

Spiritually Speaking

Blessed are you: If you abide by Christ

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph

Last Sunday, we reflected on the call to Peter and the first apostles in the Lucan narration. Trusting in the words of Christ always impacts people's lives. The same idea runs through this Sunday's readings, as well. "Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose hope is in the Lord. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the streams: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought, it shows no distress, but still bears fruit." (Jer. 17:6-8). How often do we trust these scripture passages as Simon and his companions did? It calls us for a deeper trust and faith in the Lord. The church is gradually moving towards the season of lent. That calls us for a change of heart and mind. The main theme of lent will be repentance: and come back to the Lord.

The first reading and the Gospel of the day stress a similar theme dealing with cursed and blessed. Anyone who leaves the statutes of Christ and lives by worldly norms and designs is considered as cursed and the one who lives and moves according to the words of Christ is described as blessed. The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah pronounces it like this; "Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the Lord" (Jer.17:5). This verse doesn't require any more descriptions. It is very apt and touching words of the Messiah to return to Him if we have gone astray from Him.

The Gospel reading is from Luke (6:17, 20-26), which is described as the beatitudes according to Luke. I was reminded of one of the old stories I read some time back. A priest began his homily on this week's Gospel by asking for a show of hands from all in the congregation who would love to be poor, starving, weeping and hated by everybody. No hands went up. Then he asked who, on the contrary, would love to be rich, happy, joyful, wealthy, well-fed, laughing and well-spoken of in the community. All hands went up. A similar survey in any church would probably yield similar results. Yet Jesus in Luke declares a blessing on those who are poor, hungry, weeping and hated. To make sure we get the point, He goes on and explicitly pronounces a woe on those who are rich, well-fed, laughing and well-spoken of. What is happening here? Does Luke want us to understand that material poverty in itself is a sign of divine approval and material prosperity a sign of divine disapproval? Certainly, not!

Poverty in itself is not a blessing but an evil, a lack. In fact, all the qualifying factors mentioned in Luke's beatitudes -- poverty, hunger, weeping, hatred, rejection, reviling, defamation -- are all evils. These are things no good parents would want for their children. Neither would God want these things for us, God's children. How are we then to understand Luke's beatitudes? The key to Luke's beatitudes is to be found in an important clause which he adds at the end of the last beatitude: "on account of the Son of Man." What Luke is saying is that those who accept these evil conditions as the price that they have to pay for following Christ, are the blessed ones. Some knowledge of the social background of Luke's Gospel would help us here.

Luke wrote his Gospel at a time of terrible social and religious persecution taking place against the believers in Christ. It was so severe that anyone professing to be a follower of Christ knew for sure that he or she would be disowned by family, rejected by friends and excluded from the synagogue. One immediately lost one's birthright, free association and social relationship in the community. Even if one was a very rich person with lots of land and farms, the moment they declared their faith in Christ, they were automatically dispossessed and reduced to a state of stark poverty. But the love of Christ and His message attracted them and enabled them to go through all these difficulties and hardships; because they knew for themselves that the one who called them will never leave them. I was reminded of the beautiful words of St. Paul to the Philippians, "There is nothing I cannot do in the One who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).



Fr. Thankachan Joseph

Death Notices

Norma Rae French

Norma Rae French was born May 29, 1926, in Promise (Wallowa County), OR and died January 13, 2022, at Pioneer Memorial Nursing Home in Heppner, OR.

A joint funeral service for Norma and Raymond is planned for later this spring. Condolence messages may be sent to the Norma French

family, c/o Susan French, 84176 French Lane, Heppner, OR 97836.

Sweeney Mortuary of Heppner is in care of arrangements. The online condolence book is available at www.sweeneymortuary.com.

Her obituary was published in a previous issue of the G-T but was missing some information.

E. Leon Ball, 95, of Heppner, died Sunday, February 6, 2022, at Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner. He was born January 12, 1927, at Ione, OR. At his request no service will be held. Sweeney Mortuary of Heppner is in care of arrangements.

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Ryan Dee Neal

God has welcomed home an incredible son and brother, an amazing father and a great uncle, cousin and friend to so many others. Ryan Dee Neal, 40, passed away Tuesday January 18, 2022, at Providence St. Vincent, Portland, OR due to COVID complications.

Ryan was born September 30, 1981, in Clarkston, WA to Gary and Kathy Neal. At 7-1/2 years younger than sister Rochelle, his mission as a brother was to tease and love her as much as possible. The family lived in Clarkston until the second half of Ryan's third grade year when his father accepted a position in Boardman. On his first day of school there Ryan was immediately welcomed by his classmates. A tight knit group of friends bonded together and to this day, "The Boardman Boys" keep in touch on a regular basis. Ryan had not just his own family, but his friend's families became his as well.

Ryan loved and participated in many sports -- football in middle school, baseball until high school, and he lettered in golf and basketball. The highlight of his senior year at Riverside High School was the basketball team's third place finish at state with Ryan and all his many close friends playing together. Golf continued to be a huge part of Ryan's adult life. Ryan had just recently retired the Walla Walla Community College golf bag he received as a member of their golf team.

"We have many happy memories with Ryan. Lots of family time tubing and boarding on the river, snow skiing, family reunions, times when he tagged along with his dad to meetings and conferences and too many others to list. Some of our most special memories are from our trips in the car with Ryan. Those living in eastern Oregon and small towns will understand. Our family spent a large part of our days on the road -- to shop, to play sports, to go to movies, to do so many things. We feel blessed to have shared those times with him," reported his family.

After high school graduation Ryan attended the University of Portland, Walla Walla Community College, and graduated with a business management degree from Oregon State University in 2004. He was proud to be a Beaver alumnus. Ryan loved his time and professors in the OSU business department. They thought highly enough of Ryan that he was asked to give campus tours to potential incoming professors. The family has heard from so many how smart Ryan was. His friends on campus noticed too. They lamented that they studied for days

before an exam, yet Ryan would study for two hours the night before and ace it. Ryan connected with his future wife Sonja during this time. Sonja lived in Irrigon, the town closest to Boardman, but they did not know each other well until their college years.

Immediately upon college graduation, Ryan went to work for Knight Transportation, working his way up to operations manager and west coast marketing manager. Ryan and Sonja were living in Manteca, CA when Ryan accepted the position in 2012 as Director of Operations for Haney Truck Lines in Yakima, WA. While living in Yakima, the forever love of Ryan's life, Ari Dee Neal, was born. Ryan and Ari's love for each other was like no other. Every possible moment was spent together enjoying everything from swimming to hot tubbing, movies, golf, visiting Coeur d'Alene, and most of all, snuggling together on the couch.

In 2014 Marten Transportation lured Ryan away from Haney Truck Lines when he became their area sales director for the Pacific Northwest region. When the Port of Morrow established a freezer warehouse operation in his hometown of Boardman, Ryan and Sonja were thrilled at the chance to come home to raise their son in the town they loved. Ryan was hired in 2015 as operations manager and the family moved to Boardman. In October 2018, after an extensive search and interview process, the Port of Morrow hired Ryan as their Executive Director/CEO.

Ryan's love for his community and desire to help it continue to be an amazing place to work and raise a family was endless. His hand can be seen in many ways, from the directional signs around town to the refresh and transformation of Willow Run Golf Course into the Marker 40 Golf Course. Ryan was a valued member of many organizations and committees -- Kiwanis, Boardman Chamber, Boardman Community Development Association, Intermountain Education Service District and others.

Many, many people have reached out to Ryan's family to share their stories about Ryan and the positive influence he was in their lives. "He had a huge heart, cared deeply and mattered so much to so many. Knowing how Ryan touched others is helping his family as they grieve. The world is a better place because of him, he will be missed deeply and remembered always."

Ryan is survived by his parents, Gary and Kathy; son, Ari; Sonja; sister, Rochelle (Tim) and their children, Grandpa and Grandma Olson; uncles. Scott, Mike,



Ryan Dee Neal

Dale, Keith and Ken and their children; the close-knit Hancock cousins who were a huge part of his life -- Bill, David, Robert, Robin and Gail and their children, and his much-loved brothers, "The Boardman Boys." Ryan was met in heaven by his beloved Grandpa and Grandma Neal, Uncle Edd, Uncle Leo, Grandpa and Grandma Hancock and Aunt Karen.

"The family appreciates the Morrow County EMT's and ambulance crew, the Boardman fire chief and crew, the emergency room staff at Good Shepherd Hospital, the Life Flight crew, and the intensive care unit doctors and nurses at Providence St. Vincent. Every one of them worked so hard to keep Ryan with us," his family stated.

The family has been asked if memorial contributions can be made. A Ryan Neal Memorial Fund has been established through Boardman Community De-

velopment Association, PO Box 229, Boardman, OR 97818. Ryan had been working hard to establish a Morrow County Scholarship endowment fund so that all Morrow County graduates would receive a scholarship to be used for higher education. He was also working with other community members to reestablish the RHS golf team as well as a youth golf program. Memorial funds would go towards these efforts and other community needs as they arise.

Due to COVID restrictions no services will be held at this time. Plans are to hold a celebration of life at Marker 40 Golf Course after the weather warms up. Details will be publicized at that time.

Sweeney Mortuary of Heppner is in care of arrangements. The online condolence book is available at www.sweeneymortuary.com.

Betty Louise Wilhelm

Betty Louise Wilhelm, 90, of Heppner, died Sunday, January 30, 2022, at Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner. At her request no service will be held. She was born October 2, 1931, at Holley, OR, the daughter of Vincent and Louisa Paddock.

Betty married James Wilhelm August 13, 1951, and the couple had four boys, Joseph, Gary, Jimmy and Ronald and raised them in Heppner.

Betty had been a caretaker all her life. From babysitting as a young girl, working in hospitals, cooking on ranches, raising her boys and several other children throughout the community, taking care of loved ones when they fell ill, running an adult foster home, taking care of the elderly and raising grandkids, even a couple great grandkids.

She not only loved caring for people but also several animals throughout her life. Yorkies were her favorite and she cared for them like they were her

children. The deer around Heppner were her deer and she found great joy in feeding them.

Betty had a huge heart and would give her last dollar to someone in need. Her sense of humor was about as big as her heart and if you knew her you knew she was a jokester. She loved to make people laugh and she was good at it. She loved her family, and her legacy will go on through them.

Betty is survived by her three sons, Gary Wilhelm (Crystal) of Prineville, Jimmy Wilhelm (Angela) of Heppner, Ronald Wilhelm (Linda) of Lexington; 10 grandchildren; 18 great grandchildren and one great-great granddaughter.

She is preceded in death by her husband, James; her son, Joseph; parents, Vincent and Louisa, three brothers; three sisters and two grandsons.

Sweeney Mortuary of Heppner is in care of arrangements. The online condolence book is available at www.sweeneymortuary.com.

Justice Court Report

Morrow County Justice of the Peace, Glen Diehl, has released the following Justice Court report:

-Kevin L. Mudge, 44, Heppner, was convicted of driving while suspended, fine \$440.

-Rita J. Martin, 39, Heppner, was convicted of dog as a public nuisance (at large), fine \$265.

-Melissa K. Martin, 23, Heppner, was convicted of dog as a public nuisance (at large), fine \$265.

Ione Community Church
 470 E Main Street,
 Ione, Oregon
 Church School & Adult Study at 10:00 am
 Worship at 11:00 AM

"You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."
 -Jeremiah 29:13
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