



**St. Charles  
Borromeo  
Church**

*A Catholic Community  
in the heart of Brooklyn Heights*

# Representative Homilies

## 2019

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## 16th Sunday Ordinary Time – 9 a.m. (Fr. John Gribowich)

Luke 10:38-42 + July 21, 2019

Good morning, everyone. It's great to be back here with you in New York. I think the last time I was here it was like freezing, and now it's just like sweltering. So I always come back to the East Coast when we're in these weather extremes, which is the complete antithesis of what I'm used to now in the Bay Area and Berkeley, by San Francisco, because it's like every day it's 70 and breezy. It's like, it's amazing how easy forget about weather extremes when you're living out there, so I'm guess I'm happy that I was reminded that there are other parts of the country that really struggle with weather. So I'm in it here with you as well, so thanks for being here this morning as we're all trying to get through this hot weather.

Today's Gospel, I can't help to think, is just one of those stories with Jesus that just seems all too human, all too real. How many of us have just dealt with just the frustration of someone close to us, perhaps a family member or friend, who doesn't seem to be pulling their weight. When we're overextending ourselves and trying to do something, and of course this is the case of, you know, Jesus, as the guests at this house of these two sisters Martha and Mary, and he see that Martha is doing everything to make sure that the house looks right. Everything's put together, and of course what's Mary doing? While she's just kind of was listening and hanging on to everything that Jesus is saying. It's almost as if, like, you know, Mary's that's like Jesus's biggest fan, and just can't wait to just get everything out of him.

Well, Martha's the one in the back, you know, kind of running the concession stand, making sure that, you know, everything's working, and of course there's this resentment. Martha's because she is doing all this work and Mary seems to be getting a free ride. Not only is Martha serving Jesus and making the house good for Jesus, it seems as if Martha is also making sure that Mary is okay, as well. You know, twice the amount of work almost, right?

And when we look at the story, of course, as it is with everything in the Gospel, there's probably a deeper spiritual implication going on, and many of us will take away from this story – well there seems to be two different ways to live the Christian Life. There is the life we would say of the full-time contemplative, the full-time prayer, and then there's the life of the full-time active minister – social worker, if you will. The person who's always trying to make things and make an impact in society, and of course in our Catholic Christian tradition, we could probably look upon many examples of different Saints, many different notable people who we can think of, many Saints who were monks and nuns. People who are true contemplative people who left the world as a way to reform greater intimacy with God, and in that presence of being with God they were able to engage the world in a different way, as a way to look at the world as something that is passing, and it's a way for us to prepare our souls for eternity.

The tons of even recent examples of people who were contemplative in modern times – the 20th Century – to think of someone like Thomas Merton, for example, who was, who lived a very active life here in New York City going to Columbia University, and then becoming a Catholic and leaving the world and going to a monastery in Kentucky, where he was able to develop his life to prayer and spiritual writing, and which many of us have maybe been influenced by. And of course, then we have the great other extreme: people who work very hard in the world trying to make an imprint on bringing relief to the poor to the sufferings of those are marginalized. And of course, in the Twentieth Century, again we can think of someone like a Mother Teresa, who is clearly right in the thick of things in Calcutta, working with people who are suffering from leprosy and other harmful elements in the midst of extreme poverty. And so looking at those two types of streams of how to live the Christian Life, we kind of look at this Gospel as a place where it's find the origin, Mary being the great contemplative at the feet of Jesus, Martha being the great active social worker in the world making a difference.

Yet today, Jesus seems to give Martha a hard time, almost saying that all this activity is not really what's important. Yet, when you look at it in a far deeper way, is perhaps not Jesus's criticism of the activity – it's more of Jesus being mindful that the thing that Martha was struggling with is something that I think we can all identify with and that is anxiety. Jesus says that Martha you are anxious about many things. Anxiety, I think all of us understand what it means to be anxious, to be worried. And what is anxiety? Anxiety is simply us not living in the present moment. What I mean by that, because if you really think about it, our anxiety is always worrying about things that might happen, that could happen, that maybe even will happen. But yet, they're not actually happening right now.

All of us right now this very moment may feel anxiety because you may think about what you have to do after you leave church. You may have to think about ways to deal with the rest of this week. You may think about something that's happening right now and your family life and your personal life, but if you're really honest with yourself, if we are all honest with ourselves at this very moment, as we sit in these pews, we really don't have to worry about anything. We can just be. But yet, our anxiety takes us to someplace else and Jesus is very, very delicately and very gently – I would say – gently reminding Martha that anxiety takes us outside of the presence of God, because the presence of God is always in the present.

The presence of God is a journey. Now there's not a presence of God that's found in the past, or presence of God that's found in the future, because God doesn't operate in time the way that we understand. If God exists outside of time, he's beyond time. We're the ones who think in a very linear progression. God is simply the Eternal Now – "I Am Who Am". As he reveals His name to Moses and how do we practically deal with that, what we deal with it as we've tried our best to become more contemplative.

Now that doesn't mean that we're all going to run off and become monks and nuns call to be contemplative. The Christian should always be one who is constantly contemplating the presence of Jesus Christ in the now, in the present, because only by contemplating where Jesus is in the present moment. Will anyone be able to know what he or she should do with his or her life if you're thinking about the future and always worrying about what's going to happen next? And how we're going to deal with things, or if you're even dealing with the regrets of the past? Those things do not help us learn how God wants us to live our lives today.

Now let me give up a short little example of this happened to me this week as I was coming back from California. For those you may not know, I'm out in California studying at Berkeley, and I came back on a flight that was supposed to arrive at 9:30 at JFK on Wednesday evening, but there were thunderstorms here in New York and the plane was delayed, so I didn't get to make it back here until midnight at JFK. So of course, I have to try to get back from there over to here to Brooklyn, and I want to take the subway, so had to get to the Howard Beach station to take the train back into Brooklyn. But since it was so late, I arrive at the platform at Howard Beach and there was track work being done and now it was going to rain, just so you had to be like, you know, get onto the train, go to two stops, get off the train, get onto a bus, go to – that would take you to Euclid Avenue, and then from there you go up on another train and shoot into Brooklyn. So of course, my 5-hour flight from San Francisco to New York was now going to be equally matched by probably a 5-hour commute from JFK to Brooklyn.

And here it is almost midnight and there was a man on the platform with me. He's, okay, "where're you going?" – so I go and say, you know, Brooklyn running out to Jay Street. "That's where I got to go too – let's split an Uber!" Like I just checked it out, like 50-some dollars or something like that. Now of course I was tempted, I guess, for a moment to think that, all right, well I guess it would make more sense to me and I am kind of tired and I should probably get to sleep, have a long day next day on Thursday.

But for some strange reason, I just felt that, you know, I kind of made a commitment that I was going to take the train back, and yeah, I could afford to take the Uber, so it's not like I'm some type that's financially-strapped, but

there was a great desire on my part to stay, and it's because I want to be present to this moment, because there are a lot of other people who do not have the luxury of just hopping on an Uber right now. There's lots of people right now on this platform who worked a very long day, most likely at the airport, and have to go through this whole process of hopping on the train, and dealing with this bus shuttle, and going on the other train, again to bed probably way too late and having to wake up way too early. And while it's very tempting to think that I can just kind of be removed from that, for some reason I just really felt the presence of the Spirit saying to stay. And so I did, stop after all – the different exchanges and things like that.

I probably ended up in a bed around 3 in the morning, but it's amazing what you are able to behold on the New York public transportation system at that early hours, right, because you see a lot of stuff, right? You see people who really are just spent from the day of working a very long shift, and you hear the conversations, and you're hearing their anxieties, and they're worried. And of course you see people who are dealing with their own issues of mental illness, drug addiction. You see the homeless. You see the young teenage couples making out. You see everything.

But you know what you really see in the midst of all that? You see Jesus Christ. You see Jesus Christ in each and every one of those people on that train and on that bus, because Jesus comes to us in the present moment, through each and every person and most especially through their wounds, through their suffering, through their trials, through their anxieties. We often have to remember that we worship a Jesus who's hanging on a cross. That's the Jesus we worship, that's the Jesus we behold. We don't behold Superman Jesus. We don't behold Jesus is just somehow above all the worries and stresses of the world. We behold a very broken Jesus on the cross. That's how we're able to encounter the same broken Jesus in each and everyone around us and it's what gives us hope that in our own brokenness, in our own pain, and yes, even in our own anxieties, there is tremendous hope – tremendous because as much as we gaze upon the crucified Christ, we know the story does not end there.

We know that the death of our Lord is so intrinsically connected to his resurrection, that they are almost one in the same. They are contingent on each other – our longings and our sufferings only increase our desire more for wholeness. Yet if we are always thinking about how we wish things were somehow different or if we're always thinking about how we personally have to manage things or handle things, we can neglect to see exactly what Jesus is offering us in the present moment, in our own situations. And through the people around us what we need to respond to as a way to not only get through what's happening but also find joy and what's happening in our lives yeah it's impossible to do this just simply by having a change of attitude.

Martha could very well continue to be working in the kitchen getting things ready, but rather than trying to tell Jesus – telling God – what to do, to allow her work to reveal in of itself a certain type of wholeness, a certain type of contemplative presence. Because the reality is that Martha wasn't happy doing what she had to do. She wasn't happy that she had to go through all this process of work. She didn't see the joy in the suffering of work, just like it's probably not fun to have to actually just hang out on the platform of the train and hop on the bus and do all these other things – exchanges – to get back home one night. That's not a fun thing to do and I could very be tempted to say no when I get out of this Uber, Lyft. But yet when we're able to enter into contemplation, we can see that even the roughest, toughest commute can be a moment of joy, because we are united more closely with Christ, with Jesus, in his wounds.

We do that today when we come to this Mass. Once again we approach the altar, and we are united with Christ in Holy Communion. We receive His Body – the same body that's bruised and broken on the cross. We receive that Body and we are one with Jesus's brokenness. Just as the priest breaks the host, we are then clearly entering into the broken body of Christ. Yeah, we also receive at the same time the resurrected Christ – Christ of completeness, of wholeness, of healing, as we receive Jesus today in this very hidden presence of what looks to be

bread and wine. Maybe then leave this church and once again behold and reveal the Hidden Presence in the broken bodies of people that we see all through our city, and maybe especially on our trains and buses in our city.

I know that we are in solidarity with each other in our own brokenness, and only by being in that place we're able to heal each other, because the same Jesus who unites us in brokenness is the same Jesus that is helping us all to heal, as we contemplate today what we're being called to do next.

God bless you all.

## 16th Sunday Ordinary Time – 11:15 a.m. (Fr. William G. Smith)

Luke 10:38-42 + July 21, 2019

At last week's Gospel, a scholar of the law asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus – good teacher that he is – asked what he found written in the Law. The scholar answered to love God and neighbor. Jesus agreed with him and told him to put it into practice. Good lawyer and the scholar that he was, he asked for further clarification: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responded by a shocking story that forced the man – no doubt very reluctantly – to include the hated and feared Samaritans as neighbors.

Today's Gospel follows immediately on this and asks how are we to love God. Jesus's answer to this will be no less shocking. Jesus was an itinerant preacher and would have expected to be greeted by the leading people of any town he visited. One family would host him in their home and would invite the leading men of the town to listen to him. The women, of at least that family, would be expected to prepare a meal for them. As Jesus was prestigious, they would be expected to outdo themselves to increase their status within the community. Before continuing, we should note that this was a noble activity, and should not be despised. Jesus is not making a general statement about sharing the housekeeping. He is saying simply to fulfill the injunction to love God, we need to listen to His word. This is more important than any other duty or condition: male or female is incidental to discipleship.

Luke is very careful to maintain parallels. Several chapters before this, Jesus said to a potential disciple, "follow me." The Man replied, "Lord let me go first and bury my father." But Jesus answered, "let the dead bury their dead, but you go and Proclaim the kingdom of God." Knowing, loving, and proclaiming the presence of God to the world is more important than anything else. That Jesus placed women as equal to men and were to be instructed and formed in the same way would have been shocking to his audience – those born Greek as well as Jew – as telling the scholar of the law that the Samaritan was his neighbor. The great commandment of God to love God and neighbor cannot be accomplished without undermining the social structures of the day.

As we look around us, we may find the same situation. What will need to be put aside, if not away for us to be able to listen to God's word, and to put it into practice. You can call attention to the situation on our own borders and we ask you to listen carefully to the announcement at the end of Mass<sup>1</sup>, but there is still more to be said about the specific situation of men and women in the Church, particularly the early church.

As it happens, we will celebrate the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene tomorrow. Now we use the word Feast loosely, usually for any liturgical celebration of the saints. There are actually four levels of commemoration: Feast has the second highest, surpassed only by solemnities such as Christmas or the Assumption. Pope Francis has made the

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic Charities La Frontera Migrant Shelter

Catholic Charities La Frontera Shelter at Laredo, TX receives from the Border Patrol over 200 families admitted for asylum each day. The center feeds, clothes, and reunites the asylees with family in the US until their case is adjudicated. Msgr. LoPinto and Catholic Charities Brooklyn & Queens are making an urgent appeal for donations to assist this humanitarian work. Donations can be made online through St. Charles at <https://stcharlesbklyn.weshareonline.org/LaFronteraCatholicCharities>

The following article from America magazine has more information about the shelter and their needs: <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/05/24/how-catholic-charities-shelter-texas-border-coping-influx-asylum>

celebration for Saint Mary Magdalene a feast with its own prayers and readings. If you're interested in this kind of inside ecclesiastical baseball, you can find more information on our website or in the weekly email yesterday.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, "The Apostles to the Apostles", Monday, July 22



*Penitent Magdalene, Donatello*

There is a tendency among Catholics to call any celebration of a Saint a feast. This is not quite correct. There are 4 levels of commemoration. The first is an "optional" memorial. This means that the Saint is acknowledged as worthy of recognition by the entire church but leaves it up to the individual community to publicly celebrate it at Mass or not. Most American Parishes commemorate American Saints like John Neumann or Elizabeth Ann Seton even though it is not required. The next level is "Obligatory" memorial. These are Saints that are considered so important for the entire church that they must be remembered. This Friday we will celebrate the Obligatory memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, the Parents of Mary. The next level is "Feast" strictly speaking. These are Saints whose lives were so important that we are called to pay special attention. Feasts have special prayers and readings and we sing or say the Gloria. This week we celebrate the Feast of the Apostle James on Friday. The highest level is a Solemnity. These are usually reserved for Jesus and Mary but Sts. Peter and Paul and John the Baptist are so honored. These celebrations are given the same honor and form as a Sunday Mass.

Pope Francis has elevated the celebration for St. Mary Magdalene to a Feast. Indeed, she is to be treated as an Apostle. One of the signs of a feast of an Apostle is the use of a special Preface (prayer before the consecration). As this prayer refers only to men, Pope Francis commissioned a special preface for this feast. The English translation is not yet ready, but please find below an unofficial version. It is well worth reading - note the official name.

#### Preface of the Apostle of the Apostles

It is truly right and just,  
our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks.  
Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God,  
whose mercy is no less than His power,  
to preach the Gospel to everyone, through Christ, our Lord.  
In the garden He appeared to Mary Magdalene,  
who loved him in life, who witnessed his death on the cross  
who sought him as he lay in the tomb  
who was the first to adore him when he rose from the dead,  
and whose apostolic duty was honored by the apostles  
that the good news of life might reach the ends of the earth.  
And so Lord, with all the Angels and Saints,  
we, too, give you thanks, as in exultation we acclaim:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might ...

To know why I chose the picture above, you will have to attend the 12:10 Mass on Monday.

The point is that we acknowledge St. Mary Magdalene as the Apostle of, or to the Apostles. She is found in all the Gospels usually leading a group of women and is always mentioned first. Also, she is the first in all the gospels to experience the empty tomb and to bring this news to the other apostles. Thus, the Apostle – one sent – to the other apostles.

In all the Gospels it is women who first experience the empty tomb. Now some commentators have developed ingenious theological reasons for this. I do not find them compelling. I think they're simply recording a fact, and indeed a rather embarrassing one: men weren't there. Luke, always seeking balance, included the story of the male disciples on the road to Emmaus, but however beautiful a story, it seems a little bit too contrived and convenient for me. It has been noticed that the women were there to perform a religious task of caring for the body of Jesus – that this most likely occurred, and it was simply a female role.

Let's look at this for a moment. This week, I was out with some friends, and one of them introduced me to a few of his friends. They were businesspeople, so he told them that over the years I have merged a number of parishes and started a charter school. It was a language they could understand, and I am happy – dare say proud – that I was able to have the chance to do that.

But looking back over 40 plus years of ministry, they are not what I most remember, or for that matter of what I find the most valuable. What brought me the closest to Jesus and gave me whatever insights I've been able to pass on to you was obtained by visiting the sick, especially the dying. For most of my ministry I have cleared at least one – before I was a pastor 2 days – a week to visit people in their homes or nursing homes or hospitals and bring them communion but mostly to listen to them, and often just hold their hands. That has been my empty tomb. I know that this is a ministry which does not depend on being male or female, young or old, educated or uneducated. It is simply being present to people.

Isn't it interesting, however, that it is usually done by women? Now, I understand that many women object to the statement of a "female genius" or emphasizing supposed female talents. I'm certain that there are differences, but like Luke I question how important they are for a vibrant ministry. The call of Jesus is still the same, and I feel many Christian men become Marthas – busy about many things, but it is women who have chosen the better part that leads to knowing Jesus.

Jesus has left the tomb and is now found in his body – the Church – most clearly and strongly in its weakest members: the poor, the outcast, the sick. Those who minister to this body and as a literal sense as possible, will be the first to encounter Jesus. Whoever they are, they are like Mary, the sister of Martha, and have chosen the better part, no matter what others may say. They are like Mary Magdalene: they will be the apostles to the rest of us. They will have the most important message, no matter what we think is more important.



## 16th Sunday Ordinary Time – 7 p.m. (Msgr. Alfred LoPinto)

Luke 10:38-42 + July 21, 2019

The scripture this evening presents us with 2 different stories, yet stories that have a lot of similarities. The first reading, from the book of Genesis, is a story of Abraham as he greets and meets visitors that come in the desert. One of the reasons why we like that story, upon reading, in perhaps a more modern context, based upon what the experience that we have been sharing.

And we may write the story very differently: rather than going into his tent to gather Sarah to prepare food for these strangers – we would have probably gone into the tent, gathered the servants, got their weapons, and prepared themselves to protect themselves from these unknown strangers who were coming into their midst.

The desert was a dangerous place. Abraham was a very prosperous individual. And so he really had no knowledge of who these 3 individuals were. Were they coming to attack him? Were they coming to seize his possessions?

But he doesn't do that. The story is very clear. He goes out to them. He welcomes them. He tells them, "Come, let me get you a basin to wash your feet, so you might then relax from the journey. And let me have my wife, my servants prepare a meal for you, so you may eat and be nourished as you continue on your journey."

Why? What motivated Abraham to literally operate out of what would be the normal human ambition? And you would have to conclude there were always this difference in Abraham, in respect to God. You might have heard earlier in the book of Genesis, there is again this dialogue about Sodom, between God and Abraham – very intimate with one another. Abraham even gets to bartering with God about Sodom and Gomorrah. So Abraham had a very close relationship with God. And that gave him strength to be different and to act in a different way, out of what would be the expected behavior in that circumstance, that situation.

And when you come to the Gospel, it's again, Jesus being welcomed to a home for the purpose of a meal. The focus of the story, we hear, seems to be on Mary – Mary who chooses to sit at the feet of Jesus.

You would say, what's so different about that? Well again, remember the culture, remember the time. In those days, as is still true in many parts of the world today, there were great differences between the use of space and the roles of people. The women's role was the kitchen – to prepare the meal, to serve. The dining room was where the men gathered, to converse and enjoy each other's company, perhaps to debate, perhaps to resolve problems, perhaps to explore different opportunities.

Mary seems not willing to go into that box. Mary won't accept it, and she won't accept it: by invading and then sits, and not only invading and then sits, but taking the role of men at that time and in that society, by placing herself at the feet of Jesus, the position of a student in the presence of a teacher. And she does sit in a concrete way, because of the love of Jesus, to give expression, to give thoughts, and attention to the Word.

And it also fits into Luke's work. Give Us This Day – a review of the commentaries – one of the things that's noted, said this particular episode of Mary and Martha, and the Gospel that we listened to last Sunday, of the Samaritan, are two unique stories that Luke includes in his Gospel, but not in the other Synotics or in John. They're only found in Luke.

What was Luke contending? What was he trying to get at by including these stories in his presentation of Jesus? Now, I think what Luke was really getting at – which was the overall theme of his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles – the overall theme that God has initiated a new day, and it takes a new order that is being brought into being, and that order is premised on courageous action. It is premised on trust, the trust that we have in loving God that tells us things don't have to be as they are. They can be different. And they can be different, because if

we listen to God, to the Word of God, it will show us a new way of living. It will show us new opportunities. It will show us the excitement of realizing our human potential.

Now yesterday, even though it was rather subdued, it was the 50th anniversary of the first human walking on the Moon. You may have caught some of the preliminaries, the work, the presentations that came, that in a sense, echo mystery.

I know people there, I can see them in the mirror, sitting with a bunch of younger people that were very into seminary back then. And we had our youth group, and we were sitting in front of the television in one of their homes, watching this tremendous achievement – unthinkable, unthinkable! – that we could leave the atmosphere of the Earth, that we could travel in an unknown dimension, in outer space, and actually land, and put our foot on the Moon. And then we come back, which is probably even a more exciting new void, the fact that we had figured out how to do this. And this began a whole new moment. It excited the world – because to show that in the midst of all of the terrible things that were going on at that time.

Remember, it was the time of civil unrest. It was the time of Vietnam and a lot of other war. It was the time of just unspeakable, unspeakable events. Yet, with this, we see a vision, we see possibilities.

You might remember that the words of the astronauts had quite the religious significance. It was, they, in a sense, trusted in God, because they were really alone. Not only did they trust in the Lord, but they were realizing the great potential that God had designed into the new, into the new and the unknown.

In a sense, the Scriptures today are saying the same thing to us. You don't have to do things out of fear. But if you operate out of trust with God, if you are willing to allow yourself to be connected to the Word of God, then great things are possible.

You know I wish some day, I wish you could go through the experience of a moving, a very special and momentous moment in history. How much do we miss by not doing more like that? The space race didn't end with landing on the Moon. It opened it up for all. And it is something that we will go and reflect on. How many years now have we had a space station travelling around the Earth? And how we have sanctioned this, because it does not represent the divisions of the Earth, of the human community, but it represents the unity of the human community. Arch enemies – the U.S. and Russia – working together in scientific endeavors to improve the quality of life of human people.

Today, I would think that positive use of our potential is satisfying. Since it represents, not with fear, which is promoted at this point in time, not with fear that is being promoted at this time. But hope, hope that we learn to respect, learn to listen, learn – in a sense – to meld together our potential. We have great opportunities, great opportunities, to great commonalities, which was like Abraham did in the desert, like Mary did in that home. There are great barriers.

Open the door to the wisdom of God – the new age, the new creation, to the glory of God, all ends to the Kingdom.

## 17th Sunday Ordinary Time - St. Joseph the Worker, Berkeley, CA<sup>3</sup> (Fr. John Gribowich)

Luke 11:1-13 + July 28, 2019

Good morning, everyone! It's good to see you on this very beautiful Sunday morning, and I really hope that all of you continue to enjoy the summer months here, and make sure that we are always mindful that our time in nature is a way for us to, I think, strengthen our prayer life. So, I always try to encourage people on nice days to spend time in nature. And really, today's readings get us to the heart of what is the purpose of prayer.

You know, we hear Jesus make it very clear in the Gospel today that whatever we ask, we will receive. You know, ask, you shall receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open. I think for many of us, this is a very bold pronouncement that Jesus makes and one that we are somewhat confused by, because typically we fall into two camps or in 2 modes, when it comes to us in our prayer relationship with God the Father. For some of us, we may question what we want to ask God or we may not feel like our intentions are pure enough, or we may feel that we're being selfish, or we're fearing that work asking the wrong thing. So we don't really go to God and ask him what we want because we just don't think that maybe were worthy of that request, for whatever reason.

And then the other mode would be us asking God things – good things – say someone sick, say you're sick yourself and praying for healing and strength and then you don't receive it, you don't receive the answer to the prayer that you want, and leads to frustration. These two things happen, I think that a lot of us in our relationship with God where we feel intimidated to ask and then we get frustrated when we ask and we don't receive. But Jesus says to us everyone who asks will receive. Don't be afraid to ask. In fact, be persistent in asking: keep on asking.

Jesus gives us the example today of this man who needs loaves of bread – to serve his guests – and he's banging on his neighbor's door. Jesus says, you know, if the guy's just not a not nice guy, at least the guy's going to get annoyed with you banging on the door and come down. So there's this understanding that God wants persistence. And we see that person in the famous story in the first gospel – in the first reading, with Abraham petitioning and questioning God, like would you be merciful to the city and not destroy it if there's only 10 people there.

I think that when it comes to our prayer life and why we may feel like we shouldn't ask certain things or get frustrated when we don't get what we asked, is that in both of those situations, we don't fully understand who the Father is. We don't understand who God the Father is. If we really believe that God the Father is the essence of love, that nothing could possibly exist without God the Father's Love, then our way of approaching God the Father in prayer would probably be very different than us always feeling that it's up to us to push God's hand to do something.

Who is God? God is infinite, first off, and that is such a massive word or massive concept that there's really nothing we can understand in this timely-space world that we are in, to understand the magnitude of infinity. Maybe the only thing that can kind of get us there is just thinking about, you know, numbers and the number line, right? It never ends, right? You keep on adding one, and it keeps on going on, forever. There will never be a time where you exhaust the number line; and it works both ways, right? Negative 1, negative 2, blah, blah, blah, and keep on going backwards. That might be the only way for us to somewhat grasp the magnitude of infinity. Time-space are irrelevant to God. God is present to all time, to all space. He doesn't know what's going to happen: it's actually Him who allows everything to happen. Even horrible things: sin, suffering, but that doesn't even escape how God acts.

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<sup>3</sup> Fr. Gribowich was completing a Master's degree in Business Administration at U.C. Berkeley during 2019.

Of course, does God will these things? Does he want them to happen? No, but clearly God allows everything to happen, because nothing could possibly exist without God's love in the mix – nothing. A lot of times, maybe when we're growing up, we think that the world is just really caught between this really good God figure, and then this really bad Devil figure, right, and we kind of think that they're both like on equal playing ground. They're kind of battling it out.

But it isn't an equal playing, because the Devil, even, is a creature that God created. The Devil is even subject to God. In fact, the Devil can't even operate unless he does a perversion of God's creation, meaning that something that is good, the Devil needs to use, in order to make it not good.

Now, when we get to this place of understanding that God has everything under his watchful eye, then we think about our own lives. And we have to ask ourselves the question, did any of us decide to be born? No. None of us make that decision. Did any of us decide to live currently right now, in this time of history, in 2019? No. Do any of us decide when it is we are actually going to die? No.

But you can get even more particular. Do any of us even decide what's going to happen once we go out these doors today? Yeah, we may have an agenda of what we want to get accomplished today, but there's no guarantee that that would happen, because there would be other things that may happen that cause us to have to respond differently.

So, in a real sense, we're not in control of anything! We weren't in control of our birth, not in control of our death, and really not in control of our life either. And sure, granted, we can do lots of things to create good habits, to be disciplined, to be mindful of how we have to strengthen ourselves – and prayer is definitely a discipline in of itself – but what is it a discipline for? Not necessarily to show to God that we're paying attention to Him. Not to show to God that we want to bargain with Him. And definitely not to get God to do something that He wasn't going to do. Because infinity – timelessness – means that God is impossible to change His mind.

We can understand God changing his mind, maybe on our end, but God is changeless. It's the essence of who God is, because what is God constantly? Love, infinite Love. Yet, how are we who are finite, meaning in time, in space, subject to time – how are we able to possibly grasp infinite love? There's only one way and that is building on our desire – our desire for God is what opens up our heart to receive the infinite love of God. And desire can only happen if we are constantly persisting in praying and speaking to God. Because it widens are the fullness of our person; it widens our heart to receive God's love; it widens are mine to be open to maybe that are specific prayer is maybe not the way we should be thinking about something.

The more we are desiring God, is expanding ourselves to fit, if you will, infinity into ourselves. And we realize it that's ultimately how we are designed. The longings of our hearts are far greater than instant gratification. Sure, we may think that it's nice to be able to watch movies on demand or just yell out to our phone to listen to a certain song at that moment, or just order something so quickly and it arrives in the mail the next day – sure all that stuff is convenient, but we do realize that the more we're used to that type of instancy, everything becomes not really that exciting anymore. Everything just becomes too common, and everything becomes too much of being expendable – throw away-able – and our lives start just getting cluttered with stuff that we grabbed at the very moment we can.

Yet, when were desiring, longing for something how much greater is it when we receive the gift, because in a certain sense the gift can even as far exceed what it is that we were even thinking the gift was in the first place. And this isn't just you know waiting all through December for your Christmas gift on December 25th, because even that can be thrown away, but the anticipation of being able to receive life.

Perhaps the best way to understand this is not seeing your spouse or a loved one for a very long time and the distance between the two is what law makes the longing and desire grow stronger. And the meeting of two people after a long time away is far richer, and you realize that were made for this type of communion.

Recently, I heard a story of a woman who is suffering with terminal cancer and it was very clear that she had a very short time to live. And of course, many people start to pray for her – praying for a miracle – and she even herself was tempted to pray that her health may be restored, that somehow the cancer will be cured and there were lots of people praying for this intention.

Yet, she realized that she did not have to pray for health. She did not have to pray to be healed from the cancer. There's only one prayer that she had to pray: she had to pray for life. For life. And praying for life is different than praying for good health. Praying for life is different than just praying that you have all your material needs next – insecurities. Praying for life is meaning that you are so open to God's love that you are fully confident that it is His love that will give you the ability to do anything in the present moments.

And that's exactly what the Lord says when He says to us: if we who are so limited – “wicked”, as Jesus says – if we who don't have pure intentions can still do good things for other people, despite our failures, He says how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. Because the essence of infinite love is the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

If we wonder what the Holy Spirit is, we say in the Creed every Sunday: the Lord, the Giver of Life. The Holy Spirit is what allows us to bear anything, any challenges, and despite the limitations in the sufferings that we have to face, we can still have life despite those sufferings and limitations. In fact, this woman end up living a lot longer than was expected and she lived life to the full to the ends. That is being a person of persistence in prayer. That is being a person who treasures desire for infinite love. That is a person who welcomes the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life, to continue to give life despite the limitations of time-space and the body itself.

So today, at this Mass, once again we have the opportunity to receive the Bread of Life – nourishment for the journey, but more importantly, the fullness of the infinite love of God that comes into our very body to dwell. May we pray every day to open up ourselves far, far greater to receive the Infinity, the Infinity of God's love in the Eucharist.

May God bless you all.

## 19th Sunday Ordinary Time – 11:15 a.m. (Fr. William G. Smith)

Luke 12:32-48 + August 11, 2019

That young men would take up deadly force against innocent people is shocking and horrifying, but as a pattern is it all that surprising?<sup>4</sup> The one common factor – other than being young and male – is that they have been loners. They are detached from society in general, but also even splinter groups of like-minded people. This is unusual in our history. Aging baby boomers like myself may remember the rash of bombings and politically motivated robberies in the 1970's. Members of the Weather Underground or the Symbionese Liberation Army – however alienated from the general society – were at least able to join together in small groups. This seems to be no longer the case: we are dealing with people who belong to nothing. This is a more general trend in the whole society. We see attendance in churches declining, but also in civic organizations and even bowling leagues and the Boy Scouts. To rework a somewhat familiar saying, "A person who belongs to nothing will believe in anything." As a church, we should be a home for all. St. Luke today shows us how.

We hear that words "gird our loins and light our lamps." This is a clear reference to the Passover and Exodus. "This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on your feet and your staff in hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight. It is the Passover of the LORD." as we read in Exodus (Ex 12:11).

The Jews believed that the Messiah would come during the Passover meal. Jesus today is telling his disciples to await His return in the same spirit. They know he will come, but not when, and as with the Jews on the Passover, they had to be ready to move immediately. Yet, note what Jesus says he will do: "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival. Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them." (Lk 12:37)

This obviously does not happen in real life but would be understandable to the Jews who first heard it. The time of the Messiah was seen as a time of joy which demanded feasting. We read in Isaiah, "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples / A feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines" (Is 25:6).

Luke is particularly aware of this image: he writes of Jesus' own mission: "And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God." (Lk 13:29)

At this meal the Messiah was, if you will, the host. Yet, there is a great change with Jesus: It is He, Jesus, the Master, who will serve them. And lest we fail to get the point, He will say at the Last Supper:

For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. (Lk 22:27).

The Messiah will act not in domination, but in service and if Jesus serves others, so must we. This is not for special or specific times but for everyone all the time. In this passage, Jesus refers to himself as a thief who comes in the night. It is unlikely that Luke would have felt he could have used the image if it did not come from Jesus' very mouth. So it is Jesus telling us from his very mouth, his very words, that when he returns, he will look not at what we have done but who we have served.

Peter asks here if this is just for the leaders of the church or for every member. Jesus answers with a story about the faithful steward who distributes the food allowance at the proper time. This is a reminder of Joseph of Egypt

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<sup>4</sup> "53 People Died in Mass Shootings in August Alone in the U.S.", <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/31/us/us-mass-shootings.html>. 22 people were killed and 26 were injured at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas on August 3.

who had the responsibility of distributing rations in time of famine (Gen 41:49, 56). He is to be compared with the rich fool of last week's Gospel, who kept the grain for himself (Luke 12:18). But with Luke, we should look not only for references to the Old Testament and other parts of the Gospel, but to the Acts of the Apostles as well. We will see there that the apostles will create a ministry – deacons – to do this (Acts 6:1-6). The need for both charity and hospitality will always be present; how it will be accomplished will change over time.

The impediments to this will however remain constant as well. Me-too is more like all-always. There will be leaders who will forget that God will judge them on their service and abuse their positions. The higher the person's status, the more he or she will be held accountable, but all are called to serve, and all will be judged accordingly. We are called in innumerable ways to build up the kingdom of God which before anything else means to make the church a home.

When the master in today's Gospel returned, he did not first check the books, or ask if any great building was constructed or any important literature produced in his absence. He simply looked to see if people took care of each other. And He told his disciples that this simple caring would be how they would be ranked. The person who acted most responsibly in fulfilling these simple household tasks would be the most effective leader.

Ours is a time of great change and confusion. It has provided some people with fantastic opportunities for growth and development, but as we have seen not only with mass murders, but also with the opioid epidemic and the alarming growth of people, especially the young, who report feeling alone most of the time. We others, then, have a responsibility to those fallen aside. This is very serious, and we may think that we need a very impressive answer, perhaps a profound theological statement or a particularly effective program. These would be wonderful, and I hope they're produced by someone, but it probably won't be us – I know it won't be me. We must answer a simple question: "Have we in St. Charles Borromeo Church made a good home for people". This is for us all, and it will also determine who are leaders really are.

Now, in living memory that would have been a silly question. It would have been the hierarchy of the church who would find themselves addressed in this passage. For sound doctrine and actions beyond the individual community, it still is – and let us support them enthusiastically. I am very proud of our response to the call of the Diocese to support people at the border. But, for the immediate hands-on contact, it is us, and I do not need to tell anyone here that with the decline in the number of priests this needs to be heard and acted upon by more than people who wear funny collars. At the very beginning of the Church's life, the Apostles created the diaconate to fulfill this very need. We must be open to see what will develop for us institutionally, but no matter what it will be, it is up to all of us to create a good church home.

Our ultimate question is: "Do people feel they belong? Have they found the way to God here?" If not, it doesn't really matter what else we do. If yes, we can find - all of us, all of us - can find the truth and, indeed, life itself.

### 3rd Sunday of Advent – 11:15 a.m. (Msgr. Alfred LoPinto)

Children's Nativity Pageant • Luke 2:1-14 • December 16, 2019

Each year, the children present us with this very beautiful reenactment of the Christmas story, and they do that with great enthusiasm and excitement. Witness the dedication to detail – the preciseness of their costumes, as well as the way they make the whole scene flow. So they remind us that this is a very special time of the year.

But I think, unfortunately, in the midst of the world in which we live, much gets lost of the symbolism, the meaning and significance of this special time. So when the children present the beautiful scene, I ask you to take a moment to reflect, to reflect on the scene, for Luke and Matthew – that's where the gospel today came from: a combination of Luke and Matthew who the record for us the infancy story – they did that with great deliberation and they wanted in a sense in the scene that they were portraying capture the universality of this event, for it was an event that brought together of the mystery of God's creation.

Mary and Joseph come to Bethlehem, because Caesar Augustus has decided he wants to count all the people. He wants you in a sense to build his power, build his power, by saying, look all the people I rule over. How can anyone doubt me, how can anyone challenge me?

And yet, in the midst of that moment, God chose to reveal, really the story of creation in that little scene in Bethlehem, the story of creation unfolds. For Jesus and Mary; Joseph and Mary come and they find no place. The town is overwhelmed with people who have come for the census, and so they go to the cave, some say a barn, but some place in the midst of where the animals are. And it is significant that they go to the place where the animals are. Creation is a story of Harmony, the story of unity.

And so in the midst of that scene, a child is born. An infant in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. The place is cold: it's winter and so it is the warmth of the animals' breath that creates that scene, that warmth, that sense that everything is okay.

And then come the shepherds with the sheep. They were on the outskirts – if you ever go to Bethlehem, you will see that from the site where the nativity is said to have taken place, where they are on the outskirts of town, a place called the shepherd's field, because nobody wanted their smell or the smell of the sheep. So they were outcasts, they were put aside, and yet it is to them that the angels first come and bring the good news, bring glad tidings. They were the first to come and offer worship. They were outsiders God invites in, brings to this very special moment.

And along with the Shepherds you have the Wise Men, who come later, but who represent in a sense the secular role, coming from different places, and again, of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, and they all come to one place, where there, they might find the gift of God, and the gift of God is embodied in the Child, in Jesus.

But that can be significant, because that child is not your children, in cribs or bassinets, or those beautiful things, but placed in the manger, the feeding trough of the animals. You have this scene of creation unfolding. God has another message in the that I will build, I will build this Kingdom, represented in this scene. I will build it by continually feeding you: feeding you with my life.

The Child in the Manger is the sign of the Eucharist, the sign of how God continues to draw us into the mystery of God's life. That that fulfillment of creation might ultimately be a change. In a sense, there may come a day – as Isaiah so beautifully prophesizes – there may come a day on God's holy mountain when harmony, when unity, when joy and when peace will reign over the face of the Earth.



As we prepare for Christmas, that's what we're preparing for: preparing to remember, to remember that this is what God has deigned to do and invited us as the children participated in this beautiful scene, inviting all of us to participate – day in and day out – to make this scene live.

Brothers and sisters, that is the ultimate challenge of Christmas. We thank the children for participating in presenting this great remembrance. We pray that it inspires all of us in these days that are coming, as we prepare for the great day of Christmas, that we take time, as we put that nativity scene together in our homes, we take time to take each of those pieces, to remember what they represent, and make them, make them a part of our living going forward.

We invite the children now to go back to their places. Because Life goes on.