

THIRTY-FOURTH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME

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SUN **OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST KING OF THE UNIVERSE**
Nov. 22 **The Thirty-Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time**
Living by the Hope God Gives
A reflection based on a text by Carroll Stuhlmueller

MON **Monday of the Thirty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time**
23 **The Mission Given us by our King**
A reflection by Abbot Alban Boultwood

TUES **Memorial of St. Andrew Dung-Lac & Companions**
24 **Sharing in Christ's Victory through Hope**
A reflection taken from letters by individual martyrs

WED **Wednesday of the Thirty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time**
25 **The Living Kingdom of Christ**
From a homily of St. Augustine of Hippo

THURS **THANKSGIVING DAY**
26 **Thursday of the Thirty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time**
Giving Thanks to God from the Heart
From a homily by St. Gregory of Nyssa

FRI **Friday of the Thirty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time**
27 **Our Hope is for God's Glory Within Us**
A reflection from Origen's book, On Prayer

SAT **Memorial of Our Lady**
28 **Blessed Are You Beyond All Compare**
From In Praise of the Virgin Mother by St. Benard

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Living By The Hope God Gives

A reflection based on a text by Carroll Stuhlmueller

What we may call the calendar of faith isn't coordinated with the world's calendars. This Sunday's celebration of the Lord's Resurrection calls us to place all that happened, all we did, in the past year in God's hands and view ourselves as starting anew. We fix our eyes on Jesus' Coming to save us. It requires a new or renewed decision to follow the Lamb of God, wherever he leads us. He doesn't lead us to what we were raised to seek, or to any goal as humanly conceived; we can't imagine his Kingdom as a perfect human order for living well. Jesus says clearly: My Kingdom is not "from" here. It isn't the fulfillment of any ordinary human hope but of a hope only God can realize; i.e., it is "from" God alone.

The first reading at today's Eucharist was inspired by the hope that out of the worst persecution Palestinian Jews had ever experienced something radically new would come and would remake our world to be God's world. It would mean the destruction of all existing ways of ordering life and the beginning of an everlasting Kingdom. Out of chaos—and we experience that as much as the ancient Jews did—comes new order, God's order. We can't create it because we can't even imagine it. So we have to wait upon God with no resource but hope.

John's Gospel pictures Jesus before earthly judges who are deeply puzzled by what he does and refuses to do. They are trying to protect a humanly created order, whether that of the Roman state or the religious-civil regime of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus tells them he has not come from God to do what they are trying to do. He says, "My Kingdom is not "from" here. Indeed, he has inaugurated the new order and it will continue to grow in and within our world until God causes it to be the only order. Jesus is completely certain this will happen. He calls us to that certitude.

The reading from the Book of Revelation repeats Jesus' assertion that the new "kingdom", whatever that turns out to be in the concrete, will come from God and that when it comes nobody will be able to miss what is happening. This fact is given us as the basis for the hope we are to live by. Jesus doesn't take anyone "out of the world", or even pray for that. We are to be in the world (though not belonging to it) as people who already live in the new "kingdom". But how can we live what we can't even imagine? We can do it because Jesus has told us how: Love one another as I have loved you. Jesus' love is the inauguration of the new kingdom. It grows as more and more people love one another as he has loved them.

Jesus' love is our hope! We see it in the Cross and in all Jesus did, and continues to do through the lives of those who follow him wherever he leads. That is how the Book of Revelation speaks of those who are sacred to the Lamb who was slain. The power that makes it possible is unshakeable hope. It is God's gift to us today, and every day as long as we dedicate our self to following Jesus in loving one another no matter what happens or what it costs.

The Mission Given Us by Our King

A reflection by Abbot Alban Boulwood

The title 'King' as applied to Christ puzzles some people. It means that in Jesus all things find their purpose, their fulfillment and their salvation. The Son incarnate is the only mediator of the plan of divine love, and only by that plan does creation attain its true end in God, the Father.

Celebrating the birth of Jesus we sing the hymn: "What Child is this?" Faith answers "this is Christ the King". As Jesus was dying on the cross Pilate set above his head a placard, to mock not only him but Jewish hopes: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews". What King is this? Faith answers with great reverence and fervor that it is the "true" king, the one who wins redemption for sinners and wins a definitive victory for all who follow Him.

Christ gained his victory and established his kingdom not through worldly power or success but through a love stronger than all the powers of this world. Jesus' authority is from above, from perfect union with the Father's will. Yet his kingdom is very truly in this world; he won the redeeming victory by entering completely into the human condition, including its suffering and death. In Jesus was achieved a perfect but mysterious solution to the painful division in our nature. Through Jesus, divine goodness truly penetrates our world and, if it is willingly received, totally transforms creation so all is grace.

Humans are called, and enabled to live, not for sinning but for living in God and in a true newness of life. The universal kingship of Christ is established when all is renewed and glorified in Jesus. Nothing is left unredeemable. "Take courage! I have overcome the world!" That is how John's Gospel quotes Jesus.

Christ holds his kingship in two ways. As the only begotten Son of God the Father kingship is his right. Likewise, by his humanity, he gained kingship by the perfect oblation of loving obedience on the cross. He thus restores the whole world to the Father. Our heritage in this Kingdom is also given in two ways. It is the free gift of God but a gift given as we follow the sacrificial way of Jesus. We share everything with Jesus and thus let all be transformed through the self-giving that Jesus teaches us and uses to fill us with grace.

All those who follow in the royal priesthood of Christ form a serving, suffering, loving Church. We inherit the kingship of Jesus by fulfilling the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection in our personal life—we "fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the Church". We share in Jesus' mission of redeeming the world. We share it until the end of time. Christ's kingship continues on earth in us. It is our dignity and, even more importantly, our responsibility and our vocation. We follow our king wherever he leads us in love.

Sharing in Christ's Victory through Hope

From letters by the martyrs

One of the martyrs, Paul, wrote as follows: "I want to tell you about the trials through which I am passing in order to inflame you with love for God and to ask you to join with me in praising God—God's mercy is everlasting! In the midst of things which terrify many I am filled with joy because I am not alone—Christ is with me."

These martyrs saw Christ's death and resurrection a promise to them, and so a reason to hope in God. Death would lead to life! It would be a life such as none of them had ever known before. They heard St. Paul's declaration that whoever shares in Christ's death will share in his resurrection and they believed it and put their trust and hope in that promise.

One of them wrote: "Each day emperors, mandarins and those of their retinues blaspheme the holy name of God and of Jesus. But our Savior is enthroned above the Cherubim and Seraphim. And your power, my God, is shown in our weakness. Grant that I may not grow too weak to bear you witness but let me hold fast in your strength."

"God has chosen what is weak in the world to confound those who, in the world's eyes, are strong. God chose what is despised and low to confound those who see themselves as noble. God has confounded the wise of the world by the faith of those who seem to know nothing". These truths are used as a kind of profession of faith ending with the following: "I anchor myself in God and it becomes a living hope in my heart."

The martyrs were being tested, as they saw things. They knew that a like test might come to their fellow Christians. They tell all: "So run that you may attain the crown. Put on the armor that is faith. Know that it is better to enter life without an eye or as a cripple than to be cast away with your body whole." They see themselves as in a race which they must win. Their prize will be the ability to sing God's praises forever.

During their imprisonment the martyrs lived a very unpleasant life but otherwise the challenges were very like those which every Christian faces. One must keep hope in God strong and must keep one's eyes fixed on Jesus. The Gospels show us Jesus doing every sort of work, including the thirty years spent in Nazareth doing ordinary work to support Mary and himself. There is almost nothing asked of us which was not asked of Jesus. He lived all his life as a gift of self to the Father. He asks us to do the same. This applies whether people physically abuse or mistreat us or whether our life seems relatively pleasant. Perhaps it is more difficult to face challenges which are not obviously heroic.

We are called to a kind of daily witness that can be as difficult as the witness of a martyr. We need to live it, however, in the same spirit of hope and trust that kept the martyrs faithful. We are to love even those who do not love us by living Jesus' new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.

The Living Kingdom of Christ

From a homily by St. Augustine of Hippo

Let everyone listen—Jews and Gentiles, circumcised and uncircumcised, everyone! Listen especially all kings on the earth! Realize that I am no threat to your rule, for my kingdom is not from this world or of this world. Don't fear me or my reign; come to faith.

What is Christ's Kingdom in fact? It is simply those who believe in Christ. It was to them that he said: You are not of this world, even as I am not of this world. He willed that all who believe in Him should be in the world but not belong to it by their way of living. He prayed to the Heavenly Father: I do not ask you to take them out of the world but to protect them from the evil one. He did not say that his kingdom is not "in" the world but that it is not "of" this world. So he went on to point out: "If my kingdom were of this world my servants would have fought to save me from being handed over". He ended not by saying his kingdom was not here but that his kingdom was not "from" here.

The fact is that the Kingdom of God is here until the end of time. It is here until the harvest and until then it will contain weeds. The harvest spoken of is the end of the world when the reapers, the angels, will come and gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin. None of this could happen if the kingdom were not here.

Even so the kingdom is not "from" here. It is in exile in this world. Christ says to us, his kingdom: You are not "of" the world, but I have chosen you "out of" the world. We were "of" the world when we belonged to the prince of this world, before we became Christ's Kingdom. Everyone who is reborn in Christ becomes the kingdom which is not "of" this world.

God snatched us from the powers of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Beloved Son. Christ's power lives in us in the measure we live as he lived, for the Heavenly Father and with the love and compassion which Jesus lived for everyone. We are God's Kingdom when God's law rules within us. It rules within us when we give ourselves into God's hands as did Jesus, and when we live God's love as Jesus did. Do this and you shall live forever with God. Do this and be God's Kingdom always.

Giving Thanks to God from the Heart

A reflection by St. Gregory of Nyssa

I think that if we spent the whole of our life in a constant prayer of thanks-giving to God we should be as far from having made an adequate return to One who is the Giver of All Things as if we hadn't even begun to want to do this.

We divide the time of our lives into past, present and future. In all of them we receive unnumbered things from the supreme generosity of our Lord. Consider the present. It is from him that we have the life we are living. Consider the future. All our hope that our longings and expectations will be fulfilled depends on the Lord. Turn to the past. You did not even exist until he created you.

So our very birth is a gift from the Lord. Once we were born we received the gift of living with and in God. As the apostle Paul says: In God we live and move and have our being. The hopes we have for the future depend on these very divine acts of generosity. We are in no sense master of anything beyond our present. So if you never cease to give thanks to God you will only have given thanks for the present. As for the past and the future how could one find any means for giving the thanks that are due? The only time we have is the present and we only "have time" to give thanks for the present in each present moment.

Still, though we are so far from being able to thank God as God deserves, we don't seem to have even the good intention of thanking God as we can. Who has spread out the entire earth beneath my feet and for my eyes and ears and other senses? Whose wisdom made water, and enables us to cross it. Who created the heavens? Who gave us the sun, a supremely wonderful torch to light our way? Who causes springs to gush forth from the depths of the earth? Who gives us rivers and their beds? Who enables us to obtain various services from the animals? Who gave me a life and a mind when I was as yet only dust? Who fashioned the earth into the image of the Divine Self?

What's more, when we damaged the divine image in us by our sin didn't the Lord restore it to its former beauty? When we were exiled from paradise, deprived of the Tree of Life, and lost among the multitude of created things didn't our God restore the Divine image to its original beauty? Here I am exiled from Paradise, deprived of the Tree of Life, and lost among all the created wonders, and wasn't it God who restored me to my former beauty and even offered me beatitude?

There is no one, Scripture says, who really understands. If we reflected on all these facts wouldn't we give thanks all our life and without ceasing? Let us begin to do it today, and continue each day. Give thanks to the Lord for the Lord is good; this goodness endures for ever. Let us mirror it in the goodness we show to one another and by our fervor in thanking God from all we have received from the Divine Hands and Heart.

Our Hope for is for God's Glory Within Us

A reflection by Origen of Alexandria

According to the word and promise of our Lord and Savior, the Kingdom of God doesn't come in such a way as to be seen. No one can say "There it is!" or "Here it is!" The fact is that the Kingdom of God is within us. It is clear from this that when any one prays that God's Kingdom come, the prayer is for its coming within that person's very self. One should pray for this. One should pray that it not only come but that it flourish and reach its fullest growth.

Every holy person is a subject in God's Kingdom and obeys its spiritual laws. God dwells in such a person as in a well-governed city. The Father is present within and Christ always reigns with and accompanies the Father. They dwell in the soul and it becomes more perfect. The Lord said: We will come and make our home within such a person.

Some press forward unceasingly toward this. For such people the Kingdom of God which is within will reach its full completion when the apostle's words have been fulfilled—when all God's enemies shall be made subject to God and Christ will deliver the Kingdom to God the Father so that God may be all in everyone. The Spirit inspires us to pray unceasingly. What are we to say when we pray? "Hallowed be your name; your Kingdom come!"

It is important to understand a basic fact about the Kingdom of God. There is no place in it for unrighteousness and wickedness. These cannot fit into the Kingdom of God. There can be no agreement between Christ and the Evil One. A kingdom of sin cannot co-exist with the Kingdom of God. Do we want God to reign in and over us? Then sin must have no place within us. We must let God and his Christ put to death all that is merely earthly within us—for it can't bear the fruits of the Spirit.

We are to become a kind of paradise in which God may walk with Christ, and they will take their seats within us—Christ seated at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. That realizes the spiritual kingdom for which we pray. So when all the enemies have been made a footstool for God's feet and all powers and authorities which are not of God and for God have been destroyed in us we shall indeed be God's paradise.

This can, and will, happen in each one of us. The last of the enemies to be destroyed, we have been promised, is death itself. Christ himself will speak within us: "O death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory?" What is mortal in us will then put on imperishability and all will be clothed in holiness. God will reign fully in us, that we may live amid blessings for ever. That is our hope. Never let it go.

Blest Are You Beyond All Compare

From In Praise of the Virgin Mother by St. Bernard

When Mary came to the house of Elizabeth she was met with the cry of wonder: “Blessed is the fruit of you womb!” Blessed in every way. Like a ripe, fresh fruit she has a wonderful odor, and when the fruit is tasted it has a wonderful sweetness, and when it is seen it has a wondrous beauty. This is the kind goodness that made the ancient patriarch exclaim: The odor of my son is like that of a field blessed by the Lord. Isn’t one whom the Lord blesses blest indeed? One who experiences the like will cry out: Taste and see how sweet is the Lord!

Turn to another passage: How great is the multitude of your sweetnesses, Oh Lord. You have hidden them away for those who reverence you! Oh, if only you had tasted how sweet the Lord is! Christ is the fruit which invites us to taste of it. The one who eats me, he says, will still hunger, and the one who drinks of me will yet thirst for more. Clearly, he said these things because of the marvelous flavor of his sweetness. Tasting it immediately excites our appetite for more.

This is the good fruit which is food and drink for those who thirst for justice. You have heard about the taste and about the odor; you have heard about the beauty but if that fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil, that fruit of death, had not seemed sweet and had not been so delightful to the eyes who would have eaten of it? How much more is the fruit of life and its life-giving beauty something to be longed for!

This fruit is the one concerning whom Scripture bears witness that all the angels longed to catch just a glimpse. They saw His beauty in spirit and longed to see it in its bodily form. From Zion comes His beauty. And lest we seem to be summoning you to this beauty without enthusiasm or excitement, remember what you have read in another psalm: Handsome his appearance beyond all other persons. Grace fills him and is spread abroad by his words. That is why you, Mary, are blessed forever, and we with you. This is the son of the Virgin Mother Mary. We too are her children. We can hope to be as she is, beautiful and marvelous. We need only imitate her surrender to the Lord, her humility and her love.