

The Nazareth Page
A gospel meditation for your home
November 2, 2021 – All Soul's Day (bonus reflection)
John 6:37-40

All Souls Day is for all of us - it's a good time to recall the Big Picture of our life here on Earth. Today's gospel focuses our attention on Jesus. To those who met him along the dusty roads of Galilee and Judea, he was just another person, like themselves. Although Hollywood might want to portray him as distinctive or remarkable, he wasn't. He wanted to be identified as one of us in every way, except being sinful, a fact that the gospels note.

Still, he spoke many remarkable words and did some rather wonderful deeds, none of which, by the way, were intended to deny that he was a human person. No more and no less. In God's way of connecting with us, God wanted to be with us, *as one of us*.

As we try to understand this mystery, it should not be surprising that we have questions about this. For example, how and why did the Creator of all that is (which we now know is a billion times more than previous generations might have even imagined) come to live among us as a human person? Jesus had flesh like ours with thoughts, feelings, desires and needs that accompany being human. The Incarnation must be the most amazing event that ever happened on Planet Earth!

And also, part of God's Plan included times when Jesus wanted us to know that his words and deeds were not just his. They came, in fact, from the mind and heart of God. As today's gospel states, from "the one who sent" him. Therefore, in perceiving all that he did and said, we have direct access to the One who is, who was and who always will be.

Further, in today's gospel we also are given a peak into the reason for God creating us, namely, to offer us a share of life with God, a life that will never end. That idea alone should stop us in our tracks and cause us to wonder how this can possibly be.

With the brief words of today's gospel, we might easily feel overwhelmed by their profundity. What could be more wondrous!

The word *gospel* means "good news." It was an old word used to describe a currier who came to a village with news that was positive. Today, we might say that the gospel words stand in stark contrast to the bad news that fills our nightly TV news and daily newspapers. So, today live with the gospel heard today. And give thanks that we are part of God's wonderful plan for all of us.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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November 7th, 2021 – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 12:38-44

We all live with a purpose. That purpose can change during our lives - sometimes almost daily. In today's gospel we are introduced to two types of people. The first are those who are in "high places." (They are called "scribes" meaning that they were on the payroll of the Temple.) They enjoy status and privilege and seemingly one primary purpose guides them: solidifying their own status and fulfilling their personal needs.

They live fully for themselves. They offer to God and God's work only their surplus, their leftovers. God plays no major role in their lives. They may try to appear holy, but they are not. I would classify them as "show-offs."

In contrast to them Jesus described a "poor widow." She occupies a class of persons with the least prestige in that society. She has no husband who would give her a feeling of importance and status. And she has no extra stash of money to buy her anything valuable. Apparently, she has a few coins, which she generously contributes to God's work. In other words, she lives not for herself, but generously for others.

She stands alongside other women in the gospels who are models of authentic holiness. Recall the woman at the well, the woman who anointed the body of Jesus before his death, the women who courageously stood at the foot of the cross and in today's gospel, "the poor widow" who gave her all for the enactment of God's purposes. And don't forget Mary, his mother.

We do well to wonder what happened to the role of women in the Church over all the centuries when the gospels were preached. It's worthwhile to ask if their presence and importance as women was adequately considered in the life of the Church.

The poor widow is not unlike many women over the centuries who were quietly dedicated to serving the needs of others. Mothers and grandmothers would be at the top of that list. How much are these women taken for granted, unacknowledged or not even noticed? Both in Church and in society? We certainly live at a time when their presence and importance is less overlooked than in earlier times. But still, is it valued enough? I don't think so.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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November 14th, 2021 – 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 13:24-32

Daylight is decreasing and we are beginning to think about the ending of this Year of the Lord, 2021. And what a year this has been! I will not go into details here because, besides global happenings, there are all the stresses and strains that each of us has undergone. Almost too many to count. On a personal note, my wife and I sold a larger home and acquired a smaller one. They call it "downsizing." Our children no longer dwell with us but live on their own with their own challenges. My wife and I now see more of each other because we live in a smaller cave.

When today's gospel was written, a popular format in religious circles were descriptions of what was called "the end time." It had many similarities with today's science fiction writing, films and video games. Lots of spectacular events season the story lines.

In biblical writings such imaginative happenings were used to highlight God's involvement in terrestrial history. It's important, however, to focus on God, and what God is doing, more than on the scenery being employed to make divine events all the more dramatic. Using the words of the gospel, God comes with angels "to gather" those God has chosen and bring them into eternal life with God. So, the gospel is not meant to scare us, but to provide us with a "view" of a hopeful and glorious future.

This is the primary message of our faith: God's deep love for all those God created. For two-thousand years, Christians have debated whether God has chosen only some of us and rejected others. Michelangelo's famous fresco, "The Last Judgment" places some of those depicted in heaven with God and others (interestingly, some of the artist's enemies) with the devil in hell. Most of what he presented came from his vivid imagination and not from God's revealed word.

So, what can we conclude from the gospel describing the end of time? First, this is a matter of God's doing. Humans are not in charge, especially at the end. And God's love is the most powerful force in all creation. God's reason for creating, first of all, was to lovingly share life with God. God created no one as evil, although we are all capable of evil.

This account of the end of the world is included in the New Testament to give us hope, not to frighten us. It can also serve as a reminder that we are not alone in this magnificent story. We are invited to be hopeful that we will all one day enjoy life with God together.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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November 21st - 2021 – Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
John 18:33b-37

Today's gospel is about leadership. Using the political arrangements in the time of Jesus, the teaching is about kingship. Although the number of kings these days may be decreasing, in days of old, they were quite common.

The "King of the Jews" is a reference to King David, someone many hoped would be the role played by the messiah - someone many Jews were expecting. When the feast of Christ the King was created by the Church, many kings were known to rule countries in Europe. So, the Church was saying that it had its king. But it was not the pope, but Jesus.

Having established Jesus as king, the next matter of consequence was how did Jesus exercise his role as king? Did he use it to demand tribute from its citizens? Did he assemble an army to conquer its enemies? Did he establish elaborate ceremonies to symbolize his authority? Did he use his position for personal gain? I think the answer to all these questions is obvious. He used his position of power to help others. As is sometimes said, he was a servant king. He ruled through service to others.

We are all called to imitate Christ. Especially in his role as a servant of all. This is a point constantly on the mind of Pope Francis and other recent popes. Often when in public, they went out of their way to connect with those who were elderly, disabled or who needed special attention at that moment. Pope Francis seems especially drawn to children and babies at public events. In fact, a little-known description of the pope is that he is "the servant of the servants of God."

Some refer to this aspect of leadership as "a reversal." The king, who oftentimes sits above everyone, now sits below them as a servant of all. Anyone in church leadership should have this approach to their authority. Included too in this approach is the role of parents and grandparents. As having both roles, I actually enjoy it when our grown children (and/or their children) take over the workload associated with family and home maintenance. Of course, my suggestion that they are in charge is not always met with joyful acceptance.

Connecting leadership with exercising power-under, rather than power-over, may not be easy. There are too many examples of poor leadership these days - a condition many observers have observed.

David M. Thomas, PhD

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November 28th, 2021 – First Sunday of Advent
Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

Two weeks ago, the Sunday gospel described 'the end of the world.' This was fitting because we were about to conclude the Church's year. So, it might appear odd that on this Sunday, the first Sunday of the Church's new year, we are again offered a description about the end of it all. We might ask, "What's going on?"

I begin this reflection with a few lines from the brilliant British poet, William Blake.

To see the world in a grain of sand.
And heaven in a wildflower.
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand.
And eternity in an hour.

This speaks to me of the elasticity of our awareness and consciousness. The mind is not limited to the obvious or what is in plain view. We can do two things at once and think of much more than simple physical reality (which is never "simple.") For beside physical vision, we also possess spiritual vision, which allows us to see more than what's before our eyes.

Much the same can be said of our awareness. A second can be measured by a clock but a moment can be thought of as almost timeless. And being fully aware of all that's happening in a moment is a goal well-worth the effort.

St. Paul writes that "this is the acceptable moment." What moment is he referring to? Perhaps this moment now! The one that is happening at any given moment of our lives. What Blake refers to as "eternity in an hour."

One of the primary messages of the Advent season is for us to be as alert as we can to the coming of God's Spirit. It can happen at any moment. At any time. So, be alert. It could be today. Or right now.

So be vigilant. The Lord is coming. Not just at Christmas when we celebrate his birthday two-thousand years ago, but also at any moment in our life. He said more than once that he would never leave us. And he hasn't.

And be particularly alert to when God's Spirit comes through others. Again, where charity and love abide, there God is ever found.

David M. Thomas, PhD