

Daily Devotional During “Social Distancing”

The following provides a daily meditation for this season of “social distancing.” Following the Spirit of the Living God into the world, we live in the period known as “Ordinary Time” – the growing space between Pentecost and Advent. Though we worship “apart,” may we journey “together” into the new life that Christ has brought us and the Holy Spirit continually imparts to us. May the Church grow ever deeper into the love and hope of God.

“Ordinary Time” (Growing Season)

Monday, September 28

Read: Philippians 1:3-14

Reflection:

God is not done working – not in *us* nor in our *world*. For that, we should be grateful. It’s tempting to think that our learning is done, that we’ve worked long and hard embodying the Gospel – certainly by *now* we can take a “break.” However, this is to place ourselves in the position of “master” when Scripture is clear that we remain “disciples” until the Kingdom *fully* comes. In other words, God is still working – so should we.

But it’s precisely for this process, this journey of discipleship, that Paul gives thanks. Paul gives thanks for those whom he has encountered in his own work, those whose journeys began out of his sharing of the Good News. This text offers gratitude for God’s work in us, and serves as a reminder that what God “begins” God *will complete*.

As tempting as it is to want to be a “finished” product, take heart that though we have a lifetime of learning and growing, God is the One who shall “finish” us, and not we who “finish” God. Being grateful for this journey might help others who are uncomfortable with their own “incompleteness” – if the Church openly revealed its “process” rather than its “product” what might come about from sharing the beauty of God working on us all.

Prayer: *What You began, O LORD, You will complete. Amen.*

Tuesday, September 29

Read: Judges 16:1-30

Reflection:

The story of Samson and Delilah is really *not* an appropriate “children’s tale.” It’s violent and often just as confusing for adults as it would be for children. We have created a “fable” out of this narrative where as long as you “trust in God,” God will never abandon you. That lesson might work if your goal is to destroy yourself and your enemies, as the tale of Samson depicts.

An alternate reading may offer another path. Violence, whether it is by the sword or by the heart, can “blind” us. A “judge” in Israel was one called to defend the people and lead in the way of the LORD. Samson may be a mighty warrior, but a leader? Perhaps Samson shows how “not” to lead – pursuing only your own gains may leave you “shackled” to your own desires in such a way that the only “escape” is to pull the whole house down on your head.

It’s true that God does *not* leave Samson. God’s presence does not mean the absence of pain or loss in our lives. Perhaps God’s presence offers strength in our desolation to start “new” – but it remains for *us* to still pull down the “pillars” of our brokenness and sin.

Prayer: *May our strength always be found in You alone, O LORD – keep us firmly in Your Way. Amen.*

Wednesday, September 30

Read: Exodus 19:9b-25

Reflection:

How do we prepare for God’s presence in our daily lives? Perhaps we need not consecrate ourselves for the “thunder and lightning” of God on Mount Sinai, but what does it look like for us to be truly open and affirming of God’s life in our own? How do we make space regularly to acknowledge God’s Spirit working in and through us?

God’s concern is not that we be kept “separate” from God – rather, it seems that the concern is whether our brokenness can withstand God’s *holiness*. If we want God to dwell in us, then are we prepared to conform to *God’s* vision over and against our own? If we want to have God journey *with* us, are we prepared for *God* to lead, even when that path might traverse uncertain and unknown terrain?

Clouds of fire and glory are a good description of God’s presence because the sheer element of “controlled chaos” that might be God’s impact on our lives is not to be understated. Jesus said it wisely: “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14:28)

Prayer: *May I order my life where it truly is open to Your presence, O God, for You do not just want to come “close” – You want to dwell with me entirely. Amen.*

Thursday, October 1

Read: Matthew 9:2-8

Reflection:

Notice that Jesus says nothing about the faith of the paralyzed man? It is his *friends* who are praised by Jesus. What does that mean for the Church's work of the community – is it possible to truly bear the “faith” burdens of one another? Perhaps. Perhaps it's also a reminder that we do *for others* is what testifies to *our* faith.

Should we fear that our efforts may be judged, Jesus reminds us that the Law is summed up by love: “For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk?’” (v. 5) The scribes (religious folk) were offended by Jesus' charity with the paralyzed man – they were horrified by his speaking *for* God. Yet is this not the commission Jesus lays upon *us*?

Forgiveness is God's work enacted *through* us. We bear one another up not only in faith, but also by showing mercy. Forgiveness is not letting wrongs “go,” but not letting wrongdoing remove the humanity from each other. In this way, we raise one another “up” out of our sins and encourage each other to walk in God's light one more.

Prayer: *As You forgive sins, LORD, enable us to forgive and bear with one another in love. Amen.*

Friday, October 2

Read: Philippians 2:1-11

Reflection:

Jesus is Lord, not through any triumphal greatness, but through *surrender*. Jesus did not raise himself up, but *others*. It is through this self-emptying that God brought redemption to the world. Essentially, God “steps down,” and in this way, Jesus has been “raised,” and with him, *all of us*.

Yet to think that we can achieve “greatness” *without* that same self-emptying is false. There is no “raising up” of self – there is only the surrendering of self to raise up *others*. It is sacrificial, but it is also how God has chosen to work. This is the full witness of the life of Christ.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

Prayer: *As we empty ourselves for one another, You are there to fill us with life. Amen.*

Saturday, October 3

There are no texts for today. Instead, practice a true “Sabbath” and rest in the knowledge that You are loved by the God of the universe. Be true to that, and cease striving for anything else.

Prayer: *Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the Universe, for You are good, and Your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.*

Sunday, October 4 – Worship: 10:30 a.m.

Join for Sunday worship, either online: <https://boxcast.tv/view/sunday-worship-102235> or in-person, following safety protocols. Or, use this for your own at-home worship.

Call to Worship

Leader: Gracious LORD, we gather as those called to go and bear fruit. We are here to remember Your goodness in order to better set forth and embody that goodness.

All: Remind us that we do not own nor control Your grace, but are entrusted with such love so as to honor Your gifts by our discipleship. Amen.

Reflection: Isaiah 5:1-7; Matthew 21:33-46

The Lord’s Supper

The Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, he was with the disciples. And he took a loaf of bread, and after giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, broken for you.” In the same manner, after they had supped, he took the cup, and after blessing it, he gave it to them, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink of it, in remembrance of me.”

The bread that we break is our communion with the Body of Christ. The cup of blessing which we drink is our communion with the Blood of Christ. These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

Lord’s Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise Him all creatures here below; praise Him above ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Blessing

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Risen One, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you now and forever. Amen.