Christ the King—St. Stephen
Scripture Reflection
30th Sunday of Ordinary Time
2026—A Cycle



What do I see?

"I think the most important thing is to take the long view on things. We live in such a 24/7, Twitter-fed news cycle. Everything's a crisis, everything is terrible, everything is doomsday. If it doesn't get solved tomorrow, your presidency is going off the rails."—Barack Obama

How good am I at looking at my life and the future from a "long view"? And what does that "long view" really mean to me?

Image found at GodInAllThings.com

Opening Prayer

Note: *This prayer/reflection [abridged for use here] first appeared in a homily written for Cardinal John Dearden by then-Fr. Kenneth Untener on the occasion of a Mass for Deceased Priests (1979). Fr. Untener later became bishop of Saginaw, Michigan.*
This reflection/prayer is often mistakenly attributed to Saint Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who used it often before his 1980 martyrdom.

It helps now and then to step back... and take a long view.
The Kingdom is beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise…
that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete.... No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.... No confession brings perfection.
No program fully accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything....
(continued at the end of this scripture reflection)

Scripture Readings

Exodus 22: 20-26 "Don't abuse or take advantage of strangers; you, remember, were once strangers in Egypt."

Psalm 18: 2-4, 47, 51 "I sing to God, the Praise-Lofty, and find myself safe and saved."

1 Thessalonians 1: 5-10 "In imitating us, you imitated the Master."

Matthew 22: 34-40 "When the Pharisees heard how he had bested the Sadducees, they gathered their forces for an assault."

Introduction to the 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

There's a lot of love in this weekend's readings! Each reading offers its own treasure house of everyday wisdom and compassion.

In Exodus (22: 20ff), Moses urged his people not to oppress anyone, since they themselves knew exactly what it felt like to be devalued.

In I Thessalonians 1: 5ff, St. Paul thanked the community for being so compassionate that their reputation served as a model for other communities.

In Matthew 22: 34ff, Jesus narrowed down the pharisees' 600+ Hebraic laws to an essential *two*… love your God… love your neighbor.

As we reflect on these readings, let's ask ourselves, "What role does compassion play in my life?" We're surrounded by *division*, *derision*, and *devastation*. So, let's pray with these scriptures for countering the gifts of *unity*… mutual *understanding*… *tolerance*… and *compassionate healing*.

Reading from the Book of Exodus (22: 1, 20-26)

"Anyone who sacrifices to a god other than God alone must be put to death. Don't abuse or take advantage of strangers; you, remember, were once strangers in Egypt. Don't mistreat widows or orphans. If you do and they cry out to me, you can be sure I'll take them most seriously. I'll show my anger and come raging among you with the sword, and your wives will end up widows and your children orphans.

"If you lend money to my people, to any of the down-and-out among you, don't come down hard on them and gouge them with interest.

"If you take your neighbor's coat as security, give it back before nightfall; it may be your neighbor's only covering—what else does the person have to sleep in?"

<u>Personal Reflection</u>

Moses is broadly considered as the author of the Book of Exodus. In this passage, we hear that that the core requirement of self-governance is the rule of law. And genuine law can only exist if there is a lawgiver who transcends mere humans. Humans easily seek out idols, who provide moral authorization for whatever they want for themselves. The commandment to avoid idols shows how important it is to worship the Lord and him alone. And no other philosophical or spiritual

foundation leads people to believe it's in their best interest to love their neighbors as they love themselves.

"Don't abuse or take advantage of strangers."
— *Who are the "strangers" in my life? Why should I care about them?*

Psalm 18 (2-4, 47, 51)

A song of David, one he sang to God after being saved from his enemies and from the wrath of King Saul

I love you, Lord, my strength.

My God—the high crag
where I run for dear life,
hiding behind the boulders,
safe in the granite hideout.
I love you, Lord, my strength.

I sing to God, the Praise-Lofty,
and find myself safe and saved.
The hangman's noose was tight at my throat;
devil waters rushed over me.
I love you, Lord, my strength.

God set things right for me
and shut up the people who talked back.
God's king takes the trophy;
God's chosen is beloved.
I mean David and all his children—always.
I love you, Lord, my strength.

Personal Reflection

The psalmist (likely David himself) sings to the great master of creation, who ruled over Israel. The stormy history of David is well known to us. He had no difficulty identifying his 'enemies.' But we must do our best to apply these lyrics to ourselves. The antiphon begins with, "I love you." These "three little words" sum up the psalmist's deepest inner feelings.

"My God—the high crag where I run for dear life, hiding behind the boulders, safe in the granite hideout."
— *In what ways can I (as a spiritual descendant of King David) include myself in this song of praise? For example: What major... and minor... victories have I achieved in my life thus far by God's power?*

From St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians (1: 5-10)

"You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you and determined to live that way yourselves. In imitating us, you imitated the Master. Although great trouble accompanied the Word, you were able to take great joy from the Holy Spirit!—taking the trouble with the joy, the joy with the trouble.

"Do you know that all over the provinces of both Macedonia and Achaia believers look up to you? The word has gotten around. Your lives are echoing the Master's Word, not only in the provinces but all over the place. The news of your faith in God is out. We don't even have to say anything anymore—*you are* the message! People come up and tell us how you received us with open arms, how you deserted the dead idols of your old life so you could embrace and serve God, the true God. They marvel at how expectantly you await the arrival of his Son, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescued us from certain doom."

Personal Reflection

The gospel came to the Thessalonians by power, assurance, and the Holy Spirit. They turned from worshiping idols to worshiping God. Jesus rescued them from wrath. Paul assured the community that God is solely responsible for the elements he mentioned about their faith. These good things happened because they aimed all their deeds at the Lord Jesus Christ and accepted any tribulation they suffered with the joy of the Holy Spirit. God alone created and sustained their faith.

— *What do I think St. Paul would say about my own level of faith and worship, if he were to speak to other Christians about me?*

The Gospel According to Matthew (22: 34-40)

"When the Pharisees heard how he had bested the Sadducees, they gathered their forces for an assault. One of their religion scholars spoke for them, posing a question they hoped would show him up, 'Teacher, which command in God's Law is the most important?'

"Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence. This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: Love others as well as you love yourself. These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them.'"

Personal Reflection

This weekend's gospel centers Jesus' two loves united in each of us... loving God and loving our neighbor. These are the only commandments of Jesus. No detail of religious observance is above this law of love. Jesus said this… and lived it during his life here on planet Earth. He never allowed the laws of religion to overtake the need for love. The message of Jesus is all-embracing and covers all our relationships, both the close relationships of marriage, family and friendship, as well as the call to love the broader world, particularly where the needs are great.

Unfortunately, we humans seem to love laws. The more the better. In the Middle Ages, church scholars "fell in love" with laws. So, now Catholics have the 1983 Code of Canon Law with 1,752 separate laws governing every aspect of life and worship. The 1977 revision of the Baltimore Catechism contains over 400 questions… and *answers*! What happened to the two commandments Jesus gave us? Maybe he didn't fully comprehend just how complicated "being saved" could be. Why do we feel more secure with almost 2,000 rules?

By comparison, the 2022 Constitution & Canons of the Episcopal Church number well over 100 laws. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America lists around 200.

What ever happened to Jesus' *two* great and *overarching* commandments? In many cases, Christians' self-created complexity drowns them out.

Jesus *himself* offered only a *two-pronged* standard as a summation of all 613 Jewish religious commandments: love God… love your neighbor.

Note: "Pharisee" and "Sadducee" are familiar titles to us (we think). But who were they in the context of first century Judaism? If we find our knowledge vague about these two groups who harassed Jesus throughout his public life, we can follow this link to refresh our memory: Pharisees … Sadducees.

— *How do I measure up to Jesus' two "great" commandments? How willing am I to examine my conscience using just these two criteria for faithful love and service? How do I express that willingness in my everyday life*?

For Inspirational Watching, Listening, and Reading

Watch

JohnMichael Talbot's 2-minute teaching on Mt. 22: 34-40

Listen

John Michael Talbot sings the hymn, "Father, I Put My Life In Your Hands."
This song captures the spirit of this week's responsorial drawn from Psalm 118.

Read

Apostle: The Life of Paul by John Pollock
Master storyteller John Pollock makes St. Paul and his amazing ministry come freshly alive, so we can know the Apostle to the Gentiles, as Luke did when he traveled with him. As you turn the pages, you'll sense Paul's motives, his aims and priorities; what mattered to him most; and what he found worthy of dying for.
(I read this book several years ago and found it a wonderful way to get to know the real Paul/Saul of Tarsus.— AJG)

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

Readings for All Saints Day, Sunday, November 1

Revelation 7: 2-4, 9-14 "I saw another Angel rising from where the sun rose, carrying the seal of the Living God."
Psalm 24: 1-6 "God claims Earth and everything in it."
1 John 3: 1-3 "What marvelous love the Father has extended to us!"
Matthew 5:1-12 "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule."

Closing Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

...A Future Not Our Own (cont.)
This is what we are about….
we plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water the seeds *already* planted…
knowing they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects…
far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything…
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this.
This enables us to do *something*… and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete… but it is a beginning…
a step along the way… an opportunity for the Lord's grace…
to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results…
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers… not master builders… ministers… not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

Unless otherwise indicated, the Sunday readings are from *The Message* Bible translated by Rev. Dr. Eugene H. Peterson (Catholic Edition)
Peterson's translation of the Bible is a highly interpretive paraphrase, celebrated for its readability.
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