



13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 2, 2017

Readings

This week:

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16a

Romans 6:3-4, 8-11

Matthew 10:37-42

Next week:

Zechariah 9:9-10

Romans 8:9, 11-13

Matthew 11:25-30

Psalm

Forever I will sing the goodness of the Lord. (*Psalm 89*)

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.



Happy 4th!

From Thomas Merton

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and *of absolute poverty* is the pure glory of God in us. . . . It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely. . . . I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.

—*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

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 FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

U.S. bishops struggle with issues in church and society: *All-American prayers for the 4th of July:*

Abridged from an article by Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese, June 22, 2017, at ncronline.org. Fr. Reese is a senior analyst for NCR and author of Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church.

The meetings of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have been tedious and boring in recent years and I saw no reason to think that things would be any better this spring. In fact, at their meeting [June 14-15, 2017] the bishops discussed some very important issues affecting the church and American society. How much progress they made is another issue.

One important topic that the bishops discussed is the October 2018 Synod of Bishops on youth and vocations. The prospect of a large group of celibate old men talking about young people is not enthralling, but with Pope Francis this synod might be different. The U.S. bishops would have to be blind not to recognize that the church has a problem with young people.

. . . Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, sees hopeful signs, including “the high interest among millen-

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We visit Joseph at his boarding school:

This is a short version of Margo’s latest blog from Kenya, where she has spent her summers for many years. Kenya Help, which supports this community, is a nonprofit foundation with 501(c)(3) status. If you’d like to help—since it has no paid positions, 96.7% of your donation goes straight to Kenya—go to www.kenyahelp.us.



Tomorrow we go for parent visiting day at Joseph’s school. Yes, he is Joseph, the notorious peanut butter thief. He’s now in 6th grade and I’m told he’s a reformed character. . . . Last night I realized that I hadn’t bought enough chicken for the six people going for Family Visiting Day, plus Joseph himself. So early

this morning Alison and I set off for the Naivas [a Kenyan supermarket chain]. . . . At the Naivas, the parking attendant is nowhere in sight. To the armed soldier in front, “Will you please tell the attendant that I will pay when I come out, since he’s not here?” He agrees. Inside I learn there are no fresh chickens, only frozen. I grab a package of frozen legs, along with five more whole chickens for tomorrow night’s dinner and move on. This is a good lesson in shopping here. . . . Every aisle is clogged with cartons of new supplies. It takes us almost an hour to find everything we need and by 9:15

Americans are prayerful people. We pray in times of trial, and also in times of joy and thanksgiving. We pray privately before bed, as a family at the dinner table and as a nation at the inauguration of presidents. Prayer happened on this soil before there was an America, by Native Peoples, and prayer continues today as new cultures and tradition from around the world arrive daily to enrich the spiritual tapestry of the United States.

Happy, and prayerful, 4th of July.

Fourth of July Prayer, by Fr. Ed Hays



We lift up our hearts, O God, on this day of celebration in gratitude for the gift of being Americans.

We rejoice with all those who share in the great dream of freedom and dignity for all.

With flags and feasting, with family and friends we salute those who have sacrificed that we might have the opportunity to bring to fulfillment our many God-given gifts.

As we deny all prejudice a place in our hearts, may we also clearly declare our intention to work for the time when all people, regardless of race, religion, or sex, will be granted equal dignity and worth.

Come, O gracious God, who led your children Israel from slavery, keep us free from all that might hold us in bondage.

Bless our country and join our simple celebration that we may praise you, our Source of freedom, the One in whom we place our trust.

we are back home, hungry and with many heavy bags to carry in. Fortunately the kids are helpful and soon Margaret has the chicken boiling in my kitchen. Margaret is only 20, but she is such a worker. By 11:30 she had prepared or supervised the preparation of the chickens, many chapatis, rice, fruit, and cabbage. . . . We finally had the car packed with food and set off. The school is near, just down the road leading to the prison, then left on the dustiest road I think I’ve ever seen. At times, we were totally unable to see, but fortu-

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U.S. bishops, continued:

nials during the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent” and “the continued importance in our ministries and outreach to young people which have a positive effect on vocational discernment.” While I am less optimistic, Tobin did present a smart strategy for the American bishops. He encouraged them to participate in conversation with young people and emphasized that listening is an essential part of this conversation. . . . “Listening and accompanying” is a pastoral style quite different from the patriarchal style of “teaching and directing.” The pastoral style recognizes that these youths are adults who cannot be forced into prefabricated molds. . . .

The bishops also discussed religious liberty and immigration. After extensive discussions, the bishops voted 132-53 in favor of transforming their Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty into a permanent committee of the conference. . . . Some of the issues the committee will have to address are the growing pressures on Catholic hospitals and doctors to perform procedures (abortions, sterilization, artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, sex-change surgery, assisted suicides, etc.) contrary to Catholic teaching. In addition, religious institutions and employers are now dealing with issues like adoptions by gay spouses, benefits for spouses of gay employees, and the treatment of employees who do not practice the teachings of the church. The bishops are especially concerned about efforts to defund Catholic charities, health care, schools, and development projects if they object to certain activities on religious grounds.

. . . The bishops also found major problems in the American Health Care Act passed by the House of Representatives. Bishop Frank Dewane of Venice, Florida, chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, called “on the Senate to strip away harmful promises of the AHCA or start anew with a better bill.” The bishops were also troubled by Trump’s proposed budget cuts, including the \$880 billion in cuts to Medicaid, which they said would “destabilize our own Catholic health care apostolates, take food from the mouths of school-aged children and the homebound, and deny already scarce medical resources to the nation’s neediest in every state across the land.”

Young people, religious freedom, health care, and immigration are all serious issues that deserve serious consideration by the U.S. bishops. But the question remains: Will the talk be followed by action? The bishops have given great emphasis to the religious liberty debates in the United States, but how vocal have they been on the other issues? Some bishops argue that they have spoken out on these other issues but that the media only covers the bishops when they participate in the culture wars. Whatever the case, a better strategy is needed.

The future of the priesthood looks more hopeful:

By Pat Perriello, June 26, 2017, at ncronline.org. Perriello, a retired educator from the Baltimore City Public Schools, served as the coordinator of Guidance and Counseling Services and an associate professor at Johns Hopkins University. He is a former seminarian from St. Mary’s Seminary in Baltimore.

My concern about the future of the priesthood in the United States has centered around everything I have heard and experienced involving those priests ordained in the last few decades. Now *Time* magazine presents a thoughtful article [by Elizabeth Dias, published June 7 and updated June 22, 2017] on the latest attitudes among seminarians today, and it is encouraging.

I should say that if I were writing my vision of the future of the Catholic priesthood, it would certainly include priests being able to marry if they choose to, and a priesthood that includes women in significant numbers. It would also include a clergy even less driven by doctrine than the young seminarians appear to be. Yet, the article does suggest that the youngest crop of seminarians is moving in a positive direction.

The article describes the post-Vatican-II clergy as “reserved men, removed and dogmatic, who present themselves at the lectern to guide their congregations.” I would add that my sense has been that this generation of priests sees themselves and their function as sacred and cultic. This has created distance between them and the people. Of course, not all priests fit this stereotype, but it does seem to have some resonance.

The Francis effect seems to be changing that. No one would accuse the latest crop of seminarians and newly ordained as being wildly liberal, but change is evident, especially in the area of social justice. Whereas the previous generation of priests showed little interest in social justice, that is not true of the newest generation. They are concerned about issues such as caring for the poor. They see themselves as ministering to all in their community—not just Catholics. One example involves outreach to the Muslim community around them.

Bishop Timothy Senior, who leads St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, near Philadelphia, says the style of leadership in the church needs to change to “servant leadership.” This represents a substantial and positive move from what we have seen in the last few decades. This youngest group of priests in training is not monolithic. They represent a variety of views, such as espousing the legalization of marijuana and a likely position of generally not preaching on abortion. They are comfortable with the use of technology, as would be expected. It is also important to note that they are growing—from 1,300 in 2005 to 1,900 seminarians in 2016.

On the other side of the spectrum, many still are enamored of the traditional high Mass with incense. They

We visit Joseph, continued:

nately it wasn't far before we turned into a very nice compound, full of trees, hawkers at the gate, families streaming in and students so happy to see them.

There were so many people I despaired of finding Joseph, but then suddenly there he was, running to the car, the happiest little boy ever. He hadn't known we were coming, so it was even more special. . . . We found a place to park and unloaded all the goodies. We brought everything we'd been told he wanted, including the yogurt and Black Forest cake from the Naivas. His eyes were round with anticipation.

Joseph got the first plate, heaped with a big leg and large amounts of the rest. Margaret and Mungai served the rest of us while I poured the passion fruit juice. I watched him chow down like he hadn't eaten for a week. He's not a big kid, for 13, but he ATE. He finished his first plate and dug into a second equally large serving. He was a happy camper. . . .

I wanted to meet his teacher, Mrs. Maina, whom he said he really liked, so off we head to the classrooms. . . . She tells me Joseph was doing well, but I know he has had many problems, particularly with reading, so I want to question her further. "Joseph, can you wait outside while I talk to Mrs. Maina?" Then I tell her his story, none of which she had been told. His mother had died 4-5 years ago, and he was brought by Lucas [his brother] to *Mji Wa Neema*, hungry, cold, frightened, in tattered clothing. Julia took them in without a backward glance. It was hard for both at first. Lucas was very angry at his mother for dying, although she hadn't been much of a mother. She'd refused to be tested for HIV and she died leaving two destitute orphans. Joseph seemed to be in a fog, just happy to have a full tummy, warm clothes and a bed. What he wasn't happy about was school, often yelling out, sometimes hitting, unable to do the work. . . .

But slowly, Julia's love and firm hand began to work their magic. When she was in the U.S. in February, she told me Joseph was improving, settling down. I wondered. Then, in April, she told the children she was getting married and would be leaving shortly for the U.S., where her intended lived in New Jersey. Even now I get tears in my eyes, imagining that scene, kids incredulous, "What? You're doing what?" Then as the reality sinks in, all wondering what has happened to their lives. Each has suffered the trauma of losing a mom; most have also lost their grandparents, so have no family left at all; others have relatives who don't really want to take them in. Of course they were going back to high school or where ever. All except Joseph, who was not in class 6 (as I had thought), having failed class 5.

It was at that time that the second bomb dropped. Fr. Ngaruiya had decided to close *Mji Wa Neema*! They

The future of the priesthood, . . . continued:

often prefer to wear the Roman collar when out in the community. On more important matters, they espouse conservative views on sex outside of marriage and remain traditional on matters of doctrine, such as the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. . . .

Seminarians today represent a mixed heritage of St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. They admire what they call Francis' raw spirituality, his simplicity, and his hands-on, organic approach. It does seem that the Francis effect may be taking hold with an important group for the future of the church.

Francis tells church leaders to put their communities first, avoid clerical bureaucracy and evangelize with kindness. Current students for the priesthood tend to be with Francis on social justice issues, such as immigration, the preference for the poor, and the importance of the environment. Francis has encouraged seminarians to be less rigid, less focused on self, and discern "shades of gray." So, on balance, it seems there is much to be encouraged about as a new direction for the priesthood takes shape. I would still like to see greater openness on several issues, including women in ministry, but one has to be excited about a return to Catholic social teachings, which seemed to be absent from too many in recent decades. A new sense of idealism and enthusiasm seems to be breaking out in young men entering the priesthood. It can't be all bad when a seminarian is saying, "How can we go out and get people to fall in love with Christ?"

were to gather their belongings and go home. But for many, where was home? As you may imagine, I've had a hard time processing that decision. . . . I don't know that I've thought of a better solution. I'm not sure even Solomon could have found a good one. It's just that it was all so abrupt, such a shock, first losing their beloved mom, Julia, and then losing the only real home they've had for years. . . . Time will reveal more. But today I saw a happy Joseph, doing well, not misbehaving, learning. There is no doubt in my mind that there are long-term effects of the multiple losses, but for now, my mind is at rest. When it is time to go, I remember the vanilla yogurt. . . . "Joseph, I forgot your yogurt, but surely you're too full for that," showing him the container. With eyes lighted up again, he shakes his head, "No" and holds out his hand. I can't believe it, but he got all the goodies he wanted and he's not giving anything up.

I give him a big hug, and realizing he is crying. So hard to be left by the only family he has. I hug him again. . . . Off we go, with Joseph smiling bravely through his tears, down the dusty road and home, where the car is quickly unloaded and I fall on my bed, exhausted.