

**October 2023** This month, we get back to basics: love of God and of neighbor; the call to bear good fruit as followers of our Lord; the invitation to allow God’s love and peace to fill our minds and hearts, and to shape the way we live, strengthened in the love of Christ. And while we hear these readings in the Lectionary cycle of readings every three years, we will no doubt hear them anew in each cycle. I pray you continue to take consolation through the Love of God poured out for us in Jesus Christ and that your community will be filled with God’s peace, which surpasses all understanding. — Leisa Anslinger

**Homily Connections**

**October 1:** We know that being a person of faith calls us to live in particular ways — we are called to serve, to love, to give, even when we might be tempted to do be focused on ourselves.. Today’s readings are point to the straightforward call of God to each of us: accept the call to live for God and others, so that our actions will be a witness to our commitment as children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ.

Connecting with everyday life: How many times do we catch ourselves saying or doing something that we know we should not? How often do we stop ourselves and do what we know is right, even when that “right thing” is not the easy, simple, or comfortable thing to do? Today is a good day to ask your people if faith is a driving force in their lives. Are their daily decisions shaped by their faith in Jesus Christ? Share an example from your own experience to help people reflect. (Page 2)

**October 8:** When we read today’s passage from the Gospel of Matthew, we immediately see in Jesus’ parable the reality of Christ’s passion and death. We also ask ourselves, are we bearing fruit? Are we faithfully living Christ’s mission, or are we like the vineyard that has gone wild, or the disappointing and unfaithful tenants?

Connecting with everyday life: What does faithful, fruitful discipleship “look like” in the lives of your people? Offer concrete examples of the ways in which you know some are living the mission of Christ in their lives at home, work, parish, and world. Parents who sacrifice in order to take care of their children (especially those who have children with special health or learning needs); people who strive to be ethical and kind in a difficult work environment; those who selflessly give time to parish ministries; people who are caring for elderly parents, etc. Challenge everyone to consider their call to “keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard.” (Page 2)

**October 15:** We are offered a banquet of Christ’s life and love every day, at Mass, and in our lives as Christian people. Many pastors and parish leaders are concerned that people are becoming accustomed to not coming to Mass, and are asking, “How do we convince them to come back when it is safe to do so?” Today’s Gospel offers us an opportunity to speak to the blessing of the Eucharist.

Connecting with everyday life: Ask your people to consider how each accepts Christ’s invitation to the banquet. Are they faithful in their participation in the Eucharist, even if they cannot return in person at this time? Do they pray each day? Are they learning and growing in faith? In the Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis urges each of us to be open to an encounter or renewed encounter with God’s love, daily. Invite your people to open their minds, hearts, and lives to that encounter, knowing that a banquet of love awaits!

**October 22**: “I am the Lord, there is no other.” “Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” God is the origin of all that is good and holy. The manner in which we recognize God’s grace in our midst, and in which we grow in gratitude for our lives, gifts, and resources shape us as disciples and stewards. The way in which we use our resources is a statement of faith.

Connecting with everyday life: The reality is, it all belongs to God! All we are, have, and will be is given to us in trust. We are called to steward it well. Taking this to heart is a “game changer.” Once we have the flash of insight in which we see that all is God’s, intended to be used well, to be shared with others, to make a positive difference in the world, there is no going back. Everything changes as a result. Share a personal experience of a time in which you recognized the grace of God in your own life, and the responsibility of responding to this grace in your life. (Page 1)

**October 29**: Love God, love neighbor. When we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, we will naturally come to see our neighbor as our self. These two commandments are the sum of all we are called to be and to do as Christian people.

Connecting with everyday life: How do we view the people around us, especially those who are different — the differently abled, immigrants, single and/or young adults, those with varying ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds? How can we begin to see one another as, in the words of St. John Paul II, “those who are a part of me”? This is the question we may ask today, because the ways in which we do this are a direct result of our love of God — we cannot love God and hate, or even ignore, our neighbor. Invite your people to think of the people in their lives, in your city, or in the world that they see as “other.” Then invite them to take a step, spiritually and practically, toward seeing that person or group as someone like themselves — a child of God. If there is a specific incident you can point to in your own life, share the story. Your people will be inspired and challenged through your sharing. (Page 1)

At Parish Meetings or in Adult Faith Formation this Month

**Opening Prayer**

*Almighty and ever-living God,*

*From the moment of creation, you have held us in your heart,*

*and desire that we live as your beloved.*

*Increase our faith, hope and charity,*

*and make us love what you command,*

*so that we may merit what you promise.*

*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. Amen. (Collect, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, adapted)*

**Listen to Sacred Scripture:** Read Matthew 22:34-40 (Gospel, October 29)

**Read:** Read the article on page 1.

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

How does loving God lead you to love your neighbor?

How do you hear this gospel passage differently this year than in the past?

**Commit:** Be mindful of the ways you may live faith fruitfully this month. Make a commitment to make one intentional change in attitude or behavior in order to more fully love God and neighbor.

Offer one another a sign of Christ’s peace.

**The basics.**

Sometimes it is good for us to get back to basics. At home, we might set aside time for dinner and conversation rather than family members rushing off to separate activities. In our lives of faith, Jesus says we are called to two foundational actions: love God, love neighbor.

**Love God.**

Love God, love our neighbor. It sounds so simple. And yet, we know that it is anything but simple. Loving God and neighbor requires commitment. Loving God requires us to place our trust in One who cannot be seen and yet knows us better than we know ourselves. Loving God calls us to order our lives in relationship to God and God’s ways, the way of self-giving love. When our heart is centered on God, we will see ourselves as uniquely created, God’s very own. When we love God with all our soul, we find peace in the midst of turmoil. When our mind is focused through faith, we seek what is good, right, and just before all things.

**Love neighbor.**

Loving our neighbor is the way in which we show our love for God. When we love God with our whole being, we understand that our neighbor is a child of God, one who is God’s prized possession, just as each of us is. The truth is that every person is created out of love, for love. As Christ himself taught us, whatever we do for the least among us, we do for him. Loving our neighbor is, after all, our greatest act of faith, of discipleship, and of stewardship.

**Take the call to heart.**

What would our lives look like if we really took to heart the two intertwined commandments that Jesus places before us? Would we re-order our days in order to spend time with God in prayer? Would we become more attentive to the needs of others? Might we recognize our talents as gifts from God, and more readily give the gifts back, with increase, at home, in our parish, and the world? Would we consider that the way we spend time, money and attention are signs of our priorities?

**It’s time.**

Most of us have thought about these things many times in the past, but may have done little to change our routines, behaviors or habits. One of the reasons the three-year Lectionary cycle of readings is so helpful is that we hear passages like this again and again. We hear and reflect on God’s word in light of the very real circumstances of our lives. Think for just a moment about what was happening in your life three years ago. Surely you heard the Sunday readings differently then than you do now. The gospel passages we hear this month challenge us to not be passive recipients of God’s gracious love. Let this be the year we take Jesus’ two great commandments more fully to heart, and act accordingly: love God, love neighbor. ©Catholic Life and Faith, 2023

Bear

good fruit

that endures.

**Finding strength**

“I can do all things in him who strengthens me.”

Faith in Jesus does not prevent us from having difficulties in life. Truly, discipleship includes challenges - the ordinary adversities that are part of life, and particular trials that come from our commitment to living as Christian people in the world. As we listen to the gospels this month, Jesus challenges us to live as his people, stay focused on God and God’s ways, and produce the fruit of faith through our actions.

*“I can do all things in him who strengthens me.”* Such faith is not theoretical or abstract. When we can make this statement with conviction in the midst of turmoil, we tell ourselves and others that we believe Christ is with us, that the Lord cares about us and remains with us each and every day, even when we are not conscious of God’s presence. As we face the trials of life and of discipleship, faith provides perspective. And strength. And hope. Because Jesus bore his cross and reigns victorious over it, we can face our trials with the assurance that Christ is with us and that nothing is greater than the love and power of God.

*“I can do all things in him who strengthens me.”* St. Paul wrote those words to the Christian community in Philippi from prison. “I know how to live in humble circumstances; I also know how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I can do all things in him who strengthens me.” Can we say the same? Do we trust in the Lord in every circumstance, in all things? Earlier in the same letter, St. Paul shared the faith that gave him courage in the trails that he faced, “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your request known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phl 4:6-9, 12-14)

*“I can do all things in him who strengthens me.”* Notice that St. Paul’s prayer is one of thanksgiving. Even in the midst of trial, doubt, or fear, we always have something to be thankful for, because we are blessed children of God!

*“I can do all things in him who strengthens me.”* Let these words sink into our hearts and minds. Let them become a mantra, a phrase that we repeat whenever we are challenged - by situations at home or work, when things seem to be falling apart, when we are discerning a new step on life’s path or need courage to take a stand or act as we know discipleship demands - in all things, let us trust that we are not alone. We can do these things in and with Christ.

Impact this month

Make your requests known to God. Find peace. Live faith.

Read St. Paul’s words above slowly and prayerfully. Notice where your mind or heart gravitates.

How does this message touch your heart? How does it challenge you? How does it console you?

What prayers and petitions do you bring to the Lord at this time? What in your life needs the peace of God that surpasses all understanding? What have your learned about the Lord’s way that you should keep on doing?

Turn to God in prayer this month. Rest in God’s peace when you are tired, troubled, or stressed. Remind yourself that you can do all things in him who strengthens you.