

THIRTIETH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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ALL SAINTS AND ALL SOULS DAYS

Sunday The Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Oct. 29 The Commandment to Love

A reflection derived from The Interior Castle by St. Teresa of Avila

Mon Monday of the Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

30 Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

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

Tues Tuesday of the Thirtieth Week in Ordinary Time

31 If We Only Have Love!

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Wed The Solemnity of All the Saints

Nov. 1 Blessed Are They Who Follow Christ

A reflection adapted from Sr. Dianne Bergant

Thurs The Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed

2 There Is Nothing To Fear From Death

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

Fri Memorial of St. Martin de Porres

3 The Reality That Is Christian Humility

A reflection developed from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

Sat Memorial of St. Charles Borromeo

4 Prayer's Impact on Love

A reflection adapted from a talk by St. Charles Borromeo

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THE COMMANDMENT TO LOVE

A reflection derived from The Interior Castle by St. Teresa of Avila

“When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Saducees they got together and to disconcert Jesus one of them put forth a question, “Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?”” In response, the Lord asked only two things: love for God and love for our neighbor. It is for these two virtues that we must strive, and if we attain them perfectly we are doing God’s will and so shall be united with God. But how far we are from doing these two things in the way that we ought to do them for a God who is so great. May God be pleased to give us the grace so that we deserve to reach this state, and it is in our power to do so if we wish.

The surest sign that we are keeping these two commandments is, I think, that we really love our neighbor. We cannot be sure if we are loving God, although we may have good reasons for believing that we are, but we can know quite well if we are loving our neighbor. Be sure that the farther advanced you find you are in this, the greater the love you will have for God. So dearly does our God love us that he will reward our love for our neighbor by increasing the love which we bear for Him, and that in a thousand ways. I cannot doubt this.

When I see people very diligently trying to discover what kind of prayer they are experiencing and so completely wrapped up in their prayers that they seem afraid to stir, or indulge in a moment’s thought, lest they should lose the slightest bit of the tenderness and devotion that they have been feeling, I realize how little they understand about the way to the attainment of union. They think that the whole thing consists in such feeling. No, sisters, no! What the Lord desires is deeds. If you see a sick woman to whom you can give some help, never let the fear that your devotion will suffer affect you. Take pity on her. If she is in pain you should feel pain too. If necessary fast so that she may have your food, not simply for her sake but because you know it to be your Lord’s will. If you hear someone praised be more pleased than if they were praising you. When you see a fault in someone else be as sorry about it as if it were your own. This is really easy if you have humility.

All this is true union with God’s will. May the Lord grant us never to fail in this, and, so that we may not, I tell you that you must not cease to beg God for the union I have described. It may be that you have experienced devotion and consolation and even enjoyed some brief period of the prayer of quiet. But if you find you are lacking in that virtue (of compassion) you have not attained union with God’s will. If you use your best endeavors and strive after this in every way you can, God will give you more than you can even desire. Think what God’s love, our spouse’s love, cost him. He did so much to redeem us. So great is God’s love.

PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR

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

You shall love the Lord, your God, and your neighbor as yourself. We are all fed every day by the exhortations of Holy Scripture. What nourishment our hearts find in the word of God! Yet the love we owe to one another forces me to say something further to you about love. What else is there to speak of apart from love? There is no need to select special passages from Scripture; we can open the Bible at any page and find it extolling love. We know this is so from

the Lord for when asked what were the most important commandments of the Law he replied, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

Then, just in case you might be tempted to search further through the pages of Holy Scripture for some commandment other than these two, he added, "*The entire Law and the prophets too depend upon these two commandments.*" If the entire Law and the prophets depend upon these two how much more must the Gospel do so?

People are renewed by love. As sinful desire ages people, so love rejuvenates them. Enmeshed in the toils of desire the psalmist laments, "*I have grown old surrounded by enemies*". Love, on the other hand, is the sign of our renewal, as we know from the Lord's own words: "*I give you a new commandment—love one another*".

Even in ancient times there were people who loved God without thought of reward, and whose hearts were purified by their longing for God. They drew back the veils obscuring the ancient promises, and caught a glimpse through such figures of a new covenant to come. They saw that all the precepts and promises of the old covenant, geared to the capacity of unregenerate people, prefigured a new covenant which the Lord would bring to fulfillment. St. Paul says this clearly, "*The things that happened to them were symbolic and were recorded for us who are living in the last age.*" When the time for it came the new covenant began to be openly proclaimed so that all might understand that the old covenant promises pointed to those of the new covenant.

So love was present under the old covenant just as it is under the new. Then it was more hidden and fear was more apparent, whereas now love is more clearly seen and fear is diminished. As love grows stronger we feel more secure and when our feeling of security is complete fear vanishes. As the Apostle John declares: *Perfect love casts out fear!* Let that be true for you!

IF WE ONLY HAVE LOVE

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Today probably few remember the name “Jacque Brel” and his most famous song, “If only we have love”. Love will open our arms to one another and it will even melt the world’s guns so our children will be able to grow up in peace. As insignificant as each of us may seem, love can accomplish in and through us what no other power can. What is more it is a theme found every where in the Bible. It shows us that God’s law was never legalistic but issued a summons to reach out to those who couldn’t protect themselves or one another. It can be summed up in the famous summons to live a “preferential option for the poor”. As covenant partners of God we have a serious responsibility to care for all the disadvantaged.

The Gospel story we heard on Sunday is very well known. An expert in the interpretation of God’s law asked Jesus which of the 613 laws contained in the Pentateuch—they had been carefully counted—was the most important. What did Jesus say in response? He quoted from Deuteronomy the famous command to love God with 100% of one’s heart and mind and strength and then quoted from Leviticus the command to love one another as we love ourselves. This was not so special except in making it clear that love for God fail to be accompanied by love for neighbor. Loving one another is part of what it means to give 100% of our love to God! And then he adds that every other command in the law of God depends on these two primary commandments.

Those who pray the psalms regularly are acquainted with many reasons for loving God. God is our strength, our rock, our fortress, our deliverer, our shield, the horn of our salvation, our stronghold, one who cares for us more than anyone else can. It seems that we love God because he loves us in so many ways. But if this were the case there wouldn’t be like case for loving our neighbor, especially some of our neighbors! What do they do for us? And then the Lord tells that whoever needs our help is our neighbor—you do remember the parable of the Good Samaritan. In fact, God wants to transform the way we understand, and live, love.

St. Paul gives us many examples of how we are called to love. He unselfishly poured out his entire life for those to whom he ministered. The Thessalonians, he says, have been exemplars of God’s kind of love in reaching out to those who didn’t belong to their community. I want to call your attention to this message, and that he needs to be proclaimed in every possible way—even in pop songs like that of Jacques Brel. The world is called to become the kind of covenant community we hear about in the Great Commandments. It is to realize the “reign” of God as proclaimed in Scripture, by Jesus, by the saints who have walked the earth in endless efforts to imitate Jesus. The power of God is at work within us to accomplish this wonderful thing. We have to believe and put all our hope in God.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO FOLLOW CHRIST

A reflection by Sr. Dianne Bergant

The Beatitudes given us the gospel of Christ remind us that the dispositions—the inner and life-shaping attitudes Jesus shows us—aren't to be equated with obedience to laws. Rather they are brought to birth in our relationships with others. We are called to be poor in spirit and clean of heart, to be comforters, meek and merciful in every sort of situation. We are challenged to hunger and thirst for righteousness and to work for peace, and there is certainly no formula for doing things like this or becoming the kind of person who will do them even at the cost of one's life.

As high minded as a person can be and as dedicated to doing what God commands doesn't show us how to carry out the beatitudes as though they were rules or regulations. Rather God's holy ones are people who seek to alleviate the plight of the desperate, whether by sharing physical things or inventing new ways to lead others to a worthy and dignified human life, and whether they live next door or in far away places. We are to console those who are crushed by loss and fear and despair. We are summoned to empower rather than intimidate, to encourage rather than judge. We are to commit ourselves to justice for all and extend to others the same kind of mercy we have received. When God's reign in the world is under attack they find the courage to stand steadfastly on the side of what they know as truth and act with integrity even while humbly admitting their ignorances.

What enables God's holy ones to live lives like these? We are called to be such persons. The answer is that the love of God transforms all who accept it. This is the gift we have all been given and which we have to claim personally. The greatest obstacle may not be outside us but within us. It may be our own self-concern or lack of empathy with others. Will you let God's love transform you?

We all know and have known people who are living examples of this kind of life. It is called a life of "holiness". You and I are called to holiness. We are to stand up in times of crisis and step forward to help when needed. The saints we celebrate at this time in the Church's calendar are people like us who opened themselves to God's transforming love. That is all that is asked of you and me today, and each day of our lives. Nothing is impossible for God. An angel told that to Mary and in Scripture we are allowed to overhear this message. It led to Christ's growing within Mary, and has done the same in all the millions and billions of saints God has called to be one with Christ just as God now calls us. Recall the other angelic message that resounds through the Scriptures: Don't be afraid!

THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR FROM DEATH

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

Why do we feel such sadness one a loved one dies? Is it because they are leaving us and we will so miss what they gave to us or symbolized for us? Are we saddened on their account or on our own, or both?

We believe that in the future we will again be with those who have died and so believe that they aren't leaving us forever. They have gone ahead of us and in not too long a time we will follow. With this in mind, some have thought it a disgrace that we Christians mourn our dead.

Yet St. Paul, contrary to this view, tells us simply that our sadness shouldn't be like the sorrow of those aren't Christian or have no real faith. We experience sadness because we have lost certain kinds of opportunity to love them and accept the gift of their love. It seems, from this point of view, that the loss is ours rather than theirs. Yet we are also told that God's love envelops the dead in love and even in a kind of joy we can't yet experience. Don't we believe that God has prepared for those who die wonderful things that we can't yet even imagine?

In part what we do is governed by social norms and expectations and is designed to maintain the prestige of our families. Insofar as this is true it has little or nothing to do with the well-being or happiness of the departed but the status and reputation of those they leave behind. Indeed, our reactions to death are very complex and touch almost every dimension of our lives and those of the dead. What we want to do is fill all these rites and customs with the new wine of faith in Christ and unconditional hope in our Heavenly Father.

Yes, we pray fervently that our loving God will show great mercy to those who have gone before us in death. We remember that they too were weak and even sinful persons and that God knows all our secrets and sins and weaknesses—even those in our trust and faith and hope in our redeemer. All the same, we know that God has chosen them as his own and created them to be with him forever. We accordingly not only pray for them but ask them to pray for us. It is an opportunity for us to cast our cares upon the Lord and let our God care for us more completely, as God has always sought to help us do. We are gathered together by a death and drawn to rely more upon one another, and precisely in learning how to rely on God.

Prayer is an expression of faith and trust and hope. When we pray we are strengthened and open ourselves more fully to God's grace. From now on we can share and touch each other only in God. We learn more profoundly that God wants to bring us together, and in healing and enriching ways. Those who are with God and accept God's love are saved, even if they still need to grow in their ability to love God with all their heart and be purified of all that gets in the ways. That is exactly the way in which we, the living, need to grow as well. As we mourn and simultaneously rejoice in God's saving grace toward one another we enter more fully into it, and so into what God has prepared for those who love. Be not afraid!

THE REALITY THAT IS CHRISTIAN HUMILITY

A reflection from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

The example of Martin's life is overwhelming evidence that we can strive for holiness and salvation and find it just as Jesus has shown us. First, we do this by loving God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind; and, secondly, we love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

When Martin had come to realize that Christ Jesus suffered for us and that he carried our sins in his body on the cross this led him to meditate with remarkable ardor and fervor. And he put his meditations into practice in remarkable ways of humbly loving others.

Whenever he contemplated Christ's terrible torture, he was reduced to tears. That was how real his experience of God's love for him in Christ was. He had exceptional love for the great sacrament of the Eucharist and often spent long hours in prayer before this sacrament. His desire was to receive it in communion as often as he could.

St. Martin was always obedient. He felt inspired by his divine teacher and so dealt with his brother religious, even those who refused him respect, with a profound love of the sort that comes from pure faith. He was humble in spirit as well as in all his dealings with others. Martin loved people because he honestly saw them as God's children, just like himself. He even saw them as better than he was, and not only as a social inferior who could be put down by others who wanted to feel better about themselves. God's known love for him was the unshakable basis of his humble self-esteem.

He didn't blame others for their shortcomings. He was tireless, however, in his efforts to reform criminals. He was always there for the sick and did all he could to care for the poor, especially those considered the dregs of his society. He was called "Martin the charitable".

We see in Martin what a "virtuous life" actually is. It is something humanly marvelous and transformative and even humanizing. It meant that Martin's way of living exerted a powerful attraction on others and one that led them toward God. Even today this sort of influence draws people and shows them what faith lived out really is.

God's love, lived in humility and respect and charity for others is transformative. It frees and lifts people up to a greater sense of their, and others', dignity. If only we could all learn this lesson from the example Martin left us and then live it ourselves. We too are called to be examples of love and what God's love actually means and accomplishes. Are we afraid to trust in God, as Martin did? Do we want to see in ourselves the beauty of character that all saw in Martin? Turn to God.

PRAYER'S IMPACT ON LOVE

A reflection adapted from a talk by St. Charles Borromeo

We are all weak, but if we want help the Lord God has given us the means to find it easily. Suppose you want to live a good, holy life and so want to live chastely, to reflect and meditate on virtues and live them. Have you complained that as soon as you come into church to pray the Divine Office or to celebrate Mass a thousand distractions fill your mind. How did he prepare yourself? What did you do to keep your thoughts focused on God? Would you like to learn how to grow in virtue, and to grow from one virtue to another? Would you like to know how you can be recollected at prayer and Mass, and become ever more recollected and so give God more pleasing worship?

Think of yourself as a wood stove. If even a tiny spark of God's love burns within you don't let too much draft blow it out. Keep the stove's door closed. If you leave it open the stove will lose its heat or the fire will go out and it will grow cold. This is what happens when one gets distracted. We have to learn how to avoid this by making distractions an occasion for turning to God and asking help. This turns the distraction into fuel for prayer. You are loving yourself in and through loving God.

The thing is to stay quiet with God. That means avoiding useless chatter when you are preparing to pray. If teaching were your job you would study diligently beforehand. No matter what your job you have to apply yourself to all that is necessary to do it well. If you have to help others find the path to God you have to walk it yourself. If you don't live what you proclaim you will only provoke cynical laughter or derisive shakings of the head. Think of yourself as the priest in charge of the parish that is your own soul. When you have such a ministry you must give yourself to it completely. That means saving energy and time to care for yourself spiritually. You can't be forgetful of self just as you have to be mindful of other the people you live with so their well-being too is before your mind and in your prayers.

In all this, remember that nothing is more important than meditation. A person has to meditate before, during and after every work is done. One of the prophets says: "I will pray, and then I will understand". When ministering to self, as when ministering to others, reflect on what you are doing. When you offer Mass reflect on the sacrifice you are offering. When you pray the Divine Office think about the meaning of the words you are saying and about the Lord to whom you are speaking. When you care for another meditate on the Lord's blood shed for them and the Lord's death by which they are made clean.

The goal is that all that one does should become a work of love. In this way we can overcome endless difficulties which are inseparable from our life and its work. In meditation like this we find the strength to bring Christ to birth in ourselves and in many others. Meditation is prayer and that builds up love of God and of oneself in God.