

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

August 29, 2021

Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–8 • James 1:17–18, 21b–22, 27 • Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23

I.

Yesterday,

I was in Massachusetts to celebrate the Funeral Mass for my aunt.

Driving to and from the airport,

I remembered that I was close to Walden Pond, in Concord.

The transcendentalist poet and philosopher,
Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862),
lived for a time in the woods at Walden Pond.

He famously wrote that,

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately,
to front only the essential facts of life,
and see if I could not learn what it had to teach,
and not, when I came to die,
discover that I had not lived.

I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear;
nor did I wish to practise resignation,
unless it was quite necessary.

I wanted to live deep
and suck out all the marrow of life”
(*Walden: Or, Life in the Woods*, 1854).

Thoreau’s declaration is a summons, for all time, to be engaged in life,
to not to let events and opportunities pass us by.

II.

Today’s readings tell us that there are consequential decisions in daily life,
which make us who we are.

In the Second Reading, St. James exhorts us to,

“Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you
and is able to save your souls.”

That grace of God, which is meant to flourish,
can bring about tremendous good.

In the Gospel,
Jesus warns us that there is also a potential for evil within us:

“The things that come out from within are what defile.
From within people, from their hearts,
come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder,
adultery, greed, malice, deceit,
licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly.
All these evils come from within and they defile.”

We often say something like this:
“It’s what’s on the inside that counts.”

We mean that there is a part of who we are—a core—
that lies deeper than what can be immediately or superficially perceived.

It’s that inside that makes us who we are.

Who we become is the result of the choices we make each day:
either drawing closer to God,
or sliding toward sin.

As Sarah Connor says in the “The Terminator” franchise,
“There is no fate but what we make for ourselves.”

St. James says something similar:

“Be doers of the word and not hearers only,
deluding yourselves.”

If we haven’t yet experienced the power of God,
or if we’re in a spiritual rut,
or if we’re looking for greater meaning in life,
then practicing our faith more intently is the way forward.

“To live deliberately,” as Thoreau would have us do.

Some concrete recommendations for living the Catholic faith “deliberately”:

1. Don’t just come to Mass; pray the Mass.

Pray the Mass by participating fully:
singing, listening to the readings and prayers,
and making the responses attentively.

2. Pray daily for at least five minutes, allowing some time for silence.
3. Each day, read the Gospel for Sunday’s Mass
and ponder its meaning.
4. Confess one’s sins in the Sacrament of Penance
to experience the mercy of God.

Confessions are heard on Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m.

5. Participate in the parish’s monthly service project.

This weekend, we’re finishing up the clothing drive for the homeless
ministry at St. Peter’s Pro-Cathedral.

During September,
we’ll be counting steps to support the Cathedral’s sister parish in Haiti.

As we heard in the Second Reading,

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this:
to care for orphans and widows in their affliction
and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

These recommendations can become generous responses to God,
whose grace then bears fruit in our lives.

Thoreau urges us to ask the big questions in life,
and to seek the answers.

Those questions are answered by the choices we make each day.

Yesterday was the feast of the great St. Augustine of Hippo,
a towering figure in the Church's history.

He lived from 354 to 430 AD,
mostly in his native North Africa, in present-day Algeria.

Augustine led a wayward life as a young man,
but he never stopped asking the big questions, nor searching for answers.

Grace was always at work in him,
and his response to it led him to eventually accept Baptism.

In his famous autobiography, the *Confessions*,
Augustine described the power of God's grace at work in his life,
and which is at work in each person's life.

He responded to God's grace by going deeper, by "living deliberately":

"Urged to reflect upon myself,
I entered under your guidance into the inmost depth of my soul.
I was able to do so because *you were my helper*. ...
I sought a way to gain the strength which I needed to enjoy you.
But I did not find it until I embraced *the mediator between God and men,*
the man Christ Jesus...
He was calling me and saying: *I am the way of truth, I am the life.*"

Augustine's response to Christ—his decision to do so—changed his life:

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! ...
You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness.
You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness.
You breathed your fragrance on me;
I drew in breath and now I pant for you.
I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more.
You touched me, and I burned for your peace."

God's grace is at work—ready to flourish in our lives.