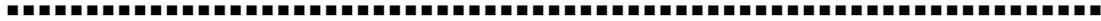


THE TENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME



June 5 **The Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
The Gift of Life
A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

MON **Monday of the Tenth Week in Ordinary Time**
6 **Seeing the Truth about our Call**
A reflection based on a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

TUES **Tuesday of the Tenth Week in Ordinary Time**
7 **The Power to Give Life to the Dead**
A reflection taken from a book by Fr. Ladislav Boros

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8 **Practical Trust in God's Mercy**
Taken from a retreat conference by Fr. Ronald Knox

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A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

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A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman



The Gift of Life

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

All life comes from God. We often carelessly fall into the error of thinking that this only means that God makes people alive. Yet, as the common saying “Get a life!” reminds us, having life is more than just “being alive”. All the readings this Sunday focus our attention on this fact.

God had led the prophet Elijah to declare that there would be a drought in Israel so long as so many Israelites worshiped Baal rather than the one and only true God. But the drought threatened Elijah’s life as that of other Israelites. Finally, God told him to seek refuge with a widow in the non-Israelite town of Zaraphath, perhaps because he was also hiding from King Ahab and would be out of his jurisdiction. The widow was preparing to die, together with her son, due to the famine that came with a severe drought. Elijah’s faith gave the two of them a new lease on life, as we say; suddenly they had hope again to live through the hard times and find a better life. Yet one day the widow’s son fell ill and suddenly stopped breathing. Through Elijah God again gave him, and his mother, a new gift of life.

The gift of life means so many things! A woman without a husband or son had no legal protection and so that widow counted on her son to save her from being robbed and left with no really decent or secure life to look forward to. She would rather have died with her son in the first place than try to live without him. That is almost exactly the situation of the widow at Naim whom Jesus met as she accompanied her only son’s body to the grave. ‘Naim’ means ‘nice’ in Hebrew but the widow from ‘Niceville’ had nothing nice to look forward to. Is a life without hope a “real life”? Jesus gave her back the gift of hope, a gift even more important than mere physical life.

The God who saves by giving hope to those who have none is the God of Mercy. When Paul was trying with all his might to destroy the Church of Christ he had no real hope for a good life, because he was fighting God. When God called him to Christ he gave him the entire life we have read about so frequently. When God called us didn’t God, in mercy, give us a new life completely worth living? Where were we headed before we were called to our new way of living-in-God? Is there any hope apart from God? So we have a real, worthwhile, even wonderful hope because of our call. It is a call to share, and to share God’s mercy. How? By helping others hear God’s call and live it day by day. We are servants of God’s mercy—as were Elijah and St. Paul, and as Jesus was and is in so many ways, now and forever.

Scripture tells us that the worst drought is the absence God’s Word. Without God’s word we don’t know the path of genuine hope. In mercy, God never takes away his Word, in Jesus or in Scripture. Our responsibility is to listen carefully to these words and then to invest our energy and time in living according to what we hear. The life we live in response to this word is to be mercy and love. This is what Jesus called us from spiritual death to do and to be. We are living and breathing works of mercy. We are called to share life by helping others see this.

Seeing the Truth about Our Call

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

All believers are moved by the stories of the miracles Jesus, our Lord and Savior, worked for those in need. Yet different people are affected by these stories in very different ways. Some are astounded at the cures themselves but often can't see that greater wonders are being done than is physically apparent. Others are astonished that even today our Lord works more wonders in people's souls than were done of old in their bodies.

No Christian can doubt that even today the dead are being raised to new life. We all have eyes to see when a dead person rises in the way the son of the widow of Naim did. But not all of us use our eyes of faith to see those who are spiritually dead rise. Only those who have themselves experienced such a spiritual resurrection note this.

Yet it is a greater thing to raise what will live forever than to raise what must die again. When the young man of Naim was raised his widowed mother rejoiced. When souls are daily raised from spiritual death, mother Church rejoices. The young man was physically dead but these others were dead in spirit. Those who witnessed the young man's visible death mourned openly and visibly. But the invisible death of those dead in spirit is neither visible nor do most pay attention to it.

The Lord Jesus sought out those he knew to be dead. Only he knew they were dead and he alone could bring them to life again. The visibly dead are often said to be "sleeping" in a kind of euphemism. For Jesus, who had power to wake them, they really were only sleeping but a dead person, so far as you and I are concerned, can't be awakened by a slap or pinch or anything else. But when Christ called the young man got up immediately. Christ raises the dead more easily than we get somebody to get out of bed and come to pray.

Our Lord Jesus Christ wanted us to understand that what he did for people physically he can also do for souls. A person who see the letters of a beautifully written manuscript but who cannot read praises the skill of the calligrapher because the beautiful shapes of the letters are obvious. But such a person misses the meaning of the writing. What is seen with the eyes prompts praise but the mind is not enriched with knowledge. Another praises the calligraphic art but also reads the message written. So too some observed Christ's miracles without grasping the meaning they have for those who are able to understand spiritual things. They admired the deeds. But you can see more than the events. You can see the meaning of what Christ did. We are pupils in the school of Christ precisely to learn this skill. Then we will see what we too are to do. We can lead others to Christ—lead them to place all their hopes in Christ. To do this is to be given a new life in the Spirit. We too are made mediators of the Spirit to those whom God wants to lead to receive this gift. It is the gift of an everlasting life.

The Power to Give Life to the Dead

A reflection based on a text by Fr. Ladislav Boros

Jesus sought out those who found themselves in dead end situation and could see no way to new hope. That was exemplified in the Gospel of this past Sunday in which he gave new life to a widow who had just lost her only son. Many live under a crushing burden of toil and affliction, and even oppression. They often come to think of themselves as of no significance—destined to disappear one day and leave no trace behind them. People like that need to learn to sing Mary's Magnificat and so to rejoice in God, who is their savior and never ceases to look upon them and reach out to them.

Jesus reached out to those who felt their life a failure and had no one to turn to but God—if they realized his love for them. He reached out especially to those whose sin made them expect nothing from God. Further, this was not a matter of passing emotion. It was the central theme of Jesus' teaching about God and salvation. The heart of God is always filled with mercy. God doesn't rejoice simply over the righteous but at the repentant sinner, the lost sheep waiting to be found without knowing it, the unloving son who finally sees the need to return to the Heavenly Father to begin a new life. Didn't Jesus tell us that God waits only for such people to make a move and then runs to them and gives them everything they can ask for that will lead them back into God's way of life. The Lord is patient with the fig tree that never bears fruit cares for it and waits for it to come into fruit.

Jesus demanded his followers "be merciful, even as your Heavenly Father is merciful". Mercy is an essential condition of entering into the Kingdom. After all, only the merciful can expect mercy. Jesus repeated the subline teaching of the prophet Hosea: God says, I desire mercy and not sacrifice. The mercy has to be tender and gentle and should bring those who live in misery close to God. On my way through the world, says Jesus, I make the wretched I encounter my neighbors; I have mercy on them, just as a Samaritan had mercy on a Jew who had been robbed, beaten and left half-dead by the roadside. We will be judged solely by the mercy we have shown. Perhaps unknowingly I show mercy to Jesus when I show it to a brother or sister who is suffering.

In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus encountered a widow utterly bereft by the death of her only son and support. He immediately felt compassion. "Don't cry!" he told her. Then he touched the bier and told the young man to get up. He did! Fear came over all who saw this. Yet it was from start to finish a matter of mercy and of feelings we have all had and can easily understand. Jesus saw suffering, felt deep compassion, reassured the sufferer and acted immediately and effectively. He gave the son back to the mother, alive. If we were able to do such things we would act in exactly the same way. God gives us the power to be compassionate and tells us that we can bring new life where there was only death if we live this compassion, as Jesus did. The key is to trust in Jesus! That is what he calls us to. It is the key to ministering to others in his Name, in his Person.

Practical Trust in God's Mercy

A reflection from a retreat conference by Fr. Ronald Knox

Last Sunday we encountered the prophet Elijah hiding from King Ahab in Sidonian territory. He was totally preoccupied by the spread of Baal worship sponsored by Queen Jezebel. He thought he had to convert King Ahab and put an end to official approval of this idolatry. Shortly he would triumph on Mt. Carmel; he killed the prophets of Baal—and ended up fleeing to Mt. Horeb to escape Jezebel's death decree for him.

Elijah wasn't looking at things with complete trust in God. He thought the situation was desperate and he had to change it. But he couldn't. He didn't know what was really important. For instance, Ahab was to die in battle and his son be killed by Jehu, his army commander, who also killed Jezebel. But even that wasn't crucial. The King of Syria was to crush the Kingdom of Israel. Only Elijah's successor will witness these things but, as God tells Elijah, "I have 7000 who haven't worshiped Baal". Seven thousand is the number of fullness. God has things well in hand.

There is not much human understanding of God's purposes. There are so many false calculations, as was the case even for the most favored of the prophets. Was ever a patriot or reformer so deceived in his reading of his times and situation as Elijah was? Yes, there were many such in the time of Jesus. Take a glance at the New Testament. For example, the person who corresponds to Elijah is John the Baptist. He sees the People of Israel as supremely important and he knows he has been sent to convert them. His mission has been crowned with success and penitents have flocked to him in the wilderness. But if the People is to be redeemed he has to convert King Herod. But Herodias is another Jezebel who seeks the prophet's life, and gets him killed! No wonder he sent to Jesus to ask him if he were really the Expected One who would destroy those who come between Israel and God.

The historical situation was very much the same for John as for Elijah. The dynasty of the Herods is unimportant and will shortly vanish. The People of Israel will shortly be conquered and dispersed. Vespasian will come from Syria and Israel will cease to be a nation. Yet God sees in Israel a faithful remnant—like the 7000 he told Elijah were faithful still. They are to become the nucleus of a universal Church.

Do we worry that Church will perish if this or that is not accomplished unless we convert certain key people? Must the Church be reformed or nations drawn to live laws and ways of God? Before we lose ourselves in the midst of such preoccupations we must remember that God has things well in hand. We are not the saviors of the world. God is the Savior. Trust in God, day by day, leaving the sweep of history in God's hands. Trusting in God is our vocation and we must trust with all our hearts and minds and selves that God will save. God is mercy and God is almighty!

The Call to Shepherd One Another

A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

“I am the good Shepherd; the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep.” Our Lord appropriates to himself the title under which he had been foretold by the prophets. Almighty God says through Ezekiel, “David, my servant, shall be king over them and they shall all have one shepherd”. What is more, our Lord found the sheep scattered. Recall his saying, “All who came before me were thieves and robbers”. He said this concerning the official shepherds, the rulers in Israel. As a result, the people had no proper guides. That was the character of the priests and rulers of the Jewish people when Christ came. Recall that one day when he was teaching, we are told, “he saw the multitudes and was moved to compassion for them because they were scattered and losing strength like sheep who have no shepherd”.

This had been true for a long time. Recall the stories about the prophet Micah and King Ahab. When asked if Ahab should attack Syria Micah responded “I saw all Israel scattered among the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said: These have no master; let everyone return to his house in peace”. The same had been true in the time of Ezekiel who prophesied: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves, though shepherds should feed their flocks. Israel was scattered because there was no shepherd and so they become prey for wild animals”. The prophet Zechariah said, “Woe to the idle shepherd that abandons the flock”.

In fact, it was this way all over the world when Christ came in infinite mercy to gather all God’s children who had been scattered abroad”. Though Christ, the Good Shepherd, had to lay down his life it was only for a moment. He rose from death to live forever. He is now calling his own by name and leading them and goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice”. We are all like Mary Magdalen who wept in the garden because she couldn’t find her shepherd but recognized him when she heard his voice.

How do we hear Jesus’ voice? We hear it in and through the Spirit Christ has poured into our hearts. We hear it through the ears of love that the Spirit gives us. What did Christ tell his chosen one’s when he breathed into them the Spirit? He said, “As the Father has sent me I send you!” We are given the Spirit so we may be taught how to imitate our Good Shepherd and become shepherds to one another. From Jesus we learn compassion for those who can’t find their shepherd and don’t recognize his voice. If we love as he does then we speak with his voice. In giving us his own Spirit the Lord Jesus has given us his own love and so his own compassion and so his own care for one another, even to the point of giving our lives for one another. A true shepherd of God’s people shows a love like that of Jesus, loving all those who belong to God’s flock. It is a great privilege to follow and to imitate and to share in the work of the one truly Good Shepherd. That is our privilege. Today we are called to love one another with the same mercy and tenderness with which we ourselves are loved and shown mercy by Christ, our One Good Shepherd.

Called to Encourage One Another

A reflection developed from a commentary by St. Jerome

In Scripture we heard the following: In their distress the Israelites sought me saying, Come, let us return to the Lord. He has hurt us but he will heal us; he has stricken us but he will bind up our wounds; after two days he will receive us and on the third day he will raise us up to live in his presence. Let us know—let us press forward—to know the Lord. God delivered the entirety of the Chosen People into captivity and there was no one who could snatch them from his hand. He withdrew from them until they began to waste away and seek his face, making them search for him as though he were angry with them and had withdrawn from them and so left them feeling abandoned. In their troubles they felt far from God.

Yet even in their tribulation, when the light of repentance dawned upon them, they rose up to seek him early in the morning. Isaiah gives us the text, “In my tribulation I remembered the Lord; I cried to the Lord in my distress and he answered me”. What did they say when they rose early to seek God? “Come; let us return to the Lord!” It was not each of them seeking personal salvation but they urged and encouraged one another to return to the Lord whom they had deserted and forsaken through their sin.

We too at times feel stricken and perhaps even forsaken and we long for the Lord to heal us. At times like these we need to remind one another that “the Lord disciplines those whom he loves and chastises every child whom he acknowledges as his own”. We need to help each other to remember such truths. We need to repeat to one another that the Lord has chosen us as his own children and that the Lord will heal us. We may be dead in sin but the Lord will raise us up again, as was the case with Jesus, the Only Begotten. God raised up Jesus Christ and told him to bring us back to our God so we too could be raised up. This is a ministry God has given to each and all of us. It is the ministry of mutual encouragement.

When God heals those who have been stricken and revives those who have been healed and raises up those who have been revived, then we who were dead in sin and far from our God live in God’s very presence. But it is not always easy. We need to make every effort to follow our Lord, the one by whose resurrection we too rise. And to do this we need one another’s encouragement. All those who believe will have Jesus the Christ and Savior as their shepherd. He is the one who most encourages us to follow in his footsteps. But he also has given us one another. Do we bend every effort to encourage and restore one another’s spirits? Do we show by our own confidence in our Savior that He can be trusted to lead us and revive us and support us and heal us in our every need? That is what God asks us to do.

The Ministry of Consolation & Encouragement

A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

Scripture says of St. Barnabas “he was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith”. In a sense, he is praised for being the person his very name proclaimed him to be, one who consoles and encourages others. His life as well as his name teaches us a lesson about the importance of our own call to be consolers and encouragers for one another.

Barnabas was not afraid to trust others or to think well of them. His character seems to have been marked by kindness, gentleness, consideration, warmth of heart, and compassion. Who among us would not wish to leave such a memory behind us? The first we hear of him is when he sold some land and gave the proceeds to the Apostles to help the poor. The second is when the Jerusalem Church feared to accept Paul the Persecutor and Barnabas talked with him and brought him to the apostles to win acceptance. Because he reached out to one about whom others knew no good he discovered him as gifted greatly for service of the Lord and subsequently brought him to Antioch to begin his career as an evangelist. Without this would the churches Paul founded have come to be?

A simple act of kindness can have stupendous effects! Why was Barnabas sent to Antioch? Because all saw him as a good man filled with the Holy Spirit. There he “saw the grace of God he was glad”. He exhorted all to cling to the Lord, their hearts filled with good intentions. He encouraged those converts and helped them stand firm in their faith. Is there anyone who doesn’t need such encouragement, and more than one in life? And to multiply the good that had already been done he recalled what he had learned in helping Paul and so decided to bring him to ministry to this new church. Was it from one who was so generous in sharing his own possessions with the poor that Paul became so determined to help the gentile Christians share from what they had with the poor Christian Jews of Jerusalem?

Again, when some Christians, convinced that salvation was only to Jews, and so believing that all who were to be saved in Christ had to become Jews, caused great distress among the converts of Antioch, Barnabas took Paul and went to Jerusalem. And there the two of them convinced the council of apostles and elders to make a decision which marks the character of the Church unto the present day. In his gentle way he too was responsible for the opening of the Church to the gentiles, and so to us.

The Holy Spirit is called comforter and consoler, because the Spirit strengthens us and gives us a heart that loves the Lord entirely and wholly. The grace of the Spirit is very like that signified by the name ‘Barnabas. The Spirit comforts and encourages and calls us to be “children of encouragement” after the model given us by St. Barnabas. It isn’t difficult to see why he is a holy person and a model for us all. He seemed to do nothing extraordinary, yet in him God did extraordinary things, that have shaped even our lives. So God wills to do, and can do, through us if we are willing to become like Barnabas.