



Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 27, 2019

Readings

This week:

Nehemiah 8:2–4a, 5–6, 8–10

1 Corinthians 12:12–30

Luke 1:1–4, 4:14–21

Next week:

Jeremiah 1:4–5, 17–19

I Corinthians 12:31–13:4–13

Luke 4:21–30

Psalm

Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life. (*Psalm 119*)

Today

Today's presider is Rev. Kevin Ballard, S.J.

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Waverley and Homer Streets, Palo Alto. Members of the Thomas Merton community participate in planning these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to “full, active and conscious participation” in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate, there are return envelopes in the bulletin on the last Sunday of each month for your convenience (donations by check or cash are welcome). The donation basket is in the back of church after Mass or available by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope to mail your donation. **Please do not put your TMC envelope in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).**

Calendar

No TMC meetings this week.

From
Thomas
Merton

The most dangerous man in the world is the contemplative who is guided by nobody. He trusts his own visions. He obeys the attractions of an interior voice, but will not listen to other men. He identifies the will of God with anything that makes him feel, within his own heart, a big, warm, sweet interior glow. The sweeter and warmer the feeling, the more he is convinced of his own infallibility. And if the sheer force of his own self-confidence communicates itself to other people and gives them the impression that he is really a saint, such a man can wreck a whole city, or a religious order, or even a nation. The world is covered with the scars that have been left in its flesh by visionaries like these. However, very often these people are nothing more than harmless bores.

--*New Seeds of Contemplation*

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy, to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality, and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development.

COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

Merton scholar Michael Higgins to speak February 23 in Menlo Park:

Save the date: Saturday, February 23, at 3:00 pm to hear a talk by Prof. Michael W. Higgins entitled “Thomas Merton and Martin Luther King: Prophets for Today.” Location is the Menlo Park Recreation Center at 700 Alma Street in Menlo Park.

The TMC Spiritual Education Committee is bringing Professor Higgins from Connecticut to speak on Merton and Martin Luther King and what might have been had they had an in-person conversation, as they had hoped to do. Higgins is Canadian-born and educated, a celebrated scholar, writer and gifted speaker. He is a leading biographer of Merton and of the Dutch priest-psychologist Henri Nouwen, a popular spiritual writer in the post-Vatican II years.

In the meantime, we suggest you peruse one of Higgins’s many books; he has several biographies of Merton and a couple on Henri Nouwen, as well as volumes on the Jesuits, Catholic education, women and the church, saint-making, and the clerical sex abuse scandal. Most are available on Amazon or other used book websites.

Seton School thanks Merton Center:

We received a letter of gratitude from Carmel Caligaris, Director of Advancement, and Evelyn Rosa, Principal, at St. Elizabeth Seton School:

“We thank the Thomas Merton Group for their significant contribution to St. Elizabeth Seton School for 2018 and years prior... Your donations go directly to supporting our students, and we thank you greatly... With your help, SESS is blessed to provide our students with a comprehensive education and solid faith formation that we hope will prove to be instrumental throughout their lives.” In addition, Carmel penned a personal note: “We are so very grateful to all that support our students, but the TMC group in particular gives even more every year. Our students succeed through help from the whole community. Blessed to have your help! Warm regards, Carmel.”

Fred Dietrich Memorial Mass February 16:

Longtime TMC member Fred Dietrich passed away January 1, 2019. There will be a memorial Mass celebrated on Saturday, February 16, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Thomas Aquinas Church. All are welcome.

TMC donation envelope enclosed today:



Please use the envelope enclosed in this bulletin to make your monthly contribution to the support of the Thomas Merton Center. Your dollars make possible the sponsorship of the 8:45 Sunday Mass, monthly contributions to Seton School (\$1,000) and the Ecumenical Hunger Program (\$40), spiritual education talks, retreats, and the publication of this bulletin. Lay-led, self-sustaining, self-generating—this is TMC. Thanks to all who contribute.

Blood Drive Saturday, Feb. 16--save the date:

The parish has arranged with the Stanford Blood Center to come to our parish Saturday, February 16, between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. at Our Lady of the Rosary Hall (3233 Cowper Street, Palo Alto) to accept blood donations.

NOTE: You do not need a physician’s consent to donate. If the nurse at the time determines there is a medical condition requiring consent, then this is the only case in which one would be required.

Contact Chris Lundin(clundin@stanford.edu) with questions. For more information or eligibility requirements, call 650-723-7831 or visit bloodcenter.stanford.edu

Prayer for just action on the govt. shutdown:

The article inserted into this bulletin, “A Call to Prayer: Reopen the Government,” by Jim Wallis of *Sojourners*, published Jan. 16, is even more relevant over a week later. It was submitted by TMC Member Richard Placone.

PRAY FOR US: Please remember in your prayers this week Denise Alongi, Rudy Bahr, George Bouche, Tom Carmody, George Chippendale, Mary Connors, Mike Cummings, Jim Davis, Ken Dias, Pat Dietrich, Dick Freeman, Fr. Thierry Geris, Deonna Gill, Emily Gill, Joanne Hasegawa, Fr. John Hester, Dean Judd, Hunter Kubit, Dick Jackman, Alicia Kot, Fr. Bill Leininger, Andre and Alyssa Lippard, Deacon Ysidro and Dolores Madrigal, Mary Rose McGuire, Maureen Mooney, Hayden Pastorini, Paul Prochaska, Anne Rush, Priya Smith, Bernice Sullivan, Jean Vistica, Dolores Walsh, Kay Williams, and T. J. Wooten. [Add or subtract names by e-mailing editor Kay Williams at kaywill@pacbell.net.]

TMC Board: Gerard McGuire, gerardmc@aol.com, 650-814-2223

Bulletin: Kay Williams, kaywill@pacbell.net

Finance: Helena Wee, 650-323-7987, shhwee@sbcglobal.net

Hospitality: Jim Davis, 328-2584

Liturgy: John Arnold, 325-1421, jsaoso@comcast.net

Sally Benson, 408-972-5843, sallymbenson@gmail.com

Membership: Kay Williams, 650-270-4188, kaywill@pacbell.net

Needs Net: Roberta Kehret, 650-494-1488, robkehr@yahoo.com

Adult Education: Jim Davis, 650-704-8002, Jim_Davis@pacbell.net

Mary Coady, 650-261-9155, coady_94025@yahoo.com

SpeakOut: Diana Diamond, 650-323-4787, dianadiamond@gmail.com

COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

Learn Gregorian chant at Stanford:

All are invited to a workshop in singing Gregorian chant. Learn the ancient and moving music of the Church, and then sing Compline with us: Monday, January 28, and Saturday, February 23, 4:30–7:30 p.m. at Braun Music Center at Stanford, Room 103, 547 Lasuen Mall, on the Stanford campus.

The Benedict XVI Institute of Sacred Music and Divine Liturgy of the Archdiocese of San Francisco is sponsoring a workshop led by Mary Ann Carr Wilson, an experienced teacher of chant, and by well-known sacred music expert and St. Ann Choir Director, Stanford Professor William P. Mahrt.

Everyone is welcome, space permitting. Light refreshments served. A donation of \$10 to cover the cost of food and supplies is requested, payable at the door. Parking is free after 4:00 p.m. Email mwilson@bxvi.org to apply.

Formation of priests examined:

[By Massimo Faggioli, professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova University, in *Commonweal*, 1/24/19]

Many symbols of Catholicism have changed, receded, or even disappeared, to be replaced by others. But not the Catholic priest. The church's presence in education, culture, and social work may not be as visible as it once was, but the priest's role remains conspicuous....

A seminar sponsored by Boston College that ran from September 2016 until the summer of 2018 has produced an interesting document on priesthood and ministry, with a noteworthy set of proposals on the formation of future priests. The document, published in the last 2018 issue of *Origins*, is titled "To Serve the People of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood and Ministry." ...

Addressing the future of diocesan seminaries, the document states that "the enclosed setting of the seminary, often insulated from the everyday world of families...can isolate seminarians." ...[T]he document encourages dioceses to resist "the pressure to increase numbers by accepting seminarians indiscriminately." ...

Overall, the Boston College document has two major emphases. The first is the need to see ministry as a collaborative enterprise between priests and other ministers...: the authors stress the ecclesial nature of all ministries. ... The second emphasis is

on the need to rethink our approaches to formation, to get beyond the monolithic seminary—an innovation of the Council of Trent that has persisted without much adjustment for more than four hundred years....

This Boston College document [notes that] a "*consensus fidelium* does not exist" with respect to the ordination of women or married men... It may take a long time for such a consensus to emerge.

... In the past few decades there has been a redistribution of leadership roles involving the permanent diaconate restored by Vatican II, new male and female lay ministries, and the new "ecclesial movements," where the distinction between lay and ordained members is much less relevant.... But many of these new ministries came about as a result of the emergency shortage of clergy. Note that this was possible only where local churches had the financial resources to hire lay personnel (male and female) for positions of pastoral care that had previously been entrusted exclusively to the clergy. ...At a larger scale, bishops in rich parts of the world, lacking a sufficient number of homegrown priests, now import clergy from poor countries that seem to have a surplus, at least compared to us. Results may vary, but even when this works well, it poses a moral questions concerning the relationship between the church in the rich countries of the West and the church in the developing world. It can look like just another form of resource extraction.

The history of the church can be seen as a history of reforms of the clergy: the enforcement of clerical celibacy in the Roman Catholic Church was a centuries-long struggle; it took decades to build and staff diocesan seminaries after Trent. ...Both the clerical abuse scandal and the shortage of priests in the West require the post-Vatican II Church to address an issue that Vatican II never focused on: the selection and formation of priests. Vatican II elevated the episcopacy (at least in theory) to collegiality with the pope, and called the laity to holiness and a much more active role in both the church and in the world. But the lower clergy were left stuck in the middle as a kind of afterthought.

A synod—by definition a kind of collaboration—would be the ideal way to deal with this important and neglected issue. #

Elaine Pagels on religious answers:

[By Bill Tammeus, *National Catholic Reporter*, 1/23/19]

Almost 30 years ago, religion scholar and Princeton professor Elaine Pagels introduced the world to the Gnostic Gospels in her book by that title. These were intriguing early Christian writings that didn't make the canonical cut.

In books and other writings since then, she has asked important questions about faith and its sources. But until now she has not explored in depth what may be the foundational question about religion: why it exists at all.

It would be a relief to tell you that she has answered that question in a satisfying, exhaustive way in her new book *Why Religion?: A Personal Story*. But she hasn't. That is, she hasn't come up with a bumper-sticker-size answer.

Instead, she has told personal stories about catastrophes in her own life and how they've led her to think about religion. The result, a good result, is that readers are invited to join her in unpacking ideas about how we relate to religion, how religious ideas shape our cultures and, in turn, our assumptions.

Readers may come away from this book not so much with a list of answers about why religion exists but, rather, with respect for Pagels for walking through the valley of the shadow of death and emerging whole, still willing to engage life's hardest questions.

Theologians call one of those the theodicy question. It asks why, if God is good, all-powerful and loving, there is suffering and evil in the world. This question is the open wound of institutional religion. Honest people will confess that there's no satisfying answer to it. Sometimes life simply seems unfair.

Simplistic answers ("This was part of God's plan") should be catapulted into history's dustbin. Pagels is clear about that ("So we're stuck with this problem and left with no answers," she writes) as she first describes the death from incurable pulmonary hypertension of her 6-year-old son and then the death of her husband at not quite age 50 from falling off a mountain on a hike.

She's clear about rejecting clichéd answers, perhaps in large part because she grew up in an evangelical church in which simplistic answers to knotty theological questions were always on the menu. Eventually, those answers made little sense to her, so she began "to look for a larger life, perhaps on a canvas even bigger than the universe."

As she began to explore that larger life, she came across the Gnostic Gospels and changed her mind about religion being "primarily a matter of 'what you believe.'" That view of religion, she notes, "led certain leaders to equate 'true religion' with a set of beliefs ... [to be used] as a test of who is — or isn't — legitimately religious."

Such beliefs usually had roots in sacred texts. For instance, she notes, "Creation stories help create the cultural world by transmitting traditional values." Which caused her to keep wondering, "Why do people continue to tell such stories to this day? What do these stories mean to them?"

As such questions engaged Pagels professionally, she could not simply dismiss them when she was slammed by the death of her son Mark, and then her husband, Heinz, made worse by her mother, who seemed to her to be incapable of giving comfort. So as Mark died in her presence, she "sensed that he'd felt a burst of joy and relief to leave his exhausted body. Before that moment, I'd taken for granted what I'd learned, that death was the end, any thought of surviving death only a fantasy ... what I experienced that day challenged that assumption."

One obvious question about suffering, evil and death is whether they are punishment for sin, a question she asked herself about the death of Mark and Heinz. That idea, she says, is found in the story of Adam and Eve, though the book of Job stands as an argument that suffering is, in fact, no sign that one has sinned. But Pagels helps readers understand where the idea of suffering as punishment came from and what to do with it.

Despite the horror of losing a son and husband, Pagels writes, "I was startled to realize that somehow I still wanted to believe that we live in a morally ordered universe, in which someone, or something — God or nature? — would keep track of what's fair."

In the end, she insists that whatever explanation religion offers, it must not be the "facile comfort that churches often dole out like Kleenex." Rather, she insists, one role of religion is to suggest "that every one of us is woven into the mysterious fabric of the universe, and into connection with each other, with all being and with God" — a God, she says, "we cannot fully know."

Maybe that's an answer to why there's religion: to make us careful theologians, unwilling to say too much.

[Bill Tammeus, a Presbyterian elder, writes the daily "Faith Matters" blog for *The Kansas City Star*, a column for *The Presbyterian Outlook* and a column for *Flatland*, KCPT-TV's digital magazine. His latest book is *The Value of Doubt: Why Unanswered Questions, Not Unquestioned Answers, Build Faith.*]

A Call to Prayer: Reopen the Government

By Jim Wallis, *Sojourners Commentary*, 1-16-2019

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

—Ephesians 6:12-18 King James Version

In this classic New Testament text, the Apostle Paul tells us that we don't just struggle with human leaders and institutions but are engaged in spiritual warfare against principalities and powers and rulers of darkness in high places. Spiritual warfare between our "better angels," as Lincoln contrasted against our worst demons, are easily provoked — as in a time such as this.

The longest government shutdown in U.S. history reveals the brokenness of our systems, the danger of a strong man exploiting that brokenness instead of trying to fix it, and the suffering of countless people, always beginning with the most vulnerable. It also painfully shows Washington's current habit of blaming instead of solving problems, which has left our politics both polarized and paralyzed.

The traditional practices of petitions, lobbying, pressuring, and negotiating — while important — now seem inadequate in our current moment. So, if we are to take both our perilous situation and this text from Ephesians seriously, we need to find some new weapons for this struggle. That's what Paul is saying here, that we must take on "the whole armor of God," using the weapons of spiritual warfare in order to "withstand on that evil day, and having done everything else, to stand firm." He lists those weapons as a belt of "truth" around your waist, which needs to be "buckled up" in the NIV version; the "breastplate of righteousness," which also means "justice"; "shoes for your feet" to "make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace," reminding us that shoes were made for walking and to pray with our feet; "the shield of faith," which will help us to "quench" the expected "flaming arrows of the evil one"; the "helmet of salvation"; the "sword of the Spirit"; and the "word of God," which overturns all other words. Notice that these are not just pious, prayerful suggestions but are weapons from the whole armor of God meant to be directed at the principalities and powers in the evil day.

We are indeed in an evil day as this government shutdown drags on. It has undermined our fundamental institutions, protocols, practices, and procedures and resulted in suffering and danger to more and more people. Listen to all the stories of government workers and their families who aren't getting their paycheck, and can't afford their rent or medicines and doctors visits for their children. Listen to the fears of many people who are approaching hunger and homelessness in the near future.

The final weapon listed in the Ephesians passage is this: "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." We don't normally think of prayer as a weapon or as an action to take, but it is both. Prayer is an active measure to open ourselves to God, to ask God to prepare us for further and even more courageous action, and to ask God to intervene in even dire situations, such as this.

Therefore, in the midst of this government shutdown and the political and humanitarian crisis it has created, Sojourners is calling people of faith to prayer — as an action in itself and as a preparation for future action. We are asking every one of you, our readers and partners and allies to pray — in your daily lives and in your churches. Offer your prayers below for the Senate and specifically Leader Mitch McConnell, who has the authority to call for a vote that would end the shutdown and reopen the government. Sojourners is ready and willing to collect and deliver your prayers to your senators and to McConnell in person here in Washington, D.C.

In this critical political and spiritual moment, let each of us write, say, and send a prayer right now. And let us pray without ceasing in our daily devotions and corporately in our churches until the shutdown ends. Here's my prayer:

Dear God,

I see the pain and suffering of working families that I know must be breaking your heart even more than ours.

Dear Lord, open hearts to the real stories of parents struggling to take care of their children and pay their bills. I pray that they not feel alone. Comfort them with your presence.

I pray for those who rely on government programs and will soon lose their support for food, housing, and health care and could become hungry and homeless very soon. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ tells us how we treat “the least of these” is how we treat him. Lord, help us respond.

I pray for the women and children whose services at domestic violence shelters and first-response organizations are at risk as funding runs out. Watch over them.

I pray for our churches, service organizations, and people of good will who are trying to bridge the gap by serving meals and offering temporary jobs for those affected. Fill them with your Spirit.

As I am biblically instructed to pray for our political leaders, I pray for President Trump to listen to pain of the people, to listen to you, and to put love for neighbor over political goals.

I pray for our senators, who have the authority and responsibility to reopen the government. And I pray particularly for Sen. Mitch McConnell, who is the only one who can call for a vote. Help them and help him to put country over politics, party, and ideology or self-interest.

I pray for our senators to vote in sufficient numbers to override a presidential veto if the president refuses to listen to the prayers and petitions of a growing majority of people across our nation.

Oh God, we need power beyond ourselves in this painful, difficult, and dangerous moment, and we need you to lead us to deeper and more faithful and sacrificial action. I ask you to sustain us together.

Lord, hear our prayers.

Prayer is a good thing, especially for one another and especially within the body of Christ and even more so where we may seem to disagree. There is always God's will and the leading of His Holy Spirit, looking to man most surely will disappoint, because we are fallen in a fallen realm. We are living in critical times with deception rampant giving us more reason to put our trust in God, not always an easy thing to do, prayerfully.