



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 17, 2008

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

No unheard prayers

Some people will tell you that God only hears the prayers of Christians. But today's story is about a pagan woman whose prayers are answered because she believes they will be. In Christ, there is no "us" and "them"; there is only "us." God's mercy and compassion is universal. You can't divide up God's infinite love. Not everyone goes to church on Sunday or even claims a religion. But just about everyone prays because God is the first and final hope of all. When the chips are down and everything else fails, people pray. And God, who hears the prayers of all, will answer.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 56:1, 6-7; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15:21-28*

'Jesus answered her; 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.'"

MONDAY, AUGUST 18

Poor guy

A wealthy young man came to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to have eternal life. We can identify with him; it's the question we all have in the end. Christ told him that if he wanted to "enter into life" he was to keep the commandments. The young man said he had done that. But then Jesus threw him a curve ball: Sell what you have, give to the poor, and follow me, and that will clinch the eternal life thing. But the young man couldn't stomach that last step and "went away sad." Jesus asks us, too, to go beyond following the rules and make a personal sacrifice of our security in order to share with one another. Will we follow or go away?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 24:15-24; Matthew 19:16-22*

'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'"

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19 FEAST OF JOHN EUDES, PRIEST

The descending way of Christ

The way of Christ is a descent that will take us very far from the ascending pull of the world. For John Eudes (1601-1680) this way brought him all the way from the Normandy estate of his inheritance to an empty cask. How? Eudes first veered from the path of the world when he took a private vow of celibacy, defying his father's wishes to marry and build up the family's fortune. Later, when Eudes had become the star preacher in the Congregation of the Oratory of France, he departed again to serve the victims of a plague. From then on, there was no turning back. Even when Eudes returned to his monastery, he lived in a cask in the middle of a field to avoid infecting others. At what times have you felt the closest to Christ?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 28:1-10; Matthew 19:23-30*

'Many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.'"

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20

FEAST OF BERNARD, ABBOT, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Past imperfect

Strike with confidence and die yet more confidently, for he serves [God] when he strikes. . . . He is God's minister, for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of the good. Should he be killed himself, we know that he has not perished, but has come safely into [heaven]." These words come from the mouth of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), the "Mellifluous Doctor" of

the church, who "preached" a crusade against the Muslim empire of his day. We celebrate someone like Bernard—and rightly so—as a theologian and leader. But saints are also human beings who don't always do or say the most admirable things. That's what makes them human—like us.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 34:1-11; Matthew 20:1-16*

'Thus says the Lord God, I am against the shepherds; and I will demand my sheep at their hand.'"

THURSDAY, AUGUST 21

Prophets see things differently

Anyone who sees Ezekiel only as a haranguing prophet needs to turn to the oracle mentioned in the reading today, remarkable not only because of the tender and powerful love of God it promises, but because God *chooses* to prove God's own holiness not by spectacular special effects but by wiping out the sin that separates a foolish people from their loving God. "I'll show you that I am God by cleansing you of your impurities, giving you a new heart and a new spirit." It's as though God is starting all over again so that creation is not left wallowing in its own folly. It will bring hope to remember today, should things not go well, the absolute statement of God: "They *will* be my people, and I *will* be their God." Any questions?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 36:23-28; Matthew 22:1-14*

'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you.'"

FRIDAY, AUGUST 22 QUEENSHIP OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY A different kind of queen

An odd juxtaposition of images comes to mind when we consider the words *queen* and *Virgin Mary*. The common words associated with "queen"—wealthy, dominant, imperious, proud, and distant—do not apply to Mary in any way. Rather we know her as humble, present, gentle, kind, protecting, and consoling. Why then has the title "queen" resonated with so many people for so long? Perhaps she embodies what we most desire in our leaders—thus, she is our true Queen. When Pope Pius XII instituted this feast day he was not proclaiming a new truth but rather making official what for centuries had been a cherished belief. Today, take some time to think about what Mary, Queen of Heaven means to you.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 37:1-14; Matthew 22:34-40*

'I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live.'"

SATURDAY, AUGUST 23 FEAST OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY The exalted and the humbled

Jesus frequently cautioned people about their religious leaders. Follow what they say, he told the crowds, but don't imitate their example, for they like outward displays of piety, try to impose their priestly ways on others, take the best seats, and want to be called things like *rabbi, teacher, father*. As one quipster put it, "I trust God, but not always the people who work for him." Leaders lead best by doing, and the best doing is not lording it over others but serving them. On this weekly Saturday remembrance of the Virgin Mary, recall the words of her Magnificat in which she praised God who "has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant."

TODAY'S READINGS: *Ezekiel 43:1-7ab; Matthew 23:1-12*

'The greatest among you will be your servant.'"

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