mother-in-law in bed with fever. He took her by the hand and the fever left her; she got up and began to wait on him.

Towards evening they brought to Jesus many possessed by evil spirits, and with a word he drove out the spirits. He also healed all who were sick. In doing this he fulfilled what was said by the prophet Isaiah: *He bore our infirmities and took on himself our diseases.*

**Commentary**

*TODAY*, meet a different approach to words: meet an army officer, used to giving and receiving commands. Here we are dealing with a tight organization with its clear-cut ranks an army and not with the shifting

sands of ordinary life and speech. For this officer, language was as clear as everything else in army life. This clarity holds great attraction for some people, and they would love to impose it on the whole society. They are called fascists. This comes from the Italian word *fascio*, meaning a bundle (it is related to the English word *fascicle*). Mussolini's Fascists used to carry a bundle of twigs at the front of their marching columns, signifying the greater strength there is in a bundle of twigs than in any number of single twigs. Armies look very efficient, but they are surely the most wasteful organizations in any society. Why do soldiers have to march rather than just walk? Because when they march they look more like a mindless machine, and this is calculated to strike fear into everyone who sees them. We have to beware of people who worship uniformity and efficiency in Church and state alike. It is only about appearances. There is infinitely more vitality and creativity in the drift of ordinary life.

But wait a moment! The army officer in today's reading says to Jesus, *I am not worthy to have you under my roof. He knew that Jews incurred ritual uncleanness on entering the house of a pagan, and he wanted to save Jesus this inconvenience. It was out of consideration that he said, Say but the word. He wasn't an army man through and through. There is hope for every one of us!*

**Sunday, June 27, 2004**  
**13th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 1 K 19:16, 19-21**

Yahweh said to Elijah, You shall also anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, as king over Israel; and Elisha, son of Shaphat, from Abel Meholah, you shall anoint as prophet in your place.

So Elijah left. He found Elisha, son of Shaphat, who was plowing a field of twelve acres and was at the end of the twelfth acre. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak over him. Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah and said, Let me say goodbye to my father and mother; then I will follow you. Elijah said to him, Return if you want, don't worry about what I did. However, Elisha turned back, took the yoke of oxen and slew them. He roasted their meat on the pieces of the yoke and gave it to his people who ate of it. After this, he followed Elijah and began ministering to him.

**2nd Reading: Gal 5:1, 13-18**

Christ freed us to make us really free. So remain firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. You, brothers and sisters, were called to enjoy freedom; I am not speaking of that freedom which gives free rein to the desires of the flesh, but of that which makes you slaves of one another through love. For the whole Law is summed up in this sentence: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* But if you bite and tear each other to pieces, be careful lest you all perish.

Therefore I say to you: walk according to the Spirit and do not give way to the desires of the flesh! For the desires of the flesh war against the spirit, and the desires of the spirit are opposed to the flesh. Both are in conflict with each other, so that you cannot do everything you would like. But when you are led by the Spirit you are not under the Law.

**Gospel: Lk 9:51-62**

As the time drew near when Jesus would be taken up to heaven, he made up his mind to go to Jerusalem. He had sent ahead of him some messengers who entered a Samaritan village to prepare a lodging for him. But the people would not receive him because he was on his way to Jerusalem. Seeing this, James and John, his disciples said, Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to reduce them to ashes? Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village.

As they went on their way, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

To another Jesus said, Follow me. But he answered, Let me go back now, for first I want to bury my father. And Jesus said to him, Let the dead bury their dead; as for you, leave them and proclaim the kingdom of God.

Another said to him, I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say goodbye to my family. And Jesus said to him, Whoever has put his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God.

## **Commentary**

*JAMES and John were known as the Sons of Thunder. Many young people (even in ancient times, it seems) are Sons of Thunder for a few years. Those two could also be called Sons of Lightning. Do you want us to call down fire from heaven to reduce them to ashes? they asked Jesus, when they were refused hospitality in Samaria. Ashes: that's what Sons of Lightning usually want to leave behind them. I wonder what Jesus said when he rebuked them. What would you have said? Could anyone then have imagined them the great apostles that they were to become? Jesus didn't expect them to be old men while they were still young. In fact young people who have no fire in them are likely to become very boring and begrudging old people later on.*

*The pattern is the same throughout. Jesus took people as they were, and through his influence they were transformed. He led them into the unknown. The later John the John of the Letters, say would have been the Unknown to the younger John. Jesus always leads into the Unknown. The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head, he said to the man who wanted to follow him. Leave the past behind, he says, Leave the dead to bury their dead.*

*If I crave for security and certainty, if I have a horror of the unknown, if I use my religion only as an anchor in the past, then I am denying the Gospel more effectively than any atheist could. And I am laying the foundation for a very boring old age.*

**Monday, June 28, 2004**  
**13th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Am 2:6-10, 13-16**

**Gospel: Mt 8:18-22**

When Jesus saw the crowd press around him, Jesus gave orders to cross to the other shore. A teacher of the Law approached him and said, Master, I will follow you wherever you go. Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

Another disciple said to him, Lord, let me go and bury my father first. But Jesus answered him, Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.

## **Commentary**

*MATTHEW gives us today what Luke gave us yesterday: those two sayings of Jesus. The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head, and Leave the dead to bury their dead. It's not surprising; they are hard to forget.*

*There is a great fascination about wanderers. While the rest of us hang around a few familiar places, hugging the walls, these free spirits wander wherever their fancy takes them. We would love to have the freedom of the tramp under the bridge, but the price of it is the surrender of security. We would love to have both freedom and security but they are incompatible. We don't want to join the free spirits, but our imagination goes with them. We become restless in an ineffectual way, like farmyard chickens in the migration season.*

*Leave the dead to bury their dead. It sounds heartless. But we mustn't become too literal; Jesus spoke a poetic language. There is a sad history of unimaginative literal interpretation of the Scriptures. In this case, surely, the man's father was not dead, but perhaps elderly; and the man was asking if he could wait till after his father's death. No, said Jesus, come now! Postponement becomes a habit: after his father's death he would find another reason for delay, and another.*

*Putting the two sayings together, what do we get? He is saying to us: if you want to be free, be free now!*

**Tuesday, June 29, 2004**  
**Sts. Peter & Paul, Apostles**

**1st Reading: Acts 12:1-11**

**2nd Reading: 2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18**

**Gospel: Mt 16:13-19**

Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi. He asked his disciples, Who do people say the Son of Man is? They said, For some of them you are John the Baptist, for others Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Jesus asked them, But you, who do you say I am? Peter answered, You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus replied, It is well for you, Simon Barjona, for it is not flesh or blood that has revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.

And now I say to you: You are Peter (or *Rock*) and on this rock I will build my Church; and never will the powers of death overcome it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what you unbind on earth shall be unbound in heaven.

#### **Commentary**

*FOR some of them you are John the Baptist, for others Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. In other words, the people see you through the eyes of the past; in fact they think you are the past; all those names they mentioned are the names of dead people. That s not unusual. Come to think of it, it s what we do most of the time: we interpret the present not as something new but as something old. I shiver a little now when I realize it.*

*But for one moment that heavy stone the dead past moves aside a fraction of an inch and Peter sees Jesus as the one who is to come, the future, the Messiah.*

*Could we say that there are two kinds of recognition: 1. when you check and are satisfied that something is just as you have always thought it to be; and 2. when something confronts you in that painfully familiar way of dragging you out of your rut and setting you naked in some new situation. Both are re-cognition : knowing again. In the first case it s a repeat of the past, it s a refusal of life; in the second, it s the repeated call to be a living being.*

*Peter had that moment of grace to see Jesus as God s new deed. It is on that faith that the community of the faithful is built.*

### **Wednesday, June 30, 2004 13th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Am 5:14-15, 21-24**

**Gospel: Mt 8:28-34**

When Jesus reached Gadara on the other side, he was met by two demoniacs who came out from the tombs. They were so fierce that no one dared to pass that way. Suddenly they shouted, What do you want with us, you, Son of God? Have you come to torture us before the time?

At some distance away there was a large herd of pigs feeding. So the demons begged him, If you drive us out, send us into that herd of pigs. Jesus ordered them, Go. So they left and went into the pigs. The whole herd rushed down the cliff into the lake and drowned.

The men in charge of them ran off to the town, where they told the whole story, also what had happened to the men possessed with the demons. Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their area.

#### **Commentary**

*THE city of Gadara was in pagan territory, and so it was unclean to Jews. It s not surprising to find pigs there: these were unclean animals, which no Jew would ever have on the land. In this unclean place they were met by two demoniacs who lived in the tombs. For Jews, a dead body was unclean , so tombs were unclean places. Only a demoniac would think of living there. Everything in this story, then, is unclean, untouchable. At least it was appropriate that all these unclean things and people should be in the one place. There s a kind of right order in that.*

*By the end of the story Jesus has rearranged everything: the demons have gone into the pigs, which in turn have gone into the water. Jews had a great fear of water for them the sea was the abode of Leviathan, the monster of the deep so it was appropriate that the pigs should end up there. Besides, it was also fatal to demons: so it was right that they too should end up there. Meanwhile (in Mark s account) the demoniac was*

*clothed and in his right mind (5:15): he was restored to his family. Thus, in this story, Jesus restores everything to its proper place. He establishes right order.*

*But the other order could be said to be right too, in a sense. The local people were happy with it. They begged Jesus to go away: he had upset the arrangement of their world. That makes me think: what are the arrangements in my life that seem right to me (at least in the sense of being familiar), but which are not right at all?*