

January 2012 Prepare the Word Weekday Reflections

SUNDAY, JANUARY 1

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

Make a free and fresh beginning

Turning a new page on the calendar always invites a fresh perspective—even more so when it's a brand new calendar! So lose your chains. You're invited today to let go of the old year, both "what we have done" and "what we have failed to do." Time to give and receive pardon for offenses. Time to craft resolutions and adopt new habits. Time to become people of justice and peace. On this eighth and final day of Christmas, accept the gift of your true identity: a free child of God, heir to a land of relentless hope.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21 (18)*
"You are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God."

MONDAY, JANUARY 2

FEAST OF BASIL THE GREAT AND GREGORY NAZIANZEN, BISHOPS, DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

There is strength in numbers

After finishing his education, Saint Basil went on a tour of the desert dwelling places of the first Christian hermits. While he admired their holiness, it seemed like a good idea to him for such people to have a common life together, sharing work, study, and prayer in obedience to a superior. So when he was done with his trip, he and his friend Saint Gregory began what was one of the first monastic communities. Basil recognized long ago that two—or more—Christians can do more than one. Your local church community offers many ways to participate in the living Body of Christ.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 2:22-28; John 1:19-28 (205)*
"Now, children, remain in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence."

TUESDAY, JANUARY 3

FEAST OF THE MOST HOLY NAME OF JESUS

What's in a name?

How you talk about someone by name shows the regard—or lack of it—you have for them. God gave the Israelites the commandment: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." Honoring the name of God, though, means more than not using it casually. It also involves showing respect for whom the name represents.

That there is a feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus should come as no surprise. Devotion to Jesus' name goes back many centuries, and the Franciscan saints Bernardine of Siena and John of Capistrano helped to make it popular. Honoring the name honors Jesus the person and his presence in your everyday life.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 2:29; John 1:29-34 (206)*
"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 4

FEAST OF ELIZABETH ANN SETON, RELIGIOUS

How religious men and women speak God's language

Within Catholic life there are many ways to serve and dedicate one's life to God. Some choose a commitment like marriage. Entering a community as a religious sister or brother, a monk or nun is another way. From the sixth-century monastic Saint Benedict in Italy to Mother Seton, who founded the first congregation of religious sisters in the United States, religious communities have striven to "signify the very charity of God in the language of our time" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 926). That can mean educating young people, sheltering the homeless, presenting gospel values in corporate boardrooms, or caring for persons with AIDS. What are the religious communities in your neighborhood up to?

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 3:7-10; John 1:35-42 (207)*
"Jesus said to them, 'Come, and you will see.'"

THURSDAY, JANUARY 5

FEAST OF JOHN NEUMANN, BISHOP

Stewardship makes for a seasoned leader

There's a time to build and a time to tear down, the Book of Ecclesiastes says. Bishop John Neumann led the diocese of Philadelphia in the 1850s, a time of explosive growth in the immigrant Catholic population in the U.S. Under his leadership the number of Catholic schools increased from 1 to 200 and on average a new parish opened every month! We live in another era, one in which Catholic schools and parishes are being consolidated, closed, or otherwise changed in many parts of the nation. Each age calls for different gifts but good stewardship is never out of season. Pray that church leaders will be good and faithful stewards of the great legacy entrusted to their care.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 3:11-21; John 1:43-51 (208)*

"You will see greater things than this."

FRIDAY, JANUARY 6

FEAST OF ANDRÉ BESSETTE, RELIGIOUS

Passionate about the Passion

The 20th-century French-Canadian Holy Cross brother André Bessette spent much of his life counseling troubled people. He also had a special devotion to the Passion of Jesus, and when confronted with those who had crises of faith or serious shortcomings in their Christian life, he would deliver lengthy and emotional retellings of the Passion story. "Rarely," wrote one of his Holy Cross brothers, "could a sinner resist the authority of the frail old man who, with tears in his eyes, talked about the Passion of the Lord." Let the story of how Jesus so loved the world that he was willing to give his life for it inspire your own love and sacrifices.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 5:5-13; Mark 1:7-11 or Luke 23-38 (209)*

"This is the one who came through water and Blood, Jesus Christ, not by water alone, but by water and Blood."

SATURDAY, JANUARY 7

FEAST OF RAYMOND OF PENYAFORT, PRIEST

Live with one foot in the future

When Raymond of Penyafort (1175-1275) was born, the average life expectancy was around 35 years. Hence, when Raymond joined the Dominicans at age 47, he might reasonably have expected to have only a few more years to live. Instead, he lived to be 100! We don't know how long we have on earth, so we must make the most of every day. That includes preparing for the future. "If you do not make plans, you leave the future an empty field of chance . . . forfeit to your own unpredictable moods," cautions author Robert Grudin in *Time and the Art of Living*. He continues: "The future will do much for us, [but] we must do much for it." What will you do today to prepare for your future?

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 John 5:14-21; John 2:1-11 (21)*

"My hour has not yet come."

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

One who is for all

The Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord gets easily swamped by the song "We Three Kings" and the typical crèche scene that includes three royally robed monarchs. While scripture specifies three gifts, though, it does not specify as many persons. Nor are they kings; nor are they necessarily all men. The key, of course, is the actual name of the feast: *Epiphany*—a sudden

burst of understanding, a revelation, a light. But even that is not enough. The light who is Christ is called a "light to the nations," which in Bible-speak means "all the world." The new translation of the Mass proclaims Jesus' salvation "for many" rather than "for all," as we used to say. Words matter, but the point is to celebrate the absolute and pure light that dawns upon all the world in the Incarnation of Christ.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 6-5; Matthew 2:1-12 (20)*

"Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come."

MONDAY, JANUARY 9

FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD; NATIONAL VOCATION AWARENESS WEEK BEGINS

The start of something big

John the Baptist preached a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus presented himself for baptism, the stakes got higher: He saw the heavens open and heard a voice proclaim him the beloved Son of God. His public ministry began immediately afterward. The sacrament of Baptism also calls the followers of Christ to something big: repentance and service. Today begins National Vocation Awareness Week, a time to think about how you will live out your call to greatness—in your chosen vocation or in the vocation you are still contemplating. By your baptism you were anointed with the Holy Spirit, which gives you the power to act with justice and compassion.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7 or 55:1-11; Acts 10:34-38 or 1 John 5:1-9; Mark 1:7-11 (21)*

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing."

TUESDAY, JANUARY 10

Ask an authority on the subject

Jesus astounded the people who met him along the way not only by the great deeds and signs that he performed and by what he taught—to love one's enemies or forgive countless times. The amazement of the crowds was also due to the authority with which he spoke, not citing other rabbis or scholars but teaching from his own soul. In the church we often identify "authority" only with the teaching office, the Catechism, the decrees of popes, or the sense of the faithful. But the authority with which each baptized person testifies to Christ is also the authority, the authenticity, of his or her own life of faith, justice, and mercy.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 1:9-20; Mark 1:21-28 (306)*

"The people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes."

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11

Appearances aren't always deceiving

You don't have to look very hard into Catholic tradition to find stories of supernatural appearances of Jesus, the saints, and especially Mary to believers through the centuries. These kinds of occurrences really go back to biblical times. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit "appeared" in the form of a dove at Jesus' baptism, Jesus himself appeared to his disciples after his Resurrection, and the risen Christ made a decisive personal intervention in the life of Saint Paul, to name a few examples. Officially the church treads lightly on the subject and does not require Catholics to believe in a particular apparition. Most of us will never have such an experience, but we can indeed learn to make ourselves aware of the presence and guidance of God.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20; Mark 1:29-39 (307)*

"Speak, for your servant is listening."

THURSDAY, JANUARY 12

Everybody needs some healing

Some days it can be really tough to know and feel that God is with us. Though we believe God is there, it can sometimes feel as though we are miles away from God. Think about a time when you've been there; hardship, suffering, grief, and sickness can exacerbate that feeling, yet it is in these times when God draws especially close to us. The church honors such points in life with the Sacrament of Anointing. The sacrament is not only for people near death but for all in need of healing. It is a way in which you can acknowledge and place your pain and fear in the presence of a loving God and your community of faith. In what ways could you use a bit of anointing in your life?

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 4:1-11; Mark 1:40-45 (308)*

"Woe to us! This has never happened before."

FRIDAY, JANUARY 13

FEAST OF HILARY, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

A both/and, not an either/or situation

While we might not remember much about the heresies that roiled the early church, in their day they were the subject of some hard-ball religious

conflict. Why all the fuss? Because most of these false beliefs challenged the basic tenets of Christian faith, like the divinity of Jesus. If we believe in one God, some said, how can we also believe that both the Father and Jesus are God? Isn't that two Gods? Saint Hilary, a church leader who defended the orthodox doctrine, wrote: "Whatever is in the Father is also in the Son; whatever is in the unbegotten is also in the only-begotten." Have faith in a God who would be so gracious and loving as to take the form of a human being, Jesus.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22a; Mark 2:1-12 (309)*

"Who but God alone can forgive sins?"

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14

Righteousness tests should be left behind

Ever considered serving the church via a vocation to religious life only to conclude you couldn't "measure up" to the challenge or that you somehow were not "worthy" of the calling? It is no accident that Vocation Awareness Week closes with a gospel passage in today's Mass readings highlighting the fact that Jesus called to discipleship those whom his society and its religious leaders considered to be unworthy sinners and outcasts. The truth is, all are called to serve in some way. There is no test for righteousness you have to pass first. Rather than focus on your shortcomings, take some time to consider how your gifts, skills, and interests can serve humanity and the church.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1a; Mark 2:13-17 (310)*

"Many tax collectors and sinners sat with Jesus and his disciples."

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15

SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

"Here I am"

Throughout the Bible when God would call on someone by name, the answer would be: "Here I am." Many saints throughout the church's history responded with the same willingness to serve God's will for them, whether it be to start a hospital, feed the poor, educate the young, or shelter the elderly. Even when the task seemed overwhelming, they pursued it. Faced with the challenge of founding a community and an academy in the then-wilderness of Indiana, Saint Mother Theodore Guerin, the foundress of the Sisters of Providence of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods, wrote: "All appearances are against it." But establish it she did. Look for opportunities to say an unconditional "yes!" to love and serve others as God loves you.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19; 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20; John 1:35-42 (65)*
"Here I am. You called me."

MONDAY, JANUARY 16

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

Getting head and heart right

"One day we will learn that the heart can never be totally right if the head is totally wrong." The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote that in his book *Strength to Love* in 1963. He underscored the necessity of taking responsibility for the formation of our consciences—including *informing* our consciences through ongoing education even after formal classroom days are behind us. After all, integrity doesn't mean simply holding to your principles and actions in tandem with each other. You have to be sure, first of all, that your convictions are tied to more than your preferences, biases, and opinions! To be tethered to true north, reflect on scripture daily.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 15:16-23; Mark 2:18-22 (311)*

"No one puts new wine into old wineskins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins."

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17

FEAST OF ANTHONY, ABBOT

Turn down the distractions

On the feast of Saint Anthony of the Desert, we recall that there has been, almost from the beginning, a way of following Christ that draws the believer away from busyness, away from noise, away from the sense stimulation that many experts say we are becoming addicted to. We respond reflexively not to what is most important in life but to the latest signal, beep, buzz, or ringtone to impinge upon our consciousness. Few of us have a desert at hand where we can retreat and listen to the still, small voice of God, but perhaps there is a park, a rooftop, a chapel, a parked car with the radio off that can offer a chance for contemplation, for quietly considering the things that really matter.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Samuel 16:1-13; Mark 2:23-28 (312)*

"The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18

Fighting Goliath

It's challenging to face off with the monsters of one's own making in this world: relationships that are fraying, decisions poorly made, today's bills that reflect yesterday's foolish purchases. How

can we also be expected to fight the monsters who owe their creation to the forces of history? Take, for example, the sad divisions that make up Christian history. You and I didn't forge the breach between Rome and today's Lutherans, Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists. Yet as we prepare for the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we're asked to reach out across this scarred battlefield and recall the Christ who invited all to be his friends.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51; Mark 3:1-6 (313)*

"You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy."

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY BEGINS

How to be a real winner

The theme of this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, "We shall all be changed by the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ," asks us to consider the entrenched role of winners and losers in our society and then to move beyond such oppositional thinking. Our prayer this week is to reach toward the level of awareness where opposites like winners and losers are transcended and reconciled through the forces of love and compassion. That is the "victory" of this year's theme. That is the mindset of Jesus. That kind of change, however, is going to take more than a week. Still, we must begin where we are. What will you do to put this prayer into action?

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 18:6-9; 19:1-7; Mark 3:7-12 (314)*

"Hearing what he was doing, a large number of people came to him."

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20

FEAST OF FABIAN, MARTYR, POPE AND SEBASTIAN, MARTYR

Take this call seriously

Saint Sebastian, the patron saint of soldiers, and Saint Fabian, who was chosen as pope by the sign of a dove descending from above, were both men who embraced what God had called them to do and eventually gave their lives for Christ. They accepted the opportunities God offered them and fought through persecution because they believed in the unconditional love of God. The apostles did the same when Jesus summoned them up a mountain. By emulating the apostles and Sebastian and Fabian, we allow ourselves to fully accept our true vocation from Jesus.

TODAY'S READINGS: *1 Samuel 24:3-21; Mark 3:13-19 (315)*

“Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted and they came to him.”

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21

FEAST OF AGNES, VIRGIN, MARTYR

The most vulnerable deserve the most protection

The stories of child sex abuse that have come out recently remind us in no uncertain terms that the exploitation of the youngest and most vulnerable among us is an ongoing and serious problem. Today in the church calendar we remember Saint Agnes, who died at the tender age of 13 back in the year 304 A.D. It was said that as punishment for refusing a forced marriage to the son of a Roman official, young Agnes was dragged naked through the streets of Rome to a brothel where she was raped and then executed. A horrific tale of child abuse no doubt, but one that has been repeated in some form or another through the ages. It is time for Christians to speak with one voice worldwide to denounce the abuse of children wherever and whenever it occurs.

TODAY'S READINGS: 2 *Samuel* 1:1-4, 11-12, 19, 23-27; *Mark* 3:20-21 (316)

“Rouse your power, and come to save us.”

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22

THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Discipleship 101

How did you begin your journey as a follower of Jesus? Perhaps your parents saw to your baptism, although some make that decision later in life. Others had the advantage of a Catholic education or religious instruction that was parish-based. Many had special mentors in the faith: priests and sisters, grandparents or siblings, friends or teachers whose love and example made Christianity both credible and attractive. Consider how to give the gift of faith to children. You, too, can be a spiritual mentor!

TODAY'S READINGS: *Jonah* 3:1-5, 10; 1 *Corinthians* 7:29-31; *Mark* 1:14-20 (68)

“Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’”

MONDAY, JANUARY 23

Let grace and love unite

During the Reformation the church headed into the chaos of conflicting views of how it should function. It was a dark time in church history that saw much division and persecution. Through all this darkness, however, the light of Christ was still present. Even though the church was divided, there still was hope. When we tear one another apart, we lose sight of what is truly

important—God's grace and love. Instead of creating divisions among ourselves, let's embrace a sense of community and compassion for one another to allow God's grace to shine through the darkness and enter our hearts.

TODAY'S READINGS: 2 *Samuel* 5: 1-7, 10; *Mark* 3:22-30 (317)

“If a kingdom is divided against itself, the kingdom cannot stand.”

TUESDAY, JANUARY 24

FEAST OF FRANCIS DE SALES, BISHOP, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

The great communicator

In 1923 Pope Pius XI proclaimed Saint Francis de Sales a patron saint of writers and journalists because he made extensive use of flyers and books in his work as a spiritual director and defender of the Catholic faith. De Sales, who served as bishop of Geneva from 1602 to 1622, was also a polyglot, known as a clear and gracious stylist in French, Italian, and Latin. He even developed a form of sign language in order to teach a deaf man about God and thus is also the patron saint of the deaf. There are many ways to communicate the glory of God to the world. What is your particular gift and how will you use it to spread the Good News?

TODAY'S READINGS: 2 *Samuel* 6:12b-15, 17-19; *Mark* 3:31-35 (318)

“Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25

FEAST OF THE CONVERSION OF PAUL, APOSTLE

You're never an impossible mission for God

The details of the story vary, but whatever happened to Saint Paul on the road near Damascus was literally a turning point in his life. What was so incredible about Paul's "turning around"—his conversion—was not only the dramatic suddenness of it but also the fact that it happened in the midst of his persecution of Christians. He literally changed sides in mid-stride, switching his allegiances completely. Paul's conversion was a decisive statement on God's part that personal change is always possible. Have faith, and therefore hope, in that power today.

TODAY'S READINGS: *Acts* 22:3-16 or 9:1-22; *Mark* 16:15-18 (519)

“About noon a great light from the sky suddenly shone around me.”

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26

Get fired up

Known as the “Light to the Gentiles,” Saint Paul was a master with words and images, which continue to resonate 2,000 years after they were first written. Picture what happens when you stir a smoldering fire: Sparks snap and fly then a flame bursts from the center and a warm, reassuring blaze ignites from the ashes. Our eternal, internal flame never dies but merely dims through forgetfulness. It needs only to be revived by our memory. Suddenly we become aware of the inner resources we had forgotten or didn’t know we had. Today when your spirit is flagging, conjure an imaginary stick and kindle into flame the presence of God that is within you. Make it a blazing fire, generating great quantities of heat and light.

TODAY’S READINGS: *2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:1-5 (520); Mark 4:21-25 (320)*
“I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have.”

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27

FEAST OF ANGELA MERICI, VIRGIN

Step out and step up

Saint Angela Merici did two things that may seem small now but in her time (16th-century Italy) were huge: She organized a group of single laywomen to teach the uneducated girls of her town. In her time, very few women had any schooling, let alone became teachers, and the ones who did have some education were nuns, who, like other unmarried women, rarely went out on their own. Her community eventually became the Ursuline religious order. It’s easy to ignore the fact that things people now take for granted came about because of someone who had a daring idea and the courage to carry it out. Their example can also serve to inspire you as well to take a bold step to do good in the world.

TODAY’S READINGS: *2 Samuel 11:1-4a, 5-10a, 13-17; Mark 4:26-34 (321)*

“To what shall we compare the Kingdom of God? It is like a mustard seed that . . . is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants.”

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28

FEAST OF THOMAS AQUINAS, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

Faith can be an open question

Last November an Oxford-style debate on the proposition “the world would be better off without religion” ended with the audience voting that those who argued for the claim were the “winners.” Saint Thomas Aquinas would have been intrigued, and perhaps if he were on the “opposed” team the outcome might have been

different, but he wouldn’t have been afraid of the debate. “The truth of our faith,” Aquinas said, “becomes a matter of ridicule among the [nonbelievers] if any Catholic, not gifted with the necessary scientific learning, presents as dogma what scientific scrutiny shows to be false.” Catholics have an enviable intellectual tradition, and we honor the patron of schools, colleges, and students when we not only read and pray but study and learn and are not afraid to ask questions.

TODAY’S READINGS: *2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 10-17; Mark 4:35-41 (322)*

“Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?”

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME; CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK BEGINS

Get a complete education

Catholic schools in the United States had a rough start. Partly in response to the religious bias (not to mention anti-Catholicism) in the public schools, the first Plenary Council of Baltimore (1852) mandated that every Catholic parish establish a school. The campaign was so successful that riots ensued, incited by groups such as the Know-Nothing Society, which was committed to eliminating “foreign influence, popery, Jesuitism, and Catholicism” in all aspects of American life. We have come a long way. This year’s theme for Catholic Schools Week, “Faith, Academics, Service,” highlights the three pillars of Catholic education. How can you promote these values?

TODAY’S READINGS: *Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28 (71)*

“A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you.”

MONDAY, JANUARY 30

Bring hurts to heal

The expression “inner demons” captures something of the helplessness that those in the grip of negative behaviors feel. The ancients took that phrase literally, believing that illness was due to divine punishment for sin or demons taking up temporary residence in a person. The remedy was to seek forgiveness or a healer who could rid you of the bad spirits. While most people nowadays don’t believe that sicknesses and personality problems come from evil spirits or God’s wrath, there is still the need for reaching out to others for help when you cannot help yourself. Medical and other professionals, counselors, family, friends, and especially Jesus the Healer in prayer provide that assistance.

TODAY'S READINGS: 2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30;
16:5-13; Mark 5:1-20 (323)
"Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you."

TUESDAY, JANUARY 31

FEAST OF JOHN BOSCO, PRIEST

Love and support your local child

Saint John Bosco was born in Italy in 1815 into a family of farm workers. He became a priest and a teacher, devoting his life to the care and education of abandoned and neglected children. His approach was considered novel at the time: He used love instead of the threat of punishment to shape the behavior of his students. John embraced the spirituality of Saint Francis de Sales and dedicated his work to him when he founded the Society of St. Francis de Sales (also known as the Salesians of Don Bosco). How can you support teachers and those who care for children? What are some ways you, in the spirit of John Bosco, can extend love, compassion, and respect to children, especially those most in need?

TODAY'S READINGS: 2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14b,
24-25a, 30-19:3; Mark 5:21-43 (324)
"Jesus took the child by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha koum,' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise!'"

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