

# PARISH OF ST ANTHONY

110 Anchor Avenue • Oceanside, NY 11572 • 516-764-0048



*These seven reflections were written by St. Anthony's Deacon Richard Nichols, S.J.  
for the Third Week in Ordinary Time, January 21 – 27, 2018.  
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**Sunday, 21 January 2018**

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## Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

The prophet Jonah was sent to preach in Nineveh. "Now Nineveh was an enormously large city; it took three days to go through it" (Jon 3:3). And yet, at the preaching of one man, the whole city, with over 120,000 inhabitants, repented.

Although it was among the largest cities in the world at that time, today, Nineveh's size seems quaint. Topeka, Kansas and Fargo, North Dakota have similar populations. But we must not let ourselves imagine that Jonah's achievement was quaint. Consider it this way: without God's help, the odds against Jonah's mission were 120,000 to 1. His chances of winning were 0.000833%. Now, if Jonah were to be sent to New York City today, and New York City were to be just as sinful as Nineveh once was, then the odds against Jonah would be 8,500,000 to 1, so his chances of success would be 0.000012%.

If God can create a victory when the chances of winning are 0.000833%, don't call it quaint, and don't think God will be impotent when the chances are down to 0.000011%. Your mind, your emotions and your problems are far more complicated than quaint old Jonah could have imagined, yet the kingdom of God is very close to you, too, so repent and believe in the Gospel.

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Monday, 22 January 2018

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## Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children

David was a great warrior king with many conquests. Scripture tells us that his military victories were due to God's help. "David grew steadily more powerful, for the LORD of hosts was with him" (2 Sm 5:10). This view of divinely sanctioned kingship caused many of Jesus' disciples to expect him likewise to bring military conquests, but Jesus offered power and conquests of another sort.

In Jesus, God is with us (Emmanuel). That presence gives us a steady growth in power, much like David's. We grow in our power to do what really matters, which is to obey God's will and to carry out his commandments. This is the greatest power of all: to do what is right, despite temptation to do what is wrong.

Every one of us is tempted, from time to time, to refuse God's gifts, to destroy God's creation. Today is a day of prayer for the legal protection of unborn children, because in the United States, many of us have succumbed, even lawmakers, to the temptation to refuse God's gifts. We must pray for them and for ourselves, too, that we may all remain close to God no matter what, and that, with God's help, we will have the wisdom and the strength and the courage to do God's will

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Tuesday, 23 January 2018

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## Tuesday of the Third Week in Ordinary Time

It is recorded that when the ark of the covenant was first brought to Jerusalem, King David danced before it with abandon, that is, with all his might. This scene makes a good Ignatian contemplation because there is much fodder for the imagination. What did David look like? What kind of a dance was he doing? What did the music sound like? What kind of a day was it?

The point of letting our imagination fill in details like this is to create a space for God to act. Of course, God can act whether or not we create a space for Him, and we can never force God's hand, but we can cooperate with God's grace, and we can ask for it.

One of the reasons that David was so loved by God was because of this dance that he did. It was not a half measure. He put himself all out there, rejoicing in God's goodness with all his might. To those of us who are long used to half measures, David is a good role model. We come to Church, we pray, but perhaps we lack David's enthusiasm. Our neighbor approaches us with a certain need. We assist him or her, but only with a half measure.

Find one act of love today, be it towards God or towards your neighbor, and do it with all your might, with abandon, like David did.

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Wednesday, 24 January 2018

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## Memorial of Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Ailments can be exterior to your soul, such as a need for money, or a feud with a friend, or a problem with your job. Ailments can also be interior to your soul, such as depression or bewilderment or temptation. In either case, the more you love God, the more you will look to Him for deliverance from these ailments. Meanwhile, you will strive for freedom calmly and deliberately, like a surgeon operating.

On the other hand, the more you love yourself over and against God, the more you will seek deliverance by your own hand, or by the hand of some other flawed human being whom you happen to fancy. Idiocy! This is why you are so impatient and troubled. You and every human being like you have failed before and will fail again. This is why distress and anxiety plague you. This is why you sometimes despair of ever being freed from your ailments, whether interior or exterior.

On this topic, St. Francis de Sales, whose feast we celebrate today, had this to say: "This unresting anxiety is the greatest evil which can happen to the soul, sin only excepted." His point is that our desire to be freed from some evil or to attain to some good must not go unregulated. Otherwise, our soul will be tossed and torn by anxiety and distress, making it more and more vulnerable to temptation. The great saint's solution? "Whensoever you urgently desire to be delivered from any evil, or to attain some good thing, strive above all else to keep a calm, restful spirit,—steady your judgment and will, and then go quietly and easily after your object, taking all fitting means to attain thereto."

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Thursday, 25 January 2018

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## Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, Apostle

Saint Ignatius Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, lists three times when a correct and good choice of a way of life may be made. The first time, he says, is “when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that a devout soul without hesitation, or the possibility of hesitation, follows what has been manifested to it. St. Paul and St. Matthew acted thus in following Christ our Lord.”

In the case of St. Paul, whose conversion the Church celebrates today, there was no hesitation or possibility of hesitation, according to Saint Ignatius. Well, why not? He saw a bright light, and he heard the voice of Jesus talking to him. His companions saw the light, but they did not hear the voice. The light was so bright that St. Paul went blind temporarily, but his companions, who saw the light, did not go blind. It seems that St. Paul was more sensitive to the light, which is why only he went blind.

I argue that the reason that there was, for St. Paul, neither hesitation nor the possibility of hesitation was that he had developed a sensitivity to God’s light. In other words, he had been a devout man, even as a Jew, prior to his conversion to Christianity. The lesson for us is that if we wish to be led by God with as much clarity as St. Paul was, then we must cultivate our devotion to God with as much zeal as Paul had, even if our devotions may be flawed, as were St. Paul’s prior to his conversion.

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Friday, 26 January 2018

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## Memorial of Saints Timothy and Titus, bishops

There is a Jesuit in his forties who is dying from advanced cancer. He is dying well, because he believes in his heart that this present life that we see and feel is not the same thing as “the promise of life in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:1). The followers of this man, Jesus Christ, or rather, this true man and true God, Jesus Christ, are not promised a long life on this earth. Jesus, himself, died after only 33 years here. Instead, Christians have been promised a spiritual life. This promise was fulfilled when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost. We, ourselves, received that same spirit when we were baptized, and it was strengthened when we were confirmed.

Death is a heavy thing, and we have a right to suffer and to grieve when it approaches, but not as if we had no hope. Did Jesus fail to follow through on his promise to the good thief: “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43)? Will he fail to follow through on his promise of life to the rest of us? “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day” (John 6:54).

Death only puts an end to this earthly life. We may have had some happiness on this earth. We may have had some heavy crosses to bear. When our time on this earth is over, then, at last, will we set down our crosses. Then will we be truly happy with our Lord in paradise. If we remember this, we will die well. We will also live well.

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Saturday, 27 January 2018

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## Saturday of the Third Week in Ordinary Time

The prophet Nathan told King David a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had flocks and herds in great numbers, but the poor man had nothing at all, except one little ewe lamb that he had bought (cf. 2 Sam 12). The prophet's story resonated with the great king, because the king himself had once been a humble shepherd, the youngest son in a large family. As the prophet's story goes, the rich man, in his greed, seizes the poor man's lamb and makes a meal out of it. The purpose of the story is to get the king to realize that *he is the man*, in other words, that he, the King, has acted like the rich man, has been greedy and has taken something important from a poor man.

Are you like King David? Has the Lord blessed you richly? Perhaps, instead of livestock, God has blessed you with rich knowledge of a certain topic, like childcare or education or the arts. Must you always score the most points when that topic comes up in conversation? Must you always establish your dominance? Even if what your neighbor has said is true, must you have the last word? "*You are the man*" (2 Sam 12:7).

We live in an information age. Wealth and poverty look different now than they did 3,000 years ago, in King David's time. Those of us who are rich must learn to use our riches with a spirit of generosity and, above all, charity, and for the times when we have failed, like David, we must repent.