



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 2011

NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Listen to Jesus? Indeed!

People in the construction business know that before you start building anything you have to figure out what kind of ground you have to work with. Only after that's done can you know the right foundation to use to produce a solid structure. Being a disciple of Jesus follows much the same pattern. In fact, Jesus makes the same comparison himself, saying that the one who builds on solid ground is like the person who both hears his words and *acts on them*. Think about some of most important things you believe about God and Jesus. Then ask yourself: How can I put these beliefs into action?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28, 32; Romans 3:21-25, 28; Matthew 7:21-27*

"Everyone . . . who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock."

MONDAY, MARCH 7 FEAST OF PERPETUA AND FELICITY, MARTYRS

You belong to Christ

"I cannot call myself by any other name than what I am—a Christian." As she waited to be taken to prison and ultimately her martyrdom in third-century Africa, Saint Perpetua tried to explain to her father the depth of her faith in Christ. She didn't only have faith; she had allowed that experience of Christ to transform her whole life such that she hardly knew herself except in Christ. She strove to see all things, even her own suffering and impending death, with the eyes of faith, hope, and love. Each of us encounters our own moments of struggle and suffering, and at times we can barely muster a good thought, let alone faith. In these moments let us remember who we are in Christ.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Tobit 1:3; 2:1a-8; Mark 12:1-12*

"Have you not read this scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?"

TUESDAY, MARCH 8

Two sides of the same coin

One of Jesus' most controversial—and cryptic—statements was his response to a trick question. Asked, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" his reply was: "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." Over the centuries some Christians have come to think Christ was teaching faithfulness to political leaders as well as to God, while others have believed the very same words clearly state the opposite: the gulf between loyalty to God and earthly political power. Jesus, however, was not giving a civics lesson. The Roman coin in his hand served as a prop for something larger: to speak the truth in the face of hypocrisy and deception.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Tobit 2:9-14; Mark 12:13-17*

"Teacher, we know that you . . . teach the way of God in accordance with truth."

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9 ASH WEDNESDAY

Lent: A season of joy?

Thank God! Lent at last! If that's an unlikely comment, it shouldn't be. "Each year you give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the Paschal Mystery with mind and heart renewed," says a Lenten prayer. What makes Lent joyful is that it gives focus to vague notions of "doing better" or "getting serious about faith." A framed motto on a pastor's desk shows a kid's wagon and the words "Lord, I need a push." Lent gives that concrete shove we need toward almsgiving, fasting, and prayer. And

during Lent we're not on our own. We're shoulder-to-shoulder with fellow pilgrims, a community of home-bound prodigals, all needing and capable of giving each other a gentle push in the right direction. Springtime and welcome home! What is more joyful than that?

TODAY'S READINGS: *Joel 2:12-18; 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2;*

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

"As we work together . . . we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain."

THURSDAY, MARCH 10 THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

One size fits all

In 1971 Catholic peace activist Eileen Egan coined the term "seamless garment" to describe Catholic reverence for life across the spectrum of contemporary issues—abortion, capital punishment, and euthanasia—but Egan also included militarism and social and economic injustice. "The protection of life," said Egan, "is a seamless garment. You can't protect some life and not others." Later, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* ("Gospel of Life") gave the seamless garment image and the consistent ethic of life for which it stands wider visibility. The garment is as fitting today as it was several decades ago. Try it on yourself!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 9:22-25*

"I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then."

FRIDAY, MARCH 11 FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

A fast guide to Lent

At summers' end long-suffering baseball fans in Chicago invariably exclaim, "Wait until next year!" Many Catholics say the same thing at the end of every Lent. Despite years of practice and our best intentions, sustaining a 40-day season of "fast" remains elusive. Perhaps that is because we miss the point of fasting. It is far more than a means of self-control or a way to deprive ourselves. To receive the spiritual benefits of fasting, we have to go beyond simply giving up a regular hearty meal because it's Lent, and genuinely, compassionately remember and pray for those whose diets are inadequate 365 days a year. Deep reflection and prayer are what give a fast its significance. Try them. Don't wait until next year.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 58:1-9a; Matthew 9:14-15*

"Is such the fast that I choose . . . to share your bread with the hungry?"

SATURDAY, MARCH 12 SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Who will you be tomorrow?

Jesus calls all of us to repent—and be quick about it, advises Pope Gregory the Great, who died on this day in 604. "God, who promised pardon to every repentant sinner, has not promised us tomorrow," writes Gregory in *Be Friends of God*. Today is a "day for conversion," says Gregory. But wait, don't get comfortable. Even if you've repented today, you need to be watchful and in full conversion mode tomorrow. Why? "Because," Gregory counsels, "even if we know what kind of person we are today, we do not know what we will be tomorrow. Nobody must rejoice in the security of their own good deeds." Blessings in your continued conversion.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 58:9b-14; Luke 5:27-32*

"I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."

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Scripture quotes come from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

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