



# Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of October, 2011

by Terry A . Modica



## 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 2, 2011

Read:

Isaiah 5:1-7

Ps 80:9, 12-16, 19-20

Philippians 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

### Reflect:

"The kingdom of God is given to those who produce its fruit." That's the moral of the story that Jesus gives us in this Sunday's Gospel reading.

And what is this kingdom of God for us while we're still on earth? What are its fruits, which we produce during our earthly lives?

Anything we do in imitation of Christ is a fruit that has grown as a result of following Christ on our journey toward heaven. If we love as he loves, forgive as he forgives, minister to others, teach the truth, and heal the hurting, we are living in the kingdom of God now.

When I ask Catholics if they believe they're going to heaven, most feel very uncertain, either because they're afraid they might lose their salvation through some future grave sin, or because they're afraid it's not humble enough to answer with a firm "yes."

Granted, we do not imitate Christ perfectly. Most of us will need to spend time in Purgatory being purged of whatever is unheavenly about us, but when the purging is finished, we'll be fully alive in the wonderfulness of God.

If we make it to Purgatory, of course we'll reach the glories of heaven. And if our desire to be Christ-like is genuine, then of course our sins will never be so "grave" that we turn completely away from Christ. Of course we'll gladly embrace him when he comes for us at the moment of our death.

Whatever you do because of Christ and out of love for Christ, this is evidence that you are living in and will eternally live in God's kingdom.



### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What good fruits are you producing in your life now? List them; get out a pen and start writing them down. During the week, as you think of more good fruits, add those to the list.

† Look at the list you produced for the above question. How do these fruits give evidence of God's goodness within you?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How do they provide the kingdom of God for the benefit of others?

† How do they assure you that you are truly a heaven-bound follower of Christ?

### Comments/Prayer Requests:

## 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 9, 2011

**Read:**

Isaiah 25:6-10a

Ps 23:1-6

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Matthew 22:1-14



**Reflect:**

In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus addresses the problem of fakers: people who try to win his friendship by being religious and showing up for the banquet without entering into a genuine relationship with God.

You know the type: They are friendly as long as it works to their own advantage. They do good deeds but only when it's convenient. They perform Catholic rituals perfectly during Mass but at home they don't even take time to pray. Their faith is so shallow that distractions easily keep them away from Mass. When their relationship with you requires sacrifice or repentance, they abandon you.

Those who have a genuine relationship with God are identified by the presence of God's love within them radiating outward and blessing others, especially when it's not easy to love.

Jesus shows us in today's parable how to handle the fakers. The invitation to join the party is open to everyone, but when people want only the fun of being a friend of God and they ignore the hard work of sharing his love with others, God sets up boundaries against them.

Think of the people you've invited to your banquet table, i.e., into a healthy, Godly relationship, but they've tried to reshape it according to their unhealthiness and immorality. We should love them but not within harmful circumstances. We should do our own part to make the relationship healthy, but when others do not do their part, they've already abandoned the relationship.

God asks us to carry the cross of doing everything possible to invite them to repentance, conversion, and healing. However, healthy boundaries need to remain in place, and when our efforts are fruitless, eventually God says it's time to let go and move on.

And always, we're to go back out into the byroads to find those who genuinely value Godly friendships.

**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

† How many Godly, healthy friendships do you really have?

† Where can you go to find more people who want to be in a holy, Christ-centered, faith-building relationship with you?

**Questions for Faith Sharing:**

† What makes a friendship truly good?

† How do you know when the time has come to say no to an unhealthy, unholy relationship?

† How have you handled it?

† Where have you gone to find support and healing and growth?

**Comments/Prayer Requests:**

**29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time****October 16, 2011**

Read:

Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Ps 96:1, 3-5, 7-10

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5b

Matthew 22:15-21

**Reflect:**

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, when Jesus asks the Pharisees to tell him whose image was engraved on the coin owed for the census tax, he uses it to teach a lesson about the image that should be engraved upon our hearts. Our hearts should belong to God and to God alone.

The Romans believed that their emperors were divine. Therefore, to possess Roman coins meant carrying around the graven image of a human god. The Pharisees knew this when they challenged Jesus.

Paying the census tax to Caesar symbolized more than just submission to a foreign government. It had religious connotations. If Jesus was a true prophet, he should speak up against Jews possessing pagan coins. If he was a true messiah, he should deliver them from the oppression and taxes of the foreign government – or so they thought.

We don't know how they happened to have the Roman coin that they showed to Jesus. If they pulled it out of their own purses, which is likely, it revealed their hypocrisy. However, Jesus wasn't just interested in exposing their hypocrisy; he wanted to make a point about the True Messiah.

If we belong to God, Jesus is engraved upon our hearts. We have been rescued from the destruction of sin by the Messiah. We have let him deliver us from the oppression of evil that was caused by our sins.



Whose image do others see when they look at your life? When people see you, do they see Jesus engraved upon you?

To the extent that they do, that's the extent to which you belong to the kingdom of God!

**Questions for Personal Reflection:**

† How do you know that others see Jesus in your life? What's the evidence?

† What have they told you about yourself that is also a description of Christ?

**Questions for Faith Sharing:**

† What are some of the ways in which Jesus has come into your life and changed you from within?

† How has that changed the way you live?

† How does this evangelize the people around you?

**Comments/Prayer Requests:**

## 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 23, 2011

Read:

Exodus 22:20-26

Ps 18:2-4, 47, 51

1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

Matthew 22:34-40

### Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading reminds us that we cannot love God without loving ourselves *and* others, but God must always come first.

When we have difficulty loving God with all our heart, mind and soul all the time, every day, every moment, no matter what's going on, it's because we're spending too much time focused on other people and/or on our own plans and wishes.

Yes, we must focus on others in order to love them. And yes we must focus on our own needs so that we can love others *as much* as we love ourselves. Our own needs are important and we are responsible for seeing that our needs get met; otherwise we don't have enough to share with others – enough energy or enthusiasm or kindness or patience. Likewise, we can't focus so much on ourselves that we neglect the needs of others.

So the question then becomes: What are the priorities? In other words: How much time should we spend alone with God? How much time should we spend nurturing ourselves? How much of our time and needs and wants should be sacrificed for the sake of others?

Interestingly, we find the right balance only after we put God first and make our relationship with him our highest priority. This divine friendship is what heals us in our unmet needs. It's what empowers us to love others even when they are difficult to love. And we don't have to be alone with God all day to have intimacy with him.



We love him first and foremost simply by relying on him for success in loving others and ourselves. If we keep turning to him for guidance, healing and strength, we are loving him with all our heart, mind and soul all the time, every day, every moment, no matter what's going on.

### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† How good are you at setting priorities and keeping God at the top?

† What puts your priorities out of order?

† What can you do to increase God's role in your everyday life?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe some of the techniques you've used to increase God's priority in your everyday life.

† How has focusing on your relationship with God helped you to be more loving to yourself and kinder toward others?

### Comments/Prayer Requests:

## 31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

October 30, 2011

Read:

Malachi 1:14b--2:2b,8-10

Ps 131:1-3

1 Thessalonians 2:7b-9,13

Matthew 23:1-12

### Reflect:

This Sunday's Gospel reading contains a verse that, when taken literally, has been used by some Protestants to condemn Catholicism because we call our priests "Father." By that logic, when Jesus said, "Call no one on earth your father," he meant our dads, too, right? Did he never call St. Joseph by the title father? Perhaps when Jesus as a lad had a question about carpentry he said, "Hey dude who's married to Mom!" I don't think so.

To understand what Jesus means in this scripture, we need to read the whole passage: This singled-out verse is actually part of a teaching about equality. He is telling us that we must not consider anyone to be superior to ourselves—no one but God is superior to us.

Jesus says here: "The greatest among you must be your servant." At other times in other scriptures, Jesus says that if we want to be greatest, we have to be the servant of all, because we must not think of ourselves as superior to others. But in today's lesson he's telling us not to think of ourselves as inferior, either. He is trying to cure our low self-esteem.

Do you know, for example, that as a child of God you are not inferior to the pope? This is why he's called the servant of the servants of God. As Christ's representative in Church leadership, he serves us in everything he does, whether it's presiding at Mass or making decisions.

No matter what someone's credentials are, no matter how much authority God has given to our priests and other Church leaders, and no matter how famous or well-liked anyone is, we are all equally loved by God. We're all equally important to God. To see our worth, we must see ourselves through God's eyes.



### Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Do you feel served by those who have higher status? Why or why not?

† When you don't, how much of this is your own attitude of assuming that you're inferior? What will

you do to shift your thinking and accept your own value according to God's perspective?

### Questions for Faith Sharing:

† When someone's job or talents or position in the family or church seems greater than yours, how do you overcome your feelings of inferiority?

† How does Jesus convey to you that you are inferior to no one?

Describe a time when you felt inferior but then became aware of your equal value. (This story will help others who are struggling to overcome their own feelings of inferiority.)

### Comments/Prayer Requests: