

# Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last nine Sundays, our Scripture readings called us to walk in faith, be men and women of hope, nurture a confident and trusting relationship with the Lord, have courage to face the challenges of following Jesus as his disciples, to listen to the voice of God, to go to a quiet place with the Lord, to show compassion in generous and sacrificial giving, to be strengthened by the bread of Life, to take Jesus in as our bread of life, to be disciples who are in a continuous process of transformation in Christ, to make wise choices, to choose God and God's way in Jesus as we go about doing our daily chores and fulfilling our responsibilities....

Pope Francis says, "Christianity is not a school of ideas or a collection of beautiful temples and lovely art; it is a living people who follow Jesus and give witness to him every day. We are not a religion of ideas, of pure theology, of beautiful things and commandments. No, we are a people who follow Jesus Christ and give witness -- that is, want to give witness to Jesus Christ -- and this witness sometimes ends up being giving one's life."

These thoughts of Pope Francis are reflected in the Scripture readings of this Sunday. The readings give us good insight into the nature and purpose of our religion as a loving, loyal, and obedient relationship with God expressed in generous service to God's people. It is interesting to note that the word "religion" comes from the Latin word "religio" – the verb "religare" means "rebind." Religion then is a re-binding, unifying and harmonizing force, a vehicle that binds us back to God and to one another. Prayers, rituals, sacraments, and observance of rules, laws, traditions, and other religious practices help us to reconcile, reestablish, and strengthen our connection and communion with God and one another.

The first reading speaks of religion as a Covenant relationship with God sustained by observing the commandments that God gave Israel which also kept them united and protected by God. The Responsorial Psalm describes a person who practices true religion as blameless, honest, just and mindful in dealing with others. The second reading speaks of helping the needy, the poor, the weak, the vulnerable and the marginalized in the community as integral part of practicing religion. In the Gospel excerpt, we hear Jesus calling his followers to purify their motivation and keep their intention pure. He cautions us about external observances of rituals and traditions without internal holiness and purity. Prayers, rituals, Sacraments, and observance of rules, laws, traditions, and other religious practices must reflect purity of heart.

At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus said, "Bless are the pure of heart, they will see God" (Mathew 5:8). Heart refers to the innermost part of our being, the whole interiority of human activity and consciousness. Jesus calls us to keep our heart in a good place – pure, honest, humble and simple – and reach out to the world from this good place and let all we do reflect what is deeply in our hearts: love of God and God's people. Jesus says, "The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." (Mathew 22:40)

All the Scripture readings and the responsorial Psalm of this Sunday's Mass, remind us that these commandments that we are called to observe are not abstract ideas or theological constructs or doctrine of a church. They are gifts of God's grace that came from the heart of a loving God for the direction and guidance of our life. We must let them guide our life, let them take hold of our attitudes and behavior patterns and let them control, direct and guide our lives. They must define the relationships we nurture and the way we go about doing our daily chores and fulfilling our responsibilities. They must define who we are and whose we are.

One day, a man was a little later than usual to get on the road to work. Then his car wouldn't start. He tried everything and nothing worked, and no time to call in someone to fix the car. So, he took his wife's car and rushed and still got stuck in traffic. On a highway in Houston, in the middle of a traffic that looked like a parking lot, he was stuck. The man behind him honked. He turned around and gave him a look – but the man behind smiled and waved his hand. Few minutes later the man behind honked again.

This time our gentleman turned and gave him a stern look. The man behind smiled and waved again. Few minutes later the man behind did it again. This time our gentlemen took matters into his own hands. He got out of the car and went to the car behind. The man in the car behind rolled the windows down. Our gentleman said, "what is the matter with you...can't you see I can't move...we are stuck.... blah, blah...". The man replied, "I was only doing what you asked me to do. Your bumper sticker says, "honk, if you love Jesus.... and I love Jesus." Didn't remember that his wife's car had such a bumper sticker....

Posters, bumper stickers, religious habits, religious articles, etc. can give effective, impressive and wonderful witness of our relationship with the Lord....but they can also give counter witness. Be cautious and be discerning about the kind of witness you give to the world around you, as disciples of Jesus. Live in such a way that those who know you but don't know God will come to know God because they know you.

I encourage you to take a few minutes each day of this week to go to a quiet place, be still and reflect on whether your heart has been in a good place throughout the day, what was deeply in your heart and how your actions reflected what was in your heart. Reflect also on how your choices reflect who you are and whose you are!

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

# Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 1, 2024

**Christian faith is not only a matter of believing that certain things are true,  
but above all a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.  
It is an encounter with the Son of God that gives new energy to the whole of our existence.  
When we enter into a personal relationship with him, Christ reveals our true identity  
and, in friendship with him, our life grows towards complete fulfilment.  
(Pope Benedict XVI)**

## Collect

God of might, giver of every good gift,  
put into our hearts the love of your name,  
so that, by deepening our sense of reverence,  
you may nurture in us what is good  
and, by your watchful care,  
keep safe what you have nurtured.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

## Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

**We need to develop the godly trait of forbearance,  
having the capacity to have compassion and mercy on others  
while we wait patiently for them to change.**

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

This excerpt from the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the law was God's gift to the desert wanderers through Moses. The law taught the Israelites how to live with one another in God's

presence. Their faithful observance of the law would lead them to life because the law was revered as God's will. To ignore the law and its wisdom was to choose death. The law of Yahweh was unlike all other laws legislated for good order and the governance of a society – it was the will of Yahweh.

This excerpt reminds us of the importance of the moral code, standards, and principles to guide our life and laws to govern our life. We are taught again that the laws which govern our life are God-given. If we observe them carefully and with devotion, we will live and have life to its fullness.

We must observe the law because we are convinced of its value and are dedicated to its purpose and not to avoid punishments. The author of Deuteronomy challenges us to go beyond the fear of punishment or the hope of reward to a willingness to belong to God and to follow God's ways, God's laws.

**The author calls to aspire to a very high standard of living, to purify our intentions, to observe God's law as an act of faith and trust in God and God's plan.**

## **Psalm 15**

**This psalm gives us a new set of commandments. It could be used also for a good examination of conscience.**

1. One who walks blamelessly (as in psalm 1). It describes one who walks in integrity.
2. One who does what is right. It describes one who is in right relationship with God.
3. One who speaks the truth from the heart - one who means what he says.
4. One who does not slander his neighbor. One cannot love his neighbor and tell tales about him.
5. One who does not do evil actions against his neighbor.
6. One who disdains (looks with scorn) those who have rejected God.
7. One who honors those who "fear God" - those who revere God in awe and wonder.
8. One who does not go back on his word, even if he could not foresee consequences.
9. One who does not "abuse" money - money is a gift from God (OT). People are more important than money. So, if a brother or a friend is in need, one ought to lend him enough money to set him on his feet again.
10. One who does not take bribe against an innocent man. Bribery itself was a problem, worse still is bribery against the innocent.

These are extracted from the Law of Moses. True faith does not mean just keeping the commandments. True faith bears fruit - changes the person - touches every aspect of his/her life. A person of such faith, of integrity, can "never be moved" (last line of the psalm). The law of the Lord is "written in his heart" (Jeremiah 31:33).

**O Lord, who shall dwell on your holy mountain?  
Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice;  
Who thinks the truth in his heart,  
And slanders not with his tongue.....**

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

James tells us that we have been birthed in truth and all good living is the result of this birth. Our moral conduct is an outgrowth of being rooted and grounded in God's word. He reminds us today that it is not enough to listen to God's Word. We must act on it, live it faithfully in love and compassion.

**Reflect on being and becoming faithful to God's Word.**

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

Jesus and his disciples were criticized because they had failed to complete the ritual washing before eating. Jesus told them that it was insufficient to cling to mere human traditions while ignoring or sidestepping God's law. Jesus called them to a conversion of heart and mind and attitudes and not for clean hands and clean words on the lips.

Jesus' contemporaries were burdened with countless and confusing legal prescriptions. They were forced to seek guidance from the experts (not different from today). Eventually, the law turned into mere external observance. Jesus urged the disciples to let their observance come from the heart. The law requires inner conversion.

**Jesus teaches us today that inner purity, the holiness which the law is supposed to create, cannot be achieved by mere external observances. The cleansing of heart does not happen by mere washing of hands.**

**It is inner conversion, change of attitudes and dispositions in response to God's call for conversion that brings about purity of heart, a thorough cleansing of life.**

**Be Still for a few moments!**

**Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.**

## **Spiritual Communion**

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

### **Be Still for a few moments!**

#### **Saint of the day, September 1 - St. Giles and 18 other saints are remembered this day.**

Giles was born around the year 650 in Athens, Eastern Roman Empire. He was one of the fourteen Holy Helpers and the only one definitively known to not be a martyr. The Fourteen Holy Helpers are a group of saints venerated together because their intercession is believed to be particularly effective, especially against various diseases.

In the middle of the 14th century, the plague - also called "The Black Death" - ravaged Europe, killing 50 million people, or about 60% of the population (a vastly higher death rate than coronavirus), within a few years. It was at this time that the Fourteen Holy Helpers came to be invoked by Catholics against the plague and other misfortunes.

Devotion to these 14 saints started in Germany at the time of the plague, and they were called "Nothelfer," which in German means "helpers in need." As bouts of the plague resurfaced over the decades, devotion to the Holy Helpers spread to other countries, and eventually Pope Nicholas V declared that devotion to the saints came with special indulgences.

St. Giles became a seventh-century monk in the area of Athens, despite his birth to nobility. He eventually retreated to the wilderness to found a monastery under the rule of St. Benedict, and was renowned for his holiness and the miracles he performed. Giles died peacefully around the year of 712 in Southern France.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

**What counts is not the fulfilment of my desires, but of his will.  
In this way life becomes authentic.  
(Pope Benedict XVI)**