

TWENTY-SIXTH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME



SUN **THE TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**
Sept 27 [To Follow Christ is to Share the Gifts Received](#)
A reflection inspired by a text of Carroll Stuhlmueller

MON **Monday of the Twenty-Sixth Week of Ordinary Time**
28 [Putting Your Heart into Seeking God](#)
A reflection by Symeon the New Theologian

TUES **Feast of St Michael & All the Angels**
29 [The Ministries of the Angels](#)
Based on a reflection by St. Albert the Great

WED **Memorial of St. Jerome**
30 [Seeking God with All our Heart](#)
A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Eugene Burke.

THURS **Memorial of St. Therese of the Child Jesus**
Oct. 1 [Breaking Down Walls With Charity](#)
A reflection inspired by a text of Ida Gorres

FRI **Friday of the Twenty-Sixth Week in Ordinary Time**
2 [The Point of Active Love for the Neighbor](#)
A reflection extracted from a text by Barbara Ward

SAT **Memorial of Our Lady**
3 [A Little Thing that is No Little Thing](#)
A reflection taken from talks by Pope St. John Paul II



To Follow Christ Is to Share the Gifts Received

A reflection inspired by a text of Carroll Stuhlmueller

This Sunday's reading from the Letter of James enunciates a theme that ties all three of the day's readings together. Watch out, if you are rich, because if you hoard what God has given you to share you will lose it. This is not only about "riches" in economic or material sense. It is about spiritual riches. Our spiritual gifts are not just for us but are given to be shared. The task entrusted to us is to find ways to do the sharing that will lead others to God.

A reading from the Book of Numbers describes what happened when Moses asked each of the smaller groups in Israel to select people who could help their fellows resolve disputes and claims to have been wronged. Two who had been chosen by their peers didn't come to the service of commissioning. The Spirit came upon them anyway; they prophesied.

The first work of a prophet is to proclaim the hopes people can have because of their relationship with God. This is larger than hoping to end disputes. It has to do with bringing people together around God to build community in mutual support. God respected the choices each group makes and gives the chosen ones special gifts—e.g., of showing others how to put all their hope in God. Do that and you are a "prophet". A gift of hoping in God is a form of riches which has to be shared!

Jesus pointed out to his disciples that one should respect gifts of God for helping others even if their uses has not been officially recognized. Someone was exorcising demons in Jesus' name without becoming one of Jesus disciples. Such a gift should be respected, Jesus says: Whoever isn't against us is with us! The community of God is found wherever God has given spiritual riches that are being shared. As Pope Francis never stops saying: The Church of Christ is about merciful love. Church order is a gift intended to help this happen and not to prevent any unofficial sharing of spiritual giftedness.

Jesus calls us to be passionate about sharing our gifts, material and spiritual. If there is anything in us or about us that gets in the way of doing this we must get rid of it—even if we have to amputate a hand or remove an eye! The goal is not to increase our medical expenses. It is that sharing our gifts leads us closer to God. We have to share this experience—even if not officially recognized.

Anything, spiritual or material, which gets in the way of helping others to God needs to be gotten rid of. Nothing is really worth having except as a way to love and serve others as Jesus does. That is to be the criterion for deciding what to do with whatever you have. The hoarding of goods and money James speaks of is only one example, and unfortunately a common one, of failure to do this. The lesson is general. Do I have or do anything that can't be used to help myself or another love and serve like Jesus? Make it something you can use as Jesus would, or get rid of it! Loving Jesus with all our heart is the grace enabling us do this.

Putting Your Heart into Seeking God

A reflection by Symeon the New Theologian

Do you tremble when you hear God telling you day after day, through the entirety of Divine Scripture: Let no evil word come from your mouth! Indeed, I tell you that you will have to answer for every careless word. You will receive a reward for a cup of cool water given to a thirsty person; a good word is even more of a gift than a cup of water and a bad or hurtful word is like giving fouled water that will harm one who drinks it.

Do not deceive yourselves. God loves us; God is compassionate and merciful. I myself testify to this by telling you that it is God's compassion that makes me confident of being saved. Yet you must understand that my confidence will be of no help if I refuse to repent and to observe God's commandments in every detail and with great reverence and awe. Quite the contrary, God punishes believers who fail to do this even more than unbaptized unbelievers.

We must not deceive ourselves! Let no sin be so small in your eyes that you take it lightly, as though it did no great harm to your soul. Right minded servants make no distinction between a small failure and a great one. If they offend even by making a face they feel they have fallen away from dedication to their service. In our case it is a matter of falling away from the love of God! Whoever thinks, in passing, of acting contrary to the divine will should immediately repel the thought. One who welcomes it and consents to it is counted guilty of a sin, even if that person has not been taught it is an evil to think this way. It is enough to know it does not lead one to God.

We need to be extremely vigilant and zealous. We need to give serious time to searching the Divine Scriptures to learn what leads to God. The Savior's command—"Search the Scriptures"—shows us how helpful they are for us. So search them and hold fast to what they say. Do it with faith and exactitude. When you have been given an accurate knowledge of God's will you will be able both to distinguish between good and evil and to help others do so. Nothing is so conducive to our salvation and living according to the divine commandments and loving one another.

We may have to work very hard and shed many prayerful tears before we understand what our Master has taught us. Then we will be ready to die for even the least of God's commandments. The Word of God is a two-edged sword, cutting away all desire for what is merely humanly pleasing. It is like a blazing fire that stirs us to zeal; we disregard all life's sorrows and see all trials as joys, even desiring and embracing death if that be a means to attaining God and life. This is what we must share with one another. We find it easy to do so in the measure our love of God and Christ consumes us little by little as an ordinary fire burns good wood.

The Ministries of the Angels

A reflection by St. Albert the Great

Our Lord warns us: “See to it that you do not treat one of these little ones with disregard for I tell you that they have angels of their own in heaven and these behold the face of the Heavenly Father continually.” Christ is telling us to be attentive to all because all have been called to be Children of God; no matter how poor or uneducated or weak a person seems to be yet that person is under the care of an angel. We are to esteem others very greatly and seek to guard them from every evil. God has assigned an angel to watch over and care for them, and us.

What does that mean? Are we to look at such an angel as we do at a dishwasher in the lowest class restaurant? Are they poor and without any special talents? The angels are more like officers and officials of a ruler, ministers of state whose importance is seen by their have continual access. We know this because they are in God’s presence continually and are very important in carrying out the work of God. There is a Gloss on Scripture which reads: “Great is the dignity of souls; there is not one who has not at his or her service from birth an angel charged with watching out for that person continually.” St. Michael is among the Greatest of these angels. We celebrate angelic ministry today so we may learn from them how to serve God by serving and care for one another.

The first ministry is to call attention to the good things God’s people do. In the Book of Tobit Raphael says: “I was constantly presenting your prayer to the Lord as you buried the dead”. In the Book of Revelation of John we hear: “An angel took his stand at the altar with a censer of gold and much incense was given it so an offering might be made out of the prayers of all the holy ones.” The altar is the heart of one who is faithful to God; angels gather our thoughts, prayers, words and works to offer them, glowing with the fire of charity, before the throne of God. It is good always to have something ready to put in the angelic censer.

The second ministry consists of missions for the salvation of God’s people carried out with enthusiasm, as Raphael did for Sarah and Tobiah. The text enumerates the benefits received. Angels guard the Church and all who are joined to Christ, as the Psalm says: “God entrusted you to his angels to guard you in all your ways.”

The third ministry is praise of God for the love shown even repentant sinners. They sing out their own joy as they witness God’s joy. This is the rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner who repents. The fourth ministry is to contemplate with great desire the Face of God. This is the source of the highest happiness that can be experienced and yet it never fills one so as not to want more. How are we to imitate the angelic example? Begin by asking the Lord to grant us to want to serve faithfully and fervently. Note all the good others do & thank God for it. This is the path to contemplation.

Seeking God with All Our Heart

A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Eugene Burke

In a sense, each individual creates a personal world using talents, virtues, interests, convictions and experiences, and focuses all on some objective that becomes “the world” for that person. The axis and objective of St. Jerome’s life was the quest for Christian perfection. It was with this in mind that he worked so hard to understand Scripture and share what he learned. He describes how he gave himself to this quest in a letter:

“I established myself in the desert and solitude and struggled not to think of the delights I had known in Rome. I wore sackcloth, my skin was burned black, I tried to keep vigil and so sleep less and I drank only water and ate raw vegetables. There I was in a monastic cell but in my mind I seemed surrounded by pole dancers; I was pale from fasting yet my mind was hot with desire. I could only lie at Jesus feet and bathe them with my tears. I feared myself as I tried to seek only the Lord.”

Jerome was decisive and enthusiastic. Once committed all his abilities, time and energy were at the service of the objective selected as a way to Christian perfection. He wouldn’t hear of putting off acting out the Gospel call. Spiritual mediocrity was to be opposed in every way. All should forego compromising the demands of the Gospel but seek to live as Christ with whole-hearted intensity. He was unwilling to allow those who wouldn’t follow his lead to think they were on a path leading to Christ. Yet he was not blind to the weakness, even those in himself.

All this made him irascible and gave rise to a tendency to strike out at those who seemed to attack or devalue what he stood for. He was a master of rhetoric and used it to take the skin off those he considered opponents, as to charm those who seemed ready to follow him. He could only see laxity in the behavior of those living in the way accepted as normal in Roman society. So he denounced it and the associated lifestyle like the prophets Amos and Jeremiah.

The struggle was to exercise charity to all without compromising what he saw as unchangeable principles. The fact that society was seemingly committed to Christian principles and goals but seemed to him really to live according to Hedonistic pleasure seeking that made things more difficult for him. How to keep a balance—which he often failed to do. We too live in a society that easily pays lip service to Christian faith and moral teaching but lives as though they did not exist. We too have to find our way to commit ourselves whole heartedly to living Christ’s Gospel while not losing our balance or ability to respect others and interest them in Christ’s way of living. We have to model an attractive way of living Christian life while refusing to make pleasure or comfort the goal. So our task is to live Christ and to show how this is a better life than any other. Can we be creative in finding ways to live Christ’s love and compassion so as to draw others to do the same?

Breaking Down Walls With Charity

A reflection inspired by a text of Ida Gorres

Therese of Lisieux is best known for her autobiographical account of how she came to understand her vocation: *“Since my longing for martyrdom was powerful and unsettling I turned to the epistles of St. Paul in the hope of finally finding an answer. By chance the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of the first epistle to the Corinthians caught my attention. In the first section I read that not everyone can be an apostle, prophet or teacher, that the Church is composed of a variety of members and the eye cannot be the hand. I kept on reading until I found this theme: “Set your longing on the greatest gifts, and I will now show you that which surpasses all others.” For the Apostle insists that the greater gifts are nothing without love and that this is the best path leading directly to God. I prayed: O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my calling .. in the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love.”*

This became her famous “little way”. Part of what it does is break down all the barriers between religious and lay life. The Little Way consists in doing small acts of love and care and respect for those you live or work with. Everyone is called to do this, and to make loving others in this way, and for love of Jesus, the heart and substance of life. This is the way of perfection for those who live in a cloister and dedicate themselves to contemplation, and it is the way for those who live in the world and have a very ordinary family life. It is a way that brings all together and leads all to God, while both respecting and transforming the characters and temperaments and personalities that distinguish people from one another and so easily become causes of irritation and all that is opposed to real Christ-like love.

St. Pius X is said to have called Therese the greatest saint of the 19th century. He transformed the Church from within by breaking down the barrier that had denied easy access to the Holy Eucharist to laypeople and reserved it to the clergy and religious. The seemingly insignificant nun who derived from her family experience a way of holiness for everyone was integral to that transformation we connect especially with St. Pius X. She stands at the intersection of the “old piety” and the new. It is perhaps not mere chance that both her parents are canonized saints. So she shows all how to build on the foundations of one’s experience, beginning from that in their own families. They are ways of loving and respecting and caring for others day by day and without special drama. This Little Way made her a Doctor of the Church. She sought only to love Jesus with all her heart as “love in the heart of the Church”. Our task is to see that the barriers she broke down are not rebuilt and we do it in the same small ways that she did. They are the ways of daily love and concern that lift up those we meet or live with to see the hope and joy that comes only from God through Jesus Christ and those who imitate his example.

The Point of Active Love for the Neighbor

A reflection extracted from a text by Barbara Ward

Should we leave to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's? Should Christians engage in political action? Because God made us body and soul there is really no escape from involvement in politics. On every possible occasion Jesus told us to see human beings as they are. We are constantly reminded of the need to feed the hungry, shelter those who are without homes and give help to those in danger of death. God would never have taken a human body if God had not cared for it. He didn't build the human body to be starved.

Yet God did leave us the enormous leeway of intelligence and free will. God left the decisions about how to live to us. Because of this freedom, we have the incredible dignity and the appalling risk of being creators of our own societies. We cannot create them without being involved even in politics and its daily bread. As creators of the human order Christians now face a challenge which no previous generation did.

First, as citizen of the First World we are extremely rich relative to the rest of the world. The national communities to which we belong have the resources to prevent starvation throughout the world. If people starve today it is due to a choice made by other human beings. Freedom is the essence of morals. We can choose whether or not children die of hunger. Do we want to wear the brand of Cain for not caring for our brethren?

Second, the fact is that today for the time our fraternity with all means something concrete in technical and physical terms. The planet has been sufficiently united by technology for all people to be actual neighbors. This technology can be used to promote friendship or escalate violence. We have the resources and the unity needed for political action in favor of a united, viable and fraternal international society. Our vision of how to do this depends on the Christian conscience and the prospect of a joy we can create for all to share.

So here we are. Let's try to be the salt of the earth, and the leaven for its societies, and the light on a hill. We can do so many small things which yet make large differences. We can create. I think we have what it takes. I am convinced we are going to try. What sort of success will God give us? Certainly God will transform us through the very effort we make to do what we know is God's will. There are so many Christians! Each doing a little thing can make a very large difference for the good. You can begin where you live and with your circle of friends. That is where Jesus began. You don't need to be greater than Jesus! But you do need to be like him. He just had to find out when to begin. Following him, the answer for us is now.

A Little Thing that is No Little Thing

A reflection made of talks by Pope St. John Paul II

God, to redeem humanity keeps especially in mind those in need and those who suffer. The Son of God was born poor and lived among the poor in order by his poverty to make us rich spiritually. As a consequence we are not merely God's servants but God's children. Can we doubt that our Heavenly Father gives good things to his children? The greatest gift is Christ our Savior. Christ is always there for us, to relieve and refresh us when we are weary and burdened and suffer.

This Christ calls with all his strength upon those who have the means to help others and who believe in Him to work for greater justice and to share with those who are in want and need. No one need lack food, clothing, housing, work and even the goods of culture. All can share in that which gives dignity to the human person.

Sharing with others freely, in imitation of God, is part of what gives us dignity. It is not simply physical but spiritual sharing. Christ's is a pressing appeal to spend our lives in putting ourselves at the service of those in need of physical and spiritual help. It is a charity which is generous and does not sympathize with injustice but seeks truth, which does not fear spiritual want but reaches out to it.

The divine economy of salvation, as Christ revealed, it is manifested in the freeing of human persons from all that is evil. This begins as an interior transformation of what is spiritually evil into something good by imitating Jesus. We are thus called to become new persons, like Christ. What is good builds people up in the image of Christ—who in Gethsemane suffered, and was scourged, and crowned with thorns, and walked the way to the Cross, and died on it. Christ drained the cup of human suffering to show how it can be transformed individually and interiorly.

Jesus says to each of us: Come, follow me! It is an invitation to take part in this process of transformation. In my flesh, says St. Paul, I complete what is still lacking in Christ's sufferings—those of Christ's Body. This is itself a transformation of what caused his sufferings. We can each and all make these words our own. Then, again like St. Paul, we can share this with others by showing them how even suffering can be made good for the one who suffers. We can show it because we have experienced it.

The suffering need not be great or prolonged. It need not be physical, for suffering as such is primarily spiritual. That is what is transformed. They we become different persons spiritually, more capable of helping and sharing. Jesus wants love, the solidarity of love, to grow from suffering and around suffering. This is a good which is possible only to human persons. It is a good which never passes away. We do little things but doing them is no little thing! Are you ready to accept this gift today in whatever, little or great, causes you suffering and distress?