

Weekday Homilies of Pope Francis



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Contents

1. [Discern the spirits](#) - Tuesday, January 7, 2014
2. [Christian love is always 'concrete'](#) - Thursday, January 9, 2014
3. [Faith requires confessing and trusting](#) - Friday, January 10, 2014
4. [Anointed priest or a 'greasy' one?](#) - Saturday, January 11, 2014
5. [God's love makes whole our personal stories and heals all of history](#) - Monday, January 13, 2014
6. [Christians are not legalists, and the Faith is not a burden](#) - Tuesday, January 14, 2014
7. [Scandals happen when there is no true relationship with God](#) - Thursday, January 16, 2014
8. [Do not 'sell' your dignity as God's children](#) - Friday, January 17, 2014

1. Discern the spirits

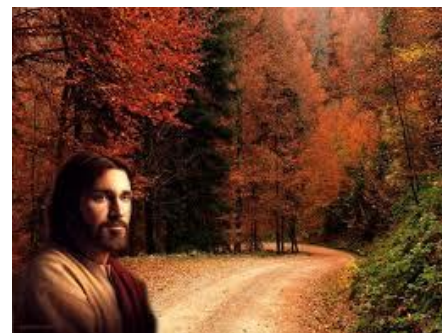
“The Christian knows to guard his heart in order to distinguish what comes from God and what comes from the false prophets,” *was the message of Pope Francis at mass, Tuesday, January 7. The Pope said* “the way of Jesus is that of service and humility, a path that all Christians are called to follow.” [\(VIDEO\)](#)



Pope Francis took the words “Remain in the Lord,” from the first Reading from the Apostle John, as the starting point for his homily. “It is a ‘counsel for life,’ that John repeats almost obsessively. The Apostle shows one of the attitudes of the Christian who wants to remain in the Lord: to understand what’s happening in one’s own heart. For this reason, do not to trust every spirit, but test the spirits. It is necessary to know ‘the discernment of spirits,’ to discern whether something helps us remain in

the Lord or takes us away from Him. Our heart always has desires, has cravings, has thoughts. But are these from the Lord or do some of these things take us away from the Lord? That’s why the Apostle John exhorts us to ‘test’ what we think and desire:

If this goes along the line of the Lord, it will go well, but if not... Discern the spirits to see if they really come from God, because many false prophets have come into the world. Prophets or prophecies or suggestions: ‘I want to do this!’ But this does not bring you to the Lord, it leads you away from Him. That’s why vigilance is necessary. The Christian is a man or a woman who



knows to keep watch over his or her heart. **And many times our heart, and with so many things that come and go, seems a local market: everything, you can find everything there... No! We need to test things - this is from the Lord, and this is not – in order to remain in the Lord.**

What, then, is the criterion to determine if something comes from Christ or from the antichrist? St. John has a clear ‘simple’ idea: “Every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God, and every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus does not belong to God. This is the spirit of the antichrist.” But what does it mean, “to recognize that the Word is come in the flesh?” It means “recognizing the path of Jesus Christ,” recognising that He, “being God, He emptied Himself, He humbled Himself” even to “death on the Cross”.



That is the path of Jesus Christ: abasement, humility, humiliation as well. If a thought, if a desire takes you along the road of humility and abasement, of service to others, is from Jesus. But if it brings you to the road of sufficiency, of vanity, of pride, along the path of an abstract thought, it is not from Jesus.

We think of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness: all three proposals the demon makes to Jesus are proposals that intended to take Him away from this path, the path of service, of humility, of humiliation, of charity. But the charity accomplished with His life, no? To the three temptations Jesus says no: ‘No, this is not my path!’

Let us think about what happens in our own hearts. What do we think and feel, what do we desire, do I examine the spirits? “Do I test what I think, what I want, what I desire? Or do I accept it all without discernment?”

“So many times, our heart is a road, everything passes there... Put it to the test! And do I always choose the things that come from God? Do I know which are the things that come from God? Do I know the true criterion by which to discern my thoughts, my desires? Let us think of this, and let us not forget that the criterion is the Incarnation of the Word. The Word is come in the flesh: this is Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ who was made man, God made man, who lowered Himself, humbled Himself for love, in order to serve all of us. And may the Apostle John grant us this grace to know what is happening in our hearts, and to have the wisdom to discern what is of God and what is not of God.”



2. Christian love is always ‘concrete’

“Christian love is always ‘concrete,’ *Pope Francis said at Mass Thursday, January 9, morning.* “Love, then, consists more in actions than in words, more in giving than in receiving. Love is not a kind of romanticism: either it is a selfless and solicitous love which rolls up its sleeves and looks to the poor, preferring to give rather than to receive; or it has nothing to do with Christian love.”



Pope Francis took as the starting point for his reflection the words of the First Letter of John, in which the Apostle insists: “if we love one another, God remains in us, and His love is brought to perfection in us.”

“The experience of faith, is found in this double ‘remaining’. **We are in God and God is in us**: this is the Christian life. Not remaining in the spirit of the world, not remaining in superficiality, not remaining in idolatry, not remaining in vanity. No, no, remaining in the Lord. And He reciprocates: He abides in us. But **He remains in us first. Many times we push Him out and we cannot remain in Him.** It is the Spirit that remains.”



Remaining in the love of God is not so much an ecstasy of the heart, a nice thing to feel.. You see that the love John speaks of is not the love of soap operas! No, it is something else. Christian love has a particular quality: concreteness. Christian love is concrete. **Jesus Himself, when He speaks of love, speaks to us about concrete things: feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and many concrete things.** Love is concrete. . . . And when this concreteness is not there, you can live a Christianity of illusions, because you don’t understand where the centre of Jesus’ message is. This

love does not arrive at concrete being: it is a love of illusions, like the illusions the disciples had when, looking at Jesus, they thought He was a ghost.

The ‘ghost,’ in fact, (from the story in today’s Gospel) is what the disciples, astonished and fearful, see coming toward them, walking on the sea. But their astonishment arises from a hardness of heart, because, as the Gospel says, “they had not understood” the multiplication of the loaves which had taken place shortly before. If you have a hardened heart, you cannot love, and you think that love is to imagine things. No, love is concrete. And this concreteness is based on two criteria.

The first criterion: to love with deeds, not words. Words are taken away by the wind! They are here today, tomorrow they are not. **The second criterion of concreteness is: in love it is more important to give than to receive.** The one who loves, gives. . . . Gives things, gives life, gives oneself to God and to others. On the other hand, [is] the one who does not love, who is selfish, always seeks to receive, always seeks to have things, to have advantages. Stay with an open heart, not like that of the disciples, which was closed, which did not understand anything: remaining in God and God remaining in us; remaining in love.”



3. Faith requires confessing and trusting

“Faith makes all things possible, but we must place our trust completely in God.” *This was the central focus of Pope Francis’ remarks following the readings of the day at Mass on Friday, January 10. Pope Francis concentrated especially on the 1st Letter of St John, in which he speaks of the faithful Christian as the one who is truly victor over the world. He explained that genuine faith must be total and complete, not partial, and must express itself as an abiding in the Lord, abiding in Love.*

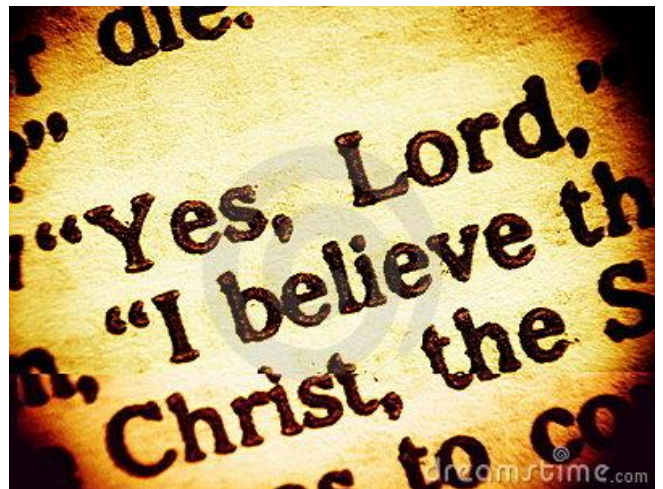


“Whoever abides in God, whoever is begotten by God, whoever abides in love, has victory over the world – and this victory is our faith – on our part, it is the faith. On God’s part, [it is] the Holy Spirit who makes this [abiding, this victory] possible

through faith. For our part, faith: it is powerful! The strength of faith has overcome the world! Our faith can do everything! It is victory! It would be beautiful to repeat this, even to ourselves, because we are often [as] Christians defeated. The Church is full of defeated Christians who do not believe in this, that faith is the victory - who do not live this faith, because if you do not live this faith, there is defeat, the world wins, the prince of this world.

Let us recall the great praise that Our Lord had for the faith of the haemorrhagic woman, the Caananite woman, or the man who was blind from birth – saying that faith as large as a mustard seed could move mountains. **This faith affirms and requires of us two attitudes: confessing and trusting.**

Faith means confessing God – the God who revealed Himself to us, from the time of our fathers down to the present: the God of history. This we recite each day in the Creed – **but it is one thing to recite the Creed heartily, and another [merely] to parrot it, no?** I believe, I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe – **but do I believe what I am saying?** Is this a true confession of faith or is it something I say somehow by rote, because it is [the thing to say]? Do I believe only halfway? Confess the Faith! All of it, not part of it! Safeguard this faith, as it came to us, by way of tradition: the whole Faith! And how may I know that I confess the Faith well? There is a sign: he, who confesses the faith well – the whole Faith – has the capacity to worship God.



The other attitude is that of trusting: The man or woman who has faith relies on God: entrusts himself or herself to Him! Paul, in a dark time in his life, said, ‘I know well to whom I have entrusted myself.’ To God! To the Lord Jesus! Trusting [in God] is what leads us to hope. **Just as the confession of faith leads us to the worship and praise of God, so trust in God leads us to an attitude of hope.** There are many Christians with a hope too watered down, not strong: a faint hope. Why? Because they do not have the strength and the courage to trust in the Lord. But if we Christians believe confessing the faith, and safeguarding it, taking custody of the faith, and, entrusting ourselves to God, to the Lord, we shall be Christian victors- and this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith.”

4. Anointed priest or a 'greasy' one?

A true priest, anointed by God for His people, has a close relationship with Jesus. When that relationship is missing, the priest becomes “greasy,” an idolater, a worshiper of the “god Narcissus”, said Pope Francis on **Saturday, January 11.** [\(VIDEO\)](#)



The homily of Pope Francis was entirely dedicated to the priests. Commenting on the first letter of St. John, where he says “We have eternal life because we believe in the name of Jesus”, the Pope said “the strength of a priest is in this relationship with Jesus. When Jesus was growing in popularity, the Pope said, “He went to the Father,” He retreated “to a deserted place to pray.” This is a kind of “touchstone for

priests” he said: whether or not we seek to find Jesus. “What is the place of Jesus Christ in my priestly life? Is it a living relationship, from the disciple to the Master, from brother to brother, from the poor man to God, or is it a somewhat artificial relationship... that does not come from the heart?”

We are anointed by the Spirit, and **when a priest turns away from Jesus Christ he loses the anointment.** In his life, no: essentially he has it ... but loses it. And instead of being anointed ends up being ‘oily’. **And how much harm they do to the Church ... these greasy priests!** Those that put their strength in artificial things, in vanity, in an attitude ... in a cute language... **But, how many times we hear it being said with pain: 'But this is a butterfly-priest!' Because he is always in vanity ...** He does not have a relationship with Jesus Christ! He has lost the anointing ...he is unctuous.



We priests have many limitations, we are all sinners. But if we go to Jesus Christ, if we seek the Lord in prayer - intercessory prayer, the prayer of adoration - **we are good priests, even though we are sinners.** But if we turn away from Jesus Christ, we compensate for this with other mundane attitudes ... And so, all these figures ... even the **businessman-priest, the entrepreneur-priest...** But the priest who loves Jesus Christ, the priest who speaks with Jesus Christ, the priest who seeks Jesus Christ and he that lets you look for Jesus Christ: this is the centre of our lives. If this is not there, we lose everything. And then, what do you give to the people?



Our relationship with Jesus Christ, is a relationship of an anointed one for the people, which ought to grow in us priest more and more each day.

But it is good to find priests who have given their lives as priests, truly, of whom the people say: “Yes, he has a bad temper, he is this or he is that... But he is a priest! And people know! On the other hand, when people see idolater priests, so to speak, priests who instead of having

Jesus have little idols... worshippers of the god Narcissus... When people see [priests like this] they say ‘poor guy!’ The relationship with Jesus Christ saves us from worldliness and idolatry that makes us greasy, preserves us in the anointing [we have received] and a close relationship with Jesus Christ. And today, this is my hope for

you who have been kind enough to come here to concelebrate with me: Even if you lose everything in life, don't lose this relationship with Jesus Christ! This is your victory. Go forward with this!"

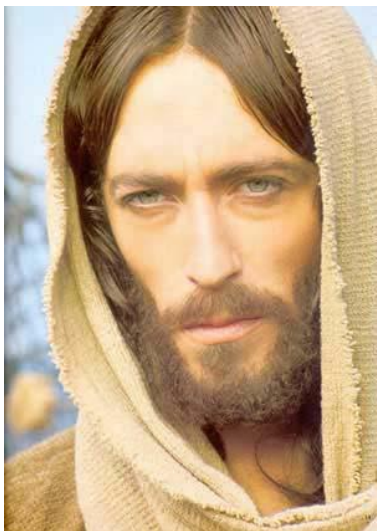
5. God's love makes whole our personal stories and heals all of history



God's love is good beyond comprehension. It repairs the damage caused by our sins and errors; it makes whole our personal stories after they have been broken by sin; it heals all of history." *This was the focus of Pope Francis in his homily at Mass on **Monday January 13**. The Holy Father concentrated his comments on the Gospel reading of the day, which was taken from the Gospel according to St Mark, which tells of Christ's calling of the disciples, Andrew, Simon (who would be called Peter), James and John.*

"It seems [in this passage] that Simon, Andrew, James and John are chosen once-and-for-all: [and] yes, they were chosen! At this moment [in the story], **however, they had not been faithful to the last**. After being chosen, they went on to make mistakes. They proposed un-Christian things to the Lord. They denied the Lord – Peter most glaringly, and the others out of fear: they were afraid and they ran away. They abandoned the Lord. **The Lord prepares** – and then, after the Resurrection – the Lord needed to continue this journey of preparation, up until the day of Pentecost. Even after Pentecost, some of [the disciples] – Peter, for example – made mistakes, and Paul had to correct him – but the Lord prepares.

When things are not going well, He gets Himself involved in history; he sorts the situation, and goes forward with us. Think of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, of that list: this one begets that one, and that one begets this one, and so on... In that story there are men and women who are sinners. How did the Lord [work it all out]? He stepped in, He straightened the path, He put things right. Think of the great David, a great sinner, and then a great saint. The Lord knows. When the Lord tells us, 'With eternal love, I have loved you,' He is referring to this. **The Lord has been thinking of us for many generations – of each and every one of us.**



The Lord awaits us in history and lovingly accompanies us through history. This is the love of God, who loves us forever, and never forsake us. We pray to the Lord, that we might know this tenderness of His heart. This is 'an act of faith,' – it is not easy to believe this:

Because our rationalism says, 'how is it that the Lord, who has so many people to think about, should think of me?' However, he has really prepared the way for me. With our mothers, our grandmothers, our fathers, our grandparents and great-grandparents ... That's what the Lord does. This is His love: real, eternal, and also 'customized' [Italian: artigianale]. We pray, asking for the grace to understand the love of God, but God's love can never be fully grasped! We can feel it, we [can even] weep for it, but [in this life] it cannot be understood. This also tells us how great this love is. **The Lord has been preparing us for some**

time; He walks with us, preparing others. He is always with us! Let us ask for the grace heartily to understand this great love.”

6. Christians are not legalists, and the Faith is not a burden

Commenting on the readings of the day, the Holy Father offered four models of the believer, with a view to



developing his reflection on the nature of Christian witness during mass on **Tuesday January 14**. Pope Francis spoke of Jesus, the scribes, Eli the priest, and his two priestly sons, who were priests as well. He said that the Gospel offers an example of Jesus’ own catechetical attitude: “The Lord taught as one who had authority – and not as the scribes, who, in their teaching and preaching, tended to bind people with many heavy burdens, and the poor people could not go on”

“It is Jesus himself who says that [the scribes] did not move these things even with a finger, right? And then He will say to people: ‘Do what they say but not what they do!’ [They are] incoherent people. It always seems – doesn’t it? – that these scribes and Pharisees are always beating on the [regular folks]. ‘You must do this, this and this...’ to the poor people. Jesus told them – told the **scribes and Pharisees** – that in this way, they closed the door to the Kingdom of Heaven, [as if to say], ‘You don’t let others enter, and so neither will you yourselves gain entrance.’ This is how some people teach, preach and witness the faith...and how many people out there think that the faith really is as they present it!”

In the First Reading, from the Book of Samuel, the figure of **Eli**, who disparages the humble lady who prays after the simple manner of the common people for the gift of a son, represents the ‘salesman’ or ‘manager’ of the faith – a tepid priest whose heart wasn’t really in it. “How many times do God’s people feel themselves unloved by those who ought to give witness: by Christians – by lay faithful, by priests, by bishops ... ‘But [these] poor bumpkins [Italian: “povera gente”] do not understand anything ... one needs to do a degree in theology to understand.’ Why, then, do I have some sympathy for this man, [Eli]? Because in his heart he still had the anointing, because when the woman explains her situation, Eli says, ‘Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant you what you asked for.’ The priestly anointing comes out in the end: he had hidden it inside his laziness, poor man, a lukewarm man, and it ends badly for him, poor fellow.”

Eli’s sons represent a **third model** of the witnessing believer. “They were brigands, they were priests, but [they were also] brigands, who chased after power and money. They exploited the people took advantage of alms, gifts – and the Lord punishes them powerfully. Eli’s sons are figures of the corrupt Christian – like Judas – who betrays Jesus.



Then, there is the **fourth model: Jesus himself**, who teaches with the power and authority of his own holiness, by being close to people – to sinners especially – pardoning the adulteress and talking theology with the Samaritan woman – seeking genuinely to heal people’s wounded hearts.

Let us ask the Lord that these two readings help us in our lives as Christians: all of us, each of us in his own place – [let us learn] not to be pure legalists, hypocrites like the scribes and Pharisees. Let us not be corrupt like the sons of Eli, nor to be lukewarm as Eli himself, but to be like Jesus, with that zeal to seek the people, heal

people, to love people, and with this to say: 'But if I do this tiny little thing, little as I am, think about how God loves you, think about how your Father is!' Let us ask for this grace.

7. Scandals happen when there is no true relationship with God

“Scandals in the Church happen because there is no living relationship with God and His Word. **Thus, corrupt priests, instead of giving the Bread of Life, give a poisoned meal to the holy people of God**” *that’s what Pope Francis affirmed in his homily **Thursday January 16.***

Commenting on the day’s reading and responsorial Psalm which recount the crushing defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines, the Pope notes that “the people of God at that time had forsaken the Lord. It was said that the Word of God was ‘uncommon’ at that time. The old priest Eli was ‘lukewarm’ and his sons were corrupt; they



*frightened the people and beat them with sticks. In their battle against the Philistines, the **Israelites brought with them the Ark of the Covenant, but as something ‘magical,’ ‘something external.’ And they are defeated.*** the Ark is taken from them by their enemies. There is no true faith in God, in His real presence in life...

"This passage of Scripture makes us think about what sort of relationship we have with God, with the Word of God. Is it a formal relationship? Is it a distant relationship? The Word of God enters into our hearts, changes our hearts. Does it have this power or not? Is it a formal relationship? But the heart is closed to that Word! It leads us to think of the so many defeats of the Church, so many defeats of God's people simply because they do not hear the Lord, do not seek the

Lord, do not allow themselves to be sought by the Lord! And then after a tragedy, the prayer, this one: ' But, Lord, what happened? You have made us the scorn of our neighbours... The scorn and derision of those around us... You have made us the laughing stock (Italian: favola) among nations! All the nations shake their heads about us..."

But are we ashamed? So many scandals that I do not want to mention individually, but all of us know...We know where they are! Scandals, some who charged a lot of money.... The shame of the Church! But are we all ashamed of those scandals, of those failings of priests, bishops, laity? Where was the Word of God in those scandals; where was the Word of God in those men and in those women? **They did not have a relationship with God!** They had a position in the Church, a position of power, even of comfort. But the Word of God, no! 'But, I wear a medal,' 'I carry the Cross ' ... Yes, just as those bore the Ark! Without the living relationship with God and the Word of God! I am reminded of the words of Jesus about those for whom scandals come ... And here the scandal hit: bringing decay (Italian: decadenza) to the people of God, including the weakness and corruption of the priests."



"Poor people! We do not give the Bread of Life to eat; we do give – in those cases - the bread of Truth! And many times, we even offer a poisoned meal! 'Awaken! Why do you sleep, Lord?' Let this be our prayer! 'Awaken! Do not reject us forever! Why do you hide Your face? Why do

You forget our affliction and oppression?' We ask the Lord that we never forget the Word of God, which is alive, so that it enters into our hearts and never to forget the holy people faithful to God who ask us to nourish and strengthen them. "

8. Do not 'sell' your dignity as God's children

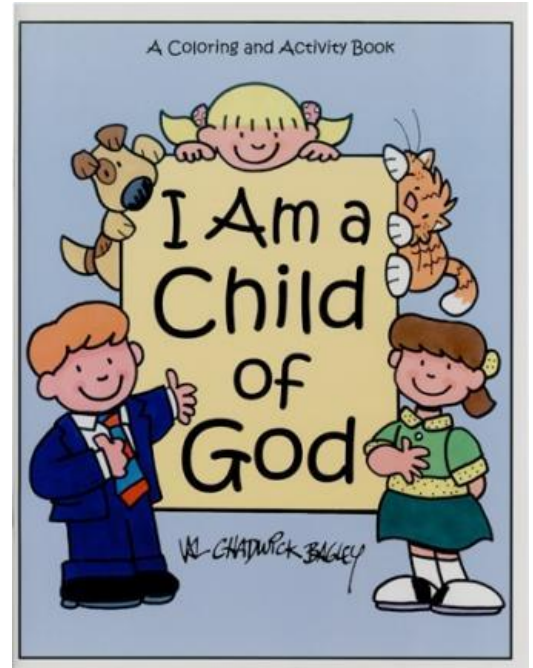


“We must not sell out the gift of being God’s children for a distorted sense of normality, which leads one to forget his word and to live as though God does not exist.” *These were the words of Pope Francis at Mass on Friday January 17.* As Christians, *Pope Francis said*, “we must actively strive against the normality of our everyday lives to remain faithful to God’s choosing. **We must not sell out to the temptation of worldliness, of living as if God didn’t exist.**” [\(VIDEO\)](#)

The temptation is of wanting to be ‘normal’, when in fact we are the children of God. That in essence is to ignore the Word of the Father, and chase only a human, ‘word of their desire,’ It is a certain way of **choosing to "sell" the gift of a predilection in order to plunge into a "worldly uniformity."** The Jews in the Old Testament had more than once undergone this sort of temptation, which is the focus of the episode proposed by the first reading today, taken from the First Book of Samuel. In it, the leaders of the people are demanding from Samuel himself, just then beyond his years, to appoint for them a new king, in fact claiming to govern themselves. By doing so, the people reject God. Not only do they don’t hear the Word of God, but reject it! And the sentence that reveals distance (between God and them), is the one uttered by the elders of Israel, “Give us a king to govern us” so that “we also may be like all the nations.” That is rejecting the Lord of love, rejecting the ‘election’ (being a chosen one) of God and seeking the path of worldliness, just like so many present day Christians.

The normality of the Christian life demands loyalty to his ‘election’ and not sell it to go towards some mundane uniformity. This is the temptation of the people, and ours too. Many times, we forget the Word of God, what the Lord tells us, and we take the words that are in fashion, no?, Even that of the soap opera is fashionable, Let us take that ! it's more fun! The apostasy is precisely the sin of breaking away from the Lord, but it is clear: The apostasy is clearly seen. **This is more dangerous than renouncing of Faith, the worldliness, because it is more subtle.**

It’s true that the Christian must be normal, as are normal people," but there are values that the Christian can not take for granted. The Christian must take upon himself the Word of God that says, 'You are my son, you are my chosen one, I am with you, I walk with you.' Let us resist the temptation then - as in the episode of the Bible - of being considered victims of ‘a certain inferiority complex’, and not to feel as ‘normal people’



The temptation comes and hardens the heart and when the heart is hard, when the heart is not open, the Word of God can not enter. Jesus said to the disciples of Emmaus: ' O foolish men, and slow of heart! '. They had a hard heart, they could not understand the Word of God. **Worldliness softens the heart, but it is evil. It is never a good thing - the soft heart! What is good is an open heart to the Word of God, the one who receives it.** As Mary, who

pondered all these things in her heart, says the Gospel. When we receive the Word of God we are not far away from the 'election'.

We ask then, the grace to overcome our selfishness: the selfishness of wanting to do something of my own, as I please. We ask for the grace to overcome them and ask for the grace of spiritual docility, to open our hearts to the Word of God unlike our brethren who have closed their hearts because they have turned away from God and for a long time, have not felt and have not understood the Word of God. The Lord gives us the grace of an open heart to receive the Word of God and meditate always.... and from there, to take the path of truth.



The Back Pew - Jeff Larson



When Susie recites the Lord's Prayer she liked to add her own personal touch.

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