



The Word...

“Brothers and sisters: As you excel in every respect, in faith, discourse, knowledge, all earnestness, and in the love we have for you, may you excel in this gracious act also....

Not that others should have relief while you are burdened, but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their needs, so that their abundance may also supply your needs, that there may be equality.

As it is written: ‘*Whoever had much did not have more, and whoever had little did not have less.*’”

(from 2 Cor 8:7,9, 13-15)

Pondering the Word ...

Paul is participating in the age-old religious tradition of fundraising! He even employs the time-honored tactic of pointing out to the Corinthians the generosity of the Macedonians as a way to “encourage” them to be generous as well! But this fundraising is not for lining coffers or embellishing temples. There is a severe famine sweeping the Roman Empire (40s - 50s AD) and Jerusalem is at the epicenter. People are starving, just as people are starving today.

I encourage you to go to <https://inequality.org/great-divide/updates-billionaire-pandemic/> to get a statistical picture of the inequity in wealth distribution that has occurred in the US over the past year or so. It’s staggering — jaw-dropping -- and even more so for a nation that claims to be based on Judeo/Christian principles. It should greatly trouble anyone who claims to be a Christian. I just don’t get it.

Living the Word ...

Let’s put the labels aside: socialist vs. capitalist, liberal vs conservative, Republican vs. Democrat, “welfare queens” vs. “fat cats.” I know there are many ultra-wealthy people who do wonderful things with their money, and poor people who take advantage of welfare. But this is not about judgment of individuals. It is about a system that allows for such gross disparity and inequality.

There’s a lot of talk these days about “critical race theory,” a means for looking at laws and systems that either tacitly or explicitly promote racism. We need to a “critical poverty theory” to take a good, hard look at the current capitalistic system in many Western countries—particularly the US -- and how this system feeds the continuation of the ever-widening gulf between those who don’t have, those who have little, and those who have in excess.

Each of us is called to make changes in our individual lives —I surely have changes I need to make in this regard —but we cannot hide behind what we do as individuals, or behind our piety as part of the faithful, as an excuse for ignoring societal change. This is not about just about charity either. It is about the basics of Christian social justice—foundational to the practice of our faith. Go online today and look for opportunities in your community or nationally to advocate for change to help narrow the divide. “Be the change.”

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jun 28: *Then Abraham drew nearer and said: "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city...Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?"* (Gn 18:16-33)

I love the transformation in Abraham. He goes from being a docile, obedient follower of whatever God instructs him to do, to asking questions of God. Still obedient and subservient, he takes advantage of God's calling him to be closer, unafraid to get to know his God better. **Today's reflection** *How is God inviting you to come closer, to get to know God better, particularly in the midst of grief, difficulty, or strife?* **Provision:** *Be curious! Ask God those questions that are in your heart, even if they seem a bit bold!*

Tue, Jun 29: *"Look to him that you may be radiant with joy, and your faces may not blush with shame."* (Ps 34)

A good follow-up to yesterday's reflection. If you can't approach God without blushing with shame, perhaps you've not really accepted God's mercy, the mercy that makes you radiant with joy! God's mercy does not give us *carte blanche* to continue to sin; in fact, it is the joyous radiance we feel at receiving mercy that keeps us from sin! **Today's reflection:** *Does God's mercy bring you joy or make you more ashamed? If it's the latter, seek advice from a minister or spiritual director.* **Provision:** *Show unconditional mercy to someone today.*

Wed, Jun 30: *Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin with water, and then let the boy drink. God was with the boy as he grew up.* (Gn 21:5, 8-20)

If you ever get into a discussion with a bible literalist, ask about this math problem. We hear in Gn 16:16 that Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born. We hear in today's reading about Isaac's weaning that Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born. That really changes the image of Abraham putting Ishmael—a sixteen or seventeen-year-old boy -- on Hagar's back! The lesson from today is not about history but about hope. God "opens" Hagar's eyes to see the future. He promises that Ishmael will be great. God's messenger brings her the most oft-repeated words in Scripture: "Don't be afraid." **Today's reflection:** *Have you ever been rejected or sent away by someone? How did (or do) God's promises help you see the future with hope?* **Provision:** *Don't be afraid!*

Thu, Jul 1: *Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the sheep for the burnt offering."* (Gn 22:1b-19)

I know people who reject God because of this passage. Is this historical? Could be. Child sacrifice was practiced at this time. Or is it symbolic, a lesson for parents whose egos are tied up in their children or whose children have become "their gods?" Or to remind all of us we need to let go of what stands between us and God? While we can't assume the concept of a "year" in Scripture is the same as we define it, if you look at this chronologically, Abraham has been hanging with God for almost 50 years. Throughout that time, God has repeatedly promised to make of him a great nation, specifically through this son, Isaac. I pray never to be put to the kind of test God puts Abraham through here, but could it be that Abraham truly believes what he says, that "God himself will provide?" **Today's reflection:** *Consider when God has provided for you in a time of trial. If you can't think of a time, dig a little deeper.* **Provision:** *Let go and allow God to provide for you today.*

Fri, Jul 2: *"Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners."* (Mt 9:9-13)

From Sunday's reading from Wisdom: *"God formed us to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made us."* God created us to be merciful, compassionate, patient...just as God is with us. Our God is not like other gods that demand elaborate sacrifices. Just the willingness to forgive as God forgives us, sinners that we are.

Today's reflection: *"There are two kinds of people: the righteous who believe themselves sinners; and, the rest, who believe themselves righteous."* (Blaise Pascal) **Provision:** *Answer Jesus' call to come to him for mercy.*

Sat, Jul 3: *"Through (Christ Jesus) the whole structure is held together..."* (Eph 2:19-22)

When I get discouraged or disgusted by the division and strife within and between Christian denominations, I go back to this verse. I wish all Christians would do the same. Why can't we focus on what Jesus taught rather than on the dogma and doctrine that divide us? **Today's Reflection:** *In what ways does your religious practice support or get in the way of your Christian faith? How do you reconcile any disconnect?* **Provision:** *Be aware of this and that it's unlikely there is a perfect fit or answer. Consider how you will live into the disconnect.*