



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

SUNDAY, AUGUST 24, 2008

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

The big question

You might remember or have heard of the 1950s game show *The \$64,000 Question*. If contestants answered questions correctly, they won more and more money, culminating in a shot at the \$64,000 question—worth a fortune then—which they attempted to answer from the sponsor-named “Revlon Isolation Booth.”

Two millennia earlier Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” After they had reported the theories that were floating around, he asked them the first-century version of the \$64,000 question: “Who do you say that I am?”—with the emphasis on *you*. Quick, before the clock runs out: What would be *your* answer?

TODAY’S READINGS: *Isaiah 22:19-23; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20*

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’”

MONDAY, AUGUST 25 FEAST OF LOUIS OF FRANCE

Can you see yourself in Saint Louis?

Not too many of those who wield political and military power on earth also manage to attain sainthood. King Louis IX of France (1214-1270) was one of the rare few, the only king of France to do so. Perhaps we rightly look askance at the Crusades he undertook in the name of the papacy (both of which failed utterly), but he is also remembered for his great piety, his kindness toward the poor, and his work for justice. He founded hospitals, built libraries, visited the sick, and like his patron Saint Francis of Assisi, even cared for people with leprosy. We would do well to cultivate a similar zeal in our own piety, care of the poor, and work for justice.

TODAY’S READINGS: *2 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 11-12; Matthew 23:13-22*

“We always pray for you, asking that our God will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith.”

TUESDAY, AUGUST 26

How to make interesting conversation

The true battles of our hearts seldom make good conversation. The poet W. H. Auden hit squarely on this point when he wrote, “To hear people talk, you would think that in their free time they were concerned with nothing but sex, prestige, and money. But the very readiness with which we frankly discuss such matters is a sign that they are not our serious concern.” Our serious concerns? That we do not feel worthy to be loved and that we cannot love others. We fight to keep these hidden beneath conversations about celebrities or investments. As Christ put it to the Pharisees, we strain out gnats while leaving camels to swallow whole. Begin to let the most serious concerns of your life guide your interactions with others.

TODAY’S READINGS: *2 Thessalonians 2:1-3a, 14-17; Matthew 23:23-26*

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27 FEAST OF MONICA

Temperance becomes her

Saint Monica is the patron of alcoholics. Not, as you might imagine, because of the licentious ways of her adulterous husband and profligate son Saint Augustine, whose conversions to Christianity

were her crowning achievements, but because she herself became addicted to alcohol at a young age. As Augustine tells the story, according to biographer Serge Lancel, “Monica was sent to the cellar to fetch wine from the cask, but before using the goblet she had brought to fill the carafe she would just wet her lips with the wine . . . Gradually she had acquired a taste for it, to the point where she was drinking entire goblets of it with great gusto.” Monica eventually chose prayer over drink and lived a life of holy perseverance worthy of imitation.

TODAY’S READINGS: *2 Thessalonians 3:6-10, 16-18; Matthew 23:27-32*

“We were not idle when we were with you . . . in order to give you an example to imitate.”

THURSDAY, AUGUST 28

Now and then

In the early days of the church, many—maybe most—Christians expected Jesus to fulfill his promise to come back soon, maybe in their lifetimes. For people today, 2,000 years out, the anticipation may have retreated to a dim expectation. We’ve grown used to thinking Christ will fulfill the kingdom in which we have placed our hopes at some distant point in the future, probably after we die, sort of like the Chicago Cubs winning the World Series. But it’s easy to forget that Christ has been with us always, through his Spirit, in our neighbor, ourselves, the sacraments, scripture, and all of creation. We can look for him there, as well as in the time to come.

TODAY’S READINGS: *1 Corinthians 1:1-9; Matthew 24:42-51*

“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

FRIDAY, AUGUST 29

Nothing to fear

Fear wears many masks. Often it looks like anger or annoyance. At other times it appears as defensiveness or aggression. Now and then it shows up as the desire to control or even harm another person. The absolute destructiveness of fear is well known. There are literally thousands of books on the subject. But if we think what we are feeling is anger, a book about overcoming fear isn’t going to be of much help. Consider this: Every negative emotion you can name is rooted in fear. The next time you feel resentful or defensive or powerless, ask yourself, “What am I afraid of?”

TODAY’S READINGS: *1 Corinthians 1:17-25; Mark 6:17-29*

“Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody.”

SATURDAY, AUGUST 30

Well done

The delightful Oscar-nominated Iranian film *Children of Heaven* tells the story of a boy living in Tehran who must share a single pair of shoes with his little sister. He’s a fast runner, so he enters a foot race to win a second pair of shoes for his sister. It is a lovely parable of someone who takes the one talent he has and puts it to use for the sake of love. If we are truly good and faithful servants of God, we can share our master’s joy by putting our talents to work for the sake of those who are in need.

TODAY’S READINGS: *1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 25:14-30*

“Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.”

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