

THURSDAY, October 22

Ecclesiasticus 10:9. How can dust and ashes be proud? Even in life the human body decays.

Ps 37:1-18 * 37:19-42 | Ecclesiasticus 10:1-18 | Revelation 9:1-12 | Luke 10:25-37

Modern science tells us that our skin cells last a mere three weeks; colon cells survive only four days. In contrast, brain cells usually last a lifetime.

How does such scientific knowledge connect with the spiritual life? This verse ponders how dust and ashes can be proud. In today's language, we might wonder how atoms and cells in one human body can think of themselves as any better than atoms and cells in another human body, or animal, or cactus, or stone, or tree.

The constant turnover of cells in our bodies reveals that we are indeed what we eat. I would further extrapolate that we are what we breathe, sing, and pray. While we have learned much about the physical world, there is so much we don't know about the workings of the spirit. Let us humbly give thanks to God for both our bodies and our spirits.

PRAY for the Dioceses of Ngbo and Jalingo (both of Nigeria) and Antananarivo (Indian Ocean)

MOVING FORWARD: Do a little research on Ecclesiasticus (also called Sirach). Why do you think this book is important for us to read?

THURSDAY October 29

James and his Companions

Psalm 50:24. Whoever offers me the sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me; but to those who keep in my way will I show the salvation of God.

Ps 50 * [59, 60] or 103 | Ecclesiasticus 31:12-18,25—32:2
Revelation 12:7-17 | Luke 11:53—12:12

Consider which of your friendships are sincerely relational, as opposed to merely transactional. Do you have deep discussions, wrestle with challenging ideas and issues, struggle to discern a way forward together—or do you chat about the latest trends and bemoan what other people are doing?

A sacrifice is meant to acknowledge that all of who and what we are comes from God. Ideally, we offer portions of our time and our treasure in thanks to God because we

believe that all we have belongs to God anyway. The best of what we have is what we offer back, because God has offered the best to us.

Over time, however, this kind of sacrifice can become transactional—and this grieves God’s heart. God wants relational interactions—heart-to-heart talks—full of thanks and praise.

PRAY for the Dioceses of Nimule (South Sudan), Arkansas, and Jerusalem (Israel)

MOVING FORWARD: How might you express the importance of your relationship with God to God in prayer or action, today?

THURSDAY, November 5

Revelation 16:13. And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet.

Psalms [70], 71 * 74 | Ecclesiasticus 44:1-15 | Revelation 16:12-21 | Luke 13:18-30
What in the world? Despite spending half my life studying scripture, preaching, and teaching, I frequently ask this question when I read some passages from the Bible. Revelation, which we will read throughout this month, gives rise to many of these moments.

Taken as a whole, Revelation builds a vivid and visceral universe, delightful and sometimes frightening. When we break Revelation up into bite-size readings in the Daily Office, the reality is more likely to breakthrough. We peek into this land of slouching beasts and ask: Wait, what?

Revelation describes signs of endings all around us. Dragon mouth frogs, wars, and rumors of wars—this is how we grapple with our anxieties about the unknown. And in the midst of it all, our Lord offers these words of comfort to us: Be not afraid.

MOVING FORWARD: Reach out to a friend who may need a little extra love.

THURSDAY, November 12

James 1:2-4. My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith

produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

Ps [83], or 23, 27 * 85, 86 | Joel 2:21-27 | James 1:1-15 | Luke 15:1-2, 11-32

I rarely mistake trials for joy, and I have never thought the key to being complete might be more suffering. I pray for the patience of the saints but live in the reality that I am often whatever the opposite of gracious is.

I admire long-distance runners and hold them in the lofty regard one affords the holiest of people. Despite all my efforts, I've never managed to become one of them, with their long limbs and slow heart rates. Running marathons—and enjoying them—is the epitome of endurance. So, this exhortation from James to enjoy our spiritual marathons can feel like an impossible goal.

I have had tests of faith: losses, disappointments, regrets. If there are marathons of failure, I have won my share. Through it all, my faith in God has carried me—it has brought me across each finish line and eventually back to wholeness. Such endurance is more common than we imagine. Everyone around us carries their own secret marathons of the heart. May God give us joy in the journey.

MOVING FORWARD: How do you celebrate joy in your journey? Has your way of celebrating varied with age or experience?

THURSDAY, November 19

Psalms 105:4-5. Search for the Lord and his strength; continually seek his face. Remember the marvels he has done, his wonders and the judgements of his mouth.

Ps 105:1-22 * 105:23-45 | Malachi 2:1-16 | James 4:13—5:6 | Luke 17:20-37

I met my first spiritual director in seminary. She was a nun, a founding member of an Episcopal order. I went to her—at first—because I was hoping she could teach me how to be holy. She did this by modeling her own sort of holiness during our conversations in her patience and gentleness with my angst over not knowing everything yet.

Mostly, she taught me how to pray, how to simply talk to God without ceasing. “When you wake up in the morning, say ‘Good Morning, God!’ Really mean it. At first, it will feel silly, but if you stick with it, you won’t stop seeing and feeling God all around you.” She was right. I did feel silly. But eventually, this practice became second nature, a way

of being present with God all day long.

MOVING FORWARD: Write yourself a sticky note that says, “Good Morning, God!” Stick this note on your bathroom mirror and follow the instructions.

THURSDAY, November 26

Thanksgiving Day (USA)

Luke 17:14-16. And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.

Ps 65 | Deuteronomy 8:7-18 | 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 | Luke 17:11-19

Author Anne Lamott says there are only three prayers in life: help, thanks, and wow. Our catechism outlines seven: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition. As a parish priest, I have the privilege of praying for and with other people often. Of the seven principal types, thanksgiving is the one that we are most likely to forget.

Petition and intercession often crowd out the rest, so a practice I have found helpful in my own prayer life is to try to offer one ‘thanks’ for every ‘help.’ This helps me match my petitions evenly with gratitude. When I pray this way, I am able to appreciate all the blessings already in my life.

Whether you are gathering with friends and family today to celebrate or you’re at work, caring for others, or on your own, my prayer for you is that your prayers of “thanks” always outnumber your prayers of “help!”

MOVING FORWARD: Share your own “help,” “thanks,” and “wow” with your family and friends today.

THURSDAY, December 3

Isaiah 2:17. The haughtiness of people shall be humbled, and the pride of everyone brought low; and the Lord alone will be exalted on that day.

Ps 18:1-20 * 18:21-50 | Isaiah 2:12-22 | 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 | Luke 20:27-40

Pixar Animation’s beloved movie Cars gives us an excellent example of how pride can become a barrier to relationships and personal development.

After being thrust into community service for his

destructive actions, the arrogant race car Lightning McQueen befriends a gang of misfits, including Doc Hudson, a three-time championship-winning racer known as “The Fabulous Hornet Hudson.”

Through Doc’s mentorship and the comradery of the other vehicles, Lightning McQueen’s haughtiness is humbled. No trophy is worth more than the love and friendship of Lightning’s friends.

Once he returns to the racetrack, he realizes his superiority is gone. During the race, Lightning witnesses a fellow car (not a friendly one) knock out a rival. Everyone in the crowd watches as Lightning McQueen goes after the wounded vehicle—and they cross the finish line together. Isaiah wants us to see that pride will be demolished. Winning means we all finish together.

MOVING FORWARD: Find time to watch one of the Cars movies this week. See if you can see the lessons about pride in it, too.

THURSDAY, December 10

Thomas Merton

2 Thessalonians 2:3. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction.

Ps 37:1-18 * 37:19-42 | Isaiah 7:1-9 | 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 | Luke 22:1-13

I decided to change my internet plan and contacted a company. They transferred me to the financial department—or so I thought.

The operator told me they were offering several premium options. I excitedly took one that seemed like a good fit and set up the payments. He advised me to wait a few days for a confirmation email before canceling my previous plan.

No confirmation email came, so I contacted the service provider again. A different operator told me the service had made no such offers and that a scam service had answered my call. I panicked. However, this kind soul talked to me and explained that I wasn’t the only one who’d been had by these scammers. My money was reimbursed, and I returned to my regular plan.

I’m grateful for the hard lesson I learned about being deceived—and for the kind friend of God who helped make things right.

MOVING FORWARD: When have you been able to help someone make things right after a hard lesson? When have you been helped?

THURSDAY, December 17

William L. Garrison and Maria Stewart

Psalm 33:1-2. Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous; it is good for the just to sing praises. Praise the Lord with harp; play to him upon the psaltery and the lyre.

Ps 50 * [59, 60] or 33 | Isaiah 9:18—10:4 | 2 Peter 2:10b-16 | Matthew 3:1-12

Gretchen's paintbrushes are her harps, and the hundreds of bright colors she paints with serve as her strings. Occasionally we paint together and share stories.

One afternoon, she told me about the pain of losing her husband of over 50 years. She still misses him so much. After his death, she stopped "singing" for a while. She cherishes the memories they made—she delights in the family they built together and the painting studio he created just for her.

In God's good time, Gretchen's vivid colors sang again. Even in sorrow, she rejoices. Art is her voice. We all can "sing joyfully," whether it be with a paintbrush, pens, a dance, or a song. All of us can praise the Lord with our very existence.

MOVING FORWARD: How will you sing your praise to God today?