

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-20, 1 Corinthians 15:30-32, 2 Corinthians 4:11-18

Something I learned from my Catholic school days was the Catholic tradition of The Four Last Things: death, judgment, Heaven, and Hell. However, I didn't learn about these things from any textbook or class, but in a conversation I had with the principal. No, I wasn't in trouble. I was actually good friends with my principal, Sister Carmelisa.

She told me that when the day of her death comes, she pictured judgment to be like looking into a three-way mirror. One part of the mirror would show all the good that she did, another part would show the bad things she did, and the third part would show the state of her soul at the moment of her death. Although the conversation didn't include anything about Heaven or Hell, I got my first glimpse of at least two of The Four Last Things from that small conversation.

A year after I moved from New Jersey to California, I found out that Sister Carmelisa died in a car accident. She was driving on an icy road at night, a very dangerous thing to do. I don't know why she did that, given how she was usually such a stickler about safety, but as Hamlet said "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Today's reflection from Ephesians cautions us to be careful about the way that we live our lives and to make the most of our time. It kind of reminds me of the phrase "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

While that quote is often thought as coming from Ecclesiastes, it actually comes from 1 Corinthians 15:30-32, which says:

“And why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? I die every day! That is as certain, brothers and sisters, as my boasting of you—a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’”

Death is always a certainty. It’s just a matter of when. And it’s a scary thought, I’m not gonna lie. Whenever I think of my own death, I am still filled with dread at the thought because there’s so much I haven’t done yet. But the inevitability of death reminds me that I need to make the most of the time that I have. Today’s passage from Ephesians shows how:

“Be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

If you’re still afraid of death, that’s okay. Even though death is one of the four last things, there’s a joy in knowing that even death will die, as Audrey Assad sings in her wonderful song Death, Be Not Proud*. Remember, sisters in Christ, that if we die living a Christ-filled life, we will be led to Heaven. The thought of Heaven casts out any fear of how we will die.

Pray for the grace of a happy death, dearest sisters in Christ, and make the most of your day today!

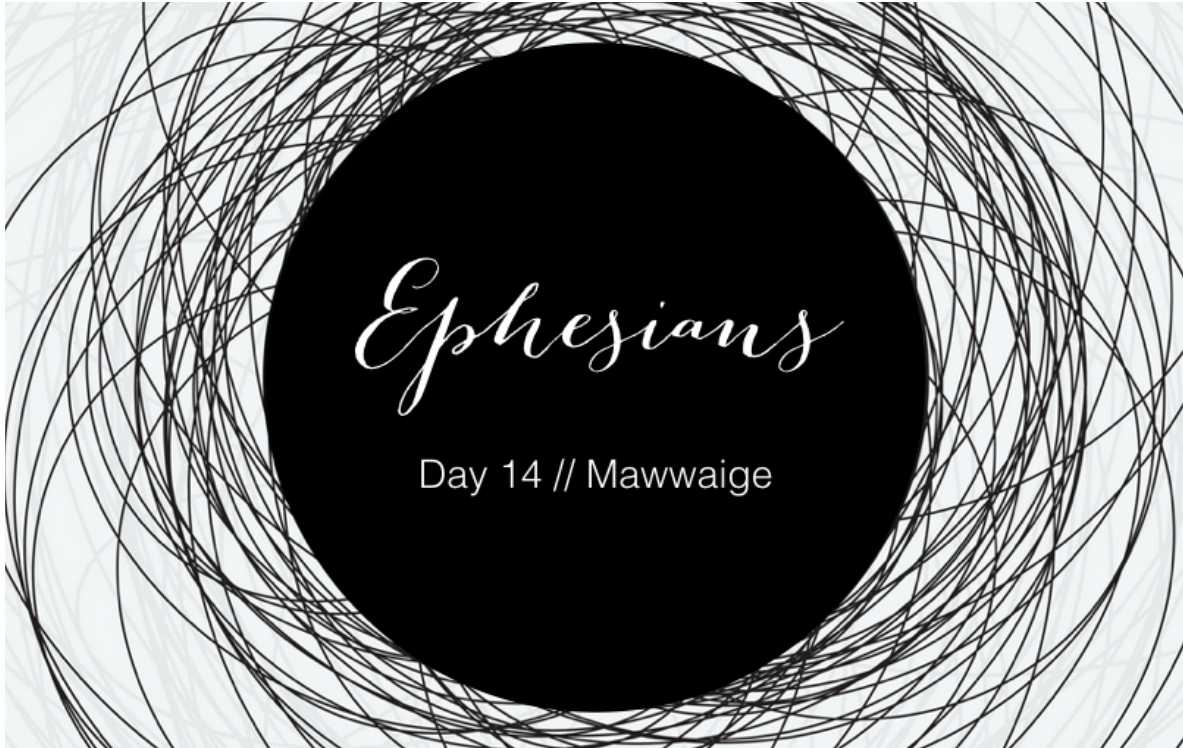
- Monique

Reflection: What are your perspectives on death? How has it affected your life?

Reflection: How can we make the most of our days while knowing of the four last things?

Act: Pray for the souls of the faithful departed and for all the souls in Purgatory.

*Song Website: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sikF_phQHZw



Scripture: Ephesians 5:21-33, Isaiah 62:1-5, John 2:1-12

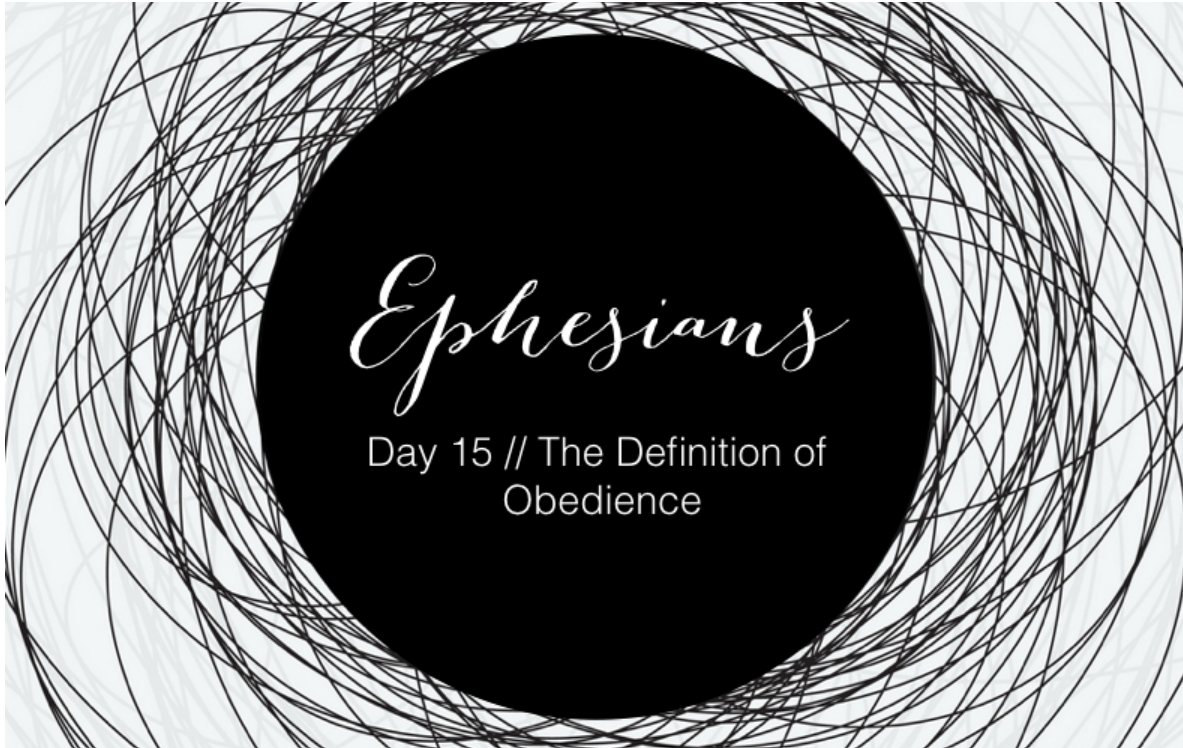
Mawwiage. Mawwiage is what bwings us together today.

It's amazing to me how many people misunderstand today's passage. "Feminists" get up in arms about wives being asked to be subject to their husbands, but they forget the rest of the passage, which asks husbands to love their wives as much as they love themselves, as much as Christ loved the Church. Keep in mind that Christ was willing to die for us, to lay down his life as a sacrifice for us.

Now granted, I am not married. I know that marriage is hard work and that there is often conflict involved. But just as the members of the body of Christ are supposed to cooperate and work together to fulfill God's will, so must a husband and wife work together in order to answer their mutual call to holiness.

All three of today's passages tie together because they all show what marriage really is: It's a sacrament that involves more than just the bride and groom. It also involves God. As Fulton Sheen is known for saying, it takes three to get married.

According to Christopher West's *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, "God created us male and female so that we could image his love by becoming a sincere gift to each other. This sincere giving establishes a 'communion of persons' not only between the sexes but also—in the normal course of events—with a 'third' who proceeds from them both. In this way, sexual love becomes an icon or earthly image in some sense of the inner life of the Trinity."



Scripture: Ephesians 6:1-9, Luke 2:41-52

The idea of completely submitting ourselves to someone or something else usually fills us with a sense of dread or disgust. Or worse, it gets perverted and used as part of an addiction to pleasure. Submitting ourselves to God, however, is a completely different thing. God isn't an evil dictator, or a judge who will keep a record of wrongs and constantly bring them up, or someone who keeps you down because he wants what's best for you. God is merciful, forgiving, and elevates us by His grace. By surrendering ourselves to Him, He paradoxically brings out the best in us.

If the idea of obedience still scares you, know that God has actually set a good example of obedience in the form of the Holy Family. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph completely surrendered their lives to God and Jesus spent his hidden life obedient to His parents.

Of course, that didn't mean that their life was always perfect. Keep in mind that shortly after Jesus was born, the family had to hide in Egypt for a few years until Herod the Great's death. And then, around the time that Jesus was twelve years old, Mary and Joseph lost him. I can't even begin to imagine their fear and anxiety. Danielle Rose perfectly captures this in her song "The Finding*," which tells today's passage from Luke's Gospel in Joseph's point of view.

What I love most about the finding of the Child Jesus was that even though Mary and Joseph had all these questions, Jesus ultimately decided to go home with them.

The Holy Family is a devotion that made an impact on me when I volunteered at a retreat one spring. At the time, I was nursing broken heart and couldn't really talk about it because I didn't want to ruin the retreat by whining about my problems. If anyone could understand a broken heart, it was Mary. In spite of the pain I had, my prayers to Mary and Joseph gave me the strength to carry on in spite of it. There were times during the retreat that I felt left out or invisible and I wanted to cry or get angry or just leave and go home.

But I didn't. Instead, I prayed. Whenever I asked for the intercession of Joseph, that prayer was quickly answered with an action or a sense of consolation. Prayers to Mary helped when I woke up restless in the mornings and needed some peace.

I had small periods of consolation throughout the weekend in between the heartbreak and the interior struggles. I cherished my time in Adoration and found great joy in celebrating Mass. But the best consolation came from making new friends and rekindling some old friendships. I was reminded why I love serving retreats: I help people in the process of growing, giving them the same experience I received as a retreator. In surrendering myself the way Mary and Joseph did, I ended up having a great retreat experience.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, pray for us!

- Monique

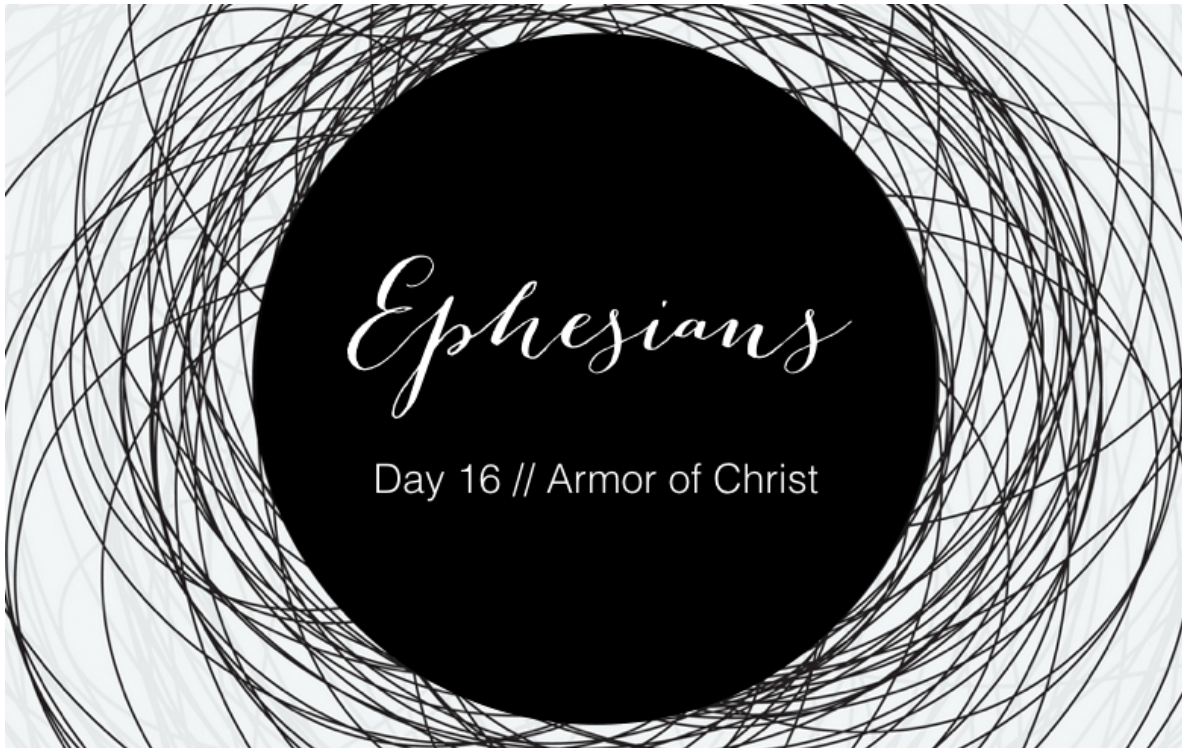
Reflection: What are your perspectives on obedience?

Reflection: Which part of the Finding of the Child Jesus did you relate to the most?

Act: Pray this prayer of abandonment by Charles de Foucauld:

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures. I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul: I offer it to you with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father. Amen.

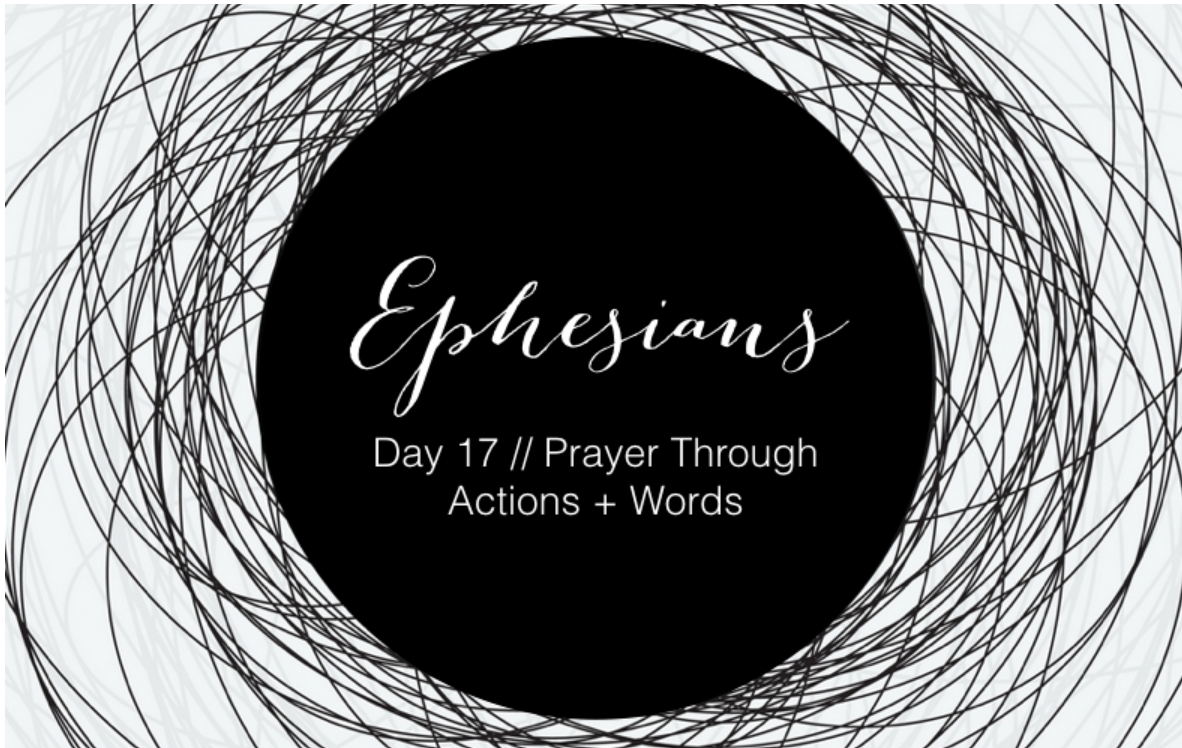
*Song Website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEhQubbqcwk>



Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-17

There are many saints out there that started out as soldiers or aspired to fight in great battles. Saint Francis aspired to fight in many great battles, such as the Crusades or battles going on in Assisi. However, his attempts into becoming a great warrior met with failure. Eventually, he heard a different calling from God: “Francis, seest thou not that my house is in ruins? Go and restore it for me.” Francis became obsessed with rebuilding the church in the ruined church in his town, in spite of the fact that it got him in major trouble with his father to the point that he disowned his earthly father in order to devote his life to the Heavenly Father. Eventually, Francis realized that God was calling him to rebuild not just one church, but the One Church, the Holy Catholic Church. Francis did so by creating an order of friars who went out into the world and administered help to the poor and needy while also living a very simple lifestyle. To this day, there are millions of Franciscan friars, sisters, priests, and laypeople who help serve the community in different ways.

Saint Ignatius also started out as a man who had big dreams of glory and was part of the army in his youth. Unfortunately, his leg was struck by a cannonball during a battle, which ended his military career. While recovering, the young Ignatius read the lives of the saints, including Saint Francis, and decided to devote his life to serving God. This would eventually lead Ignatius to create the order of Jesuits, who became essential in bringing Catholicism to all the ends of the earth, including China and Japan. These days, you’ll find Jesuit priests everywhere, from your local Loyola University to a New York City newspaper to Vatican City.



Scripture: Ephesians 6:18-24, Colossians 4:2-6

A saying that is often associated with Saint Francis is “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.”

How exactly can we pray constantly? By making everything we say and do a kind of prayer and offering. In the morning, we can wake up and complain about all we have to do for the day, or we can get sit up and ask God to be with us throughout the day, to guide us in our thoughts and actions. When we go on our daily commute to work, we can complain about the traffic or we can pray a Rosary or listen to praise and worship as we get through the morning rush. When we’re at work, we can complain about our bosses and supervisors or we can figure out ways to help around the office without bringing attention to ourselves. You get the idea.

God offers up plenty of opportunities for us to be like Christ to the world. We can live out God’s word by giving food instead of just money to the homeless guy at the next stoplight. We can preach the Gospel by helping out kids who tend to cause trouble in the neighborhood. Every action we do in God’s name can be our prayer.

Of course, there will be times when words are necessary. When someone comes to us for advice, ask the Holy Spirit to come over the both of you. Make sure to listen to them and let God speak through you. We can also use our words to encourage others or to caution people before they take a dangerous risk. Don’t underestimate the power of your words.

