



The Word ...

Praise the Lord, my soul!
The LORD 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.
(from Psalm 146)

Pondering the Word ...

“Word Association.” You might know this as a technique employed by psychoanalysts to uncover biases and perceptions in their clients: “What word comes immediately to your mind when I say the word....” It’s a rapid-fire line of questioning and has served as the basis for many a comic skit over the years!

The practice of Lectio Divina is somewhat similar: what word or phrase or image from the selected reading jumps out? This is what I do each week to prepare my reflections. I pray the Spirit will allow me new eyes and ears to read each passage like I’ve never read or heard it before. Then I circle words or jot down notes based on my immediate reaction.

My first reaction when I read these psalm verses about the Lord doing all the work to save the oppressed? “I wish!” My second reaction: “Or do I hope?”

The word “wish” rings of fantasy. In lessons for English as a Second Language students, a “wish” is explained as a desire that is impossible or unlikely to happen, whereas “hope” is something in the realm of possibility. To wish for something can be lofty and inspiring, but to hope means work, getting our hands dirty.

Living the Word ...

I am rereading—this time in great detail for what it means in my life -- the Pope’s book, *Let Us Dream*. To be honest, it’s hard to think in terms of hope; some of what he asks of us seems impossible. He acknowledges this and his own difficulties as well. I encourage you to read this book. Read it in detail, preferably with a discussion group, with an eye for what it could mean in your life. Are you willing to change for the dream?

“We Christians talk about taking up and embracing the Cross. Embracing the Cross, confident that what will come is new life, gives us the courage to stop lamenting and move out and serve others and so enable change, which will come only from compassion and service.” “I see an overflow of mercy spilling out in our midst. Hearts have been tested. The (pandemic) crisis has called forth in some a new courage and compassion. Some have been sifted and have responded with the desire to reimagine our world; others have come to the aid of those in need in concrete ways that can transform our neighbor’s suffering. That fills me with hope that we might come out of this crisis better. But we have to see clearly, choose well, and act right. Let’s talk about how. Let’s allow God’s words to Isaiah to speak to us: Come, let us talk this over. Let us dare to dream.” (Francis, Pope. *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, pp 3; 7. 2020. Simon & Schuster.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ... _____

Mon, Nov 8: "... (the LORD) is found by those who test him not, and he manifests himself to those who do not disbelieve him," (Wis 1:1-7; Note: Book of Wisdom is found in the Apocrypha of some Protestant Bibles.)

Or said another way: The Lord is found by those who don't need to look—they know God is with them, in them, around them, always! **Today's reflection:** Reflect on a time when you were challenged to feel God's presence. Though we may believe God is always present, like Jesus on the cross, it may be hard to see God. In retrospect, can you see how God was working? **Provision:** See if you can recognize God today in unlikely places and situations.

Tue, Nov 9: "...each one must be careful how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 3: 9c-11, 16-17)

Here's that topic again—having an informed conscience. There are lots of people who want to tell you what and how to think. Jesus is the foundation. If someone adds something that doesn't fit the foundation, your temple may tumble. The good news: you can always start rebuilding. **Today's reflection:** Is there something you have been taught that just doesn't "fit?" Don't dismiss it out of hand; it doesn't mean it's wrong or doesn't belong in your building. It just might have been laid in the wrong way. Pray with Scripture. See if Jesus has anything to say about it. Seek wise counsel if it is troubling. (Note: some people have asked me to define "wise counsel." Wise counsel always listens-- a lot--and knows it is the Spirit who provides the guidance. Wise counsel rarely offers proforma/pat answers to soul questions.) **Provision:** Walk around "the temple of God, which you are." Do you notice anything that needs work?

Wed, Nov 10: "Judgment is stern for the exalted...the mighty shall be mightily put to the test." (Wis 6: 1-11)

Jesus echoes these words in Luke: "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much." Those with power and influence will be held to a higher standard. But we don't need to have big titles or be "in charge" to be considered mighty. Those of us blessed with an easier life path, great gifts, or a greater awareness of God will account for what we do with what we've been given. **Today's reflection:** Where are you "mighty?" This can be hard to imagine; we often feel powerless against the tide. But chances are you have advantages not given to everyone. What do you do with your might, your gifts, your faith? Do these ever give you an unfair advantage over others?

Provision: Be keenly aware of and humbled by ways you are "mightier" than others. Always use your might for good.

Thu, Nov 11: "Wisdom is mobile beyond motion; she penetrates, pervades all things..." (Wis 7:22-8:1)

St. Bonaventure says of Wisdom, "(She) is active, not because She is moved but because She moves all things." Thomas Merton writes, "She is in all things like the air receiving sunlight." It is Wisdom that grants us the grace to accept what is, but also to look beyond to the universal whole, the Cosmic Christ that was, is, and will be. Though these words sound lofty, they are the essence of faith. **Today's reflection/provision:** "I believe in one God—sole, eternal—who, motionless, moves all the heavens with love and desire...This is the origin, this is the spark that then extends into a vivid flame and, like a star in heaven, glows in me." (Dante Alighieri) Let Wisdom move you today.

Fri, Nov 12: "All men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan." (Wis 13:1-9)

When my kids were little—a long time ago!--we played a game to guess the artist from the painting style. It's a fun way to teach children about art and music—learning to discern the artisan by their work. It's also a good way to teach kids about God. As we enjoy a beautiful day or see a positive result come from a negative situation; as we celebrate the wonder of our bodies and minds or marvel at scientific discoveries and the frontiers yet to be searched—all these are the works of our God, the ultimate artist, creator, and lover. **Today's reflection/provision:** Turn off the phone, social media, and the noise, and for a few minutes, look at the "art" that surrounds you. It's easy to do in nature, but how about around the house, the classroom, the workplace? God's artistic hand is there too. The more you do this, the more you will see God everywhere!

Sat, Nov 13: "...pray always without becoming weary." (Lk 18:1-8)

"It's hard enough to be so mindful as to pray always. But I also need to do so without getting tired!?" **Today's reflection:** Go back to our reflection from Sunday. Are your prayers based on wishes or hopes? Are your prayers rooted in faith? Faith and hope are the antidotes for weariness. **Provision:** The cornerstone of Ignatian Spirituality is finding and seeing God in all things. It is not easy, but give it a try today, even if it's just for one hour. You will find the more you see God, the easier it is to fend off weariness!