THE LIVING WORD OF THE SEASON AFTER PENTECOST

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE September 25 - October 1

PENTECOST

Proper 21

The Pursuit of Lasting Contentment

"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." So argued the 17th-century Christian philosopher, Blaise Pascal, and his provocative statement compels us to reflect on a central theme in this week's readings: contentment.

In the first half of the week, Jeremiah plunges us into the chaotic pursuit of human contentment apart from God. The sadly predictable result is broken hearts (Jer. 23:9-22) and false dreams (Jer. 23:23-32), yet those who are content in God — who "rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1) — receive a promise of fruitfulness, even in a harsh and distant land (Jer. 24:1-10). Our New Testament readings complement Jeremiah's bleakness and sorrow with invitations to strengthen our contentment in God. Paul provokes the Corinthians to give generously, trusting in God's sufficiency (2 Cor. 8:8-15). The Ephesians are redirected to a gift of divine grace that "made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Eph. 2:5). In Luke, Jesus cuts to the chase by making a vulnerable child the measure of true greatness — and contentment — in God's Kingdom (Luke 9:43-48).

On Sunday, Jeremiah's chaotic darkness is pierced with a ray of light when God tells the prophet to buy a plot of desolate and forsaken land. The only rationale for this otherwise worthless investment is Jeremiah's contentment in the God who declares: "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (Jer. 32:15). In 1 Timothy, Paul brings our theme to the surface by declaring, "there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment" (1 Tim. 6:6). Moreover, he points Timothy toward a path of lasting contentment that we all are invited to follow:

"pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11). This is how we "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12) until the manifestation of Christ to the world (1 Tim. 6:14). Our Sunday Gospel underscores this theme with a fiery parable about Lazarus and the Rich Man that is less about the afterlife and more about reliable sources of contentment in this life: "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them" (Luke 16:29).

The second half of the week continues strengthening our hope in the God whose promises preserve our lives (Psalm 119:49-56). In the face of overwhelming devastation, Jeremiah rehearses God's mighty deeds (Jer. 32:16-35) as a prelude to the day when God will reestablish His people and "give them singleness of heart and action" (Jer. 32:39), leading to contentment in God's never-failing love (Jer. 33:1-13).

As Jeremiah moves from darkness to light, our New Testament readings offer guardrails to keep our contentment from drifting. John the Seer cautions against worldly comforts that render faith lukewarm (Rev. 3:14-22). James intensifies the corrupting effects of luxuries that erode our contentment in God (James 5:1-6). In Matthew, Jesus leaves us with a haunting question: Is there anything we could not abandon to find our contentment in Him (Matt. 19:16-22)?

FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Jesus tells the story of a rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, who feasts every day without thought, while Lazarus, covered in sores, lies at his gate longing for crumbs. We know this story, and yet it unsettles us every time we hear it. Because if we are honest, we see ourselves somewhere in it.

Notice that Jesus never says the rich man was cruel. He didn't beat Lazarus, didn't throw him out, didn't shout insults. His sin was subtler: He simply didn't see. Day after day, the poor man was there at his gate, and day after day the rich man passed him by.

The tragedy is that the man had trained his eyes not to see, his heart not to feel.

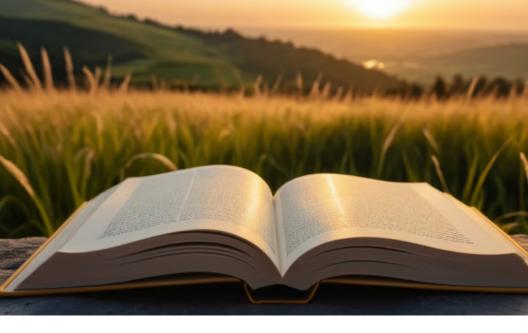
Psalm 146 reminds us where the living God directs His gaze: "The Lord watches over the foreigner, upholds the orphan and the widow ... but frustrates the way of the wicked." God's vision is not clouded. God sees Lazarus. God defends the vulnerable and sides with the forgotten.

This means the rich man's blindness was not just a moral failure—it was a failure to see reality as God sees it. He lived in a fantasy, a self-contained world of abundance and denial, until death exposed the truth.

The invitation for us, then, is to let our eyes be healed. To ask God to show us who is lying at our gate. To see the people our world teaches us not to notice—the hungry, the displaced, the elderly, the neighbor whose loneliness we've grown accustomed to ignoring.

This is what it means to live in the hope of Psalm 146: To praise the Lord by seeing as He sees, by trusting that His kingdom belongs not to the powerful, but to the poor in spirit.

Ask each day: "Who is lying at my gate?" And then—look until you see.



SCRIPTURE

READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Thursday

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; Jeremiah 23:9-22; 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

Friday

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; Jeremiah 23:23-32; Ephesians 2:1-10

Saturday

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; Jeremiah 24:1-10; Luke 9:43b-48

Sunday

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16; Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15; Amos 6:1a, 4-7; Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

Monday

Psalm 119:49-56; Jeremiah 32:16-35; Revelation 3:14-22

Tuesday

Psalm 119:49-56: Jeremiah 32:36-44: James 5:1-6

Wednesday

Psalm 119:49-56; Jeremiah 33:1-13; Matthew 19:16-22

Why do the daily readings begin on Thursday?

The daily readings for each week begin on Thursday and end on the following Wednesday. The Thursday through Saturday readings prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead. The Monday through Wednesday readings reflect on what was presented on Sunday.

The Morning Liturgy

Opening Scripture

The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.

Habakkuk 2:20

Opening Prayer (based on Psalm 51)

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim Your praise. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of Your saving help again and sustain me with Your bountiful Spirit. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

Amen.

Scripture Reading (read Psalm and Gospel text here)

Period of Silence

Confessing Our Faith (Apostles' Creed)

The Lord's Prayer

The Collect (Proper 21)

O God, You declare Your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of Your grace, that we, running to obtain Your promises, may become partakers of Your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

A Midday Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You said to Your apostles, "Peace I give to you; My own peace I leave with you:" Regard not our sins, but the faith of Your Church, and give to us the peace and unity of that heavenly City, where with the Father and the Holy Spirit You live and reign, now and forever.

Amen.

An Early Evening Prayer

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know You as You are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of Your love. *Amen.*

A Bedtime Confession and Prayer

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against Thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. But Thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, spare thou those who confess their faults, restore thou those who are penitent, according to Thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord; and grant, O most merciful Father, for His sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of Thy holy Name.

Amen.

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let Your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let Your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus

Christ our Lord. Amen.

