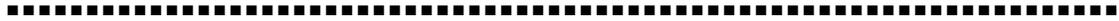


TWENTY-FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME



- Sunday** **Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Sept 11 **Who Am I When God Seeks Me Out?**
A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller
- Mon** **Monday of the Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**
12 **The Shoulders of Jesus**
A reflection from a sermon of Fr. John of Avila
- Tues** **Memorial of St. John Chrysostom**
13 **Put All Your Trust in God**
A reflection from a homily by St. John Chrysostom
- Wed** **The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
14 **How We Are Exalted by the Holy Cross**
A commentary on an Easter Hymn by Dorotheos of Gaza
- Thurs** **Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows**
15 **What God's Love Called Mary to Teach Us**
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant
- Fri** **Memorial of Sts. Cornelius & Cyprian**
16 **What Does a Christian Fear?**
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- Sat** **Saturday of the Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**
17 **Finding Meaning in our Crosses**
From a Scripture Commentary by St. Gregory of Nyssa



Who Am I When God Seeks Me Out?

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Do you remember when department stores had a “Lost & Found” desk? This Sunday’s readings are from God’s Lost & Found desk. It is so easy to misplace items, even important ones. Usually it is accidental but some do it deliberately, to collect insurance or to gain some advantage. Israel had just come to God at Mt. Sinai and Moses was speaking with God amid thunder and lightning, but Israel was impatient. Give us a symbol to worship! So Aaron made a calf and they started celebrating. Would God destroy them? Moses is pictured telling God not to make himself look foolish by destroying those he had taken such care to bring to him. He argues selflessly and compassionately. Where did he learn this? From the God he argued with.

The Lord is teaching us compassion and mercy today. Paul uses himself as an example. He sinned because he didn’t really grasp what he was doing but was ignorant and impulsive, just like we often are. And he hurt many others, getting them imprisoned and even killed. Paul told people who couldn’t understand how God could let this happen that God is teaching us mercy and compassion. It is why Christ came into the world!

But Christ was criticized too for accepting sinners and those who didn’t make God first in their lives or work. His response was to tell three tales about the mercy of God. Still, why does God even let so many bad things happen? Because God would share his own life with us, and that life is freely chosen love. To teach us freedom in love God teaches us mercy and compassion. And to make it all worse, Jesus says that when God finds one who is lost and brings it home there is more joy in heaven than for the many who don’t have to be saved in such special way. God’s love rejoices in being merciful and compassionate!

Do you object? You are playing the part of the angry older brother of the prodigal! Don’t be envious but join the joy! Jesus’ parables remind us that we are all lost in some part of ourselves. Who hasn’t squandered marvelous opportunities to serve and show mercy? Who doesn’t possess within potentials for goodness and love and helpfulness and joy that have been ignored and not used? Each of us, in some way, is lost for any number of reasons. What does Jesus do? Jesus welcomes us with joy, just as he did tax collectors and prostitutes. We don’t have to come to Jesus at our best. The heavenly wedding banquet is actually a come-as-you-are party. Let God, and Jesus, and all Heaven itself, rejoice that you are found!

The Shoulders of Jesus

A reflection by Fr. John of Avila

“Jesus told this parable: Which of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one, wouldn’t leave the ninety-nine to go look for the missing one until he found it?” Lord Jesus, you came looking for lost sheep and you placed each one on your shoulders. Imagine a prince leaving his Father’s royal palace with its table and its music and coming to wherever there were lost sheep. More, he put on their own garment of humanity and accepted their toils.

Can you imagine a starry sky as beautiful as the sight of Jesus Christ coming with lost sheep in his arms? If a little sheep is a bit rebellious he doesn’t strike it and if it wants to be put down he still doesn’t put it down. O blessed shoulders of Jesus Christ! What does it mean to say Jesus takes the sheep on his shoulders? It means what washing the feet of his disciples meant. He washes them and he kisses them and he says: My disciples, do you understand what I have done? Don’t you see that I mean you to wash one another’s feet as I, your Lord and Master, have washed yours? Then Jesus says, Do you see me coming with this little sheep on my shoulders? I am trying to tell you that you are to bear one another’s burdens and toils and difficulties. Don’t be like those whose shoulders seem made of pastry dough; who answer if they are told to be peacemakers: Why are you trying to involve me in other people’s quarrels?

To travel on the shoulders of Jesus Christ means that your fasting, almsgiving and prayers have special value. Precisely because you are on Christ’s shoulders you are supported by his merits. Apart from them your words are worthless. So get up on his shoulders. He has gained everything by carrying our sins on his cross, on his shoulders. Get up on his shoulders because while he is carrying you God will not give you what you deserve, justice!

Jesus will say to the Heavenly Father, Lord, if you won’t forgive them because they are my servants, consider that they are my brothers and sisters and brides. If this is not enough notice that they are my members and are one with me. If it is not possible to punish the members without punishing the Head, then being my members should be reason enough. And think of yourself! Their being members of Jesus Christ is quite enough reason to love and help others. If you saw Jesus and gave him what he needed that wouldn’t deserve great praise. Even wicked people would do that. But if you receive the poor because they belong to Christ, and because he commands it, that is a sign of great love. Just as he took us on his shoulders so let us take our brothers and sisters on ours. You don’t have wax shoulders that can’t support any weight. The members of Christ have his shoulders.

Put All Your Trust in God!

A reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

“Life to me means Christ, so death is gain.” Have the waters risen and severe storms come upon us? We don't need to fear drowning; we stand firmly on a rock. Let the sea rage; it can't break that rock. Let the wave rise; they can't sink the boat of Jesus! What are we to fear? Do we need to fear death? But life to me means Christ and so death is gain. Do we need to fear exile from our home? But the earth and all its fullness belong to the Lord. Do we need to fear loss of all our possessions? We brought nothing into this world and we shall take nothing from it.

The world's threats are empty and its blessings laughable. There is no need to fear poverty, and no point in desiring wealth. Death is nothing to fear nor is long life something to desire. There is no point in living except to serve. Present trials are nothing to fear. Have confidence! Can't you hear the Lord saying: Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst? Can Christ be absent when so many people united in love are gathered together as now?

I have Christ's promise. Surely I am not going to rely on my own strength! I have what God has written and that is my staff and security, my peaceful harbor. Let the world be in upheaval, but I will hold to his promise and read his message and that will be my protecting wall and garrison. What is that message? “Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world.”

If Christ is with me, whom should I fear? Though the waves and the sea and the anger of the mighty all beat against me they seem less than a spider's web. I always say: Lord, your will be done! That is my strong tower, my immovable rock, my staff that never gives way. If God wants something, let it be done! If God wants me to stay where I am I praise him but wherever God wants me to be I am no less thankful. But remember that we are a single body. So where I am there you are too and where you are there am I. We are a single body and the body cannot be separated from its head, or the head from its body. Distance may seem to separate but love unites. Death itself cannot cut us off from one another.

You are my fellow citizens in God's Kingdom. You are fathers, brothers, sons, limbs, and even my body. You are my light—sweeter to me than the ordinary visible light. What can rays from the sun bestow on me that is comparable to the love of my brothers and sisters in Christ? Sunlight is useful in earthly life. The love of brothers and sisters in Christ fashions a crown for me that will be mine in the life to come. Do not be afraid. Put all your trust in God.

How We Are Exalted by the Holy Cross

A commentary on an Easter Hymn by Dorotheos of Gaza

Let us come to understand the power of the mystery of Christ's death on the cross for the power of the mystery of Christ's death lies in it. By disobedience we sinned and effaced God's likeness in us, but God is life and to be unlike God is to be in death. St. Paul reminds us we were dead by our sins and transgressions, but God, remembering his mercy and compassion, became human for our sake to restore our likeness to our Creator. Accepting death in our place he led us, who were already dead, back to life again—the very life from which we had fallen away by our sin.

When the Lord Jesus mounted the Holy Cross he nailed to it that sin for which we were thrown out of paradise. We sinned in deciding for ourselves what was to be good or evil and rejected God's word telling us what was good and evil. So Christ accepted the Father's word that it would be good for him to die on the cross and so destroy the sinful refusal to believe that was our First Parents' sin.

What does it mean when Scripture speaks of "leading captivity captive"? By reason of our obedience to the Enemy's word we were captured by him and held in his power. So when we died we had no entrance into Heaven but were shut out of that greatest paradise. They had only Hades to which to go. When Christ, then, was lifted high on the Holy and Life-Giving Cross, snatched us away from our unbelief and disobedience that held us captive, and he did it by his own blood shed in trust and obedience to the Father's word. He seized us from the power of unbelief and so from the Enemy's power and made us his captives, as it were. He did this by casting down the power that held us captive and "led captivity captive".

Here lies the power of the Mystery we celebrate. This is why Christ died for us. This is how he led us who were dead back from Hades and by his loving kindness. Now it is within our power to enter the Heavenly Paradise, for we are free and no longer slaves.

The important thing is this. We must be on guard and keep ourselves from all sin in every one of our actions. Every sinful deed puts us once more under the power of the Enemy, since of our own free will we cast ourselves into unbelief and disobedience and so place ourselves in the Enemy's power. Isn't it a shameful thing that after Christ has delivered us from hell though his own blood, and after we know the truth that we have been delivered, that we go backwards and cast ourselves into hell? But God who loves us so much has had mercy and shows us compassion like little children. Keep your eyes on Jesus and on the Cross and you will find mercy with God, even on the Day of Judgment.

What God's Love Called Mary to Teach Us

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Perhaps the best known of biblical passages reads: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son". This passage revolutionizes the Biblical theory of sin and of retribution. We interpret this passage as telling us that God is love. But as a child I didn't find this image of God wholly satisfying. I was happy that God loved me so much, but I always felt bad for Jesus. Why would God make him suffer like that when he didn't do anything wrong? If I had known about the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows perhaps I would have been even more puzzled. Here is another person who didn't do anything wrong and "had her full" of sufferings; the number 7 in the bible means "fullness". Don't we all think people have had "their fill" of suffering, especially children?

Jesus emptied himself for the Heavenly Father. He did it willingly. What Jesus did, Mary did too; she followed him in every way God allowed her to. They both show us God's love and tell us that being called to that love is a call to suffering. Jesus and Mary gave themselves wholly to the Heavenly Father so that all might have life, and have it in all its abundance. The path to this leads through suffering. We don't suffer because we have sinned but so we can learn to love as God loves.

If the only example we had was that of Jesus we might misunderstand. Is God glorifying an instrument of torture? No! Mary shows us suffering that didn't call for her to die on a cross. Whatever happened to her, and especially what we call her seven sufferings, were calls to say "Let your word be accomplished in me!" just as she had when God asked her to be the mother of his Son. What is supremely important is Mary's "*fiat*", her total consent to God's call and will, even when she only very imperfectly understood what that would cost her or why it was important.

God does not rejoice in suffering. God rejoices in the gift of self without any qualifications when that gift is made for the sake of life and the sharing of life. When one gives one's very self into God's hands—as everyone is called to do in dying—one loves as God loves. That is why St. Luke presents Mary as the ideal believer and ideal servant (the word is really 'slave') of God. Slaves have no choices once they are slaves, except to die rather than do what they believe to be so bad it can't be done ever. Mary didn't die for refusing to do wrong, as perhaps Jesus did. She died every day in saying her wholehearted "Yes!" to whatever God asked of her that day. This is our path to God as well.

What Does a Christian Fear?

A reflection from a letter by St. Cyprian

What do you fear most? What do you fear as a Christian? The very beginning of Christ's life was marked out by an attempt to kill him. Herod so badly wanted him dead as to kill all the children in the Bethlehem area who were two years old or less. Think of the fact that the martyrdom of infants was occasioned by Christ's birth. We do not know how many there were who bore innocent witness to Christ by shedding their blood for him, and without even knowing they were doing it.

Our Lord and Master suffered death for us. What a shameful thing it would be for us, who are Christ's chosen ones and servants, to flee suffering brought on us because of Christ. The infants who were killed in Jesus' place witness that no one is immune from persecution or similar perils. Besides, all of us have sinned; why would we not be asked to suffer something in recompense for those sins? The Master suffered first and he was as innocent as the infants Herod killed. He suffered so much for us because he wanted us to be children of God. Would anyone who has received this sonship refuse to persevere as God's children because of some suffering?

If we have to bear with the world's hatred we must remember that Christ was hated first. We may have to endure insults, homelessness, tortures and all sorts of abuse in the world but our Lord knew all this in harsher form and warned us. "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you." If we belonged to the world the world would love us as its own. But we are not of this world. God chose us out of the world and that is exactly why the world hates you. The servant is not greater than the master, Jesus warned us. If the world persecuted Christ it will persecute us as well.

Our Lord and our God practices all that he taught. There can be no excuse for a disciple who hears this teaching but doesn't act on it. My beloved, let no one of us be so intimidated by fear of the future and its persecutions, or of the imminent coming of the Antichrist that you are not armed against all contingencies. The precepts and the exhortations of the Gospel come from Heaven. Antichrist may come, but Christ will come in his wake. All sorts of enemies may rage and storm, but Our Lord will follow hard upon them to avenge our wounds and sufferings.

Our adversaries may rage and threaten but Our Lord comes to deliver us. Christ it is whom we must "fear". No one can escape his anger and no one can deliver us from his hands! It is the Lord we must "fear" for no one can escape him, as he himself has warned us. "Don't fear those who kill the body but can't kill the soul." Do not fear suffering. Do not fear the loss of earthly goods. Fear only the loss of God. He is everlasting life and joy.

Finding Meaning in Our Crosses

Developed from a Scripture Commentary by St. Gregory of Nyssa

No passage of Scripture and none of the realities given us by God have just one meaning. It follows that with regard to the cross, and the crosses we bear, we must look for both the human and divine meanings. Thus, a cross is an instrument of torture and death; that is one of its human meanings. But it also has a divine meaning. For example, it is proper to God to pervade all things. Whatever exists does so in God. Nothing can remain in being without remaining “in God”. The only reality that exists in the primary sense of that word is God and God’s Divine Nature. We learn this from the shape of the cross. It is divided into four parts in such a way that each indicates one of four directions. God is above and below, at one end of the universe and at its opposite end. God is everywhere, even in our sufferings, as God was in Christ’s. This is a divine meaning; it reminds us God is always with us and in everything that happens.

By dying on the cross Jesus fulfilled the divine plan of salvation. The four parts of a cross converge on the middle position, because it is from the center, God, that all things come and to which all things return. That is God’s Provident plan for all things. Nothing happens which is not part of that plan. Jesus was stretched on a cross when he died because it is in his person that all the diverse things and natures filling the world are brought into unity and made one. Christ brings everything into harmony. Even our sufferings, like his, are intended in God’s plan to bring us to share his life.

As already pointed out, everything is above or below, to the right or to the left of something else. But all places are filled with God. God alone is in all things and maintains all things in existence. And since the whole of creation has its center in God and looks to God for cohesion and unity, it was fitting that knowledge of God’s plan and love should come to us through a cross and through Jesus on that cross.

All these are called mystical meanings of the cross and of human sufferings. Even the Great Paul spoke of this in his letter to the people of Ephesus. He tells them they have learned what is the depth and height, the breadth and length of the power and love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. I think he brings out this idea even more clearly in his letter to the Philippians. “At the name of Jesus Christ all being in heaven, on earth, and in the underworld shall bend the knee” to God. All time and places and peoples are brought together by Christ in God the Heavenly Father. We have nothing to fear. We have been chosen by God to be his and to be united to him in Christ forever. Every time we see a cross, every time we have to bear a cross we are remind of this fact and called to glorify his love and mercy.