



# Bringing Home the Word

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time | September 2, 2018

## Genuinely Model God's Love

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Our English word *hypocrite* comes from a Greek word that is pronounced almost the same. The Greeks often used the word to describe acting, but its root meaning is closer to this: "One who pretends or acts under a mask." We might describe such a person as two-faced.

There are several places in the Gospels where Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites because they say one thing and do another. Their actions appear to be part of a show so that others will think that they are good and holy. Jesus cuts to the heart of the matter when he points out that clinging to the letter of the law is

not what makes someone holy. Rather, it is the person with a pure heart free of greed, malice, envy, and evil of all kinds who is closer to God.

Jesus has the Old Testament Scriptures on his side. Psalm 15 lays out a wonderful description of the ones who will dwell with God forever in heaven. First and foremost, they are not hypocrites. Rather, they have integrity of heart and speak the truth (15:2). They "never defame a neighbor" (15:3). They practice what they preach and do it for the greater glory of God.

We all have moments when we act better (or sometimes worse) than we are because we want to appear differently to others. The challenge for us today is to be genuine, to let the love of God become the model for how we love. Then we will have no need to worry about whether we are following the law. Our own actions will tell us so. +

## Sunday Readings

### Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

[Moses said to the people,] "You shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it."

### James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.

### Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

[Jesus said,] "You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition."

*Jesus notes that clinging to the letter of the law is not what makes someone holy.*

## A Word From Pope Francis

We all know...how much harm and scandal is done to the Church by those people who say they are deeply Catholic and often go to Church, but who then neglect their family in daily life, speak badly of others, and so on. This is what Jesus condemns because this is a counter-witness to Christianity.

—Angelus, August 30, 2015



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Am I ever guilty of not practicing what I preach?
- Instead of merely following Church law, is my emphasis on genuinely loving my neighbors?



# The Paradox of Power

By Richard Rohr, OFM

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).*

This is the familiar opening of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—his inaugural address. At the beginning of his teaching, Jesus gives us a revolutionary understanding of how change happens.

In God's reign, the "poor in spirit"—the excluded, rejected, overlooked, and useless—have a big advantage. They have a "privileged seeing" over the rest of us.

The poor in spirit are those who have been defeated somehow and then rediscover themselves in a new place of utter security and freedom. They no longer need or believe in the old power or identity that appears simple and naïve to those of us still playing the game. In our competitive eyes they are poor and powerless. In Jesus' eyes they are blessed and happy.

Beginning in the Hebrew Scriptures and continuing throughout the Bible, we are taken on a journey into powerlessness. Biblical revelation is repeatedly undercutting conventional power and relocating it. It is one of the most difficult messages God delivers.

The word of God is seeking to stop the cycle of violence that has plagued humanity and to unlock it from within. Problems cannot be solved by changing things from the top down or the outside in. Instead, the Bible gradually reveals

what I call spiritual power: transforming things from the bottom up and the inside out.

## Slow but Effective

Spiritual power is the ability to influence others through one's very being, through the transformative influence of truth and love. It moves from God's very being to people who have let God love them, and from these people who have been loved by God to everything they touch. It is slow but ultimately effective.

Only vulnerable people can keep growing, converting. They allow events to influence them. It is always the vulnerable and powerless that God can risk sharing power with because they alone know how to handle power. The rest of us normally abuse it.

Who does God choose to show God's self to? An enslaved people rather than a dominant power—the Israelites instead of the Egyptians or Babylonians. They gradually learn that they are not alone, that someone else (God) is in control. And so, they let go of control!

The theme continues with barren women (Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca, and Elizabeth), neglected sons (Isaac and David), rejected prophets (all of them) and in the daily ministry of Jesus with the lepers, blind, lame, and poor (who

respond to him, while the powerful fight him and finally kill him).

## Jesus as Model

Spiritual power reaches its fullness in Jesus. He never forces God's will, but invites transformation. Even after he models the way of powerlessness to his apostles, they argue about who is the greatest. He challenges them: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve..." (Matthew 20:25–28).

Through his life and teaching, Jesus revealed the nature of true power. He gave us a critique of all systemic power, prestige, and possessions that we still struggle to accept 2,000 years later. Without experiencing true spiritual power, we will never have the security to let go of all of its lesser forms. +



Lord, you come from the heart of the Trinity. Give me a pure heart, that I may reflect goodness and love.

*From Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney*

## WEEKDAY READINGS

September 3-8

Monday, St. Gregory the Great: 1 Cor 2:1–5 / Lk 4:16–30

Tuesday, Weekday: 1 Cor 2:10b–16 / Lk 4:31–37

Wednesday, Weekday: 1 Cor 3:1–9 / Lk 4:38–44

Thursday, Weekday: 1 Cor 3:18–23 / Lk 5:1–11

Friday, Weekday: 1 Cor 4:1–5 / Lk 5:33–39

Saturday, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

Mi 5:1–4a or Rom 8:28–30 /

Mt 1:1–16, 18–23 or Mt 1:18–23