minimalists about the effort we invest. Jesus praises the man who looks out for his best interests with all the ingenuity at his disposal. Then he criticizes his friends for failing to be ambitious with half this show of zeal.

If virtues were dollars, how wealthy would you be? If prayers were coins, would you have amassed a fortune yet? If kind words were cash, what would be in your piggy bank at the end of each day? If an automatic payment were made to your bank account every time you forgave someone a slight or an injury, would you be well on your way to a retirement home in kingdom come?

LENTEN PRAYER
Woe to the complacent in Zion!

We all cherish those hours when we can stretch out, enjoy a meal, listen to some music, and relax. It can seem annoying if Amos, a prophet with a dark mood, wants to spoil one of those truly delicious times with his bad-tempered accusations. Isn’t it all right to enjoy some sweet downtime without all of this pious finger pointing?

Our personal comfort isn’t the problem Amos sees in this scenario. It’s the terrible want of others that our complacency fails to address. Hard-working people raise the lament: How can you allow us to be born healthy, raised by stay-together parents, attend good schools, or grow up in a country of opportunity. We all have good reason to be grateful, generous, and just.

How can you share the comfort you enjoy with someone else today?

LEPTONARY 126C
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING
AMOS 6:1A, 4–7

Problem Amos sees in this scenario. The wealthiest are richer than ever in this our country, we keep hearing. According to a Pew Research Center Report, upper-income families are seven times richer than middle-class ones—a gap twice as wide as in 1995. The means of poor families are seventy times smaller than the wealthiest. The top 1 percent of Americans hold more wealth than the 90 percent at the bottom. This makes our country the fourth most uneven in income distribution globally. Only Chile, Mexico, and Turkey are in worse straits.

The wealth gap doesn’t measure the value of persons, only of what’s in their pockets. But social unrest and deep frustration arises when communities or regions feel the deck is stacked against them and in someone else’s favor. In gospel terms, the rich man better start caring about Lazarus. The time to listen to the warning is now.

What properties would you need to acquire to “win”?

LEPTONARY 126C
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

SECOND READING
1 TIMOTHY 6:11–16

But you, man of God, compete well for the faith.

It helps to talk to people in terms they understand. Some folks respond to poetry, others to movie references, and still others to the Dow Jones Industrial Average. And a lot of people—from the time of early Greece to last I checked—peck up and pay attention when you make a sports analogy. St. Paul, living in the Greco-Roman world, makes a lot of sports comparisons for this reason. His society was wild about competition. Paul urges his younger associate Timothy to compete in the realm of the spirit with the diligence and energy he might employ in an Olympic contest. What if we all pole-vaulted for peace? Jumped for justice? Raced for reconciliation? Dived into the ocean for the faith.

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What does your parish or community do to bridge the gap?

SECOND READING
LUKE 14:19–31

“But between you and us is a great chasm to prevent anyone from crossing.”

The wealth gap is larger than ever in this our country, we keep hearing. According to a Pew Research Center Report, upper-income families are seven times richer than middle-class ones—a gap twice as wide as in 1995. The means of poor families are seventy times smaller than the wealthiest. The top 1 percent of Americans hold more wealth than the 90 percent at the bottom. This makes our country the fourth most uneven in income distribution globally. Only Chile, Mexico, and Turkey are in worse straits.

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What does bring you to the sensation of awe and wonder, and a recognition of divine presence?

GOSPEL
LUKE 14:1–14

“Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place.”

It may be easy for us to give up the larger portion of cake to a friend or the place of honor at the table to an aging parent. We may surrender the remote to our spouse and offer deference to the boss, pastor, or team leader. It’s a little more challenging to make the humble choice our first choice in every circumstance, especially in those situations in which we, frankly, might feel we deserve a little respect and appreciation. Or when the person taking the seat of honor is not someone we honor very much at all. Fact is, humility doesn’t serve us well in our society. You have to be aggressive, self-promoting, and rooting your own horn manically to get ahead. You have to be the president of your own fan club to be elected or admired. Humility is only useful if the goal is wisdom and spiritual growth. Where are we headed: to the top or to the bottom?

Imagine your life like a spiritual Monopoly board. What properties would you need to acquire to “win”?

SECOND READING
LUKE 16:1–19, 22–24A

You have approached the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels, and God the judge of all….

What doesn’t take to make us bend a knee? Granted, some older knees don’t literally bend at all anymore. But we can all “take a knee” in our hearts before that which is greater than us and enable us to rightly assess our actions and our dependence.

The writer of Hebrews does his best to evoke a scene so full of glorious images that his audience would fall on their knees spontaneously: the Temple Mount, God’s celestial city, legions of angels, bastaions of resurrected souls, Almighty God, the saints, Jesus crucified, and the blood of martyrs everywhere? Are we on our knees yet? And not only. May we’ve been over-wowed by cinematic special effects and technological genius so that heavenly hosts are rather ho-hum. What would it take to get you or me to confess our limits and to pledge our trust in God alone?

What does bring you to the sensation of awe and wonder, and a recognition of divine presence?
SECOND READING
PHILEMON 9-10
I am sending Onesimus, that is, my own heart, back to you.

Gospel
LUKE 14:23-35
"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

Gospel
LUKE 14:12-17
I have been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief.

SECOND READING
1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17
Have I been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief.

Today's a good day for compassion lessons, since it's Cathechetical Sunday. Many parishes celebrate their religion teachers on this weekend. It's also a moment to acknowledge parents who bring up their children in the faith by the example of their own fidelity to prayer, worship, and Christian living. Maybe it's a good time to consider the role playing lessons in every one of our lives. We surely act out of ignorance, as Paul says, if we stop matur- ing in understanding when we age out of formal religious education after receiving Confirmation. How do we keep the fire of learning burning as adults? Saints like Paul made frequent course corrections as they navigated the path of faith. At the end of his life, even the great theologian Thomas Aquinas wondered if anything he'd writ- ten about God was rubbish. The only cure for ignorance is to keep learning.

What steps do you take to ensure that you continue to grow in understanding?

Gospel
LUKE 16:1-12
Tax collectors and sinners drew near to listen, but the Pharisees and scribes complained.

Ask the average churchgoer to name a parable, and chances are they'll say the Prodigal Son. It's famous because it's outrageous all the way around: the

September 22
IN MONEY WE TRUST?

FIRST READING
AMOS 8:4-7
"We will diminish the ephah, add to the shekel, and fix our scales for cheating!"

Money is essential for survival in the modern world. Barter just won't cut these days. And charity is something few of us want to depend on. While we may ourselves be compassionate and generous people, we don't re- lish the being the one for whom compassion and generosity is necessary. Our dignity in large part depends on being able to pull our own weight and actually make a contribution. Earning money enables us to do that.

We're often rather negative about money, buying and selling, and the gathering of wealth in general. The prophets routinely go after the person sitting on a pile of it, appreciating human nature too well. If the acquisition of wealth is the primary goal, then other considerations—quality, fairness, justice, virtue—must take a back seat or be ejected from the vehicle altogether. Money is a means, but it must never be the end.

On your list of top ten priorities, does anyone “unforgiveable”?

SECOND READING
1 TIMOTHY 2:1-8
I ask that prayers be offered for all in authority, that we may lead a tranquil life.

We're encouraged to pray for our leaders. We pray for those we admire and elect, and twice as hard for those we suspect and vote against. We pray for leaders we don't get a choice about at all: popes, pastors, principals, police officers, parents. And we do all this because much depends on the people in power. They hold the reins of authority over decisions that affect the public welfare and the peace.

What do we expect to gain from our prayers? Perhaps a groundswell of supplication will actually turn a faulty leader's heart toward the common good. Just as likely the act of prayer may change our hearts, so that we're less hard and impatient, more willing to collaborate or listen. Prayer is, in the end, a surrendering of all authority to God. We might even pray that God will raise up the leaders our future dearly needs.

SECOND READING
1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17
I have been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief.

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September 8

BIG PRICE TAGS

FIRST READING
WISDOM 9:13-18
The corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind.

We worry about our health and our homes an awful lot. At church each week, the two most common topics at coffee-and-donuts are the latest doctor report and the much needed home repair. Certainly we should be concerned about the condition of our bodies (perhaps a few less donuts would help). And if the roof is leaking or the furnace isn’t working, we can’t afford not to respond to these situations.

As a big price tag as we pay for medi- cal and home care, the cost of maintain- ing what’s not corruptible is even higher. We invest our time and attention in prayer and worship. We bring cans for the food basket, write checks for recent disaster victims. We vigorously examine our consciences for selfish habits and responses that lack integrity. We confess our sins, ask for mercy, offer forgiveness, and demand justice until everyone is safe and no one is in need.

» What does your faith cost you in the average week? Is it enough?

SECOND READING
PHILEMON 9-10
I am sending Onesimus, that is, my own heart, back to you.

If you value brevity and concise ideas, you probably aren’t keen on reading the letters of Paul. Which makes the Letter to Philemon something of a prize. At only twenty-five verses, it’s the shortest and sweetest of Paul’s letters. It’s also the most personal, since Paul directs his remarks not to an entire assembly of believers but to one fellow in particular. Philemon, it seems, is master of the fate of Onesimus. Onesimus has become to Paul, in his imprisonment, a beloved son. Let the drama ensue.

We’re left with many unanswered questions. Will Philemon free Onesimus from servitude? Will Onesimus return to Paul’s side? Will the dilemma of masters and slaves in Christian households be altered in light of Paul’s singular plea for this one dear person?

What does it take for Christians to embrace the ways of Christ over culture?

» How do you personally feel challenged in conflicts between Christ and our present culture?

SECOND READING
LUKE 14:25-33
“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

Some shoulder light loads that are easily carried, while others bear bigger burdens. The diagnosis at the doctor’s office that changes the very metric of our lives: that’s a sobering hour to live past. If the roof really is falling in and there’s no money to fix it, we’re paralyzed as to how to proceed. The addictions of adult children, the unemployability of a spouse, the persistent memories of old injuries that echo into the present are real obstacles to happiness. We all carry crosses even if others can’t see them.

Still we follow after Jesus. The Way of the Cross is among the most popular devotions for a reason, as we stagger and fall and get up and continue. We’re judged and betrayed, stripped and aban- doned, then offered unexpected kind- nesses along the way. Death is at the end of this path, and more. We journey for- ward together, believing in that “more.”

» Reflect on your personal crosses. Who or what makes it possible to carry them?

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» What steps do you take to ensure that you continue to grow in understanding?

GOSPEL
LUKE 16:1-32
Tax collectors and sinners drew near to listen, but the Pharisees and scribes complained.

Ask the average churchgoer to name a parable, and chances are they’ll say the Prodigal Son. It’s famous because it’s outrageous all the way around. The remarkably foolish younger son, the deeply scornful older son, and the astonishingly loving father. The scene is so full of colorful characters that we may fail to observe anyone else in the picture. But actually, some very significant others inhabit the space around Jesus as he tells this story. First there are the undesirables— tax collectors and sinners—who stand in rap-tant attention at the many stories Jesus tells about God’s eagerness to receive us home. Other characters are the presumed righteous in the crowds—the Pharisees and scribes. They “don’t listen,” they complain and object. Those who object to God’s compassion for those who need it may be surprised to discover that divine mercy does have limits—for them.

» Who is hardest to forgive? Is anyone “unforgivable”?

September 15

MOSEYING TOWARD COMPASSION

FIRST READING
EXODUS 32:7-11, 13-14
Why, O Lord, should your wrath blaze up against your own people?

There’s no question the community has bungled this one royally. Moses is hardly gone a few days on the holy mountain Sinai before the people clamor for a new focus of their allegiance. Moses and his secret invisible God won’t do. It’s a grand god and great like the other nations! Aaron, newly minted high priest and brother of Moses, readily commits to the plan. Meanwhile God, fully aware of the golden calf, informs Moses there’s a new plan on the divine side of the equation too. God will wipe out this faithless nation and start again with Moses and his offspring. It’s the only one and only chance Moses even gets to create a dynasty with his two sons. But it’s an opportunity he instantly rejects. God has made a promise; Moses intends to keep it. This isn’t exactly an argument for compassion, but it’s a step in the right direction.

» Are you willing to exercise compassion even if you don’t feel it? How is compassion more than a feeling?

SECOND READING
1 TIMOTHY 2:1-8
I ask that prayers be offered for all in authority, that we may lead a tranquil life.

We’re encouraged to pray for our leaders. We pray for those we admire and elect, and twice as hard for those we suspect and vote against. We pray for leaders we don’t get a choice about at all: popes, pastors, principals, police officers, parents. And we do all this because much depends on the people in power. They hold the reins of authority over decisions that affect the public welfare and the peace.

What do we expect to gain from our prayers? Perhaps a groundswell of supplication will actually turn a faulty leader’s heart toward the common good. Just as likely the act of prayer may change our hearts, so that we’re less hard and impatient, more willing to collaborate or listen. Prayer is, in the end, a surrendering of all authority to God. We might even pray that God will raise up the leaders our future dearly needs.

» How often do you include world, Church, or civic leaders in your prayers? How do you determine what to pray for?

GOSPEL
LUKE 16:17-33
“For the children of this world are more prudent than the children of light.”

Those looking to save or make a buck are always on the prowl for a good deal or a great opportunity. Those who profess their allegiance to the kingdom of God... Well, let’s just say we tend to be...
September 29 | TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

**FIRST READING**

AMOS 6:1A, 4–7

Woe to the complacent in Zion!

We all cherish those hours when we can stretch out, enjoy a meal, listen to some music, and relax. It can seem annoying that Amos, a prophet with a dark mood, wants to spoil one of those truly delicious times with his bad tempered accusations. Isn’t it all right to enjoy some sweet downtime without all of this pious finger pointing?

Our personal comfort isn’t the problem Amos sees in this scenario. It’s the terrible want of others that our complacency fails to address. Hard-earned our happy hour; don’t we deserve some sweet downtime without all of this? Accusations. Isn’t it all right to enjoy some sweet downtime without all of this? Earned our happy hour; don’t we deserve some sweet downtime without all of this? The wealth gap is larger than ever in this country, we keep hearing. According to a Pew Research Center Report, upper-income families are seven times richer than middle class ones—a gap twice as wide as in 1995. The means of poorer families are seventy times smaller than the wealthiest. The top .1 percent of Americans hold more wealth than the 90 percent at the bottom. This makes our country the fourth most unequal in income distribution globally. Only Chile, Mexico, and Turkey are in worse straits. The wealth gap doesn’t measure the value of persons, only of what’s in their pockets. But social unrest and deep frustration arises when communities or regions feel the deck is stacked against them and in someone else’s favor. In gospel terms, the rich man better start caring about Lazarus. The time to listen to the warning is now.

**SECOND READING**

1 TIMOTHY 6:1–16

But you, man of God, compete well for the faith.

It helps to talk to people in terms they understand. Some folks like poetry, others to move references, and still others the Dick Tracy Industrial Average. And a lot of people—from the time of early Greece to last I checked—pecks up and pays attention when you make a sports analogy. St. Paul living in the Greco-Roman world, makes a lot of sports comparisons for this reason. His society was wild about competition. Paul urges his younger associate Timothy to compete in the realm of the spirit with the diligence and energy he might employ in an Olympic contest. What if we alligned ourselves for peace and justice; hungered for victory. Raced for reconciliation. Fought down the field for the peace we want. But just in case you’re not a sports fan, let me put it to you this way: be passionate about what you value most. The stakes have never been higher.

**GOSPEL**

LUKE 19:19–31

“Between you and us is a great chasm to prevent anyone from crossing.”

The wealth gap is larger than ever in this country, we keep hearing. According to a Pew Research Center Report, upper-income families are seven times richer than middle class ones—a gap twice as wide as in 1995. The means of poorer families are seventy times smaller than the wealthiest. The top .1 percent of Americans hold more wealth than the 90 percent at the bottom. This makes our country the fourth most unequal in income distribution globally. Only Chile, Mexico, and Turkey are in worse straits. The wealth gap doesn’t measure the value of persons, only of what’s in their pockets. But social unrest and deep frustration arises when communities or regions feel the deck is stacked against them and in someone else’s favor. In gospel terms, the rich man better start caring about Lazarus. The time to listen to the warning is now.

**LET US PRAY...**

Generous God, you have given each of us gifts in abundance. We thank you for home and belonging, food and nourishment, warmth and comfort. Bless us with the spirit of generosity in turn, so that all the world will find a blessing in your Church. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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