



# Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of November, 2011

by Terry A . Modica



## 32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 6, 2011

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Read:

Wisdom 6:12-16

Ps 63:2-8

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Matthew 25:1-13

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God's ways are awesomely much, much better than anything we can imagine!

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What have you resisted doing because it doesn't make sense?

† What can you do, where can you turn, to whom can you go for help in discerning whether or not it's God's plan for you?

### Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading shows us what it means to be truly foolish. We believe in Christ – good! We pray – good! We put time into our faith growth and we value opportunities for more faith formation – very wise! And we say that we trust God – wonderful!

But what happens when God doesn't answer our prayers fast enough? What if we need Christ's loving embrace or his protection from evil and yet we're suffering with no end in sight? Where is Jesus then?

Usually, God's timing is not ours. We think we have the right idea about how soon God should intervene when we ask for his help. Right now is a good time for it, right? Of course! But perhaps not from God's perspective. (Why do we want to leave God in charge anyway, if he doesn't see things our way, huh?)

When we despair over unanswered prayer, the reality behind it is that we're emotionally unprepared for any timing that's different from what we think it should be. The foolish bridesmaids thought the groom would arrive before their lamps burned out. They thought they understood the situation. Do we?

Furthermore, if God's plans are illogical – if they don't make sense to us – we distrust them. And then we get ourselves into the mess of trying to handle things apart from God.

We cannot trust our logic. We cannot trust our perception or our understanding of the situations we're in. The sooner we decide to enjoy the absurdity of being a Christian, the sooner we will find out that

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How do you know when an illogical plan is really what God wants you to do?

† What's happened in your life that has taught you to trust the Holy Spirit's surprises?

† Share a lesson you learned when you weren't ready for God's plan because you didn't believe it.

### Comments/Prayer Requests:

## 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 13, 2011

Read:

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

Ps 128:1-5

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

Matthew 25:14-30



### Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading reminds us not to bury the gifts that God has given us. To do so is to be a "wicked, lazy servant!"

Ouch.

We all have some buried talents. There's more we could be doing for the kingdom of God, but we think: "Not me. I'm not gifted enough" or "Someone else can do it better than I can" or "God can't be telling me to do *that*" or "I don't have the time, the financial resources, the know-how, or good enough health" or "I'm retired now and I've been waiting a long time to finally focus on my own desires."

There's no holy excuse for wasting anything good that God has given us, but sadly it happens quite often, because we don't realize how necessary our talents are for the Church and its mission of spreading Christ's influence upon the world.

What's pushing your gifts and talents aside? What's interfering with your usefulness to the kingdom of God? Now is the time to open wide your potential and release your talents into God's plans!

We are all gifted "enough" to make a difference for God's kingdom, because our abilities come from him. We're his servants, and it's up to him, not us, to decide what we're capable of doing for him.

Even the homebound and the bedridden have a divine purpose that can be accomplished in their circumstances and sufferings. Often, these are the most powerful prayer warriors and have some of the soundest wisdom on earth.

Have you ever been challenged by the question: "If God is so good, why does he allow evil to happen?" The answer is: It's not God that allows it. It's we who allow it! We are the Body of Christ on earth. We are his hands and feet and vocal chords and embracing arms. Jesus truly wants to make our world more heavenly, but too many of us have seemingly good reasons to bury the gifts that could make a difference. Indeed, this is wicked laziness!

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What good have you done? Hear God assuring you: "Well done, my good and faithful servant! Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you greater responsibilities. Come, share your Master's joy!"

† What "greater responsibilities" can you say yes to using the gifts that he's provided? What's stopping you from saying yes?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How would you recommend, based on your own experiences, that Christians invest the gifts of God?

† How do you identify (1) your giftedness and (2) God's purpose for it?

### Comments/Prayer Requests:

## Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King

Date, 2011

Read:

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

Ps 23:1-3, 5-6

1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28

Matthew 25:31-46



### Reflect:

We don't usually think of shepherds as kings, but the scriptures this Sunday describe the kingly powers of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. A good king cares for his subjects the way a shepherd cares for his sheep.

Kings increase the size of their reign and accomplish their work over the whole territory through their subjects. That's why Jesus says, "Whatever you do for one of the least of mine, you do for me."

For example, our Good Shepherd King wants to distribute food to the hungry all the way to the farthest reaches of his kingdom. How does he get it done? He gives an abundance of food to some of us and commands us to take it to those who need it.

What happens if we don't fulfill the King's commands? Do the starving people think the King is benevolent? No, they can only see his goodness when we do as he tells us to do.

Look at the people who are around you. Each one is an opportunity to give the King a good name.

What about the people whom you like least of all? What about those who've made you feel angry or intimidated or hurt? Well, ask this: What is he/she hungry for? If the answer's not obvious, ask the Holy Spirit. Observe that person long enough to identify the emptiness or pain or fears that are buried under the surface.

Then ask this: What abundance has God given to me that this "least one" is lacking and needs from

Christ our King? Can I show him/her the King's benevolence despite my feelings?

When we say no to opportunities to share what we have, we are behaving like one of the goats whom the Good Shepherd-King separates from the sheep on the way to heaven. And when we say yes, despite the feelings that could make us goat-like, the King's good reputation spreads, and we are all blessed.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What good things do you have in abundance? How readily do you share them?

† Who is of least importance to you? How can you take your focus off of what you don't like about them so that you can give them what God wants to give to them through you?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Have you ever done something good to someone who didn't deserve it? How did this affect your relationship with Jesus?

† What abundance do you see in each member of your family or faith sharing community that, when shared, blesses others?

### Comments/Prayer Requests:

## First Sunday of Advent

November 27, 2011

Read:

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

Ps 80:(4) 2-3,15-16,18-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37



### Reflect:

How many Christmas gifts have you given that became mere dust-collectors? Which ones turned out to be truly valuable with a long-lasting impact?

Since Christmas is the celebration of the birthday of Jesus, let's remember to give him a gift, too. God deserves more gifts than anyone else, but what do you give to someone who already has everything? Or does he?

What gift can you give to Jesus that will have an eternal impact, a gift that no one else can give him, a gift he doesn't already have? What have you been withholding from him? What talent or activity or ministry or commitment or change in lifestyle?

Today's first reading reminds us that God is our Father. The responsorial Psalm asks the Father to help us turn to him. The second reading gives thanks to God for all that he has done for us. So – what gift can you give to God to express your appreciation for what he has given to you?

In the Gospel reading, we're reminded of the need to prepare – to actually do something that makes a difference – for the coming of Christ. This not only refers to his Second Coming. It's also about the day when he comes for us as we breathe our last earthly breath. It's about the way he wants to come to you during this year's Season of Christmas. And it's about the way he is coming to you right now, today.

There's something new that he wants to give you. When he offers it, will he find you doing what's right (as in the first reading)? Will he find you using your spiritual gifts (as in the second reading)? Will he find

you alert and ready to do his bidding (as in the Gospel reading)?

Advent is an opportunity to take notice of the gifts he gives us and for becoming aware of the gifts we can give to him that he doesn't already have. It should make an eternal difference – for him and for us.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† List the gifts that God has given to you. Write them on a sheet of paper.

† Next, think about how much appreciation you have given to God for the gifts on that list. Do you know how much he appreciates your appreciation?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Name some of the obvious ways that Jesus comes to us today.

† What are some unexpected ways that Jesus has revealed himself to you?

† What will you do this Advent to become more aware of Jesus coming to you? How will this make you more ready for Christmas?

### Comments/Prayer Requests: