Good News
INSPIRATION FOR DAILY LIFE

Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of July, 2011

by Terry A . Modica

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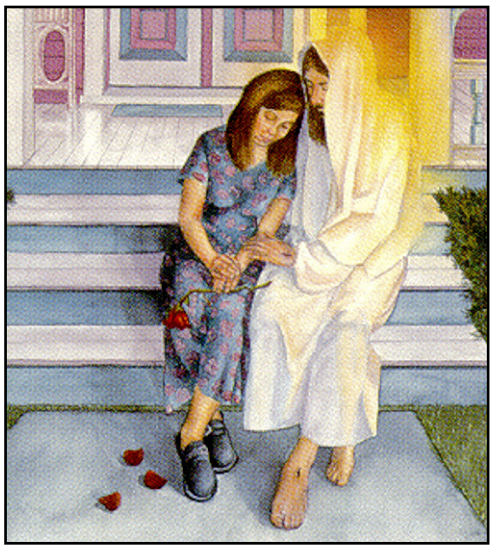
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 3, 2011

Read:
Zechariah 9:9-10
Ps 145:1-2,8-11,13-14
Romans 8:9,11-13
Matthew 11:25-30



Reflect:
Does the yoke of Jesus make you feel weighed down or lifted up? His yoke – as his life revealed – is servanthood, a ministry that cares for others, a love that makes sacrifices.

However, we have so many personal struggles, so many of our own crosses to carry, so many people needing our attention, that the yoke makes us feel weighed down and exhausted. So why does Jesus tell us that his yoke is easy? Why does he say that the burdens that he asks us to carry are light?

How can sharing in the ministry of Jesus be restful?

When the burdens of life wear us down, it's usually because we've taken on more responsibility than God has given to us.

Or else it's because we're expending energy trying to get rid of a cross after Jesus has yoked us to it. If the burden leads to burn-out, God lets us get tired, because he's warning us: "Slow down! Simplify your life! Spend more time in prayer!"

If it leads to anger and resentment, God's showing us that our selfish desire for an easier life is making our lives actually more difficult.

We have to take care of our own needs before we can be useful to Jesus while yoked to his ministry. The yoke of Christ is burdensome only if we continue to give out more to others than we allow Jesus to give to us. He will give us what we need so that in our partnership with him (the yoke), together we can give to others what they need. Then our anger and resentment disappear and we experience holy pleasure in our tasks, because we're yoked to the goodness and the energy and the strength of Jesus himself.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What are you doing that seems like a good idea but is wearing you out?

† What part of it is not God's idea?

† What can you do to slow down, simplify, make a change, and feel the strength of Jesus?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Become accountable for the answer to the above questions by sharing it with your faith community: What changes are you going to make to allow Jesus to refresh and renew you?

† How do you think this will make a difference?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

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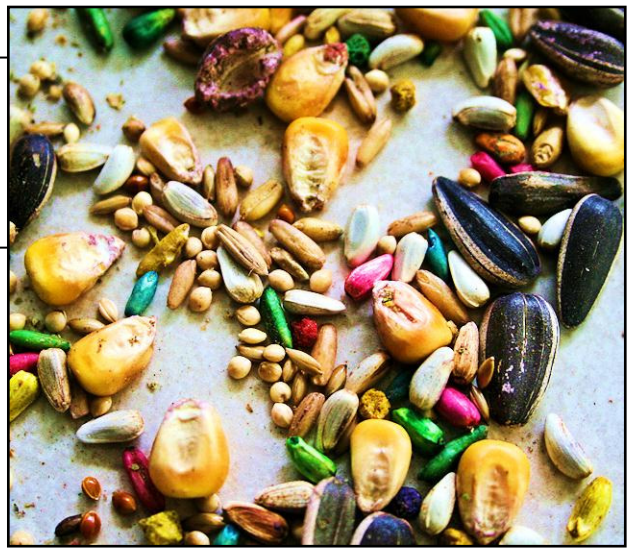
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 10, 2011

Read:
Isaiah 55:10-11
Ps 65:10-14 (with Lk 8:8)
Romans 8:18-23
Matthew 13:1-23



Reflect:
Sunday's readings are about sowing seeds. The important thing to remember about seed sowing is that the effort is worthless if the seeds are not changed by being cast to the ground.

Each seed must give up its former self, dying in the dirt while new life stirs within it. Only then can it send out a tender, first root, which will multiply and grow stronger and deeper but only if it's properly nourished.

If all this takes place, the end result is a plant that looks nothing like the seed, which as it grows develops the ever-more important mission of benefitting the wider world of Nature beyond itself.

As we listen to Jesus explain the parable, we say yes, we want to be seeds that bear abundant fruit. But desiring it does not automatically transform us. What is it that makes the soil of our lives rich and growth-producing?

The reading from Isaiah tells us that it is God himself who is the rich soil – God and his Word, which accomplishes everything that he desires. St. Paul reminds us in the second reading that suffering is part of creation (seeds must fall in the dirt and die in order to produce a fruitful life). Redemption grows from suffering and death.

We will never feel truly fulfilled until we've surrendered to the soil and have allowed God to nourish our growth.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What tender, new roots do you have that are sprouting from times of suffering and loss?

† What blessings are springing up from them?

† What ministry that benefits others is a fruitful gift of these blessings?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Share with your faith sharing group what it means to give up your former self to allow new life to stir and grow.

† What is the will of God (what does the Word say) regarding the end result? Give examples from your life or from the lives of others.

Comments/Prayer Requests:

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16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 17, 2011

Read:
Wisdom 12:13,16-19
Ps 86:5-6,9-10,15-16
Romans 8:26-27
Matthew 13:24-43

Reflect:
The U.S. Bishops have outlined the basic strategy for Catholic evangelization in a document entitled "*Go and Make Disciples*." It names three necessary goals or phases: (1) Nurture your own faith-growth, (2) invite others to conversion, and (3) transform society through true Christian living. Jesus teaches us these same three goals in the parables of the Gospel reading.

(1) Nurture your own faith-growth: In the kingdom of God, we are like good wheat growing amidst weeds. This takes effort; the weeds will take over if we're not working daily at growing in holiness. What have you been doing to prevent the weeds from taking over and strangling your holiness? How is your faith life benefiting from living in the midst of non-believers and evil? Your Father-Creator is empowering you to grow.

(2) Invite others to conversion: In the kingdom of God, we are like the tiniest of seeds that grow into a bush so large that others benefit from the abundance of our growth. Who is benefiting from your faith? How is your spiritual growth inviting them into a relationship with Jesus? The Holy Spirit is empowering you to nourish others if you're willing to invite others to learn from your experiences.

(3) Transform society: In the kingdom of God, we are like yeast that helps the whole batch swell up and mature into the bread of life that nourishes others. What are you involved in, as a Christian, that improves the world? Is your holiness making a difference in your workplace, your community, and your parish? During Mass, as you receive the nourishment of the Eucharist, you are empowered to become Eucharist for the world by nourishing what is good around you.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Maybe you never saw yourself as an "evangelist", but you are! This is your calling as a baptized Christian. Which of the above three areas of evangelization are you most actively doing?

† Which needs more of your attention?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Give an example from your own life (or from the life of someone you know or have heard about) that illustrates one of the three goals above.

† What about the other goals? Make sure that, in your discussion as a family or faith sharing group, examples are given for all three goals of evangelization.

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17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 24, 2011

Read:
1 Kings 3:5,7-12
Ps 119:57,72,76-77,127-130
Romans 8:28-30
Matthew 13:44-52

Reflect:
Jesus tells us In the Gospel reading that the kingdom of God is like a buried treasure, a pearl purchased at all cost, and a net from which the bad catch will be tossed away and the good catch will be valued.

In other words, our Christian lives are a huge cache of valuables. If our treasure chest has any worthless trash, the garbage needs to be tossed away to make room for more valuables. Some of our treasures have only temporary, earthly value, and ultimately they be will worthless unless they're used for the kingdom of God.

The reading from Romans tells us that all things work together for the good of those who love God. As we purge our lives of false pearls and dead fish, we become more like our Lord. We become more useful to the kingdom of God. Even the bad things that happen to us, under the creative hand of our all-powerful, mercifully loving God, get put to good use as polishing cloths that brighten our pearls and bring out from us a better shine.

In the first reading, Solomon could have asked God for great wealth and he would have received it, but he asked for an understanding heart so that he'd have wisdom to rule the nation well. Even though he ruled

imperfectly, his reputation as the wisest king on earth spread throughout the known world *and* he accumulated great wealth.

His story tells us that when we seek first the treasures of God's kingdom, then we can safely use the treasures of the earth, because God's wisdom guides us in using them for the benefit of his kingdom. The more we love Christ and follow his ways, the easier it is to identify what's really valuable, separate out the junk that does not belong to God, and use everything else for his purposes.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What treasures are buried within you? What pearls of wisdom have you gained, and what did it cost you to learn these? Write a list of your many good qualities.

† How do they prove that the Lord's presence is within you?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Choose one treasure, gift, or pearl that God has given to you – something that reveals the kingdom of God. How did you discover it or gain it?

† What affect does it have on others?

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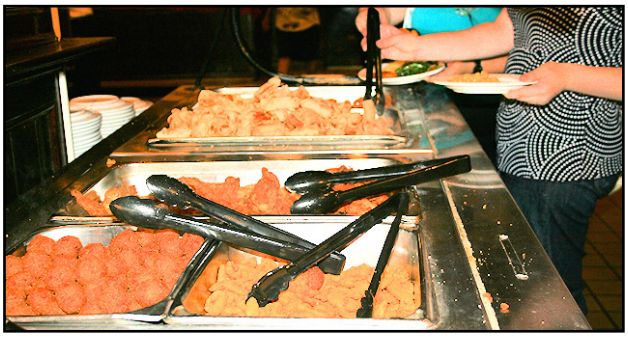
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 31, 2011

Read:
Isaiah 55:1-3
Ps 145:8-9,15-18
Romans 8:35,37-39
Matthew 14:13-21



Reflect:
This Sunday's readings make me thirsty and hungry! Can we go out to dinner after Mass?

As we say in the responsorial Psalm, "The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs!" Yet, despite knowing this, we think we never have enough. We're not content with what we have.

Even when things go well, we're not fully satisfied. We want more. Especially in relationships. We're starving for more affection, we crave more attention, our guts grumble over not getting enough concern and support and approval from those who should give it to us.

Every person in our lives has been called by God to be a provider of his love for us. But no one loves us perfectly, and some totally reject this calling. If because of this we live in a state of frustration and anger or cynicism or self-protective isolationism, we're always hungry.

When we choose instead to forgive the imperfect people and turn to Jesus, he miraculously multiplies a little into a lot. By keeping our eyes on Jesus rather than on those who fail to love us fully, his love for us fills our hearts to overflowing.

Feeling dissatisfied is a sign that Jesus is trying to get our attention; there's something he wants to give us. But how is he going to give us what we need if we can't see him and feel touched by him?

To feel satisfied by an invisible God, we need to stay closely connected to him in prayer *and* in Christian community. We have to pay attention to what he's doing and through whom he's chosen to do it. That means getting more involved and expecting the unexpected!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What are you hungry for? Who's not giving you enough of what you need?

† How can you find other ways of receiving this?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe a time when God met your needs in an unexpected way. From whom did you expect to get it, and how did it happen that you received it another way?

† Did you receive more – or less –than what you had wanted? Was it satisfying?

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