



First Sunday of Advent

December 3, 2017

Readings

This week:

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 19b; 64:2-7

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

Next week:

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

Psalm

Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved. (*Psalm 80*)

Today

Today's presider is Msgr. John Sandersfeld.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church. Members of the Thomas Merton community plan these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to "full, active and conscious participation" in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate by check or cash, every Sunday there is a donation basket in the back of church or by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope in the bulletin the last Sunday of every month to mail your donation. **Please do not put your TMC donation in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).**

Calendar

No meetings this week. December 8 is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, patronal feast day of the United States. See the parish bulletin for Mass times.

From Thomas Merton

Mary's chief glory is in her nothingness, in the fact of being the "Handmaid of the Lord," as one who in becoming the Mother of God acted simply in loving submission to His command, in the pure obedience of faith. She is blessed not because of some mythical pseudo-divine prerogative, but in all her human and womanly limitations as one who has believed. It is the faith and the fidelity of this humble handmaid, "full of grace," that enables her to be the perfect instrument of God, and nothing else but His instrument. The work that was done in her [is] purely the work of God: "He that is mighty hath done great things in me." The glory of Mary is purely and simply the glory of God in her. And she, like anyone else, can say that she has nothing that she has not received from Him through Christ.

—<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/merton.php>

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy; to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality; and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development.

COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

Adopt-a-Family is back:

Again this Sunday we will have more tags available after Mass for our Adopt-a-Family Christmas program. We have tags for specific gifts and gift certificates for members of Seton School families. You can pick up a tag or two for a \$40 gift to help make someone's Christmas special. This is not connected with the tree we usually have in the back of church. Thanks for you generosity.

—Barbara Kent

Kenya Help craft sale next Sunday:

Kenya Help will be back one more time with Kenyan crafts. We have some new items, as well as old favorites. If you missed something at our last event, join us after Mass, in the bride's room in the Thomas House, on Sunday, December 10. We and all of our Kenyan friends so appreciate the support given by the Merton Community over the years. Thank you!

—Margo McAuliffe

Workshop on Thomas Merton:

Brother Don Bisson, FMS, will be leading a conference on *Thomas Merton: A Prophet for Our Times* on January 13-14 at Mercy Center in Burlingame. Bisson, a Marist



brother based in New York, has graduate degrees in liturgy, spirituality, and transpersonal psychology, and a D. Min. from the Pacific School of Religion in the area of Spiritual Direction and Jungian Psychology, and he is widely respected as a commentator and workshop leader on the interrelationship of spirituality and psychology. He will study Thomas

Merton's writings, messages, and prophetic vision for our times.

You can register at www.mercy-center.org or by calling (650) 340-7474. Registration deadline is January 6, 2018. Cost is \$195 for overnight guests or \$120 for commuters. Bisson is also leading two other retreats at Mercy Center: *Men's Issues in Spiritual Direction*, on Saturday, January 6, and *Dreamworks as Spiritual Practice* on Sunday, January 7.

Stamp out hunger:

During the month of December, we ask you to be especially generous in your giving to our food collection program. Since most of the people we help are homeless, we ask for foods that are portable and highly nutritious: hearty soups or chili in flip-top cans, Vienna sausage, boxes of crackers packed in 'small stacks,' fruit cups, granola bars, juice pouches, and small bottles of water.



Request from the Dietrichs:

As many of you know, Pat Dietrich is home after a stay at Webster House Medical Center after a fall. Pat and Fred have expressed how much they would like an occasional home-cooked meal. If you can help out with this request, you can call the Dietrichs to make arrangements at (650) 856-2048.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

A chance for better liturgical language:

By Jessie Bazan, who serves as outreach coordinator for Saint John's Abbey Vocations and youth formation minister at Pax Christi Catholic Community in Minnesota.

In her poem, "Mysteries, Yes," Mary Oliver begins, "Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous to be understood." How grass nourishes animals, how gravity holds down rocks, how a single touch can spark a forever connection, she writes, is all mystery. If I could take a little liberty with the great poet's work, I would add *God* to her list. Our triune God is the ultimate mystery of the Christian faith. Who is this God who was in being before time itself? Who can be both fully divine and fully human at the same time? Whose Spirit transcends the bounds of heaven and earth to guide the church yesterday, today, and all the days to come?

Our mysterious God is big beyond measure. The language we use to talk about God should reflect God's great depth. [Last] weekend, Pope Francis gave local bishops conferences greater say over the language used during Mass in an apostolic letter issued *motu proprio* (on his own initiative) titled "Magnum Principium." The work of translating liturgical

The Sacrament of the Present Moment:

By Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, at cac.org.

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.*

*Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.*

—Rumi

Unitive, non-dual consciousness opens our hearts, minds, and bodies to actually experience God in the now. Ultimate Reality cannot be seen with any dualistic operation of the mind, where we divide the field of the moment and eliminate anything mysterious, confusing, unfamiliar, or outside our comfort zone. Dualistic thinking is highly controlled and permits only limited seeing. It protects the status quo and allows the ego to feel like it's in control. This way of filtering reality is the opposite of pure presence.

We learn the dualistic pattern of thinking at an early age, and it helps us survive and succeed in practical ways. But it can get us only so far. That's why all religions at the more mature levels have discovered another "software" for processing the really big questions like death, love, infinity, suffering, the mysterious nature of sexuality, and whoever God or the Divine is. Many of us call this access "contemplation" or simply "prayer." It is a non-dualistic way of living in the moment. Don't think, just look (*contemplata*).

Non-dual knowing is learning how to live satisfied in the naked now, "the sacrament of the present moment" as Jean Pierre de Caussade called it. This consciousness will teach us how to actually experience our experiences, whether good, bad, or ugly, and how to let them transform us. Words by themselves divide and judge the moment; pure presence lets it be what it is, as it is. Words and thoughts are invariably dualistic; pure experience is always non-dualistic.

As long as you can deal with life as a set of universal abstractions, you can pretend that the binary system is true. But once you deal with concrete reality—with yourself, with someone you love, with actual moments—you find that reality is a mixture of good and bad, dark and light, life and death. Reality requires more a both/and approach than either/or differentiation. The non-dual mind is open to everything. It is capable of listening to the other, to the body, to the heart, to all the senses. It begins with a radical *yes* to each moment.

When you can be present in this way, you will know the Real Presence. I promise you this is true. You will still need and use your dualistic mind, but now it is in service to the greater whole rather than just the small self.

A chance for better liturgical language, continued:

texts will shift from Rome to local conferences. I hope the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops will consider putting forth a Mass text with language that better reflects God's deep mystery.

. . . I am not advocating for ridding all masculine images of God from the Mass. Jesus Christ in his humanity was a man. Additionally, many people like thinking of God as "Father." It is a title found throughout Scripture and often said while making the sign of the cross.

People experience God in countless ways. I hope any forthcoming liturgical translation recognizes this, too. In Scripture alone, God is described as a woman giving birth (Deuteronomy 32:18), a comforting mother (Isaiah 66:13), and even as a mother hen (Matthew 23:37). God is called "Creator" in Genesis. The psalmists name God as "light" (27:1), "helper" (30:10), and "exceeding joy" (43:4). The list goes on and on. Mystery sparks creativity. Our mysterious God is endlessly knowable, and thus, endlessly nameable. I think liturgy, as the work of the people, should reflect the diversity of our images of God.

Render unto Caesar:

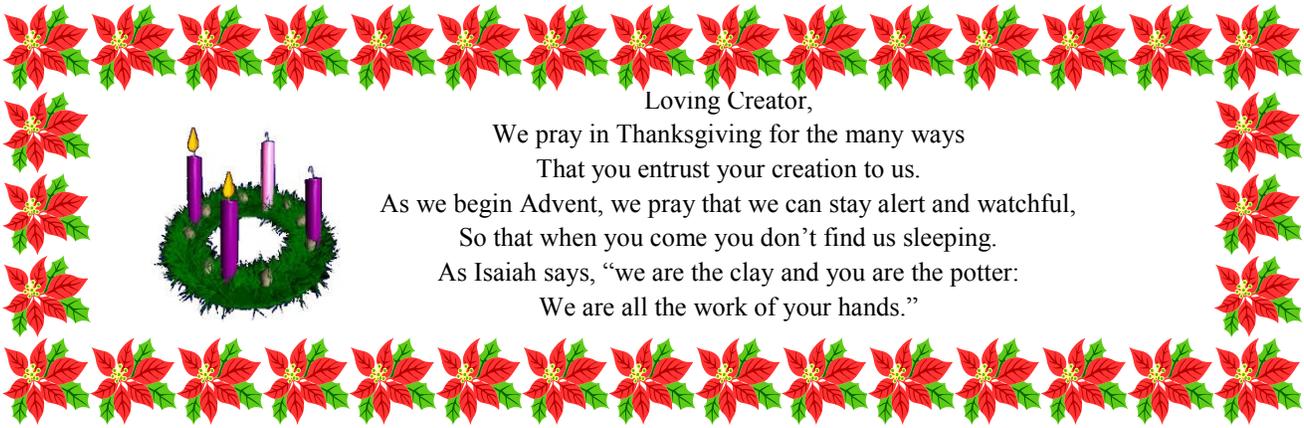
Abridged from an article by Stephen Schneck, the former Director of the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at Catholic University, in uscatholic.org.

Catholic teachings emphasize that taxes are instruments of social justice and morality. Catholics are obliged to reflect on who gets hurt most by the cost of taxes and who benefits most from what they fund. So how does the Trump tax reform proposal now under consideration in Washington answer these questions? Frankly, we should be very concerned.

As it currently stands, the Trump/GOP plan would raise taxes on the poor, raise taxes on many of upper-middle-class families (incomes between \$150k and \$300k), raise taxes on families with incomes between \$50k and \$150k, but dramatically lower taxes on billionaires.

Analysts are saying that a full 80% of the plan's proposed benefits would go to the ultra-rich—like The Donald himself. Moreover, predictions are that these alleged tax "reforms" would skyrocket America's deficit into the stratosphere by \$1.5 trillion. In other words, this plan is a giveaway to today's billionaires that's funded by shifting huge future tax burdens onto the backs of your children and grandchildren.

. . . "Render unto Caesar," Jesus says. . . . A 12% tax on a poor family may endanger its ability to provide basic necessities like food or health care or shelter, while a 39% tax on millionaires and billionaires impacts (at most) only unneeded luxuries. Therein lies the truth of the morality and justice at stake. . . .



Loving Creator,
We pray in Thanksgiving for the many ways
That you entrust your creation to us.
As we begin Advent, we pray that we can stay alert and watchful,
So that when you come you don't find us sleeping.
As Isaiah says, "we are the clay and you are the potter:
We are all the work of your hands."

The power of ritual:

By Ron Rolheiser, OMI. He is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He received his doctorate at the University of Louvain, and is a member of the Catholic Theological Society of America, the Canadian Theological Society, and the Religious Studies Association of Alberta.

I don't always find it easy to pray. Often I'm over-tired, distracted, caught-up in tasks, pressured by work, short on time, lacking the appetite for prayer, or more strongly drawn to do something else. But I do pray daily; despite the fact that I often don't want to and despite the fact that many times prayer can be boring and uninteresting. I pray daily because I'm committed to a number of rituals for prayer, the office of the Church, lauds and vespers, the Eucharist, and daily meditation.

And these rituals serve me well. They hold me, keep me steady, and keep me praying regularly even when, many times, I don't feel like praying. That's the power of ritual. If I only prayed when I felt like it, I wouldn't pray very regularly.

Ritual practice keeps us doing what we should be doing (praying, working, being at table with our families, being polite) even when our feelings aren't always onside. We need to do certain things not because we always feel like doing them, but because it's right to do them.

And this is true for many areas of our lives, not just for prayer. Take, for example, the social rituals of propriety and good manners that we lean on each day. Our heart isn't always in the greetings or the expressions of love, appreciation, and gratitude that we give to each other each day. We greet each other, we say goodbye to each other, we express love for each other, and we express gratitude to each other through a number of social formulae, ritual words: *Good morning! Good to see you! Have a great day!* . . . We say these things to each other daily, even though we have to admit that there are times, many times, when these expressions appear to be purely formal and seem not at all honest to how we are feeling at that time. Yet we say them and they are true in that they express what lies in our hearts at a deeper level than our more momentary and ephemeral feelings of distraction,

irritation, disappointment, or anger. Moreover these words hold us in civility, in good manners, in graciousness, in neighborliness, in respect, and in love despite the fluctuations in our energy, mood, and feelings. Our energy, mood, and feelings, at any given moment, are not a true indication of what's in our hearts, as all of us know and frequently need to apologize for. Who of us has not at some time been upset and bitter toward someone who we love deeply? The deep truth is that we love that person, but that's not what we're feeling at the moment.

If we only expressed affection, love, and gratitude at those times when our feelings were completely onside, we wouldn't express these very often. Thank God for the ordinary, social rituals which hold us in love, affection, graciousness, civility, and good manners at those times when our feelings are out of sorts with our truer selves. These rituals, like a sturdy container, hold us safe until the good feelings return. Today, in too many areas of life, we no longer understand ritual. That leaves us trying to live our lives by our feelings; not that feelings are bad, but rather that they come upon us as wild, unbidden guests. Iris Murdoch asserts that our world can change in fifteen seconds because we can fall in love in fifteen seconds. *But we can also fall out of love in fifteen seconds!* Feelings work that way! And so we cannot sustain love, marriage, family, friendship, collegial relationships, and neighborliness by feelings. We need help. Rituals can help sustain our relationships beyond feelings.

. . . Ritual not only can help sustain a marriage, it can also help sustain our prayer lives, our civility, our manners, our graciousness, our humor, our gratitude, and our balance in life. Be wary of anyone who in the name of psychology, love, or spirituality tells you that ritual is empty and you must rely on your energy, mood, and feelings as your guiding compass. They won't carry you far.

Daniel Berrigan once wrote: *Don't travel with anyone who expects you to be interesting all the time. On a long journey there are bound to be some boring stretches. . . .* And so we can be sure our feelings won't sustain us, but ritual practices can.