



Impact

Bring faith to life. Find life in faith.

September, 2019 For many, September is the return of the regular routines of life, school and work, parish, and family. Our Sunday readings this month remind us that the life of discipleship calls us to responsible stewardship rooted in humble trust of God's infinite and outlandish love for us. I pray that you and your people will find hope and challenge in the gospel this month. May our regular routines may be filled with the extraordinary love of God, shared among us and beyond us. — Leisa Anslinger

Homily Connections

September 1: Throughout this month, we will hear the call to humility which is rooted in trust of God. Today's first reading invites us to live humbly and know God's favor. The gospel invites us to give preference to the poor and vulnerable rather than seeking honor and status for ourselves.

Connecting with everyday life: It may be easy for us to picture ourselves as the guest at the wedding banquet, looking around ourselves to see who has been seated with whom, and hoping to be noticed or seated with honor. It might be more difficult to imagine ourselves inviting the poor, crippled, lame, and blind to our homes. What does this say about us? Jesus is not asking us to stop having gatherings of family or friends, but is calling us to live for more than the adulation of others and to give proper attention to those who most need God's love and care. Ask your people to think about this in the coming week. In what ways might they humbly show and share God's love? (Page 2)

September 8: The Sunday readings often require explanation in order to bring their richness to our people. Today's second reading and gospel are two such passages. In the second reading, St. Paul returns a slave to his master. Historically, this was often read as a text in support of slavery, but Paul's actions are actually contrary to this interpretation, as he sends Onesimus back in the hope that he will be received as a brother in Christ. Today's gospel speaks to the cost of discipleship — nothing should take preference over our love of God and commitment to the Lord.

Connecting with everyday life: What is the cost of discipleship? This could be the question you invite your people to consider today. Each of us will answer this question through the lens and circumstances of our lives, however, Jesus' message is clear — we must put God first above all else. (See Stewardship: A Disciple's Response, page 15 for a reflection on "cheap" and "costly" grace.) This could be a good Sunday to invite someone to offer a lay witness talk before or at the end of Mass and speak of the joy and satisfaction that comes from responding to the call to discipleship, costly as it may be. (See Impact this month for additional thoughts.)

September 15: Today's readings remind us that, called as we are to answer the call to humble discipleship, we are assured of God's merciful love — God always takes the initiative in seeking the lost.

Connecting with everyday life: Grace abounds. God's mercy awaits us all. Use the reflections on page one as you prepare to lead your people to more fully appreciate God's great love and all this calls us to be about in our lives.

September 22: Today's first reading may sound especially strong in light of today's national conversations about income disparity, poverty, and immigration. It is especially striking when we hear it with today's gospel passage in which we are told, "you cannot serve both God and mammon."

Connecting with everyday life: "The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones." We have been entrusted with much — life, faith, talents and gifts, material resources. We are called to be good stewards of all of this, to serve God in the ways in which we care for those who are most vulnerable. This is the way of life that leads to "true wealth," the promise and hope of eternal life with God. Ask your people to consider the ways in which they are, or are not, trustworthy stewards of the many blessings in their lives. (Page 2)

September 29: Today's readings again ask us to consider the ways in which our relationship with God leads us to view money and possessions and to treat others with respect, care, and reverence.

Connecting with everyday life: While most of your people likely do not lie on their sofa, surrounded by wealth and privilege, they still may be economically secure enough to find that today's readings sting in their hearing. You know your people and their needs. If most are somewhat financially secure, challenge them with the call to be attentive to the poor whom they encounter on city streets and who rely on others for their daily bread. If your congregation is less financially secure, share the message of God's love for them, and urge them to show care through their attention to others who are in need.

At Parish Meetings or in Adult Faith Formation this Month

Opening Prayer

Praise the Lord, my soul!

Blessed is he who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets captives free.

The Lord gives sight to the blind.

The Lord raises up those who were bowed down.

The Lord loves the just.

The Lord protects strangers.

The fatherless and the widow he sustains, but the way of the wicked he thwarts.

The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Zion, through all generations. Alleluia.

(Psalm 146:7-10, Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time)

Listen to Sacred Scripture: Lk 15:1-7

Read: Read the article on page 1 (and the quote on the sidebar if you wish).

Share: your thoughts, using these questions to guide your reflection:

What strikes you in the gospel passage? Why?

Commit: Use Impact this Month to guide your reflection and commitment in faith and action.

Offer one another a sign of Christ's peace.

Are you lost? Let yourself be found.

Have you ever been lost? Even for a few moments? Have you lost your bearings, without quick access to GPS? Do you even now remember the fear and anxiety of not knowing where you were or how to get home? Imagine yourself stranded on the side of a dark road, lost and alone, when suddenly a good friend appears. Your friend has been searching for you, and is so excited to have found you, calls your friends and throws a party in your honor!

Jesus tells the parable of the sheep that gets lost to make a point. He asks, “What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it?” Most of us have likely heard Jesus’ question and wondered instead what person among us would leave the ninety-nine in the desert to go out in search of the one! *Jesus wants us to know the extent of God’s great, outlandish love for us.* The parable points to the essential message of the gospel: God so desires that we be close to him, he came to be one with us in and through Jesus.

The sheep had wandered away, separating itself from the security of the shepherd and the flock. It might have thought for a time that it had found greener pasture all on its own. It may have been distracted by the promise of something better. It might have followed other sheep who seemed to be happy in their independence, not realizing that they, too, were lost.

Are you lost now? What separates you from God? Do you idolize material wealth or social status? Do you fail to see your poor brother or sister who needs your attention, care, and compassion? Are you challenged to be humble, remembering that everything you are and have comes from God, and instead, arrogantly lose sight of God’s grace in your midst? Do you sometimes follow the crowd, those who have no time for or interest in God, only to find yourself feeling empty inside?

God’s love is so incredible that God seeks us out when we are lost, and more. In Jesus’ parable, when the shepherd finds the lost lamb, he carries it home, calling his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him. Are you lost? Let yourself be found by God who wants to be with you in mercy, love, and peace. ©Catholic Life and Faith, 2019

The question is not “How am I to find God?” but “How am I to let myself be found by him?” The question is not, “How am I to know God?” but “How am I to let myself be known by God?” And, finally, the question is not “How am I to love God?” But “How am I to let myself be loved by God?”

God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home. I am beginning now to see how radically the character of my spiritual journey will change when I no longer think of God as hiding out and making it as difficult as possible for me to find him, but instead as the one who’s looking for me while I’m doing the hiding.

Questions like these raise a real issue: that of my own self-concept. Can I accept that I’m worth looking for? Do I believe that there is a real desire in God to simply be with me?
- Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*

IMPACT THIS MONTH

What do you put before God? How will you resolve to serve God above all, as a sign of the importance of God in your life? Acknowledge the ways you are tempted, and resolve to turn toward God with your heart and life.

When tempted to focus on material things to an unhealthy extent, give money, time, or donated goods to the poor;

When your prayer seems like a laundry list of wants, focus instead on your spiritual needs and the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of others;

When caught up in too much attention to yourself, sacrifice your time, attention, or money for another.

When you feel like you don't have time for God or anyone else, make time! Pray, give thanks, and share your blessings with others.

When tempted to unduly worry about money or the circumstances of your life, ask God for the grace to trust in him and act accordingly.

IN TRUE HUMILITY

What comes to mind when you hear the word "humility?" Humility is a quality that has great impact when we experience it in another. The humble person seems to understand his or her place in the world and as a result is not consumed by the constant pursuit of what he or she does not have, freeing him or her to value and care for others.

Humility can be misunderstood. Being humble does not mean acting as though we do not have talents or expertise that need to be shared. When we were children, we might have been told to be humble rather than being taught not to be prideful. There is a difference. As C.S. Lewis noted, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."

Jesus urges us to take the call to humility to heart: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:1, 7-14) Not only this, he explains that those who are to be given preferential treatment are the poor, crippled, lame and the blind.

In true humility, we see the needs of others and seek to follow Jesus' humble, self-giving way. We are humble when we put others' needs before our less important desires. We are humble when we live each day with the conviction that we have been entrusted with much and have responsibility to use it, to steward it, well. ©Catholic Life and Faith, 2019

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Sir 3:17-18