

# November 2007

## November 1

Reformer Jan Huss wrote, "Men are generous towards the saints who are in heaven, because they are far removed, above the attacks of their cruelty and are to be feared, sitting near God; but they are cruel towards the saints on the earth...." Hus was burned at the stake in 1415. (in Victor Budgen, On Fire for God, p. 192)

Here's what Jesus told some hyper-religious: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' Thus you witness against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets.... How are you to escape being sentence to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town...." (Matthew 23:29-34)

Today the church remembers the saints in heaven, easily done, but living the Christian life on earth is not easy. Wrote Catherine Winkworth, Jesus, "You suffered death to save us Because Your love would have US Be heirs of heavenly gladness When ends this life of sadness" (Lutheran Service Book, 745, 3)

## November 2

Hi, Christian here! I told you Mommy was on a business trip. Daddy and I had fun. Daddy took me to man places. Daddy took me to church. Church should be a man place, not just a girl place. So we two men went to church. I started to get too active. So Daddy swooped me up and raptured me out. I looked over his shoulder when he took me out of church. Daddy couldn't see but I smiled at the people. I waved bye-bye to the people. I was getting out but they were still in church. Ha, ha!

What do you big people think when you leave church? Do you smile at the people because you like them? Do you wave bye-bye because you will miss them? Opa says something about "God be with you 'til we meet again." What does that mean? Or do you think, "Good, I'm out of here! I put in my time. Mommy should be happy. Wife should be happy. What do you big people think about when you leave church?"

Opa says some big people think we toddlers should not be taken to church. We should be left to decide when we grow up. I am proof that is dumb. Thank you, Daddy, for taking me to church.

## November 5

Susan Wales wrote a book called "Standing on the Promises." In it she quotes a Vicki Baum who said, "You don't get ulcers from what you eat. You get them from what's eating you" (p.138).

What's eating you today? Use this "Minute" to apply some promises from God to your anxieties and agitations.

"Turn your burdens over to the Lord, and He will take care of you. He will never let the righteous person stumble" (Psalm 55:22).

"Thanks be to the Lord, who daily carries our burdens for us. God is our salvation" (Psalm 68:19).

"When I worried about many things, Your assuring words soothed my soul." (Psalm 94:19)

"My God will richly fill your every need in a glorious way through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

Lord Jesus, sometimes my anxieties and agitations consume me. As You told Martha, tell me now: One thing is needful, the Word of promise. Remind me that in You all the comforting promises of God are "Yea" and "Amen".

## **November 6**

Last month Pope Benedict named 81-year-old Emmanuel Delly a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. That wouldn't be worth a second thought, except that Cardinal Delly lives in Baghdad. He's been in Iraq all his life, except when he was studying in Europe, earning doctorates in theology and canon law. This lifelong Christian (there are about half a million in Iraq, a million fewer than when Saddam Hussein was in power) is understandably attuned to ecumenical relations. He has met with Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki and with the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Cardinal Delly says, "Christians and Muslims have lived together here for 1,400 years. We have much in common; in Iraq, the Christian house is next to the Muslim house."

We Americans have lived in a Christian dominated culture for so long that we're not sure how to react to the increasing presence of non-Christians in our country. Where can we find common ground for the common good? "The Christian house is next to the Muslim house," Cardinal Delly says. "Each has his own religion, each defends his own home, each defends his religion. Your faith is for God; the country is for everyone." (New York Times, November 5; A12)

Is the way to relate to non-Christians in our communities to focus on our shared citizenship, not our divided faiths?

## **November 7**

When I mentioned that the seminary often calls our lawyers, a woman sitting across from me showed surprise. "Can't be too careful" I said. Since there are so many issues where a non-profit can unwittingly break the law, we often seek legal counsel.

Senator Charles Grassley of the Senate Finance Committee has asked six leading television ministries to document their expenses. You'll recognize many of the names: Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Copeland, Randy White, Eddie Long and Joyce Meyer. By the way, Mrs. Meyer is not related to yours truly. Said Grassley, "I'm following up on complaints from the public.... The allegations involve governing boards that aren't independent and

allow generous salaries and housing allowances and amenities such as private jets and Rolls-Royces. People who donated should have their money spent as intended and in adherence with the tax code." ( St. Louis Post-Dispatch, November 6; A5)

1 Timothy 3:7 says that a minister "must have a good reputation with outsiders." Peter encouraged laypeople, "Live good lives among the pagans" (1 Peter 2:12 ). How many people are kept away from Jesus Christ by Christians who invite criticism and even investigation? "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things." (Philippians 4:8)

## **November 8**

Flying home from Washington , D.C. , our plane entered its final approach into St. Louis , an approach I've been on hundreds of times. This time, however, the pilot turned the plane sharply to the left, descending faster than I was used to. He soon pulled up, began to circle the airport, and announced that he had to try the approach again, as soon as the tower would get him into a new "sequence." I felt better.

Sometimes we forget how God "sequences" the events in our lives. That thought struck me Sunday in church when we sang, "When the tempest rages, I need not fear, For Thou the Rock of Ages are always near. Without Thy grace and favor I go astray." We like to think that we'll be spared the tough times, but the Lord's sequencing is that troubles do come, ("when the tempest rages," as the poet says), and then, when troubles are upon us, we get to know His presence, how He is with us in uncertain times.

Approaching Cedar Rapids Saturday, the pilot suddenly put on the power and ascended. She said a plane ahead of us was too slow and we needed a new sequencing. I felt better again. Don't let God be your co-pilot. Trust God as pilot to sequence you through life's troubles toward heaven.

## **November 9**

Do you ever watch the "Style Network" on TV? I surf it, see it and wonder, "This is your contribution to our society?"

You've noticed that the people in ads and commercials are young, or if they're seniors they're younger looking. Clear message: Youthful is good; mature is not.

Court programs on TV are a parade of plaintiffs and defendants who are self-righteous over some pretty trivial things.

Enough listing of the shallowness of our popular culture. If you don't know from the Bible how shallow many of the values of pop culture are, then at least reflect on the veterans we honor this weekend. Fisher Ames was a 30-year-old member of the first Congress of the United States under the new 1789 Constitution. Representative Ames studied the face of General George Washington, now President Washington. "Time has made havoc upon his face. His aspect grave, almost to sadness, his modesty, actually shaking; his voice deep, a little tremulous, and so low as to call for close attention." (A. J. Langguth, Union 1812, p. 45)

Meditate this weekend on the experiences of military service and the horrors of war that have aged and often scared our veterans. Drowning in pop culture, let's steady this country by studying the faces of those who have served for us.

## **November 12**

Last week Pat Robertson endorsed Rudy Giuliani for President. Christians playing in politics?

Followers of Jesus live in two realms at the same time. We're in the church, in which love and faith in the Savior are supposed to prevail, and we're also in the state, in which law and power prevail. Politics is a big part of how things happen in the state, and Jesus warns us we're not as savvy as people who live only for the here-and-now. "The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light." (Luke 16:8)

In 1841 P.T. Barnum bought Scudder's American Museum on the corner of Broadway and Ann Street in New York. He transformed it into a must-see place, 38 million Americans visiting it from 1841 until it burned in 1865. Ever the promoter, Barnum once strung a line of American flags from the museum to a tree in the neighboring yard, the yard of St. Paul's church. When officials of St. Paul's complained, Barnum shut them up by publicly accusing them of not being patriotic. "The people of this world are more shrewd..." (New York Times, November 9; E41)

Living in both realms takes smarts. Jesus says, "Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16)

## **November 13**

Assuming you identify yourself as a Christian, I ask, "Are you serious about your faith in God?" and you probably answer, "Yes." That answer probably comes quickly. Let's take it deeper. "How many of your friends and acquaintances have told you that they are intrigued that you follow Jesus?" I assume some hesitation from you now, not such a quick response.

In Saturday's New York Times Peter Steinfels wrote about Antonio Monda. [Do You Believe?](#) is his new book, interviews about God and the hereafter with 18 famous Americans. When he asked Grace Paley for an interview, she said, "Are you serious?" but agreed. "Do you think that life after death exists?" he asked her. "Obviously, no," she replied. "And an 83-year old is telling you this, aware that she doesn't have much time to live." Ms. Paley then asked Mr. Monda, "And what is there for you after death?" He said, "The true life." She shot back, "And what is the life we're living at this moment?" "A passage and a gift," he said. With that he had gotten her attention. "This is an idea that interests me," she said, "because it is very different from what I believe in."

Have you positioned yourself so that people are interested in what you believe?

## **November 14**

Grandpa Meyer grew up near Chicago speaking German. As an adult his English was fine, but he told me that he had to translate English church services into German before he could fully understand what was said. German was his "heart language."

My friends at the American Bible Society tell me that the Koran is written in classical Arabic, a language that today is known only by the elite in Islam. Millions upon millions of Muslims do not know that old, classical Arabic. They only know the "heart languages" in which they were raised. Despite the fact that they can't read the Koran, it is forbidden to translate it into "heart languages" that the masses could understand. If you can't read the holy book of your faith, you're open to all kinds of manipulation by clerics.

Contrast the Christian holy book. Today the Bible is being translated into 18 heart languages of the Middle East. The Christian church realized long ago that the truths of God's word can't be fossilized in an old language but must be translated into heart languages in order to transform lives with the Gospel. Jesus says, "My words are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). God bless the translators so that more and more hearts will be touched by His Spirit and His life!

## **November 15**

On this date, November 15, 1806, Zebulon Pike caught sight of a great snow-capped mountain range. Climbing one of the mountains, not the one that bears his name, Pike wrote, "Arose, hungry, dry and extremely sore from the inequality of the rocks on which we had lain all night, but were amply compensated for our toil by the sublimity of the prospects below. The unbounded prairie was overhung with clouds, which appeared like the ocean in a storm; waves piled on waves and foaming, whilst the sky was perfectly clear where we were." (A.J. Langguth, Union 1812, 121-122)

I once saw a sign in one of the plains states that read something like this: "Your tax dollars at work. The mountain removal project has been accomplished." Too bad for those who forget what awed Zebulon Pike. When we let the mountains leave our imaginations or when we dismiss them as chance results of evolution, we forget that their solitude provided a place for the Savior to commune with His Father and their towering strength calls us to look on high for help. What to do when you're between a rock and a hard place? "I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." (Psalm 121:1-2)

## **November 16**

Who cares now that Barry Bonds surpassed Henry Aaron's record for all-time home runs? Yesterday it was announced that Bonds has been indicted for perjury and obstruction of justice. He said under oath he had not used performance enhancing drugs but the grand jury concluded he was lying. It's one thing to make an illegal mistake; it's far worse to lie knowingly under oath.

A terrible story about oaths: A leader of ancient Israel, "Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, 'If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.'" Dumb. Don't ever make an oath when you don't know the details. God gave Israel victory but when "Jephthah came to his home...behold, his daughter came out to meet him.... As soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes.... 'I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.'" Jephthah's daughter was sacrificed (Judges 11).

Barry Bonds today, Jephthah long ago. Take their oath problems to heart. "Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin" (Proverbs 13:3).

## November 19

Barry Koltnow of "The Orange County Register" wrote yesterday about famous lines from movies that are part of our everyday speech. Do you know where these lines came from?

1. "I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."
2. "Go ahead, make my day."
3. "If you build it, they will come."
4. "Houston, we have a problem."
5. "Keep your friends close but your enemies closer."

Answers: 1. "Wizard of Oz;" 2. "Sudden Impact;" 3. "Field of Dreams;" 4. "Apollo 13;" 5. "Godfather"

In a similar way, our daily speech includes lines that people may not realize come from the Bible. Where would you find..

1. "To everything a season"
2. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
3. "A house divided against itself will fall."
4. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"
5. "Love your enemies."

Answers: 1. Ecclesiastes 3:1; 2. Matthew 7:12; 3. Luke 11:17; 4. Exodus 21:24; 5. Matthew 5:44.

Since the Bible has given memorable lines to our common speech, can't you enrich your personal life still more by reading and learning more lines from God?

And where does this one come from? "God helps those who help themselves?" I don't know but it's not in the Bible!

## November 20

Today President Bush will pardon the national turkey. If the turkey could think, it would wonder what it had done that needed forgiveness. Simple answer: It's not what you did but who you are. You're a turkey!

How do you determine what you need forgiveness for? "Who can understand his errors?" (Psalm 19:12) Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests a way to lead us to a better understanding of our need for forgiveness. "The guilt we must acknowledge is not the occasional mistake or going astray, not the breaking of an abstract law, but falling away from Christ, from the form of the One who would take form in us and lead us to our true form." (Ethics, 135)

For example, it's not that I cussed but that even my civil speech often falls short of Christ's pureness. Again, our good deeds often include some selfish calculation whereas Christ's

love is totally selfless. Keep thinking like this and you'll understand St. Paul: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst." (1 Timothy 1:15)

Bonhoeffer: "Genuine acknowledgment of guilt does not grow from experiences...but, for us who have encountered Christ, only by looking at the form Christ has taken." It's a rare turkey who gets pardoned!

## **November 21**

Hi, Christian here! We moved into a new house. It is bigger and better. A bigger yard to play in. A nice roof to protect me. Nice carpets to play on. I have toys all over the floor. Mr. Elephant and Elmo are my favorite toys. I play with balls. I especially like kicking my boccer ball. That's what I call it, "boccer ball." I have a nice TV. I sit on the floor and watch "Little Einsteins." Don't talk to me when I watch "Little Einsteins." I want to have my friends over, like Charlotte and Allison. They are my girl friends at day care.

Right now I am in Texas . I am at Gram's and Papaw's house. Gram is busy in the kitchen. She is making nummies for tomorrow. I love to eat nummies. I can hardly wait to spread nummies all over my face and throw some nummies on the floor. I have everything I need.

Mommy and Daddy say it is "Thanksgiving." Do you big people know what "Thanksgiving" is? Do you really? I have everything I need...and then some.

PS. Opa said to tell you he's off until Monday. Opa's off alright!

## **November 26**

"Consumption" used to mean the disease of tuberculosis. Today a different kind of "consumption" has infected Americans.

"Consumers flooded stores...on the traditional first day of the holiday shopping season.... Like thousands of Americans, Ms. (Theresa) Johnston has an adjustable-rate mortgage, and her rising payments have stolen from her holiday spending budget. 'Before this, I shopped mostly at Macy's and some at J.C. Penney, so shopping at Big Lots is, like, two big steps down for me,' she said. 'This is going to be a hard Christmas.'" (New York Times, November 23; A1)

From Rabbi Abraham Heschel: "Every object in the universe is regarded as a commodity or a tool, its value being determined by the amount of work it can perform or the degree of pleasantness it can confer.... (Man) often wastes his life in serving passions which others shrewdly excite in him, fondly believing that this is his indulgence of his freedom." (Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity, p. 312)

The cure for destructive consumption? "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." That from the One who remains the "Reason for the Season." (Matthew 6:19-21)

## November 27

You know how sometimes a song gets into your head? "Joy to the world" would be a good one for today.

The world is not a joyous place, especially the Middle East . Today nations of the Arab League are meeting in Annapolis , Maryland at the invitation of President Bush. The purpose of the meeting is to begin negotiations on a treaty to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

God always watches and uses world events. Scholars have long pointed out that Christ was born at a special time in world history. The first century saw a world at peace, a strong central government in Rome , an empire united by an excellent road system that saw people traveling hither and yon, and a common language spoken in all major urban areas, Greek. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son." (Galatians 4:4) The leaders of the Roman Empire didn't know it, but God used world situations for His purpose.

So we pray that He'll do the same today, to use Annapolis for His purposes. A way to pray that is to get these words going around and around in your head. "He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love." Think it, hum it, pray it.

## November 28

Monday a 75-year-old tradition continued when an 84 foot Norway Spruce was lit in Rockefeller Center . Also Monday, a 20 foot Fraser Fir was brought to the White House by horse-drawn wagon. Diane, how about a small tree for our house, say, only 20 feet?

Think about this: Because we adults are seasoned in sin and know, should know, our need for forgiveness, we should find a deeper joy around the tree than do little children. Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests a way, you may think it strange, to restore deep, deep joy. *We have become so accustomed to the idea of divine love and of God's coming at Christmas that we no longer feel the shiver of fear that God's coming should arouse in us. The coming of God is truly not only glad tidings, but first of all frightening news for every one who has a conscience. Only when we have felt the terror of the matter, can we recognize the incomparable kindness. God comes into the very midst of evil and of death, and judges the evil in us and in the world. And by judging us, God cleanses and sanctifies us, comes to us with grace and love.* (A Testament to Freedom, 185)

Whatever size, the joy is for adults too. Christmas: CHRISTmas.

## November 29

I opened our strong box the other day and found a somewhat yellowed, small envelope with a 3 cent stamp, cancelled on January 23, 1947. Inside the envelope were a bill and three receipts. The bill was from Ingalls Memorial Hospital in Harvey, Illinois. Five days in the hospital at \$6 a day. \$10 for maternity, \$10 for "care of baby" and some other charges to bring the grand total to \$61.10. There also were receipts from Drs. Helge and Herbert Jansen for \$135. For less than \$200 my parents took home a ten pound baby.

In that strong box I also came across the certificate of my baptism, January 26, 1947. That's a receipt of sorts, a spiritual receipt worth keeping. "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Because my parents understood that baptism needs to be lived out, there followed years of Christian family life with worship and religious education.

While the costs of bearing children have gone way up, the cost of training up a child for eternity is still unchanged. It still costs the time, commitment and example of parents with the ready help of the Spirit of God. Which of the two is your most important investment?

### **November 30**

In the Roman play "Bacchides" a deceitful slave says, "My master will immediately change me from a gold-bearer to a cross-bearer." Isn't that fear true of us all? Someone threatens us, the boss at work, the bully at school, the bill collector who calls and we are shaken, scared for our future.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (Psalm 27:1). Sounds good but how does it work? What habits can enable us to be calm when we're threatened?

"A basic reason Jesus could never be cowed by those who threatened Him was that He never claimed to own His life in the first place. You threaten a person by telling him/her that you will take away some comfort, some money, some possession or life itself if he/she does not do your bidding. But how do you threaten a person who claims to own nothing?" (Hubert Beck, *The Crosses of Lent*, p. 27)

Today is the "Day of St. Andrew," commemorating a man who calmly faced his own death on a cross. According to tradition Andrew said, "Hail, precious cross, that has been consecrated by the body of my Lord." Is it your life or God's? That's where calm begins to be built. "Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Romans 14:8).