

ALLELUIA!

A GOSPEL DIARY

BY

JANIS WALKER



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In loving memory of Albino Luciani

“... unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains only
a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest.

(John 12, 24 The New Jerusalem Bible).

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A.M.D.G.

The Feast of St. Agnes
January 21, 2009

Year A

Advent 87

Christmas 103

Lent 135

Easter 162

Pentecost 192

Year B

Advent 307

Christmas 325

Lent 373

Easter 404

Pentecost 438

Year C

Advent 548

Christmas 563

Lent 601

Easter 627

Pentecost 654

On July 7, 1998, at a noon Mass, I felt led to begin writing personal reflections on the Gospel of the day. These reflections are based on The New American Bible, the translation of the Bible on which the Mass Lectionary is based. There are also references to other translations.

Early each morning, coffee in hand, I read through Mass readings for the day, with Francis, my marmalade Gospel-cat, by my side. Then I wrote, in longhand, a short reflection on the Gospel. When we traveled, I continued writing.

The first two years (almost) of reflections were written by hand in notebooks. Faced with several fat notebooks, I began to enter the reflections into the computer.

A learning experience! I learned, for the second “set” of the reflections, to type in the reflection the very same morning it was written.

Please read the Gospel passage slowly and prayerfully before reading the reflection. These are simply my personal reflections and prayers.

Tuesday, July 7, 1998

Matthew 9, 32-38

The Healing of a Mute Person; The Compassion of Jesus

The various reactions to this healing are fascinating. The crowds were astonished. They had never seen anything like this.

The Pharisees were miffed, jealous, and mightily frustrated. Their spin on Jesus was that he was tapping into demonic power. They were perversely determined to close their minds and their hearts to the reality of Jesus’ miracle-working power. They chose to attribute Jesus’ ministry to the power of demons.

Jesus did not allow their derision to derail his ministry. “Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness” (v. 35). His motivation was compassion. “At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd” (v. 36).

Jesus could have waved his hand and instantly healed everyone. Instead, he chose to work through his disciples. In fact, “he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.’ ”

In our own lives, are we going to listen to the crowds and be “amazed” at the mighty deeds of Jesus? Are we going to listen to the Pharisees (both the Pharisees ‘out there’ and the Pharisee within each of us), sneer, and try to explain away the miracles of Jesus? Or are we going to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send us out into his harvest?

Lord Jesus, I pray, as Isaiah prayed, “Here am I ... send me (Isaiah 6, 8)!” May your purpose be accomplished in my life today . Alleluia!

Wednesday, July 8, 1998

Matthew 10, 1-7

The Mission of the Twelve; The Commissioning of the Twelve

The Twelve. Among these we find Peter, James, and John.

Peter, the impetuous, would deny Jesus. James and John were so hot-tempered that they were called “sons of thunder.” Jesus knew how to channel all that energy for purposes of the Gospel.

The commission to go to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” reminds me of yesterday’s gospel in which Jesus told his disciples, “The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest (Matthew 9, 37, 38).” The harvest is the Lord’s! He uses us -- the frail and the fragile, the rough and the hot-tempered -- to gather in his priceless harvest of souls.

Lord Jesus, help us not to focus so much on our shortcomings. You know all about them and you chose us anyway. Help us instead to focus on you, the Lord of the harvest. Thank you for giving us your love and your power as we walk among the harvest fields today. Alleluia!

Thursday, July 9, 1998

St. Augustine Zhao Rong and Companions

Matthew 10, 7-15

Commissioning of the Twelve

“Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons.” What is sick within me that needs healing? What is dead within me that needs new life? What is leprous and diseased within me that needs cleansing? What is demonic within me that needs to be driven out?

Come, Lord Jesus, cleanse me and deliver me from anything that grieves or displeases you. Heal me and raise me to new life. Let me be used to free, cleanse, heal and raise others to new life, as you instructed your disciples. Alleluia!

Friday, July 10, 1998
Matthew 10, 16-23
Coming Persecutions

Jesus told his followers to be as shrewd and wise as serpents and as simple and harmless as doves. This is a powerful combination. We are to be aware of the possible motives and malice of others, but not to worry about them.

Sheep can be wide-eyed and naive. However, those big eyes see a lot! They can see right to the heart of a matter.

Once, a young girl with Down's syndrome was aware that her mother was very upset. Suddenly, the girl saw a beautiful butterfly and exclaimed, "Look, Mother, a butterfly!" The worried mother instantly had a new focus -- one of beauty and resurrection.

Lord Jesus, please help me today to focus on you, not on the trials of this life. Help me to exercise a combination of the shrewdness of a serpent and the innocence of a dove. Alleluia!

Saturday, July 11, 1998 St. Benedict
Matthew 10, 24-33
Coming Persecutions; Courage under Persecution

Jesus says three times in this passage, "Do not be afraid." The disciple is not above the Teacher. If the Teacher has been persecuted, the disciple can expect some form of persecution. Still, we are not too afraid.

"Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known."

"And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul ..." Our Father in heaven knows when even a little sparrow falls to the ground.

Once again, we are told not be afraid. "So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (v. 31)."

Our heavenly Father knows all and is in complete control of our lives.

My way of the Cross and your way of the Cross is to walk in the footsteps that Jesus has left for us.

On the beach, I may notice someone's footprints and try to walk in them. If they have a long stride, I may not be able to walk in them. Jesus knows my stride and has left specific footprints for me. I'm the only one who can walk in these particular footprints. Only you can walk in the footprints Jesus has for you. These footprints lead us to the arms of our loving Father. Alleluia!

Sunday, July 12, 1998 Fifteenth Sunday Ordinary Time, Year C
 Luke 10, 25-37
 The Greatest Commandment; The Good Shepherd

The cautious, cagey legal scholar, wishing to preen and to polish his image, asked Jesus "... who is my neighbor?" Jesus, in calm control of the conversation, confronted the scholar with the unwelcome news that a despised outsider, a Samaritan, was the one who had actually fulfilled the law of love by acting in love.

Do I wish to justify myself and to guard my image or do I choose to risk my reputation in order to love as Jesus loved?

Lord Jesus, help me to be merciful to everyone who crosses my path today. Help me to extend mercy to myself also. Alleluia!

Monday, July 13, 1998 St. Henry
 Matthew 10, 34-11, 1
 Jesus: A Cause of Division; The Conditions of Discipleship

Where is the sword of Christ falling in my life? It is not peaceful or easy to be a true disciple.

Lord Jesus, show me how to welcome you and follow you today. Alleluia!

Tuesday, July 14, 1998 Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha
 Matthew 11, 20-24
 Reproaches to Unrepentant Towns

"Woe" is the word Jesus spoke to Chorazin and Bethsaida. This was not an expression of hatred, but rather an expression of grief. These cities had every opportunity to repent, but had stubbornly refused to do so.

For a period of time, Jesus had spoken "peace" to these cities and had performed miracles of love in their midst. This window of opportunity was now closing.

Lord Jesus, where have I seen you in action in my life and still I have not repented? Where have I poured myself out in love to others and they have not responded? Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Alleluia!

Wednesday, July 15, 1998, St. Bonaventure
Matthew 11, 25-27
The Praise of the Father

"I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and learned you have revealed them to the childlike." The childlike are open and candid. The childlike are humble. The childlike want Jesus more than they want their own agenda.

Am I open to receive Jesus and to follow in his steps of preaching, teaching, healing, and suffering? Do I think I already know it all and have nothing left to learn?

The basis of the Pharisees' arrogance was their assumption that they already knew it all, that they were the religious insiders, the powerful, and the elite. They did not want this threatening young upstart carpenter upsetting their apple cart.

Do I upset any apple carts by my childlike trust in Jesus? Alleluia!

Thursday, July 16, 1998, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel
Matthew 11, 28-30
The Gentle Mastery of Christ

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Jesus extends three invitations --to come to him, to take his yoke, and to learn from him. The promise Jesus offers is REST.

Sometimes we are our own ruthless, relentless taskmasters. Sometimes we carry burdens Jesus never intended for us to carry.

Eugene Peterson, in The Message, expresses the familiar words of this Gospel in a fresh way. "Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me -- watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay

anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." Alleluia!

Friday, July 17, 1998

Matthew 12, 1-8

Picking Grain on the Sabbath

There are still those who insist on putting their own rules above the needs of those for whom Christ died. Theirs is a spirit of compulsive religiosity, not a spirit of servanthood.

Jesus ministered directly to people. He saw their needs and addressed those needs first and foremost. He was not deterred by the squawks of protest from these self-righteous leaders.

If I see myself as an "insider" in the Church, how do I treat others? Do I jealously maintain what I consider the privileges of power and disregard the feelings and the hearts of others? Or do I tie a towel round my waist and wash the feet of God's children?

If I see myself as an "outsider," do I gossip, complain, and play the victim when I see leaders who do not appear to be following Christ? Do I pray for them? Do I continue to place my ultimate trust in Jesus, the Head of the Church? Alleluia!

Saturday, July 18, 1998 St. Camillus de Lellis

Matthew 12, 14-21

The Chosen Servant

Jesus had just healed the man with the withered hand and he did this on a Sabbath! This was too much for the Pharisees who "... went out and took counsel against him to put him to death." Jesus left that particular place, but was not deterred from his work of healing.

Jesus knew when to remain in a particular place or in a particular situation. He also knew when to leave and to exercise his ministry elsewhere.

He had a particular concern for the "bruised reeds," who had been wounded.

"A bruised reed he will not break,
a smoldering wick he will not quench
until he brings justice to victory

(Matthew 12, 20; Isaiah 42, 3, 4)."

Lord Jesus, I don't know how or when you will bring "justice to victory," but I trust in you and in your word. Alleluia!

Sunday, July 19, 1998 Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 10, 38-42
Martha and Mary

Martha, a real type A, was the one who welcomed Jesus! Poor dear, she often gets bad press, as though her role wasn't also important. Probably she was just super-responsible. "If I don't do it, it won't get done, or it won't get done right!" may have been her attitude when Jesus arrived. She was fixated on serving the Lord in a certain way.

Sometimes, in our own prayers, we come with our own agenda. We mean well, but perhaps Jesus would like us, first of all, simply to bask in his presence. Perhaps he will speak to us and direct our prayers. Perhaps we will simply be together in comfortable silence.

Lord Jesus, I come before you in silence and in trust. Thank you for directing my thoughts and my actions this day. Alleluia!

Monday, July 20, 1998 St. Appollinaris
Matthew 12, 38-42
The Demand for a Sign

The "sign" of Jonah was his presence for three days and three nights inside a whale. The "sign" of the Son of Man was to be three days and three nights in the tomb.

How are you a "sign?" Have you died in some way? Has God delivered you and raised you to new life?

Are you still in the "tomb?" Sometimes I have felt that major chunks of my life could be described as "Holy Saturday." In some way, I am "dead" and still in the tomb, awaiting my resurrection.

If you, too, are currently in some sort of "tomb" situation, take courage. Look and eagerly expect Jesus to come at the right time and raise you to a new life, a new vision, a new purpose. Wait in joyful expectation!

Don't waste the time in the tomb, however. In the tomb, it's cool and quiet, as well as dark. There is plenty of time to see the Lord's light in our darkness. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the "treasures of darkness."

"I will go before you
 and level the mountains;
 Bronze doors I will shatter,
 and iron bars I will snap.
 I will give you treasures out of the
 darkness,
 and riches that have been hidden
 away,
 That you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel,
 who calls you by your name (Isaiah 45, 2, 3)."

Trust and wait. There will be a resurrection day for you and for me.

"... I believe I shall enjoy the LORD'S
 goodness
 in the land of the living.
 Wait for the LORD, take courage;
 be stouthearted, wait for the
 LORD (Psalm 27, 13-14)!" Alleluia!

Tuesday, July 21, 1998 St. Lawrence of Brindisi
 Matthew 12, 46-50
 The True Family of Jesus

Jesus did not allow his ministry to be interrupted by what appeared to be a legitimate claim on his attention by members of his earthly family. Instead, he re-directed his listeners' focus to the true meaning of the family of God -- those who do the will of the heavenly Father.

Do I allow myself to be distracted from following the Lord by those who demand of me what is not mine to give? Do I allow myself to be pressured, for example, to serve on a committee to which I feel no personal calling? Do I avoid the call of God by passively allowing others to direct my life? This is not an excuse to shirk responsibility. It is, however, a call to focus first of all on the Lord.

Lord Jesus, you only did what your heavenly Father told you to do. Please help me today to do likewise. Alleluia!

Wednesday, July 22, 1998 St. Mary Magdalene
 John 20, 1-2, 11-18
 The Empty Tomb, The Appearance to Mary of Magdala

Mary of Magdalene came to Jesus in the darkness. All seemed lost. Jesus was dead and buried. Still, she came to be near him.

All she saw was that the stone had been removed from the entrance to the tomb. She ran to tell Peter and John! She still did not know where Jesus was, but she ran with what knowledge she did have. She has been called the first preacher of the resurrection.

Peter and John came to the tomb, but returned home puzzled. "But Mary stayed outside the tomb weeping." Although it was probably daylight by now, Mary was experiencing an interior darkness, because she still did not know where Jesus was. She stayed as close to him as she could, by the tomb, and wept.

Her world must have whirled before her eyes, when she realized that this stranger, the "gardener," was really Jesus! She was commissioned to tell the apostles. She has been called the "apostle to the apostles."

Are we open to seeing Jesus in a new way? When we are able to recognize him in a new way, he can send us out on a new mission. Alleluia!

Thursday, July 23, 1998 St. Bridget of Sweden
Matthew 13, 10-17
The Purpose of the Parables

A message is received according to the predisposition of the hearer. If the hearer has a crooked heart, even the purest message will seem twisted and distorted.

"A clean heart create for me, God;
renew in me a steadfast spirit (Psalm 51, 12)."

I long to receive God's words in simplicity and humility.

Lord Jesus, purify my heart to receive your word to me today as you intended it to be received. Alleluia!

Friday, July 24, 1998 St. Sharbel Makhlof
Matthew 13, 18-23
The Explanation of the Parable of the Sower

As in yesterday's Gospel, we see that the message is received according to the predisposition of the hearer, i.e. the "soil" in the heart of the hearer.

In Marsha Norman's Broadway musical, "The Secret Garden," (based on Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel) the young boy Dickon, who worked in the garden, told Mary, an orphaned child, "The strongest

roses will fair thrive on bein' neglected if the soil is rich enough." So it is with us.

Lord Jesus, help us to nourish the soil of our hearts with adoration, thanksgiving, confession, repentance, praise, and trust. Let us freely forgive others in order that we may be forgiven. Let us receive Your word into our hearts and bear luscious fruit for Your kingdom where You live and reign forever and ever. Alleluia!

Saturday, July 25, 1998 St. James
Matthew 20, 20-28
Request of James and John

This is really an upfront mother, asking Jesus to promote her boys to the big time! Jesus basically responded, "Are you crazy? Do you have any idea what you're asking?"

Then the other disciples became quite indignant. Jesus told them to cool it and reminded them again that his kingdom is not of this world. If you turn everything upside down, then it will be right. The great one is the one who serves. The great one is secure enough to serve. The great one's identity is not in question and therefore does not need to be cosseted, protected, and defended.

Things can change so fast in this world. Today at Mass, I was last in line to receive Holy Communion. Then, all of a sudden, the Eucharistic minister walked to the back of the church and I was first in line.

Lord Jesus, help me to fix my eyes on you. Let me look into your eyes and see my own identity. Help me not to crave earthly rewards, but to live as you call me to live in this world. Alleluia!

Sunday, July 26, 1998 Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 11, 1-13
The Lord's Prayer; Further Teaching on Prayer;
The Answer to Prayer

Today I reread this familiar passage in The Message by Eugene Peterson.

"Father,
Reveal who you are.
Set the world right.
Keep us alive with three square meals.
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil."

As for as persistence in prayer, “Don’t bargain with God. Be direct. ask for what you need.” “And don’t you think the Father who conceived you in love will give the Holy Spirit when you ask Him?”

Lord Jesus, thank you for teaching us how to pray. Alleluia!

Monday, July 27, 1998

Matthew 13, 31-35

The Parable of the Mustard Seed; The Parable of the Yeast;

The Purpose of the Parables

The kingdom of heaven is like _____. If God alone ruled in my life, what would my life look like? How would his kingdom be expressed in my life and in your life?

How does God take something tiny, yet vital within us, like a mustard seed, to shelter others? How does God take something powerful within us, like yeast, and create “bread” to nourish a multitude?

God does this by our willingness, first of all, to die to our ideas of how God should use us. The mustard seed has to “die,” to go into the ground, to disappear into obscurity for a season until it can rise to new life. The yeast has to be kneaded and incorporated into an another element, flour, in order to serve its powerful purpose.

Lord Jesus, help me to trust you with my inescapable death and with my certain resurrection. Thank you that you are working in unseen, yet powerful, ways in my life today to bring about my resurrection. Alleluia!

Tuesday, July 28, 1998

Matthew 13, 34-43

Use of Parables; Explanation of Parables

Follow Jesus and Jesus will explain the “parable” in your own life. After dismissing the crowds, Jesus went into the house and the disciples asked him to explain the parable. Go to Jesus and ask him to explain whatever it is that you need to understand for the living of this day.

Tempting as it is, it is not our job to go out and collect and burn the “weeds.” We live and bloom for the Lord. He will deal with the “weeds” within and the “weeds” without. Alleluia!

Wednesday, July 29, 1998 St. Martha
John 11, 19-27
The Raising of Lazarus

Martha, impelled by her earthy, active faith, ran out to meet Jesus! Her sister Mary, the contemplative, remained at home. Martha wasted no time informing Jesus that if only he had been there Lazarus would not have died. Martha also manifested a tough, persistent faith, in the midst of the worst circumstances, when she said to Jesus, "[But] even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you."

Martha's faith was future-oriented. She believed that Lazarus would rise in the resurrection.

Aha! This was just where Jesus wanted her. She had told Jesus about her faith in the future. Now he could tell her that he, Jesus, IS the resurrection and the life.

Notice how gently Jesus led Martha to this understanding. She responded, "I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

As with Martha, Jesus gently takes us where we are in our understanding of him and leads us on to the next step. Do not despise and look down on where you are right now. Jesus is faithful and will take you all the way until He has you at last in his arms in the heavenly kingdom. Alleluia!

Thursday, July 30, 1998 St. Peter Chrysologus
Matthew 1, 47-53
More Parables

These parables speak of joyful, wholehearted abandonment. The person finding the treasure buried in a field gladly sells all to purchase that field. The merchant finding the costly pearl sells all to acquire it.

Lord Jesus, YOU are the treasure! Help me to be joyful in giving my entire being into your wise and loving care. Alleluia!

Friday, July 31, 1998 St. Ignatius of Loyola
Matthew 13, 54-58
Rejection at Nazareth

Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house." The people in the synagogue had seen Jesus doing mighty works and yet had not responded in faith.

Rev. Jim Nisbet, reflecting on the book of Acts at a Catholic Bible Institute in the summer of 1994, noted that we find our place in the Church through a process called rejection. This is obviously a painful process.

We're not alone in this process, however. Jesus, the stone rejected, became the cornerstone (1 Peter 2, 7).

Lord Jesus, help us not to be dismayed when we go all out for you and then we are rejected. You are head of the Church and will place us where you choose. Thank you, Lord, for the freedom to live for your glory and for your smile. Alleluia!

Saturday, August 1, 1999 St. Alphonse Liguori
(written on a flight to New York)
Matthew 14, 1-12
Herod's Opinion of Jesus; Death of John the Baptist

Herod believed that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Herod must have been strangely aware of the power of John the Baptist, even after John's death.

Herod, a tragically weak figure, initially bowed to the pressure of his wife, Herodius, to have John thrown into prison. Next, he bowed to her pressure to have John beheaded. Succumbing to the pressure of this driven woman and to the pressure of the opinion of the guests at his birthday party, he violated what little conscience he had in order to save face.

How tragic. How tragic when those in position of great responsibility and great power are so insecure that they bow to ungodly pressure, that they play politics with the lives of others. It is a very deep betrayal.

Mark's Gospel tells us that "Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man ... (Mark 6, 20)." Both Matthew and Mark record that Herod was "distressed" at Herodius' demand that John be beheaded, but not distressed enough to stop the execution. Always playing politics, even at the expense of innocent life.

Do I "play politics" with the lives and reputations of others? Do I truly want God's approval or would I rather have the approval of those I am pathetically trying to please? Do I want to grovel before others or stand before God? Alleluia!

Sunday, August 2, 1998 Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 12, 13-21
Saying Against Greed; Parable of the Rich Fool

Where is my focus? Is my focus on the Lord or on “things?”

Lord Jesus, teach me to be wise in my use of all resources entrusted to me. Alleluia!

Monday, August 3, 1998
Matthew 14, 13-21

Return of the Twelve and the Feeding of the Five Thousand

Jesus had just heard of the death of John the Baptist. His response was to withdraw to a place of silence and solitude, a “desert place.”

The crowds, however, continued to seek him. Despite his own grief, he was touched with pity for the people and reached out to heal them. Now that it was evening, he expected his disciples to feed the crowds out of their own resources!

Jesus was teaching and preparing the disciples for the time when they would do the works which he had done. Jesus said that “... whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father (John 14, 12).”

What were the works that Jesus had done? We think first of his teaching, preaching, and healing.

However, as one of our seminary professors reminded us, the ministry of Jesus was not only a ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing, but also one of suffering. This “miracle” of the feeding of the five thousand was a mere preview of what the disciples were to do. They would be engaged in ministries of teaching, preaching, healing, and, inevitably, suffering.

Where is Jesus leading you to learn from him so that you can go out and do the work to which he has called you? Do you know what your work is? He reveals his will to those who ask. You may not, and probably will not, be given a full description. What he will give you is the next step of faith.

Lord Jesus, help me to take this next step, whether it's drying the dishes or ministering to a multitude. It is my obedience to your will that honors you. It is my trust in you that touches your heart. Alleluia!

Tuesday, August 4, 1998 St. John Vianney

Matthew 14, 22-36

The Walking on the Water; The Healings at Gennesaret

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat! Sometimes we say, "Oh dear, I'm in this difficult situation. It must be my fault." Not necessarily.

In today's Gospel, Jesus was clearly in charge, as he always is. After making the disciples get into the boat to precede him to the other side of the lake, he dismissed the crowds and sought a place of solitude in order to pray.

The lake became very stormy and the disciples were terrified. Jesus did not go to them right away. He did not immediately play rescuer. Instead, he chose another time, the "fourth watch" of the night, between 3:00 and 4:00 a.m. It was then that he approached them.

The Gospel records that the wind was against the boat. That was why it was being tossed about! So what? That's obvious.

Again, we have to remember that Jesus was completely in charge. His authority extended to the wind and the waves!

Jesus did not "choose" to be tempted by Satan in the desert. This temptation was a furious onslaught we find difficult to comprehend.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both state that it was the Holy Spirit who led him to the desert. Mark's Gospel uses even stronger language. Immediately after Jesus' baptism, it was the Holy Spirit who "drove" him, even thrust him, out into the wilderness.

Jesus sometimes leads us and sometimes drives us into turbulent situations. Our only resource is to cry out to him, as Peter did, "Lord, save me!"

Peter had the guts to venture out of the boat in the first place. He began to falter only when he focused on the turbulent wind and the waves instead of on Jesus, the One who controlled the wind and the waves.

When you are called out of your boat of safety and the waves are crashing all around you, remember to call out to Jesus. At the right time, He will take your hand and lead you to safety. Alleluia!

Wednesday, August 5, 1998

The Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome

Matthew 15, 21-28

The Canaanite Woman's Faith

Jesus was sent first of all to the "children," his own Jewish people. However, he ministered to a Gentile woman when she persisted in asking for help for her child.

Jesus, moved by her persistence and humility, granted her request. Her daughter was healed at that very time!

In addition, very significantly, Jesus commended this courageous woman from Canaan. Although others had labeled her as an outsider, Jesus praised her! He praised her for her radical faith. "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."

"Dogs" and "swine" were Jewish terms of contempt for Gentile outsiders. Perhaps others have labeled us as inferior, lesser, or deficient. We need to write these words off!

We ask God to erase the effect these words have had in our lives. To God, we are precious, of infinite value.

Lord Jesus, help us to persist in trusting you and hear you say to us, "Great is your faith!" Alleluia!

Thursday, August 6, 1998 Transfiguration of the Lord

Luke 9, 28-36

The Transfiguration of Jesus

Sometimes I feel like saying, "Peter, please be quiet!" Impetuous Peter just seems to have a gift for not knowing when to remain silent. Open mouth, insert foot. That's Peter all over,

One day when I was very discouraged about my same tendency to speak out bluntly, the Lord said tenderly to me, "You're like Peter." Peter, Peter, Peter. Always Peter.

Another time, again when I was discouraged over my hot temper, the Holy Spirit flashed into my mind (Mark 9, 2). A little apprehensive, I looked up the passage." Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them."

Jesus knowingly chose Peter, James, and John to share this moment as he had knowingly chosen them as disciples and would later send them out as apostles. Jesus knew all about Peter's volatile personality.

Then there were James and John, the hotheads. Jesus called them "sons of thunder (Mark 3, 17)." John, the mystic, the contemplative, also had a temper. Still, Jesus knowingly chose him.

When we glimpse bits of our "dark side," we can take comfort that the Lord sees all and chooses us anyway for a particular vocation. The Transfiguration is about the identity of Jesus. It is also about our own identity. Go up to the mountain with Jesus. Be silent. Let the Heavenly Father tell you, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." And then let Jesus tell you, "I love you. I chose you. I will fulfill my purpose for your life." Alleluia!

Friday, August 7, 1998 St. Sixtus and Companions, St. Cajetan
Matthew 16, 24-28
The Conditions of Discipleship

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." To make the transition from serving myself to serving Christ does not happen all at once.

The parallel passage in Luke's Gospel refers to the daily taking up of the cross. "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me (Luke 9, 23)."

It has been said that your "cross" simply means the will of God for your life. This is not something awful or something to be dreaded. It is your glory and your joy to live your life for your crucified and risen Lord. When your "crucifixion" to your old life is complete, you will be raised to a new life which will last for ever and ever. Alleluia!

Saturday, August 8, 1998 St. Dominic
Matthew 17, 14-20
The Healing of a Boy with a Demon

This healing follows immediately after the glory of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Glory on the mountain and then back down to the "valley" and to a manifestation of evil!

Jesus, however, is triumphant over the power of all evil. He, of course, cast the evil spirit out of the boy.

Notice the sequence. Notice the timing. We have all known moments “on the mountain” followed by “demons” in the valley.

We are not to be frightened or superstitious, but to be alert! This is still “the world,” not heaven. We continue to pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In the meantime, as St. Peter tells us, “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith, knowing that your fellow believers throughout the world undergo the same sufferings. The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory through Christ [Jesus] will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you after you have suffered a little. To him be dominion forever. Amen (1 Peter 5, 8-11).”

Jesus assured his followers, “Nothing will be impossible for you.” Nothing.

Lord Jesus, thank you for these words to encourage us. Thank you for your victory in our lives. Alleluia!

Sunday, August 9, 1998 Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 12, 37-48
Vigilant and Faithful Servants

We are to hold lightly the things of this world. They are all passing away so quickly! Our task is not to “succeed” according to this world’s standard, but to do the will of the Lord. Alleluia!

Monday, August 10, 1998 St. Lawrence
John 12, 24-26
The Coming of Jesus’ Hour

The grain of wheat falls into the ground, or is pushed into the ground, and dies to its previous identity. It has disappeared, vanished, and is no more. Dead and buried.

Not so! During this time of obscurity and seeming disappearance and death, the God of the harvest is nurturing and preparing the little grain to come forth and fulfill its destiny.

When it comes forth into the sunshine, it will be gathered and, alas for the grain of wheat, it will be crushed. What could seem more cruel? First, it is buried and then it sees the light of day. All of this only to be crushed? What kind of cosmic joke is this?

The good Gardener of our souls knows what He is about. It is only when we have been buried and crushed that we can become bread to feed the starving. As Christ's Body on earth, the Church, we pray to be seen as those who have yielded to God's process.

"The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf (I Corinthians 10, 16b-17)." Alleluia!

Tuesday, August 11, 1998 St. Clare

Matthew 18, 1-5, 10, 12-14

The Greatest in the Kingdom; The Parable of the Lost Sheep

A small child is usually happy, believing the best, and trusting. A happy little child is not ambitious for self-promotion and is not anxious about ego or image." A healthy child focuses on the present and does not brood about the past. Most of the time, fusses on the playground are soon forgotten.

Of course, there are difficulties even in the life of the happiest child. The child then reaches for the hand of a loving parent, fully expecting to be protected.

As we know, tragically, there are abusive parents unworthy of the trust of their children God, however, is worthy of all trust.

When we put our hand into the hand of our loving God, we are trusting the Almighty One with our lives. We are becoming like little children.

We do not have to be anxious about promoting ourselves. We do not have to worry about our image. We are free to focus on the present moment and trust God to heal the past.

If we try to live this way, we will be living in a very different way from most people around us. We will be a sign of contradiction. According to Jesus, we will be called "greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Alleluia!