

# THE ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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**June 12**    **The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Faith & God's Forgiveness**  
A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

**MON**        **Memorial of St. Anthony of Padua**  
**13**            **How We All Speak in Tongues**  
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Anthony

**TUES**       **Memorial of Blessed Gerard**  
**14**            **The Contemplative Vocation**  
A reflection developed from texts by St. Bernard & St. Anselm

**WED**        **Wednesday of the Eleventh Week in Ordinary Time**  
**15**            **Remembrance of the Dead**  
**Christ Came to Save Sinners**  
Inspired by a text of Sr. Sandra Schneiders

**THURS**      **Memorial of St. Lutgard**  
**16**            **To Love Christ Wholly is to Love Self Truly**  
A reflection derived from texts by Fr. Louis Merton

**FRI**         **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**  
**17**            **Memorial of Blessed Joseph Mary Cassant**  
**How God Teaches Us the Truth**  
A reflection developed through a sermon of St. Augustine

**SAT**         **Memorial of Our Lady**  
**18**            **Mary, the Church & Contemplation**  
A reflection taken from a text of Hans Urs von Balthasar

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# **Faith & God's Forgiveness**

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Sunday's readings call us to reflect on our personal experience of our God's forgiveness in the light of St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians. He tells us that he no longer lives a life that is merely his own but now lives the very life of Christ. What does this concretely mean to you? We have received the gift of faith. We share it with King David and with the sinful women of the Gospel story. Both believe in God as a loving and forgiving God. That was what made it possible for them to believe they would be forgiven when they turned to God.

Let's compare this faith with our self-awareness. We are aware of ourselves, but this doesn't make who we are or can be clear. Faith is awareness of God's presence with us in a like way. We know God is there and that God is with and in us but we aren't aware clearly of who God is. Yet we know that God will never leave us, any more than we stop being ourselves. So we know that God accepts us and cherishes us and can even rejoice in us—as is usually the case in our relation to ourselves. If you think about it, then, it isn't just "me" who is living "in" me but God. My life, because of faith, is as much God's as it is mine. Now Paul had met Jesus as Christ and as having chosen just him for a work that would enable others to know Jesus as Paul had come to know him. That was his experience on the road to Damascus.

We have faith in God and we have faith in Jesus as God's Christ and our Savior. So we know Christ lives in us, chooses us and accepts us and cherishes us. Now put that together with your awareness of your own sinfulness. David has been so overwhelmed by sudden lust that he forgot God—forgot God's presence with and in him. Forgetting God let him into adultery, an attempted cover up, abuse of power and betrayal of a man who was wholly loyal to him working itself out in a murder that was supposed to make the cover up work. And he was caught and everything became public. People saw him just as he was when he wasn't living by faith, by God's presence in him.

The story makes clear the difference faith makes and shows us what a difference reclaiming the gift of faith after we've "forgotten" it makes. The Gospel story of the repentant woman shows us that repentance is a form love takes when it is found after forgetting God. The woman repented in the most public way imaginable, but it didn't embarrass her because it acted out how much she loved God who reminded her of his love through Jesus. Forgiveness is a response to love. We know we are forgiven if we remember God's love and love God back.

Love dies to selfishness and acting it out can be painful—St. Paul calls it being crucified with Christ. God asks us to let our love blossom and come to fruit. We are to live in a way that declares "I love you my God; I love you my savior; I love you more than anything else—including myself". We are sinners. We know we have forgotten God's loving presence but Jesus reminds us and reclaims our love as we "wash his feet". Think of the Holy Thursday rite of washing feet and of St. Benedict's Rule that we are to "wash the feet" of all guests. Modern monks don't keep this observance literally but they do serve their guests and show them the care of genuine Christian love. Showing such love is how we repent and turn to our God. Can we do it, day by day, with all our hearts?

# **How We All Speak in Tongues**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Anthony of Padua**

A legend tells us that once St. Anthony preached to the Pope's court and that all those who heard him seemed to understand him in their own languages—Latin, Greek, French, German, Slav and English. He, however, had a different view of what is and is not wonderful and a miracle of God. He preached a sermon about this.

The one who is filled with the Holy Spirit speaks in different languages, but they are the different ways of witnessing to Christ. One speaks the language of humility, another than of poverty, another that of patience or of obedience. We speak in these languages when we show in our own person just such virtues and when we practice them with one another. Actions speak louder than words! Your words will teach Christ when your actions show Christ. We are often full of words but empty of such actions. For this one receives only a curse from the Lord, as he cursed a fig tree when he found on it no fruit but only leaves.

St. Gregory says: A law is laid upon preachers to practice what they preach. It is useless for a person to flaunt leaning or knowledge of God's law if their actions undermine rather than support what they proclaim. The apostles spoke as the Spirit gave them the gift of tongues. Happy a person whose words come from the Holy Spirit dwelling within and not from one's self. Some speak as their own character leads them to. When they do this while preaching Christ they, in effect, "steal" the words of another and present them as their own. They think they are doing a good thing in embellishing the stolen words.

Listen to the Prophet Jeremiah: "I have a quarrel with the prophets who steal my words from one another. I have a quarrel with the prophets who only move their tongues and utter oracles, says the Lord. They make prophecies out of living dreams and recount them and so lead my people astray with lies and pretenses. I certainly never sent them or commissioned them. They do no good to my people. So says the Lord."

We don't want this said of us by our Lord. We should speak as the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of speaking in a Godly way. Our humble and sincere prayers to the Spirit for ourselves should ask that God may bring the day of Pentecost to fulfillment in our time. May the Spirit infuse in us a grace for using our bodily capacities perfectly by living God's commandments even as the Lord Jesus lived them. Let us pray that we be filled with a keen sense of sorrow and repentance. If our speech is fiery let it be so in our way of confessing our faith in deeds. May it be our reward to stand in the blazing splendor of the saints and look upon the Triune God, our Lord and Savior.

The writer who commented on the legend and the sermon says that this illustrates the sort of followers St. Francis prayed for. That holds true for all who would see the Gospel proclaimed as it should be. That is what draws people to recognize the gift of God that is within them and so to turn to God with all their hearts and minds and deeds.

# **The Contemplative Vocation**

A reflection taken from texts by St. Bernard & St. Anselm

Citeaux was founded from a reform monastery by members who wanted even more reform. Their ideal was a full contemplative life. Yet the contemplative ideal presented by St. Benedict calls for monks to live by the work of their own hands. It is never easy to contemplate while working hard at a task that requires attention to detail and thought. Blessed Gerard possessed great work skills and St. Bernard depended on him to make the monastery and its business affairs work well—so that the labor of all the monks would provide enough to support their contemplation. He took care of the practicalities of St. Bernard's journeyings, and walked with him (e.g.) all the way to Rome and back. He freed Bernard to do the many things an abbot must do, and those that Bernard's special talents enabled only him to do for the Church.

When it came Gerard's time to die he began to pray: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!" But then he got stuck, in the way contemplatives do, on the word "Father". He simply repeated this word, wrapped in a wonderful smile, until the Lord took him. Though, Bernard tells us, he never admitted to having any real spiritual wisdom, yet he was always insightful in seeing the spiritual meaning and implications of whatever was going on. Bernard says he was one of his finest advisors in things of the Spirit. How could he see himself so humbly, while his brother said he was holy? It could be because he had learned contemplation. The following prayer of another very active contemplative, St. Anselm, can help us understand.

"O lord, how long? How long, O Lord, will you forget us; how long will you turn your face from us? When will you look upon us and hear us? When will you enlighten our eyes and show us your face? When will you draw near to us? Look upon us, O Lord, hear us and enlighten us; reveal yourself to us that it may be well with us. You invite us and help us and so I plead with you Lord that I may not lose hope but find new breath. Lord my heart is bitter from its desolation; sweeten it I beseech you and grant your consolation! Lord, in hunger I began to seek you. May I never cease to hunger for you.

Let me not go away unfed. I have come in poverty to your riches and in misery to your compassion. Let me not go away empty. Lord, I am bowed down and can only look downward so raise me up and help me look always upward. My sins seem to overwhelm me and weigh me down. Free me from them; unburden me; let the pit of hell not close over me.

"May it be my part to look upward toward your light, even from the depths. Teach me to seek you and reveal yourself to me when I seek you. I cannot even seek you unless you teach me, nor can I find you unless you reveal yourself. Let me seek you in longing, let me long for you in seeking, let me find you in love and love you in finding you. Lord, I thank you that you created me in your image so that I may be mindful of you and so may love you. That image has been tarnished and spoiled by my sins and bad habits and it cannot by itself achieve that for which it was made. You will have to renew it and recreate it. I am not trying to penetrate your sublimity but I long to understand just a little what my heart believes and loves. And so Lord, give me understanding even as you give me faith."

This was the sort of prayer we can imagine Gerald praying. The gift of walking in faith and without understanding, and all through a life time, brought him to contemplation's goal, the vision of God. It can bring us there as well.

# **Christ Came to Save Sinners**

A reflection taken from a text by Sr. Sandra Schneiders

Christ, Scripture tells us, came to save sinners. When we think of our departed family members, friends, and companions in faith there is at least one thing we can say about them all with confidence: They were sinners. Many pay no attention that the New Testament says sinners are were persons who have given up on finding salvation in obeying laws. This was true of the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet, of the publican praying for mercy in the Temple, and of the the thief who hung next to Jesus on the cross. Those who think themselves righteous believe that obeying the Laws and rules is all it takes to be saved. The fact our departed confessed themselves sinners gave them a special claim on Jesus. They had given up on the "law" as a source of salvation or a criterion of being acceptable to God and turned to Jesus.

The Pharisees thought ordinary people, not knowing God's laws, were accursed. Most ordinary people, then as now, didn't have time or leisure or learning to become expert in the requirements of law, whether religious or civil. They had two choices, they could despair of their salvation or they could develop a humanly groundless and even suborn hope that God would find a way to save them in spite of the fact that they were and always would be sinners. It is worthwhile to explore the spirituality of such people. After all, we, and our departed, are among them.

Many can be classified as "outside the law" not because they habitually violated it but because it seemed useless to try and keep it without exception. That made them people for whom the law works, as St. Paul observed, to show them they are helpless to save themselves. They can never look to their observance of the whole law for assurance that they are "good". They will never be able to demand as their right any reward from God. They can only receive salvation as a free and undeserved gift.

This means living a kind of existential humility. The only prayers one can say with any conviction magnify the mercy God has shown one. By the same token, one can never condemn another, even if another seems worse than oneself. One has given up the only known norm—obedience to law—by which a person can judge others to be condemned or saved. If you can't declare yourself condemned or saved by the laws then how can you pass such a judgment on another? To despise or condemn another is to assume the status of being righteous but lose your claim to be among sinners.

This is a lesson Jesus himself taught Simon, the Pharisee, who was his host when a sinful woman washed his feet with tears, dried them with her hair and kissed them. He thought himself righteous. He thought he didn't need forgiveness. But that meant he had little reason to show loving gratitude to God. The woman did this and Jesus declared that her love and faith had saved her. She had the right sort of relation to God. Is that how our departed related to God? Were they filled with gratitude for the love God had shown them and for the way God had called them to be his own in Jesus, in spite of their not deserving it? If we have shared in the dying process of those we have loved and "lost", as we say, then we have learned from them a great lesson about "dying well". We have also learned a great and wonderful lesson about "living well". They were not pleased to admit they were sinners, any more than we are. But it helped them live in utter dependence on God. That is what saves.

# **To Love Christ Wholly is to Love Self Truly**

**A reflection taken from texts by Fr. Louis Merton**

Lutgard, an especially attractive young woman, was a nun with an admirer. He came to visit in the monastery parlor. One day as they talked she saw Jesus saying to her: "Stop seeking the pleasure of this kind of affection; look at the wound in my side and see what you should love." She imagined the wound in the heart of Christ and was terrified. She began to pray to love Jesus with all her heart. The spiritual life of St. Lutgard centered on the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

This meant its center was Jesus' humanity. She felt called to make reparation for all who rejected their own humanity as God's gift to them by which they were to be raised up to share the life to the Trinity itself. She loved Jesus as she saw him on the cross. She received God's love as a pure gift and gave Jesus, as God, her own human love. She recounted an experience in which Jesus asked what she wanted. She replied: "I want your heart!" Jesus replied: "But I want your heart!" "Take it", she said, "but let my love be so united with yours that I may possess my own heart only in yours."

She met Jesus in visions as one would meet anyone else. They spoke of what would bring them together and it was always something rather ordinary and practical. She became famous for her prayer and self-denial. She didn't claim a right to special experiences and when they came they were just invitations to love God more completely.

She also loved those she knew through spiritual direction. Many of them became her very close friends and from them we learn about her very lively interior life. Thus, a few days before she died she told the nun who was watching with her that an old friend and spiritual advisor, the Abbot of Afflighem, was coming to see her the next day. Though the abbot had made no such plan, it happened that the following saw him making a trip that took him within two miles of Lutgard's monastery. He suddenly got the idea of making a detour to see her. Entering the sick room she raised herself in bed to say, "I am about to start out for heaven, dear friend, and you are the best of all those I leave behind me." In fact, two days passed, and she suddenly asked her companion: "Come and sit here close to my heart. For look, the monastery is all filled with the soldiers of the heavenly army. The souls of the blessed are here present with us, and among them are many, many of our sisters who have gone before us out of this world". She seemed to see the entire monastery packed with all the friends who had advised her spiritually. Now they had gathered in a tremendous multitude, and seemed to be jostling one another to find a place at her passing and to accompany her journey to her home of light with the songs of exaltation she loved. That's how she thought of death and it brought her joy. She remained rapt in that joy for the next day, returning to her ordinary self only long enough to receive the Eucharist and anointing and die peacefully. She was leaving an earthly community and entering a heavenly one. There she would belong even more wholly to Jesus, and so to God, and would have so many with whom to share this joy. May that be our hope and expectation too.

# **How God Teaches Us the Truth**

Inspired by a sermon of St. Augustine of Hippo

Blessed Joseph Mary Cassant died at the age of 25 after a life filled with sickness, suffering and weakness. He was never able to do an ordinary day's work and may never have passed a day without experiencing painfully feeling his weaknesses and inability. He was constantly put to the test by God. That is what he decided. That enabled him to find in his weakness a vocation within his monastic vocation. He abandoned himself into God's hands in trust.

This is what St. Augustine said about such situations. When God puts someone to the test it is not so God will learn something he had not known. It is to question the one being tested so as to bring into the light hidden qualities. The Psalmist prayed: "From hidden faults acquit me"! There are in all of us things hidden from us—not only bad but good—and they do not come out, are not brought into the open, unless one is put to the test. We do not know ourselves as our creator knows us any more than the sick know themselves in the way their physicians know them. If God were to give up putting us to the test God would be giving up the work of teaching us the truth about who we are and who and what we are called to become.

God tests us in order to teach us truth, just as the devil tests people in order to deceive them. There is a simply remedy for the temptations of the devil, one must overcome oneself interiorly; to do that is to overcome the devil outwardly. When we learn to know ourselves we are no longer careless and do not neglect some of the gifts God has given us. You may neglect the self you do not know, but not the self you do know.

We are told that Joseph Mary Cassant was tested every day by temptations to despair and depression. He was tempted to give up on himself, and so, on his life, because he felt depressed by all that he could not do. But in facing these temptations he discovered what he could do. He could love God by accepting himself as he was, and accept suffering as an invitation to draw close to God as Jesus had on the cross. He was capable of great love and great generosity in giving the gift of self to God and others. He was capable of showing others this opportunity. He did it by putting on real cheerfulness and charity.

What about us? Recall Abraham and Sarah, who could not have a child. When they placed their trust in God they were given the longed for child. What does this teach us? We should not value God's gifts more than God's giving himself to us; the gifts are secondary. God is to be loved without considering whether we will receive anything or not and the reward will be God himself.

This was the insight which Joseph Mary Cassant received. We know how he used it and how it enriched and saved him as well as others. That is which he has been beatified. No matter the burden and no matter our weakness we are called to the vocation of love. In his monastic community Joseph Mary found people to supply what he lacked and people to share his love of God with. There is no greater gift one can give or receive. This is a truth God is teaching us too.

# **Mary, the Church & Contemplation**

**Reflections by Hans Urs von Balthasar**

Mary is the “prototype” of the Church. She is this for two reasons. She is the place of the real and bodily indwelling of the Word in the supremely intimate union of mother and child—sharing in the same flesh. She is in the Spirit a servant—in her entire person, body and soul—just because the Son indwells in her. She is one who knows no law except that of conformity to the Word of God.

She was a virgin. This means a pure and exclusive Hearer of the Word. She became mother as the place of the incarnation of the Word. Her womb was blessed because, as Luke says, she “heard the word of God and kept it” (11:28). She was blessed because, as Luke also says, she “kept all these words and pondered them in her heart” (2:19).

Because of all this she is the model which should govern our contemplation. She helps us keep clear of two dangers. One is that of seeing God’s word only as something external, instead of the profoundest mystery within our own being—that mystery in which we live and move and have our being. The second is that of regarding the Word as so interior to us that we confuse it with our own being, with a natural wisdom given us once, and for all and ours to use as we will.

The supreme example of being a hearer of the Word is Mary’s becoming pregnant with that Word. She bore Jesus as her own and the Father’s son. She herself, even as mother, remained a servant. The Father alone is master, together with the Son. Jesus is her life and the one who molds her life. She lives wholly for this one who is the fruit of her womb. Even after she has given him birth she continues to carry him within her—she need only look into her heart to find him.

But she does not neglect, for all this, to turn her gaze uninterruptedly on the child growing up outside her, by her side. Jesus is the youth and then the man whose ideas and actions seem to her every more unpredictable and astonishing. More and more she does not understand what he means—when he stayed behind in the temple without telling her, when he did not receive her and the family while preaching, when he concealed his power and spent himself seemingly in vain, and, in the end, when he detached himself from her as she stood at the foot of the cross by giving her to another, John.

With all the force of her body and spirit she obeyed the word that resounded ever more strongly and divinely for her. But seems more and more alien and this almost tears her asunder. She lets herself be led, she knows not where, that is how far the Word she follows is from being her own wisdom. Yet she is wholly in accord with its leading, so surely is the word she loves grafted in her heart.

That is our model.