



Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 18, 2015

Sure I Can!

By Janel Esker

Did you ever say “Yes, sure I can!” to something, only to realize moments later that you should never have said those words? A friend asks you to volunteer to be on a committee. “Yes, sure I can!”—and then you remember you have absolutely no time to spare. Or a buddy shooting hoops with you bets you can’t make the next shot. “Yes, sure I can!”—and then you realize you’re way too far from the basket to have a chance. Or your spouse asks if you can fix the leaky faucet. “Yes, sure I can!”—and then after one twist of the wrench, you know you should have called a plumber.

I wonder whether James and John

had that same feeling of regret after they instantly replied, “We can!” to Jesus’ question, “Can you drink the cup that I drink?” I wonder whether they saw a knowing look on Jesus’ face—and then realized they probably shouldn’t have answered so quickly. Jesus knew they didn’t understand how difficult drinking that cup would be. Their focus was on gaining a place of honor for themselves rather than on the self-sacrifice required to drink Jesus’ cup.

If Jesus asked us to drink the cup that he drinks, would we be as quick to answer, “Yes, sure I can!”? We should answer so confidently only if we’re fully prepared to do as Jesus did—to live as a servant. Parents, do you serve your children? Bosses, do you serve your employees? Teachers, do you serve your students? It’s a completely different model of authority than we’re taught in our culture.

Yet it’s the cup we’re asked to drink if we are to follow the Lord. †

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 53:10–11

“Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many.”

Hebrews 4:14–16

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.”

Mark 10:35–45

“Whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.”

A Word From Pope Francis

He is a shoot, He is humble, He is meek, and He has come for the humble, for the meek, to bring salvation to the sick, to the poor, to the oppressed...He marginalized himself...He humbled himself, He debased himself...became an outcast, He humiliated himself [in order to] give us the mystery of the Father.



—Morning Meditation, December 2, 2014

PRAYER

Lord, I am grateful for your gift of humility. Give me a humble heart so that I may imitate your compassionate ways with all people.

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

The Dance of Death

By Stephen J. Rolfes

In the fourteenth century, amid the throes of the bubonic plague, a bizarre form of art known as the *Dance of Death* emerged. Here, Death, depicted as a grinning skeleton, appears to all manner of people, snatching them from their everyday lives, no matter how comfortable or fortunate they are. Whether king or beggar makes no difference to God's messenger; all are summoned.

On a trip to Europe, strolling through the streets of Berne, Switzerland, I chanced to wander into an old Protestant cathedral. To my amazement, the very last stained-glass window on the right side was one of the finest examples of the *Dance* in existence! It was a moving masterpiece, a hard-hitting example of religious art rarely seen in these modern times.

My daughter complained that the window was "morbid and depressing." I explained that even with the grotesque skeleton, it is, in truth, uplifting. It is, first and foremost, an expression of the equality of all people. In the sight of God, there are no kings or beggars. Ultimately, there is only the gift of salvation, not earned by any title of nobility, privilege of birth, wealth, not even good works or charitable offerings. Paul made this clear in his letter to the Ephesians (2:8-9).



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Why do I feel the need to control and manipulate others?
- What sacrifices have I yet to embrace in my life?

It is an obvious fact that all people must die, but everyone wants to forget it. There are many who would love nothing better than to spend their lives in the pursuit of pleasure and the luxuries of this life. Such is the belief of

a fool, and Christ used that exact word (Luke 12:20). As the window in Berne clearly illustrates, we must live each day as though it were our last. We must be prepared, as were the wise virgins. We must have the word of God in our hearts and preach it often. We must always be on guard, resist the temptations of this world and the fleeting pleasures they can provide, and look instead to the true treasure that awaits us. It is not an easy task for us today any more than it was for the people at the time of the Black Death.

One day before Palm Sunday 1942, in the magnificent Church of St. Mary in Lübeck, Germany, air-raid sirens screeched as terrified residents ran for shelter. Among the casualties of Allied bombs that evening was the stained-glass *Dance of Death* in the church. Ten years later, artist Alfred Mahlau began a five-year labor to painstakingly recreate the masterpiece. It is this work that stands today, although it contains a detail not found in the original. Beneath the characters in medieval costume is the skyline of the modern city completely engulfed in flames. This is a stark testimony against the cruelty and waste of modern warfare and terrorism in which any person could easily become collateral damage.

This full version of this article first appeared in the January 2008 issue of *Liguorian*.

WEEKDAY READINGS

October 19-24

Mon.	<i>Sts. John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues and Companions: Romans 4:20-25 / Luke 12:13-21</i>	Thu.	<i>Weekday: Romans 6:19-23 / Luke 12:49-53</i>
Tue.	<i>Weekday: Romans 5:12, 15, 17-21 / Luke 12:35-38</i>	Fri.	<i>Weekday: Romans 7:18-25 / Luke 12:54-59</i>
Wed.	<i>Weekday: Romans 6:12-18 / Luke 12:39-48</i>	Sat.	<i>Weekday: Romans 8:1-11 / Luke 13:1-9</i>