

# **THE THIRD WEEK OF EASTER**

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- SUN**            **The Third Sunday of Easter**  
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- MON**            **Memorial of St. Stanislaus**  
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# **The Mission of those Called to Resurrection**

**A reflection taken from a homily by St. Augustine of Hippo**

The Lord appeared repeatedly to his disciples following his resurrection. We hear today that he found a group of them working at their trade. Since they had caught nothing he directed them to a miraculous catch of fish. This last is a reminder to Peter of how he was first called to follow Jesus. Then the Lord called them to a breakfast, of bread and fish, as he had on two occasions fed the crowds who came to hear him proclaim the good news of the coming of God's Kingdom. In his person, his Risen person, the Kingdom has fully come. But we are still on the path that leads to its fullness and he shows us how to walk it.

Beside all the pleasant reminders of past wonders, the Lord also reminded Peter—and reminds each of us—of the betrayals and failures to live the life he so freely gives. Jesus had died on the cross and Peter had died spiritually due to his denials. The Lord has risen and he now raises Peter up with him as he shows Peter the path he must walk in the future. He demands that Peter three times affirm his love for the one he denied. What have we done to affirm our love for our Lord in the face of our own denials?

Notice how Jesus follows each of Peter's affirmations with the command to feed those who are his own. Ask yourself: What advantage could there be for Christ in Peter's love for him? If Christ loves you then you profit. If you love Christ, again you gain the advantages. But Jesus wished to show us how to demonstrate our love for him. We do it by showing concern for the well-being of those who belong to him. If you love me then feed my flock! He says this three times. Peter could only say three times, "I love you", and Jesus responded three times, "Then feed my sheep." When we love one another we love Christ.

Christ, who is eternal God, was born in time as a human being. He appeared to us as a genuine member of the human race. As human he suffered much from others but as God in human form he rose from the dead and lived for forty days on earth. Now he has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. We believe all these things. We also believe that we have been commanded to love one another just as Christ has loved us. In the Letter of John we read: If you do not love those you can see, how can you love the God you cannot see?

It was to make us members of his own body that the Lord became one of us that he allowed himself to be led like a lamb to the slaughter. But this lamb has tremendous strength. If he could vanquish the devil think with what power he is able to rule as king of all! Yet he does all this for our sake. May nothing be dearer to us than Christ, our Lord! Let us love him with all our hearts and so love one another even as he loves each of us.

# **Loving Like Christ and Dying With Christ**

**A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Karl Rahner**

It is common knowledge that there are often great difficulties to living the love that Christ showed us. One of the greatest of these challenges is martyrdom. We heard a good deal about martyrs in the Book of Revelation and what it says can also seem to offer great difficulties. But much of the obscurity of this Scripture is only apparent. The Seer who writes down the book is looking into his own time and into his experience of the Christian life and its challenges. Enlightened by the Spirit of God he looks toward the future and points out that its climax is God's triumph. That is what a martyr does. That is what St. Stanislaus did in his time when he faced down a king in order to live the love that led his Lord to give his own life. We learn from all these witnesses.

In the Book of Revelation the Seer keeps seeing one and the same thing. It is the crucial struggle that goes on throughout human history but will end in eternal victory for God. One thing is said over and over again. God is seen holding a book, sealed with seven seals—in other words it is completely unopenable. It is the book of human history. Nobody can open this book except the "Lamb who was slain". The meaning of all history—in other words—is Christ, the crucified Son of God. He came into history, experienced it and suffered all that has happened of ill and sin, and then rose.

This imagery is meant to remind us that God has sealed those he calls. God has sealed each of us with the seal of his love. So we can't open and read the book we are except in and with Christ. But when Christ opens it for us he shows us that our story ends in the triumph of our God. It ends in our salvation. That means that our history, no matter what it contains, can be endured and that it has wonderful meanings. Perhaps when we look at it we wish that God would not call us to account for it. But all God will do is hold up our life next to that of Jesus and compare the two. That is what we fear. But the prospect is meant to lead us to love one another now even as Christ has loved us. We will see Christ's love and will we see our love. What a difference! But this is not a cause for despair. We never lose, due to the mercy of God.

Jesus has sealed us with the seal of his everlasting love. He tells us that he sends us down no road that doesn't lead to Him and to the Heavenly Father. Even if it isn't a road to martyrdom it will lead us to the same place he leads martyrs. Jesus has placed us in a history that ends in beatitude. It ends there because beatitude is the experience of God's love and our own whole hearted loving response to it. We are sealed with God's love. This means that we find meaning in our lives, and meaning for others as well as for ourselves, in living love as Jesus did. The Martyrs in Heaven cry out and pray for us to join them and fill up the number God has set for the communion of saints. We are among that number and in our joy we have daily love to share with all we meet.

# **Sing a New Song to the Lord**

**A reflection developed from a sermon of St. Augustine of Hippo**

Listen to the Scripture: *“Sing to the Lord a new song; sing God’s praise in the assembly of the Holy Ones”*. We are called to sing a new song to the Lord. What is this “new song”?

We are told that it is a song that can be learned only by those who have become new persons in Christ. We are told that it is to be an expression of joy and, here especially, of love. So what is the new song?

It is each person who has learned to live the new life of love Christ has shown us in his person. You are the new song! If you sing the song that is love, and let it transform you, then you are becoming the new person and the new song that is God’s gift.

If we are to learn to “sing” this new song we are, then we need to be reminded of the nature of the new life we have in Christ. The new person, the new song, the new covenant, and all the other newnesses that are given us in the Risen Lord, belong to the new Kingdom that is God’s. One who can sing the new song belongs to the new covenant and the new Kingdom!

No one fails to love something. What is crucial is what one loves. The psalms tell us again and again to choose the object of our love with care. But how could we choose if we had not first been chosen? We cannot love, for example, unless someone loves us first! The source of our love is our God and our God has chosen us.

Listen to what the Apostle John has to say: *We love God because God first loved us!* God has given us the whole of himself; in doing that God has shown us the object that we are to love. What is more, God has given us the very source of that love. Listen to the Apostle Paul: *The love of God has been poured into our hearts*. What has been poured into us? The Holy Spirit has been given us by our God that we may love as Christ loves because we will love in and by the same Spirit as Christ loved.

Since we have such wonderful assurance, we have only to love God with the love God has given us. As the Apostle John says, *God is love, and whoever dwells in love dwells in God*. God offers us a short route to possessing all we long for, God! God cries out: Love me and you will have me. Yet we would be unable to love God if we did not already have God the Spirit. We have been given our new selves and our new way of life.

Listen to me, all you who have been born again in Christ and whose life is from above. Listen to me—or rather listen to the Holy Spirit, Sing to the Lord a new song! Look at me. Am I singing? Look at one another. Are you singing? Indeed, we are all singing. Sing clearly. I can hear your song and its words but the love they express must be clear. We must make sure that our lives never contradict the words that we voice. We must sing with our voices, with our hearts, with our lips and most of all with our lives. Sing to the Lord the new song that you are. And rejoice!

# **Rising to New Life with Christ**

A reflection developed from a homily of St. John Chrysostom

St. Paul poses a difficult question for us: How can we still live in sin when we have died to sin? To see the difficulty, and likewise the grace that overcomes it, we have to consider what dying to sin amounts to.

Do we die to sin just because we are forbidden to sin? Clearly not. Does it mean that when we live according to the enlightenment we received when we were baptized we are dead to sin? The second explanation is better and closer to the truth. To be dead to sin means never again to submit to it and let it lead you to act against the love Christ has shown us. To live in this way is to be dead to sin. To live in this way permanently is to be dead to sin once and for all.

Why do we find it so difficult to continue in the state which was ours when we came forth from the waters of baptism? What we must do is remain unmoved, as unmoved as a dead body, when sin urges us to do something. Paul says: *Don't you know that when you were baptized into Christ you were baptized into his death? By baptism we were buried with Christ, we shared in his death!* But we still find ourselves asking what this means.

To be baptized into Christ's death is to have died as he did. This doesn't mean dying on a cross. It means living the obedience to God that Christ lived. The cross and the tomb were accepted in complete surrender to the Heavenly Father. Whatever brings us to such surrender is for us the cross and tomb and this is the death to sin, in and with Christ. That is why Paul went on to say that we have died "*a death resembling Christ's death*". With Christ it was a bodily death but with us a death to the sin which Christ had never committed. Both are real deaths. In our case it is a process we must live out.

As Christ was raised from the death by the glory of the Heavenly Father, Paul tells us, we too can live a new life. In speaking of a new life Paul indicates the resurrection as our final goal. If you believe that Christ died and rose again then you should believe also that your destiny is the same as Christ's. If you share his death you will share his resurrection, and his new life.

What is the greater evil—sin or death? Many think death the greater evil but it is actually the lesser. Sin is the greatest evil. Sin separates us from life everlasting. We are called to face the death we fear so much in order to escape the evil we seem to fear so little. But to escape this evil we need only live the love of Christ. This is how one lives complete obedience and surrender to God. You have experienced a first taste of that love. You have only to walk in it and continually taste it more and more fully, until you taste its fullness in the resurrection life. Do not be afraid! Who needs to be afraid of love? To love with all your heart and life is to die completely to sin. Love and live!

# **The Path to Christian Perfection**

**A reflection from a treatise by St. Gregory of Nyssa**

**Christ redeemed us by giving himself for us. We were slaves to sin and, in effect, he has purchased our freedom. By redeeming us, buying us back, Christ has not only made us his own but given us immortality. Now that we belong to the Lord we must follow his lead in everything. We must not live simply for ourselves any longer, as though we could succeed on our own, but must be ruled by his teachings and will. We must never allow sin to cause us to disobey this good Master of ours because that would enslave us once more not only to sin but to death.**

**As St. Paul tells us Christ is our priest. His offering of obedience and total surrender to the Heavenly Father displays his most important teaching. We are to offer ourselves to our God as living sacrifices—turning ourselves over to God to do his will by loving one another. Refuse to conform to the standards of a world that stands apart from God; doing this will change the way we view and evaluate everything. We now look for what is good and pleasing to God, trusting that God’s way is best in every fashion.**

**God cannot show us the divine will and way if we live a worldly life in which we are not directed by the Spirit. If we value the things the world values more than we value God’s will and way then we end up at enmity with God. Everything which can cause us to do this must be destroyed, offered to God as a kind of sacrifice. That frees us to live in God’s way without any obstacle or hobble. It helps greatly to meditate on Christ’s own offering of self; that teaches us to imitate Christ and to mortify in ourselves what-ever is not of God or leading to God.**

**Christ is called in Scripture “the reflection of God’s glory and the very stamp of God’s nature”. We catch only a glimpse and a glimmering of what God has in store for us and of the depths of his wisdom. Yet the essential is stated clearly. We are to love God, and to love one another, as Jesus has done. The path to Christian perfection is one that leads us to real likeness to Christ. This path is not one of constant pain or distress. One can never be downcast when one is filled with love. Love opens the eyes to joy and joy makes all burdens light.**

**Think once again of the metaphor of “redemption” as being bought so as to free us from our slavery to sin and so to death. Where God comes death flees; God is not the God of the dead but of the living. God comes when love comes, for God is love. Divine love is gift and self-giving. When we want to be like Christ, like the Only Begotten Son of God, then we want to love as Christ does. No slave can do this, especially if the master is sin. It would not have helped us for Christ to buy our freedom unless he had taught us how to use it. That is what he shows us in his life and teaching and in the wonders he worked. We have been given the gift of this love and our task is to share freely with others what we have been given. Trust in God and you will not find this path to perfection hard or difficult. We learn to walk it by our daily deeds of love and mercy.**

# **Transformation in Christ**

**A reflection from a scripture commentary by St. Cyril of Alexandria**

Although we are many as individuals we are all one Body in Christ. We have been united in Christ by the bonds of love and so are members of one another. Christ breaks down all the barriers that separate peoples by reason of religion or ideology or way of life. This is why all should be of one mind. If one member suffers some misfortune all should suffer. If one is honored, all should be glad.

St. Paul says: "Accept one another as Christ accepted you, for the glory of God." This means being willing to share the thoughts or feelings of others. We are to "bear one another's burdens while preserving the unity of the Spirit. We need to become willing to share one another's thoughts and feelings. This is how the Heavenly Father has accepted us in Christ. St. John tells us that the Father "loved the world so much as to give the only Son for us". God's own Son has delivered us from death by buying us back from the slavery to sin in which we were trapped. Thus Christ has delivered us from death.

Why did God send the Only Begotten Son to do this? It was so that all might have life. Paul tells us that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's faithfulness to the promises made to the patriarchs. God had told them that he would bless their offspring and give them descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. So Christ came into this world in human flesh, not to be served but to serve, as he tells us. That is why Christ gave his life. He freed all from death so that they might have life and have it in all abundance.

But God also promised that through these descendants of the patriarchs all the nations of the world would be blessed. So Christ not only fulfilled the promises to Israel but also brought salvation to the gentiles. Now all are able to praise God, the creator of the universe. The mystery of divine wisdom contained in Christ has reached to absolutely every people on the earth. The whole world has been saved.

Yet this is not accomplished apart from us. We are servants of Christ and it is through our witness of love and our proclaiming of God's mercy that all peoples actually are drawn to Christ and so to God. We have been set free from sin so that we might follow Christ's example in helping others cast off the same slavery find the same glorious freedom of the Children of God. There is to be no division which sets people against one another. All are to be one in God and one in loving one another according to the model given us in Christ. This is the fulfillment of Easter and the path we are to tread toward our own sharing in the resurrection. Rejoice and be glad for God shall reign as king over all. Exult for joy for there shall be no more death but only life. This is the transformation which God offers us in the Son.

# **Giving the Gifts We Have Received**

**A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Joseph McSorley**

There is deep significance in the emphasis which Christ laid upon teaching. He sent his apostles, and all his disciples, into the entire world to teach what he had taught them. He told them, and us, to remember that they had received the gift of knowledge and understanding, of love and mercy, of peace of heart and the power of the Spirit precisely in order to be able to give these gifts to others. They are to give them freely, just as they received them. The only cost to be paid is that which comes of imitating the Lord Jesus, and those whom he has sent as teachers and givers of gifts.

The Church, the living Body of Christ still walking all the pathways of the world, is to be a teaching church in all its members. Some teach by words and some by deeds, and some will teach in ways we have not yet imagined. All will teach Christ and the Good News about God's Kingdom and all will lead others to God and to God's salvation given us in Christ. But the best teachers are always learners. Christians are always pupils, studying the same lessons until the end of time. They are lessons about believing, about hoping and about loving. They are lessons about holiness and about docility to all that Christ has taught us.

Docility is openness. Some people are closed because they resent being "told what to do", even by God. Some imagine they can take care of themselves in all important matters and so have no need of Christ's gifts. Some fear what they might have to suffer if they were to imitate Christ and so be set against the ways of the world they must live in. There are so many reasons for refusing to open oneself. We all think ourselves "old dogs" who can't learn new tricks.

The Lord doesn't ask us to renounce initiative or creativity. The Lord means only to put a kind of seal of approval upon those who are open to the new way—the way that leads to a genuinely new joy and contentment that spring from his dying and rising. We are called to a kind of obedience rather different from worldly obedience. Yes, the believer does whatever God asks. But we know that we are asked nothing except what leads to life and life in its fullness. We are told that even when we seem to be headed for a sad or painful death we are really on a path to life. Jesus' resurrection shows us the truth of this trusting faith. Serene confidence in the midst of trials is the mark of one who trusts in God and in God's Son. Jesus has given us an unshakable reason for trusting. He has told us that our reward will be great in heaven. To win a reward, however, one must continue right until the end. When that will come—either individually or for all the earth and its peoples—we do not know. We live, as the saying goes, and we learn. The great thing is never to close ourselves to new learning. The resurrection is a fact. It is the symbol of all we believe and all we can hope for. It is the evidence that God's love conquers all. We are invited to live in that love. In the end it will lead us into God's own life, which Scripture tells us is love. When all is said and done we gain something immeasurably great by paying little installments. Each moment we live in openness to God's grace is an installment. Come, good and faithful servant! This is the key to the Kingdom.