

The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY

Ezekiel 18:25–28
Philippians 2:1–11
Matthew 21:28–32

MONDAY

Luke 9:46–50
"... whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

TUESDAY

Luke 9:51–56
"... he turned and rebuked them."

WEDNESDAY

Luke 9:57–62
"Follow me."

THURSDAY*

John 1:47–51
"You will see greater things than these."

FRIDAY

Luke 10:13–16
"... whoever rejects you rejects me..."

SATURDAY

Luke 10:17–24
"... rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

* Feast of Saint Michael, Saint Gabriel, and Saint Raphael

Free to Change and to Be Changed

A real change of heart, a complete conversion, is no simple matter. Many things conspire to keep us from changing or accepting change. Today's readings grapple with the most fundamental changes of our lives—from sinners to forgiven sons and daughters, from ego-centered and self-absorbed creatures to Christ-centered people with generous hearts.

When Ezekiel challenges the people of his time to true change and conversion of heart, he identifies their resistance with their own frozen judgments, "The way of the Lord is unfair!" Perhaps their comparative lens on life never allowed them to see themselves and their own need to change or the mercy of God in providing them the opportunity to be changed.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus issues a similar but somewhat different challenge to the religious leaders

of his time. Absorbed and caught up in their own presuppositions about good and bad, right and wrong, they, too, are frozen in their positions and unable to recognize their need to change and be changed. The great public sinners of the time—tax collectors and prostitutes—are more open to acknowledging their need for a change of heart.

In the second reading, Paul offers an earnest plea to the Philippians to let go and be free of self-interest in order to change and live in an entirely new way—the way of Jesus' self-emptying.

In various ways, today's word of God captures our fundamental resistance to a change or conversion of heart. It is often affected by our being too caught up with ourselves. Letting go of self-concern frees us to change and be changed by God's grace and power.



The Faith of the Church

All followers of Jesus are called to a perfect holiness of life, something that only God can accomplish in us. Still, for our part, we need to cooperate with God's grace by being open to change and grow in the life that Christ offers us. This kind of availability to what God has to offer is the hallmark of the lives of the saints (Cf. the Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 40).



Questions of the Week

It is notoriously difficult for us to determine what holds us bound. And yet we must identify those things that contribute to our lack of freedom. Only when they are identified can we let them go and be free to embrace what Christ wants of us.

Adults

How can I identify the things that keep me bound to an old way of living and cut me off from embracing a full and complete change of heart by God's grace?

Children

How can I let God know that I want to do what he wants me to do?

Responding to God's Word . . .

Our intellects enable us to know and understand ourselves and the world around us. Our wills enable us to make decisions and take action. Today's word gives special attention to our will and our process of making decisions, especially important decisions that give direction to our lives.

We can live *willfully*, that is, determined to exercise control and have things our way. Alternately, we can live *willingly*, that is, in a way that makes us open and available, especially to what God calls us to be and to do.

We could easily be living among the people of Ezekiel's time or the

Philippians to whom Paul wrote or with those who heard the teaching of Jesus. It is and has always been a universal spiritual challenge to let our wills, our capacity to decide and choose, be pliable and ready to move with the direction God gives us—God's will.

The effects of sin and our inclination to ego-centeredness dispose us to be willful. First, we must recognize how that plays out in our lives. Then, with God's grace and in the supportive environment of a community of faith, we can embrace a different way, the way of willingness.

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. Strategically place a card with the words from the Lord's Prayer "thy will be done" as a reminder to live in a willing way.

In the workplace or in school. Decide to do something that reflects the will of others rather than your own. Reflect and pray on that action.

In the community. Identify advertising that appeals to the possibility of controlling life and arranging various outcomes. Reflect on the message.



Meditation Moment

A man turned to drink. He also turned from God and his family. One day while walking along, repenting how his life turned out, he saw a bent, rusty nail in the gutter. It reminded him of himself and his life. So he picked it up and took it home. Placing the nail on an anvil, he began to straighten it out and clean it up. An hour later, it looked almost new again. Then it occurred to him. He could straighten out and clean up his own life in the same way. That thought triggered his conversion. He turned away from drink and back to God and to his family. Today, he keeps that nail, straightened and cleaned, in his wallet.

For reflection . . .

Was there a time when I was almost like that bent, rusty nail? What changed me?

WHO REPENTS SIN IS ALMOST INNOCENT.
SENECA

FROM *VISION* BY MARK LINK, SJ

Reshape My Uncertain Heart

Jesus,
as I watch you
in your temptations and
in the struggles of your earthly
ministry and in the garden of
Gethsemane and on the cross of
Calvary, I know your only focus
is doing your Father's will.
Reshape my own uncertain
heart so often caught in my own
will and my own plans.
Conform my heart to yours,
so that I may be
finally and fully free to
embrace the holy will
of God. Amen.

Carry this thought in your heart as a guide for your faith journey this week.

When we focus on doing our own will or accomplishing only our own goals, we do not move beyond ourselves. When we are open and available to doing God's will, a universe of infinite possibility opens up for us.

Profile in Faith

Matt Talbot (?–1925), an Irish laborer, has been named "venerable" by the Church. In his early years, he suffered from alcoholism and stole to support his drinking. He gave up alcohol and devoted himself entirely to a life of prayer and reparation. He moved from doing his will to doing God's will.

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