

# **TWENTIETH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**



**Sunday**      **Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Aug 14**      **What Do You Stand For?**  
A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

**Mon**            **THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**  
**15**              **Trusting God's Promises to Us**  
A reflection taken from texts by Fr. Louis Bouyer &  
Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

**Tues**          **Tuesday of the Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time**  
**16**              **Praying the Incarnation in the Monastic Way**  
A reflection extracted from an article by Fr. Louis Merton

**Wed**          **Wednesday of the Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time**  
**17**              **Serving God in a Quiet Life**  
A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

**Thurs**        **Thursday of the Twentieth Week in Ordinary Time**  
**18**              **The Gifts God Gives to Those Who Serve**  
A reflection developed from a psalm commentary by St. Ambrose

**Fri**            **Memorial of Blessed Gueric of Igny**  
**19**              **A Monastic Vocation**  
A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

**Sat**            **THE SOLEMNITY OF ST. BERNARD**  
**20**              **Loving God Unites Us in Peace**  
A reflection extracted from a letter of St. Bernard



# **What Do You Stand For?**

**A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller**

**Jeremiah was sent to God's People to warn them of the consequences of seeking what is not God's will and refusing to live by God's word whenever that seemed contrary to self-interest. Now Jerusalem is under siege and he has warned the soldiers that they cannot successfully defend the city and should surrender. He is thrown into an empty cistern and sinks up to his arm pits in the mud at its bottom. This amounts to a sentence of death for treason.**

**Very many persons are killed for their faithfulness to God and God's word. Estimates of how many Christians were killed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century for being and acting like Christians run into the tens of thousands. It looks like the number will be even higher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But the cloud of witnesses which surrounds us is composed both of martyrs and of people who simply live quietly for the Lord, striving to love one another and pointing the way to the new and better life offered us in and through Jesus Christ.**

**For all of us this witness has its times of anguish and suffering, of fear and disappointment, and of the threat of violence from those who can't accept the message Jesus has given his followers to proclaim. Jesus declares that he too is in anxiety and anguish because of what the Heavenly Father has sent him to do. We see what that meant in the Garden on the night of his arrest and condemnation to death. We too have been warned, and by Jesus himself. We have been warned that by living his word and making whole hearted love for God the cornerstone of our lives we are going to be sources of division and dissension.**

**Being faithful can mean losing friends or family or maybe even our lives. Those who should care for us can make themselves instruments of our destruction. Think of this practically. Have you ever caused another to be harmed psychologically or behaved destructively and harmed another? Have you ever occasioned spiritual destruction because you didn't work hard enough at figuring out how to support another in his or her life with God? Have you ever spoken careless words that ended up hurting rather than helping a family member, a brother or sister or a fellow believer?**

**Is Jesus warning us that we will cause harm to those who are trying hard to follow his word and way because we sometimes love ourselves more than one of those for whom Christ died? Being sent by God to walk in the footsteps of Christ is a full-time task and one that takes all the attention and care and skill that we have. Has God sent me to warn you of this? And to whom have you been sent? Will you find a way to so warn others that they can recognize the warning comes of God's love through their experience of your love? At baptism we are called to be prophets and so to proclaim hope. Only in God is there real hope. Only by God's grace can we answer that call well, with a love like the love Jesus lived and died by on his Cross. Is this what you stand for? Is this what you put your heart and mind into day after day? That is God's call.**

# **Trusting God's Promises to Us**

A reflection taken from texts by Fr. Louis Bouyer & Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Mary should be looked on as the living pledge of Christ's promise to the Church: Where Christ is we too shall be. The glory given him by the Father will be given to us. We see this realized in Mary's Assumption. As Mary, by the grace of redemption was conceived immaculately, and by opening herself to this grace also opened the whole of mankind to it, so as Christ was the first to rise to resurrection life so she was given this grace next, and given it as a promise to us as well. Her assumption pledges that the glory of Christ will be that of the spouse of Christ, even as it already is that of the Mother of Christ.

*"It has not yet appeared what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is."* This is how St. John puts the matter. The door to this is a faith as complete as Mary's. In this we shall be like her and that means seeing Jesus as he is. To be like her is to be like Him. But the path we must tread, like that of Mary, is not easy or free from the Cross.

To walk Jesus' and Mary's path all the way to our Heavenly Father's house we must trust that the Lord's word to us will be fulfilled. We must trust the promise that we will keep the faith, trusting that promise no matter what. In the famous vision from the Book of Revelation, which we hear when we celebrate Mary's Assumption, she and her son are preserved in spite of all Satan can do. We hear that a "special place" had been prepared for her, for the Church, for each of us. There we can live in trusting faith until the Lord catches us up to his throne.

Think of that place as your personal vocation. Think of that place as the community of faith and support the Lord has given you to help you live out your vocation. To live it out is to place your trust in the Lord's word to you, and the promise that God's love will be fulfilled in your salvation and in the same resurrection life that Jesus and Mary live. Jesus told his disciples before his death that he was going to prepare a place for them and would then come and take them to be with Him. This grace is not given due to your labors or personal virtue or goodness, any more than it was in Mary's case. You do not earn your vocation but receive it as a gift. You did not earn the company of the others who constantly support your faith by prayer and in deeds of love and kindness. This was given you by God's Providence.

This was true of Mary as well. Mary is the best example of obedience to the goals and hopes God through Jesus places within you. She is your model of fidelity to the hopes God holds out to you. The evil one stands before you looking to destroy the Christ who is coming to birth in your life and deeds. She cried out in pain at the pangs involved in following Jesus, but she knew they were only trials of faith, even those that lead the many martyrs of today to death with Christ. You will be caught up as she was, to the most special place prepared for you next to God. Jesus, the Letter to the Hebrews promises, stands at the right hand of God interceding for us. Next to him stands Mary, imitating his intercession. With them stands a great cloud of witnesses to the truth of God's promises. Blessed are you, who trust that the Lord's word to you will be fulfilled.

# **Praying the the Incarnation in the Monastic Way**

**A reflection taken from an article by Fr. Louis Merton**

According to St. Gregory we don't contemplate and love only the Word as present in Christ but the "unlimited light", the "glory" humanity receives from the Heavenly Father and communicates to us "in the Spirit". The light of this contemplation that is poured into our hearts by the Spirit of Christ gives us an inexpressible grasp of God's work in us through the union of the two natures which is the incarnation.

The call to monastic contemplation is a call to renounce all that opposes this "inexpressible" light that God wishes to shine forth from us as from Christ. We seek to submit totally and without reservation to that light of Christ. It means accepting one's own helplessness and deficiency, one's impurity and darkness in the presence of this light. Yet we seek it with all our heart; we seek to become transformed by this light in contemplation and love. We are entering into the purity of the light itself.

Preaching on the parable of the woman who lost a coin and then lit a lamp and turned her entire house upside down until she found it, St. Gregory says that the woman symbolizes God seeking the divine image planted in our humanity. God lights a lamp when he enkindles the light of Divine Wisdom in human nature. "*A lamp*", says St. Gregory, "*is a light burning in an earthenware vessel, and the light in the vessel is divinity in human flesh.*" St. Gregory adds: "*An earthenware vessel is hardened by the fire and the power of Christ and is dried up like a fragment of a broken pot*" because the flesh that the Son assumed was made strong, transformed, by the tribulation of the Passion so that it might be glorified in the Resurrection.

We come once again to the paschal theme of the passage or Passover of Christ as a human being into the glory of the Heavenly Father. By means of these approximations and comparisons, St. Gregory is hinting at a deeper mystery. The distinct and yet inseparable natures united in Christ were manifested as in a more intimate and perfect unity after the Resurrection.

The human Jesus was penetrated more and more completely by the light and glory of the divine, the hidden divinity within. In this way Jesus grew in grace and wisdom and in contemplation. After the Resurrection the human is totally penetrated by the glorious light of the Godhead. This makes the glorified Redeemer the source of all spiritual illumination and sanctification. We are penetrated more and more completely by that same light and glory.

St. Gregory goes on to say that when the light is lit in the lamp of the Risen Christ it is able to penetrate more deeply into our conscience, which is shaken from top to bottom. The consequence is that the lost coin, the likeness to God in us, is found by means of the "unlimited" light entering us and purifying us. It enters our hearts as purifying fire consuming our sins. Then, when the eyes of the heart are cleansed, the joy of our heavenly homeland opens up to us. Like Jesus' humanity we grow in this grace and its wisdom and little by little become more and more like Jesus.

# **Serving God in a Quiet Life**

**A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman**

When Philip told Nathaniel he had found the long-expected Messiah and that he was Jesus of Nazareth, at first Nathaniel doubted. He was well-read in the Scriptures and knew that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. If Jesus was from Nazareth hadn't he been born there? There was no promise of God concerning Nazareth, which seemingly had bad reputation since Nathaniel thought no good could come from it. Yet he sought the truth about God's promises and so he went when Philip said, "Come and see!"

The grace of meeting Jesus, and talking with him, was all it took to convert him into a disciple. Their conversation, then, tells us about God's way of getting a person ready for discipleship. When Our Lord saw him he said: "Behold, an Israelite in the true sense, one in whom there is no guile." What's more, Nathaniel seems to have been praying and meditating in the shade of a fig tree. This way of life prepared him to answer God's call.

His life had been outwardly quiet and he was inwardly guileless. How did this prepare him for great dangers, for sufferings and even giving his life for Christ? Is this the kind of person honored by Christ and called to be heroic?

A calm and unexciting life is the lot of most of us. There are occasional troubles and disturbances but nothing more. We often look down on this life and on ourselves for leading it. We are likely to get bored and long to "see the world" or experience new things. Worse, we may think that a life like this offers no great opportunity for serving God or giving ourselves in love. We get up, we go through the same duties and tasks, and go to bed again. This goes on week after week, with only Church to break the monotony. Year follows year and we get older. Is this a good life? Many never even ask this question but go through it all without thinking about the matter at all. It is as though God and religion were nothing special and one can live rather like an irrational animal, and then perish.

But we know there is more to us than to an animal. We know God has a work for us to do and a reward he wants to give us for doing it. We know we have talents and that God expects us to use them to do some worthwhile thing. Do we react by getting worried and beginning to ask: "What do I have to do to please God?" Do we get the idea we have to step away from our unvarying life and do some great thing?

When such thoughts come we need to remember people like Nathaniel, or the other apostles. We don't have to step out of our usual way of life to find that which God calls us to. We can serve God quietly and in our usual way of living simply by doing the things that we do with love, for God and for others. The most important thing is that we mature as Christians, and that we develop a character like that of Jesus. God may call us to be an apostle, or simply to pray and study Scripture and to serve in love in our daily duties—as he had called Nathaniel. Perhaps Nathaniel continued to do this even as he walked with Jesus and contemplated his life. "*If you see me, you see the Father*", Jesus at last told Nathaniel. Isn't that contemplation enough for us?

# **The Gifts God Gives to Those Who Serve**

A reflection developed from a Psalm Commentary by St. Ambrose of Milan

It makes a big difference whether one does what is pleasing to God willingly or because one thinks one has to. St. Paul was completely free and freely he became the servant of all in order to win for Christ as many as possible. He was under no legal requirement to become everything to everyone. What is more he wished everyone to act in the same way. He shows this especially in his letter of Philemon. Paul had been ill and in prison and somehow a runaway slave named Onesimos can across him, recognized him as a friend of his former owner, and willing gave himself to help and care for Paul. Ironically, the name 'Onesimos' means "useful". Whoever named him thought that the meaning of his life was be of use to someone. No freedom was involved or possible, for he was a slave.

Paul was filled with gratitude for all that Onesimos had freely done to help him. He had truly been useful, but freely and voluntarily and for Paul's missionary work. Paul wanted him to become a permanent part of his team. Onesimos was willing but Paul wanted him to return to his owner and be sent back freely. His service would be a free gift from the owner, Philemon. *"I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that your goodness might not be from compulsion—a kind of necessity—but of your own free will."*

Not only this, but he asks Philemon to treat Onesimos as a brother in Christ. The entire web of relationships between Philemon, Onesimos and Paul were to be completely free and dominated by love for one another in Christ. The Lord looks for voluntary servants.

In Isaiah God says, "Whom shall I send?" He certainly could have commanded Isaiah, as his slave, and then honored by finding him worthy to be sent on his Master's errand. But he preferred not to do this. He wanted Isaiah to make a voluntary offering, and spontaneously. He wanted him to offer himself. Something very like this happened in the call of Jeremiah. The only difference is that Jeremiah resisted being called in a way Isaiah didn't. So the Lord told him to do what he was told but didn't compel him to obey.

Such people could plead, as Jeremiah at least did, that they were not suitable for the task the Lord had in mind. But if the Lord gives the call the Lord gives the capacity to respond, and to respond freely. We are always to see ourselves as capable of doing God's will—as gifted with whatever may be needed for a given task. We are all to realize that we have to freely accept the gift of that capacity and then to accept God's call without worrying about the difficulties or even the sufferings that will come with it. It is up to God to make us able to do what he wishes us to do. We must accept it and do it freely and voluntarily.

It doesn't matter what our background is or isn't. It doesn't matter what training we have or lack. Only God's call matters because God gives whatever it takes to do what he asks of us. We need to see ourselves as wondrously gifted to freely do all that God asks of us. This is as true of our daily tasks of loving and helping one another as it is for the extraordinary missions. God has set us free to serve him freely. Do not be afraid to accept the gift.

# **A Monastic Vocation**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny**

**Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. Our Holy Father, Benedict, was one who trusted in the Lord. He was met by God with wondrous blessings and filled with confidence in his Lord, and now is filled with every spiritual blessing in the Heavens. In very truth, the one who trusts in the Lord is blessed in the Lord. Whoever trusts in the Lord enters into the Lord. A tree drinks in the sap of life with the waters that cause fertility out of the depths to which its roots have penetrated. A person who has sent out roots to the Words of the Master—to the words of Christ as taught us by Benedict—such a person has hoped in God. God is the very source of all good, so one rooted in God drinks in the Waters of Everlasting Life.**

**It is for these reasons, by dear brothers, that the hand of the Most High has transplanted you near to the waters of rest and rebirth. Human birth into the world's customs planted you in a parched place, in a wilderness and in an uninhabitable salt flat. As a result you were destined to be cut down like a barren tree and thrown into the fire. Your lives were unfruitful. But now you have been transplanted into the House of the Lord and the courts of our God. So you can flourish and bear fruit—and bear a fruit that will abide.**

**The waters that now nourish you are the Holy Scriptures on which you meditate day and night. They are the tears of compunction that have become your drink day and night! They are the sacraments and other aids to salvation which you eat and drink at the altar. The Fountain of Wisdom has sprung up in the middle of paradise and it flows out to you in each of these gifts, just as the tiny streams flowing from a river spread its water to all.**

**Such waters fill the streets of the City of God. Wisdom himself has promised *“I will water the plants of my garden and the fruits of my begetting will be most abundant”*. (Sirach 24:41) It is the community made up of wisdom's children that makes us plants in the Lord's garden. God says, *“Shall I bring you to the point of birth and not let you be born?”* (Isaiah 66:9) God brings forth the good will that leads you to seek Him. God planted this when he caused the beginning of the life of faith in each of us. God waters you when God floods the mind with grace. God tills the soil of your spirit when God imposes discipline on you. *“Hear me, you divine offspring, and you will bud forth like a rose planted by brooks of water”*. (Sirach 39:17)**

**You have been called to a monastic life. Put forth roots to the Waters of Life, that is to loving God in this land of the living. It is not an earthly love, for in this land all things grow old and decay. A tree cannot bring forth fruit that will abide unless its roots are in the heavenly places. We are said to be upside down trees because our nerves lead upward to our head. But it is better to say they do this because our love and longing reach out to Heaven and to our Head, Jesus Christ. Whoever has roots there and draws life from that source has the sap of eternal life. Such a one will stand in glory forever before the Lord. Isn't that what our life is about? Isn't that our destination?**

# **Christ's Love Unites Us in Peace**

**A reflection extracted from a Letter of St. Bernard**

**Dear Brothers,**

**You are feeling my absence, you are worried and anxious. I feel the same way. If my absence bothers you, if you are concerned for me, I feel the same anxiety for each of you individually and for all of you together. I find I can't stop fearing for your safety and am distressed because I am absent. This will never change until we are reunited; you are part of my life.**

**For the time being I am under obligation to be away. Even if I were king it would feel like an unpleasant form of slavery to be away from you, but the needs of the Church force me to and I hope that my presence here will not be necessary much longer. Pray that it may at least bear fruit for others. We must see any loss we suffer for the sake of God as a gain.**

**God can easily make up for any loss we suffer. God loves us and is all-powerful. So we have to keep our spirits up. Just because God is with us no matter how great the distance between us may seem we are united in God. Those who are well-disposed, humble, reverent, zealous in holy reading, attentive in prayer and fervent in fraternal charity can be quite sure I am not far away from them. How can I fail to be present in spirit with those who are one with me in heart and soul? But if someone were scheming, double-faced, grumbling, rebellious, insubordinate, restless and flighty, or were eating the bread of idleness unblushingly—even if I were with such a person physically we would be far apart in spirit. Such a one would be alienating himself from God. Our unity depends on our shared love for God.**

**While I have to be away, brothers, serve God in fear. When I return then you will feel freed from the danger posed by the enemy and will be able to serve God without fear. Serve God with hope; God is faithful to his promises. Serve God thankfully, because God has a claim on our gratitude and every right to call us to dedicate our lives to his service. He gave his life for us—isn't that reason enough?**

**Who deserves my gift of self more than the one who gave himself so I might live? God purchased for me eternal life at the price of his own life. Is there anyone whom I ought to serve rather than the one who has everlasting fire at his command? Yet I serve willingly and not out of fear. It is because charity sets me free from fear. I invite you to this same willing service, dearest brothers. Serve God and serve Christ with that "charity which leaves no room for fear".**

**For such love nothing is too much. It seeks no reward and yet impels us as nothing else can. No fear has such power to spur us on and no reward is so great as to draw us the way love of God does. No sense of obligation can demand of us all we want to give. This is the bond between us. In this love I am with you always. I am most especially with you at the hours of prayer.**

**In God's love we are indeed, one another's dearest brothers. In God's love we are free from anxiety about one another. It depends on the depth of our love for God.**

