

***Do Whatever
Jesus
Tells You!***

***ANDREW JEROME
YEUNG***

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Eighteenth edition

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Yeung, Andrew Jerome, 1938-, author

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A note to translators of this book

The Gospels were written many centuries ago in an ancient tongue. It is impossible for one English version of these sacred texts to bring out completely and exactly what was in the minds of the inspired evangelists. That is why the quotations in *Do Whatever Jesus Tells You!* are taken from four different editions of the Bible. Two of these have been prepared by Catholics, and the others by Protestants.

Translators of this book are advised to likewise consult at least two responsible and authoritative renditions of the New Testament.

It has taken fifty years to complete the book. Please translate faithfully and prayerfully. There must be no additions, subtractions, or alterations. Words and ideas must not be injected into the material to conform to the thoughts of current popular writers and speakers.

Parts of any book can be easily misinterpreted due to inaccuracy of quotation and reading out of context. Do exercise the greatest care.

Access to a large comprehensive dual-language dictionary is mandatory, as well as a thesaurus of synonyms.

Express permission must be obtained from the author or Dr. Jennifer Ann Yeung before translation or publication of this book is allowed.

Please be advised that, because the citations used here are from Scripture published in England and the United States, some spelling will be British, and some American.

Contents

Acknowledgments	i
A note to translators of this book	iii
Contents	1
Foreword	5
Introduction	7
SECTION I LOVE	13
LOVE Part 1	14
<i>Prayer</i>	18
<i>Reading One</i>	19
<i>Reading Two</i>	20
<i>Reading Three</i>	21
<i>Reading Four</i>	23
LOVE Part 2	24
<i>Prayer</i>	33
<i>Reading Five</i>	34
<i>Reading Six</i>	35
<i>Reading Seven</i>	36
<i>Reading Eight</i>	38
<i>Reading Nine</i>	39

SECTION II SELF _____ 41

SELF Part 1 _____ 42

Prayer _____ 54

Reading Ten _____ 55

Reading Eleven _____ 55

Reading Twelve _____ 56

Reading Thirteen _____ 58

Reading Fourteen _____ 59

SELF Part 2 _____ 62

Who Is Jesus? What Kind of Man Is He? _____ 62

Prayer _____ 76

SELF Part 3 _____ 77

Prayer _____ 85

Reading Fifteen _____ 86

Reading Sixteen _____ 87

Reading Seventeen _____ 88

Reading Eighteen _____ 89

Reading Nineteen _____ 91

SECTION III LIVE JESUS' GOSPEL __ 95

LIVE JESUS' GOSPEL Part 1 _____ 96

Prayer _____ 110

Reading Twenty _____ 111

Reading Twenty-One _____ 112

Reading Twenty-Two _____ 114

Reading Twenty-Three _____ 116

Reading Twenty-Four _____ 116

LIVE JESUS' GOSPEL Part 2	118
<i>Prayer</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>Reading Twenty-Five</i>	<i>129</i>
<i>Reading Twenty-Six</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>Reading Twenty-Seven</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>Reading Twenty-Eight</i>	<i>133</i>
An Exercise	137
Jesus	139
Final Exhortation	149

Foreword

“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

“I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken.”

“Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had!”

“Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once

the householder has risen up and shut the door, you will begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us.' He will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!'"

Jesus,
Son of God,
Son of Mary.

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. Mark 1:15 | New American Bible (NAB) |
| 2. John 12:46–49 | New International Version (NIV) |
| 3. Matthew 7:24–27 | New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) |
| 4. Luke 13:24–27 | Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV) |

Introduction

Jesus said to him, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment.”

(Mt 22:37–38, NJB)

“Jesus said” – let this phrase signify what the inspired writers of the four Gospels intended it to signify. All the sayings quoted in this book are ascribed to Jesus by these evangelists.

“Heart,” “soul,” “mind” – Jesus is emphasizing this: you must love the Lord with all your faculties, with all your resources, with your entire being. It is the greatest thing you can do. It must come first.

How does Our Lord want us to love him? The answer is found in the Gospel according to John, Chapter Fourteen. Jesus declares, “If you love me, keep my commands” (v. 15, NIV). Again, in verse 21 (NJB), “Whoever holds to my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me.” And still again, “Whoever loves me will keep my word” (v. 23, NAB).

This is the way Jesus wishes to be loved: that we obey his commands. The person who genuinely loves Jesus adheres to his word. Conversely, he who keeps

Jesus' commandments – that is, in spirit and in truth, and not by merely going through the motions – demonstrates his love for him.

Do not look upon a commandment as an irksome encumbrance. Once you decide to live it, you will discover that Jesus is right when he says, “Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light” (Mt 11:30, NJB). Living Jesus' commands brings understanding and freedom. He promised, “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31–32, NAB).

Besides being an order, a commandment is also a guide and an invitation. For example, when Jesus tells you to forgive an enemy, he is showing you a very effective way of handling a difficult situation. At the same time, he is inviting you to love your enemy and himself, through the act of forgiveness.

Love of Jesus should be an indispensable attribute of all Christians, especially the leaders. Jesus made sure that Peter understood this:

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon

son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

(Jn 21:15–17, NIV)

Jesus makes three promises to those who love him. The first is this: “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (Jn 14:23, NAB). When you obey Jesus, God the Father loves you. Both he and Jesus will enter your heart and stay there. They will never say to you, “I do not know where you come from; go away from me.” Against you the door to the Kingdom will not be shut. For you there will be no rejection, no condemnation on the last day. These sentences will not be directed against you: “If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken” (Jn 12:47–49, NIV).

The second promise is: “Whoever holds to my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me; and whoever loves me will be loved by my Father,

and I shall love him and reveal myself to him” (Jn 14:21, NJB). Besides the Father’s love you will also receive that of Jesus. You will come to know him much more, for he will disclose himself to you, imparting to you his thoughts, and teaching you his ways. In you light will exist, not darkness. Your house is built on a firm foundation; it will not fall. “Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had” (Mt 7:24–27, NJB)!

The third promise is: “If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:15–17, NIV). The word *advocate* is translated from the Greek *parakletos*. A “parakletos” is a defence lawyer. But *the Parakletos*, the Holy Spirit, is more than just that. Whereas a lawyer may act on your behalf in one case and only on a professional basis, the Holy Spirit is always lovingly and passionately on your side. He is committed totally to your present and eternal well-being. He has been called out to speak and intercede for you, to teach and advise you, to console, protect, defend, and fight for you. He

witnesses to Jesus and the truth of his teachings; he gives evidence against the lies of the world; he confers strength and courage, and provides a shield and security in your walk with the Lord. And this Counsellor-Comforter will be given to you and will remain with you forever because of your obedience to Jesus.

If you love God, if you keep his commandments, the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all present in you, with their love, their friendship, their acceptance, their wisdom, their power.

Listen to Jesus – his Father commands it (Lk 9:35). Do whatever he tells you – his mother requests it (Jn 2:5). Put him in the first place in your life; keep him at the centre of your being. Make sure, if he should ask you in a little while, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” or, “Edward, son of Andrew, do you love me?” or, “Jennifer and Andrea, daughters of Rosalind, do you love me?” that you can answer with conviction, with honesty, with heartfelt insistence, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

Let him know! Let him know!

SECTION

I

LOVE

LOVE

Part 1

We have just seen that love of Jesus involves carrying out what he commands. We invite you, dear reader, to spend some quality time familiarizing yourself with his teachings. But do not do this merely for the sake of discussion or commentary. We beg you to take Jesus' gospel to heart and live it.

Let us begin with two suggestions. First, when meditating on the gospel readings provided, be sure to apply them to yourself, not to anybody else. Do not use them to judge others.

Second, apply the readings in a positive way. If you find that Jesus' teachings challenge your lifestyle, do not give in to thoughts like these: "The gospel may be fine for some people, but don't bother me with it. I am busy with more important matters. Religion should not interfere with my private affairs anyway." Or, "Lots of men and women never read the Bible; they don't even go to church. Why should I have to do more?" Or, "I admit that I'm not a perfect Christian. But it's so annoying to change. If corrections had been introduced earlier in my youth it might have made a difference. It is too late now; I'll simply carry on as before."

Think along these lines instead: “I will open my heart to Jesus. He knows it takes most people repeated prodding over the years before they learn what he wants them to learn. But he has allowed for that. He does not condemn me for the lost chances. He will help me. His way will make me a much better person. By becoming better, I will benefit myself and all those around me. Even if these are my last days on earth, it is not useless to start. The good that comes from my transformation will, at the very least, be an enormous influence on my loved ones.”

The following is a rough example of how to use the gospel passages. Reading Two opens with the command: “But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” Call to mind an enemy. If you do not have one, think of a person you dislike or do not get along with, or against whom you bear a grudge or feel resentment. If there are several, begin by picking a comparably less troublesome one. He or she is probably somebody in your home or at your place of work. (See the list on page 137.)

“Love your enemies.” Decide to love this person from now on. Do not just promise to do it, but actually behave lovingly towards him. “Do good to those who hate you.” Plan right away a good deed you will do for him. “Bless those who curse you.” From this day forward say only what is good about this person. Stop gossiping about him. Look for admirable qualities in

him. Make it a point to talk nicely to him, perhaps with genuine compliments and words of encouragement. Do not be unkind again. “Pray for those who abuse you.” Stop reading for a moment, and pray for this person immediately. Ask God to bestow choicest graces upon him.

“To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.” People may not go about physically slapping each other across the face, but they often do so with stinging remarks. If this person insults you, do not insult him back. If he goes further by getting angry at you, let him! “And from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your coat as well.”

“Give to everyone who begs from you.” Should this person request something legitimate, do not spite him by outright refusal. Give him what he asks. Even if you are not able to comply, at least pass on information as to how he might find it elsewhere.

“And of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again.” Should he misappropriate what belongs to you and not return it, be quietly gracious.

If you have been insistent that any reconciliation among you must come from his side, perhaps you can initiate the first move yourself. “And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.”

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you

lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great.”

It is in loving this person who has no love for you, in doing good to him who may not return the favour, in lending to him who may never reimburse you – it is in living this way that you will be extraordinarily compensated. Your generosity may eventually smooth out the hostilities between the two of you; you may gain an excellent friend; you may win a new disciple for Christ; your own soul will be made cleaner; and you will show yourself to be a child of God.

“And you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish.”

This person with whom you seek to make peace is often ungrateful and selfish as well. God is kind to him and forgives him. Will you also be kind to him? Will you also forgive him?

Prayer

“This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Mt 6:9–15, NIV).

Listen to Jesus now. Take as long as you wish to meditate on the following readings.

Reading One

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did

we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

1. Mt 22:37–40 2. Jn 14:21 3. Mt 25:31–40 4. Jn 15:11–12 5. Jn 13:35 (NIV)

*

Reading Two

But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your coat as well. Give to everyone who begs from you; and of him who

takes away your goods do not ask them again. And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish.

Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.

1. Lk 6:27–35
2. Lk 6:38 (RSV)

*

Reading Three

That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was

brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, “Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.” Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, “Pay back what you owe.” Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, “Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.” But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. His master summoned him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?” Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.

1. Mt 18:23–35 (NAB)

*

Reading Four

So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and the Prophets.

If your brother does something wrong, rebuke him and, if he is sorry, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, “I am sorry,” you must forgive him.

It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice.

Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.

1. Mt 7:12 2. Lk 17:3–4 3. Mt 9:12–13 4. Lk 6:36
(NJB)

LOVE

Part 2

Let us review briefly. In Reading One Jesus says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” How does Our Lord want us to love him? “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.” And what does he command? “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

When we love one another we are obeying Jesus, and in obeying we show our love for him in the same action. That is a reason why he says, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

In obedience to Jesus, and in union with him, feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. Do it personally or with monetary contributions. In whatever capacity you can, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, look after the sick, visit the confined. Drop in to see the elderly. Bring them presents. Telephone the bedridden, the housebound, those with no friends. Give alms to the poor. Pray for all in need. Open your heart to orphans and widows. Speak to the young. Spend time with your adolescents. There are people who hunger and thirst because no one cares for them.

In the second reading Jesus tells us to love our enemies. We have already seen how the passage can be used to heal the divisions between us and the people with whom we are experiencing problems. Of course, no passage has to be applied in the way suggested in this book. When Jesus says, “Give to everyone who begs from you,” the word ‘everyone’ does not refer only to enemies or persons we do not like.

In the next paragraph he says, “Give, and it will be given to you.” Give and God will shower his favours on you most generously. How generously? Imagine yourself buying potatoes from a kind-hearted farmer. Selling by the basket and not by weight, this good man fills it to the very top. Not satisfied with that, he proceeds to shake it, diminishing many of the empty spaces. He then presses the potatoes together tightly and adds more, till the basket overflows. It is only afterwards that he pours them into the container which you brought along. That is how unstintingly God will reward you. For he says, “Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.”

In Reading Three, the theme of forgiveness is accentuated by a parable. As God has forgiven you for much greater sins, forgive now your spouse who has wronged you, though many times, still, only in very small ways. Forgive your relatives, friends, colleagues. Blot out their offences from your memory forever. Pray for them and be good to them from this moment on.

In the fourth reading we are asked to be “compassionate just as your Father is compassionate.” The word *compassion* is made up of the prefix *com*, which means ‘with,’ and the Latin *passio* (*passionis*) meaning ‘suffering or feeling.’ To be compassionate means to be able to identify with the sufferings and feelings of another. The sense of the word includes one’s willingness to help.

That brings us to the next group of teachings. Reading Five is from the Prodigal Son parable. “There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living.” You know the rest of the story. In the midst of a famine, the destitute lad decided to go home. “But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had *compassion*.” Compassion! He sympathized with the son’s feelings and sufferings. He understood his son’s immaturity and paucity of discipline. He knew how young people could make mistakes. He recognized human sinfulness. But the boy had now repented. He had returned. Instead of condemning his son, the father “ran and embraced him and kissed him.”

One very important thing to remember about this parable is who it was that related it. Jesus did! Jesus knew about people who squandered their lives in

dissolute living. He saw what human beings could become. He was well aware of sins and those who committed them. He told the story to highlight his Father's unswerving love for his children.

He said, "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk 15:4-7, RSV).

If you have led a life of sinfulness, bear in mind that God has not given up on you. He looks for you lovingly because he cares about your eternal happiness. He will not stop until he finds you. In the company of his angels he will celebrate your homecoming with great jubilation.

The parable in Reading Six illustrates God's generosity towards his people. Jesus introduces it with these words: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard." At intervals during the day he invited more people. "About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' 'Because no one has hired us,' they

answered. He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’” And, like those who came in earlier, the latecomers were then paid *the full day’s wages!*

Reading Seven begins with this warning: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones.” “Little ones” do not refer only to children. Little ones are also people that we tend to look down on for any number of reasons. For example, we may scorn their opinions on certain matters; we may disdain their physical appearance, their psychological immaturity, their low educational status, their deficiency in good social manners, ... As we ponder this reading, we should bring to mind the people we ignore, the ones we ridicule or curse, those we disparage (face to face or behind their backs). Remember also those to whom we often exhibit an expression that says, “I am irritated by your presence; I am too occupied to speak to you; you are not fit to carry on a meaningful relationship with me.” (See the list on page 137.) In addition, remember those in our families, and those who hold positions below us in our places of work, especially the ones we nag, or scream at, or order around, or insult.

In this reading Jesus also says, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” The word “judged” at the end of the sentence may refer to God’s just judgement on the last day. But the first word, “judge”, means, in this context, censure, blame, condemn, find fault in a spirit of arrogance and forgetfulness of one’s own faults. Many people today delight in complaining, mocking, sneering at things they do not understand, and making

pronouncements on every topic that comes up in conversation. The more they can find to criticize, the loftier they regard themselves. Much of their idle talk is devoted to putting others down and puffing themselves up. They constantly overrate themselves but hastily undervalue others. They take immense pleasure in wishing misfortune on those they deplore so as to justify their verbal abuse. Blind to their own ill-will, they spread nasty rumours about the people whose shortcomings they think they see. Instead of helping their neighbours to improve and praying for them, they fan the flame of hatred by inciting derision and hostility. Their speech reveals the wickedness inside. As Jesus states, “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mt 12:34–37, NIV).

Do not be like that. It is not love.

Please note that imperfections will be singled out unequivocally throughout this book – purely with the hope that, once we are alerted, we will mend our ways. In the Ten Commandments, in eight of them, God says: “Thou shalt not...” What is bad is torn down to make way for building up what is good and beautiful.

Let the utmost best be our goal. *“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

The eighth reading deals with humility. Jesus says, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.” “For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Great persons are not the ones who look to be admired and to be treated with extra courtesy everywhere they go. Great persons are those who serve quietly in humility and love.

Reading Nine ends Section I. Here, we have a narrative: Jesus waits on his apostles at the Last Supper by washing their feet. After the washing he says, “You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other’s feet.” Jesus is telling us to attend to one another in small kindnesses. Love does not consist in grandiose deeds. Love lies in ministering to those who are near. We can perform tasks like cleaning the dishes for our family after a meal. We can take out the garbage even though it is not our customary duty. We can make someone a cup of coffee or tea. We can offer to help an acquaintance who is busy or sick. These are the kinds of things Jesus means primarily when he speaks about serving, not the more visible or supposedly more exalted undertakings that some public figures are engaged in.

When we meditate on Jesus’ teachings, we may discover we are not as good at being Christians as we

thought. In fact, at times we could have been quite sinful. Keep this in mind: even though Jesus certainly wants us not to fall into sin at all, but if we do, he gives us the opportunity to repent.

Listen to the parable he told about the Prodigal Son who came home saying, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” This was how the father in the parable reacted. “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’”

By means of the parable, Jesus wants us to know that our Father is compassionate, he is forgiving, he is generous. We too can hope that our Father will welcome us repentant sinners. He can still let us wear his best robe to remind us that we have been created to be images of himself. He can still give us his ring, to show that we are members of the family, we are his daughters and sons, we are his heirs. He can still put shoes on our feet, letting us know he does not want us roaming about like barefooted orphans, that he wants to take care of us, that we should come to him for all our needs. He can proclaim, “... let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” He does not dwell on the painful memory that we were once dead and lost. He is ecstatically delighted that we are alive and reunited with him safe and sound.

Our Father sent Jesus to tell the wayward, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mt 9:13,

NIV). It is not good to be always thinking of ourselves as perpetually virtuous decent persons. Rather, it is proper to admit our sinfulness. Sinners are the people Jesus came to call.

And, perhaps, after we have heeded his call, we could decide to move forward and become more loving and less self-centred for the blessing of others. We could take it upon ourselves to pray and work for the conversion of all transgressors that they, too, would turn back to God and be received into the happiness of his kingdom.

Jesus said, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that *your joy* may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (Jn 15:11–12, NIV). Jesus did not give commandments to make our lives difficult. He wants us to love one another so that true joy will come into us. That is precisely the purpose of his teachings – our joy. If we extend our love to relatives and friends, to enemies, and to the least of Jesus’ brothers and sisters, his joy will become ours, and his love and peace will flow out from us to all his people, especially to those with whom we come in contact each and every day.

Prayer

God, you are infinitely superior to me, yet you love me so humbly and persistently.

May I learn to love my neighbours as you love me, no matter how inferior I imagine them to be.

May I remember that you love them also, that they too are created for everlasting glory in Heaven. When difficulties arise with anyone, let me always turn to you first.

Your Spirit brings understanding, and peace.

Now, listen to Jesus. Concentrate on his words and not on my sketchy introductory remarks. Spend more time on Reading Seven, paying special attention to the passage about the speck and the log.

Reading Five

There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that falls to me." And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and

let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

1. Lk 15:11–24 (RSV)

*

Reading Six

All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them *a denarius* for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, “You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went.

He went out again about noon and about three in the

afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?”

“Because no one has hired us,” they answered.

He said to them, “You also go and work in my vineyard.”

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.”

The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received *a denarius*.

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

1. Jn 6:37–40 2. Mt 20:1–9 3. Jn 10:10 (NIV)

*

Reading Seven

See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.

You have heard that it was said to the men of old,

“You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, “You fool!” shall be liable to the hell of fire.

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me take the speck out of your eye,” while there is a log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.

You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

1. Mt 18:10
2. Mt 5:21–22
3. Mt 7:1–5
4. Lk 6:37
5. Mt 5:48 (RSV)

*

Reading Eight

Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Will any one of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, "Come at once and sit down at table"? Will he not rather say to him, "Prepare supper for me, and put on your apron and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink"? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty!"

Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

1. Mt 18:3–4 2. Lk 18:10–14 3. Lk 17:7–10 4. Mt 20:26–28 (RSV)

*

Reading Nine

Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end.

They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garments and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing.

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments again he went back to the table. "Do you

understand”, he said, “what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.

“In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him.

“Now that you know this, blessed are you if you behave accordingly.”

An argument also began between them about who should be reckoned the greatest; but he said to them, “Among the gentiles it is the kings who lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are given the title Benefactor. With you this must not happen. No; the greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest, the leader as if he were the one who serves. For who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet here am I among you as one who serves!”

“This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.”

1. Jn 13:1–5 2. Jn 13:12–17 3. Lk 22:24–27 4. Jn 15:12–13 (NJB)

SECTION

II

SELF

SELF

Part 1

In Reading Ten we will again hear Jesus say, “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” A suitable interpretation of the phrase “to lay down one’s life” is “to put aside the manner in which one could be living.” To love greatly you must sometimes let go of what you want for yourself so that someone else might be better off. You have certainly done this, probably multiple times. For example, haven’t you ever interrupted a pleasant activity in order to help a person in trouble? Haven’t you ever decided against spending money on expensive clothing for the good of the family budget? Haven’t you ever let a mother and her little baby take your cozy seat on the bus? How many of these kinds of things have you done in the past year alone, or the past week? Pause for a moment and think about it. That is how you have loved. Keep on this path. Be prepared to lay down your life in other ways for people you know, as well as for strangers.

(1). The readings of this chapter concentrate on three areas. The first is ourselves. Jesus says, “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world

will preserve it for eternal life.” “Hates” is from a Semitic term which means “loves less” or “prefers less.” If we love less our life-in-this-world we keep it safe for life-eternal, that is, participation in the life of God. It is in not clutching mindlessly to a self-centred way of life that God’s life blossoms in our hearts.

This means, for instance, among other things, that we should hold in check the desire to manipulate events habitually to our own advantage and convenience, or to invariably force our ideas and plans upon associates; we should stop chasing after every temporal pleasure but leave space to carry out spiritual responsibilities.

It also means that we must renounce sin (which is an act of putting ourselves above God’s laws.) For example, Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:27–28, NAB).

“Things that cause sin will inevitably occur, but woe to the person through whom they occur. It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin” (Lk 17:1–2, NAB).

“Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this faithless and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels” (Mk 8:38, NAB).

(2). The second area is money. In the eleventh reading, Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters.

Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

“Anyone who is trustworthy in little things is trustworthy in great; anyone who is dishonest in little things is dishonest in great. If then you are not trustworthy with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches” (Lk 16:10–11, NJB)? If Jesus can trust that we will consider money as something for use and not a substance to hoard, as a servant and not a precious object that can be allowed to take our love away from God and neighbour, then he will lead us to real treasures. If he can trust that we will not defend our materialistic behaviour with rationalizations such as the following – “I must be well-supplied for my retirement and for the ample comfort of my family, therefore I cannot give to the poor; besides, my funds are tied up in investments, all my spare cash has to generate interest just to keep up with inflation; my friends and relatives have exorbitant incomes, so at all cost I must cling to my handsomely paid and distinguished career in order that no one can look down on me; I have worked very hard to maximize revenue for my company, I will not waste corporate capital to meet the terms of unprofitable moralities and pious principles” – then he will show us what is truly valuable.

Be careful! People who submerge themselves in the deceptive brightness of money may be ruled by darkness. We do well to ponder whether we, too, are

unsuspecting slaves of this beguiling dictator. In addition to the above examples, we might also recall arguments with our family members. How many of these came about because of the exaggerated importance we placed on money? We might recall the months we spent in dejection and regret for failing to profit from a business opportunity, or missed squeezing every penny out of a commercial transaction. Remember how we fretted when someone cheated a few dollars off us? Remember how we walked shamefully away from the less fortunate, even though we could well have afforded to give?

(3). The third area is a person's relationship with God and his priorities. In Reading Twelve, Jesus presents this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves *but is not rich toward God.*"

Do not get this wrong. Jesus is not against the enjoyment of the fruits of one's labours. The fault of the man in the parable is not in his wealth, but in his poverty towards what matters to the Lord. There are saintly well-

off individuals, like Abraham of old, but there are also those, rich and poor alike, who leave God out of their consciousness. They treat him as an irrelevant nobody. They pay little heed to his ways. They have scant regard for Jesus or for the ones with whom he identifies himself – the destitute, the suffering, the vulnerable, the powerless.

Listen to what they will hear at the Last Judgement if they persist in their indifference. “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me... Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

How will such persons be able to enter the kingdom of heaven? Indeed, what can people who suppose they are sufficient unto themselves do in order to be saved? Is there any possibility of eternal life for those who routinely shun their Creator? “By human resources it is impossible, but not for God: because for God everything is possible” (Mk 10:27, NJB). “But *seek first his kingdom and his righteousness*, and all these things will be given to you as well.” In other words, they must return the Lord to the place of primacy in their lives!

Jesus says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where

thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Mt 6:19–20, NIV). He promised: “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come. But many that are first will be last, and [the] last will be first” (Mk 10:29–31, NAB). Jesus is telling us to put him and the gospel ahead of earthly attachments. If the buying and selling of lands and houses cut into our prayer time and Sunday worship, we must resist. If, in endeavouring to please a relative, we are tempted to violate our faith, we must not give in. If the effort to satisfy our craving for luxury diverts us from God, we must change. Our loyalty to Jesus will not go unrewarded.

The finest investment we can make for ourselves is in heavenly treasure. It is the best inheritance we can leave to those dearest in our hearts. It is the pre-eminent gift we can bestow on our fellow human beings, especially the weak. And the way to build up treasure in heaven is by a life of reverence and love towards God and his creatures, expressed in part through alms-giving. “Sell your possessions and give to the poor.”

It should be made very clear that God is not interested in our money, but our hearts. It is not how much of our surplus abundance we give that he wants,

but how much of ourselves. This is borne out emphatically in Jesus' praise of the lady in the following incident. "As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 'Truly I tell you,' he said, 'this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on'" (Lk 21:1-4, NIV).

In Reading Thirteen, he reminds us: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." It is not prosperity or a life of glamour and endless entertainment that we should love. It is God, first and foremost.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you." The Holy Spirit is someone that the worldly ignore. They are so mesmerized by the delights of material things that they have no room for him. They are so blinded by their fixation to be "in," to parade their familiarity with the latest fads, to scoop everybody with the most recent rumours, to buy the newest toys on the market, to eat at the trendiest restaurants, that they do not notice his presence and guidance. But they can – if they turn to God in love, and obey what he says.

“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” This is a recurring theme: when we persevere in keeping Jesus’ commandments, instead of being restricted, we are genuinely liberated. As we love him, as we love our neighbour, we begin to gain insights into what life really is. We begin to discern what is good and what isn’t. We begin to differentiate between what brings lasting happiness and what doesn’t. We begin to understand what is necessary and what is of no consequence. We begin to know the truth. And the truth sets us free. It frees us from the oppression of pagan anxieties. It frees us to discover God’s protection and care. It frees us to experience his joy and peace.

The Beatitudes are introduced in Reading Fourteen. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” The intentions and dispositions of the pure of heart are straightforward and clean, not insincere or mixed. They do not say one thing and do another. They do not profess faith in Jesus and act as if he does not exist. They do not take his words and twist their meaning to fit their behaviour. They do not utter with their lips, “Your kingdom come, your will be done,” but desire inwardly, “My kingdom come, my will be done.” The pure in heart will “see God.” They will recognize the Holy Spirit. They will perceive his plans at every turn. They will look for his counsel, and find it.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is the first Beatitude. The poor

in spirit in the Gospel according to Matthew are those who know their need of God. They understand that God is the one who upholds them, that it is he who provides for them. Hence, they do not display the arrogance and ugly assertiveness of some who are rich. Neither do they pretend to be what they are not, nor look for ways to boast. Their inability to match others does not fill them with depression or contempt. Their reliance is not on their own importance, but on God. How blessed they are. “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” God’s life is in them, right now!

Sometimes it is fruitful to read only the first part of a Beatitude – it is in the present tense. For example, “Blessed are those who mourn.” How blessed you are, starting this minute, when you choose to use your time and energy to serve Jesus, knowing full well you may have to endure derision and scorn from your peers. How blessed you are, unlike them, you turn your back on the amassing of vast quantities of belongings as the goal of life, and so you end up lacking the opulence they have. They possess beautiful houses and cars, they wear glittering jewellery and up-to-date fashions, they attend lavish parties and enjoy fabulous banquets and vacations, whereas you are met with ridicule on your journey with Jesus. How blessed you are.

One meaning of “blessed” is “happy.” Jesus is saying, “Happy are those who mourn.” A disciple’s reaction to shortages, struggles, inconveniences, or thriftiness, is not shame or sadness. He knows that,

because of goodness, God pays special attention to him. God's favour rests upon him. So he does not go around explaining himself to everybody and soliciting pity. He does not take every opportunity to moan and groan: "My devout and holy life is so obscured from sight. I am such a martyr yet no one sees it. I have done much but few people appreciate the significance of my admirable sacrifices."

Jesus' disciple is not a person of whining and complaining. He is full of joy and hope. He rejoices under the most trying circumstances. When things go well, he remains humble, knowing that tomorrow may not run as smoothly. In moments of desolation, he does not despair, remembering that better times always come again. He has to deal frequently with evil, yet he never ceases to trust God in every situation. He is at peace. He finds consolation in the Lord's silent companionship. His cheerfulness brightens the lives of all who meet him.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." One often-missed connotation of this Beatitude is: blessed are those who decide to become less obsessed with sumptuous food and drink so that what is right should be done. In response to Jesus' teaching they are spending smaller amounts of money on luxurious eating and drinking, and committing more of their wealth to the service of the poor; their willingness to put aside the affluent manner in which they could be living makes them happy to cut down on lavish foods, to stay away from expensive places and events, or

befriending those who busy themselves in high-flying styles of living. How blessed they are who give more of their abundance to those who have little. They will hear Jesus saying, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink” (Mt 25:34–35, NAB).

How blessed you are if, at least once in a while, individually or through an institution, you do this: “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Lk 14:13–14, RSV).

How blessed you are if you seek to serve instead of every instant thinking about making more money or having fun. How blessed you are if you decide to abstain from keeping up with the rituals of the worldly. How blessed you are if you lay down your life for the love of God and neighbour.

How blessed you are if, in order to do what is virtuous and just, you go against popularly accepted dishonest practices and other forms of misconduct. How blessed you are if ridicule and loneliness do not deter you from following the Lord’s commands. How blessed you are if your master is Jesus and not affluence or social status.

How blessed you are if you spend some time in prayer instead of wasting away all day long preoccupied

with television, or the computer, or the phone, audio devices, and games. How blessed you are! How blessed you are!

Prayer

God, sometimes, because of my pursuits and interests, I do not stop to care for people who need me.

Sometimes, because of my worries and fears, I forget your commands and promises.

Often enough, I leave you at the bottom of my list of priorities, and I even neglect to pray.

Jesus, help me not to be engrossed in myself.

Your way will disrupt my plans, but then your power will be at work.

If only I would let go!

There will be trials, but I must not be afraid; instead, I must learn to listen to you.

Your light and peace are not far from those who hear.

Again meditate on Jesus' words now. Linger over all these readings. It is good to review them periodically.

Reading Ten

This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.

If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments... 'You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother'; and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

1. Jn 15:12–13 2. Jn 12:24–25 3. Mt 19:17, 18–19
(NAB)

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Reading Eleven

Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

1. Lk 12:15 2. Mt 6:22–24 (NIV)

*

Reading Twelve

The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, “What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.”

Then he said, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’”

But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”

This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left...

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me."

They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?"

He will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

1. Lk 12:16–21 2. Mt 25:31–33, 41–46 3. Lk 12:33–34 4. Mt 6:33 (NIV)

*

Reading Thirteen

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.

If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

1. Mt 22:37–39 2. Jn 14:15–17 3. Jn 8:31–32 (RSV)

*

Reading Fourteen

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."

But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."

Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them."

“No, father Abraham,” he said, “but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.”

He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

1. Mt 5:3–12 2. Lk 6:24–26 3. Lk 16:19–31 4. Mt 10:28 (NIV)

SELF

Part 2

Who Is Jesus? What Kind of Man Is He?

Much faith is needed to accept and carry out the teachings of Jesus. That is why this chapter will deal primarily with faith. The word, however, has several meanings. Here, we will concentrate on faith as trust in Jesus, as confidence and belief in him.

A related topic concerns knowing Jesus. By that we do not refer to knowledge gained solely through the mind. We learn it through inspiration by the Holy Spirit and personal involvement. We need to step out courageously to grasp it first-hand. The reader is invited to participate in the discovery process by replying to the questions posed throughout this chapter.

As well, what we are doing includes the subject of asking God to answer our prayers.

And we will be looking not only at Jesus' sayings but also at some of the miracles he performed.

This is the first one.

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them, just as he was, in the boat. And other boats were with

him. And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?”

(Mk 4:35–41, RSV)

What did the disciples do that caused Jesus to say, “Have you no faith?” Please take part in the exercise and re-examine the passage to find out.

Have you ever said to Jesus, “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” Have you ever spoken to him as if he were asleep and had forgotten about you?

After the miracle, the question the men put to each other was, “Who then is this?” That is one of two main questions we invite the reader to ponder in the next part of this chapter. When I pray to Jesus, just to whom do I think I am speaking?

The question is phrased differently when the incident is reported in the Gospel according to Matthew. “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” (Mt 8:27, NIV)

What kind of man is this Jesus from whom we often request favours? That is the other main question we ask the reader to contemplate.

Here is a second miracle.

And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear. But immediately he spoke to them, saying, “Take heart, it is I; have no fear.”

And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, bid me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

(Mt 14:25–31, RSV)

What was Peter’s problem? What caused it?

The next miracle reveals not a lack of faith but an abundance of it.

And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed [him], crying out, “Son of David,

have pity on us!” When he entered the house, the blind men approached him and Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I can do this?” “Yes, Lord,” they said to him. Then he touched their eyes and said, “Let it be done for you according to your faith.” And their eyes were opened.

(Mt 9:27–30, NAB)

How greatly Jesus regards faith! “Let it be done for you *according to your faith*.” The two blind men could not even see Jesus; they simply believed in him. And because of their belief, their sight was restored.

This tremendous faith in Jesus can be yours, too. To help it grow, we recommend that you follow to the letter two specific commands of Jesus.

The first one is:

In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

(Mt 6:7–8, NAB)

This is the prayer of petition. When you ask God for anything, ask very briefly. If you use many words, Jesus says you are behaving like pagans. You know what pagans are – they have no faith in God. Moreover, when you rattle on and on, you are often instructing God. But

God requires no instructions. He knows your needs even before you open your mouth.

Few words are employed by the supplicants in the above story, and in the following ones.

After he had come down from the mountain large crowds followed him. Suddenly a man with a virulent skin-disease came up and bowed low in front of him saying, "Lord, if you are willing, you can cleanse me." Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him saying, "I am willing. Be cleansed." And his skin-disease was cleansed at once.

(Mt 8:1-3, NJB)

What was the leper's prayer?

Find the prayer of the next person.

And behold, a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment; for she said to herself, "If I only touch his garment, I shall be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

(Mt 9:20-22, RSV)

What was her prayer? Did she say anything to Jesus? Did she make a big fuss? Did she hang onto as much of

Jesus' cloak as she could, or did she merely make contact with a tiny corner of it?

Jesus was so impressed that he healed her immediately.

The second recommendation for us to grow stronger in faith is this: don't worry.

Jesus said,

Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? ... Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry.

(Mt 6:27, 28–31, NAB)

What are your anxieties? Some of mine are revealed in these thoughts: "Is Jesus willing to give me what I ask? Does he care? I have not been perfectly good lately – my guilty feelings and troubled conscience probably mean he will not listen to me. It is very easy to lose favour with God. What I am asking is so impossible, I doubt if he has the power to work this miracle. Does he even do this sort of thing? How is he going to help? Will his help come in time? Will he make me wait

interminably? Will I be put to shame? Will he give me exactly what I want, or will he substitute something I do not like? If he does make a substitution, will it satisfy me? And even if my wish is fulfilled, will it be a permanent reality or only a temporary illusion?"

Here is the next miracle.

Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.

(Jn 6:5–11, RSV)

What did Jesus do?

He made the people sit! It was after they had sat down that he passed out the food. When we ask Jesus for

something, let us, too, be spiritually seated. Let our fears subside. Let our apprehensiveness come to rest. Let peace descend on our emotions. Let Jesus dispense his gifts to us who remain calm and disciplined.

The Gospel according to Mark adds: “They all ate and were satisfied” (Mk 6:42, NAB). What was dry bread and stale fish, touched by Jesus’ hand, became delicious and satisfying. Jesus satisfies. He satisfies all.

Do not be anxious. Jesus did not say, “Ask, and perhaps, if you deserve it, you might receive. Search, and if you’re lucky, you might find. Knock, and if I feel like it, I might open the door.” No. He said:

Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened. Is there anyone among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or would hand him a snake when he asked for a fish? If you, then, evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?

(Mt 7:7–11, NJB)

When God gives, it is never anything that is not a reflection of his immeasurable love for you. If he makes substitutions, they will bring you joy, and satisfy the

deepest longings of your heart, ones you may not even be conscious of. He will give at the right time and at the right place, for he knows how to provide for his children.

Please, when you ask God for anything, use very few words; and after asking, do not worry. Your Father will not fail you.

The following passages describe several of Jesus' followers whose faith was severely tested. One betrayed him. One denied him. All deserted him.

And suddenly while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared, and with him a large number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. Now the traitor had arranged a sign with them saying, "The one I kiss, he is the man. Arrest him."
(Mt 26:47-48, NJB)

Then the men arrested Jesus and led him away. They took him into the high priest's house. Peter followed from far away. They started a fire in the middle of the courtyard. Then they sat down together. Peter sat down with them.

A female servant saw him sitting there in the firelight. She looked closely at him. Then she said, "This man was with Jesus." But Peter said he had not been with him. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.
(Lk 22:54-57, NIV)

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.
(Mt 26:56, RSV)

Try to answer these questions: Why did Judas betray Jesus? Did he not like the kind of kingdom Jesus wanted to establish? Did he lose faith in Jesus' vision of life, preferring to give in to the devil's temptation? Why did Peter deny Jesus? Was he ashamed of him? Did he lose faith in his Master? Why did the apostles desert him? Were they fearful for their personal safety? Did they lose faith in Jesus' way?

Observe that when Peter said, "I don't know him," his intention was deceit. He meant to lie, but in fact, and unwittingly, he told the truth. He certainly did not know Jesus. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had asked, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter had answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16, RSV). But what did that really mean to Peter? How did that answer affect his actions? Was he any better for saying it?

What happens when you pray the Creed, "I believe in God"? Does it influence your decisions? Does it improve your conduct? Does it allay your fears in times of crisis?

The Chinese term for crisis is *wei-ji*. By itself, the word *wei* means "dangers," and *ji* alone means "opportunities." When we go through a crisis, we often see the dangers, but seldom do we spot the opportunities. We pray to Jesus, begging him for protection, imploring

him to remove obstacles and to get us out of the storm. Often, it seems that Jesus does not hear. His answer is so slow in coming that we begin to panic. We doubt if the menace will ever pass away. But do we ever wonder why Jesus delays? Can it be that he wants us to look at the opportunities – the opportunities to change, to grow, to do things differently? Can it be that he wants us to use this interruption to view our troubles from another angle, to have a deeper understanding of our human condition, of our limitations and the limitations placed on all mortal beings by time, space, and the nature of creation? Can it be that he wants us to pay closer attention to someone who needs us, or to refine our bonding with those who are near?

Perhaps he wants us to dwell on a state of affairs that requires correction. Perhaps he wants us to terminate an illicit relationship. Perhaps he wants us to avoid taking part in a certain activity, or to discard a bad habit.

Maybe he is awaiting our consent to a job he wants us to perform. Maybe he is asking us to include him as a partner in the projects we undertake. Maybe he wants us to spend more time with him in prayer. Maybe he wants us to trust him in complete surrender.

If your faith is weak now, do not be disheartened. Learn from the apostles. As you can see, they were no better than most people: their belief in Jesus collapsed pitifully on the night of Holy Thursday. They were stunned. They were shattered. Their dreams fell apart. Yet barely three days after that terrifying evening of

betrayal, denial and desertion, and after Jesus subsequently suffered, died and rose again, they began to learn the true meaning of faith. Three days! A very short time.

Watch what happened on the third apparition of Jesus after his resurrection. (This is the last miracle presented in the chapter.)

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tibe'ri-as; and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathan'a-el of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zeb'edee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of

fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off.

When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.

(Jn 21:1–12, RSV)

Finally! They came to know Jesus. And not only did they know who he was, they understood now what he was like: the all-seeing, all-caring, and all-powerful Lord. In the serenity of the early morning, they sat down with him in silence. Few words needed to be spoken as they ate what he served. Former anxieties had vanished. In their place came trust, and peace.

The transformation of the disciples’ faith took several years, but the crucial stage happened in a matter of days. We can hasten the arrival of that crucial stage of our own faith transformation by following these two injunctions without compromise: “In praying, do not babble like the pagans,” and, “Do not worry.” Obey them tenaciously, neither veering to the right nor the left. Hold fast to Jesus’ word. Then watch your faith increase

and soar. You will begin to notice the miracles he is working in your life. You will begin to understand what a great friend he is. You will begin to experience a oneness with him that is uncomplicated and filled with joy. You will begin to know who he is. You will begin to know what he is like. You will begin to know him.

Jesus said to us in Jn 6:47 (NJB), and then to his Father in Jn 17:3 (NJB):

“In all truth I tell you, everyone who believes has eternal life.”

“And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

If you follow the logic of these two statements, you will see that to believe is to know God, and Jesus Christ our Lord.

The highest praise you can extend to your loving Saviour is unqualified faith in him. Give him that praise, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
Creator of me and my loved ones,
Creator who cherishes the work of his hands.

I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord,
who delivered himself up
so as to save us from every evil,
so that our sins may be forgiven,
so that we may have everlasting joy.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,
the Lord and giver of love,
the Lord and giver of courage and wisdom.

I believe God made us as friends, not strangers.
He made us as family, not outsiders.
He made us for good, not disaster.
From this day I go forward in confidence,
in faith,
in understanding,
in peace.

SELF

Part 3

In Reading Fourteen we heard Jesus say, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” When people insult and persecute you on account of Jesus, when they tell lies about you and speak all sorts of evil against you, do not be afraid. Be glad. Be happy. Jump for joy. You are in the company of the prophets. You are in the company of the greatest prophet of all – Jesus himself.

In Reading Fifteen you will hear him say, “Remember the word I spoke to you, ‘No slave is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” You are walking in your Master’s footsteps. You are becoming like him. You are what he wants you to be. “No disciple is superior to the teacher; but when fully trained, every disciple will be like his teacher” (Lk 6:40, NAB).

“You will be led before governors and kings for my sake, as a witness before them and the pagans.” Governors and kings in your situation today may mean

the directors of your corporation, or your immediate superior, or even your spouse. You may have to answer to them for your Christian decisions and actions. “How dare you oppose company policy with ethical concerns? Why were you not as ruthless as you could have been to this debtor? Why didn’t you berate more harshly those who made mistakes? Why didn’t you grab everything that was ours by right?” Do not panic when you are cross-examined. Jesus has told you beforehand that he allows you to face these people as his *witness*.

“When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

In Reading Sixteen Jesus says, “So do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear.” Do not be distressed if people misunderstand you or accuse you unjustly. All will be revealed and set right in due course. There is no need to react rashly or defend yourself dishonourably, no call to take revenge. Keep open the lines of communication; find out the causes of friction; present your case wisely; pray for God’s help. Pray for those who hurt you.

At the same time, do not be envious of the apparent successes of wrongdoers and unbelievers. God will deal with them. In the next reading (Seventeen), Jesus says, “Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so

will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

In the same reading, the parable about the weeds among the wheat gives some insight into the problem of evil. God’s enemies try constantly to destroy his people; the Lord is fully aware of this, but has perfect control of the situation. He allows the children of light to live alongside the children of darkness, absolutely confident of his transcendent and inscrutable plans. In praying for the apostles at the Last Supper, Jesus said to his Father, “I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one” (Jn 17:15, RSV). The disciples did not have to be removed to a sanitized environment. They could function admirably on earth, and achieve outstanding holiness, under God’s protection.

In such circumstances, no doubt, there will be hardship and suffering; but if we trust God’s designs and purposes, if we love him, if we lend support to one another in our difficulties, then all things will work together for good.

Keep in mind Jesus’ assurance: “In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world” (Jn 16:33, NAB).

This does not mean that we can be any less vigilant

against the forces of evil. No! It does mean, however, that we need not be afraid.

When problems come, do not mope around all day restating them again and again. Instead, begin learning from them. Start searching for good solutions. Pray for guidance. It is best to pray before seeking advice from people or from books offered at the parish library.

We turn in Reading Eighteen to a matter that can be a source of nagging scruples to Christians, namely, our lack of progress in converting some sinners. Here is what Jesus teaches: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.” Be sure to attempt this. Go to the next step only if that fails. “If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three.” If that does not have the desired effect, then take the third step. “If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church.” If nothing comes out of that, here is what Jesus says: “If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.” You are not obliged to do anything else. Commend him prayerfully into God’s hands.

Yes, we should correct – lovingly, respectfully, and not through fits of anger, sarcasm, or bullying. But we must not fret if there are no immediate visible signs of what we hope to accomplish. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the

prophets: ‘They shall all be taught by God.’” God himself will teach them. He will draw them. He will look after them in his own way.

Sometimes Jesus may use you to bring people to him, even without your awareness of it. And he will use you more often if you let him be your leader. “*Come after me*, and I will make you fishers of people” (Mt 4:19, NJB). Come after Jesus, follow him, let him show the way, and you will be able to capture souls for him.

“To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed [in] with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch of dough was leavened” (Lk 13:20–21, NAB). The life of God diffuses itself through his faithful followers. As you do your part, others will be influenced. Therefore, adhere to Jesus’ teachings and many will be affected and transformed in the course of time.

Reading Nineteen ends Section II. Again, we have a narrative. This one concerns Jesus’ passion and death. At Gethsemane, Jesus is momentarily deluged by his human emotions. Horror, anguish and grief come over him. He is so reluctant to accept the impending ordeal that he begs his Father, “Take this cup of suffering away from me.” Still, his love for the Father prevails; he is willing to obey in whatever is asked of him. In the end he says, “But let what you want be done, not what I want.” Just as he taught his disciples to love him by keeping his commands, so Jesus loves his Father by obeying all that he requests.

After this, Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. In our own relationships, let us be wary of superficial signs of comradeship. False friends will disguise their wicked agendas through seemingly amiable gestures. And never assume that false friends are found only in non-religious circles. Judas Iscariot was an apostle! Do not be surprised that within the Church there are betrayers of Jesus. Take care not to be deceived by them.

In this reading, we see Jesus healing his accuser's servant whose ear is cut off. Instead of retaliating, he responds with kindness.

“So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.” Jesus is now numbered among convicts. We, too, may meet the same fate. Our loyalty to Jesus can cause the world to brand us as criminal, wasteful, foolish, impractical, old-fashioned, narrow-minded, weak. For these perceived deficiencies, we may be socially crucified by our peers. The insult and disrespect can be borne in silence only because there is unflinching faith in Jesus' teachings.

In his short life on earth, Jesus was rejected many times. When you encounter rejection, do not be sad, but rejoice that, for a while, like our Lord, you have to face the rebuffs and misconceptions of scoffers.

At three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*’ This means ‘My God,

my God, why have you deserted me?” He does not so much as feel the presence of God. Undaunted, he resolutely affirms, “Father, into your hands I commit my very life.” Even though the road seems to be heading towards disgrace and failure, he surrenders totally to his Father.

Reading Nineteen leaves us with the question of whether we, too, as followers of Jesus, will love and trust God to the extent our Master did. Will we be true to his precepts even if it costs us everything? Do we dare place our fidelity above reputation, above ambition, above economic security? Can we let go of our elaborate plans? Are we willing to lay down our lives for Jesus just as he did for his Father?

“A Roman commander was standing there in front of Jesus. He heard his cry and saw how Jesus died. Then he said, ‘This man was surely the Son of God.’” The commander was a pagan, yet even he acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God. Remember the teaching from Reading Two: “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High” (Lk 6:35, RSV)? Remember also this Beatitude: “Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognised as children of God” (Mt 5:9, NJB)? Jesus continues to love his enemies. He does not stop doing good to those who hurt him. He makes peace between God and man. These things alone are capable of inspiring people to call him the Son of God. We, too, can someday be recognized as

God's children if, in the face of evil and opposition, we remain fearlessly faithful to his commands. If we love him with all our heart and soul, paying no heed to personal prestige or safety, if we face our persecutors with heroic fortitude, if we follow Jesus even to the point of death, believing valiantly in him and his promises, then, one day, not only Christians but pagans as well, will glorify God through us with shouts of acclamation: "This man is surely a son of God! This woman is surely a daughter of the Most High! This disciple has surely become just like his Master!"

Prayer

Lord, you are a loving God,
and you always hear my prayers.
Yet, when my petitions are not answered quickly,
fear creeps in; I feel helpless, my spirit grows weary.
In these times, it is important that I do not lose hope.
For you are quietly there.
You do not forget your people;
you never abandon your own.
You hold me close.
At the favourable moment, on the acceptable day,
you will grant the desires of my heart.
Lord, you choose the time,
you decide the place.
Your will be done.
Your will be done.
Your will does not lead to misery and defeat;
it is the shortest and surest way to triumphant victory.

Reading Fifteen

If the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you, “No slave is greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

You will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not finish the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy. When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the

world. So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.

I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.

1. Jn 15:18–20 2. Mt 10:18–20 3. Mt 10:22–23 4. Jn 16:20–22 5. Jn 16:33 (NAB)

*

Reading Sixteen

Disciple is not superior to teacher, nor slave to master. It is enough for disciple to grow to be like teacher, and slave like master. If they have called the master of the house “Beelzebul”, how much more the members of his household?

So do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops.

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two

sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.

1. Mt 10:24–33 (NJB)

*

Reading Seventeen

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?” He said to them, “An enemy has done this.” The servants said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” But he said, “No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in

bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear!

1. Mt 13:24–30 2. Mt 13:40–43 (RSV)

*

Reading Eighteen

Do not give what is holy to dogs, or throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot, and turn and tear you to pieces.

If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that “every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three

witnesses.” If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.

Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them.

If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.

Let them alone; they are blind guides [of the blind]. If a blind person leads a blind person, both will fall into a pit.

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets:

‘They shall all be taught by God.’

It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.

Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.

1. Mt 7:6 2. Mt 18:15–17 3. Mk 6:11 4. Lk 16:31 5.
Mt 15:14 6. Jn 6:44–45 7. Jn 15:16 8. Mt 8:22
(NAB)

*

Reading Nineteen

Jesus and his disciples went to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus said to them, “Sit here while I pray.”

He took Peter, James and John along with him. He began to be very upset and troubled. “My soul is very sad. I feel close to death,” he said to them. “Stay here. Keep watch.”

He went a little farther. Then he fell to the ground. He prayed that, if possible, the hour might pass by him. “Abba,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup of suffering away from me. But let what you want be done, not what I want.”

While Jesus was still speaking, a crowd came up. The man named Judas was leading them. He was one of the Twelve. Judas approached Jesus to kiss him.

But Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you handing over the Son of Man with a kiss?”

Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen. So they said, “Lord, should we use our swords against them?” One of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

But Jesus answered, “Stop this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

Then all the disciples left him and ran away.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

One of the criminals hanging there made fun of Jesus. He said, “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself! Save us!”

But the other criminal scolded him. “Don’t you have any respect for God?” he said. “Remember, you are under the same sentence of death. We are being punished fairly. We are getting just what our actions call for. But this man hasn’t done anything wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “What I’m about to tell you is true. Today you will be with me in paradise.”

At three o’clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” This means “My God, my God, why have you deserted me?”

Jesus called out in a loud voice, “Father, into your

hands I commit my very life.” After he said this, he took his last breath.

A Roman commander was standing there in front of Jesus. He heard his cry and saw how Jesus died. Then he said, “This man was surely the Son of God.”

1. Mk 14:32–36
2. Lk 22:47–51
3. Mt 26:56
4. Jn 19:16–18
5. Lk 23:39–43
6. Mk 15:34
7. Lk 23:46
8. Mk 15:39 (NIV)

SECTION

III

LIVE JESUS' GOSPEL

LIVE JESUS' GOSPEL

Part 1

We saw this in the last reading: “Then all the disciples left him and ran away.” Have you ever deserted Jesus? Have you ever been misled to follow the convenience of dismissing him as an outmoded custom? Were you ever tempted to consider his commandments superfluous? Have you ever rejected the teachings of his Church leaders because they appeared to have fallen short of your friends’ and informants’ deductions reached through their self-proclaimed exhaustive knowledge, unbiased research, and flawless opinions?

If you have ever run away, no matter what the cause, the important question is: will you return to him now? He bears no grudges.

When Jesus predicted Peter’s denial of him, he announced, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Lk 22:31–32, RSV). Jesus is telling you also that Satan may have tried to detach you from God, shaking your faith and dislodging your allegiance. But the Lord respected your freedom, and allowed you to move away, certain

that once you have turned back you would give strength to your brothers and sisters with understanding and humility. God can draw forth good out of potentially bad situations.

If you have left Jesus, don't be afraid to change. He is waiting for you with outstretched arms. Should you ever doubt his longing for your reversal of heart or his willingness to forgive, ponder deeply the reason why he died. Even on the cross this was how he prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34, NIV). He himself pardons all your sins and weaknesses, and intercedes on your behalf.

No damage is ever irreparable if one accepts and trusts Jesus. The thief crucified beside him exemplified this in such a beautiful and touching moment. He asked to be remembered when Jesus came into his kingdom, and received this promise, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43, NIV).

When Jesus appeared to his disciples on the night after his resurrection, this was what took place: "Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you'" (Jn 20:19-21, RSV). Notice that Jesus did not say one word of rejection. He did not harp on the group's disloyalty. He did not belittle. Instead, he wished them peace. He greeted them with goodwill. He put their troubled hearts at ease. That is the way he

behaves towards those who have deserted him temporarily. He offers himself in friendship. “He showed them his hands and his side.” In sporting his wounds, his battle scars, he demonstrated the familiarity that a man shows his friends, not his foes. “Jesus said to them *again*, ‘Peace be with you,’” emphasizing his desire for reconciliation.

He went on to say, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:21, 22, RSV). So he still wanted to treat his disciples as his Father treated him; he still wanted to send them out; he still wanted to give them the Holy Spirit. It is the same with you even if you may have abandoned him for a little while. He still wants you to be his disciple; he still wants you to be his partner in service; he still wants to pour his Spirit upon you without reserve.

“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that *repentance* and *forgiveness* of sins should be preached in his name to all nations’” (Lk 24:45–47, RSV). He asked his disciples to preach forgiveness. If you have deserted him, do not forget this: he forgives you too. Jesus also made sure that his disciples preached repentance. Turn your heart and mind away from sin and back to God.

Now we come to Section III, “Live Jesus’ Gospel.” To *live* Jesus’ gospel means to *carry out* what he taught

and not just hear and do nothing. To live *Jesus' gospel* means to carry out *what he taught* and not simply being content with continuing on a path which relegates his teachings to a lowly position in one's daily routines. For all Christians, and especially those who serve, to live Jesus' gospel must include going beyond the crowd whose highest concerns are leading a physically, socially and psychologically balanced life, eating a healthy diet, taking the recommended daily dosage of vitamins and herbs, exercising, wearing the right cosmetics and outfits, complying with popular etiquette, entertaining, being entertained, holding 'intelligent' conversations... It should mean more. It should mean actively practising Jesus' commands: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength'... 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mk 12:30, 31, NAB), applying them in every situation, in our thoughts, our work, and the way we speak to anyone, especially the person we habitually insult. It means putting Christ at the centre of the home, of Christmas, of Easter – not the television set, not the tools of commerce like Santa Claus, not the Easter Bunny. It means honouring the name of Jesus and not using it as a swear word. It means devoting more silent moments to him than talking on the mobile phone. It means living in joyful love and obedience to the word of Our Lord and the will of his Father...

In the first reading (Twenty) of this chapter, we are told: "It is not anyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'

who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?’ Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers!” None of the deeds Jesus mentions, if done apart from the Father’s will, can ever be construed as proof of true love of God. “Evil” here in the term “evil doers” means the absence of good. Evil doers are those who take part in activities (some of which may be laudable) but merit no eternal good from them. If I have read hundreds of books and am very erudite on many subjects, but ignore the Father’s will, I gain not a single thing by it. If I donate thousands of dollars and give large presents so as to match others’, but leave God out of my life, I am nothing. If I have the gift of fine diction but waste it daily in a bid to impress people with pretentious utterances, I am just a clashing gong. If I live with little reverence for the Lord, consigning him to the last place, I may someday hear Jesus say to me: “I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers!”

Love of God is not the same as giving eye-catching performances. Holiness and wisdom do not equal having much to say. Those who think otherwise may be able to fool some people. They can certainly fool themselves. But they cannot fool God.

Let there be no misunderstanding about this: Jesus is not opposed to learning or the pursuit of excellence or

the promotion of health in body, mind and soul. He does not discourage anyone from doing good.

On the contrary, he makes it abundantly clear what it is that will cause our efforts to be truly fruitful. He said, “*Remain in me*, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.”

So how do we remain in Jesus? He said, “I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. If you *keep my commandments* you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.” Keep his commandments! It is when we remain in Jesus through obedience that we become productive disciples. Jesus himself obeyed his Father to his very last breath. The harvest he was thus able to reap is bountiful, continuous and everlasting.

He said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit — fruit that will last” (Jn 15:16, NIV). Jesus does the choosing, not the other way around. He is the one who appoints his labourers, who trains them, who gives the order to go forth when they are ready. If he sends them out, the good they accomplish will endure.

In Reading Twenty-one, he says, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” Remember not to apply these sayings negatively. Jesus is not

accusing us of hypocrisy. He is warning us to be on guard against it. Not even a tiny bit should be allowed to creep in. Like leaven, a small amount will affect the whole.

We will dwell on this subject a little longer because hypocrisy is a very dangerous shortcoming, and can lead to gross superficiality, serious error, and embarrassing disillusionment. Jesus' admonition is: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Of all the faults Jesus mentions, hypocrisy is the one he comments on most often. Throughout the Gospels, hypocrites arouse his severest anger. He launches the sharpest words at them. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside may also be clean." Stop thinking you are holy when your heart is full of judging and despising, haughtiness and animosity. Stop imagining yourself an example for everyone to follow. Quit fancying that people are looking up to you. Chasten yourself before you attempt to chasten others.

"You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." For instance, just by going to church in our "Sunday best" suits does not demonstrate holiness. Knowing the prayer responses and when to sit and stand during liturgy is no

indication of love for Jesus. Greeting others after a religious service with suave pleasantries is merely an attempt at making ourselves appear better than we are.

“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.”

“You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” When we read the Bible, do we pick out only the texts we are fond of? But when we encounter passages where Jesus tells us to do what we do not like, do we skip over them quickly? Do we exempt ourselves by declaring: “I have read this old stuff before; they are passé and reserved only for beginners, not me. I am good enough, and I am fascinated by more advanced things”?

Hypocrites have a way of seeing exclusively what they want to see. They remain conveniently blind to what they disapprove. Everything they do is admirable in their own sight. Whatever conforms to their lifestyle they accept as correct. They make countless rules instantly, and all of these are interpreted to fit their ‘philosophy.’ Everyone is inferior who does not know what they know. Let an ‘inferior’ person make a suggestion, and their blood boils over. If they do not belittle and reject in public, they do so in the darkness of

their hearts. Hypocrites imagine themselves wise and knowledgeable. They are, in fact, eloquently empty and ignorant.

In the same paragraph we read, “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.” Sometimes we begin to doubt and downgrade Jesus’ teachings when we hear an opposite message from a popular person who comes along speaking what pleases our ears, someone who, because of his wealth, his position of influence, or university degrees, is able to charm many self-styled intellectuals. As well, we often find it comfortable to congregate with friends who give little prominence to Jesus but love instead to seek praise for each other’s theories and practices. How easy it is to stop believing in what Jesus considers important. “How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

Hypocrites expect everybody to love and respect them. At no time do they have love or respect for anyone other than themselves and a handful who are dear to them. Of course, when people are watching, they may condescend to give some semblance of civility towards the rest of humanity.

There are hypocrites who summarily write off rivals by branding them with the stigma of shallowness but do not admit to the errors in the hypotheses and inferences of their own criticisms. They become hostile and behave as if they know everything.

Now, to be fair, it must be pointed out that the character imperfections cited are not necessarily evidence of hypocrisy. More often than not they are unconscious habits and have no linkage to wilful or culpable blindness. The answer to the question, “Why do you see the splinter in your brother’s eye but not the plank in your own?” may legitimately be, “Because I didn’t know I was doing it.”

It is out of loving concern for our present and future happiness that Jesus instructs each of us: “You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5:48, NJB)

In Reading Twenty-two, Jesus says, “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.” Jesus does not want us to fall. And we will not if, when we hear his words, we carry them out. If we are not blown about by every wind of doctrine, if we live by “these words of mine,” Jesus’ words, our foundations are solidly built. Nothing can topple us.

“And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.”

Also in this reading, Jesus relates the parable of a king hosting a banquet for his son’s marriage. “But when

the king came in to meet the guests he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. He said to him, ‘My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?’” Jesus is cautioning: “I have invited you to my kingdom; why is it you do not wear the clothes I expect you to wear? Why do you not come the way I request? Why do you not follow my instructions?”

In the next parable Jesus warns, “But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is long delayed,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with drunkards, the servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.” Sometimes we may be tempted to think, “I am a pretty respectable citizen now. Surely I should be permitted to act impolitely towards those who work beneath me; I can use foul language to express my displeasure; I can bait my spouse into petty arguments; I can dole out my mundane observations shamelessly, and often. Surely I deserve to have any kind of entertainment I choose, to drink as much as I want, to read all the latest novels, to see any movie at the theatre or watch whatever program that is shown on television; nothing can be harmful to me. I am ‘successful’ but dissatisfied at home, surely I am entitled to engage in extra-marital liaisons.”

Do not be guided by such thoughts. A person with these dispositions could be cut off and sent to “a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and

grinding of teeth.” Such a person could tell himself, “My master is long delayed,” meaning, “I don’t have to do as he commanded just yet,” and would hear Jesus say, “The servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely.” “That servant who knew his master’s will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely... Much will be required of the person entrusted with much.”

The parable in the twenty-third reading describes a landowner who, having found no fruit from his fig tree for three years, gave orders to have it chopped off. But the gardener pleaded with him. “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.’” Jesus is saying that we still have the chance to grow up! But don’t wait indefinitely.

Please do not get the mistaken notion that Jesus has condemned us to the aforementioned punishments already. In point of fact, the opposite is true: what he is doing is telling us how to avoid them! With God’s help, it actually takes very little to redirect our lives so that our gifts and energies will not be wasted, so that we can become holy, loving, and genuinely useful for the kingdom of God. May we avail ourselves of this time of grace which God has given. May we devote some of our abilities, money and influence to the service of God, of the poor, of the weak, of those who do not know how to help themselves.

The more gifted we are, the more should we be patient, kind, humble, polite, merciful, gentle, helpful and loving towards everyone – everyone, not just our equals or those we wish to impress, but especially those under our financial or authoritative control. Let us do it sincerely for their benefit, and not to enhance our public image.

Let us also reserve time for prayer, honouring and thanking our Maker who gave us our talents and opportunities. Let us pray for the welfare of all.

What Jesus wants is found in Reading Twenty-four: “Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them.”

In the fourth paragraph Jesus says, “The light will be among you only a little while. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you.” Jesus urges us to walk in the light now, to live his gospel immediately, to follow him right away. Do not tarry. Start today. It is not that he won’t accept us if we procrastinate. He will always forgive and welcome us. But if we persist in ignoring him, hardening our hearts, refusing to go back to him, and rotting in the darkness, we may end up convicting ourselves, like Judas Iscariot.

That would lead to tragic consequences.

“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light.” And as children of light we will see, we will understand, for that is what light does: it enables one to see. As children of light, we will have power to illuminate the way for others so that they, too, may see. This is the light Jesus refers to when he says, “Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:16, NAB).

There is no paradox between the above passage and the following one: “Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention” (Mt 6:1, NJB). If you do things just to show off, “you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven” (Mt 6:1, NJB). But when you walk with Jesus, his light radiates from within; no amount of self-trumpeting can duplicate it. Everyone knows it is given by God, and glory will not be wrongly directed to you, but to “your heavenly Father.”

“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” If you live according to “my word,” that is, Jesus’ word, you really and truly deserve to be called “my” disciple, Christ’s disciple – Christian. You will know the truth – you will see, you will understand. And the truth will set you free, not restrict you. It will set free those to whom you give of yourself in loving service.

Prayer

God, I will make use of my resources.

I will develop my capabilities.

I will strive for perfection.

But I must not cling to the things that make me hollow.

It is not how highly I am esteemed which results in righteousness, but whether your word reigns over the way I live.

You do not make me all-powerful; you do not render me trouble-free.

You want me to be your child;

much good is accomplished through those who are children.

Let all thanks and praise be directed to you, Lord,
now and forever. Amen.

Reading Twenty

It is not anyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?” Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers!

Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch – and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt.

I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.

1. Mt 7:21–23 2. Jn 15:4–6 3. Jn 15:9–10 (NJB)

*

Reading Twenty-One

Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

They do all their deeds to be seen by men.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside may also be clean.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.”

You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. I do not receive glory from men. But I know that you have not the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

1. Lk 12:1 2. Mt 23:5 3. Mt 23:27–28 4. Mt 23:25–26 5. Mt 23:15 6. Lk 16:15 7. Mk 7:6–8 8. Jn 5:39–44 9. Mt 5:20 (RSV)

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Reading Twenty-Two

Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.

The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son...

But when the king came in to meet the guests he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. He said to him, "My friend how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?" But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, "Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." Many are invited, but few are chosen.

That servant who knew his master's will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely; and the servant who was ignorant of his master's will but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating shall be beaten only lightly. Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still

more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.

Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant, whom the master has put in charge of his household to distribute to them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on his arrival finds doing so. Amen, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. But if that wicked servant says to himself, “My master is long delayed,” and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with drunkards, the servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

Salt is good, but if salt itself loses its taste, with what can its flavor be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear.

And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.

1. Mt 7:24–27 2. Mt 22:2, 11–14 3. Lk 12:47–48 4. Mt 24:45–51 5. Lk 14:34–35 6. Mt 10:28 (NAB)

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Reading Twenty-Three

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to his vinedresser, "For three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied, "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more.

1. Lk 13:6-9 2. Jn 15:1-2 (NJB)

*

Reading Twenty-Four

Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master's return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them.

Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

The light will be among you only a little while. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness may not overcome you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light.

If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

1. Lk 12:35–37 2. Mt 11:28–30 3. Jn 8:12 4. Jn 12:35–36
5. Jn 8:31–32 (NAB)

LIVE JESUS' GOSPEL

Part 2

To live Jesus' gospel means to act upon what he taught and not just to theorize about it. Living his gospel also means practising what is in *Jesus'* gospel. We may be able to learn something about God from other religions and thinkers, and we are not forbidden to learn from them. But if we profess to be Christians, we must be committed to Christ. God said of him, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" (Lk 9:35, NIV).

When Jesus appeared on earth, wise men came seeking him. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, Wise Men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who was born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him'" (Mt 2:1-2, RSV). When they located him, what did they do? They stopped looking for someone else! "And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage" (Mt 2:9-11, NAB). They knelt down and bowed low before him. They adored him. They were

thrilled to meet him and were convinced that he was the king they had set out to find.

And when they were cautioned to go home by an alternative road, they did just that. “And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route” (Mt 2:12, NIV). They changed course. They changed direction. They changed plans. And by changing, they escaped all the pitfalls and snares of their former way.

Be like wise men. Having found Jesus, be sensible enough to put your faith in him. By all means examine him from every angle; search out the height and depth and length and breadth of his words and deeds. Compare him with others, if you wish. But be satisfied that Jesus is the Son of God; his words are words of life, his gospel, when lived, leads to true happiness. Delight in him. Worship him. Be devoted to him.

You heard Jesus say in Reading Twenty-four, “*Come to me*, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and *learn from me*.” “Come to me... learn from me.” All Christians should respond to this invitation wholeheartedly. We have gone to hear famous speakers, we have read books by popular authors, we have looked for advice from a variety of sources; yet the one person Christians should study under, first of all and above all, ought to be Jesus Christ himself. We should let his teachings form the basis for our way of life. Let them be the solid foundation on which all our beliefs are built. Let them

set the standard for how we think. If other doctrines and principles do not agree with Jesus', let us have the good sense to stay away from them. Let us be wise enough to take a different path.

In Reading Twenty-five, Jesus reiterates the invitation to come to him: "Let anyone who is thirsty *come to me!* Let anyone who believes in me come and drink! As scripture says, 'From his heart shall flow streams of living water.'" From the heart of the person who goes to Jesus in faith the Holy Spirit will be sent forth to give life abundantly.

"The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches." When one allows the life of God to come in, the effect can far transcend its tiny beginning. Transformations will take place not only in him, but also in those who draw near.

In Reading Twenty-six, Jesus promises, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

He goes on to say, "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." This is a compelling reason for Jesus to answer our prayers: that the Father is glorified. Therefore, go to Jesus for everything. Give him numerous occasions to heap praise and honour upon his Father.

He says, "Your Father knows what you need before

you ask him.” Just because God knows our needs does not mean we shouldn’t talk to him about them. It is indeed proper to do so, for when we pour our hearts out to him in faith and simplicity, we put him at the centre of our being, we affirm our dependence on him, we acknowledge his ability to control the future. If we do not place our petitions before him and something good comes our way, we might be tempted to boast, “What good luck I have,” or “I deserve this; I worked so hard for it.” But if we do appeal to him and receive what is sought, we are more likely to say, “Thank you, God. Praise you.” We will be glorifying our Father along with his Son.

Let us continue on this important subject of prayer. “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation”’” (Lk 11:1–4, NIV). Jesus’ reply meant, for one thing, that prayer should be God-centred and childlike. The goal of prayer is not the fancy things we can say or do. The mark of a person who prays well is not how much he thinks he knows about the topic. The mark of a person who prays well is the childlike trust he puts in his heavenly Father. “In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the

kingdom of Heaven” (Mt 18:3, NJB). In saying this, Jesus shows how we ought to relate to God and, consequently, the correct attitude to have when we pray.

Sometimes we may repeat short prayers like the Our Father. Doing this reflectively, in the prayer of meditation, does not constitute “babbling” or “heaping up empty phrases” (see Mt 6:7).

We should say formal prayers, but not mindlessly or just to get them over with. We should pray attentively and reverently, coming closer to God in friendship.

Prayer is not doing God a favour. Prayer is doing a favour for ourselves and for our neighbours. It is more beneficial to everyone if we pray with our hearts – purposefully and out of love – rather than grudgingly or hurriedly. It takes just as much time to pray politely as to pray rudely. Why not put in a bit of effort to concentrate on praying with courtesy? After all, we are speaking with our Creator.

The greatest prayer of the Church is the liturgy of the Holy Eucharist. Let us celebrate it consciously. Let us live it actively. Let it be for us an experience of God. If we are to pass judgment on the quality of a particular Sunday service, the criteria should not be the length of its duration, the calibre of the sermon, the choice of music by the choir, or whether other parishioners noticed us. If we are to evaluate, it should be done on the basis of the intensity of our own participation.

Pray and be exceedingly glad because prayer is a source of life for the whole world. Prayer constitutes the

easiest way of making God and his love manifest to his people. Those who are precious to you need your prayers. Those who are in trouble, including strangers, need your prayers. Imagine their gratitude when they find out eventually, in Heaven, that somewhere along the way your prayers helped to call down divine assistance in their hour of need!

Through prayer we are united with God, we receive joy and peace, we obtain guidance and blessings. Through prayer we will have a way out of temptations. Through prayer we will be protected from sin.

Pray in the morning as you awaken; pray before and after your meals and your work; pray when you get ready for bed at night. Keep alive the spirit of prayer throughout the day, knowing that God loves you immensely.

If you have not been setting aside some time each day for the Lord, perhaps you can at least give him your spare moments while travelling in the car or bus, while standing in line, while awaiting your turn at the doctor's office or elsewhere, while walking alone, when you cannot sleep, when you are struggling with difficulties,... Your life will not be boring, and you will do much good for yourself and for others.

To spend five minutes now and again with God in your heart (a very special place) is not a frivolous idea. It is possibly the beginning of the prayer of contemplation. Think about it, *contemplation*, as the word-origin indicates, means being with (*con*) God in a place set

apart (*templum*). Don't you know that you are a temple (*templum*) of the Holy Spirit?

As Jesus prayed frequently, so should we. As Jesus fasted, so should we. As he gave of himself for the good of humanity, so should we.

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest’” (Mt 9:36–38, RSV). Let us do as Jesus requests and offer this prayer to our Father. Let us go further and search ourselves to discover how we may, in one form or another, be an answer to the prayer for more labourers.

Reading Twenty-seven contains three post-Resurrection narratives. “Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Mag'dalene.” Mary received here a most wonderful sign of Jesus' affection. At his crucifixion she had remained loyal as the crowds turned against him. She did not run away while others fled. She believed in him even when many lost faith. If you wish to be special in Jesus' eyes, let your allegiance to him never falter.

Jesus also appeared to the disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. You will recall that they had gone fishing all night but caught nothing. Just as they were about to give up, Jesus called out from the beach, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they

did and were rewarded with a huge catch. We, too, if we do what Jesus says, even if it seems impractical, will enjoy magnificent results in our endeavours – results beyond our wildest fantasy.

And when we have attained our heart's desires, when we have achieved our earthly goals, perhaps we will realize how insignificant they are after all. Like Peter, perhaps we will let go and turn our attention wholly to the Lord. "When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea" (Jn 21:7, RSV). The fish and his success at catching them were no longer important. To come to Jesus, to be with him, to be his friend, that was important.

Notice that Peter did not beg to walk on the water this time. He swam, focusing on Jesus, not on himself.

In this reading, Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" If Jesus addresses the question to you, what would be your response?

The final reading, the twenty-eighth, is a brief summary. Jesus again urges: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words."

Watch the last sentence. A person's lack of love for Jesus is shown in unwillingness to obey him. For this individual, Jesus' words rank second, or third, or are totally subordinate to other norms.

Jesus reminds us, "But seek first the kingdom of

God and his righteousness.” Seek first that God should be your king, that he reign over you, that his rules be the rules you live by. Seek first to rely on him as the benevolent king who looks out for your good, defends you and provides for you. Seek first what he regards as righteous, not what unbelievers say it is. “And all these things will be *given* you besides.”

Jesus loves you. Do you know how much? Do you know how much the Father loves Jesus? There is no love stronger than that which God the Father has for his Son. And yet that is exactly how much Jesus loves you. For he says: “As the Father loves me, so I also love you.” In the same way! Just as profoundly. Just as tenderly. Just as limitlessly. Remain in his love. “If you *keep my commandments*, you will remain in my love.”

Then, in the last line of this reading, we come to the closing verse of the Gospel according to Matthew. Jesus says, “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” Keep that forever in your mind. Know without a doubt that Jesus is constantly present in you. He is present not only when you call upon him but even when you have forgotten him. Whether you feel neglected or restless, downcast or weary, he has not left you. At the times when you have problems, or when you doubt your own adequacy and worth, when you experience a sense of meaninglessness, when you feel unimportant and small, he remains near.

Moreover, “I am with you” also means “I am not against you! I am for you. Everything that I have ever

done on earth has been for your sake. I created the world for you. I came to live, suffered, died, rose from the dead – all for you. Everything I have ever taught is for your good. Every word I have spoken is to bring you understanding and joy. Every commandment I have given is for your well-being.

“I am with you! I am by your side! I am on your side!”

Prayer

Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit,
you love your people,
you care deeply for them,
your heart is always open to your children.
And so you teach them with patience.
You prune them when they do not grow.
You look for them when they are lost.
You bring them back in the way they learn best.
Praise you, Lord.
Thank you for everything.

Reading Twenty-Five

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink! As scripture says, “From his heart shall flow streams of living water.”

The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, at once he starts to reap because the harvest has come.

It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples.

1. Jn 7:37–38 2. Mt 13:31–32 3. Mk 4:26–29 4. Jn 15:8 (NJB)

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Reading Twenty-Six

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Everything is possible for one who believes.

Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

1. Jn 15:7 2. Jn 14:13–14 3. Mt 7:7–11 4. Mk 11:23–24
5. Mk 9:23 6. Jn 16:24 7. Mt 6:5–8 8. Lk 11:2–4
(NIV)

*

Reading Twenty-Seven

Now when he rose early on the first day of the week,

he appeared first to Mary Mag'dalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tibe'ri-as; and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathan'a-el of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zeb'edee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Jesus said to them, "Children, you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish.

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs."

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should

be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.”

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.

1. Mk 16:9 2. Jn 21:1–3 3. Jn 21:5–6 4. Jn 21:12 5. Jn 21:15 6. Lk 24:45–53 (RSV)

*

Reading Twenty-Eight

You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make

our dwelling with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.

I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness. And if anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: the word that I spoke, it will condemn him on the last day.

As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.

So do not worry and say, "What are we to eat?" or "What are we to drink?" or "What are we to wear?" All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.

I have told you this while I am with you. The Advocate, the holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name – he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.

1. Mt 22:37–40 2. Jn 14:23–24 3. Jn 12:46–48 4. Jn 15:9–14 5. Mt 6:31–33 6. Jn 14:25–27 7. Mt 28:20
(NAB)

An Exercise

Consider this question: How has living the gospel more attentively affected my attitudes and behaviour lately towards the following? Use as reference points the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control.

my spouse

my children

my parents

my other relatives

my friends

my fellow workers

the poor – in material possessions

– in intelligence

– in education

– in looks

– in sophistication

– in personality

– in efficiency

– in emotional and/or physical health

myself

money

social status

fear of unbelievers' ridicule

my faith in Jesus' way

God

Jesus

We now wind up with three central aspects of Christian life – companionship with Jesus, promulgation of his teachings, and Holy Communion.

First. A key principle of spiritual priorities can be seen in this passage: “He now went up onto the mountain and summoned those he wanted. So they came to him and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to proclaim the message, with power to drive out devils” (Mk 3:13–15, NJB). Wherein lies the special significance of the passage? It lies in the order of importance Jesus places on the following: before he dispatched his apostles to preach and cast out evil spirits, he appointed them first of all *to be his companions*. When he calls us, it is first and foremost for the same purpose: to be his companions, to be with him.

How do we become Jesus’ companions? How do we become his friends? He said, “You are my friends if you do what I command” (Jn 15:14, NIV). The requirement is undeviating: keep his commandments!

Many of us yearn to serve God in some way. Many of us long to do something of value for him. These are normal aspirations. But it should be noted that, to Jesus, service does not mean extraordinary exploits. The tasks he has in mind are those he exemplified in the washing

of his apostles' feet at the Last Supper. We please God by ministering to our neighbours in small kindnesses, not by driving out demons or performing other phenomenal feats. "Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Lk 10:20, NAB).

There may be occasions, once in a while, when he does give us a tiny extra assignment. But that is his decision. It is his choice. We have to await his order.

Jesus waited (see Lk 2:51–52). John the Baptist waited (see Lk 1:80). Even after the disciples walked with Jesus for three years, they were made to wait longer. Before Jesus ascended into heaven he told them, "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk 24:49, RSV). They had to wait for the Holy Spirit's descent. They had to stay in Jerusalem. They did not know for how long.

And this was how they waited. "Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God" (Lk 24:52–53, NIV). They waited joyfully. They praised God continually. They remained in the temple, not going off in their own directions. That is how we ought to spend our days. Let the Holy Spirit determine when to clothe us with his power for any additional mission he chooses for us. In the meantime, do not allow boredom and depression to enter. Let us be occupied with what is constructive and joyful, remembering Jesus' words,

“Many who are first will be last, and the last, first” (Mt 19:30, NJB).

To wait upon the Lord with joy and patience requires great love. To wait upon the Lord with joy and patience is loving him greatly. And patience is less difficult to acquire if we understand that time seems to creep along very slowly only when we look ahead into the future. If we look back instead, we can see that years and years have gone by in the twinkling of an eye. Therefore, do not anticipate the next ‘big’ event by counting the hours; do not sit around and let the present crawl sluggishly by. Do cheerfully what is there to do today, help the person who needs you, arrange some recreation, pray, become more and more an obedient companion of Jesus, and tomorrow will arrive just as quickly as yesterday went by.

Second. When Jesus gave the apostles their ministry, what did he intend them to preach? Examine Mk 3:14 (NJB) again. “He appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to proclaim *the message*,” Jesus’ message: the gospel! Luke recorded the following when, earlier, Jesus had ordered his disciples to go forth, permitting them a foretaste of their up-coming duties: “So they set out and went from village to village proclaiming *the good news*” (Lk 9:6, NJB). The “good news,” that is, Jesus’ gospel. In Matthew 28:18–20 (RSV), Jesus issued this great commission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe *all that I have commanded you.*”

In the same way, the apostles of today are asked to teach what Jesus commanded. They are to spread his gospel everywhere, urging his people to come to him, exhorting them to learn from him.

“Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and his teaching made a deep impression on the people because he taught them with authority, unlike their own scribes” (Mt 7:28–29, NJB). “His teaching,” what he considers important, makes deep impressions on people. It affects those who hear. It leaves lasting imprints on their hearts and minds. If Jesus sends us out, let us be sure to promulgate his words. Let us promote his messages. Let us stress what he stresses. His power accompanies his commands. All authority has been given to him, both in heaven and on earth.

“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, at once he starts to reap because the harvest has come” (Mk 4:26–29, NJB). When the words of Jesus are sown into receptive hearts, they will germinate and take root. We do not have to worry about the results. The gospel will do its appointed work. You can be sure of that.

So, let us raise up Jesus' teachings. "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops" (Mt 10:27, NJB). "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:14–15, RSV). "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32, RSV). Jesus is the one to be elevated, not someone else. When that is done, he will draw his people. And he will draw them, not to any other human being, but to himself. That is as it should be.

Third. Before discussing the next point, let us learn from the woman who showered her love on Jesus without being coerced. She earned her place in the gospel. "When he was in Bethany reclining at table in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, costly genuine spikenard. She broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head. There were some who were indignant. 'Why has there been this waste of perfumed oil? It could have been sold for more than three hundred days' wages and the money given to the poor.' They were infuriated with her. Jesus said, 'Let her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. The poor you will always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could. She has anticipated anointing my body for burial. Amen, I say to you, wherever the

gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (Mk 14:3–9, NAB).

This woman did not have to give the perfume to Jesus. No one was compelling her to do so. Yet she did it gratuitously, despite much criticism, and with considerable extravagance.

We, too, can be extravagant to Jesus by voluntarily doing all that he requests in the gospel, and not just coasting along with the bare minimum. We can devote more attention to him – especially in prayer – and a little less to eating and drinking, shopping, small talk, music, television, magazines, computers, games, sports, and other forms of amusement. We can lead more holy lives, giving increased quiet time to listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, worshipping and thanking God, interceding for sinners and unbelievers and offering penance on their behalf. We can lay down our lives for our sons and daughters, for our husbands or wives, relatives, friends, God’s other children, and for his Church.

Now, as Jesus was gracious to the woman at Bethany, so is he gracious to us: he has given us an additional way to become his companions. Without going into any depth, we conclude this book by mentioning it.

The term *companion* is a composite of the prefix *com* and the Latin *panis*. *Com* means ‘with’ and *panis* means ‘bread.’ A companion is one who shares bread

with you. When Jesus shares bread, he shares himself, for he says, “I am the bread of life... This bread is my flesh... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them” (Jn 6:48, 51, 56, NIV). This is Holy Communion. When we partake of the Sacred Bread we become Jesus’ friends in the closest interrelationship – we remain continually in him, and he in us.

Holy Communion is not just something nice to do. It is vital. Jesus says, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” It is that vital. Conversely, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” (Jn 6:53, 54, NIV). Beginning this instant!

What do ‘life’ and ‘eternal life’ mean in the above context? Each kind of being has its own distinctive type of life or existence. God has God-life, the angels have angelic-life, and humans have human-life. These are followed by animal-life, plant-life, and inanimate existence. In the Gospels according to Mark, Matthew, and Luke, God’s life is often referred to as *the kingdom of God*, or *the reign of God*, or *the kingdom of Heaven*. We have come across these expressions several times. In the Gospel according to John, the terms employed to denote God-life are simply *life* and *eternal life* – the life that has always existed and will forever exist, the life that God wants to share lovingly with his people. When we receive Holy Communion, this life comes into us. “As the living Father sent me and I draw *life* from the

Father, so whoever eats me will also draw *life* from me” (Jn 6:57, NJB).

Holy Communion is life-giving. What should we do about it? Two things. Both are requested by Jesus. Number one: “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body’” (Mt 26:26, RSV). In other words, go to Holy Communion. Take, eat! And perhaps we might go not only on Sundays, but on some weekdays as well, not as an obligation but as a way of nurturing our friendship with Jesus. We can be extravagant in this way.

Number two: “Then he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me’” (Lk 22:19, NJB). Remember him! Remember him! Do not go to Communion as a matter of routine. Do not take Jesus for granted. Bring him to mind over and over again. Let him be the object and centre of your attention. Let his life be reinforced in you.

Remembrance of Jesus is a superlative prayer. No word needs to be spoken. He has said, “And look, I am with you always” (Mt 28:20, NJB). This is one promise you must never forget. Believe it with all your might. Jesus is truly present. He is close to you. He knows your problems and takes care of you. Trust him. Trust his love. Trust his providence. When you turn habitually to him and away from yourself, you will begin to experience the peace he promised. “I am the bread of

life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst” (Jn 6:35, NAB). There will be no more pining and craving, no more hungering and thirsting. A peace that surpasses all understanding will descend upon you. There will be quiet joy.

Keep remembering Jesus and you will soon discover that he himself continually remembers you. He never takes you for granted. He is always bringing you to mind, putting you at the centre of his attention. Again and again he proves to be the one who does not forget. He is the extravagant friend, he is the true companion. He it is who, day after day, longs to share bread with you. He it is who, time and time again, hungers and thirsts to give you his very own life.

“Then many of his disciples who were listening said, ‘This saying is hard; who can accept it?’ Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, ‘Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.’ Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. And he said, ‘For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by my Father.’

“As a result of this, many [of] his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, ‘Do you also want to leave?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?’ He was referring to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot; it was he who would betray him, one of the Twelve” (Jn 6:60–71, NAB).

Final Exhortation

At the wedding feast in Cana, Mother Mary, after informing her Son that “They have no wine,” gave this instruction to the servers: “Do whatever he tells you!” (Jn 2:5, NJB) Immediately, all the servers responded wholeheartedly to Jesus’ subsequent commands, and thereby assisted in the commencement of his public ministry on earth – the most fruitful ministry the world has ever known.

As you hear the instruction “Do whatever Jesus tells you!” may you be moved to put Jesus’ every word into practice from this day forward, living a life of fruitfulness for the love of God and neighbour.

Keep in mind Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the sower and the seed.

“The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown. As soon as they hear, Satan comes at once and takes away the word sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground who, when they hear the word, receive it at once with joy. But they have no root; they last only for a time. Then when tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Those sown among thorns are another sort. They are the people who hear the word, but worldly anxiety, the lure of riches, and the craving for other things intrude and choke the word, and

it bears no fruit. But those sown on rich soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” (Mk 4:14-20, NAB)

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