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## Hannah is barren

Monday

1 Samuel 1:1-8

*Her rival made her burden heavier.*

Jay Kesler

tells this story in his book *Growing Places*.

Late one night

he was walking down a street in India.

A boy with no legs hobbled up on crutches and asked for money.

Jay obliged him generously.

Jay turned and continued his walk.

He hadn't gone ten steps

when he heard a terrible racket.

He turned around and saw several beggars swarming over the boy.

They were stealing from him the money he'd just begged.

Like Peninnah,

who ridiculed Hannah for being barren,

the other beggars

made the boy's burden even heavier to carry.

Do we add to the sorrow

of those already heavily burdened?

"Kindness is a language the deaf can hear and the blind can see." Anonymous

## Hannah asks God for a child

Tuesday

1 Samuel 1:9-20

*She gave birth to Samuel.*

Twelve-year-old Irmgard Wood lived in Stuttgart, Germany, during World War II.

One morning her mother and sisters saw an American plane catch fire and fall from the sky.

Instinctively, they prayed for the pilot, even though he was an American.

Years later, the Woods migrated to America. Irmgard's mother got a job in a hospital in the San Fernando Valley in California.

One day a patient detected her German accent and asked her where she lived in Germany. "Stuttgart," she said.

The patient replied, "I almost got killed in Stuttgart during World War II.

One morning my plane caught fire and fell from the sky.

Somebody must have been praying for me."

How much faith do we have in prayer?

Do we pray for our enemies?

"More things are wrought through prayer than this world dreams of." Alfred Lord Tennyson

## God calls Samuel

Wednesday

1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20

*Samuel said, "Speak, Lord; I am listening."*

Robert Moffat

was a Scottish missionary in South Africa.

He returned home

to try to recruit other people to join him in this work.

One cold night,

only a few old women and a boy showed up to hear him preach at one of the churches.

He was terribly disappointed.

He thought to himself,

"It's hardly worth my while to give this talk."

But Moffat

put his heart and soul in it anyway.

The boy was thrilled by the challenge.

He never forgot it.

When he grew up, he became a doctor

and went to work as a missionary

among the unreached tribes of South Africa.

That boy was the great Dr. David Livingstone.

Do we try to teach young people

how to listen to God's word to them?

"Let us listen to the Gospel as if Christ himself stood before us."

St. Augustine

## Israel takes the ark into battle

Thursday

1 Samuel 4:1-11

*They were defeated; the ark was captured.*

Eli's sons were evil men.  
They turned away from their father  
when he tried to correct them.  
Finally Eli warned them:

"If a man sins against another man,  
God can defend him;  
but who can defend a man  
who sins against the LORD?" 1 Samuel 2:25

Eli's words proved to be prophetic,  
as today's reading points out.  
Their sins made them unworthy  
of God's presence in the ark.  
God refused to defend them  
in their battle against the Philistines.

Do we ignore God's law,  
debase his presence by our conduct,  
and still expect all kinds of special blessings  
from him?

"It is not well for a man to pray cream  
and live skimmed milk." Henry Ward Beecher,  
*Proverbs from Plymouth Pulpit*

## The Israelites demand a king

Friday

1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22

*God told Samuel to anoint a king.*

In many ancient societies,  
kings were more than just human rulers  
of human beings.  
They believed they got their right to rule  
from God.  
They even demanded godlike treatment.  
Israel always looked upon God as their king:  
"The LORD became king of his people Israel  
when their tribes and leaders  
were gathered together." Deuteronomy 33:5

This explains God's remark to Samuel  
in today's reading,  
that in demanding a worldly king,  
the people  
"are rejecting me as their king." (NAB)

But for some mysterious reason,  
God yields to their demand.

To what extent does Christ reign as king  
in our hearts?

"Jesus Christ will be Lord of all,  
or he will not be Lord at all." St. Augustine

## God chooses Saul as king

Saturday

1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1

*Samuel anointed Saul.*

Saul was unusually gifted as a person.  
He "was a foot taller than anyone else  
in Israel and more handsome as well."  
1 Samuel 9:2

After Saul was anointed,  
"the spirit of God took control of him."  
The people were amazed, saying,  
"Has Saul become a prophet?" 1 Samuel 10:10, 11

"After Saul became king of Israel,  
he fought all his enemies everywhere. . . .  
Wherever he fought he was victorious."  
1 Samuel 14:47

God had blessed Saul in every way.  
If anyone seemed destined for greatness,  
it was Saul.

How has God blessed us  
similar to the way he blessed Saul?

"What is man, that you think of him;  
mere man, that you care for him? . . .  
You crowned him with glory and honor.  
You appointed him ruler  
over everything you made." Psalm 8:4-6

## Saul disobeys God

Monday 1 Samuel 15:16-23

*God rejected Saul.*

Samuel rebuked Saul for not following customary battle procedure and enforcing the "ban" against the Amalekites. The ban was a primitive religious practice by which everything captured in battle was destroyed.

Instead of putting all the cattle to the sword, Saul permitted his men to take some cattle and sacrifice them to God.

At issue was the teaching that obedience to the Law is far better than sacrifice. The prophets constantly reiterated this point.  
(Amos 5:22-24, Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:7-8)

How guilty are we of praying to and worshiping God in church, but not always following his teachings in life?

"What I want from you is plain and clear: I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices. I would rather have my people know me than have them burn offerings to me."  
Hosea 6:5-6

## God chooses David

Tuesday 1 Samuel 16:1-13

*Samuel anointed David as king.*

The patron of parish priests is St. John Vianney, the Curé of Ars.

He performed so poorly in his priestly studies that seminary officials seriously questioned if he were intelligent enough to be ordained.

The pastor to whom he was assigned after ordination considered him too stupid to preach.

Yet, as the years passed, people came to the curé from all over Europe

to seek his advice and to confess to him. Some days he spent up to 14 hours in the confessional.

David too was an unlikely candidate to succeed Saul as king. He was considered so unlikely that his father, Jesse, had him tend the sheep while his seven brothers met with Samuel. Yet it was David whom God chose as king.

Do we tend to judge people on the basis of externals?

"Man looks at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7

## David demonstrates courage

Wednesday 1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51

*David defeated Goliath.*

Don Bell was an infantryman in France during World War II. He now makes his living as a cowboy in Byron, Wyoming.

One of his favorite stories is about a fellow infantryman from West Virginia. A miner who came from a mining family, he always carried a little chip of coal in his pocket.

Whenever the going got extra difficult, he'd reach into his pocket, squeeze the chip of coal in his hand, and say to himself,

"If I can take the mines, I can take this." It always gave him the courage to go on.

Today's reading shows that David, too, had the capacity to reach down inside himself and find the courage to do a difficult job.

What is the "piece of coal" that we squeeze and draw courage from when we need it?

"Courage is fear that has said its prayers."  
Anonymous

## Saul plots to kill David

Thursday 1 Samuel 18:6-9; 19:1-7

*Jonathan saved David's life.*

Dr. Joseph Matarazzo was once the head of the medical psychology department of the University of Oregon.

The Associated Press quoted him as having said that "more psychotherapy is accomplished between good friends at coffee every morning at ten o'clock than all day long in doctors' offices."

Dr. Matarazzo says that a good talk with a good friend is what is most needed when things get tough. The trouble, he says, is the "scarcity" of good friends in today's world.

The conversation between Jonathan and David in today's reading is a good illustration of what Dr. Matarazzo was talking about.

Do we have a friend to whom we can turn in times of need?  
Are we such a friend to others?

"A loyal friend is like a safe shelter; find one, and you have found a treasure."  
Sirach 6:14

## David spares Saul's life

Friday 1 Samuel 24:3-21

*David respected Saul's role as king.*

We've all heard stories about people who have dropped out of the Church because a pastor treated them harshly.

It's understandable that an insensitive pastor might hurt us. But it's unthinkable that we should use that hurt as the reason for discontinuing the practice of our faith. It's tantamount to leaping overboard

because we don't like one of the crew members on a ship.

When difficulties arise with a pastor, we should recall David's reasoning in today's reading.

David drew an important distinction between the *person* and the *role* a person has in life. Saul may have been a bad person, but he was, nonetheless, God's chosen king.

How do we handle a personal dislike for a pastor or a minister of God?

Lord, help us keep our perspective—always.

## Jonathan is killed

Saturday 2 Samuel 1:1-27 *passim*

*David eulogized Jonathan and Saul.*

A father told author John Powell about his son's death in an auto accident. He also told him how he composed a letter and slipped it under his son's body in the casket. An excerpt from the letter reads:

"I never told you how much I loved you. I never told you what a large part of my heart you occupied. . . .

But now you are dead. . . .

So I am writing this note and hoping that God will tell one of his angels to read this to you.

I want you to know of my love for you, and my sorrow

that I never told you of that love."

*Will the Real Me Please Stand Up?*

Why is it that we must wait for people to die before we let them know how we feel about them?

Is there someone we should express our feelings toward, but haven't done so for some reason?

Jesus said, "I love you just as the Father loves me." John 15:9

## David is anointed king

Monday

2 Samuel 5:1-7, 10

*The Lord was with him.*

J. S. Abbott  
wrote a biography of Napoleon Bonaparte.  
In it, "the little corporal" says:

"I have so inspired men  
that they would die for me. . . .  
The lightning of my eye, my voice,  
a word from me,  
then the sacred fire was kindled in their hearts.  
I do, indeed, possess the secret  
of this magical power that lifts the soul."

David, too, possessed a priceless charism  
that could lift people's soul  
and inspire them to do remarkable things.

David's natural charism was greatly enhanced  
by grace.

In the words of today's reading,  
the "LORD God Almighty was with him."

How are we putting our gifts to work  
for God?

"What we are is God's gift to us.  
What we become is our gift back to God."  
Raphael Simon

## David brings the ark to Jerusalem

Tuesday

2 Samuel 6:12-15, 17-19

*Everyone rejoiced.*

The film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*  
rekindled interest in the ark of the covenant.  
The ark was a wooden box, about four feet  
by two feet by two feet, overlaid with gold.  
On the top of the ark were two cherubim  
whose wings formed a canopy. (Exodus 25:20)

"There was nothing inside . . .  
except the two stone tablets  
which Moses had placed there at Mount Sinai,

when the LORD made a covenant  
with the people of Israel." 1 Kings 8:9

The ark  
symbolized God's presence among his people.  
2 Maccabees 2:5 says  
that Jeremiah hid the ark in a cave  
when the Temple was destroyed in 587 B.C.  
It has never been found.

When and where do we experience  
God's presence most vividly and joyfully?

"Do not be afraid or discouraged,  
for I, the LORD your God, am with you  
wherever you go." Joshua 1:9

## God makes a promise to David

Wednesday

2 Samuel 7:4-17

*"Your kingdom will last forever."*

God's promise to David is the cornerstone  
of Israel's hope for a messiah.  
He will come from David's line,  
establish God's kingdom in Israel,  
and extend it to the ends of the earth.

The word *messiah* is Hebrew.  
It's rendered *christos* in Greek,  
from which we get our word *Christ*.  
The word *messiah*  
is best translated "anointed" in English.

The fulfillment of God's promise to David  
was realized in Jesus. The angel told Mary:

"He will be great and  
will be called the Son of the Most High God.  
The Lord God will make him a king,  
as his ancestor David was, and . . .  
his kingdom will never end!" Luke 1:32-33

Are we letting the kingdom of God  
take strong root in our own heart?

"I have a great need for Christ;  
I have a great Christ for my need."

Charles H. Spurgeon

## David sits before the Lord

Thursday 2 Samuel 7:18-19, 24-29

*David prayed to the Lord.*

In a Washington, D.C., cathedral there's a statue of Abraham Lincoln at prayer. It's the work of artist Spencer Houk.

Houk got his inspiration for the statue from a story that his grandfather told over and over. One day he was walking through a woods in Gettysburg. Suddenly he came upon a kneeling figure. It was President Lincoln.

Lincoln was a man of prayer. Like David, he drew strength from God by going off alone and praying.

How often do we turn to God in prayer?

"Meditation is not an escape from daily living, but a preparation for it. . . . Like pearl divers, meditators plunge deep into the inner ocean of consciousness and hope to come swimming back to the surface with jewels of great price." Ardis Whitman

## David sins

Friday 2 Samuel 11:1-17 passim

*David compounded his sin.*

Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons* is based on the life of St. Thomas More. A moving scene occurs when Lord Norfolk tries to persuade More to sign a document swearing that Henry VIII's marriage is lawful.

When More refuses, Norfolk responds something like this:

"Confound it all, Thomas. Can't you do what I did and sign it to keep the king happy?"

Who knows if his marriage was legal or not?" More refuses.

Norfolk not only sinned; he compounded his sin by trying to persuade More to sin also.

Do we sometimes find one sin leading us to yet another one?

"Sin is like circles in the water when a stone is thrown into it; one produces another—when anger was in Cain's heart, murder was not far off." Philip Henry

## Nathan confronts David

Saturday 2 Samuel 12:1-7, 10-17

*David acknowledged his sin.*

Babe Ruth drifted away from his faith during his great baseball career.

Toward the end of his life, Ruth had to undergo a serious operation. One of his closest friends, Paul Carey, said to him one night, "Don't you think you ought to put your house in order?"

The Babe said later:

"I didn't dodge the long, challenging look in his eyes. I knew what he meant. . . . I nodded, and Paul got up, called in a chaplain, and I made a full confession. . . . As I lay in bed that evening, I thought to myself what a comfortable feeling to be free."

Is our own "house" in order? Would we have the courage to confront a friend as Carey did Ruth and Nathan did David?

"If you are weak enough to sin, do not be too proud to recognize the fact." Louis Evelyn

## Shimei curses David

Monday 2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30; 16:5-13

*David ignored the curse.*

A Near Eastern legend says that Abraham always postponed his breakfast until a hungry person came by to share it.

One day an old man came walking by, and Abraham invited the man to eat with him. But when Abraham heard the old man utter a pagan blessing over his food, he drove him from the table.

A few minutes later Abraham heard God's voice say:

"Abraham! Abraham!  
I've supplied that unbeliever with food for 80 years.  
Couldn't you have tolerated him for one meal?"

It takes a big person to overlook the curses and the shortcomings of other people. That's what David did in today's reading.

When people say things against us, or do something to ruffle us, how do we respond?

"We are as big as the things that we let get us down." Anonymous

## Absalom is killed

Tuesday 2 Samuel 18:9-19:3 passim

*David mourned his son.*

Some years ago the *Amarillo Globe* carried the letter of a father to his dead son. The boy had been killed in Vietnam. The father described to his son the moment he heard the news in these moving words:

"How can I tell you how much like death life was at that instant?

I pictured you  
as clearly as I have ever seen you. . . .  
You, Mike, shot down in battle?  
Preposterous, a lie.

That you could have lain dead for days without our having known it, or sensed it, was impossible."

This father, like David, mourned the loss of his son.

He would have given anything for a few hours with his son to tell him how much he loved him.

How do we express our love for the members of our family—in an explicit way?

Lord, help us  
show our love for others, concretely,  
just as you showed your love for us, concretely.

## David numbers the people

Wednesday 2 Samuel 24:2, 9-17

*David repented his lack of trust.*

The great Philippine leader Carlos Romulo used to say that his people had an expression that covered a great multitude of needs and situations. They would simply say *Bahala na*, which means "Put your trust in God."

David showed a lack of "*Bahala na*," or trust in God, in today's reading.

The purpose of counting the people was to see how many were available for military service. In biblical times, such a census reflected an inadequate trust in God. It showed a reliance on human resources for protection, rather than on God. Even Joab, David's general, tried to dissuade him from taking the census. (2 Samuel 24:3)

Later, David himself repented his lack of trust.

How is our own trust in God?

"Trust in the LORD.  
Have faith, do not despair.  
Trust in the LORD." Psalm 27:14



## David dies

Thursday

1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12

*David gave advice to Solomon.*

Jack Kelly was the father of Grace Kelly. She eventually became Princess Grace of Monaco.

Jack Kelly began life as a common bricklayer in Philadelphia. Eventually he acquired his own construction company. In his last will he wrote this to his children:

"I can give you only worldly goods . . . but if I had the choice I would give you character . . . and I hope a sense of humor."

David says something similar to his son Solomon in today's reading: "Take courage and be a man. Keep the mandate of the LORD, your God." (NAB)

What parting advice about life would we give to those we love, if we were to die today? Do we live that advice in our own lives?

"Let us live that when we come to die, even the undertaker will be sorry." Mark Twain

## Sirach eulogizes David

Friday

Sirach 47:2-11

*The Lord forgave him and exalted him.*

At 16, Thomas Merton was orphaned.

At 23, he found Christ.

At 26, he put all he owned in a duffel bag and entered a Trappist monastery in Gethsemane, Kentucky.

He remained there until he died in 1969.

Mark Van Doren eulogized Merton in words something like this:

"The best bottle of wine tipped over all at once and spilled.

Catch it, save it, but nobody could. Now, nothing's left but the fragrance."

Sirach eulogized David in similar words in today's reading.

The most moving line of the eulogy is, "The LORD forgave him his sins and exalted his strength forever." (NAB)

What would we like someone to say of us by way of a eulogy when we die?

"Life must be lived forwards but can only be understood backwards."

Soren Kierkegaard

## God offers to bless Solomon

Saturday

1 Kings 3:4-13

*Solomon asked for an understanding heart.* (NAB)

An old Irish blessing reads:

"May there always be work for your hand to do. May your purse always hold a coin or two.

"May the sun always shine on your windowpane. May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain.

"May the hand of a friend always be near you. May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you."

Solomon composes his own blessing in today's reading, and God grants it. One of the most beautiful lines in Solomon's request is for an "understanding heart" to judge his people.

If we could compose a blessing that God would grant us, what would we ask for, above all else?

"I touch my heart as the Easterners do: May the peace of Allah abide with you. Wherever you come, wherever you go, May the beautiful palms of Allah grow."

Author unknown

## The ark is placed in the Temple

Monday

1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13

*A cloud filled the Temple.*

In his spiritual autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Thomas Merton describes a religious experience he had.

The summer after graduating from high school, he traveled around Europe on his own. During his travels he discovered Europe's magnificent cathedrals, with their inspiring statues and stained glass. He writes:

"I began to haunt the churches. . . .  
For the first time in my life I began to find out something of who the person was that men called Christ. . . .  
But above all . . . [I began to experience] Christ himself present in those churches."

It was this kind of experience of God's presence that the people had in today's reading.

Where do we experience God's presence most in our own life?

"God enters  
by a private door into every individual."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Solomon prays to God

Tuesday

1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30

*"Listen to my prayer!"*

Henry Nouwen is an authority on the spiritual life. He makes this surprising statement in his book *Prayer and Hope*:

"[The person] who prays with hope might ask for everything . . . like nice weather and advancement. This concreteness is a sign of authenticity. . . .

"All those concrete requests are merely . . . ways of saying that we must trust

in the fullness of God's goodness. . . .  
Whenever we pray with hope we put our lives in the hands of God."

Today's reading reminds us not to hesitate to place before God all our concrete needs.

How concretely and specifically do we speak to God about the affairs of our life?

Jesus said to his disciples,  
"Ask, and you will receive;  
seek, and you will find;  
knock, and the door will be opened to you."  
Luke 11:9

## The Queen speaks about Solomon

Wednesday

1 Kings 10:1-10

*"Your people are fortunate to have you."*

"Not until I became a mother did I understand how much my mother sacrificed for me; not until I became a mother did I understand how hurt my mother was when I disobeyed; not until I became a mother did I understand how proud my mother was when I achieved; not until I became a mother did I understand how much my mother loved me."

Victoria Farnsworth

The words of Victoria Farnsworth about her mother and the words of the Queen of Sheba about King Solomon add up to the same thing:  
We often take for granted the people around us. We often need an outsider to make us aware of how fortunate we are to have such people.

Of the people in our life, is there anyone we have been taking too much for granted? What could we do to show our appreciation to that person?

"My mother was dead for five years before I knew that I loved her very much."  
Lillian Hellman, *The Unfinished Woman*

## Solomon's wives influence him

Thursday

1 Kings 11:4-13

*They turned his heart from God.*

Theodore White makes a surprising observation in his book *The Mountain Road*. He says that if you put a chunk of pure gold next to a chunk of pure silver, something unusual and unexpected will happen.

Invisible flecks of silver will cross over and embed themselves in the gold. And specks of the gold will cross over and embed themselves in the silver.

What happens to metal happens to people also. When people are put in close contact, parts of their character and values cross over and embed themselves in the other.

This crossover can be for good or for evil. In the case of Solomon's wives it was for evil. They turned his heart against God.

Who are those closest to us?  
What kind of an influence  
are they having on us?

"I am part of all I have met."  
Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"

## The twelve tribes split

Friday

1 Kings 11:29-32; 12:19

*Solomon's sins affected the people.*

One of the most critical battles in history was the Battle of Waterloo in Belgium in 1813. Had the outcome of that battle been different, the history of the world may have been quite different.

At Waterloo, England's Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon and his French army. Wellington had great respect for Napoleon. He is reported to have said that Napoleon's presence on the battlefield was worth 40,000 soldiers.

For better or for worse,  
our leaders have a great impact on us.  
We see this in the case of Solomon.  
Much of the blame for the split-up  
of the twelve tribes of Israel was due to him.

What kind of an impact are we having  
on our own families by our leadership  
or our lack of it?

"Our chief want in life is someone  
who shall make us do what we can."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Jeroboam fears tribal reunion

Saturday

1 Kings 12:26-32; 13:33-34

*He thwarted worship in Jerusalem.*

In May 1915, the Germans sank the United States passenger ship the *Lusitania*. They claimed it was carrying munitions to be used against them. United States officials denied the charge. They went even further. They used the sinking of the *Lusitania* to mobilize public opinion to get the United States into World War I.

Later it was proven that the *Lusitania* was carrying munitions, and that the United States officials knew it. Not only did the officials lie, but they used their lie as a springboard to get us into a war that killed and maimed tens of thousands of Americans.

Jeroboam did something similar to this. Not only did he thwart a possible unification, but he also led his people into further sin by setting up worship places of false gods.

Have we ever found ourselves  
compounding sin?

Sin is the wind  
that blows out the lamp of reason.

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1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13

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Of the people in our life, is there anyone we have been taking too much for granted? What could we do to show our appreciation to that person?

"My mother was dead for five years before I knew that I loved her very much."  
Lillian Hellman, *The Unfinished Woman*

## James talks about death

Monday

James 1:1-11

*Death comes to all, rich and poor alike.*

It's fascinating to note how *People* magazine selects the people who will appear on its cover. The editors have an unwritten law that young people are preferable to old people, TV stars are preferable to movie stars, and athletes are preferable to politicians.

There's another fascinating statistic. A sample year of *People* covers showed that almost one of four covers were death related.

This caused one editor to quip, "Maybe we should change the magazine's name to *Dead People*."

The death-related covers underscore what James says in today's reading. As the flowers of the field wither away and die, "the rich man will be destroyed while he goes about his business."

Do we ever meditate on the brevity of life and the certainty of death?

"Our hearts . . . like muffled drums, are beating Funeral marches to the grave."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

## James talks about temptation

Tuesday

James 1:12-18

*Temptation precedes sin.*

In his book *Voyage to Windward*, J. C. Furnas includes a thought-provoking story about Robert Louis Stevenson, author of the classic story *Treasure Island*.

In his youth, Stevenson was filled with curiosity and superstition.

In his late adolescence, he carried about on his body a formula for summoning forth the devil.

"What a strange thing to do!" we say. What kind of person would do a thing like that?

The truth is that we all do things like this. We do it when we place ourselves in a situation which we know has led us into temptation in the past. This is what James warns us about in today's reading.

How diligently do we guard against placing ourselves in temptation situations?

"Better to shun the bait than to struggle in the snare." John Dryden

## James talks about action

Wednesday

James 1:19-27

*Be doers of the Word, not just hearers of it.*

A zealous young salesman was assigned to a rural area in the South. One day he came upon a farmer sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch of his rundown house.

After introducing himself, the salesman launched into his sales pitch: "Sir, I have a book for you that is worth its weight in gold. It describes how to farm your land ten times better than you're now doing."

The farmer continued to rock back and forth. Then, after a long pause, he said, "Young feller, I know how to farm my land ten times better than I'm now doing. My problem isn't knowing what to do. My problem is doing it."

To what extent are we hearers of the Word, and not doers of it?

What keeps us from doing the Word?

"Wisdom is knowing what to do. . . . Skill is knowing how to do it. Virtue is doing it." Thomas Jefferson

## **James talks about favoritism**

Thursday

James 2:1-9

*Do not show favoritism to the rich.*

Ray Bradbury has a short story about five poverty-stricken young men. Being about the same size, build, and weight, they decide to pool their meager resources and buy a handsome suit of clothes. Then, on the weekends, they take turns wearing it an hour at a time.

The story describes how much better they feel—and are treated by other people—when they wear the suit.

People smile at them, talk to them, and treat them in such a way that their spirits soar like an eagle in the sky.

The story makes us ponder the words of James in today's reading:

“‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’  
But if you treat people  
according to their outward appearance,  
you are guilty of sin.”

To what extent do we show favoritism?

“Man looks at the outward appearance,  
but I [God] look at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7

## **James talks about helping people**

Friday

James 2:14-24, 26

*Faith without words is dead.*

Seven-year-old David Rothenberg was kidnapped by his mentally ill father and set ablaze as he slept in a California motel. David suffered third-degree burns over 90 percent of his body.

Reggie Jackson, who was playing for the California Angels then, heard about the tragedy. He located the hospital where David was and visited with him.

That was the beginning of a series of kindnesses on the part of Jackson toward David.

Since Jackson's acts of kindness, David's situation has gone from one of being a life-or-death situation to one of recovery.

The turning point, said the boy's mother, Marie Rothenberg, was Reggie's concern—and subsequent visits with David.

How is our own faith  
translating itself into good works?

“Until we lose ourselves there's no hope  
of finding ourselves.” Kwame Nkrumah

## **James talks about our speech**

Saturday

James 3:1-10

*We ought not to curse our brothers.*

In his book *Saint Francis of Assisi*, Lawrence Cunningham tells this striking story.

One day a certain friar cursed a poor man who was begging alms. Francis was shocked and, on the spot, ordered the friar to prostrate himself, kiss the beggar's feet, and beg his forgiveness.

Francis used to say,  
“Whoever curses a poor man injures Christ  
whose image he bears,  
since Christ made himself poor for the world.”

That story illustrates how we can  
use our power of speech to hurt others.

How are we using God's precious gift  
of speech?

How could we use it more fittingly?

“Words of thanksgiving and cursing  
pour out from the same mouth.  
My brothers, this should not happen!  
No spring of water pours out sweet water  
and bitter water from the same opening.”

James 3:10-11

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## True wisdom is from above

Monday

James 3:13-18

*It is humble and filled with good sense.*

A son tells this story on his father.

When the son was just a small boy,  
he was riding on a train with his father.  
They unintentionally violated a minor rule.  
The conductor flew into a rage,  
bawling his father out unmercifully.

When the conductor left,  
the boy turned to his father and said,  
"Why didn't you tell him off, Dad?  
He was terribly mean to you.  
I think you should've done something."

The father put his hand on the boy's shoulder  
and said,  
"Son, if that poor man can stand himself  
all his life,  
I guess I can stand him for five minutes."

How do we respond  
when people treat us unreasonably?  
Are we like the small boy or the father?

"It is better to be patient than powerful.  
It is better to win control over yourself  
than over whole cities." Proverbs 16:32

## Be humble!

Tuesday

James 4:1-10

*"God resists the proud."*

Charles Colson  
was a close aide to President Richard Nixon.  
He was convicted in the Watergate scandal  
and sent to prison.  
As a result of the Watergate experience,  
he underwent a deep religious conversion.

One book that influenced him tremendously  
was C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*.  
This passage touched him, especially:

"I don't think I have heard anyone  
who was not a Christian  
accuse himself of this vice. . . .  
The more we have it in ourselves,  
the more we dislike it in others.  
The vice I am talking about is Pride. . . .  
Pride leads to every other vice. . . .  
Pride is a spiritual cancer;  
it eats up the very possibility of love,  
or contentment, or even common sense."

How do we handle pride  
when it rears its ugly head in our life?

"A proud man always looks down  
on people and things." C. S. Lewis

## Tomorrow is uncertain

Wednesday

James 4:13-17

*"Life is brief like a puff of smoke."*

CBS News says  
the average American spends a week this way:  
52 hours sleeping, 40 hours working,  
26 hours watching TV,  
21 hours listening to the radio,  
18 hours eating,  
and 8 hours reading newspapers and magazines.  
That leaves two precious hours  
for things like loving, recreating, and praying.

Whether these statistics fit our life or not,  
they do jar us into asking ourselves,  
How profitably are we using the gift of life?

"Referees *call* time; prisoners *serve* time;  
musicians *mark* time; historians *record* time;  
loafers *kill* time; statisticians *keep* time. . . .  
The fact remains that all of us are given  
the same amount of time." Dennis Hensley

How are we using the time God has given us?

"Lost, yesterday,  
somewhere between sunrise and sunset,  
two golden hours,  
each set with sixty diamond minutes.  
No reward is offered  
for they are gone forever." Horace Mann



## Your riches have rotted

Thursday

James 5:1-6

*Your gold is covered with rust.*

The Greek biographer Plutarch lived about the same time as did the Apostle James. Plutarch tells this story about Alexander the Great.

One day Alexander came across the ancient philosopher Diogenes studying bones in two different containers. When Alexander asked him what he was doing, Diogenes said:

"I'm trying to find out if there is a difference between the bones of your father and the bones of his slave. But I don't see any."

Diogenes' point seems to be that riches and gold don't accompany us to the grave. All that goes with us is ourselves.

How does the fact that we will die affect what we do in this life?

"Blest be you, my Lord, for our sister Death, from whom no living man can escape."

St. Francis of Assisi

## Use the prophets as models

Friday

James 5:9-12

*Be patient!*

The *New York Times* ran a humorous story about a little boy on a bus. The youngster was bombarding his mother with scores of questions.

Finally the boy's mother lost her patience and shouted, "Will you please shut up!" The boy stared at his mother in disbelief for about a minute.

Then he tugged his mother's sleeve and said, "Hey, Mommy, it's me, Danny. Remember?"

People, especially small children, have a way of getting on our nerves. It takes the patience of Job to deal with them day in and day out. But that's what a Christian is called to do, says James in today's reading.

What effort are we making to improve our relationship with others, especially when it comes to patience?

"A lot of the road to heaven has to be taken at thirty miles per hour."

Evelyn Underhill

## Remember this!

Saturday

James 5:13-20

*Whoever converts a sinner does a great work.*

Irene Champernowne tells this story in her book *The One and Only Me*.

She was walking along the beach one evening, when she came upon some little children throwing stones at a crippled sea gull.

Irene was shocked by the children's behavior, and told them so.

"You should be helping the wounded sea gull, not hurting it more," she said passionately.

"How would you feel if you were hurt and people threw stones at you?"

When Irene returned about a half hour later, she was delighted to see that the children had taken her words to heart. They were feeding the sea gull and building it a "house" for the night.

Do we try to right wrongs when we see them? Or do we ignore them and pass them by, pretending they are "none of our business"?

"If you stop to be kind, you must often swerve from your path."

Mary Webb

## You may have to suffer

Monday

1 Peter 1:3-9

*But it will purify your faith.*

Near Cripple Creek in Colorado, gold and tellurium occur mixed as telluride ore. The refining methods of the early mining camps couldn't separate the two elements. So the ore was thrown away.

One day a miner mistook a lump of ore for coal and tossed it in his stove. Later, while removing ashes from the stove, he found them littered with beads of pure gold. The heat had burned away the tellurium, leaving the gold in a purified state. The discarded ore was reworked and yielded a fortune.

We are like telluride ore. We have gold inside us, but it often takes some trial in the fiery furnace of affliction to bring it out of us.

Recall some affliction that revealed unexpected gold inside us.

"The gem cannot be polished without friction, no person perfected without trials."  
Chinese proverb

## Recall Scripture's words

Tuesday

1 Peter 1:10-16

*"Be holy because I am holy."*

The idea of biblical holiness is not well understood by modern Christians. It is not something reserved for saints, who go off to monasteries or desert hermitages to spend days in penance and nights in prayer.

Perhaps holiness can be best understood in terms of its opposite—sinfulness.

When sin entered human life after Adam's fall, it dehumanized people. It alienated them

from themselves, their neighbor, and God. It destroyed the oneness that once united them.

In the final analysis, holiness is reconciliation, oneness with oneself, one's neighbor, and one's God.

How at peace are we, right now, with ourselves, our neighbor, and our God?

"There's a tendency among modern Christians to place a statue of St. Francis of Assisi in a nook in their house or garden and let the business of holiness go at that."  
C. Kilmer Meyers (slightly adapted)

## We have been saved

Wednesday

1 Peter 1:18-25

*The price of salvation was Christ's blood.*  
(NAB)

Albrecht Durer was a 16th-century German painter.

One of his masterpieces is called "Descent from the Cross." It shows Jesus being taken down from the cross.

There's an interesting detail in the painting. One of the disciples has just picked up the crown of thorns that fell from Jesus' head when they lowered him from the cross.

Durer shows the disciple pressing his finger against one of the thorns to get some idea of how much pain Jesus felt when the thorns were pressed into his flesh.

How do we try to gain a better appreciation, from time to time, of the price Jesus paid for our redemption?

"Who never ate his bread in sorrow, who never spent the darksome hours, weeping and watching for the morrow, he knows you not, you heavenly powers."  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

## Once you were not God's people

Thursday

1 Peter 2:2-5, 9-12

*Now you are God's people.*

Starr Daily was a hard-core criminal, ending up in solitary confinement.

One day, when he was lying on the icy floor, something strange began to stir within him. He suddenly began to wonder what would have happened had he devoted his vast reservoir of energies to doing good, rather than doing evil.

What happened next is hard to describe. As best he could piece it together, he experienced the powerful presence of Jesus.

About the experience's effect on him, he said, "I had never felt such love as I did then. Before it happened I was a calloused criminal. After it I was completely healed."

Recall a moment of insight in our own life.

"Starr Daily is the best living proof I've ever seen that 'a new creation in Jesus Christ' is not just the old man patched up, but an altogether new person living in the same body." Peter Marshall

## Don't be surprised by trials

Friday

1 Peter 4:7-13

*Their purpose is to test you.*

Abraham Lincoln was acquainted with failure. It dogged him all his life.

In 1832 he was defeated for the legislature.

In 1833 his business failed.

In 1836 he had a nervous breakdown.

In 1843 he lost the nomination for Congress.

In 1854 he was defeated for the Senate.

In 1856 he lost the nomination for vice president.

Then, in 1860, he was elected president.

Lincoln was well prepared for the defeats and setbacks that bruised the nation during the Civil War years.

Another man

might have collapsed under the ordeal, but not Lincoln.

Failure and setback had taught him how to ride out the storms of discouragement.

Recall some setback that we weathered well.

"God selects his own instruments, and sometimes they are queer ones; for instance, he chose me to steer the ship through a great crisis." Abraham Lincoln

## Remember the Apostles' words

Saturday

Jude 17, 20-25

*Pray in the Holy Spirit.*

Ralph Martin writes in *Hungry for God*:

"A real estate man I know gets up early in the morning to pray; an aerospace engineer prays and reads Scripture on his lunch hour; a production manager of a computing firm prays after the children are in bed at night."

Martin goes on to note that if we don't have a schedule for prayer, we probably won't pray.

When anything becomes important to us, we schedule it into our day.

We don't leave it to chance.

We should do the same with prayer.

Unless there's a commitment

to a fixed time for prayer,

there's not likely to be much prayer.

That's just how we humans are.

How deeply committed to prayer are we?

"If two people

want to become more than acquaintances, they need to agree on definite times and places to get together." Ralph Martin

## Peter sends greetings

Monday

2 Peter 1:2-7

*May you be filled with peace.*

The bishops of the United States wrote a *Pastoral Letter on War and Peace* in the early 1980s.

In it they pointed out that the biblical idea of peace is not so much the absence of war as it is the presence of a right relationship with God.

We sometimes forget that peace begins in the soul of each one of us. An old Chinese proverb explains how:

“If there is right in the soul,  
there will be beauty in the person.  
If there is beauty in the person,  
there will be harmony in the home.  
If there is harmony in the home,  
there will be order in the nation.  
If there is order in the nation,  
there will be peace in the world.”

What is our present relationship with God?

“Lord, make us instruments of your peace.”  
St. Francis of Assisi

## We await a new creation

Tuesday

2 Peter 3:12-15, 17-18

*God's justice will reside in the new creation.*  
(NAB)

In their joint statement on *Justice*, the bishops of the world said something that jarred many Christians from complacency. They said it's not enough to preach the Gospel. We must also work for justice.

Then they spelled out the kind of justice we must work for. It's not just making sure that people get a fair shake in everyday life. It's far more demanding than that.

It's combating those structures in society that contradict the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's declaring outright war on attitudes, structures, and procedures that exploit the poor, oppress minorities, and allow powerful special-interest groups to impose their will on the majority of citizens.

What are we doing to combat such evil structures in society? Or do we feel that's something beyond our ken?

“It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do a little. Do what you can.” Sydney Smith

## Keep God's gift alive

Wednesday

2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12

*The gift came when I laid hands on you.*

Timothy was dedicated to God's service when church leaders laid hands on him.

This ancient gesture is still used in the liturgy of the Church today. It is a powerful visual symbol that something is being communicated from the person laying on the hands to the person upon whom the hands are laid.

Luke says, “[Jesus] placed his hands” on sick people “and healed them all.” Luke 4:40

Mark says, “[Jesus] placed his hands” on the children “and blessed them.” Mark 10:16

The Acts of the Apostles says, “Peter and John placed their hands on” the Samaritans, “and they received the Holy Spirit.” Acts 8:17

Do we ever place our hands on our children to bless them, as some Christian parents do?

“[Church leaders] fasted and prayed, placed their hands on [Paul and Barnabas], and sent them off.” Acts 13:3

## They can chain me

Thursday

2 Timothy 2:8-15

*But they can't chain God's Word.*

Marjorie Lawrence  
was one of the great operatic stars of our time.  
At the height of her career,  
she was struck down with polio.  
It left her a helpless invalid,  
unable to walk or to stand.

Up to this point in her life,  
neither she nor her husband was religious.  
Nevertheless,  
they began to read the Bible together  
for strength.

For the first time in their lives,  
they discovered the power of God's Word.  
Marjorie said,  
"There were parts of the Scriptures  
that seemed to have been written just for me."

Do we have a list of favorite Bible passages  
that we can turn to for comfort and help  
in times of crisis?

"LORD . . .  
you are good to me, your servant. . . .  
Your word is a lamp to guide me  
and a light for my path." Psalm 119:65, 105

## You know the Scriptures

Friday

2 Timothy 3:10-17

*They are inspired by God.*

How did God inspire the Scriptures?  
Some suggest  
that God dictated to the biblical writers,  
as a boss dictates to a private secretary.  
Others suggest the biblical writers  
were inspired religiously,  
as songwriters are inspired musically.

Most people hold a middle position.  
They hold that God enlightened the writers  
in such a way that they wrote all and only

what God wanted them to write.  
God is therefore the primary author;  
the biblical writers are secondary authors.

The important thing, however, is not  
*how* the biblical writers were inspired,  
but *that* they were.

Can we say with Samuel Taylor Coleridge,  
"The words of the Bible find me  
at a deeper level of my being  
than any other book does"?

"My heart has always assured me  
that the gospel of Jesus Christ  
must be Divine Reality." Daniel Webster

## I have finished the race

Saturday

2 Timothy 4:1-8

*I await God's reward.*

In his book *Light from the Ancient Past*,  
Jack Finegan  
cites a 4,000-year-old Egyptian writing.  
Called the "Prayer of Ani,"  
it is addressed to the 42 gods  
who must decide Ani's fate after death.  
Excerpts from Ani's prayer read:

"I have not stolen. . . .  
I have not played the hypocrite. . . .  
I have not told falsehoods. . . .  
I gave bread to the hungry,  
water to the thirsty,  
clothed the naked. . . .  
Enter no complaint against me."

Like Paul, Ani too awaited his final reward.

Do we think of death as someone  
coming to snatch us away,  
or as Christ coming to embrace us  
and lead us into the eternal love of the Father?

"As the voice of death whispers  
'You must go from earth,'  
let us hear the voice of Christ saying  
'You are coming to me!'" Norman McLeod

## Elijah warns Ahab

Monday

1 Kings 17:1-6

*"A drought will ravage the land."*

At one point in the Old Testament, the ten northern tribes of Israel broke away from the two southern tribes. One of the kings who ruled these ten tribes, before a foreign power destroyed them forever, was a man named Ahab.

The Bible speaks harshly of Ahab, saying, "He sinned against the LORD more than any of his predecessors."

1 Kings 16:30

Ahab was confronted about his sinful ways by Elijah, the first great prophet of Israel. Today's reading describes the first confrontation between the two men. Elijah warns Ahab that a long drought will punish his people.

A prophet's job was often hard and thankless, but Elijah performed it faithfully.

How faithful are we in our everyday job, even though we get little recognition for it?

"Since you were faithful in small matters, I will put you in charge of ten cities." Luke 19:17

## A poor widow feeds Elijah

Tuesday

1 Kings 17:7-16

*Her faith and generosity were rewarded.*

The story of the widow in today's reading must have made a deep impression on Jesus. He referred to it in the very first sermon he preached in his hometown of Nazareth. (Luke 5:25-26)

It's easy to see why the story would have made a deep impression on him. It's a beautiful tale of faith and generosity.

The widow gave away what she had every right to keep.

She gave away that which stood between her and starvation. Moreover, the widow gave it away because she trusted Elijah. She believed him when he told her not to worry because God would provide for her.

How trusting are we when it comes to other people—and God?

"The man who trusts other men will make fewer mistakes than the one who distrusts them." Ardis Whitman

## Elijah prays

Wednesday

1 Kings 18:20-39

*"Answer me, Lord!"*

Lucille Campbell tells this story about her little daughter, Donna. One night Lucille suggested they might pray for the end to the drought that was ruining farm crops across the state.

Donna showed unusual reluctance to do this. "Whatever is the matter, Donna?" said Lucille. "The farmers need rain badly for their crops."

"That's not it," said Donna. "I left my dolls in the sandbox in the yard. I'll promise to pray for rain only if you promise to bring them inside, so that they don't get wet."

It was with this same kind of faith that Elijah addressed God in his challenge with the 450 prophets of Baal.

Do we believe that prayer "is not overcoming God's reluctance," but "laying hold of his highest willingness"? Richard Treacher

"When we reach up to pray, God reaches down to give." German proverb

## Now, go and eat!

Thursday

1 Kings 18:41-46

*Elijah sat with his head between his knees.*

Elijah's words to Ahab, "Now, go and eat," suggest he even got the king to fast to petition God to send rain upon the land. Elijah's strange posture suggests that he was engaging in intense prayer.

Prayer and fasting are often joined in Scripture. King David fasted and prayed for his infant son. (2 Samuel 12:16)

Ezra and the people fasted and prayed for protection. (Ezra 8:21)

The early Church fasted and prayed before sending Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. (Acts 13:3)

The nation of Israel fasted and prayed in time of national need. (2 Chronicles 20:3-6)

Jesus fasted and prayed in the desert. (Luke 4:2)

When was the last time we not only prayed but also joined fasting to it?

"I know now . . .  
there is no prayer without fasting."  
Mohandas Gandhi

## There was a soft whisper

Friday

1 Kings 19:9, 11-16

*Elijah covered his face when he heard it.*

John Buchan, Canada's former governor-general, was on a camping trip. While another member of the camping party prepared breakfast over an open fire, John went for a swim. When he came out of the water, he lay in the morning sun to dry off.

The sounds of the flowing water and the birds touched him deeply.

He forgot about breakfast and was caught up in a kind of ecstasy. He wrote later that the experience "transcended human expression, even human thought. It was like a glimpse into eternity."

Like Elijah, Buchan found God's presence not in violent storms or earthquakes, but in the simple phenomena of nature: morning sun, flowing water, and singing birds.

Where do we find God's presence in our day?

"Entering the forest he moves not the grass; entering the water he makes not a ripple."  
Zenrin

## Elijah calls Elisha

Saturday

1 Kings 19:19-21

*Elisha followed Elijah.*

Catherine Marshall's book *A Man Called Peter* tells the story of her husband, who was the famous chaplain of Congress. It was made into a highly successful movie.

One day, after the movie's release, Catherine received an unusual letter from a young assistant sports editor of a newspaper. He told her that it was while watching the movie of Peter's life that he felt God's call to the ministry.

The young man responded and was now happily studying in a seminary.

It was under a similar unusual circumstance that Elisha experienced God's call, said yes to it, and succeeded Elijah as God's prophet to Israel.

Did we ever experience God's call to us in an unusual situation or circumstance?

God is constantly calling us to follow him more closely than we are.

## Jezebel plots Naboth's death

Monday

1 Kings 21:1-16

*Witnesses lied and Naboth was killed.*

Two days after the assassination attempt on President Reagan's life, a West Coast psychic recorded a TV program predicting the attempt. Then she and a TV interviewer aired it, claiming it was made before the event.

Similarly, a *Washington Post* reporter, Janet Cooke, won the Pulitzer prize for a story she claimed was true. Then it was discovered to be purely fictional.

Both of these examples deal with the evil described in today's reading: the lie. It has plagued the human race since the serpent lied to the first couple in the Garden of Eden.

Do we sometimes "embellish" the truth? Why?

"This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."  
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

## Ahab's wife leads him astray

Tuesday

1 Kings 21:17-29

*Ahab sinned gravely against God.*

A Catholic boy married a non-Catholic girl. After two years of marriage the girl enrolled in the parish RCIA program and became a Catholic.

In the months and years that followed, she became deeply involved in the parish.

As the boy's wife became involved, so did the boy. Later he told some of his friends, "If it weren't for the example and inspiration of my wife,

I wouldn't be involved at all in the Church. I'd probably not even be a Catholic anymore."

In contrast to Ahab's wife, the wife of this young man drew him to God, rather than away from God. She became a force for good in his life, not a force for evil, like Ahab's wife.

Do we lead those we love closer to God or further away from God?

"Our chief want in life is someone who shall make us do what we can."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Elijah strikes the water

Wednesday

2 Kings 2:1, 6-14

*He and Elisha crossed the river dry-shod.*

Elijah took his cloak and struck the water. Immediately the water divided, and he and Elisha crossed the river on dry ground.

This unusual action serves two purposes.

First, it sets the stage for Elisha to repeat the same miracle, confirming that Elijah had passed on to him the power of prophecy.

Second, it shows that God worked through Elijah and Elisha just as powerfully as he worked through Moses, who parted the Red (Reed) Sea.

We have a parallel phenomenon in the Church. As Elijah passed on his power to Elisha, so bishops pass on the power of priesthood to their successors.

Do we see bishops and priests as successors of Jesus, from whom they receive their power and authority?

"Then [Jesus] breathed on [his disciples] and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven.'" John 20:22



## Sirach eulogizes Elijah and Elisha

Thursday

Sirach 48:1-14

*Elisha worked many marvels.*

The Book of Sirach treats two main themes: meditations on how to live and a review of Old Testament history.

The review of Old Testament history takes the form of eulogies of the great heroes of Israel's past. One by one, the book parades these heroes before us.

Today's reading eulogizes Elijah and Elisha, two great prophets in Israel. Concerning Elisha, Sirach writes:

"Nothing was beyond his power. . . . In life he performed wonders, and after death, marvelous deeds." (NAB)

The stories of Elijah and Elisha are examples of how God works through ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things.

Have we ever experienced God's power acting through us in some extraordinary way?

Lord, help us become an instrument through whom you can do your work.

## Athaliah plots evil

Friday

2 Kings 11:1-4, 9-18, 20

*God's providence frustrated her plot.*

Athaliah was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Like her pagan mother, she was a follower of pagan gods.

When her son, King Ahaziah, was assassinated, she seized the throne. Then she cold-bloodedly plotted the deaths of the rest of the royal family in order to maintain her power.

Athaliah's plot was frustrated, however, when Ahaziah's infant son, Joash, was spirited off by his nurse. The nurse gave him to the high priest, who hid him in the Temple. When Joash was seven years old, he was presented to the people and anointed as the legitimate successor in the line of David. Athaliah was arrested and executed.

How strongly do we believe that God's providence is at work in our world, even though things seem so bad at times?

"God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom."  
1 Corinthians 1:25

## Zechariah speaks out

Saturday

2 Chronicles 24:17-25

*Zechariah was murdered by the people.*

Jehoiada was the high priest who hid the royal infant in the Temple until he was old enough to be anointed king.

When Jehoiada died, he was succeeded by his son Zechariah. When Zechariah stood up for what was right, the king whom his father had saved and anointed gave the order to kill him.

Jesus referred to Zechariah when he warned the religious leaders of his day that they were in danger of doing to him what their ancestors had done to Zechariah.

Standing up for truth and doing what is right has never been easy. It wasn't easy for Zechariah in his day; it wasn't easy for Jesus in his day; and it still isn't easy for us in our day.

How courageously do we stand up against evil?

"Men reject their prophets and slay them, but they love their martyrs and honor those whom they have slain."

Feodor Dostoevski

## The tribes of Israel fall

Monday 2 Kings 17:5-8, 13-15, 18

*Only Judah remained.*

There comes a time  
when we must reap what we have sown—  
perhaps unwittingly.  
There comes an hour of reckoning.

When that hour comes,  
we may cry, we may curse.  
We may try to blame others,  
or we may accept the blame ourselves.  
We may wish  
we could cram a lifetime of change into an hour,  
but we can't.

Such a moment of reckoning  
came for the tribes of Israel.  
In spite of the prophets God sent to warn them,  
they did not change.  
And so the day of doom came for the tribes.  
Only Judah remained.

What kind of harvest  
are we planting at present in our lives?

“Of all sad words of tongue and pen,  
The saddest are these: ‘It might have been.’”  
John Greenleaf Whittier

## Hezekiah prays

Tuesday 2 Kings 19:9-11, 14-21, 31-35, 36

*God heard his prayer.*

Edward Roe was a 19th-century novelist.  
Many can't remember a single book he wrote,  
but many do remember a passage on prayer  
than he penned. It reads:

“To a certain extent,  
God gives the prayerful control of himself,  
and becomes their willing agent;  
and when all the mysteries are solved,  
and the record of all lives is truthfully revealed,  
it will probably be seen that not those  
who astonished the world with their powers

but those who quietly, through prayer,  
used God's power will be the ones  
who made the world move forward.”

Such a man was Hezekiah in today's reading.  
His prayer,  
not his armies, saved Judah from disaster.

How convinced are we that God responds  
to our prayers?

“Pray unto him in any way you like.  
He is sure to hear you,  
for he can hear the footfall of an ant.”

Ramakrishna

## King Josiah initiates reform

Wednesday 2 Kings 22:8-13; 23:1-3

*He recommitted the people to the covenant.*

After the destruction of the tribes of Israel,  
Judah alone remained.

But life in Judah was a far cry  
from what it should have been.

At this crucial moment in Judah's history,  
God raised up a remarkable young king  
named Josiah.

Josiah was only in his twenties  
when he initiated reform  
throughout the land.

He did everything a king could possibly do  
to get his people back on track again.

God also raised up a great prophet, Jeremiah,  
to assist the young king.

God was doing everything he could do  
to help the people get back on track again.

But the people failed to respond.  
Josiah was killed in battle,  
and Jeremiah stood alone, urging reform.

How conscious are we of God's grace,  
calling us to continual renewal and reform?

“He who repents a sin is almost innocent.”

Seneca

## Babylon attacks Judah a first time

Thursday

2 Kings 24:8-17

*Many Jews were led into exile.*

In spite of Josiah's efforts to reform Judah, in spite of Jeremiah's warnings to Judah, the people continued to drag their feet.

Finally, the day came in 597 B.C. when Babylonian armies entered Judah and brought the nation to its knees. Thousands of its finest craftsmen, smiths, and soldiers were led off into exile in Babylon.

One might think that this attack by Babylon would bring the people to their senses, but it didn't.

Some even rejoiced, saying in effect, "The city and the Temple are still intact. See, God is protecting his chosen people."

Do we sometimes become complacent because we are God's people?  
How ready are we to reform when we see that things in our lives stand in need of reform?

"When we lay our sins at the feet of God, it feels as if we have taken wings."  
Eugenie de Guerin (adapted)

## Babylon strikes Judah again

Friday

2 Kings 25:1-12

*The city and the Temple were destroyed.*

Judah's "day of reckoning" dawned in 587 B.C. That date is branded forever on the heart of every Jew. It marks the year when Babylonian armies descended upon Jerusalem and reduced the city and the Temple to a pile of charred rubble.

The people who survived the devastating defeat were led off to captivity in Babylon.

There they joined many relatives and friends who had been taken captive ten years before.

The great philosopher Santayana said that those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it. What does God want us to learn from the defeat of Judah and the destruction of the city and the Temple?

"How lonely lies Jerusalem. . . . Her children have been captured and taken away. The splendor of Jerusalem is a thing of the past." Lamentations 1:1, 5-6

## Jerusalem's glory is gone

Saturday

Lamentations 2:2, 10-14, 18-19

*The nation, king, and Temple lay in ruins.*

It is impossible for us to imagine what the fall of Jerusalem meant to devout Jews.

The three great pillars of Judah's existence, which linked them to God's covenant, now lay in smouldering ruins: the king, the Temple, and the nation.

The king was dethroned, the Temple was in ashes, and the city was a pile of rubble.

With Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed, the focus of Jewish history shifted to Babylon. There, many conscientious Jews began to think and reflect on their past. As a result, they underwent a profound change. They experienced a reawakening of their religious sensitivity. They experienced a communal conversion.

Do we use adversity to draw us closer to God, as the exiles used their adversity?

"By the rivers of Babylon we sat down; there we wept when we remembered Zion."  
Psalm 137:1

## Amos prophecies in Israel

Monday Amos 2:6-10, 13-16

*"You trample on the poor!"*

This week's readings are from Amos. He's the first of the so-called *writing* prophets, those whose works are recorded in books. Although Amos came from Tekoa, in the southern kingdom of Judah, he was sent by God to prophesy to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Amos was ill-equipped to be a prophet. He himself said:  
"I am a herdsman, and I take care of fig trees. But the LORD . . . ordered me to come and prophesy to his people Israel." Amos 7:14-15

At the time Amos preached, Israel was enjoying a period of prosperity. But the wealth benefited only a few who ignored the poverty of the masses.

What is our attitude toward the masses of poor?

"Your extra bread belongs to the hungry; your extra coat belongs to the naked; and your extra gold belongs to the poor." St. Basil

## I treated you as special

Tuesday Amos 3:1-8; 4:11-12

*"But you did not return to me."*

There's a colorful passage in Luke's Gospel where Jesus compares the people of his time to petulant, ill-humored children playing games in the street.

One group complains to the other group:  
"We played wedding music for you, but you wouldn't dance!  
We sang funeral songs, but you wouldn't cry!" Luke 7:32

That's the way the people of Israel responded to the preaching of Amos.

There was nothing Amos could do or say to get them to repent and change their ways. Nothing would move them. Finally there was nothing to do but pass judgment on them.

How responsive are we to God's grace, constantly inviting us to draw closer to him?

"How many times I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me!" Luke 13:34

## Take your sacrifices away!

Wednesday Amos 5:14-15, 21-24

*"It is justice that I want from you."*

The God of Amos was a God of concern for the poor. He scorned those Israelites who came to offer sacrifice on religious feasts but trampled on the poor the rest of the year. God said of these people:

"I hate your religious festivals; I cannot stand them! . . . Instead, let justice flow like a stream, and righteousness like a river that never goes dry." Amos 5:21, 24

Jesus fleshed out the God of Amos in New Testament times. Speaking to those who ignore the poor, he said:

"Away from me. . . . I was hungry but you would not feed me, thirsty but you would not give me a drink." Matthew 25:41-42

What is our attitude toward the poor?

"If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." John F. Kennedy

## **Amos is ordered out of Israel**

Thursday

Amos 7:10-17

*"Go on back to Judah."*

Israel refused to change her ways in spite of Amos' preaching. There was nothing Amos could do but pass judgment on her.

Israel's response to Amos' judgment was predictable. Amaziah, the high priest of Bethel, ordered him to leave the northern kingdom. "Go on back to Judah and do your preaching there," he said.

Amos risked his neck by staying a little longer. He still had a few more things to say. Eventually, however, he returned to Judah. But his words kept echoing in the land of Israel long after he left.

How do we respond when people tell us things we don't want to hear?  
Do we close our ears to them?  
Do we try to silence them?

Jesus said,  
"This people will . . . not understand . . . because their minds are dull, and they have stopped up their ears."  
Matthew 13:14-15

## **Amos foretells terrible days ahead**

Friday

Amos 8:4-6, 9-12

*"People will hunger for God's Word."*

Before Amos departed the northern kingdom and returned to Judah, he delivered a disturbing prophecy.

After condemning the rich, who "trample on the needy and try to destroy the poor," he foretells that terrible days lie ahead for Israel.

During those days, Israel's world will turn upside down. Joy will turn into mourning, songs will turn into dirges, and day will turn into night. Worst of all, says Amos, God's Word will disappear from the land. The people will wander about aimlessly in a great spiritual desert.

How much do we appreciate the gift of God's Word?  
Do we seek to learn more and more about it and follow it as closely as possible?

"[The Gospel] is God's power to save all who believe." Romans 1:16

## **Amos holds out hope to Israel**

Saturday

Amos 9:11-15

*God said, "I will rescue my people."*

If we refuse to breathe, the air doesn't punish or suffocate us. We punish or suffocate ourselves. If we beat our fist against a brick wall, the brick wall doesn't punish our fist by making it bleed. We punish or bloody it ourselves.

This may help us understand better the situation between Israel and God.

In a real sense, when Israel refused to obey God's Law, it was Israel who punished herself, not God. Israel's punishment was the natural result of her sinfulness.

But in spite of Israel's foolishness, God promised not to desert Israel. He would still save her, if she would let him.

Recall a pain that we brought on ourselves by our own refusal to do what was right.

"We cannot break God's commandments; we can only break ourselves against them."  
Author unknown

## Hosea prophecies in Israel

Monday Hosea 2:16, 17-18, 21-22

*I will speak to Israel's heart.* (NAB)

Hosea followed Amos as God's prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel. Like Amos, he was appalled at the evil in Israel and spoke out fearlessly against it.

But Hosea's prophecies were more compassionate in tone than were the prophecies of Amos. Perhaps that's because of the personal tragedy that Hosea experienced in his life.

Actually, little is known of Hosea's life, other than he seems to have been married to an adultress. He loved her deeply in spite of her infidelity.

Conditioned by this painful experience, Hosea tried to draw Israel back to the covenant by love rather than by threat. He compared God's love for Israel to that of a loyal husband for his disloyal wife.

How forgiving are we toward our loved ones when they sin against us?

"Forgiveness is a funny thing. It warms the heart and cools the sting."  
William A. Ward

## Hosea warns Israel

Tuesday Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13

*"Sow the wind; reap a storm."*

A building contractor built large luxury homes. To increase his profits, he routinely cheated on the materials he put into his homes. He had it down to such a science that no one could detect his shortcuts. At times his cheating was so bad that the homeowners were in serious danger because of under-designed electrical systems and the like.

The contractor's shortcuts were especially dangerous in the final home he built for the company for which he worked. Even he worried about some things in that home.

Imagine the contractor's consternation when the company gave him this home as a gift. It would be the home in which he would spend his retirement years.

Hosea warned Israel that she had sown the wind. Now she would reap a storm.

What is the quality of the work we do?

"All who take the sword will die by the sword."  
Matthew 26:52

## Hosea prophecies disaster

Wednesday Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12

*The people must suffer for their sins.*

The northern kingdom was prospering when Hosea began to prophesy in Israel. In fact, this is what stirred Hosea into action. He rebuked the nation, saying that the more fruitful their orchards were, the more altars they built for false gods; and the more productive their fields were, the more pillars they erected to pagan idols.

Hosea warned the people that they must reform. If they didn't, punishment would descend upon them. It would be so severe as to make them "call out in the mountains, 'Hide us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'"

But Hosea might as well have been talking to a brick wall. When stomachs and pocketbooks are full, warnings fall on deaf ears.

How aware are we of the dangers of too much prosperity?

"It will be very hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom of heaven."  
Matthew 19:23

## Hosea talks about God's love

Thursday

Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8-9

*"I was the one who taught you to walk."*

Joseph Stalin's daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, wrote a book called *Twenty Letters to a Friend*. A letter from her father contains this excerpt:

"You don't write to your little pap.  
I think you've forgotten him. . . .  
Never mind, I kiss you.  
I am waiting to hear from you."

Any parent who can relate to that excerpt can relate to today's Scripture reading. It is one of the high points of Old Testament revelation about God.

God is portrayed as a loving father.  
It was he who took Israel into his arms.  
It was he who lifted Israel to his cheeks.  
It was he who taught Israel to walk.

But the more he loved Israel,  
the more Israel turned aside and rejected him.

How do we respond to those who love us,  
especially our own fathers and mothers?

"Father!—to God himself we cannot give  
A holier name." William Wordsworth

## Hosea concludes his prophecy

Friday

Hosea 14:2-10 (NAB)

*Return to the Lord, your God.*

There's a line  
from a song in the musical *Paint Your Wagon*  
that goes something like this:  
"I'm so lost, so very lost,  
that even God can't find me."

This line could have been applied to Israel during the period when Hosea preached. Israel had strayed far from God and from the covenant. They were lost, terribly lost.

Today's reading makes it clear that God, indeed, did make heroic efforts to find Israel.

But Israel refused to be found. The nation turned further and further from God and, eventually, fell to Assyria in 722.

It was a tragedy of the first magnitude.

How do we respond to God's overtures of love and forgiveness in our lives?

"Before God can do his thing,  
we must do our thing."

St. Augustine (free translation)

## Isaiah has a vision of God

Saturday

Isaiah 6:1-8

*"Holy, holy, holy!"*

God's call to Isaiah came about 20 years before the northern kingdom fell to Assyria. Thus, some of his prophecies are directed to the northern kingdom of Israel. Most, however, are directed to the southern kingdom.

Isaiah sought to get the people of Judah to reform their ways before the same fate that befell Israel befell them.

In all, Isaiah's career arched like an umbrella over 40 stormy years of the history of God's chosen people.

In keeping with today's reading, Isaiah is often called the prophet of God's holiness. No fewer than 30 times in his prophecies he refers to God as the "Holy One." Again and again, he reminded the people that God had called them at Mt. Sinai to be a holy nation. (Exodus 19:6, NAB)

How conscious are we of our call to holiness?

"The LORD Almighty is holy!  
His glory fills the world." Isaiah 6:3

## Isaiah calls for reform

Monday

Isaiah 1:10-17

*"Stop all this evil."*

In the early days of history,  
when punishments were still cruel and unusual,  
a man was caught stealing sheep.  
The authorities branded the initials S. T.  
(sheep thief) on his forehead.

As the years passed, the man reformed his life,  
making up for his past.  
He succeeded to an eminent degree.

When he was a very old man,  
the letters S. T. could still be seen  
on his wrinkled forehead.  
When children asked what they stood for,  
their parents would reply, "Saint."

That man's life is a model for all lives.  
It makes us realize that we, too,  
can reverse our lives completely, if we try.  
All we need do is ask for God's help.

How dedicated are we to improving our lives  
over what they were a year ago? A month ago?

"As far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our sins from us."

Psalm 103:12

## God speaks through Isaiah

Tuesday

Isaiah 7:1-9

*"If your faith is firm, you'll be firm."*

Tennessee Williams  
wrote a play called *The Night of the Iguana*.  
In one scene  
Hannah Jelkes is talking to Mr. Shannon,  
who seems to have a drinking problem.

Hannah says,  
"Liquor isn't your problem, Mr. Shannon."  
And, of course, Mr. Shannon says to Hannah,  
"Then what is my problem?"  
Hannah says, "The oldest one in the world—

the need to believe in something  
or in someone—almost anyone—  
almost anything . . . something."

Faith is to our lives  
what a solid foundation is to a house.  
It is something firm to build on.  
If our faith is firm, our lives will be firm.  
If our faith is shaky, our lives will be shaky.

How do we nourish our faith  
and keep it firm?  
What part does prayer play in this process?

"If we believe in absurdities,  
we will commit atrocities." Francis Marie Voltaire

## Isaiah rebukes Assyria

Wednesday

Isaiah 10:5-7, 13-16

*"Can an ax be greater than its user?"*

The nation of Assyria  
destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel.  
Now it threatened to destroy  
the southern kingdom of Judah, as well.

Isaiah portrays Assyria as an ax in the hand  
of a woodsman (God) who was grubbing out  
the undergrowth from his vineyard (Judah).  
God was using Assyria to purify Judah.

Meanwhile, Assyria grew arrogant,  
thinking that it alone was responsible  
for its power and its victories.  
This led Isaiah to remind Assyria  
that without the power of the woodsman's arms  
the ax is useless.

In other words, it was as foolish for Assyria  
to take credit for its victories  
as it is for an echo to take credit for sound.

How aware are we  
that all we are and all we have comes from God?

"Whoever remains in me . . .  
will bear much fruit;  
for you can do nothing without me." John 15:5



## Isaiah holds out hope

Thursday                      Isaiah 26:7-9, 12, 16-19

*Those sleeping in their graves will wake up.*

After the *Titanic* sank in the North Atlantic, a newspaper carried two pictures side by side.

The first picture showed the ship's side ripped open by the huge iceberg. Under it was printed:  
"The weakness of man, the supremacy of nature."

The second picture showed a passenger giving his place in a lifeboat to a woman with a child in her arms. Under it was printed:  
"The weakness of nature, the supremacy of man."

Isaiah sees the southern kingdom in similar terms. By itself, it appears doomed and without hope. With God's help, however, it can rise from the grave and live again.

When we fall or lose hope, do we focus on ourselves and on our own inadequacies? Or do we focus on God and his love and power?

"Jesus said, 'Young man! Get up. . . .'  
The dead man sat up."     Luke 7:14-15

## Hezekiah prays to God

Friday                      Isaiah 38:1-6, 21-22, 7-8

*God answered his prayer.*

Alexis Carrel was a French physician who did much of his work in the United States. He eventually won the Nobel prize for his contributions to the field of medicine.

After a period of religious doubt and skepticism, Carrel underwent a profound conversion. He also became a great man of prayer. He wrote in an article for the *Reader's Digest*:

"Too many people regard prayer . . . as a refuge for weaklings or a childish petition for material things. Properly understood, prayer is a mature activity indispensable to the fullest development of personality."

How do we look upon prayer?  
What role does prayer play in our daily lives?

"When we pray, we link ourselves with the inexhaustible motive power that spins the universe. We ask that a part of this power be apportioned to our needs."     Alexis Carrel

## Micah warns Judah

Saturday                      Micah 2:1-5

*"What you take will be taken from you."*

Micah bears a striking resemblance to Amos. He preached around 700 B.C., just before Assyria destroyed Israel in the north. Like Amos, who lived some 50 years before him, he came from the vicinity of Bethlehem.

Micah also spoke out in the same blunt, unpolished way as did Amos. But where Amos preached to Israel, Micah preached to Judah in the south.

In today's reading, Micah foretells that those who plunder the poor will in turn be plundered by God.

There is a message here for all of us. As we do to others, so God will do to us.

Do we really believe that as we sow, so we shall reap?

Jesus said, "If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you."  
Matthew 6:14

## The Lord instructs us

Monday

Micah 6:1-4, 6-8

*Walk humbly with your God.* (NAB)

Richard Nixon resigned the presidency August 8, 1973. His resignation ended the Watergate scandal that sent several of his aides to prison.

What happened to him and his staff?  
Why did so many talented people go bad?

In his book *Born Again*, Charles Colson, one of Nixon's aides who went to prison, gave his own answer. Referring to C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, Colson said that one passage in that book "seemed to sum up what happened to all of us in the White House":

"Pride is a spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense."

In other words, Colson and his colleagues had failed to "walk humbly with God."

How humbly do we walk with God?

"We are never too big to be humble, but we are sometimes too small." Anonymous

## God is forgiving

Tuesday

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

*He casts our sins into the sea.* (NAB)

In *Forgive and Forget*, Lewis Smedes tells about a Jewish prisoner who worked in a Nazi field hospital. One day a nurse asked him to accompany her to the bedside of a dying German soldier. The soldier asked to be forgiven for his part in persecuting the Jews, saying, "I know what I am asking is almost too much, but without your answer I cannot die in peace."

The Jewish prisoner thought for a long minute and then walked away, leaving the soldier to die without his forgiveness.

The prisoner survived the war but could never forget the incident. It bothered him the rest of his life. He wondered if he had done wrong by refusing to forgive the soldier.

In today's reading, we are assured that God will always forgive us, if we ask.

How forgiving are we?

"To err is human, to forgive divine."

Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism"

## Jeremiah protests his calling

Wednesday

Jeremiah 1:1, 4-10

*"I am too young!"*

John Powell

writes in *Through Seasons of the Heart*:

"There's an old Christian tradition that God sends each person into this world with a special message to deliver, with a special song to sing for others, with a special act of love to bestow.

"No one can speak my message, or sing my song, or offer my act of love. These are entrusted to me."

None of us is too young, too weak, or too old to deliver a message, sing a song, or bestow an act of love. Regardless of who we are, we have a mission to fulfill in this world. It was given to us by God himself.

Do we look upon our talents as gifts to be shared with others?

"God has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have a mission." John Cardinal Newman

## My people have sinned

Thursday                      Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13

*"They have forsaken me, their living water."*  
(NAB)

Alexander Solzhenitsyn is a Russian novelist. He fled his native land and later received the Nobel prize for literature.

Writing in *National Review* magazine, he describes several boyhood memories. One involves being taunted by his playmates as he accompanied his mother to the one remaining church in his town.

Another involves someone tearing away the cross that he wore around his neck.

A final one involves old people saying of the tragedies befalling Russia, "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened."

Solzhenitsyn says what happened to Russia in his youth has now happened to the world. We have "lost touch with our Creator."

How closely in touch with God are we, right now in our lives?

"If God loved us as much as we love him, where would we all be?"      Anonymous

## God speaks to the people of Jerusalem

Friday                                      Jeremiah 3:14-17

*"Return, rebellious children."*      (NAB)

Ed Baldwin was a banker, and his wife, Janice, a career woman. Both were moving up the corporate ladder. Neither bothered about religion or church. But something was missing from their lives.

One Sunday, by chance, they attended church. Something happened to them both. They began to see that the one "who dies with the most toys" isn't the winner of the game of life.

To make a long story short, Ed and Janice have turned their lives inside out. She now devotes all her time to their new baby. He devotes all his time to study for the ministry.

Apparently, others feel the way Ed does. The average age of the students in his seminary is 37.

How open are we to change in our lives?

"Of all the acts of man, repentance is the most divine."      Thomas Carlyle

## The Lord speaks

Saturday                                      Jeremiah 7:1-11

*"Reform your ways and your deeds."*      (NAB)

Lloyd C. Douglas wrote *The Robe*, a novel. In it a young Roman soldier, Marcellus, is ordered to crucify a Galilean whose preaching is upsetting authorities. Marcellus really believes the man is innocent, but he obeys his orders.

When the Galilean is dying, Marcellus joins the other soldiers in dicing for the victim's beautiful robe. When he puts the robe on, however, he becomes troubled and can't get his thoughts off the Galilean.

The idea of becoming a Christian begins to plague his thinking, but he fights it. Eventually he realizes that God is speaking to him. He becomes a Christian and discovers a peace that he had never known before.

How do we react when our thoughts seem to invite us to become better Christians than we are?

"Christ is not valued at all unless he is valued above all."      St. Augustine

## God talks about his people

Monday

Jeremiah 13:1-11

*"I made them cling to me closely."* (NAB)

One approach to prayer is to get in touch with ourselves before trying to get in touch with God. For example, we sit in a chair and relax. We become aware of our clothes gripping our shoulders, legs, arms. We feel the chair gripping our body, shoes gripping our feet.

When we are in touch with ourselves, we then try getting in touch with God. For example, we pray to God like this:

"Father, you embrace us as certainly as the clothes we wear, as the chair we sit in. May each sensation we feel deepen our awareness of your loving embrace."

The inspiration for this approach to prayer is today's reading, where God uses the analogy of clothes gripping the body to express his close relationship with people.

How aware are we of God's closeness to us?

"We need not cry very loud; he is closer than we think." Brother Lawrence

## A disaster strikes Judah

Tuesday

Jeremiah 14:17-22

*The people wondered if God still loved them.*

A newspaper described what was left of the town Udall, Kansas, after a tornado:

"All homes were shredded to splinters. Only the shells of stores and office buildings stand above the hip-level mass of kindling strewn across the area. . . .

"And from the population of 500 persons, no one has been found who was not injured in some way. . . .

"A water tank which held the town's water supply high atop a skeletal tower was twisted inside out like a paper cup." International News Service

A natural disaster like this helps us appreciate the spiritual disaster that struck God's people. Small wonder they thought that God had deserted them.

How do we react to disasters in our lives?

"If God sends us stony paths, he provides strong shoes." Corrie ten Boom

## Jeremiah is crushed and depressed

Wednesday

Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21

*God promised to help him.*

Years ago, *Time* magazine carried a story about a priest imprisoned in Romania. His underground cell was in total darkness. A stench pervaded it 24 hours a day because it was next to an open drain into which toilets from five floors above him flushed.

His bed consisted of two damp boards lying on a damp floor. Rats scurried over him constantly whenever he tried to sleep.

But God did not abandon the priest. He spent hours meditating on Jesus' crucifixion. At times during his meditations, he was filled with an overwhelming sense of God's presence and strengthened to the point of great joy.

Recall a time when God strengthened us, when we were overwhelmed by suffering or sorrow.

"Whenever God gives us a cross to bear, it is a prophecy that he also gives us the strength." Anonymous

## **We are clay in God's hands**

Thursday

Jeremiah 18:1-6

*He fashions us like a potter.*

Rembrandt was a 17th-century Dutch painter. He is still regarded as one of the world's greatest artists.

Rembrandt's wife, Saskia, died in the midst of his career. Following her death, he went into a period of deep mourning, in which he didn't paint at all.

Eventually he resumed painting again. When he did, he painted with a new power and passion.

Some critics suggest that the death of his wife was a turning point in his career. It transformed him into an outstanding artist. Rembrandt's story illustrates how God can use tragedy to fashion us into something better than we originally were.

Do we believe  
God wants to make something beautiful of us?

"It is by those who suffer  
that the world has been advanced." Leo Tolstoy

## **Jeremiah prophesies trouble**

Friday

Jeremiah 26:1-9

*The people threatened Jeremiah.*

When Samuel Morse explained his plans for telegraph communication in 1842, some people ridiculed him.

When Bell Telephone applied for a patent in 1876, some communication experts dismissed the telephone idea as a toy.

When Thomas Edison outlined his plans for an incandescent light in 1878, the British Parliament laughed at the idea.

Something like that happened to Jeremiah in today's reading.

He was not only ridiculed  
but threatened with death  
for speaking out in God's name.

How do we respond  
when people make fun of us  
for doing or saying what we think is right?

"Happy are those who are persecuted  
because they do what God requires;  
the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!"

Matthew 5:10

## **God speaks through Jeremiah**

Saturday

Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24

*"Reform your ways!"* (NAB)

The *Dallas Morning News* carried a story about an Olympic hopeful. It began:

"Jeff Kostoff's list of achievements fills an entire page in the Stanford swimming guide, but missing among the . . . U.S. distance records, NCAA titles and medal performances, is mention of . . . his best friend from high school.

"He was a swimmer, too,  
but he wasn't that talented,"  
said Kostoff. . . .

'He realized the talent I had,  
and convinced me to stop screwing around  
and concentrate on swimming.'

Jeremiah tried to provide a similar function for God's people.

Recall a time when we challenged someone about squandering God's gifts to them. Did anyone ever help us by challenging us on this point?

"Our chief want in life is someone  
who shall make us do what we can."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Two prophets

Monday

Jeremiah 28:1-17

*One was false; the other, true.*

Years ago

a Russian pianist gave a concert in New York.

The next morning the music critic for the *New York Times* called the concert “disconnected” and “disappointing.”

The music critic for the New York *Herald Tribune*, however, called the concert “blazing” and “electrifying.”

Two professional critics heard the same concert but judged it totally differently.

In today’s reading, two prophets viewed the same situation but judged it totally differently.

Hananiah viewed it and judged it from his human perspective; Jeremiah viewed it and judged it from God’s perspective.

How do we tend to view and judge situations—from God’s all-knowing perspective, or from our own limited human perspective?

“We see things not as they are, but as we are.”  
H. M. Tomlinson

## God speaks to his people

Tuesday

Jeremiah 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22

*“I will restore my people.”*

Jeremiah prophesied in Judah in the most critical time in the nation’s history: before and after the destruction of the city and the Temple by the Babylonians.

Today’s reading is addressed to the people in their darkest hour: after the fall of the city and the Temple.

It assures the people that God will eventually restore their nation to its former glory.

He will wipe away their tears and, once again, make them dance for joy.

How do we respond when sorrow or tragedy invades our lives? Do these imposters tend to make us bitter or better as persons?

“How often we look upon God as our last and feeblest recourse! We go to him because we have nowhere else to go. And then we learn that the storms of life have driven us not upon the rocks, but into the desired haven.” George MacDonald

## God comforts his people

Wednesday

Jeremiah 31:1-7

*“Once again I will rebuild you.”*

A woman dropped a beautiful orange vase, and it splintered into dozens of tiny pieces. She swept them up and threw them away.

An hour later the woman discovered that her little daughter had retrieved the pieces from the wastebasket and pasted them on a piece of white cardboard. Then, taking some crayons, the little girl drew stems, leaves, and flowers, converting the pieces into a bouquet.

The woman was moved to tears. Her daughter had made something beautiful out of something that was broken and useless.

God did something similar to his people. He retrieved them from the wastebasket of history and shaped them into something beautiful.

How firmly do we believe that God can take the broken pieces of our lives and make something beautiful out of them?

“You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance.” Psalm 30:11

## God makes a promise

Thursday

Jeremiah 31:31-34

*"I will make a new covenant."*

At the Last Supper, Jesus said,  
"This cup is God's new covenant  
sealed with my blood." Luke 22:20

When the disciples heard these words,  
their thoughts went immediately  
to today's reading from the Book of Jeremiah.

From Jesus' viewpoint,  
the new covenant didn't destroy the old one  
anymore than adulthood destroys childhood.  
It grew out of the old covenant as naturally  
as adulthood grows out of childhood.  
It brought the old covenant to its fulfillment.

Speaking about the new covenant, Paul said,  
"No longer do we serve  
in the old way of a written law,  
but in the new way of the Spirit." Romans 7:6

Do we still serve in the old way by asking,  
"How far can I go before I break the law?"  
Or do we serve in the new way by asking,  
"How much more can I do because I love?"

"In the evening of life we will be judged  
by how well we loved." John of the Cross

## God speaks through Nahum

Friday

Nahum 2:1, 3; 3:1-3, 6-7

*The city was doomed.*

The Book of Nahum  
is one of the shortest books in the Bible.  
It celebrates the fall of Nineveh,  
the capital of Assyria, Judah's ancient enemy.

Nothing is known of Nahum (ca. 650 B.C.),  
except what we find in this brief book.  
Two things stand out as we read it.

First, Nahum possesses great poetic talent.  
His style is filled with vivid images.

Second, Nahum's message is extremely clear:  
No lasting kingdom  
can be built on fraud and force.  
God will not tolerate such a kingdom,  
as the destruction of Assyria shows.

What can be said of kingdoms  
can also be said of persons.  
The unrepentant sinner is doomed to die.

How aware are we of the sin in our lives?  
What are we doing to root it out of our lives?

"Our sense of sin is in proportion  
to our nearness to God." Thomas D. Bernard

## Habakkuk questions God

Saturday

Habakkuk 1:12-2:4

*God promised that justice would prevail.*

The Book of Habakkuk  
is nearly as short as the Book of Nahum.  
Habakkuk prophesied shortly before  
the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple (587 B.C.).  
He wrestled with the same question Job did:  
Why do good people seem to suffer  
and evil people appear to prosper?

God answers Habakkuk by saying  
that although evil nations, like Babylonia,  
appear to prosper now,  
the countdown for their ultimate destruction  
is already in progress.  
It's just a matter of time.

The Book of Habakkuk ends  
with the prophet expressing his faith in God,  
even though God and God's justice  
seem to be far away and slow in coming.

Do we sometimes wonder  
about God's fairness to people?  
How do we resolve the questions this raises?

"Trust the past to God's mercy,  
the present to his love,  
and the future to his providence." St. Augustine

## God appears to Ezekiel

Monday

Ezekiel 1:2-5, 24-28

*The Lord appeared in a storm.*

Ezekiel was in his 20s when Babylonian armies destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. As he was marched off in chains to Babylon, with thousands of other young men, his dreams of serving as a temple priest marched away with him.

Then one day in Babylon, Ezekiel gazed across the plains and saw an approaching storm: thunder, lightning, and storm clouds. In the storm's midst stood the Lord of glory, in human form, seated on a throne and surrounded by a dazzling rainbow. The great God of Israel was present in Babylon and had come to make Ezekiel his messenger to the exiles in Babylon.

There's a lesson here for all of us. God never deserts his people. He is with them not only in their years of glory but also in their years of drums.

How do we react when God seems to desert us?

"God dwells wherever we let him in."  
Hasidic saying

## God speaks to Ezekiel

Tuesday

Ezekiel 2:8-3:4

*"Preach to the people of Israel."*

Jews had an interesting way of introducing children to the Word of God. When parents deemed it time to present God's Word to their little ones, they began by placing honey on their lips.

This ancient practice may have been inspired by today's reading.

In it God commands Ezekiel to eat the scroll of God's Word.

Ezekiel obeys and discovers that God's Word is sweet as honey.

Eating the scroll is a symbolic way of saying that Ezekiel assimilated God's Word. It became part of him and nourished him in a spiritual way. Only after he had assimilated it, and had been nourished by it, was he in a position to share it with others.

How well have we assimilated God's Word?  
How nourishing do we find it?  
To what extent do we share it with others?

"The devil is not afraid of the Bible that has dust on it." L. R. Akers

## Ezekiel has a vision of Jerusalem

Wednesday

Ezekiel 9:1-7; 10:18-22

*"Only those who mourn will be saved."*

Five years after arriving in Babylon, Ezekiel is returned to Jerusalem in a vision. He finds himself beside the Temple. What he sees may have been actual or symbolic. In any event, the meaning is clear: He sees a breakdown of the religion of Israel. Even the Temple is desecrated by pagan worship.

At this point a man dressed in linen—the fabric worn by priests and those who serve God in heaven—appears flanked by three men on his right and three men on his left.

Then a voice instructs the man in linen to mark the foreheads of those who grieve the breakdown of religion. Only those who mourn its breakdown will be saved; the rest will be destroyed.

How much do we grieve the breakdown of religion in the modern world?

Do we pray for the return of faith to the world?

"One person with belief is equal to the force of ninety-nine who have only interests."

John Stuart Mills



## God speaks to Ezekiel

Thursday

Ezekiel 12:1-2

*"These rebellious people look but don't see."*

Helen Keller, who was deaf and blind, made this provocative remark:

"I have walked with people whose eyes are full of light but who see nothing in the sea or the sky, nothing in city streets, nothing in books. It is far better to sail forever in the light of blindness . . . than to be content with the mere act of seeing."

This is also the message in today's reading. It is also a point that Jesus made in his lifetime:

"This people . . . will look and look, but not see, because . . . they have . . . closed their eyes." Matthew 13:14-15

How sensitive are we to the needs of people around us? Do we see the pain in their eyes? Do we see the face of Christ in their face?

The Little Prince said, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly."  
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

## God speaks of Israel

Friday

Ezekiel 16:1-15, 60, 63

*"I loved you, but you deserted me."*

Some time ago *America* magazine carried an article entitled "Adult Runaway." It dealt with the growing number of adults who desert their spouses and families.

These adults almost always end up unhappy. Quoting the head of the Missing Person's Bureau of Los Angeles, the article says:

"The majority . . . would give anything to be back living their former lives.

But they mistakenly figure there's no way they can undo the past."

Today's reading compares Israel to an adult runaway. It also portrays God as being willing to forgive if the runaway would only return.

How do we handle family frustrations? Do we seek help when these frustrations become "unbearable," or do we foolishly hope the situation will remedy itself?

"A successful marriage is an edifice that must be rebuilt each day." André Maurois

## God speaks about judgment

Saturday

Ezekiel 18:1-10, 13, 30-32

*"I will judge each by what he has done."*

Ancient Jews believed that God rewarded and punished in this life. This created problems because many good people seemed to suffer and many evil people seemed to prosper. Three explanations were offered to explain this.

1. The good suffered because of secret sins.
2. The good suffered because God treated the people of Israel as one body; thus the good suffered because they belonged to a guilty whole.
3. Finally, the good suffered because of the sins of parents or children.

Today's reading refutes the last two explanations. Each person will be judged according to his or her own sins, not another's.

Do we, at times, blame our suffering on others?

"For when the One Great Scorer comes To write against your name, He marks—not that you won or lost— But how you played the game."

Grantland Rice, "Alumnus Football"

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How much do we grieve the breakdown of religion in the modern world?

Do we pray for the return of faith to the world?

"One person with belief is equal to the force of ninety-nine who have only interests."

John Stuart Mills

## God speaks about tragedies

Monday

Ezekiel 24:15-24

*Some tragedies are infinitely worse than others.*

The normal sign of mourning among Jews was to remove one's head covering, to remove one's shoes, and to wail loudly.

When Ezekiel's wife died, God told Ezekiel not to observe these signs. Moreover, when people asked him why he did not observe them, he was to respond that this was how God wanted them to mourn the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

God's point seems to be that some tragedies are so terrible that the normal signs of mourning do not apply.

What is the worst tragedy that ever befell us?  
What is the worst tragedy that could ever befall us?

Lord, help us realize that the loss of wealth, power, and fame is as nothing compared to the loss of God and heaven through personal sin.

## A prince claims to be a god

Tuesday

Ezekiel 28:1-10

*He lost his perspective.*

Fame and wealth are fickle things, but they fail to change some people. Take the modern painter Salvador Dali.

At 20, Dali was unknown and starving. At 70, he was famous and a multimillionaire. His paintings hung in 41 museums around the world. One sold in New York for \$250,000.

Yet, through his rise from rags to riches, Dali managed to keep his perspective.

He never let fame or wealth blind him or distort his spiritual vision.

Unfortunately, the prince of Tyre, in today's reading, failed to do what Salvador Dali did. He failed to maintain his perspective. And because he lost his perspective, he lost his life—and possibly his soul.

How clear is our perspective on what is and is not important in life?

“Will a person gain anything if he wins the whole world but is himself lost or defeated?” Luke 9:25

## You shepherds are doomed

Wednesday

Ezekiel 34:1-11

*“You take care of yourselves, not your sheep!”*

Fr. Horace McKenna of Washington, D.C., spent much of his life helping the city's poor. Just before he died, he said:

“When God lets me into heaven, I think I'll ask to go off in a corner somewhere, sit down, and cry—because the strain is off. I won't have to worry any longer about who's at the door, whose breadbox is empty, whose baby is sick, and whose children can't read.”

Unlike the shepherds that Ezekiel talks about in today's reading, Fr. McKenna devoted every waking moment to the flock God had entrusted to his care. He was, indeed, a good shepherd.

What kind of a shepherd are we to those God has entrusted to our care?

Lord, make shepherds to others in the image and likeness of your Son, Jesus, who was the model for all shepherds.

## God makes a promise

Thursday

Ezekiel 36:23-38

*"I will give you a new heart and a new spirit."*

An accident left 17-year-old Joni Eareckson a quadriplegic.

Her body was completely broken and helpless.

But even more broken than her body

were her heart and her spirit.

She wondered how she would ever be able

to live out the rest of her life

in her tragic condition.

Yet, thanks to prayer

and to her daily reading of the Bible,

she began to glimpse possibilities in life

that she never dreamed of before her accident.

Today, Joni is an accomplished painter

(holding the brush in her teeth),

a best-selling author, a singer,

and a popular lecturer to young people.

God, indeed,

breathed into her a new heart and a new spirit.

Do we believe that God can use us

in ways we never dreamed to be possible?

Do we believe he can use us to work miracles?

"There is nothing that God cannot do,"  
through us, if we but let him. Luke 1:37

## Behold these dry bones!

Friday

Ezekiel 37:1-14

*"I will breathe life back into them!"*

Robert Veninga describes  
an Alcoholics Anonymous support group  
in his book *A Gift of Hope*. He says:

"The friendship among those seven men  
is one of the strongest bonds of friendship  
that I have ever seen.

They telephone each other several times a week.

Even when the executives

are traveling on business,

they make certain that they fly home

for the Saturday night meeting.  
It's just too precious to miss."

If today's reading

applies to any group of people,

it applies to members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

God has, indeed, breathed life back into them—

individually and as a group.

Do we believe

God can breathe life back into us,

if we turn our lives over to him as AAs do?

"I prophesied as I had been told.

Breath entered the bodies,

and they came to life and stood up." Ezekiel 37:10

## I saw God's glory

Saturday

Ezekiel 43:1-7

*It filled the Temple once again.*

Movie actor Martin Sheen

told a newspaper reporter, not long ago,  
that he had returned to the Catholic Church  
after a 16-year absence from it.

He said it all started in India  
where he saw absolute poverty, misery,  
and hopelessness.

"I saw in India

what I was taught as a boy in a Catholic school  
and in a Catholic family:

We're all part of the mystical body of Christ."

And at that moment,

the glory of God, so to speak,  
reentered the life of Martin Sheen  
in a new and powerful way.

Martin Sheen is now devoting himself  
to films that will further God's glory.

How aware are we

that our needy brothers and sisters  
are members of Christ's body?

"The glory of God is a person fully alive."

St. Irenaeus

## Paul addresses the Thessalonians

Monday 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 11-12

*I thank God for you.*

Charles Jones is the Hollywood animator who developed the Bugs Bunny cartoons. In the 1930s he was just a struggling artist in Hollywood's Warner Brothers Studio.

At that same time Walt Disney created the famous "Three Little Pigs" cartoon. Jones recalls how he wrote Disney a letter of congratulations. Disney was deeply grateful and wrote a personal thank-you letter back.

Years later Disney lay dying in a hospital. Jones visited him. During the visit Disney recalled the letter Jones had written him thirty years earlier. He thanked him again. "I treasure your letter," he told Jones, "because you're the only animator who ever wrote to me."

Would people classify us as a "grateful" person? Would God?

"When every bone in our body aches, we can, at least, thank God that we're not a herring." Quin Ryan (adapted)

## Paul speaks about Jesus' coming

Tuesday 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 14-16

*Don't be misled by false prophets!*

The *Evanston Review* for April 8, 1982, carried a full-page ad. The ad's headline read, "A Warning from God." The subhead read, "In 1982 Russia will invade Israel in fulfillment of the biblical prophecy in Ezekiel 38-39."

The ad went on to say, "Jesus is coming soon . . . the hour is late . . . the end is near. . . . Come into the Ark of safety which is Jesus Christ."

Paul's words to the Thessalonians in today's reading have just as much relevance today as they did for the Thessalonians. We too are besieged on all sides by false prophets who claim to have special insight into the meaning of Scripture concerning the end of the world.

To what extent do we allow ourselves to be agitated by religious panic peddlers?

Jesus said, "No one knows . . . when that day and hour will come . . . ; the Father alone knows." Matthew 24:36

## Do just what we did

Wednesday 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10, 16-18

*We worked day and night.*

Fr. Robert Cahill, an American missionary in Bangladesh, writes of its citizens:

"These people crave work. . . . Mojibur, a young man whose only ambition in life is to support his widowed mother and four sisters, has work for a week hauling baskets full of fresh earth on his head, under a merciless sun, for the equivalent of 65 cents a day. The job, though temporary, revives his spirit and encourages his family. Day labor is a way of life for millions of Bangladeshis. It provides bread for today only."

*National Catholic Reporter*

These millions of people carry out Paul's advice with enthusiasm and gratitude.

How do we look upon the opportunity to work? Do we do it with gratitude? With enthusiasm?

"God doesn't want our deeds, but he wants the work that prompts them."

St. Theresa of Avila

## Paul encourages the Corinthians

Thursday

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

*God will keep you firm to the end.*

A Jesuit missionary to Africa wrote this letter to his brothers at Loyola University in Chicago:

"Little boys jabber, fight  
and run foot races outside the window.  
Sometimes they stare in at me and watch me,  
as if I were a gorilla in a zoo.  
Women come with sick babies  
and sit on the floor outside my room,  
talking at the top of their voice.  
All the villagers talk as if you're 30 yards away.  
But these things are bearable and routine.

"It's the crisis of conscience that is hard.  
Christ said: 'When you were hungry,  
you gave me to eat.'  
But there's nobody here who isn't hungry;  
everyone comes for food." Torrens Hecht, S.J.

Missionaries don't have an easy life.  
They draw needed strength from Paul's promise  
that God will strengthen them to the end.

How do we cope with life when it grows hard?

"Come to me, all of you who are tired . . .  
and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

## Paul talks about Christ's crucifixion

Friday

1 Corinthians 1:17-25

*It was nonsense to the Gentiles.*

The English poet Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem called "Cold Iron."  
It's about a baron who rebels against his king  
and tries to overthrow him.

The king's army engages the baron's army,  
defeats it, and takes the baron prisoner.  
When the baron is brought before the king,  
everyone expects him to be severely punished  
and then executed.

To everyone's consternation,  
the king responds in a totally different way.  
Instead of punishing and executing the baron,  
the king treats him kindly, sets before him  
a table, and serves him bread and wine.

The symbolism of the poem is obvious.  
It also helps us understand better the "folly"  
of God's wisdom.

How do we treat people who hurt us?

"God's foolishness  
is wiser than human wisdom." 1 Corinthians 1:25

## Paul talks about God's ways

Saturday

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

*God chose the lowly to confound the lofty.*

The *Detroit News* carried an article telling how  
John W. Cannon, a Detroit insurance man,  
lost an expensive summer home  
because he didn't have a dime for a pay phone.

One night in rural Canada,  
John was at his new summer home,  
which had no phone yet.  
Suddenly he was awakened by a fire.  
He leaped up and drove to a pay booth  
on the highway, half a mile away.  
To his consternation,  
he had no coins at all in his pockets.  
He drove to Kingsville  
and led the fire department back to his home.  
By the time they arrived, his house was gone.

This story illustrates graphically  
that sometimes a dime can be worth more  
than a thousand-dollar bill.  
There are times when the same is true  
of God's plan of salvation.

Do we tend to value things  
according to their monetary value only?

"God purposely chose . . .  
what the world considers weak  
in order to shame the powerful."

1 Corinthians 1:27

## I spoke with no eloquence

Monday

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

*The Spirit, however, spoke through me.*

Malcolm Muggeridge, the BBC-TV celebrity, interviewed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

The verdict on the interview was that it was hardly usable on TV. Mother Teresa's delivery was halting, and she spoke with a rather thick accent.

One BBC official, however, felt that the interview had a mysterious power and held out for its use on a Sunday night. To everyone's surprise, viewer response to the program was amazing—both in terms of mail and contributions.

What came through was not the eloquence of Mother Teresa, but the power of the Spirit acting through this saintly woman. It was the same power Paul speaks about in today's reading.

Do we seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in dealing with difficult situations?

Jesus said,  
"The words you speak will not be yours; they will come from the Holy Spirit."

Mark 13:11

## Paul speaks about the Spirit

Tuesday

1 Corinthians 2:10-16

*The Spirit helps us appraise everything.*

In the ninth book of his *Confessions*, St. Augustine describes an incident near the end of the life of St. Monica, his mother.

They were in Rome standing at a window, overlooking a garden. Augustine writes:

"We had gone there . . . to get away from the noisy crowd and rest. And so the two of us . . . were enjoying a very pleasant conversation. . . ."

We were asking one another . . . what it would be like to share the eternal life enjoyed by the saints. . . .

"In the course of our conversation that day, the world and its pleasures lost all their attraction for us."

Augustine and Monica experienced what Paul talks about in today's reading.

Is our attraction to the things of this world growing stronger or weaker?

"[The Spirit] will lead you into all the truth."  
John 16:13

## Paul talks about ministry

Wednesday

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

*We plant, but God gives the growth.*

Author Irene Champernowne says that her favorite saying was written out for her by an old Arab living in a small mountain village in Lebanon. It reads:  
"I will set my face to the wind and scatter my seed on high."

Irene says she likes the saying because it reminds her that God can do great things with the seed we sow.

Our job, therefore, is to have the courage to keep facing the wind and sowing the seed. This is not an easy task, because we rarely see the results of our efforts. "But even if we don't," she adds, "other people do and they are grateful. The seed we sow is our gift to life and God."

What kind of seed are we sowing in our lives, right now, for life and God?

Paul writes:  
"I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant grow."

1 Corinthians 3:6

## Paul speaks about wisdom

Thursday

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

*The world's wisdom is nonsense to God.*

St. John Vianney was considered a dunce by his schoolteachers. The only reason he got through the seminary was because he was pushed through. When he arrived at his first parish, the pastor thought him too stupid to preach. But the bishop had more insight. He moved the young priest and made him pastor of a small village called Ars.

The young priest did such a remarkable job that people began coming from all over France to hear him preach and to be absolved by him in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

St. John was canonized in 1925 and made patron of parish priests. He is a living example that the world's wisdom is nonsense in God's sight.

How do we tend to evaluate people—by the world's standards or by God's standard?

“‘My thoughts,’ says the LORD, ‘are not like yours; and my ways are different from yours.’”  
Isaiah 55:8

## Paul talks about judgment

Friday

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

*Don't pass judgment ahead of time.*

There's a trial scene in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. When all is ready, the king says, “Read the accusation against the accused, the Knave of Hearts.”

With that, White Rabbit blows three loud blasts on the trumpet. Then Rabbit unrolls a huge parchment scroll and reads the accusation. He finishes and rolls the scroll back up.

Then the king turns to the jury and asks, “What is your verdict?”

White Rabbit jumps up and says, “No, your Highness, we're not ready for that yet. There's a great deal we must do before we pass judgment.”

Like the king, we too are prone to pass judgment before it is time. This is also Paul's point in today's reading.

How judgmental are we of people?

“Do not judge others, and God will not judge you.” Luke 6:37

## Paul rebukes the Corinthians

Saturday

1 Corinthians 4:9-15

*We are fools; you are wise.*

Greek dramatists portrayed Corinthians as drunk, depraved, and boisterous. When Greeks wanted to put someone down, they'd say, “He behaves like a Corinthian.” The Greeks also used the expression “Corinthian girl” to refer to a prostitute.

The Corinthians were not noted for gentility. They were citizens of a port city with all the vices of such a population.

This explains Paul's biting irony in today's reading. Some Corinthian Christians had grown smug and complacent with their spiritual progress. Paul tried to wake them up. They were not half as spiritual as they made themselves out to be.

Do we sometimes grow smug and complacent in our own spiritual progress?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!”  
Matthew 5:3



## Paul talks about sin

Monday 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

*Remove the old yeast of sin.*

In her book *Winning by Letting Go*, Elizabeth Brenner explains how people in India catch monkeys.

They cut a small hole in a box. Then they put a tasty nut in the box. The hole is just large enough for the monkey to put its hand through. But it's too small for the monkey to withdraw its hand once it has clutched the nut inside.

So the monkey has two choices. It can let go of the nut and go free, or it can hang on to the nut and stay trapped. Monkeys usually hang on to the nut.

The monkey is a good image of us, and the nut is a good image of sin in our lives. As long as we hang on to our sin, we cannot go free. We remain trapped.

What sin do we hold on to in our lives?

"One leak will sink a ship; and one sin will destroy a sinner." John Bunyan

## Paul speaks about disputes

Tuesday 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

*Settle your disputes among yourselves.*

During the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, French and German soldiers were facing each other in opposite trenches on Christmas Eve.

Suddenly a young French soldier began to sing the Christmas hymn "O Holy Night." He stood on top of the mound of dirt in front of the trench, facing the Germans. Not a shot was fired throughout the song.

When the French soldier finished, a German soldier climbed out of his trench and began singing the Christmas hymn "From Heaven to Earth Come."

That story makes us ask why Christians and Christian nations have to resort to wars to settle disputes. Why can't they settle their disputes peacefully, among themselves, as Paul recommends in today's reading?

How do we settle disputes with others?

"Happy are those who work for peace; God will call them his children!" Matthew 5:9

## Paul speaks about life

Wednesday 1 Corinthians 7:25-31

*The time is short.* (NAB)

Buddy Holly rose to fame in the 1950s. The 19-year-old Texan was the first rock star to write, play, and sing his own music.

During his 36-month career, he wrote 45 songs. Then a tragic airplane crash brought his promising life to an end. When Buddy Holly died, six of his songs were on the chart of best-sellers.

Commenting on the Buddy Holly story, author Albert Cylwicki says:

"If Buddy Holly were alive today, he would probably want to say to us what St. Paul says to the Corinthians in today's reading.

'I tell you, brothers, the time is short.'" (NAB)

How are we using the precious bit of time God has given us?

"I shall pass through this world but once. Any good thing I can do, or any kindness that I can show any human being, let me do it now and not defer it. For I shall not pass this way again."

Stephen Grellet

## Paul talks about scandal

Thursday 1 Corinthians 8:1-7, 11-13

*Take care not to cause others to sin.*

The Corinthians had asked Paul if it was okay to eat the flesh of animals that had been sacrificed to idols.

This was a practical question, because only a portion of the sacrificed animal was offered to the idol.

The remaining flesh was sold in meat markets. It was difficult to determine what meat in a market was from a sacrificed animal and what meat was not.

Paul answers that they can eat this meat. On the other hand, if eating the meat causes them to scandalize someone whose conscience, for some reason, won't permit him or her to eat it, they shouldn't eat it.

Paul's point is that we should always beware of leading others into sin, even by actions that aren't sinful in themselves.

How sensitive are we to the consciences of other people?

"Every believer in the world must become a spark of light." John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*

## Paul talks about discipline

Friday 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-27

*Athletes deny themselves for earthly crowns.*

In his autobiography *Nigger*, Dick Gregory, the athlete, comedian, and civil rights activist, tells how, in high school, he disciplined himself to run for several hours each day, even in the midst of winter. He says:

"I don't think I would ever have finished high school without running. I never got hungry while I was running, even though we never ate breakfast at home and I didn't always have enough money

for lunch. . . .

I was proud of my body . . . and never had to take a rest."

Dick Gregory is a living example of what Paul talks about in today's reading.

How courageously do we discipline our bodies and our spirits to win a crown that will never perish?

"The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight,  
But they, while their companion slept,  
Were toiling upward in the night."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

## Paul talks about the body of Christ

Saturday 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

*We are one body.*

The Hollywood actor Martin Sheen was in India working in the movie *Gandhi*. One day some kids were hanging on the back of the taxi he was riding in. He says:

"I looked out and saw their faces . . . they looked like old people, teeth gone, bugs in their hair. I suddenly knew what I had to do. We stopped the car and got them inside."

At that moment God gave Sheen a great grace. Sheen says:

"I saw . . . what I had been taught as a boy. . . . We're all part of the mystical body of Christ. . . . We are all united. . . . It is not just confined to the Catholic Church."

That experience helped bring Martin Sheen back into the Church after a 16-year absence.

Do we see Christ in the needy in our midst?

"Whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me!" Matthew 25:40

## Paul rebukes the Corinthians

Monday 1 Corinthians 11:17-26, 33

*Your meetings do more harm than good.*

Early Christians met each week for a "fellowship meal." Paul calls this meal the "Lord's Supper."

In the context of this "fellowship meal," or "Lord's Supper," Christians celebrated the Eucharist, or Mass.

In today's reading, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for abuses that are starting to take place at the Lord's Supper.

Factions are forming; some people are refusing to share their abundance with their poorer brothers and sisters; other people are even getting drunk.

These abuses are destroying the proper atmosphere of sharing and love for the celebration of the Eucharist.

How filled with sharing and love are we when we celebrate the Eucharist?

"The effect of our sharing in the body and blood of Christ is to change us into what we receive."  
Pope St. Leo the Great

## Paul speaks about Christ's body

Tuesday 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27-31

*We are all members of one body.*

On Good Friday, April 5, 1985, 8,000 radio stations across the world played the song "We Are the World" at the same time.

The purpose was twofold: to raise funds to feed Ethiopian famine victims and to show the unity of the human family, rather than its division.

Paul would have applauded the gesture on the part of the disc jockeys of the world.

What he says about the body of Christ in today's reading applies equally to the family of humankind.

We are all members of the same family and should begin to use our talents for the good of the entire family.

How are we using our own special talents for the good of the body of Christ and the family of humankind?

"If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it."

1 Corinthians 12:26

## Paul talks about gifts

Wednesday 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

*The greatest gift is love.*

St. Theresa was a Carmelite nun in Lisieux, France. She died on September 30, 1897, at the age of 24. Among her writings was a passage in which she talks about her search for what *special* calling God had given to her to better serve the Church.

She turned to Paul's letters and read that *not* everyone was called upon to be an apostle, a prophet, or a teacher. This left her more confused than ever.

She continued reading Paul until she came to the words in today's reading: "Set your hearts, then, on the more important gifts. . . . The greatest of these is love." Then, she writes: "Nearly ecstatic with supreme joy in my soul, I proclaimed: 'O Jesus . . . At last I have found my calling: my calling is love.'"

How are we using our gift of love to better serve God and the Church?

"We are shaped and fashioned by what we love." Goethe

## Paul talks about our roots

Thursday

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

*I passed on to you what I received.*

In 1977 the television miniseries *Roots* set viewing records that still stand.

*Roots* was the fruit of 12 years of research by author Alex Haley, who traced his family tree through seven generations of black Africans.

Haley's book motivated thousands of Americans to search out their own ancestry.

Commenting on their search, Haley said, "One of the most powerful things in the world is to have a sense of one's family history and . . . identity."

In today's reading, Paul talks about our own Christian roots, saying,

"I passed on to you what I received . . . that Christ died . . . and that he was raised to life three days later." It was this event that gave birth to our Christian faith.

How do we try to renew our own appreciation of our Christian roots from time to time?

"If Christ has not been raised . . . we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe." 1 Corinthians 15:14

## Paul talks about our resurrection

Friday

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

*Christ has been raised.*

In his book *The Year of My Rebirth*, Jesse Stuart, the Kentucky poet, tells how his family planted Irish potatoes each year on Good Friday, the day of Jesus' crucifixion.

Sometimes the snow fell after that date and the potatoes would lie lifeless in the cold ground, just as Jesus did. Then one day a miracle took place.

"Suddenly, the crumpled dark-green leaves would peak through the dark crust of earth."

Reflecting on this unfailing miracle of nature, Stuart says:

"How can I possibly doubt the resurrection of Almighty God's Son when every springtime I have seen the process of resurrection. . . .

"I have faith—that when man, the seed of God, is placed in the ground . . . he will be resurrected to new life."

Where do we find other evidences of the resurrection?

"We are Easter people." St. Augustine of Hippo

## Paul speaks about the dead

Saturday

1 Corinthians 15:35-37, 42-49

*They will be raised to new life.*

Fr. Walter Ciszek, a Jesuit priest, spent 23 years in Russian prisons and work camps.

In his book *He Leadeth Me*, he tells how the second Tuesday after Easter is a very special day for Russian Christians. On that day they commemorate the dead.

They go to the graveyard with flowers and food. The graves are decorated, and the family sits down beside them to enjoy a picnic lunch.

Ciszek says that all the years of atheistic propaganda have not dimmed the Russian peasants' faith that their loved ones are not gone from them forever. There still burns within their hearts the faith that they will be reunited with them.

How great is our faith in the resurrection?

"Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime." Martin Luther

## Proverbs speaks about humble people

Monday

Proverbs 3:27-34

*God treats humble people kindly.*

John XXIII had many admirable virtues. One of his most admirable ones, however, was his humility.

One of the first things he did as pope was to visit Rome's central prison.

He told the prisoners,

"You couldn't come to me,  
so I have come to you."

He also told them that he had a cousin who once served time in prison.

The Vatican newspaper, *L'Observatore Romano*, didn't print the pope's remarks for fear they'd scandalize its readers.

John XXIII had the kind of humility that today's reading talks about.

How seriously do we take Jesus' words when he says,

"Learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit"? Matthew 11:29

"A mountain shames a molehill until they are both humbled by the stars."

Old adage

## Proverbs talks about the poor

Tuesday

Proverbs 21:1-6, 10-13

*If you ignore them, you will be ignored.*

John R. Coleman, former president of Haverford College, wanted to get a firsthand feel for the plight of New York City's homeless.

So he spent ten days on the streets without money or shelter.

A diary of those ten days was published in the *New Yorker* magazine. One entry reads:

"I walk much more slowly.

I no longer see a need to beat the traffic light.

Force of habit still makes me look at my wrist. But there's no watch there, and it wouldn't make any difference if there were. The thermometer has become much more important. I go back to the heated grate on 47th Street. The man who was there last night is already in place."

Coleman's experience affected his attitudes toward the homeless in a dramatic way.

How responsive are we to the needy?

"Poverty . . . teaches men to do evil." Euripides

## Proverbs speaks about human needs

Wednesday

Proverbs 30:5-9

*Let me be neither rich nor poor.*

On Thanksgiving Day, 1985, 175 syndicated cartoonists banded together to give 90 million readers of some 2,000 papers in the United States the same message: While we feast on plenty, many go hungry.

Typical of the cartoons was *Peanuts*.

It showed Linus asking Charlie Brown if he were going to have a big Thanksgiving dinner. Charlie says, in effect, "I guess so, but I don't think that much about food."

Snoopy overhears him, looks at his empty dish, and says to himself,

"You think about it a lot when there's nothing in your dish."

Perhaps the next worst thing to having nothing to eat is having too much. It makes us insensitive to the hungry and ungrateful to God.

How sensitive are we to the hungry?

How grateful to God are we for our plenty?

"In the middle you will find virtue."

An old Latin saying

## **Ecclesiastes talks about human nature**

Thursday Ecclesiastes 1:2-11

*There is nothing new in the whole world.*

“Children love luxury.  
They have bad manners . . . and love to chatter.  
They no longer rise when elders enter the room.  
They contradict their parents . . .  
gobble up dainties at the table . . .  
and are tyrants over their teachers.”

If you think that was written  
by a disgruntled adult in our modern times,  
you’re wrong.  
It was written by a Greek philosopher  
nearly 2,500 years ago.

The philosopher’s observation testifies  
to the truth of today’s reading,  
especially the words  
“There is nothing new in the whole world.”

Do we tend to get pessimistic and down on life  
because everything seems to be getting worse?  
Do we tend to think  
that things are getting out of hand  
and God is no longer in control of the universe?

“Two men looked through prison bars,  
the one saw mud, the other stars.”  
Oscar Wilde, “Reading Gaol”

## **Ecclesiastes talks about time**

Friday Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

*Everything happens at the time God chooses.*

Margaret Mitchell,  
author of the great novel *Gone with the Wind*,  
was struck by a car in Atlanta, Georgia,  
and died August 16, 1949.

Someone who knew her well  
reports that while she was delirious,  
Margaret kept repeating the words,  
“I’ll take care of that tomorrow.”  
The same person said she was a lapsed Catholic

who kept putting off her return to the Church,  
saying, “I’ll take care of that tomorrow.”

Assuming the story is true,  
it’s a good example  
of what today’s reading talks about:  
“Everything happens at the time God chooses.”  
And there are some things  
that shouldn’t be put off until tomorrow.

What are some of the things  
that we keep putting off until tomorrow?  
Why do we keep putting them off?

“Time is what we want most,  
but what alas! we use worst.” William Penn

## **Ecclesiastes talks about death**

Saturday Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:8

*God is going to judge you.*

Dr. Wilder Penfield,  
director of Montreal’s Neurological Institute,  
made an amazing discovery.

One day while performing an operation  
with local anesthesia,  
he accidentally touched the patient’s brain.  
Instantly and vividly, the patient recalled  
an exciting experience from childhood.  
A similar touch to another person  
caused the patient to relive in perfect detail  
the experience of having her baby.

Penfield and other scientists  
now believe that every action of our lives—  
even the feelings we had during the action—  
is stored in our brain.  
In other words, there is a physiological basis  
for the theological concept  
of a personal judgment after death.

How much  
does the idea of a final, personal judgment  
influence our daily actions?

“Do not wait for the last judgment.  
It takes place every day.” Albert Camus

## Suffering comes to Job

Monday

Job 1:6-22

*Job remained faithful to God.*

The Book of Job is one of the most beautifully written books in the Old Testament. It deals with a man named Job, who spent his whole life doing good. He was a real saint.

Then, one day, a series of terrible tragedies comes crashing down on him. Job can't understand why these things happened to him, because he had always led a good life.

He seeks an answer from his friends.  
He seeks an answer from God.  
But no satisfactory answer comes.

Through it all, however, Job trusts God. He doesn't know why he is suffering, but God does and that's enough for Job.

How do we react when suffering and misfortune come crashing down on us?

"Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of the Risen Christ." Mother Teresa

## Job speaks about his suffering

Tuesday

Job 3:1-3, 11-17, 20-23

*He didn't hold back on his feelings.*

Joseph Stein's play *Fiddler on the Roof* is set in Russia in 1905. It centers around a man named Tevye, the father of a poor Orthodox Jewish family.

One of the delightful features of the play is the way Tevye talks to God from the heart. He tells God exactly what is on his mind.

For example, one day his horse loses a shoe on the Sabbath.

Since it is the Sabbath,  
Tevye cannot get the horse shod.  
And so he ends up  
pulling the wagon himself.  
All the while he lets God know  
exactly how he feels about becoming a horse.

Job does the same thing in today's reading. He lets God know exactly how he feels about the suffering that has befallen him.

Do we speak to God frankly, from the heart?

"God instructs the heart not by ideas,  
but by pain and contradiction."

Jean Pierre de Coussade

## Job speaks about God

Wednesday

Job 9:1-12, 14-16

*God is beyond our comprehension.*

The God who emerges from the Book of Job is a God beyond human comprehension.

The greatest blunder a person can make, the book seems to say, is to try to reduce God to the level of human definition and comprehension.

St. Augustine,  
the great fifth-century Christian,  
put it this way:

"God is inexpressible.  
It is easier for us to say what he is not  
than what he is. . . ."

"If you could conceive of him,  
you would conceive of something  
other than God.  
He is not at all  
what you have conceived him to be."

How do we think about God in our prayer?

"God is that indefinable something  
which we all feel,  
but which we do not know." Mohandas Gandhi

## Job puts his trust in God

Thursday

Job 19:21-27

*"I will see God with my own eyes."*

There's a poem that goes like this:

"My dreams for life were laid;  
my journey mapped and made.  
The Lord was at my side,  
to be my friend and guide.  
And so I started out.

"But then the sky turned dark.  
The road grew steep and stark.  
I scarce could travel on.

"I turned and cried: 'My Lord!  
Why the pain; why the plight?  
Where's the road; where's the light?'

"The Lord turned and said: 'My child!  
Why the fear; why the fret?  
Where's your heart; where's your faith?  
I chose this road for you.  
Just trust and travel on.'" Mark Link

Recall a time when we could scarce travel on.

"The more we depend on God,  
the more dependable he becomes."  
Cliff Richards (slightly adapted)

## Job talks about God

Friday

Job 38:1, 12-21; 40:3-5

*God's wisdom far surpasses ours.*

God's words to Job take the form of a litany recounting the wonders of nature. God reminds Job, in a dramatic series of rhetorical questions, that Job neither created nor understands the workings of the universe.

This doesn't answer Job's questions directly, but it does suggest a new line of thought. It is this: If Job admits that God's wisdom greatly surpasses his,

why does he question God's fairness to him? If he can't understand other things, why does he expect to understand this?

Job's wisdom falls so short of God's wisdom that it is folly for Job to challenge God. To challenge God is the posture of a fool, not a wise man.

In any event, Job's experience of God changes him from a sage into a saint. It transforms him into a true person of faith.

Do we sometimes challenge God? Why?

"Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man."  
Thomas Paine

## God blesses Job

Saturday

Job 42:1-3, 5-6, 12-16

*God rewarded Job beyond his dreams.*

In their book *Finding God*, Louis Savary and Thomas O'Connor tell the story of a young man who had a remarkable experience of God.

He knelt down and prayed for the first time in over 20 years. In the course of the prayer, he surrendered himself to God, totally. As he did, he suspected that God would make his life hard and painful.

But the opposite happened. God blessed him beyond his wildest dreams. The young man wrote later:

"Since I gave up to God all ownership of my own life, he has blessed me in a thousand ways, and opened my path in a way almost incredible to those who do not enjoy the secret of a truly surrendered life."

Have we ever experienced God's special love after surrendering something to God?

God's blessings put our wildest dreams to shame.



## Paul reproaches the Galatians

Monday Galatians 1:6-12

*Hold fast to the Gospel I preached to you.*

Paul's letter to the Galatians was triggered by Judaizers. These conservative Jews followed Paul into new Christian communities and told the Christian converts that they must be circumcised.

The Judaizers tried to discredit Paul by saying that he had watered down the Gospel to make it appealing to Christian converts. They accused Paul of preaching a gospel that was contrary to the true Gospel.

Some Galatians believed the Judaizers and strayed from what Paul had taught them.

As a result, Paul wrote this fearless letter to his new Christian converts in Galatia.

How faithfully do we follow the Gospel?  
How do we react when people, pretending to follow Jesus and the Gospel, challenge what we have been taught concerning Jesus and the Gospel?

"I have complete confidence in the gospel; it is God's power to save all who believe."  
Romans 1:16

## Paul talks about life

Tuesday Galatians 1:13-24

*God has called me to conversion.*

In his book *My Life without God*, William F. Murray, son of the famous atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair, describes his conversion to Christianity at the age of 33.

Murray, like Paul, embarked on a crusade to spread the Gospel he once ridiculed. After his conversion, he wrote two open letters. One was to a newspaper in Austin, Texas, apologizing for helping build

the American Atheist Center in Austin. The other was to the Baltimore *Sun*, apologizing for his part in getting Bible reading and prayer removed from public schools in that city. He was the plaintiff in the famous Supreme Court case of 1963.

How hard do we work for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

"You are the chosen race . . . chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvelous light." 1 Peter 2:9

## Paul rebukes Peter

Wednesday Galatians 2:1-2, 7-14

*You are not being straightforward.* (NAB)

Some Jewish converts to Christianity continued to eat only foods that were allowed by old Jewish dietary laws. Peter no longer observed these antiquated laws.

One day, when some of these conservative converts visited Peter, he observed the laws, too, rather than rock the boat. When Paul heard about this, he rebuked Peter for not being straightforward.

Paul's point with Peter is clear. We can't compromise ourselves simply to maintain peace and harmony. There are times when we must act and speak out candidly.

How candid are we about our faith when we are around people who believe and act differently than we do?

"If anyone declares publicly that he belongs to me, I will do the same for him before my Father in heaven." Matthew 10:32

## Paul challenges the Galatians

Thursday

Galatians 3:1-5

*Your life comes from the Gospel, not the Law.*

Conservative Jewish converts to Christianity told Paul's Galatian converts that they must observe certain Jewish laws, like circumcision.

Many Galatians agreed to be circumcised.

When Paul learned about this, he was furious. He was not only angered by those who spread this false teaching, but also annoyed with the Galatians for being taken in.

To illustrate the error of their ways, Paul asked the Galatians one single question:

"Did you receive God's Spirit by doing what the Law requires or by hearing the gospel and believing it?"

Do we sometimes lose sight of the fact that our ability to live the Christian life comes from God's Spirit uniting us to Christ's body?

Jesus said,  
"Remain united to me . . .  
for you can do nothing without me." John 15:4-5

## Paul speaks about salvation

Friday

Galatians 3:7-14

*Faith, not the Law, saves us.*

A cellar wall in Cologne, Germany, contained a beautiful testimony to faith in God.

Workers found it while clearing away debris and rubble from a bombed-out house. Written on the surface of one of the walls were these words:

"I believe in the sun  
even when it is not shining.  
I believe in love  
even when I do not feel it.

I believe in God  
even when he is silent."

The unknown author's faith is a model of the kind of faith that Paul exhorts us to strive for in today's reading.

It is the same kind of faith in God that our father in the faith, Abraham, had.

Do we realize that our faith is a gift, and do we ask God to increase it?

"I do have faith, but not enough.  
Help me have more!" Mark 9:24

## Paul speaks about faith

Saturday

Galatians 3:22-29

*Faith in Christ makes us children of God.*

A Cleveland man, W. J. Hecht, made out a spiritual will and testament for his four children. He requested it be read at his funeral Mass. A portion of it reads:

"[My children,] I leave you faith in God. Please keep it, use it, cherish it, and pass it on. This inheritance of faith far surpasses any other possession I could leave you."

The reason why it surpasses any other possession is clear. Our faith in God reveals Jesus Christ to us and makes us members of his body. Because of our unity with Christ, we can truly call God "our Father" and he can truly call us "his children."

How well are we growing in our own faith and passing it on to our children?

"I have never discarded beliefs deliberately. I left them in the drawer, and, after a while I opened it. There was nothing there at all."

William Graham Sumner

## Paul talks about Christians

Monday Galatians 4:22-24, 26-27, 31-5:1

*We are children of the new covenant.*

Ancient marriage contracts required that a sterile wife provide her husband with a substitute wife for childbearing, so that they could have an heir.

This explains why Abraham had a son by Hagar, his wife's maid.

Later, when Sarah bore Abraham a son, that son, Isaac, replaced the maid's son.

Paul compares the old covenant to the maid's son and the new covenant to Sarah's son. His point is that Christians are children of the new covenant and are saved by *faith in Jesus*, not by antiquated Jewish practices like circumcision.

How deep is our own faith in Jesus?  
How do we nourish it and keep it alive?

"It is never a question with any of us of faith and not faith; the question always is, 'In what or in whom do we put our faith?'"

Anonymous

## Paul talks about faith

Tuesday Galatians 5:1-6

*Faith must be accompanied by love.*

One of the things many adults remember from their high school chemistry course is that litmus paper turns red when placed in a solution of acid.

In other words, red-colored litmus paper is a sure sign that acid is present.

Paul says that love performs a similar function when it comes to true Christian faith.

Love is a sure sign that true Christian faith is present.

In other words, if we are loving toward other people, it's a sure sign that our faith is truly Christian.

How loving are we in our relationships?  
How seriously do we work at those relationships to keep them growing and developing in the right direction?

"I may have all the faith needed to move mountains—  
but if I have no love, I am nothing."

1 Corinthians 13:2

## Paul talks about the Spirit

Wednesday Galatians 5:18-25

*Generosity is a fruit of the Spirit.* (NAB)

In his book *What Is a Jew?* Morris Kertzer says that every Hebrew child learns the story of Honi the traveler. One day Honi met an old man who was busy planting a very small fruit tree.

"When will that tree bear fruit?" Honi asked. The old man replied, "Probably years after I am dead."

Honi asked, "Why plant it, if you won't enjoy its fruit?" The old man replied, "I didn't find the world empty of trees when I was born.

So I plant it for others who will follow me, just as others did for me."

A true sign that the Spirit is active in our lives is our generosity toward others.

If we asked our friends to list our virtues, would they list "generosity" as one of them?

"It is possible to give without loving, but it is impossible to love without giving."

Richard Braunstein

## Paul talks about blessings

Thursday

Ephesians 1:3-10

*Christ is the source of great blessings to us.*

The famous marathon runner Bill Rodgers said that a retarded person, named Joe, was the source of a great spiritual blessing in his life.

The smallest act of kindness shown Joe or the smallest object given him made Joe brim over with gratitude and joy.

This impressed Bill greatly. He admired Joe's ability to focus on the good things in life, no matter how small, and overlook the bad things, no matter how big.

"Taking Joe as my example," said Rodgers, "I began to downplay the discouraging parts of my life and focus on the good things."

Joe was to Bill Rodgers what Christ is to us: the source of great spiritual blessing.

What person is a great source of blessing to us?

"We can preach a better sermon with our lives than with our lips." Oliver Goldsmith (adapted)

## We are sealed by the Holy Spirit

Friday

Ephesians 1:11-14

*We belong to Christ.*

The Greek word for "seal," which Paul uses in today's reading, is *sphragis*.

This word designates the tattoo, brand, or mark which ancients put on their slaves, sheep, and other property they owned to show that it belonged to them. Military officers placed a similar mark on soldiers under their command.

Thus, Clement of Alexander told second-century Christians to use doves

(Holy Spirit), fish (Jesus), and ships (Church) as marks of ownership on their property, rather than swords and figures from mythology.

The seal Paul refers to is the sign of the cross which was placed on the foreheads of Christians when they were baptized. It was a sign that they now belonged to Christ.

Do we act as people who belong to Christ?

"God himself . . . has placed his mark of ownership upon us." 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

## Paul prays for Christians

Saturday

Ephesians 1:15-23

*May God enlighten your innermost vision.* (NAB)

An old Dakota cowboy told a newsman, "It's going to be a fine day. If geese were flying closer together, we'd have bad weather." The cowboy went on to say that he could predict weather better than electronic equipment.

"You must use your eyes and look at God's radar. Furry calves mean early winter; hairy caterpillars signal hard winter; gophers nestling in prairie grass mean rain."

Then the old cowboy paused and mused, "Sometimes, I think we don't see anymore."

This can also be said about modern Christians when it comes to their spiritual vision. It's the grace Paul prays that the Ephesians will receive.

How clear is our own spiritual vision?

"Nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see. On the contrary, everything is sacred." Teilhard de Chardin

## Paul talks about Christians

Monday

Ephesians 2:1-10

*We were saved by God's grace.*

One Good Friday morning, a Protestant minister set up a stepladder in order to drape the cross outside his church with a black cloth. Because of the shubbery encircling the cross, the ladder was resting in an awkward position.

The minister climbed the ladder and tossed the end of the cloth over the cross. As he did, the ladder slipped and began to tip. The minister threw his arms out and grabbed the vertical bar of the cross, saving himself from what could have been a serious fall.

After he regained his bearings, the minister said his experience gave him a new appreciation of how we have been saved by the cross of Christ. He acquired a new understanding of what Paul talks about in today's reading.

How aware are we of having been saved, in a personal way, by the cross of Christ?

On Calvary, Christ crossed out our sins, individually and collectively.

## Paul talks about our salvation

Tuesday

Ephesians 2:12-22

*Christ has brought us closer to God.*

Bill Wilson was a "high roller" in the 1920s. Then came the stock market crash. Bill lost everything.

Like many other victims of the crash, Bill turned to drink. Soon he found himself addicted to drink. In the next two years, he made four attempts to break his addiction. They all failed, leaving him hopeless.

The saving moment of his life came when he met Dr. Robert H. Smith. Together, in 1935, they founded the program that is now called Alcoholics Anonymous.

Bill Wilson, and thousands like him, can relate to Paul's words in today's reading: "You, who used to be far away, have been brought near by the sacrificial death of Christ."

How have we experienced Christ's saving power in our own personal lives?

"Amazing grace! . . .

I once was lost, but now am found."

John Newton

## Paul talks about his call

Wednesday

Ephesians 3:2-12

*God called me, the least of all his people.*

The Melrose Suspension Bridge on the Niagara links the United States to Canada.

The bridge was reportedly built in 1848 by engineer Theodore Elliot, in this fashion.

First, a kite with a thread attached to it was flown across the Niagara River. Next, a cord was attached to the thread and pulled across.

Then, a rope was attached to the cord. Finally, a cable was attached to the rope. From the cable, larger cables and the rest of the bridge were moved into place.

Had Paul lived in our modern times, he might have used this story to make the point he stressed in today's reading. He, "the least of all God's people," was the tiny, fragile thread by which God began the conversion of the Gentile world.

Do we believe that God can use us to do big things, just as he used Paul?

"I'm only a spark,/Make me a fire,  
I'm only a string,/Make me a lyre."

Amado Nervo

## Paul talks about charity

Thursday

Ephesians 3:14-21

*Make love the root and foundation of life.*  
(NAB)

In his last speech before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King, as if he had a premonition of death, spoke about his funeral. He said:

"If you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell him not to talk too long. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred awards. That's not important.

"Tell them . . . that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say on that day that I tried to love and serve humanity."

What Martin Luther King was saying is what Paul is saying in today's reading. He is saying that he tried to make charity "the root and foundation" of his life.

To what extent can we say that charity, or love, is "the root and foundation" of our life?

"When the evening of life comes, we will be judged by love." John of the Cross

## Paul talks about unity

Friday

Ephesians 4:1-6

*Preserve your unity in the Spirit.*

James McGinnis, a St. Louis resident, tells how two children were playing on the walk in front of his house. One was three years old; the other was five. One was on a tricycle; the other was blocking the tricycle's movement. Both were screaming at the top of their lungs.

McGinnis walked out and asked them if they were having fun. They both said that they were *not*.

Then he asked them what they might do to have fun.

"We could take turns riding the tricycle for about ten minutes each," the one said.

When McGinnis offered to time their rides, they both smiled and got all excited. The younger one even offered to let his older brother ride first.

How do we try to preserve family unity or friendships when something threatens them?

"It takes two sides to make a lasting peace, but it takes only one to take the first step."  
Edward M. Kennedy

## Paul talks about Christ

Saturday

Ephesians 4:7-16

*Through him the body is built up in love.*

The first frame of a *Peanuts* cartoon shows Charlie Brown staring at a tool box, saying to himself, "I can't do it! I can't do it!"

The second frame shows Lucy entering and saying to Charlie, "What's wrong, Charlie? You seem sad."

The last frame shows Charlie answering Lucy: "I am sad! I want to build a workbench, but I don't have a workbench to build it on."

The point of that cartoon, when applied to Jesus and his mission, is clear. Jesus is our "workbench." Before he entered the world, we had no workbench to build the workbench we would need to rebuild the world. Jesus became that workbench. Thanks to Jesus and his incarnation, we now have what we need to rebuild our world.

What are we, personally, doing to help rebuild the world into the kingdom of God?

"All of us have a message to deliver; all of us have a song to sing." John Powell

## Paul talks about Christian life

Monday

Ephesians 4:32-5:8

*Live like people who belong to the light.*

Mildred Butterfield makes a provocative observation in the prayer magazine *The Upper Room*.

One morning she was standing at her bathroom mirror putting the usual final touches on her external appearance. After she finished, she said to herself, "Now I'm ready to face the new day."

But then she heard an inner voice say, "Your outer person is ready to face the day, but what about your inner person? Have you made your mind and your heart ready to face the day? Have you touched up your spirit of forgiveness, generosity, and self-control? Are these ready to greet the new day?"

Do we begin each day with a renewed resolve to live our day as befits children of the light?

"The LORD said . . . 'Man looks at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart.'" 1 Samuel 16:7

## Paul talks about marital love

Tuesday

Ephesians 5:21-33

*Love and respect each other.*

In his book *If Today You Hear His Voice*, Albert Cylwicki tells the moving story of ballerina Margot Fonteyn and her lawyer husband, Roberto Arias.

Back in 1964, Roberto was paralyzed by a gunshot wound. For two years he was hospitalized 40 miles outside the city of London. Every day for those two years Margot spent her mornings

at her husband's side and her afternoons rehearsing in the theater.

Medical attention and Margot's loving care enabled Roberto to make an amazing recovery. He is still partially paralyzed, but able to practice law once again.

How loving are we toward a spouse who is going through a deep personal trial?

"My real life is my husband. This is the true reality. The ballet is a different kind of reality, a transitory thing." Margot Fonteyn

## Paul addresses parents

Wednesday

Ephesians 6:1-9

*Instruct your children in Christian living.*

Senator Jake Garn of Utah is the only senator ever to fly on a space-shuttle mission. *Time* magazine (September 22, 1986) reported on another first for Senator Garn.

His 27-year-old daughter, Susan, needed a kidney. Garn had medical tests run to see if he was a suitable donor for her. The tests were positive; he was qualified.

"I am very happy and proud to be the donor," he told the doctors. Shortly afterward the transplant was made at Georgetown University Hospital. It was successful.

Few daughters had more reasons to be proud of their father than did Susan.

Do we instruct our own children in Christian living, not only in words but also by example?

"It is easier for a father to have children than for children to have a father."

Pope John XXIII

## Paul asks for prayers

Thursday

Ephesians 6:10-20

*Pray that I may proclaim the Gospel well.*

Adelaide Proctor's poem "A Legend" tells about a monk whose preaching attracted crowds far and near. It moved people to tears and changed their lives. Every time he preached, an old man sat nearby praying his beads.

One day the monk was thanking God for his power to move hearts when, suddenly, an angel appeared to him and said something to this effect:

"My dear son, it is not your words that melts people's hearts and renews their faith. It is the prayers of that faith-filled old man who sits nearby and tells his beads."

That poem recalls Paul's words in today's reading: "Pray that I may be bold in speaking about the gospel as I should."

Do we pray for priests and ministers that their words will touch hearts?

"More things are wrought by prayer Than this world dreams of." Alfred Lord Tennyson

## God is at work in our lives

Friday

Philippians 1:1-11

*He'll finish what he began in us.*

A group of people was touring a factory where expensive pianos were made.

First, the guide showed the people a large room where workers were sawing and shaping rough wood.

Next, the guide took them to a room where workers were working on frames.

Then, the guide took them to a room where metal strings and ivory keys

were being assembled inside the frames of the pianos.

Next, they visited a room where the pianos were being sanded and varnished.

Finally, the people were led into the showroom, where a musician was seated at a piano, bringing forth beautiful music from it.

Do we truly believe that God is working in our lives and will someday bring forth music from us?

"Please be patient; God isn't finished with me yet." Anonymous

## Paul speaks about life

Saturday

Philippians 1:18-26

*To me, life is Christ.*

Elizabeth Ann Seton was the first native-born American saint. At 19, she married a wealthy businessman, William Seton. They had five children before he died, when she was only 29.

Two years later she left the Episcopal Church and became a Roman Catholic. As a result she was denied financial help from family and friends. At the age of 31, she had to shift for herself and raise five children in the process.

Yet, before she died at the age of 46, she founded the first American parish school, the first American orphanage, and the first native American community of religious women—the Daughters of Charity.

How dedicated to following Christ are we—through thick and thin?

"I shall be full of courage, so that with my whole being I shall bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die." Philippians 1:20



## Look to each other's interests

Monday

Philippians 2:1-4

*Be united in spirit.* (NAB)

On May 6, 1954,  
Britain's Roger Bannister became the first man  
to break the four-minute mile.  
Millions of people applauded Bannister's feat,  
but few realized it was a team effort.

First of all, Bannister didn't think  
he could break the record, but his coach did.  
It was his coach's confidence in Bannister  
that convinced him that he could.

Second, Bannister was helped greatly  
by teammate friends Brasher and Chataway.  
Brasher paced him the first half of the race,  
and Chataway paced him the final half.

The kind of unity of spirit  
that made Bannister's achievement possible  
is the kind of unity of spirit  
that Paul talks about in today's reading.

How willingly and cooperatively  
do we place ourselves at the service of others?

"Be humble toward one another. . . .  
And look out for one another's interests,  
not just for your own." *Philippians 2:3-4*

## Jesus became one of us

Tuesday

Philippians 2:5-11

*He took the form of a servant.*

An Islamic parable tells of a traveler  
who strayed into the "Land of the Fools."  
There he saw a mob shouting hysterically.  
"A monster is in our field," they cried.

The traveler drew nearer and saw  
that the monster was only a watermelon,  
a fruit the fools had never seen before.  
To show how fearless he was,  
the traveler cut up the melon and ate it.

The villagers became even more terrified.  
"He's worse than the monster," they said.  
And they drove the traveler out of their land.

Months later the scene repeated itself  
with another traveler.

This time the traveler didn't play the hero.  
He took up residence among the fools  
and taught them  
to overcome their fear of watermelons.  
Before he left, the villagers even ate them.

Which traveler are we like?

"If you stop to be kind,  
you must often swerve from your path."

Mary Webb

## Be models to other people

Wednesday

Philippians 2:12-18

*Shine among them like stars.*

One night, when he was quite old,  
John Ruskin, the 19th-century British writer,  
was sitting in front of a window in his home.

He was staring out into the night  
across the town to a distant hillside street.  
There the torch of the town's lamplighter  
was igniting street lamp after street lamp.  
Because of the darkness,  
the lamplighter himself could not be seen.  
All that could be seen was his torch  
and the trail of lights he left behind him.

"After a few minutes,  
Ruskin turned to a friend and said,  
"That illustrates  
what I mean by a genuine Christian.  
You may not know him or ever see him,  
but his way has been marked by the lights  
he leaves burning.'" *Ralph L. Woods*

What lights are we leaving behind us?

"Every believer in this world  
must become a spark of light."

*John XXIII, Pacem in Terris*

## I seek only Christ

Thursday

Philippians 3:3-8

*All else counts as nothing.*

Years ago the *Chicago Tribune* ran a story about a teenager named Bill Martin. It told about Bill's desire to become a professional tennis star. It said:

"He's carried on a love affair with the game since, as an eight-year-old beginner, he would stroke shots eight hours a day at River Forest Tennis Club."

Martin said that as a seventh and eighth grader he became a stranger and an outcast with the other kids his age.

His rigorous schedule didn't allow him any time with them. It still keeps him a very lonely person. Bill concluded, saying, "The loneliness—it's just part of the sacrifice."

It's this kind of dedication that Paul talks about in today's reading.

How dedicated to Christ and his work are we?

"Alas for those who never sing,  
but die with their music within them."  
Oliver Wendell Holmes

## We await Christ's final coming

Friday

Philippians 3:17-4:1

*He will refashion our mortal bodies.*

The Polish people rebuilt the city of Warsaw after World War II. They not only rebuilt it but also restored its landmark buildings as they originally were.

One building they had to reconstruct entirely was a 17th-century royal castle, which served as the seat of Polish kings, presidents, and parliaments.

The reconstructed palace is a glorious symbol of the national pride of the Polish people.

The castle is also

"a remarkable example of how the human spirit can rise and reconstruct works of architecture, art, and culture. . . .

[It] helps us to understand the more marvelous restoration the Lord will accomplish in our resurrection from the dead." Albert Cylwicki

Do we look upon death as the destruction of our body or as the beginning of its reconstruction?

"A man is not completely born until he is dead."  
Benjamin Franklin

## Paul speaks about life

Saturday

Philippians 4:10-19

*I have learned to cope with all situations.*  
(NAB)

Shortly before he died, a young seminarian named James Kelly wrote to a friend:

"I have something to share, something to give, even though I am in a hospital unable to leave my room. . . . Now I live in the present. To live in the future seems nonsense to me now. . . .

Every experience . . . [has] meaning and value. . . . God is continually revealing himself through our human and personal experiences. . . . Every situation we encounter can be a real apostolate. The apostolate is always right here, right now. I really think that this is what Jesus meant when he called us the Light of the World and the Salt of the Earth."

Do we really believe that every experience—even a bad experience—is an opportunity?

"Every part of our lives has value. What has value can be shared." James Kelly

## Paul instructs Titus

Monday

Titus 1:1-9

*Put in order the things I left to you.*

Soldiers of World War II coined the phrase “mopping up” exercises.

The phrase refers to the fact that many islands in the Pacific were taken by U.S. military forces, but isolated pockets of resistance still remained in certain parts of the islands. These isolated pockets of resistance were “mopped up,” sometimes even months after the battle for the island had ended.

Paul left Titus to “mop up” in Crete. This was typical of Paul’s style. He would do the hard work of evangelizing a city or an area and leave to others the easier job of organizing the local church.

How willingly do we do the hard work in a project and turn the easier work over to others?

“The princes among you are those who forget themselves and serve.”  
Woodrow Wilson

## God reveals his grace in Jesus

Tuesday

Titus 2:1-8, 11-14

*He gave himself for us.*

Jean Webster’s story *Daddy Long Legs* concerns an orphan girl who received many gifts from a person she never met and never knew.

She grows up through childhood, young adulthood, and womanhood, blessed by opportunities provided by her helper. She tries to imagine what he is like, but she has no idea if her image is correct.

How sad it would have been for her to have gone through life

without having met her mystery benefactor. Fortunately, the story doesn’t end that way. It ends with her discovering who he is and thanking him profoundly.

That story is a parable of God and each member of the human race. Unfortunately many people die without knowing who their benefactor is. That’s why Paul urges Titus to tell everyone about God’s grace through Jesus.

Do we tell others about God and Jesus?

“Preach the gospel to all mankind.” Mark 16:15

## We were once slaves to sin

Wednesday

Titus 3:1-7

*He saved us through baptism.* (NAB)

A native in a certain village resisted baptism, even though many of his friends asked for it. The missionary asked the native if there was something he didn’t understand in his Christian instruction.

“No!” said the native.  
“Everything is perfectly clear. The thing I want to learn now is if baptism will make a difference in the lives of my friends.”

After several months of careful observation, the native came to the missionary and said, “I am now ready to be baptized. I have seen for myself that baptism does, indeed, make a difference. I want Jesus to do for me what he has done for my friends.”

How has our baptism made a difference in us?

“Baptism signifies that the old Adam in us is to be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance . . . and that the new man should daily come forth.”  
Martin Luther

## Paul petitions Philemon

Thursday

Philemon 7-20

*Forgive Onesimus and welcome him back.*

Philemon was a newly baptized Christian who lived in the city of Colossae. He had a runaway slave, called Onesimus. Paul met Onesimus in Rome, instructed him, and baptized him around A.D. 62.

Paul's letter to Philemon asks him to forgive Onesimus and welcome him back, not as a slave, but as a brother.

The letter is the shortest one Paul ever wrote. It is also one of his warmest letters. It witnesses to the unity and the love that should exist between baptized Christians.

From a practical point of view, the letter challenges us to ask ourselves how loving and forgiving we are toward our brother and sister Christians.

Do we forgive others from the heart?

"If you are suffering from a bad man's injustice, forgive him, lest there be two bad men."

Anonymous

## John makes two big points

Friday

2 John 4-9

*Walk in love and beware of antichrists.*  
(NAB)

John addresses his second letter "To the dear Lady and to her children," which probably refers to a local church and its members.

The letter makes two points. First, it appeals to its recipients to continue to walk in the way of love. Second, it warns them against teachers who are spreading false doctrine. John calls these teachers "antichrists," or as some Bibles translate it, "enemies of Christ."

The expression "antichrist" means "one who opposes or replaces Christ."  
(Matthew 24:24, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8)

Both points of John's letter still have a practical application today.

What are concrete indications in our lives that we are walking in the way of love?

"We have learned to fly in the air like birds and swim in the sea like fish. But we have not learned the simple act of living together as brothers."

Martin Luther King, Jr., accepting the Nobel prize

## John writes to Gaius

Saturday

3 John 5-8

*Others have spoken about your love.*

The Third Letter of John is so short that it could be written on a good-sized postcard. It's a personal letter to a man named Gaius. He's a leader of a local church and is praised highly by other local Christians.

Gaius stands in sharp contrast to another local church leader, Diotrephes, who is a kind of dictator. Diotrephes ignores John's instructions and undermines his authority.

John's third letter reminds us that the Church has always had its share of good and bad members as well as good and bad leaders. These members and leaders will live side by side like weeds and wheat until harvest time comes.

Do we allow the Church's bad members and bad leaders to obscure its good members and good leaders?

"Going to church doesn't make you a Christian anymore than going to a garage makes you an automobile." Billy Sunday

## Do not grow discouraged

Monday

Revelation 1:1-4; 2:1-5

*Return to your former deeds.* (NAB)

It was halftime in the Dallas Cowboy-St. Louis Cardinal game on Thanksgiving 1985.

A reporter was interviewing Lou Holtz, newly appointed head coach of Notre Dame's football team.

"What's the first thing you're going to do to try to get the 'Fighting Irish' back to their old winning ways?" asked the reporter. Holtz surprised everyone by saying, "I'm going to work on establishing three things with my players: love, trust, and commitment."

Holtz's formula for returning Notre Dame to its winning ways is what Jesus himself would prescribe for people who want to return to the ideals of their former life.

They must *trust* that they can change, *commit* themselves to change, and use *love* as their motivation for change.

How far have we drifted from our old ideals?

"Until we lose ourselves there is no hope of finding ourselves." Henry Miller

## I knock at the door

Tuesday

Revelation 3:1-6, 14-22

*If anyone answers, I will enter.*

The British theologian C. S. Lewis describes his conversion in his book *Surprised by Joy*.

One day, riding on a bus, he got the feeling that he was blocking something out of his life. He felt as though he was keeping a door closed.

Then and there, he felt he was being given a grace to open the door if he wished. Or, if he wished, he could keep it closed.

He writes,

"I knew that to open the door . . . meant the incalculable."

He then adds, "I chose to open it." That choice started him on the road to Christianity and a new life.

What happened to Lewis happens to all of us. Jesus knocks at the door of our heart, inviting us to open ourselves more fully to him. Whether or not we do is up to us.

Are we keeping any doors closed in our life?

"We live but a fraction of our lives."

Bredan Francis

## I found myself in heaven

Wednesday

Revelation 4:1-11

*Everyone was praising God.*

A father was walking down an airport ramp to board a plane.

In front of him, his little girl skipped along. Her face beamed from ear to ear.

"Where are you going?" her father asked. Without missing a skip, she sang out, "To Grandma's, to Grandma's, to Grandma's."

Gerhard Frost, who tells the story, notes that the little girl didn't say "to Bismarck" or "to Billings," but "to Grandma's." She wasn't going to a place, but to a person.

Her answer recalls Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection:

"Go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to him who is my Father and their Father, my God and their God." John 20:17

How do we envision heaven in our mind?

Heaven is not going to a place; it is going to a person: the eternal God of heaven and earth.

## Do not grow discouraged

Monday

Revelation 1:1-4; 2:1-5

*Return to your former deeds.* (NAB)

It was halftime in the Dallas Cowboy-St. Louis Cardinal game on Thanksgiving 1985.

A reporter was interviewing Lou Holtz, newly appointed head coach of Notre Dame's football team.

"What's the first thing you're going to do to try to get the 'Fighting Irish' back to their old winning ways?" asked the reporter. Holtz surprised everyone by saying, "I'm going to work on establishing three things with my players: love, trust, and commitment."

Holtz's formula for returning Notre Dame to its winning ways is what Jesus himself would prescribe for people who want to return to the ideals of their former life.

They must *trust* that they can change, *commit* themselves to change, and use *love* as their motivation for change.

How far have we drifted from our old ideals?

"Until we lose ourselves there is no hope of finding ourselves." Henry Miller

## I knock at the door

Tuesday

Revelation 3:1-6, 14-22

*If anyone answers, I will enter.*

The British theologian C. S. Lewis describes his conversion in his book *Surprised by Joy*.

One day, riding on a bus, he got the feeling that he was blocking something out of his life. He felt as though he was keeping a door closed.

Then and there, he felt he was being given a grace to open the door if he wished. Or, if he wished, he could keep it closed.

He writes,

"I knew that to open the door . . . meant the incalculable."

He then adds, "I chose to open it." That choice started him on the road to Christianity and a new life.

What happened to Lewis happens to all of us. Jesus knocks at the door of our heart, inviting us to open ourselves more fully to him. Whether or not we do is up to us.

Are we keeping any doors closed in our life?

"We live but a fraction of our lives."

Bredan Francis

## I found myself in heaven

Wednesday

Revelation 4:1-11

*Everyone was praising God.*

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## I saw the Lamb

Thursday

Revelation 5:1-10

*By his death he bought us.*

It was April 1865.

The slain body of Abraham Lincoln lay in state for a few brief hours in Cleveland, Ohio, on its final journey to Springfield, Illinois.

A poor black woman held her child up to see the 56-year-old president's face. As she did, she said slowly and reverently, "Take a long, long look, honey. That man died for you."

What that poor black woman said to her child could be said to all of us about Jesus. "Take a long, long look, honey. That man died for you."

Unfortunately, after a while, we tend to take for granted the basic truths of our faith. And one of them is that Jesus purchased us with his own blood.

How frequently do we meditate on the crucifixion of Jesus?

"Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"  
Negro spiritual

## Eat the scroll

Friday

Revelation 10:8-11

*It tasted sweet but turned sour.*

The eating of the scroll symbolizes that John has assimilated its content. The content is sweet while he assimilates it, but turns sour in his stomach.

John's reaction reveals a twofold fact about the Christian life. The revelation of the scroll contains the sweet promise of victory for the Christian.

But the price of the victory is a certain amount of pain and suffering.

There is a basic principle of Christianity at work here.

The Christian life contains the sweet promise of heaven, but the Christian must be prepared to pay the price of pain that the struggle for heaven will involve.

How willing are we to struggle and suffer in the present to attain eternal life in the future?

"No Christian escapes a taste of wilderness on the way to the promised land."

Evelyn Underhill

## The two prophets heard a voice

Saturday

Revelation 11:4-12

*"Come up here—to heaven!"*

The Book of Revelation is a paradoxical book. On the one hand it's utterly confusing. On the other hand it's utterly clear.

Take today's description of the two witnesses. It seems to fit Moses and Elijah, who tradition said would return to earth before the final Day of the Lord. And, certainly, they did return to earth to speak with Jesus during his transfiguration.

But other parts of the description leave us utterly confused.

Even though we may not know the meaning of many individual passages in Revelation, the main message of the book is clear. God is saying to the persecuted Christians for whom the book was originally intended:

"Hold on! Just as my Son emerged victorious after his suffering, so will you. So take heart!"

How do we "hold on" and "take heart" in trials?

Jesus said to his disciples, "You can do nothing without me." John 15:5

## I saw 144,000 people

Monday Revelation 14:1-3, 4-5

*They bore the Lamb's name and followed him.*

Teachers of high school freshmen tell you that one of the first things a new freshman does is to get something with the school name on it, for example, a jacket or a T-shirt.

Wearing something with the school name on it is a statement of allegiance.

It means the students' loyalties belong to the school whose name they bear on their person.

This is the point behind the 144,000 people in today's reading, who bear the name of the Lamb on their foreheads. It's a statement of their allegiance.

But the 144,000 do more than bear the name of the Lamb. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They not only proclaim their allegiance but reflect it in their lives.

How clearly does our daily life reflect our allegiance to the Lamb?

"Wherever you go, I will go. . . . Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God." Ruth 1:16

## The Son of Man appeared (NAB)

Tuesday Revelation 14:14-19

*He wore a crown and carried a sickle.*

The title "Son of Man" is the one Jesus applied most often to himself in the Gospels. He is obviously the figure seated on the cloud, wearing a crown and carrying a sickle.

The cloud symbolizes Jesus' Second Coming at the end of the world.

The crown symbolizes his coming as king. The sickle symbolizes his coming as the harvester of the just; he is coming to take them to heaven.

But there's a second set of images as well. Two angels appear to collect grapes and cast them into the winepress of God's wrath. They are executing punishment upon the unjust.

Does the fact that we will be held accountable for all our actions, at the end of the world, have any effect on us?

"I shall tell you a secret, my friend. Do not wait for the last judgment; it takes place every day." Albert Camus

## I saw the faithful ones

Wednesday Revelation 15:1-4

*They were singing a victory song.*

The images of the sea of glass and the singing of the song of Moses recall the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

Just as the Hebrews followed Moses across the Red Sea to victory and to the Promised Land, so Christians follow the Lamb across the sometimes fiery sea of this life to victory and the promised land of heaven.

As the victorious Christians gather on the opposite side of the sea, they strum their harps, symbols of victory, and sing a song of praise to God:

"King of the nations,  
how right and true are your ways! . . .  
Your just actions are seen by all."

In moments of trial and fiery tribulation, do we draw strength from the thought of final victory and heaven?

"The main object of religion is not to get a man to heaven—but to get heaven into him." Thomas Hardy



## Babylon has fallen!

Thursday                      Revelation 18:1-2, 21-23;  
19:1-3, 9

*“Praise God!”*

John observes two things in his vision.

First, an angel passes judgment on Rome, signified by the code name “Babylon.” The angel casts a large stone into the sea. As the stone disappears into the sea without a trace, so will the evil forces of Rome be doomed to disappear without a trace.

Second, John hears loud singing from heaven: “Salvation, glory, and power belong to our God! True and just are his judgments!”

Then an angel appears and tells John: “Write this: Happy are those who have been invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.”

When trials and temptations descend upon us, do we draw strength by considering the fate of those who yield to evil?

“What we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.” Romans 8:18

## I saw the dead

Friday                      Revelation 20:1-4, 11-21:2

*They were judged according to their deeds.*

In London’s Westminster Abbey, there’s a tiny chapel called St. George’s Chapel. It was built as a memorial to Londoners who lost their lives during the air raids of World War II.

Inside the chapel are four large books. These books contain the names of over 60,000 air-raid victims. One book lies open and on it shines a light illuminating the page of names.

Each day the page is turned, revealing a new set of names. As you read them you have no way of knowing whether the person whose name you are reading was rich or poor, young or old, handsome or ugly, black, white, or brown.

Nor does it matter. All that matters is what each person became in the course of living his or her life on earth.

What are we becoming in the course of our life?

“You become a Christian; you’re not born one.” Tertullian

## There will be no more night

Saturday                      Revelation 22:1-7

*The Lord God shall be their light.*

The Kwa Noi prison camp was a living hell for British and American soldiers in World War II.

Then one day a couple of prisoners organized Bible study groups.

The camp underwent a dramatic change.

One soldier recalls the change this way. He was hobbling back to his shack one night, after a late discussion session.

Suddenly he heard a group of men singing “Jerusalem the Golden.” The soldier says:

“The words of that grand old hymn . . . made the darkness seem friendly. . . . The difference between this joyful sound and the joyless stillness of months past was the difference between life and death.”

It is this kind of difference that today’s reading talks about.

How are we working to bring about the promised new heaven and new earth?

“The Lord God will be their light, and they will rule as kings forever and ever.” Revelation 22:5