



# **TO WHOM SHALL WE TURN?**

Reflection developed from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

Do you love me? The question directed to Peter when Jesus gave him breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee is meant for us as much as for Peter. To get to know Jesus is to want to be with him, as we learned from accompanying our two fellow disciples on the road to Emmaus. We have been getting to know him better and better in recent weeks but we know he will leave us soon! We have seen other turn to him in every sort of difficulty. When he leaves to whom will we turn?

*If you love me, Christ says, you keep my commandments.* He is identified with them, because they are the Father's will, and "I and the Father are one". I have commanded you to love one another, just as I have loved you, and you can do this by helping one another keep my commandments. I have shown you how. I will show I love you by making sure you are never without help. *"I am going to ask the Father and he will give you another counselor and companion."* This is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will make us one with Christ and with the Father in a way we never imagined was possible! It can be wonderful!

Christ had purified us by his sacrifice. He was about to send us out to face dangers and the struggle to share with others our love of Jesus and all he has given us. Why doesn't he give this gift immediately after the resurrection? He did, as he said, but not the experience we have at Pentecost, because our longing will make the joy of receiving it so much the greater!

The Spirit will remain with us, Christ said. His presence will not end even at death. The faith in God the disciples had learned from Christ prepared them for what this meant. He says: "The world can't receive the Spirit because it doesn't "see" him or "know" him. It doesn't have faith but only ordinary eyes and minds and these by themselves are insufficient. But we see and know the Spirit through our faith. So we can lead others to Christ and to the gift of the Spirit. That is what we need to look forward to. It will be our joy!

In the meantime, remember the promise "I will not leave you orphans". Don't be afraid, he implies, because I promised to send another comforter but that did not mean I would abandon you in my person. Of course, I too will come to you. Never lose hope in my love for you! I have already given you eternal life with me in the house of our Heavenly Father. You are sent to summon others guests to the banquet that has already been prepared.

# **COPING CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH LOSS**

**A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant**

Some of the most moving pictures we see from war zones are of children who have been orphaned. To be orphaned means to be alone. Is that what we experience when Jesus is taken from us and enters Heaven? It depends on the extent to which we have allowed ourselves to depend on him and how we want to sense his supporting, loving presence. We can see what this means using the Scriptural stories of the disciples ways of coping, or being unable to cope, with Jesus' leaving them.

The first think we notice is that they didn't know how to recognize the "Risen" Jesus and so couldn't tell whether he was with them or not. Second, they had to learn that Jesus' presence can take many different forms and doesn't always match the ways he came to them, or us, in the past. Third, Jesus will be with us "in the Spirit".

Jesus has led us to God as Trinity and told us that the Triune God is the one who has been with us in Him, and will continue to be with us. Jesus asks the Heavenly Father to send the Holy Spirit and in doing to give himself to us. That is what the Father had done in and through Jesus to the first disciples, and now makes the same gift to us through Jesus. We have to begin by accepting the gift of that faith which can recognize the Father in Jesus through the Spirit. That same gift of faith enables us to recognize God's self-giving in ourselves. That begins by recognizing the Spirit abiding in us. How does this happen?

Do you recall the story of how the Spirit's led the Philip to the Ethiopian, then to the coastal cities of Palestine and then to the people of Samaria. He didn't just go to all these vastly different people but his message about Jesus and God's self-giving was received gladly by all. Could something which had never before happened not reveal God working through Philip? God will work in the same way through us if we allow it. We know we are not left alone when we do what the Spirit moves us to do, even if it "couldn't possibly work"!

The second reading at the Sunday's Eucharist said that living with gentleness and reverence can lead to miracles of faith. The Spirit gives us words to explain the hope we live by. Life in the Spirit is rooted in hope. Living the mercy and love of Christ is evidence of the Spirit's presence, if you are willing to learn to see how such ordinary seeming lives transform people. Genuine Christian living with love is evidence of the presence of the Spirit and Jesus. By it we learn to "see".

# **FACING TRUTH WITH CONFIDENCE**

**A reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine of Hippo**

**We are travelers. We are making our way as fast as we can toward our homeland. If we gave up hope of reaching it our very despair would leave us paralyzed. But it is God's will that we arrive at our destination. He helps and gives us strength so that we can come to be safe in our heavenly country. God knows our weakness but never ceases to love us.**

**Listen to God's word: If we claim to have fellowship with God while still walking in the darkness of sin we are liars and are not living in the truth. But we need never walk in such darkness; God is our light and if we walk with God we walk in the truth, and, best of all, have fellowship with God and with one another.**

**But what about our sins? The answer is found in the blood of God's Son, Jesus Christ. By it we are cleansed from every transgression. Note the following carefully: We call the newly baptized "little children" just because they have made their declaration of faith in the name of Christ and had their sins washed away by his blood. They entered the baptismal water veterans in sin and they came out filled with new life—as though they were newly born children. Their former life was a feeble old age but their new life is filled with vigor like that of youth.**

**We have all been renewed in that way. But have we fallen into fresh sins? We do live surrounded by temptations. So all of us must do the one thing we can—we must admit our own condition so that we may be healed by the one who died for us and who never changes in love and mercy. Scripture itself tells us: *If we deny our sins we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.* If you confess yourself to be a sinner, then the truth does abide in you. Your life may not yet be perfect but your enlightenment and renewal has begun. Scripture says: *"If we confess our transgressions the one who is faithful and just will forgive them and cleanse us of all iniquity."***

**As long as we are flesh and blood, as we now are, it seems that we cannot avoid at least lesser sins. So what hope is there for us? We may confess our sins and turn to God. This must come first. But it must be followed by love. Charity, we are told, covers a multitude of sins. God delights not in the destruction of sinners but in the salvation of all those who turn to grace and divine love and seek to live in them. It is God who saves us. We have to cast ourselves upon God's love and mercy with confidence.**

# **REMEMBER WELL!**

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

When Our Lord was leaving his apostles and they were sorrowing, he consoled them by the promise of another Guide & Teacher on whom they would be able to rely, and who would be more to them than even he had been. He promised them the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Spirit's very self. His presence, though invisible, would be more real and effective in the very measure that it was more secret and inscrutable. What's more, this Comforter wouldn't supersede Christ. "*He will glorify me*", Jesus says.

What happened was that the Spirit revealed Christ as the Only-begotten Son of the Father. But this means that it was only after his ascension, after the Holy Spirit descended, that the apostles truly understood who had been with them. When it was all over they knew, but not before. Here, I think, we see a kind of general principle that comes up again and again in scripture and in our experience. God's presence is not discerned at the time when it is upon us but afterwards, when we look back to what is gone and over.

Look back upon your past life. Notice how critical for your future were incidents and acts which then seemed unimportant. Take the school you were sent to and the people you made your friends, and note what a very beneficial effect on you some had. Think of the seeming accidents that led you to your profession and gave you the opportunities that proved crucial for your future. Even very ordinary years lived seemingly without a goal created an ideal of a good life.

The planting, then, of Christ's cross in your heart may have been painful and difficult but it has born such marvelous fruit! At such times we are unable to appreciate that God is with us, but afterwards we sense a kind of perfume coming from moments or persons and are refreshed as by the sweetness of myrrh, aloes and cassia.

Like Jacob we slept with our head on a rock in a strange, dark place. But we now awaken to the realization that we have seen angels coming to us from God. What was dark when we experienced it now reflects the radiance of the son of righteousness. So let us learn from this and, in the future, so far as we can, have faith in the presence of the Eternal Son and the Spirit even when we can't see this. This Son is ten times more glorious and powerful than when he trod the earth as our fellow. The more secret God's hand works the more powerful it is to save and support. Perhaps in knowing this we can, by faith, see a bit of the truth and be comforted and even brought to joy!

# **THE HINTS THAT LEAD US TO GLORY**

## **A reflection from St. Bede's Commentary on Nehemiah**

St. Paul teaches us that we must celebrate the Feast of Christ's Passover as our Hebrew forbears celebrated it—in spirit and looking forward to what is to come. “Let us keep the feast”, he says, “not as shaped by our old life of malice and iniquity but in a fresh way shaped by sincerity and truth”. Of old the feast was celebrated for seven days to remind us that however many days one may live all are to be lived in sincerity and truth. This life is to be our offering of the Passover with Christ.

Our Blessed Lord tasted death for a time at Eastertide, offering himself as a sacrifice. He vanquished death by the eternal power shown in resurrection, and our celebration of Easter here and now can be taken to represent in symbol our resurrection with him. We live among symbols which are but hints of much greater realities to come. Just as the Hebrew Temple hints at the dwelling made of Living Stones, itself symbolized by our Church, so the dedication of that ancient Temple hints at the dedication of the Living Temple raised by the Risen Christ so that God may dwell fully in each of us. The feast of that Temple's dedication hinted at the life to come lived by the Living Temple that is Christ's Risen Body. The Passover sacrifice hinted at the glory of the resurrection. The elect will no longer need to be refreshed by the flesh of the Lamb who is our Lord and God or by sacraments, for they will be refreshed continually by the very Truth.

Under the Law of Moses, the Passover celebration brought all who had turned to God into one. In resurrection life all without exception will be brought into unity by the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the whole world. As St. John says, “the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, cleanses us of all sin”. This prepares us for the true feast of “unleavened bread” celebrated with unqualified rejoicing because all malice and wickedness will have been done away with. All will cling to truth in utter sincerity of heart and in the vision of God.

When will all this come to pass? Not in the seven day periods of this changing world but in the one day that is eternity and eternal life lived in the courts of the Lord. This one day in the Lord's courts is indeed better than thousands lived anywhere else. This life will be lived in the light of the Holy Spirit and the sevenfold grace of God. This is the reality of which all else can be no more than a hint, and an inadequate one at that. You have been chosen to live in that light and truth and purity and joy. Begin even now to rejoice in the Lord's gifts to you.

# **THE NEW AND THE OLD: IN JESUS & US**

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Romano Guardini

The days between Christ's Resurrection and his return to the Father are filled with mystery. If we accept them as we should—not as legend but as a vital part of our faith—then we must ask what they mean in the life of the Lord and what their significance is for our own Christian living. They are days of passage from time to eternity. The Lord is on earth but has one foot in Heaven. The New Testament gives us two figures of Jesus—the carpenter's son in the midst of earthly events and toils and struggles to submit to his destiny, and a Jesus whose center of life is an eternal future of overwhelming newness.

As earthly Jesus has personal characteristics, his disciples can hear his voice and see his gestures. Yet such things were falling away to the point of making them unable to recognize him. What remains is "Christ the Lord" whose figure John tries to describe in Revelation. He is "one like a son of man", with an ankle length robe and a gold band around his chest and hair white as wool and eyes blazing like fire, and, crowing oddity from an earthly point of view, a sharp two-edged sword comes out of his mouth. "When I saw him", John says, "I fell at his feet like a dead person, but he placed his right hand on me and said, 'Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last and the living One; I was dead and see I am alive forevermore; I have the keys of death and of hell'."

Think of St. Paul's description in Colossians. He is "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, in whom were created all things in the heavens and on earth, things visible and things invisible, whether Thrones or Dominations or Principalities or Powers...for it pleased God the Father that in him all divine fullness should dwell". All that is characteristics of earthly life has fallen away. Everything is strange and seems to earthly eyes out of proper proportion.

Yet it is the same Jesus who walked this earth! But now Jesus is not so much shaped by his earthly past as by a heavenly and eternal future. He has a future, but richer than we can imagine. It is part of God's Plan for the saving and perfection of the entire universe, the human race included. Do we realize that this is the sort of future we all have? The days of Jesus everlasting life require a transition from earthly time to eternity, from orientation to the past deeds to an orientation to a pure future. One remains the same but life is transformed in a way we don't know how to describe accurately. Jesus once again shows us the way. It is our task to prepare ourselves as best we may to follow him, yet again, and into unspeakable newness.

# **LETTING GOD FILL US WITH ENTHUSIASM**

**A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Bernard Haring**

Enthusiasm is a kind of joy in God that exists as a silent presence in the heart. It shows itself in a cheerful face. It grows deeper in dialogue with other people who are also gripped by faith. Often, it is seen as a quietly flowing brook that suddenly bursts into a flood that sweeps things in its path.

The Gospel of Luke gives us a matchless picture of infectious enthusiasm. The seventy disciples whom Jesus has sent out to proclaim the Good News come back and report enthusiastically about their experiences. Jesus takes their joy to a deeper level by pointing out to them that their names are “written in heaven”. Then we witness a peak experience in Jesus’ own enthusiasm: “*Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, we are told, and broke out in praise, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants! Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will!’*” Enthusiasm is described as a state in which one is filled with the Holy Spirit.

What is unique about Christian enthusiasm is that it comes from following and serving the Gospel. It is also a model we can use to imagine the Church as Christ calls it into being. By contrast, in some spiritual exercises dedicated to his disciple, Pope Eugene III, St. Bernard depicts the Church of the time as a travesty of this. There follows a rather long list of kill-joys. Then Bernard speaks of how one can open oneself and others to the joy of the Gospel. Wherever the Spirit of God blows, wherever people let themselves be filled with the Spirit, Pentecost keeps happening. St. Augustine of Canterbury was sent to convert the English as the abbot of a monastic community. The English had to be shown how Jesus’ gift could transform a person’s living, and dying. They were brought to Christ by seeing a community of believers do all the things they did to sustain their lives but in such a way that their lives, and especially their deaths, seemed good in a new and attractive way. England was, in a sense, converted by enthusiasm. I have the impression that for Luke a key to the triumphant advance of the Gospel is the enthusiasm of believers.

We have to seriously examine our consciences. What is going on with us, with our Church, that we sense so little of the Pentecostal storm of enthusiasm? To successfully clear the way for it we need times and places of silence, prayer, meditation, and above all faith that the Holy Spirit can move mountains. “Come, Holy Spirit!”