

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Woe to Pharisee** Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time Monday, August 25, 1997  
7:00 a.m. 1 Thes 1:2-5, 8-10; Mt 23:13-22 (St. Louis of France, St. Joseph  
Calasanz) (Focus on God, not ourselves)

It is very important for us to try to understand what the Pharisees were. The word "Pharisee" is really from the Greek word that comes from the Hebrew word "Hasidean." Now there are still people in Israel who are called the Hasideans. There even are a group in New York. The word actually means "beloved." And they are people who have a very deep devotion to God. Now modern day Hasideans are not the same thing as the Pharisees of Jesus' day, but the word is the same. The Pharisees of Jesus' day, like the Hasideans of today, were intensely religious people, and they desired to please God. And they desired to please God within the context of the Jewish way of life. Well, what is the Jewish way of life? What is the Jewish religion all about? It is about doing the law. It is not about beliefs; it's about doing. It's about law.

Now, in this devotion to the law, to the will of God, something went terribly wrong, according to Jesus. He describes this in one place like leaven. He says, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." What is leaven? Leaven is yeast naturally occurring in fruit and grain. In the ancient world bread was always made by taking water and flour, mixing it and letting it sour. The souring process is a fermentation process that causes the dough to rise. No one put yeast into the dough; the yeast was in the dough. It was in the grain--hidden. Now, he refers to the leaven of the Pharisees as a hidden quality that will make things ferment and sour. He says, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." The leaven of the Pharisees has to do with something in people. It is not a group, you know, way back in the ancient world. What Jesus is always addressing is an ever present existential problem in human beings--who are devout! He is not talking about people who don't care. He is not talking about the indifferent, or the callous, or the violent. He is not talking about the criminal. He is not talking about people who are evil, or who are pathological, or who have no conscience. He is talking about devout religious people. And he says of them, "Woe to you."

Now, if you really want to be a follower of Christ, you have to really try to understand what is being said here, and why it's being said. Jesus did not believe that all that was necessary was for people to be good. He did not believe all that was necessary was for people to be sincere. He was looking for something more than that--more than goodness, more than sincerity, more than following one's conscience. He was looking for people who would actually resonate with him--with his vision of God, with his understanding of what is the heart of the Father. And when religious practice and devotion and following one's conscience, however sincerely, led people away from what he felt the heart of the Father was all about, then he said, "Woe to you. You are really missing the point. You may be sincere, and you may be devout--but your conscience is leading you astray. You are not entering into the kingdom. You are going away from the kingdom. You are not only going away from the kingdom; you are shutting the door of the kingdom for other people. You are focusing on the wrong things, and you are showing them to focus on the wrong things." That is why he called them blind guides.

We all need guidance in life. And Jesus' view in this gospel is that it is just a terrible shame that the religious leaders are themselves so blind, that the people who are looking to them for direction are getting direction all right--in the wrong direction. And this is for reasons of a fundamental flaw within human nature--actually a blindness and pride, a capacity to be deceived, while doing what one thinks is right and being full even of some rather, so-called, positive emotions such as devotion and perhaps even love. If we go to Scripture and we look at what Jesus says about the Pharisees, we can see that he might say this about any one of us, about the Church, about any church, because it's really all about human life and the flaws within human nature. One of the peculiar characteristics of Judaism was the desire to be right about the law. Why were there so many Pharisees? Well, they were actually various rabbis that had different points of view about what the law really said, and they tended to split hairs and make all kinds of distinctions, and probably were sincere about that too. There is something we call scrupulosity. The problem with scrupulosity, and for Christ I think the problem with Phariseeism itself, is it's really ultimately self-centered. What's the focus? It is on me and my performance, and how blind we would be if we were always looking at ourselves. Jesus came to show us the way to the Father. In order for us to see the Father we have to take the focus away from ourselves.

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**Jekyll and Hyde** Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, August 26, 1997  
7:00 a.m. 1 Thes 2:1-8; Mt 23:23-26 (Looking inward)

As we continue to observe Jesus' remarks, we see that it takes a certain amount of effort to follow his teachings--an effort that is not necessarily something that makes us comfortable, but quite the opposite. The Old Testament had a very important insight into pleasing God, and that is that rituals and worship and prayer that were divorced from ordinary life and from the social order were meaningless. This is something the prophets themselves railed at for a long time, sometimes in vain, other times with some effect. What we see with a Pharisee is a true and worthy desire to make sure that social life is in accordance with God's will, and that everything served a higher purpose including such things as eating and gardening and washing and getting dressed and bathing. All those things were subsumed into the law of God, and that was all part of the rabbinic way of life.

Now, there is only one great problem with this. It's going a little bit too far toward the social organization, which is after all the outside of our beings, focusing on what we do, not on what we are. What Jesus tried to say was, "Look you can't really be a guide; you can't be a teacher; you can't be a rabbi." Don't miss the connection between blind guide and rabbi. Rabbi means teacher, guide. He is saying, "You are blind teachers because you are becoming too interested in one aspect of a whole and ignoring the whole--the outside of the cup, but you are not cleaning the inside, social organization but not inner being of people themselves. You are not looking inward. You are not recognizing what needs to be purified in yourself. You are preoccupied with your acts, not with your intentions."

We have to come inside to look, and that is not always easy to do. It often makes us uncomfortable. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote the book The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde about this very case. Dr. Jekyll is the outside of the cup; Mr. Hyde is the inside--it is really the same person. Who would guess it? That's the human situation. We have to find what's hidden and expose it to the light--that's Jesus' point.

**Our Intentions** Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday, August 27, 1997  
7:00 a.m. 1 Thes 2:9-13; Mt 23:27-32 (St. Monica) (Right conscience)

This section of Matthew's Gospel is a completion of the diatribe against the Pharisees. Now, in this diatribe Jesus is taking the role of the prophet. The word "woe," "Woe to you frauds; woe to you Pharisees"--this word is a word commonly used by the prophets to introduce their messages. By and large the prophetic message is a message of woe to people who have fallen away from fidelity to the covenant. And the point of today's reading--it's a summation of what we have read the last few days--the point is that the Pharisees are very much in the tradition, not of the prophets, but of the murderers of the prophets. And in a way it is saying, almost inviting them, to continue the tradition. It is throwing down the gauntlet. It's almost saying, "Well, kill me as you have killed the other prophets to complete the cycle."

Now, to take for a moment a personal reflection: the reason the Church remembers anything is that it is relevant to its continued life. We do not remember facts from the past merely because they are facts from the past. The Pharisees that we need to be concerned about are not a group of people who lived at the time of Jesus, but rather a quality of life that we ourselves might embrace.

So let's take a moment to review what Jesus has said about Pharisees and about this kind of life, about this kind of religious life--it is religious; it is sincere to a point. It is devout. But there are three points he makes. The first one is do they really know the law-giver? Another way of putting this is are they really authorities? Yes, they know what the law says, but do they know what it means? Jesus' claim is they don't. They don't know what the law means because they don't know God. Now this might be said of anybody; it may be said of ourselves. Do we really know God? We hear often said, for example, "Well, there is only one God; so we all worship the same God." That is very nice to say, and maybe there is a very important insight there, but that's not the insight of these readings. Jesus is revealing the Father. Now, anyone who worships a god who is not the Father is not worshipping God but something else. The biblical term for this would be idolatry. You don't need a "thing" to have idolatry. We can have mental idolatry--worshipping a being that is not the Father, that is not expressed in the Incarnate Word who is Christ himself, that has no connection to the life-giving Spirit. So this is remembered by the Church because we need to consider is the God we worship really the Father Jesus is revealing to us? Is the God we worship really the Word Incarnate in Christ? Is the God we worship really the life-giving Spirit? If not, we need to be aware of that. Our sincerity will not save us from this terrible mistake which will actually turn us into evil people because we become the very thing we worship.

Secondly, it is a matter of moral proportionality. Jesus accuses them of straining the gnat and swallowing the camel. Have we ever done that? There are Christians who deny there is a difference between serious sin and light sin or venial sin. In other words they deny there is a difference between a camel and a gnat. Obviously Christ does not approve this sort of way of looking at things. There is a faculty within us that is

supposed to be able to tell the difference between what is important and not important, whether it is about law, whether it is about moral principle or whether it is about spiritual value itself. And we talk about the rights of conscience--that is what we call it; we call this a conscience. We talk a lot today about the rights of conscience. What Christ talked about is the obligations of conscience: to know the difference between a gnat and a camel. And in our Church, in our Catholic Church, we talk about venial sin and serious sin or grievous sin and that's good that we have a distinction, but I am afraid sometimes we have said one is the other. We have taken weighty serious matters and dismissed them as unimportant. And we have elevated to a place of false importance what is in fact venial or trivial in the sight of God. So these diatribes are meant to challenge us to become pure in the sight of God and objectively true, objectively correct according to God's will. And the only way we can do that is to know God--that's how this whole thing started out. We have to get to know the Father, then we will know the Father's will. If we know the Father's will, then our conscience can be properly formed.

And then lastly, it is summed up with this issue of the outer and the inner--washing the outside of the cup and leaving the inside dirty, or being like a white-washed tomb beautiful to look at, inwardly full of death. Again a very important issue. How do we pass on values to children? We, more or less, require them to conform to some standard and that is the best we can do, but that's not enough for God. It's not enough to conform to some standard. God is looking inside of us to our intentions. Jesus does not take us away from the issue of our actions, but he goes way beyond the formality of what they look like outside to what they are really coming from. Again if we are to follow Christ, we have to become aware of what is inside.

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**“Stay Awake!”** Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time Thursday, August 28, 1997  
7:00 a.m. 1 Thes 3:7-13; Mt 24:42-51 (St. Augustine) (Awareness of present moment)

“Stay awake, therefore!” In the religious literature of the world there are many examples of the theme which is, more or less, like this: “Wake up! Awaken! Smell the coffee! Get out of Bed!” more or less, that. Now, this stems from a clear insight that things are not quite what they ought to be, that the world is not as the creator intended it to be, that human life does not reflect what it could, that there is a great deal of evil in the world that does not belong here--all those things. This gospel is a little different. It doesn't say, “Wake up!” It doesn't say, “Awaken!” you might say, the basic spirituality of the world. It says, “Stay awake!” Now, what is behind this is the belief that all the disciples of Christ have been awakened and enlightened and renewed to new life in Christ. But the problem clearly is--and the reason why it has been kept in Scripture is that this is one part of the gospel--that people, who have been enlightened and awakened and renewed in Christ, sometimes go back to sleep. They, more or less, put on the snooze alarm and go back into a very comfortable way of life. Now, this is a great mistake.

I think it can be said, without any exaggeration, that the early Church was quite surprised from the apostles all the way to the least disciple. I think they were all surprised that Jesus did not return quickly. It was the expectation, as far as we can tell, by all of the early Church that Christ would return soon after the resurrection, and the delay of this return created more and more anxiety as time progressed. “Why is not the Lord returning?” And there is no answer to that. The idea that we have all knowledge is wrong. We don't have all knowledge; revelation is not all knowledge. Revelation is a

Stay Awake !

disclosure of who God is and an invitation to live in trust, to walk in faith. It is not the giving of all knowledge. In fact, there is one place where Jesus says, “The Son does not know the time or the day, only the Father does.” So Jesus, in his human nature, didn’t even know, and we are not supposed to know, apparently, the time or the hour when the Son of Man is returning. Now, on a very small scale we can say we also don’t know the day of our own departure from this planet. True enough, but that is not really the focus. The focus is we do not know when God’s plan for our world will be complete. And this is really what we are awaiting: the return of the Son of Man and the utter expectation of the Church, our sharing with Christ in glory.

Now, unbeknownst to the apostles and the disciples and previous generations, God’s plans are much, let’s say, longer sighted than expected. And God’s plans for the earth, for our world, are much more than perhaps we imagined, and so I think we are settled in for a long time. In the midst of this, we have to stay awake! There is great danger that those who have been enlightened will lose what they have received. They will give up, and that’s what this is warning us about. We have to be aware of the great danger that lies within us, within our world, to get soft and comfortable. Christ is always calling disciples to awareness of the present moment. What is God challenging us with right now? How are we to find the Spirit at work right now? “Stay awake!”

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**Beheading of St. John the Baptist** Friday, August 29, 1997 7:00 a.m. 1 Thes 4:1-8;  
Mk 6:17-29 (A contrast for Jesus' mission)

John the Baptizer has always been a very important figure in the history of Catholic liturgy. His feasts figure prominently in our celebrations. And yet in many ways, as has always been noted, he is more a prophet of the Old Testament than he really is a missionary of the New Testament. Yes, he was a herald of Jesus' coming, his birth and death, but in a sense so was Jeremiah or Isaiah. John the Baptist's importance in the history of the Church is almost as a foil for Jesus. Now, most of the prophets in the Old Testament were messengers of woe. There were occasional messages of peace and salvation, but they were actually in the decided minority. Most of the message of the prophets was a message of woe, of dire days coming. Now, in this way John the Baptist was like an Old Testament prophet. His message was primarily a message of woe: "The day of the Lord is coming and will bring with it punishment." In fact, part of the meaning of baptism was that water is meant to put out fire, the fire of God's judgment. He was more a Jeremiah or Zephaniah than he was an Isaiah. Isaiah was one who focused more on the good news of the coming kingdom of God.

Now, as I said, he was more of a foil because Jesus now was able to distinguish his own ministry very clearly from the Old Testament because John so beautifully encapsulated the Old Testament. He so perfectly expressed it that Jesus was in clear contrast to it. Jesus was not primarily a messenger of woe, not so much because he didn't believe in the messages of the Old Testament, but rather because he didn't believe they were really news. And he wanted to stress what was news, the good news, the gospel--the good news of God's attitude never yet unveiled toward humanity, God's love and his plan, his secret purpose to bring new life and salvation to the world. There is not much of this in John the Baptizer or Zephaniah or Jeremiah, maybe a little in Jeremiah, more in Isaiah. And it is Isaiah that identifies more with Jesus' view. Isaiah says, "A bruised reed he did not crush; a smoldering wick he did not quench." This is referring to Jesus, the messiah--not John the Baptizer. John was always quenching and bruising and trampling. That was his way.

Now we are called to be disciples of Christ. And I think Jesus' primary mission, which is to bring salvation and life and love to the world, is primarily what we might call the middle ground. By this I mean this: there are always people who are very good, and they are very holy, and they have always been good and holy, and they have always accepted God, and they do their best. There are always people who are also very evil, who are bent on what they want. They are bent on power for themselves. They are bent on what they can gain for themselves. They have no conscience. They use all their resources for the furthering of their own plans and purposes. These people are hardened and evil. Now, the good news is primarily for those who are neither--I mean it is meant for them. The good news is primarily meant for people who are looking, who are searching, who are lost or confused, who are really not saved, but they're really not evil either--but they could become either. Jesus reached out to them, and he did so in a very gentle way. He rejected the ways of John the Baptizer because he didn't find them

effective. To be harsh, to accentuate the negative is not going to help the people who can be helped. To issue woes against people who are already hard and evil is not going to change them.

What is necessary is to invite those who can be changed because they've never really been solidified in any decision at any choice--those people who are, as the gospel describes them, as lost sheep or sheep without a shepherd. They're the ones to whom Christ went, and they're the ones to whom we are sent--and we will meet them every day. And we will have to find a means that is suitable to attract them to the good news. And we ourselves will be to some degree the reason they accept or reject God--the way we are toward them. So we all continue with the mission, and we all have to carry it out as best we can. John had his way; he did what he had to do. We are called to do what we can do.

**Angels** Monday, September 29, 1997 7:00 a.m. Dn 7:9-10, 13-14 or Rv 12:7-12; Jn 1:47-51 (Sts. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael) (Our spiritual side)

On this feast of the Angels: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael it would be appropriate to consider the subject matter of angels. There was a time, not too long ago, when most sophisticated Christian believers thought that angels were something belonging to the world of myth, mythology--imaginary creatures meant merely to express some notion but not to be taken too seriously. In the last few years angels have become very popular, especially among groups called New Age groups. New Age books on spirituality focus a great deal on angels; however, much of what they say is not exactly consistent with the Christian idea of angels. So they are once again back in the, you might say, public discourse. And it would be good for us to consider what is meant theologically by an angel. **An angel is a being, but not a physical one.** Now, this idea is very difficult for us to grasp--a being that is not physical--because we think of everything as being a thing. But the whole idea of angels is that not everything is a thing, not every being--and the word "being" itself does not refer necessarily to something material; therefore angels cannot be imagined since imagination is strictly material. Angels cannot be imagined.

Now having said that, I will have to say that angels have been imagined by artists for centuries. They've been portrayed in pictures. So we have to understand that the portrayal of angels--that is purely imaginary. **Angels are not imaginary, but their portrayal is imaginary.** For example, they're given a somewhat human form but then different; for example, they might be pictured with wings. Well, that's an imaginary way of talking about a being that is intelligent but not bound by space. In a similar way the devil may be pictured as something like man but with horns and a tail. Meaning what? That although intelligent, something debased, crude, animal-like, brutal--that's the idea of the image. When speaking of these beings, we have to be very clear that we do not mean the images. We do not believe the devil really has horns or tail or any man-like features, nor do angels really have wings, and so on. But these are imaginary ways of conveying a concept that cannot be imagined--the concept of a being that does not inhabit time or space, but is very real.

Now, why should we even think of such a thing? Well, one of the reasons we ought to think about such a thing is that **we too, as human beings, have a spiritual nature.** Although **we do have a physical nature as well** and we do inhabit time and space, we have a spiritual nature which does not inhabit time and space, which is not restricted to time and space.

Now, God is also pure spirit, meaning God inhabits eternity, not time. When we say God lives in heaven that word "heaven" does not mean a space called heaven. It's a non-space. And this is the important thing: that **God, not being physical, does not act physically in the world--except through us!** God acts physically only through us. God acts physically only **through the Incarnate Word of God, who is Jesus.** The spiritual

world can enter the physical world only through the human door because only human beings are both physical and spiritual. Angels are not physical. Animals are not spiritual. We are both. And this is what is meant when it says in scripture that “Man is the crown of God’s creation.” The crown is the top of something. And in a sense we are superior to the angels because we inhabit two worlds. They don’t!

Now, they attempt--for better or for worse, the good angels for better, the bad angels for worse--they attempt to influence the creation, but they can only do so through us. Sin does not come into the world through the devil. Sin comes into the world through us, through human life, through human choice. Blessings do not come into the world through angels either; they come through us. We are the door. **Human life is the door between the spiritual and the physical worlds.**

And we need to pay attention to the **spiritual side of ourselves**, the timeless side, the spaceless side because this is the side that is hidden from our view. We tend to become all preoccupied with our physical side, our bodies, our bodily needs, the attraction of our senses, the world our senses draw us to. But that is only half the picture. The other half of the picture is our spiritual side. And it’s the spiritual side of us that actually chooses. Choices and decisions are not physical things. Science will never find the part of the brain that makes a choice because it is not a physical thing. It is not in the brain. It is not in the nervous system. It is not in the body. Free choice is a spiritual thing. It’s timeless. It’s spaceless. But it enters space in us. **We are the beings that bring freedom into the world.** And we are the beings that then do God’s will and cooperate with God’s will, thus aiding the establishment of the kingdom of God, or we’re the ones who avoid doing God’s will and create the world of darkness. So this is our great, important role in the world.

And it is important that we know that **our spiritual side is not something that is unattended to by God, but is constantly being addressed.** That is the whole idea of **angels, messengers** constantly addressing our spiritual natures, giving us hope, direction, encouragement, consolation, help of many different kinds. So that with the help of the angelic hosts we have nothing to fear. Nothing can overcome those who are children of God. We have victory in the power of Christ and his cross. And so we celebrate with the Holy Angels God’s own victory over everything that is dark and disastrous in life, knowing that in our physical dimension there is still time left on our journey to fulfillment.

**Sin** Twenty-sixth Week in Ordinary Time Friday, October 3, 1997 7:00 a.m. Bar  
1:15-22; Lk 10:13-16 (Sin) (Rejecting God's love)

One of the characteristics of contemporary culture is to de-emphasize sin, to de-emphasize the horror of sin, the reality of sin. And this is largely because modern culture is based on the free reign of the individual, the free reign of the "little self." But that's what sin is all about: the free reign of the "little self," the free reign of the individual. We were not created to be a mass of individuals. We are created in the heart of God as an image of God. Jesus today is speaking to cities, entire cities of people who are not repentant. Sin is not a modern phenomenon. What's modern is simply the cleverness and sophistication of the justification of sin. But sin itself is very old. It goes back to the Garden of Eden.

And all human history to some degree is based on sin, that is the attempt of human beings to live outside the heart of God, to have our own little lives. And the Book of Baruch, which was read in the first reading this morning, is really, you might say, a recital of all the ways in which people have gone their own way. And today Jesus is talking about these cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida. He says, "It will go better for Tyre and Sidon." Now, Tyre and Sidon were idolatrous cities that actually practiced sacrifice of children. Their idea of worshipping God, their idea of God was the kind of God who wanted them to throw their children into a fire. They called this worship. Of course, for a Jew that was almost the epitome, I shouldn't say the epitome, the nadir of human life--the lowest level human life could get to. And Jesus says, "It will go better for them than for you because I have worked miracles in your midst--signs and wonders expressing what? The love of God, the desire of God for you, but you have been unrepentant."

At the root, sin is this false belief that I know better than God knows, or even worse, I love myself better than God loves me. I love myself, and I can care for myself better than God can care for myself. That's what the serpent told Eve: "Oh, God doesn't want you to know. God doesn't want you to have this knowledge of good and evil. Then you will be equal to God. God is trying to keep something from you." So Eve makes herself God's rival by disobedience. That is what sin is. It's making us a rival of God, and it creates a very fearful place. That's why they [Adam and Eve] go and hide. And they live a "little life" from then on! No longer in the Garden, no longer in the heart of God, now off somewhere, on their own, growing their own food, taking care of themselves because that's what they wanted, living in fear, fear of death, living in anxiety, perpetual anxiety, easily offended. Well, if you live in fear and anxiety you are easily offended. Cain is offended by his brother Abel who seems to be loved by God more than he is. Cain doesn't trust that he is equally loved. He doesn't trust that God also wants to care for him. So he allows himself to be filled with envy. He is offended and then he strikes out. This is the life of sin. This is the history of our world.

Jesus comes to bring us back to the heart of the Father, to help us trust in the heart of the Father, to help us realize we don't have to live this little life of fear and anxiety. We don't have to be easily offended by others. We can move back home into the heart of the

Father. And Jesus so much expresses and embodies the love of God that he is willing to enter into sin. St. Paul says, "Jesus becomes sin." What does that mean? He enters into the punishment for sin, which is living without God. Punishment is really just a consequence. Jesus comes to learn what it is to live without God. On the cross he says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He tastes what damnation is all about--living without God. He goes to the nth degree because God is really broken by sin, because he is love. And he wants his children to return to his heart and to trust in his care, and not believe that I know better than God what is good for me, and I know better than God what I need, and I know better than God how to love myself, but to believe that God knows what is best for me. And God loves me more than I can love myself. And this is the Sacred Heart of Jesus beckoning us back. And it is from the broken heart of Jesus that come the blood and the water. The water is the water of baptism washing us clean of our history, and the blood is the blood we share at the altar--the blood of Christ he pours forth before the throne of God. You know, "the throne of God" is a poor translation. In Hebrew it is "kaporet." "Kaporet" is like the word "Kippur," "Yom Kippur," "kaporet." It means "the seat of mercy." Yom Kippur is the day of atonement. It is the seat of atonement, the seat of mercy. That's the throne of God. Our English word "throne" does not carry that meaning. That's where Jesus pours forth his blood before the mercy seat of God, the kaporet. And that is what the life of the Hebrew says. And that is what becomes present to us on our altar during the Eucharist--the Body, the Blood, the Soul, the Divinity of Christ, the blood that has been shed out of love for us to bring us back to the heart of the Father. And so we need to read these readings recognizing that Chorazin may be Downers Grove; Bethsaida may be Chicago. These woes are for all places that reject the love of God.

**St. Francis of Assisi** Twenty-sixth Week in Ordinary Time Saturday, October 4,  
1997 8:00 a.m. Bar 4:5-12, 27-29; Lk 10:17-24 (Created anew)

“All that matters is that one is created anew.” This text is from St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians. What does he mean “all is created anew”? Why does Jesus praise the Father for revealing to mere children what he hides from the learned and the clever? What is going on here? Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. On Monday we celebrated the Feast of the Angels. Now Wednesday we celebrated the feast of St. Therese Lisieux, of the Child Jesus. On Thursday we celebrated the Guardian Angels. All these feasts point to something, point to a world we do not see, the world of angels, or point to a life that we do not actually see, the new life St. Paul refers to in Galatians. Something that can only be perceived by something in us that is very deep, and somehow, I would even say, primitive, like a child.

Now, all of these statements about becoming a little child, and that was the reading on several days this week, those statements are meant to challenge us to recognize that we are really not the product of our own experiences. Why? We could say that in a certain sense it would be natural to think this, but it is not true. It’s natural to think of ourselves as being produced by a certain family, and then being formed by a certain education, and then by, you might say, becoming this or that profession or taking on this or that occupation. We become very identified with whatever it is that we do. All these readings are telling us “Well, that is not who you are. You are not what you do.” Even the role of father or mother is really not who you are. In fact what we do and how we’ve been educated, our learning, our cleverness, the product of ourselves is all part of the world that is passing away. St. Paul says, “What matters is that all things are new.” It’s a new life that has begun in Christ. And sooner or later as adult Christian believers we have to start to see what that means.

What is God asking us to let go of?--Not necessarily material possessions as St. Francis did. But what was that all about? What did St. Francis really do? He cut off from the world that his parents wanted him to have. It wasn’t a matter of just giving away things. It was a matter of starting all over again and letting God form his life. It was taking his baptism totally seriously. It was the preference of the spirit over the flesh. The life of God over the life of the world. That’s what Francis is all about. That’s what Therese of Lisieux is all about. And even our liturgies of the angels are all trying to tell us that there is a great deal we can’t see in life, but it is very real. And if we allow God to renew us and if we really are willing to let go of what we have been and what we have done, we are going to experience life as a completely new adventure as St. Francis did. We’re never going to have another day of boredom. We are going to recognize that our daily anxieties are really useless. That is what Francis recognized. Francis took very seriously what Jesus said, “Look at the lilies of the field. They don’t spin. They don’t reap, and look how beautifully arrayed they are.” Francis took that very seriously. And Francis went through a great deal of trouble in life and had all kinds of difficulties, but he was happy and at peace because he trusted in God, and he knew that something new was happening in him at all moments.

And what about fear? How fear drives us to segregate us from others, to separate us from others, to build defenses around ourselves! Francis didn't need that. He didn't need defenses around himself. Why? Because he trusted in God. He found that the moon was truly his sister and the sun his brother. This is not just poetry. It was really how he felt. And he was able to gather all kinds of what we would call bums, homeless men, into an order of brothers. Now we know that homelessness has many, many causes, and many of the causes are within people. Francis was able to bring the grace of Christ into that situation and turn those men into brothers to each other and to the sun and to the moon and to the earth and to the wolves and to the flowers and to everything--so much did he believe that all things are new in Christ. These are not exaggerations, really. What is exaggerated is our way of life, how important we think we are, how much we value our plans, and how much attention we give to our problems.

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Love Your Neighbor** Twenty-seventh Week in Ordinary Time Monday,  
October 6, 1997 Jon 1:1—2:1, 11; Lk 10:25-37 (St. Bruno, Blessed Marie-Rose  
Durocher) (Living God's law)

When Jesus was asked the question "What must I do to inherit everlasting life?" in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, I do believe, it is Jesus who answers the question. But in Luke the question is sent back--"Well, what do you think?" The answer comes, of course, the same. It is the famous law called the Shema of Israel: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is God alone and him you shall adore, and you shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole mind, your whole soul." But then in the New Testament this second part is added: "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself." This is also in the Old Testament but not part of the Shema. The Shema, of course, was that little watchword that was put on a piece of paper and worn in a little box on the forehead because it says in the Scripture: "Keep this always before your eyes." So they did. They put it in a box and they wore it right in front of their eyes--a very literal following of the word.

But the second part is taken from the Book of Leviticus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Strangely, it is found in Chapter 19, hidden away in the midst of six hundred other stipulations. It was part of the law, but it was not really valued. It was there, but so were a lot of other things. In the New Testament Jesus picks this straw, you might say, out of a pile and says, "Now this one is worth looking at. In fact this one belongs with the Shema that you are wearing on your foreheads--loving your neighbor as yourself is just as important as loving God, in fact can't be separated from it." And Luke then goes on and tells the story of the Samaritan which, of course, is not found in Mark or Matthew. The strange thing is, of course, that life in this part of the world has not changed much since then. It's made of people who are basically cousins--Arabs, Jews, Samaritans--it doesn't matter what you call them. They're all cousins. And yet they can't get along. They vie for these pitiful, little pieces of property, dry and full of stones and rocks, and regard the other as the enemy, even though a true relative.

Now, in a world like this what does religion mean? That's the point--what is religious observance? What is it for? We have the story of the Levite and the priest. They are religiously observant. But the point is--so what? They ignore this man on purpose because it's the law. They're not supposed to touch a dead body. That body could be dead, or if it is not dead it could be bloody. That's unclean. The priest is on the way to Jerusalem. He is on the way to service. If he touched a dead body or an unclean body he would be unable to carry out his temple duties. The same with the Levite. They were following the Book but the point of the gospel is so what? What good is this kind of a Book? What good is this type of observance? It's the letter of the law all right. It's like wearing the Shema on your forehead. You're keeping it before your eyes, but do you even know what it means? And that's the question. And in the New Testament, the gospel will always, will always pose this question: "What good is our religious observance?" And the answer is this: it is good only to the degree to which it brings the compassion of God into your life. "Go and do likewise"--that is what it means. Only in

so far as the compassion of God comes into your life because of and through your religious observance is the observance holy in the sight of God. And if it has nothing to do with that, then it has nothing do with God.

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Feast of the Holy Rosary** Twenty-seventh Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, October 7, 1997 7:00 a.m. Jon 3:1-10; Lk 10:38-42 (Our Lady of the Rosary) (Prayer influences world events)

Today we celebrate the feast of the Holy Rosary. That goes back to the time of Pope St. Pius V in 1571. The feast commemorates the defeat of the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto. And it calls on us to consider the relation between prayer and history, and history and religion. It's all connected in a very deep way--in a way that our society tends to want to ignore. It is, more or less, the official position of our American culture that religion is a personal, subjective thing; but, in fact, religion has been a historical and objective reality in the history of peoples over the long expanse of time.

Now, first of all what was Lepanto? Well, it was an attack of the Turks upon Europe. They had been defeated before when they got to Vienna. St. Stephen, King of Hungary, rode into the battle and defeated them, but they continued to try to attack Europe. If you know something about history, you know that at one point Christendom extended throughout the Middle East; but gradually it fell to the sword of Islam. Now, this itself is part of history--that Islam took over what had been the Church. Why did this happen? Nobody can say for sure. Was it because the Church had become perhaps too lax, that the Church had lost faith, or the Church had become itself heretical, or divided, weak, that the Church itself had forgotten to pray? I don't know; no one knows for sure. But around the seventh century a very strange and rather simplistic Bedouin religion called Islam started to take over the entire Arab world. The Arabs were originally, or at least at that point they had become, Christian, by and large. Then comes this other group called the Turks from central Asia. The Turks are racially more like the Europeans; that is, they are not Oriental, not African, yet culturally, they are more Oriental. Their language is more related to Mongolian. They adopted the religion of the Arab, the Moslem Religion, and they became fiercer than the Arabs were, and defeated them and established the Ottoman Empire. There were actually three different Turkish Empires. But one of them anyway was very fierce and was trying to take over all of Europe, and at one point Europe was so weak that it was actually very possible. And at this point, the Pope called on the intervention of the Blessed Mother and told Christians that if they were going to save themselves from the scourge of the Turk--it had been a scourge--that they had better pray. And the result of this was that the Turks were defeated, and so the Pope established the feast of the Holy Rosary.

Now, it has left us to consider and ponder the role of prayer in the life of the world. I think very often we are, more or less, concerned with prayer in our own personal lives, which is good; but then we need to consider prayer in the life of the world. We have been convinced that prayer does affect events in the life of the world, not in a direct, obvious way that could be proved, but in some way. All spiritual influences are indirect in the world, but never direct. And this protects, of course, God Himself. God does not actually show his hand, as it were, so obviously that people would have to accept his influence. But the same must be said for the spirit of evil--also indirect. But in the world of human choices, in the world of the human will, in the world of the human heart, prayer

has a tremendous influence, and probably even beyond that, in some indirect way. Prayer probably even influences things like nature itself. How? I don't know; no one knows, and yet it is the experience of believers, and those who pray, that prayer influences everything eventually, in some way. So on the feast of the Holy Rosary it would be appropriate if we were to pray and to renew our sense of the importance of prayer for the world; and that we would pray about events, that we would actually pray for specific events, that the will of God would enter into them.

Now, it is claimed, I don't know if it is true or not, it is claimed by some people that the Blessed Mother appeared in Yugoslavia not too long ago. The Church has never spoken of this matter, and I have no knowledge of it myself. However, according to the allegations, the Blessed Mother told people in Croatia, "Time is running out. Time is running out. You must be reconciled now to your brothers and sisters, or soon it will be too late." Well, if this is true, and it may be, it is obvious that the people for whom the message was intended did not heed it. And we can see the mischief and the mayhem that exists today in Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and so on, because people did not listen to that message. So we need to heed the message that prayer does work. We do need to pray for the events of the world, not only our own personal needs.

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Jonah's Anger** Twenty-seventh Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday, October 8, 1997 7:00 a.m. Jon 4:1-11; Lk 11:1-4 (Legal righteousness)

We have been reading for the last few days from the prophet Jonah. It is of course a novella, and it is meant to be actually a comedy of sorts. To review: Jonah is called by God to preach to the Ninevites. Now never actually in history did God ever send a prophet to preach to Nineveh. Prophets were sent to Israel, but this is a novella. In the story Jonah of course objects to this plan. And so he tries to escape but he can't. He goes on a ship. The ship is involved in a turbulent storm and the various navigators, sailors throw him overboard because they have decided by lot it must be his fault that this great turbulence has come up. They throw him overboard, and he gets swallowed by a fish, and the fish then deposits him in three days on a beach--spewed out. And then he decides well, I better do what God said; so he goes to Nineveh. And then of course, this is where the comedy comes in--the Ninevites all repent immediately. Now Nineveh was for the Hebrew people the most brutal, the most perverted, the most evil city that had ever existed; but Jonah goes through, and he goes through once--walks from one end of the city to the other--preaching. Everyone, including the king, hears the word, and immediately they repent. The king tears his robes, people sit in ashes; and they decide they are going to change their ways--totally! Of course again, this is a spoof meant to gently or not so gently nudge the Hebrews, the Jewish people, who think that of course they are God's chosen people, but who don't repent at all in spite of constant apostolic, prophetic missionary activity. They don't repent at all. So what happens? And this is where we are today: Jonah sees that the prophetic message actually has an affect on the people, and that they are actually repenting! So then God says, "Oh, this is great. Now I don't have to carry out my threats. Now I am not going to destroy Nineveh." So what does Jonah do? Jonah becomes angry. That is where we are today: Jonah is angry with God because God is merciful. That's the point of today's reading. And the Lord asks, "Have you any reason to be angry?" Well of course again, all biblical literature is aiming at our attitudes, trying to look at the various faces of sin and trying to induce repentance in each of us.

Now, one of the great gifts that Judaism brought to the world is the gift of the law. Torah became a very important instrument in the civilizing of the world--the ideal of law, order, the divine order that should exist. It is a very important idea; however it is not all inclusive. And that is the point of this story. It is much like the story of the so-called Prodigal Son whose elder brother, although he was dutiful and obedient in some external sense, inwardly he was very distant from the Father. And here Jonah has outwardly done his task; he has been dutiful, but he is not really in accord with the Father. He is really not resonating with the love of the Father.

And that's what this lesson is about today--the lesson of this little tree that grows up and dies. And Jonah feels bad for it, and God says, "Well, that is just a little tree and you didn't even create it, and you feel bad! What do you think I feel like when I see my whole creation going bad? Don't you think that I should really experience joy when I see repentance, when I see a change of heart? Don't you see that my basic heart is a heart of

love and mercy, and that I want to see change and growth and happiness and joy in people, and that I celebrate that. And if you were really a good prophet you would feel the same way!”

And we see in spite of the blatant and obvious tension of the Book of Jonah it didn't make a great impact on the people it was really meant for, the legally righteous, because in Jesus' day he had the same problem all over again. Law is good, but it is not all encompassing. It is not all inclusive. It doesn't bring in the heart which is the basic center of the whole matter. To repent means to move our hearts into the heart of the Father. It means to look into God for our perspective. It means to let God supply us with vision. How many times does Jesus restore sight to the blind? To repent means to let God be our life and to let God be the source of our joy. And Jonah here is relying on something else, some sort of feeling of meritoriousness, which then belongs to him and not to others. He has been a good prophet; others don't deserve the mercy and the goodness of God. And this sense of exclusivity spoils the blessings that otherwise would be brought by an obedient life, by a life of, you might say, legal righteousness.

And this, of course, is already in the Old Testament; it is brought to a much greater intensity in the New Testament in Jesus' various diatribes against the Pharisees and his various conflicts with the authorities and with the religiously good people of his own time. So God really is asking for much more and much less than we often see--more in the emotional sense, more in the sense that what we really are to do is to surrender our very being to God, and allow God to change even the way we feel and think and look at life--how we look at life, and feel about life--less in the sense of what we do. Transformation is about who we are; and that is really God's work, and it shall continue.

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Pray with Trust** Twenty-seventh Week in Ordinary Time Thursday, October 9, 1997  
7:00 a.m. Mal 3:13-20; Lk 11:5-13 (St. Denis & Companions, St. John Leonardi)  
(Seeking God's will)

First of all, the presumption of Jesus, as he teaches on this topic of prayer, is that life really is a journey. Now, perhaps you have heard that expression very often, and perhaps you don't even think about what it means; but a journey is going from one place to another, from a known place, where I am, to an unknown place, where I want to go. As such, Jesus brought this idea to a new level of understanding, because in the Old Testament the idea of the journey did exist, but it was purely geographical; and the journey had already been completed. It had happened in the past. It was the journey from slavery into freedom and promise, the journey from Egypt to the land of promise, the land of Israel.

Jesus used this idea of journey, which was historically already part of the history of the people, and he transformed it, you might say, into an image of what life is all about. And at every step of his life there is a corresponding point in the geographical, historical record of Israel. The culmination, of course, is the Passover of Christ. If you think about it, the Passover of Israel was just the beginning of their adventures with God, and took place way before the wandering. So if we enter into Christ and his Passover, we are just beginning the journey and we cannot exclude wandering--all meant, of course, metaphorically. The problem so often is that we really live out of the Old Testament, where we think the journey is merely historical and geographical, and we don't see how it applies to ourselves. We don't actually recognize that we are supposed to be going somewhere, of course not meant in terms of geography, but somewhere within the Spirit where we are not yet. We don't understand, therefore, process, movement.

Now, in this whole process or movement of Spirit, which is a journey, Jesus says it is very important for you to have utter trust. Sin entered the world with distrust. Apparently God originally intended all kinds of things for human life, which became impossible because people did not trust. And now Jesus had come to take us beyond our obstacles and continue what God originally intended, which is intended to be a life of adventure, but also a life of trust. Jesus does not supply any maps because that is the whole idea of trust. We have a guide; we don't need a map. He is the guide. But what is important is that we get going, and that's what seeking is about. If we seek, we find. But we will not find if we don't seek. If we knock, the door will be opened. But if we stand and don't knock, it won't be opened. If we ask, we will receive. But if we don't ask, we won't receive.

But so often we do not really persist in any of this. This is a teaching on persistence--prayer and persistence. We don't persist. In fact, we don't even ask in a very enlightened way because so often we are living out of a little world that is not on a journey at all. To ask doesn't mean anything if we're not trusting. And trusting means that we have to be seeking God's way with us, not trying to get God to do what we want. For many people that's what prayer is. Prayer is trying to convince God that God should do something

that we have planned, or that we see that we need. This is not being part of a journey. This is not being part of God's purpose. This is trying to conform God to ourselves, and is actually a great insult; and it misses the entire point of the New Testament. It's as if the New Testament might not have been written at all. Christ's life might have been completely dismissed with; we're back in the Old Testament. So, to seek means to look for God's way and for whatever God is doing and to trust completely that it is right, and that it has life, and that is what we need and it is what all our beloved need, and that God is capable of loving us and our beloved more than we are. God loves me more than I love myself. God loves my family more than I love them myself. This is the trust he is speaking of, and there is no substitute for it. And if we have that type of trust, even a little bit of it, we can move a mountain. And this is what Jesus is talking about when he says, "Ask and you shall receive." But you cannot ask from a little place in yourself that thinks it knows. You have to ask as little children ask, not by knowing. There has to be a real trust in us. "Seek and you shall find. Knock; it shall be opened to you."

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Battle of Good and Evil** Twenty-seventh Week in Ordinary Time Friday, October 10, 1997 7:00 a.m. J1 1:13-15, 2:1-2; Lk 11:15-26 (Neutrality impossible)

In today's gospel presentation Jesus is interpreting the affairs of life as actually a battle. It is a battle between the kingdom of God, the reign of God, and the kingdom of Satan. Now, this kind of thinking is very dangerous, for example, to people who are paranoid, which means excessively frightened, excessively anxious about unknown dangers; these people think in a very black and white manner, and frequently find evil everywhere; but that is not Jesus' point of view at all. He says that life is a battle between good and evil and up until now evil has had the upper-hand, but not any longer because a stronger man has entered the courtyard. The stronger man is going to despoil the powers of evil of their weapons and divide the spoils. This is a kind of declaration of war, you might say, against, again, the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of Beelzebub. "Beelzebub" of course is a word; it is kind of an odd word; it comes from Baal, a Ugaritic word meaning "The Lord." And it's also associated with worship, the Canaanite worship of the fertility deity, who is called Baal, meaning more or less: Mister, Sir, Lord, Master. And "Beelzebub" is this same word. And, of course, from the standpoint of even the Jews of Jesus' day, fertility worship and paganism and idolatry was all part of, you might say, the kingdom of darkness that divided people from goodness and God and grace, from the will of God.

And now Jesus says, "The division is going to go the other way. For all this time the kingdom of God itself has been, more or less, divided and people who have good will have been weak. Now is the time for all to gather together. He who is not with me is against me. There is no neutrality in this battle against evil. It must be recognized for what it is, and then the battle must be joined. And anyone who fails to join the battle is really on the side of evil." Neutrality is a form of evil. Think of Switzerland during World War II, theoretically neutral, but practically, constantly helping the Third Reich. This is now a historical fact. I've known it for thirty years or more. So in a similar way, even in our own daily lives, we have to join with Christ in the battle against evil, not in a paranoid way, fully realizing that Christ has all the victory because Christ is stronger. God is stronger than anything that is evil. To be afraid of evil doesn't really make any sense. It gives it too much importance. God is in charge of his creation; but, of course, God has also allowed freedom full reign; and people, many people, billions of people abuse that freedom. This alone is the reason for evil in the world. It's the sole reason according to Scripture; the abuse of freedom: that is what sin is. And this will not triumph because the stronger man has entered into the courtyard.

But existentially, in our daily lives, the battle still rages; and we have to be very aware of the danger of thinking neutrality is possible. It isn't possible. By declaring neutrality we actually tend to fall out of the battle, and then the great danger is: Will we be taken over by the enemy? An empty and tidy house is not a good thing in this case. I hope your homes are nice and tidy; I'm not saying that. But in this text an empty and tidy home is an empty thing. People who grow-up with no sense of direction have an empty home. People who don't even think about the bigger issues, they're empty and, as it

were, “sitting ducks” for the power of darkness that is just looking for someplace to go. That’s the nature of evil. It just looks around for innocent victims--innocent meaning ignorant, not already joined in the battle. So this text is not given to us to create any kind of fear or any kind of anxiety; but it is given to, shall we say, make sure that we don’t live a life of easy compromise, that we don’t take a complacent attitude toward evil in the world, that we recognize it as truly real and we recognize it as real victims, and that as disciples of Jesus we have to be engaged, that’s the word “engaged,” at all times--recognizing that ultimate victory has already been won.

**Fear Paradox** Twenty-eighth Week in Ordinary Time Friday, October 17, 1997  
7:00 a.m. Rom 4:1-8; Lk 12:1-7 (St. Ignatius of Antioch) (Inner and outer life)

Again Jesus is using what we might call provocative language in private discourses to his disciples. This little teaching was not given to the crowds; it was given to the disciples. And it contains within it again an apparent contradiction called a paradox. "Fear him. Yes, I tell you, fear him." And then later "Fear nothing." Well, how come you should fear him and then fear nothing? This paradox, of course, frames the whole teaching; and it is one that is, something that is to require the disciples to think deeply. First of all he talks about "being weary of the yeast of the Pharisees." First of all, what is yeast? It is a naturally occurring enzyme in fruits and grains; it causes fermentation. In the ancient world people all made bread by taking some flour mixed with water, letting it stand until the naturally occurring yeasts in the grain caused the dough to sour--souring dough that would begin to rise. And this is sour dough bread which is the ancient dough of all peoples. Modern bread is made in a different manner. Similarly with wine and beer, grape juice or grain juice is allowed to ferment producing a transformation. Now, some transformations are desirable and some are undesirable. Grape juice is not wine; wine is not grape juice, nor is wine vinegar nor vinegar wine.

And Jesus' point is that some transformations need to be looked at. They are really a matter of spoilage. And he is saying that the Pharisees are being spoiled. They are rotting, in a sense. They are not being transformed into something more useful, but less useful. And what he calls this rotting influence is hypocrisy. Again a word that is not really too well understood by most modern people because in Greek it means, actually, "acting." "Hypokrites" is the word for an actor. Shakespeare says, "All the world is a stage." And indeed it is part of adult life that human beings must take upon themselves some responsibility, some role. To play a role in life is required of adults. Jesus' point is this: we are not the role we play, and we cannot relate to God through that role.

This parallels exactly his teaching about becoming a child in order to enter the kingdom. "Unless you become like a little child, you shall not enter the kingdom of God. I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for having hidden from the learned and the clever what you have revealed to merest children." In order to relate to God we have to relate to God in an inner way, through the part of us that is not learned and clever and a product of life, that is not sophisticated, that has no position. It is important that there are teachers in the community. It is important that we have leaders. It's important that we have various forms of service in business, but none of that means anything in relation to God; and we have to shed it in order to relate to God.

Now, there was an actor some years ago, a comedian, supposedly, if you want to call him that. He played the role of the Pink Panther; for example, you may have seen the movie. His children said the poor man was really ill mentally because he always thought he was the Pink Panther. He didn't even know that that was a role; he took on the role so much. Well, that is actually mental disturbance in his case. But it also can be a deep spiritual flaw whereby we don't know where the inner and the outer separate, where we

live always out of the outer part of ourselves, the role we play in life, and think that is who we are. That is why Jesus says, “There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed.” The concealed is the inner life, what we truly are, the child that we always remain in God’s sight. You are never a “mother” in God’s sight or “father” in God’s sight; we are always a child to God. Incidentally we may play the role of ministry to God as mother or sister or brother, but we are always a child in God’s sight.

“Nothing hidden that will not be made known.” What’s really important is what is hidden within ourselves. “Everything said in the dark will be heard in the daylight.” Pharisees had no sense of this. They believed in their outer roles. They thought that was who they were; they were teachers. They related to God as rabbis. And they had no sense that the inner life they were leading was actually destroying everything they were trying to build up. In a similar way, believing literally in the words of Scripture, or for that matter the words of anything, is something that is simply too crude to relate to God. It’s the inner meaning that counts. “What you have whispered in locked rooms will be proclaimed from the rooftops.” The inner meaning is what I really understand. That is the way I actually relate to God.

So then what is the paradox between fearing him who can kill and fearing nothing? Well, it comes down to this: the only person who can actually cast you into Gehenna is the person within you, who is capable of refusing to relate to God while playing a role in the Church. One famous psychologist once said, “The most evil people in the world take refuge in the Church because they don’t want to be known.” There is always hypocrisy and deceit in the world. There is always hypocrisy and deceit in the Church. It is part of the very nature of things. We need to be aware; this is the yeast of the Pharisee.

**Our Role in Salvation** Thirty-second Week in Ordinary Time Friday, November 14, 1997 Wis 13:1-9; Lk 17:26-37 (Receiver and seeker)

The verse from the Book of Wisdom is, more or less, a philosophical reflection on the search for God. And the gospel is a rather dramatic description on the revelation of God. One of the great controversies during the reformation was the role that human beings played in their own salvation. Now the reformers were, more or less, unified in the idea that human beings played no role in their own salvation. Now true enough Augustine and Aquinas and the Fathers have said everything is grace, and yet Catholics felt that that was putting things too strongly--to say humans played no role in their own salvation. We do play a role in our salvation, and there are many texts in scripture that say that, even though there are many texts that also say everything is grace, everything is gift, everything comes from God. True enough, but even a gift has to be accepted. The gift that is not accepted remains given but not a gift, offered but not taken.

We do play a role in our salvation. We play the role number one, of receiver; number two, we play the role of the one who searches. And that is really what the Book of Revelations is talking about; that is what the Book of Wisdom is talking about; that is what the gospel is talking about--that God reveals himself; true enough, but those who are not searching, won't even see God when God comes. That is what the gospel is saying: that people eat and drink, they carry on business they buy and sell, they plant, they build and they don't notice anything. For them that is life. But that isn't life. That is simply, more or less, a stage for God's revelation, which is personal, which is existential--meaning it has to do with our very existence, which means it comes within our lives, within the context of our lives--it is not something in addition to; it is not something that comes by way of some extraordinary vision. It is a happening; God's revelation happens. The question is will we notice? Again the Book of Wisdom this morning is reflecting on how many very wise philosophers have missed the boat. They have been so taken up by the beauty in creation, they have failed to think about where it has come from. There needs to be something unsettled within the seeker. A seeker has to have a question. There has to be some unanswered question, some sense of something missing. To be totally happy is to be undisposed to the revelation of God--one has to sense there is something yet to be given. And as the Book of Wisdom says, you know there is really no excuse for wise men not seeing this, not recognizing that if creation itself is so beautiful, then the one creating it must be exceedingly more beautiful. The point is that they didn't even ask the question, "What about the One?" Likewise for ordinary people they perhaps do not reflect on the beauty of creation, or the mystery of the stars. None the less, in every day affairs is that all there is? Is it just building and planting? Is it just buying and selling? Is it just taking husbands and wives? Isn't there something more? And if we don't ask the question, then when the revelation comes we will be completely unprepared for it. We will be outside the arc.

Now it is true what the reformers said, "Everything is grace," and yet we have to be wanting the grace. We have to be looking for the grace. We have to be wanting God's revelation. And sometimes this whole process takes time. That is why we cannot be

pushy with others. No one can respond to God until God has made the offer in a personal existential way where they actually experience it. That cannot be fabricated. We cannot stage God's revelation for the sake of others, even our most beloved. So for them and for us sometimes it is a long waiting game, but it is not really a game. It is a process of praying and wanting and honing that desire for ourselves and for others, as Monica did for Augustine, her son. This is wisdom--searching for what does not appear, searching for what is not evident, desiring for what does not come to fore. And in this process we gradually prepare ourselves, in a way, for the revelation of God. That itself may be grace, but it is grace that we need to cooperate with and give attention to, recognizing that in the emptiness there is already a hint of what is missing.

**God's Justice** Thirty-third Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday, November 19, 1997  
7:00 a.m. 2 Mc 7:1, 20-31; Lk 19:11-28 (Parable of the Ten Gold Coins)

There is something in us, a sense of justice, which isn't exactly what God intends. Many of Jesus' parables are really, more or less, trying to pick at a part of us, a sense that we have of justice to show how it really isn't quite just--that doesn't really reflect reality; let's put it that way. So there are several parables, and one of them is the parable of the "Workers in the Vineyard" told specifically to irritate people, to arouse in them a sense of injustice at of all things--generosity! Yes indeed, God's generosity is unjust; it gives to those who don't deserve it. And, of course, in complaining about this, in protesting this we are, of course, making a judgment against ourselves. That is the intention of a parable, or rather that is one step in the intention of the parable; it is to do that and then to help us see how we do that--to recognize that we carry around in ourselves a sense of justice that is not God's sense at all. Now this parable is very similar: "Take," for example, "and give it to the one who has ten. But he already has ten. That's not fair!" In a sense it is very fair; it is very just; it is God's sense of generosity. Of course he doesn't deserve it, but God wants to give it to him because he has been a faithful servant.

There are two basic themes in all the prophets and in the gospels: salvation and judgment. People read salvation and accepted, but judgment they intend not to read. And this is one of the judgment teachings; there is judgment in regard to life and how we spend it. This parable is a parable of how we actually live our lives, how we actually develop the potential God has given to us. It is very important that we don't take literally the potential as being simply units of money. If you take it literally you become a Calvinist--and really what God is looking for is fiscal, monetary wealth. No, that is not the point of the parable. In a parable images are used in a comparative sense. Jesus is comparing life and what we do with life to business and what we do with money. It is similar in a sense that something must be generated; something must be developed; nothing may be left fallow, unproductive. That is contrary to the will of God. Life is not given to us to be hidden or buried. Life is given to us on loan to be developed, to grow, to expand, to become as rich and fertile as possible.

Now, in a parable it is very often the case that the subject of comparison is its own opposite to the subject used for the comparison. In this case what is really being spoken of is something totally intangible; the subject for comparison is something very tangible--money, units of money. Now, if we recognize that our great potential in life is our capacity to experience joy and happiness, then this ending to the story makes perfect sense. Is it not really even part of a strict sense of justice for God to say, "Here is someone who has experienced happiness in life, and it shall be multiplied ten-fold? Here is somebody who has experienced happiness in life; it shall be multiplied five-fold. Here is someone who never has found any happiness; the little they think they have they will lose." It really is a provocative story causing us to look at the true cause of happiness and conversely the true cause of misery. What is the cause of this person being miserable? Is misery caused by unfortunate circumstances in life? Some would think so.

Are people who are miserable, unhappy, and joyless so because they are hapless victims? Some think so. But the gospel does not rest on that point; it does not believe it.

There is nothing, there are no untoward circumstances that cannot be counteracted in life. Life is rich with the potential for healing. Even physical nature is actually constructed to heal. True medicine and true therapy help a natural process. And that is true on a physical level; it is true on the mental level; it is true on the emotional level; it is true on the spiritual level; it is true on every level. And it is true that there are some injuries that are irreversible in their effects, but there are no injuries that can not be healed in some sense. We are never hapless victims of our circumstances. Some of the happiest people I have met are people who had the hardest lives to lead. I have often wondered whether I could ever live and thrive amid the circumstance of someone else, and of course, I will never know. We shall never know whether we can live and thrive in the circumstance someone else has to live by, but we can know that we can live and thrive in the circumstances that each of us live within. And that is our responsibility, as it were. God had given us this task: to live, to thrive, to find joy, to find happiness, and we won't--except in God. So ultimately those who are truly joyless and miserable are joyless and miserable because they have not known God, and according to the gospel viewpoint if you don't find God it is really your own fault--because God is your life. God is not selective with whom he appears to. God is in all people's lives. The light which enlightens everyone is coming into the world. It is our responsibility to find that light and to let it shine, and when we do we reflect the light of God, and we will be rewarded.

**Kingdom of God** Thirty-third Week in Ordinary Time Saturday, November 22, 1997  
8:00 a.m. 1 Mc 6:1-13; Lk 20:27-40 (St. Cecilia) (Abandonment versus security)

In today's reading we see again the very unique ministry of Jesus, how he was different from the other rabbis and teachers and prophets. Basically religion is a conservative influence on a society. But in many ways Jesus was not religious, because his interest was not primarily in conserving anything. His focus was contrary to all the other leaders of his time and most religious leaders during most periods of history. Jesus' focus is not on the past, but on the future and on the present, in so far as the present can contain the future, which is an idea hard to grasp, but it was one of his basic ideas. The kingdom of God is the central theme in Jesus' preaching. The kingdom of God is not yet, but it is almost, well not only almost, but really present now, in so far as people are capable to really live in faith. But faith is not holding on to the past. Faith is being open to God and dependent upon God--the God who is Lord of the living.

Now, this reality is well described in the Letter to the Corinthians. It says, "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has the imagination of man ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." This is a hint at the future orientation of the gospel. We are moving toward something--something mysterious, something indescribable, but something very real and something that can even live now in us, in so far as we are ready to live this life of abandonment--abandonment to the will of God.

Now, this idea of faith in Christ--Christ's idea of faith--this idea of abandoning oneself to God, of course, works against the kind of, you might say, security that religion and tradition supplies to people; so that even that word "faith" is being used in a new way, if indeed it was even used in the Old Testament--if it was, it wasn't used much. It is not used much in religion, really. Faith is very different from religion. Faith is a personal relation to God of trust, obedience, openness, total dependence and, of course, over all expectation. It has to do with the past in this sense: that through the history of the people of God, God already proved in a spectacular way at the Red Sea, that during all the events of the Exodus, that indeed God can deliver on his promises. In this sense, there is a reference point in the past; and this sense is rooted in the history, but that's it. History only is a reference point to show what God has done, and that's only now a mere hint of what God shall do.

Now, the Sadducees in today's story are totally unprepared for this because their minds are very set, very set--they already got it figured out. The law taught them this and that, and they are not going to change. And they want to explain to Jesus now why it is really not logically conceivable how there could be a resurrection from the dead because it would cause problems with the law--putting law and their understanding of it above the kingdom. Jesus says, "Oh you are very badly mistaken; kingdom is more than the law." Kingdom is more than anything. And Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi" says, "For Jesus, the kingdom is the only absolute." It's the reason for his existence. It is his mission--the kingdom: to bring it in, to show it forth, to demonstrate its power, to call people to it--that's his work. That's Jesus' life That's the

life of the Church; that's the life of a Christian--the purpose is for all of us to continue what Jesus began.

Now, in order for us to do this, we have to recognize the limitations that are already built into us by our expectations, which are always too low. We never expect enough from God. We always sell ourselves short. We never depend totally upon God's promises. We settle for too little. This is the general gist of the gospels: we don't expect enough out of God. We cling too much to the past, and we look too much for security, which is religious but not faithful. Jesus is not calling us to be religious; he is calling us to be faithful to his pronouncements and hopeful to his promises.

So today I celebrate 22 years of ordained ministry in the Church, and I can't believe it is 22 years. It flew by, and it does fly; life flies by. That is why it is important from time to time, in fact, even daily, to think about what we are doing and that we let the Scriptures really excite us because what God has planned for us is something far beyond what is imaginable.

Now, today we experience all kinds of problems in the Church. Luckily I studied the Church long enough to know that there was never a period of time when we didn't have all kinds of problems--never ever, ever, not from day one. And I get a great deal of solace on reading the Fathers of the Church, you know, because in their day did they have a lot of problems! Augustine truly had troubles. You know, Augustine, when he was bishop of Hippo, had a diocese that wasn't much larger than this parish, if it was even this large--that was a diocese! And in Augustine's day there were all kinds of rival churches, churches that did not believe in what the Catholic Church believed. And in those days they seemed more popular and more powerful, and there were at least two different ones: the Donatists and the Manichaeans. And there were others too, and many people followed their teachings. Now, the Manichaeans were out and out anti-Christian; and the Donatists pretended to be the true Christians, but they were opposed to what the church taught. What has survived? The Church, the truth, the apostolic heritage, because Christ is with us. With that life and confidence we continue, and in Christ we shall prevail.

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Wisdom in the World**      Thirty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time      Monday,  
November 24, 1997      Dn1:1-6, 8-20; Lk 21:1-4      (St. Andrew Dung-Lac & companions)

Today we begin a reading from the book of the prophet Daniel. Daniel is as much a prophet as it is a book of wisdom. In the Hebrew Scriptures it is considered a book of wisdom. In the Christian Old Testament it is considered a prophet. It is really both. What is significant about the Book of Daniel is the--well it is many things, but one of the significant elements which is found in today's reading is the attitude toward the world. The Hebrew young men Daniel, Azariah, Mishael and Hananiah are supposed to serve in the court of the king, Nebuchadnezzor. Now Nebuchadnezzor is the name of a Babylonian king. Actually there are more than one by that name, and they were known for their lack of civilization, their brutality, their contempt for Israel. In fact Babylon did exile Israel for almost a century. This is called the Babylonian Exile.

Now the point of the Book of Daniel is that if people are faithful to God and follow the instructions of the Torah, they should be able to serve in the world, in the pagan world, with the highest honor. They should be more intelligent, more proficient in all the arts and sciences because God, who is the creator of all things, is the true source of wisdom. And if people serve God, they are serving wisdom, and this has to have, as it were, a pay off even in ordinary secular life. So there is nothing other-worldly about this idea of service--it is service in and to the world. And you might say, it is, strictly speaking, a very secular idea. Now, what we call secularism is really not a modern phenomenon, but in fact goes back to the Old Testament and is one of the focal points of it: that the people of God are supposed to distinguish themselves by their high ethical life, their great wisdom, their intelligence and proficiency in all fields of human endeavor--

thereby being attractive leaders in the secular world. In this way God, who is the source of all wisdom, will influence the great cultures of the world.

Now you will not find this idea in the Koran among the Moslem people. You will not find this idea in the Pali-Scriptures of the Buddhists. This idea is very much the basis of the Judeo-Christian sense of responsibility for life in the world. Even when St. Benedict started the monastic movement it was really not withdrawing from the world. It was an attempt to preserve the best the world had to offer and to protect it behind the walls of the monasteries during a period of great chaos and social disintegration. So we have to be reminded sometimes that our role in the world really is to serve the world. And learning and wisdom and knowledge and art are the areas where we are called to excel so that through our excellence the wisdom of God can have its influence in the world.

**Peace and Justice** Thirty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, November 25, 1997 7:00a.m. Dn 2:31-45; Lk 21:5-11 (Our efforts needed)

Contrasting the first and second readings--the first reading is from the Book of Daniel, which is the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and the Gospel according to Luke--they have one thing in common; they are both talking about the upheaval and distress that shall come upon the earth. Now, if we go back to the time of Sir Isaac Newton, who is the, more or less, the father of modern science, it is quite surprising to realize that Isaac Newton had no idea of what we now call the Law of Entropy which, more or less, says that everything is running down. Newton thought of the entire universe as a great perpetual motion machine, more or less, like the Energizer Bunny--going on and on and on and on, never stopping. If you look at Leibniz, another great scientist, he thought that the universe was in-finite, that all these starry bodies simply when on and on and on with no limit ever in all directions. It is hard to imagine, but that is what he said. Aristotle many, many centuries earlier thought the stars were divine and eternal, that they had always been there. There had never been a time when there weren't stars in the sky. Great minds had no problem with the idea of space being without end, limitless. They had no problem with the thought that things were eternal. Even Thomas Aquinas says that he could not, in reason, prove that matter was not eternal, which is surprising to me; but he said he could not demonstrate this reasonably. He took it in faith.

Indeed the biblical vision of life is very different from all these ideas. The biblical vision is that the entire universe is a created thing--that everything about it is limited. It is for a limited period of time, although we don't know how long. It just goes on so far and that's it. And thirdly, it's running down, gradually, but it's running down. That is the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. The kingdom of gold, an age of gold, yields to an age of silver, which yields to an age of bronze, which yields to an age of iron, which yields to an age of tile--gradual disintegration of the social order. The gradual disintegration of the social order is a social analogue to the law of entropy, which has to do with the laws of physics, the law of energy, really--that energy cannot be conserved. It gradually wears away, dissipates; heat dissipates; everything dissipates.

Now, in this kind of a world, the kind of world God created, we are here only for a time. Now, we know that in our own individual lives, but it is also true for the whole. And these readings are trying to look at the whole. We are, as a whole, only here for a time. Now, it may be very long time, but the length of the time should not blind us to the fact that it is temporary. In such a world we cannot evolve into something better; that is not the way the world is created. That is an idea some people have: that life is just going to get better and better. But it doesn't get better; nothing gets better by itself. All improvement is due to deliberate action. And that is why there is a mandate; that is why there is an imperative in the gospel to work for justice, to work for peace. We aren't just all of a sudden going to wake up one morning and everything is going to be wonderful--Saddam died, and now we are all at peace. No. Peace and justice are the attainments, the achievements that God has mandated we work for and toward. There may be some truth,

and no doubt there is some truth to the idea of biological evolution; but there is no true social evolution. Improvements take effort. Everything worthwhile takes sacrifice, and this is what human beings are called to work for. Within a limited space and within a limited period of time, we are called to co-operate with God in building something that reflects the divine will and the original purpose for the creation in the first place. And so once a year we read these readings to remind ourselves that after all time is getting on, and we had better get on with the work God has left to us.

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Truth** Thirty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday, November 26, 1997  
7:00 a.m. Dn 5:1-6, 13-14, 16-17, 23-28; Lk 21:12-19 (Never force)

“People will persecute you and manhandle you.” Unfortunately Christians have not only been victims of this kind of behavior but sometimes also perpetrators. The lessons of Jesus have often not been taken to heart--the lessons such as: resist not evil, turn the other cheek, the truth shall make you free. These are not simply slogans to be thrown around, but they are profound principles of action.

There are two different aspects to truth that we have to keep in mind: the objective real world, and then there is the subjective presence of each human person. Now, actually, only God is completely objective. And only a mad person is completely subjective. Total subjectivity completely unrelated to objectivity is psychosis, madness. Total objectivity is divinity. Most of us are somewhere in between. We are not totally psychotic, hopefully or most days, but we also are not divine. Therefore each of us has a possibility of participating in the truth, but it is merely a participation; it is not the possession of truth. We do not possess the truth; the truth possesses us. And even though we may speak of possessing God, it is really a misnomer. It is God who possesses us. And this truth, which is divine, will, in fact, make us free. And from this truth we have nothing to fear. And for this reason we, as believers, must champion the cause of liberty--not for any political reason, but for a profoundly spiritual one--but this is the condition upon which we can become possessed by God.

Now, as it often happens people are convinced in something or other. And what they are convinced in may have various degrees of truth in it and may be, in fact, very worthy. They may be convinced of some very worthy cause, and that is all very fine. Now, the way Jesus gave us to promote worthy causes is the very same way he gave us to promote the gospel itself. He said, “Go forth and make disciples; go forth and proclaim the good news.” To make disciples means to make pupils; to proclaim is to proclaim, teach--by word, by example, in whatever way. It is never to force. Unfortunately we have seen so many cases in the history of the Church where the Church became too close to the state, where the office of Church and government became intertwined, where missionaries did not simply bring the gospel; but they also brought a whole culture and a way of life, and with the aid of colonial powers imposed it on others. And to some degree, this is probably the main reason why the Christian gospel has not spread as widely as it could have--the wrong choice of means.

But ultimately the wrong choice of means really rests on a lack of faith. If we really believe in God and we really believe in the truth that God reveals to us, well, then we should let that truth make us free; and if it makes us free, then it will eventually make others free. If we really believe that, we will never resort to illegitimate means. And if over a long period of history the Church and all its members had seen this, the history of the world would have been very different. And the world today would be very different. This is not a minor issue; it is a fundamental basic gospel issue. “Freedom of the sons of God,” that is the term used, “freedom of the sons of God.” And it is something that all of

us sons and daughters need to understand, exercise and share with others. In a sense, we have to be convinced of this: that God, the kingdom of God and the truth of God, does not need our help, if our help is really ours. It is we who need God's help; and if our lives were a witness to that, that is being a true missionary--that is being a true disciple. That is the type of witness, that martyrdom Jesus speaks of, that will eventually bring freedom and salvation to the world.

**Thanksgiving Day** Thursday, November 27, 1997 9:30 a.m. Is 63:7-9; Col  
3:12-17; Lk 17:11-19 (Working on gratitude)

If we survey the history of the Scriptures and a history of the people whose lives are recorded in the Scriptures, we see two themes recur on a regular basis. And they both have to do with what is essentially worship, at least worship in a sense of authentic worship. There may be many false forms of worship, but authentic worship always has to be concerned with two things: number one, memory and number two, praise. Memory and praise or memory and gratitude. Gratitude is a feeling of thankfulness, a sense of having been blessed--that's what gratitude is. That is what praise is; praise is an awareness; it's a consciousness of having been blessed. What we find when we look at the Scripture is that there is a constant complaint--originating in inspiration itself, as it were--against the human race and especially against the chosen people, that their memories are very selective and their praise lacks consistency. Both of these have to do with the way our actual consciousness works in our real experience. In our real experience we find that we can remember bad things more easily than good things. There may be differences from person to person, but over all, people in general, families and groups, can remember bad things more easily than good things. We only have to look at the recent war in Bosnia and the reports that people have brought us of how formerly very good neighbors became very bitter enemies. The goodness of the relationship was easily forgotten in the heat of the growing conflict, but you can be sure that the bitterness and the suspicion and the mistrust will not be so easily forgotten--not because those people are Bosnian, but because those people are like us--this is a human trait.

And along with it then comes our orientation in regard to our feelings about life and therefore about the author of life. This, of course, is where God comes in with his laments. We find them in the psalms. We find these laments expressed in the words of the prophets, and we find ample reason for it in histories that are written in our testament. Which precedes which, I don't know. But it is also very obvious that it is very easy for people to feel cheated; it takes no effort to feel cheated. Perhaps this is the result of our selective memory, or perhaps our selective memory is a result of this, I don't know. All of it must somehow be related to the history of what St. Paul calls "Adam," meaning the history of simple humanity--that something is terribly awry in the awareness of people. It is just simply too easy to feel that one has got the short end of the stick. At any rate it has become necessary for us to deliberately choose to find reasons to be thankful; thus, the ancient festivals in Israel were established at Shechem, at Gilgal, at Shiloh, later at Jerusalem. The basic idea of the temple was a gathering place for festivals--festivals based upon the need to remember not reasons to feel cheated, not what's wrong in the world, but what God has done. So all Israelite worship from the earliest times up until the night Jesus died, the night of Passover, entered the new covenant. That entire history was spanned by this felt need to gather together: to listen to the tales, to the stories, to the recitals of what God has done to remind people, who so easily forget as they so easily remember what God did not do, or how they were so disappointed, or how they felt so let down, perhaps by another tribe, or their own family, or kin, or whatever-- to help them

consciously focus on reality as it really is, as opposed to how we tend to take it with this bias toward the negative: being so sensitive to being slighted, being so sensitive to not being appreciated, being so touchy about not being recognized--even though we ourselves may not be so sensitive about recognizing others, or thanking others, or giving others their due--toward ourselves this seems so bad and unacceptable!

So there is something within our nature that we have to acknowledge will tend to spoil our ability to live life if nothing corrects it, if we make no effort to focus on the blessings that God has provided: beginning with the creation itself, and continuing in all the acts by which he has intervened in the history of the world, when we as a people were courting disaster, when we as a people had chosen the wrong path--how God intervened and continues to do so to bring us a deeper sense of his love and compassion. Not really because God has nothing else to do but, because this represents his actual purpose in creation in the first place--to create a people after his own heart that can share his very essence, to live at his very table, the messianic table, a people who can be filled with the true gratitude that reflects knowledge of God and how Jesus Christ Himself spared absolutely nothing in order to bring us over the hump of human freedom to choose for us so that we might choose for ourselves the life that God has destined for us. This needs to be as Colossians recorded "a life of gratitude and praise," a life of true awareness of who God is and what God does and how we are utter and total beneficiaries at every moment, even in the midst of all kinds of adversity and untoward circumstances like, for example, disease, or poverty, or abandonment, or loneliness or all these things--yes, they are all a part of life. But it is our great tragedy, tragedy meaning something we can avoid, it is our great tragedy if we allow the untoward circumstances of life and all the various pains and failures which necessarily are part of this free world, meaning a world of freedom where we make choices and determine them--in this kind of world, it would be a great tragedy if we were to allow the negative things to poison our over-all sense of life, to detract from the blessings God Himself gives in spite of problems and difficulties, in spite of death itself, which Jesus Christ has overcome in his cross and resurrection.

Now, this is not something that will ever come easy to anyone. That's the whole idea of worship in Scripture. It doesn't come easy. It is not a natural thing, really. We have to take time as the pilgrims did a couple centuries ago establishing this custom--although it didn't really become a national holiday until the time of Abraham Lincoln, but it was a custom deliberately established--to give thanks, to become aware, to be wary of the opposite tendency to take everything for granted, to assume that everything good ought to be that way, and anything bad ought not be that way--a wrong headed way of looking at life, and a way that can blind us to the vision of God, and again, a tragedy because it is something we do to ourselves, even if unconsciously. What God desires, and this is very clear in the New Testament, is for us to have life and life in abundance, and we don't even have a clue what abundance means because in our country abundance is a material thing. Well, that's very nice, but it is not really the abundance that is referred to. Abundance is a quality of life, and abundance has to do with the life of God Himself. This is what God wants for us and for everyone, and we need to remind ourselves of this. And as we remind ourselves of this, it becomes more and more part of who we are. That must change our way of feeling, and it will help us deal with all of the difficulties that we

shall meet in life. We will see them as part of the fabric, but not the essence of life. We will see them as actually necessary challenges for us to seek further that God: who lies beneath the surface, who cannot exactly be touched, who cannot exactly be seen, who cannot exactly be controlled, but who needs to be sought after--needs to be sought and desired with our hearts, to some degree empty, knowing that only God can fill us and make us complete!

So as we gather today, it isn't so necessary that we think of exactly one hundred and one ways in which we have been blessed, but it is important to recognize that life itself is a tremendous opportunity and gift from God, and that everyday we have wonderful opportunities to become more like God or less, and we exercise these with our free will. And this itself is another wonderful blessing; even when we make the wrong choices we are exercising a blessing. And if we can in any way grow in a sense of gratitude to God and praise God for that, that will make us ever better ambassadors and missionaries and disciples of Jesus, who told his disciples--before he ascended to his Father--"Go forth and make disciples of all nations," letting everyone know the good news, and praise God!

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Last Days** Thirty-fourth Week in Ordinary Time Saturday, November 29, 1997  
8:00 a.m. Dn 7:15-27; Lk 21:34-36 (LastDay) (Who are we in God's sight?)

Today is the last day of the Church year. Tomorrow we start Advent. And the readings of this period of the year are always focusing on the end, the end of the world, the end of life, which brings us to the question of purpose, the purpose of life, the reason for the creation. And this is something that can often elude us in our daily affairs as the gospel says, "We can become bloated either with indulgence and drunkenness on the one hand, or with worldly cares on the other." We often divide life into people who are caring and loving, concerned for others versus those who are self-centered, caring about themselves. Either can become a trap. What we need to be alert to is the reason why God has chosen us, and how are we doing along that path that God is leading us? It is a question we often do not ask ourselves. Each day we go along either with the ordinary cares of life pressing upon us and/or the various attractions of life drawing us, or the various repulsions of life deflecting us, or whatever. But very often life leads us; we don't lead life.

In the first reading it says, "I, Daniel, found my spirit anguished within its sheath of flesh. I was terrified with the visions of my mind." Terrifying it may be to realize that the purpose of life is not what we have been living for. St. Augustine was very concerned about this issue. He raised the question of "after all what is his mind?" And I think, actually, he reached a wrong conclusion. He concluded that his mind was dependent on his memory. You can understand where he would get this idea. Without a memory who are we? But that is the whole question: who are we? That's really what the readings are asking us to think about. Who are we in the sight of God? The assumption

that we know who we are is a mistake. We are not simply the sum total of our memory; actually, more or less, that's what Augustine was saying--but I think he is wrong. Look what we know about Alzheimer's and stroke and injuries to the brain. What do they do to memory? What do they do to personality? What do they do to identity? It is a purely physical thing. Alzheimer's is a physical illness in the brain. A stroke is a physical injury in the brain. And if that affects memory the way it does, what is death going to do? Do we have our brains in death?

So what is our mind? What is our identity? Who are we in the sight of God? These are the questions that we should raise. These are the last things--at least about ourselves. Scripture is very clear that we take our good works with us. Who are we? Not really the product of our memory but we are the person we have chosen to be, over the whole span of our lives. And that might be very, very different from our memory. Our memory is often preoccupied with what happens to us, or what has happened to us, or what people have done to us, or not done for us or not done to us, or whatever--ourselves the passive recipients of experience. But maybe that all goes with death. Maybe that's all lost in death. We know from Scripture what is saved in death is our good works, our choices, the quality of being we have decided to be through the grace of God. What is that really? A good reflection for the last day in ordinary time.