



Bringing Home the Word



Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 1, 2015

Challenging Teachings

By Janel Esker

Anyone who has served as a substitute teacher or babysitter or interim manager or even guest preacher knows the challenge of stepping into a role of authority over people who aren't familiar with you. It's possible they will hear your message or lesson plan with anticipatory ears, awakened from their usual routine. More likely, though, will be complaints: "Our teacher doesn't do it *that way*," or "*that's* not how Mom makes our grilled-cheese sandwiches," or

Sunday Readings

Deuteronomy 18:15–20

Moses declares that God will give the people a prophet "from among their kin" but includes the warning that failure to heed this prophet will result in death.

I Corinthians 7:32–35

Paul encourages the Church to be free of everyday worries and distractions—even right responsibilities of family—that tempt them away from their ultimate call to discipleship.

Mark 1:21–28

A man possessed with an unclean spirit confronts Jesus in the synagogue. Jesus exorcises the spirit, and his power attracts the attention of many in Galilee.

"Our pastor doesn't preach *that* long!"

Jesus had a similar experience in the synagogue in Capernaum. It was customary for men in the community to take a turn teaching in the synagogue. However, Jesus' teaching was like none the people had heard before—he spoke as one with authority. You can imagine the murmurings that traveled among the hearers, "Our scribes don't teach *that way*." "That's not what we're used to hearing!" One unclean spirit even confronted Jesus.

Certainly this wouldn't be the last time Jesus' teachings led him into controversy. His continual challenge of the status quo eventually provoked those in power to send him to the cross. But the Gospel reports that the people in Capernaum were "amazed" at his new teaching. Most responded with awe and respect for his profound words.

We who have been Christians for a while may think we know this Jesus and his teachings. We may have decided what his message is, and we may have constructed for ourselves a simple Christianity that just requires us to be "nice" to others.

But are we willing to hear Jesus with new ears? His teachings are challenging, and they ought to shake us to the core. Will we, too, be amazed? †

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- When have I felt alone, afraid, anxious, distracted, or possessed?
- How can I better listen to and follow the true teachings of Christ?



Lord, your life and
ministry is a model
for humanity. Help me
imitate your humility
and be a servant
to all people.

—From *Faithful Meditations
for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,

Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

The Practice of Catholic Social Teaching

By James and Kathleen McGinnis

Catholic social teaching is defined by seven principles: care for God's creation; the life and dignity of the human person; the rights and responsibilities of the human person; the dignity of work and rights of workers; the solidarity of the human family; the option for the poor and vulnerable; and the call to family, community, and participation.

Simply put, Catholic social teaching helps us understand and put into practice the two great commandments Jesus proclaimed: love God totally and love our neighbor as ourselves. This love expresses itself in two forms of action: the works of mercy (direct service, such as donating to food pantries) and the works of justice (social change, such as legislation to expand the food-stamp program).

Catholic social teaching is nothing more or less than bringing the Gospel message to the social issues of our time. Through daily prayer and personal encounters, we develop relationships that motivate us to loving and sacrificial action. Moreover, when these relationships become mutually enriching experiences, then justice is being done.

Catholic social teaching makes it clear that we have a duty to use our resources in ways that respect the rights of others. We must learn about the policies and practices of those businesses and services that we support and encourage others



to get involved. People can invite their families, friends, and colleagues to cosign letters to political leaders, heads of corporations, and school officials to change unjust policies and/or institute constructive ones, and to participate in boycotts. It is precisely such action that is making a difference in how we are caring for God's creation.

Whatever the specific principle, Catholic social teaching invites us to respond with our hands and hearts, not just our heads. As it says in the Letter of James, "Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (2:17). In the face of any fears that may keep us from action, we have Paul's reminder in 2 Timothy that we have not been given "a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love" (1:7). Let us pray that this spirit will prevail in our souls, be manifested in our deeds, and transform our nation and world. †

Challenging First Impressions

By Fr. Rick Potts, CSsR

To one degree or another, we group and grade, catalog and categorize. It is human nature to prejudge people according to a whole host of traits and characteristics. We are, after all, social beings, seeing groups before we see individuals. Consider for a moment all the groups and categories into which you fit.

However natural this tendency may be, quite often our assumptions are in error and our first impressions are just wrong. The less a group or person is like us, the greater the likelihood we will judge them wrongly. We tend to allow our own prejudices to slip into the equation, judging "outsiders" more harshly than those who seem to be just like us. Making assumptions creates an even greater challenge.

When I visited the Holy Land a few years ago, I knew it would challenge prejudices and stereotypes. What I learned is that prejudices only serve to encourage the continuing violence in the region rather than help with the important task of building peace. The photos I took, the faces of the Holy Land, showed people at work, at play, and at prayer. They were Jewish, Muslim, and Christian—but I couldn't tell the difference. †

WEEKDAY READINGS February 1-7

Mon. *The Presentation of the Lord: Malachi 3:1-4 / Hebrews 2:14-18 / Luke 2:22-40*
Tue. *St. Blaise; St. Ansgar: Hebrews 12:1-4 / Mark 5:21-43*
Wed. *Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15 / Mark 6:1-6*

Thu. *St. Agatha: Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24 / Mark 6:7-13*
Fri. *St. Paul Miki and Companions: Hebrews 13:1-8 / Mark 6:14-29*
Sat. *Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21 / Mark 6:30-34*