

SIXTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME



- July 17** **The Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Knowing the Appropriate Time
A reflection taken from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller
- MON** **Monday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time**
18 **Contemplating Christ in Others**
A reflection by Bishop Ottokar Prohaszka
- TUES** **Tuesday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time**
19 **Attachment to Christ**
A reflection taken from Christian Thought in Action by
Dom. Aelred Graham
- WED** **Wednesday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time**
20 **Contemplating God's Work in Us**
A reflection taken from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom
- THURS** **Thursday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time**
21 **Contemplating Christ Everywhere**
A reflection by Fr. Henri le Saux from Saccidananda
- FRI** **Memorial of St. Mary Magdalene**
22 **Learning to Long for Christ**
A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory the Great
- SAT** **Memorial of Our Lady**
23 **Learning Contemplation from Mary**
A reflection from a sermon by St. Peter Chrysologos



Knowing the Appropriate Time

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Last Sunday we were reminded of the twin commandments to love God with all our heart and our neighbors as ourselves. This was followed by the Parable of the Good Samaritan pointing out what love of neighbor involves. This Sunday we receive a like lesson on putting love for God “first”.

Jesus refuses to tell Mary to leave her contemplation of his message and person in order to help with meal preparation. But note that he doesn't tell Martha to stop work on the meal and give herself to contemplation like Mary. The lesson is that there is an appropriate time for each activity and that it is not the same for every person. Yes, give love for God the first priority absolutely, but don't ignore wounded people needing your help in order to do it.

If that seems contradictory remember that you are human. The history of Western monasticism shows that when people try to be pure contemplatives they lose their capacity to be contemplative at all; monks need to work at helping one another deal with the necessities of life and not only help one another contemplate. It's part of the humanness created by God and must be respected! Most haven't the character or personality needed for pure contemplation. We are like Martha and Mary simultaneously.

St. Paul teaches us that love of neighbor is one of the best guarantees of authenticity in prayer. It is through service of neighbor that Paul “fills up what is still wanting in the sufferings of Christ”. When one doesn't attend wounded and needy persons contemplation of Jesus is contemplation of a fantasy. We must “hope to make everyone complete in Christ”, Paul teaches, and the suffering and work this involves is the “mystery of Christ in you”.

Remember how hard Abraham worked to provide hospitality to three strangers and that God used this to fulfill the human hopes of an old couple which had been frustrated for so long. We are sent to bring new hope to others—just like Abraham and the Good Samaritan. Charity leads to hope and the contemplative life is about putting all one's hope in God.

Our God instills prayerful contemplation as we sit at Jesus' feet, provided we do justice, live in charity and so walk blamelessly before God. We must pray to God to sanctify our minds and even our common sense so that we do the right thing for our neighbors even as we strive to love God first. We must pray to God to know the right time to contemplate and the right time to reach out to our neighbor's need, especially the need for a renewed capacity to hope in God and one another.

Contemplating Christ in Others

A reflection by Bishop Ottokar Prohaszka

Martha was a very busy woman. She received Jesus into her home but was unable to stop working even then. There is so much to do! But Mary, her sister and helper, is sitting at Jesus' feet. She opens her heart and soul to him; she adores, loves, enjoys and is radiantly happy!

In Martha we are asked to think of the imbalance of a life whose one urge is work and yet more work. It honors energy and perseverance but neglects the inner world and the need to revivify the inmost depths of our self with spiritual beauty and by keeping one's intentions pure and alert to God's presence everywhere. The Master is there and wants to enter into Martha's soul just as he does Mary's.

The main values are not what one produces but the motive behind all our efforts. In our deepest self are we faithful to our supernatural goal and principles and striving to live them? We have to devote time and effort unflaggingly to self-awareness, ardent fidelity and reality. Obsession with work makes one irritable, complaining, and unjust to others. It makes work a crushing burden instead of a vocation gladly followed. Do not let your soul become embittered and deformed by your attitude to work.

For whom do you work? For your Lord and Master. Have you heard, again and again, about the necessity of "seeing the Lord" in others? Martha could see Jesus and knew she was working to serve him in his human needs. So she was actually sitting at his feet and contemplating him all the time she thought of him as the reason for her working. When she forgot she came to Jesus in irritation and complaint and he reminded her that the "one thing necessary" is loving by means of work and not the work itself.

One thing is needed—a spirit united with God and living with God. With God as your center, all your endeavors will be integrated as the circumference is with the center of a circle. The one thing needful is a soul filled with love for God and one who chooses this has chosen the better part. We don't hide but stay at the post God has given us. Yet in all we do we keep in mind the "one thing necessary". To learn contemplation is to learn to do this.

Attachment to Christ

A reflection from Christian Thought in Action by Dom. A. Graham

Moral evil has as its source a distraction from reality and this, in turn, is caused by desire. Is desire at the root of our troubles? Do we fail to fulfill our obligations to God and others because we are seeking some private satisfaction? Some spiritual writers have thought we must eliminate desire from our lives, and some Christians have gone a long way in this direction. But what is missed is that eliminating desire is just the reverse side of abandoning oneself to the will of God. We detach from desires as we attach ourselves to God in Jesus Christ.

This means that the ideal of non-attachment is not dehumanizing and doesn't consist in a state of apathy or indifference. Rather it is a state of alert responsiveness to God. We do not eliminate or even suppress our natural appetites for food, drink, sexual enjoyment and other such. Granted the necessary training, these appetites fall into a subordinate place by reason of one's total response of God centeredness in all areas of our living and feeling.

Theoretically, it isn't hard to see that the private world in which each of us lives for a great part of our day is not co-extensive with the actual world. If one's conduct is dictated by that private world then self-interest dominates and desire rules us accordingly. The way out of all this involves a kind of re-birth. The process often called enlightenment or illumination, by which we know experientially that everything is from God, centers us on God and the journey to God. One perceives intuitively that fulfillment is achieved not by cherishing some personal distinctiveness or special object but by surrendering oneself wholly to God in Jesus Christ. This is what might be called "the attachment that saves". Salvation comes not from the negative but the positive and from an attachment.

Jesus put off his family's request to speak with him by pointing to those gathered around him to hear God's word. Who is Jesus' family? It is made up of those who seek God's word and then dedicate themselves to doing it. To be close to Jesus, to be like Jesus, is to attach oneself first and foremost to God, and God's will, and to do this in deed and not only in word. We master our self-centered desires by giving self away to God.

Contemplating God's Work in Us

A reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

Imagine a person suffering from a repugnant and infectious disease. Imagine that person as old, decrepit, poor and hungry. Suppose someone were able to transform such a person into an attractive young person, in perfect health, dressed in the finest garments and with all the marks of success and wealth. Well, that is exactly what our God has done for us. We are made beautiful, desirable, lovable, and given every sort of advantage when we are drawn by God to surrender ourselves in baptism to the new life that Jesus Christ shows us.

Yet consider the hurtful things we have said about God or about God's ways of dealing with us and our race. Contrast these with what we said when we were baptized. Are there any words more beautiful than those we use in renouncing the devil and swearing allegiance to Christ? Are there any words nobler than those of the profession of faith we make at baptism and the renewal of our baptism? So why have we been unfaithful? Shouldn't this thought fill us with sorrow? Shouldn't this make us long to be renewed?

St. Paul says that in God's Son, God's beloved, we have been redeemed. The wonder is not only that God gave us his Son but even more that God gave this gift knowing that the Son would be sacrificed and killed by enemies. See how God loves and values us! There can't be a greater marvel than this! What will God not give us in the future now that we have been reconciled to God, and to God's ways, through grace?

What we are doing in thinking these things is contemplation of God's love and goodness toward us, toward one and all. We do this so that when we pass from the heights of imagination to the depths of suffering and distress we will not forget the real truth—about ourselves or about our God. What could be more astounding than that God's blood was shed for us. What could be more wonderful than that we have been adopted by God as God's own children? Why do we let our attention get fixated on a passing feeling of worry or suffering or displeasure, forgetting all we have received?

We have been trained in contemplation not only because that praises and glorifies God; it supports us in every sort of trial. God calls us to praise and glorify him to help our love deepen through the grace bestowed. Everything is done to share with us what God is and has. To be adopted as God's children is to be taken into God's life and that life is love and gift and joy. Let us cling to what is substantial and enduring. Let's learn to see in everything opportunities to love in return.

Contemplating Christ Everywhere

A reflection by Fr. Henri le Saux, from Saccidananda

Christ is everywhere in his mystery; e.g., as the Body of Christ is. Christ's presence is always one of undiminished fullness. He is in many without losing his unity. Christ reveals himself interiorly without lessening his extension exteriorly to all times and places. In the Church we knowingly work to build up the Body of Christ in the sharing (koinonia) of the Spirit. This is what God had in mind when the universe was called into being. Everything is to come face to face with God in the communion of the Church.

The Christian experience of sharing takes place in the innermost depths of the heart, and is there we find ourselves in God. But in this act of discovery one discovers everything that is. In being present to God one is, or will be, present to all times and places.

For God there is not "within" or "without" and for those who are in God this distinction does not exist in the usual way. God calls us to make our sphere of inner work the whole of creation and to locate all our external work in the depth of the Spirit. Our own progress toward God and that of the universe itself toward God are one and the same process. So in finding God we deepen our community with humankind and in deepening our community with brothers and sisters we deepen our communion with God.

The Church is essentially love (agape) and sharing (koinonia) and is the sign and sacrament of the divine sharing of being. The Church is the sacrament of the divine love. Little by little the Church must penetrate the whole human race until every human conscience is in communion with all others and with Christ, the One Lord of all. The goal is that the Lord offer up all that is to the Father and so all must be in Him.

This is the ideal presented by St. Paul. But we have much work to do to learn to contemplate our union with others and with our universe in a way that contributes to the achievement of this goal. What is your goal when you do your contemplative exercises? Is it as broad as Christ's will and God's primordial purpose? "All things are held together in Christ" (Col.1: 18). And in Christ is all the fullness of the Godhead. We must not narrow ourselves in our contemplation of the presence of Christ in everything we are or encounter. We have to strive to let contemplation of Christ broaden us to the breadth of Christ's love and that of the Heavenly Father.

Learning to Long for Christ

A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory the Great

When Mary Magdalen came to the grave and did not find the Lord's body she imagined it had been taken away. She went to tell the Lord's special disciples. They came, looked, and believed that Mary had told the truth. The Gospel continues: The disciples went away, but Mary remained standing at the tomb and weeping.

At this point we must reflect on the ardent love in the heart of this woman who wouldn't leave the Lord's grave even after his chosen disciples did. She continued seeking the one whom she couldn't find. In tears she kept searching. Afire with love, she yearned for the one she believed had been carried off.

So it came to pass that she alone saw Jesus; she had remained behind to seek him simply because a truly good act involves the virtue of perseverance. Truth himself had said, "The one who perseveres to the end shall be saved".

She sought Jesus and found nothing. She persevered, and so she found the one she loved. While she was seeking, her longing was growing and strengthening, until, at its highest pitch, she found Jesus!

Holy desires grow with delays. If they fade because of delays they are no desires at all. That is the way it is with the love that inflames anyone who is reaching out for Jesus, and the Truth.

This is why David said, "My soul thirsts for the living God! When shall I behold the face of God?" The Church says, in the Song of Songs, "I am wounded by love!" "My soul failed me!" Jesus says, "Woman, why are you crying? Whom do you seek?" She was asked about the reason for her sorrow, and the question made her longing increase.

When Mary named the one she sought she burned with even greater love. Jesus, replied, "Mary!" He calls her by her own name, inviting her to recognize him who has recognized and chosen her. He knows her, not in some general way, but personally.

And Mary does recognize Jesus! Addressed by her own name she recognizes her maker and cries out, "My Great One", "Raboni"! It means "teacher". Outwardly he was sought. Inwardly he was teaching her how to seek him. Seek with all your heart. That is what he seeks. Teaching like that is what He does within you too. We have to persevere in our longing while he increases it to such a pitch that he can reveal his presence in our hearts. Mary Magdalen teaches us this through her love for Jesus.

Learning Contemplation from Mary

A reflection developed from a sermon of St. Peter Chrysologos

A virgin conceived and bore a son. She remained a virgin. This was a unique event. It is God's power and not nature's that brought it about. It is divine and not human. Christ's birth was not necessary but an expression of omnipotent love and grace. God had made us without generation from the clay of the earth and now makes us again from the body of the virgin. The hand of the one who formed clay into a body took a body from that clay. That the Creator is in a creature and God is in flesh brings dignity to us without bringing dishonor to the one who made us. God so loved us, and the virgin, as to do this deed. How can we be worthless in our own eyes and yet so precious to God? Mary pondered such things in her heart and most of all the things God did in her and through her and to her.

Mary lived in wonder because she contemplated the wonders of God. Had not God made the entire universe as our dwelling? Hadn't he created light so that you might escape the gloom of darkness and ignorance and find the One who is Light? It was for your sake that the earth was adorned with flowers, groves of trees and fruit, the constant variety of lovely things was given you—the air, the fields, the seas, all for you. And the Creator continues to devise things that can add to your happiness and his glory. He did make you in his image and you might, in your own person make the invisible Creator present on earth.

All these things and more Mary contemplated and her love and surrender to God grew ever greater and more complete. It was through her that God realized his image most completely in Mary's Son. He realized his image most marvelously in her who was filled utterly with grace. Isn't that what he wants to do in each of us? Don't we see in Mary's wondering and joyful contemplation of God's works our path?

Christ is born that his birth might restore our nature and us personally. He became a child, was fed, and grew to a perfect age to support and beautify us. He has gone on to make what was earthly heavenly. He raises us to God, and would leave in us neither sin nor death, nor pain, nor anything that diminishes, and has done it with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is Him that we contemplate with Mary. And as we contemplate Him we rediscover self and our neighbors. We learn to see ourselves and our neighbors as God sees and loves us, and them. That is the sort of contemplation Mary teaches us, if we begin to contemplate her and the marvelous work God has done in her.