

THE THIRTY-SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sun. **THE FOUNDING OF MEPKIN ABBEY**

Nov.11 **A FEAST OF UNENDING JOY**
An Anonymous Recollection

Mon. **Monday of the 32d Week in Ordinary Time**
12 **GIVING EVERYTHING TO GOD**
A reflection by Paulinus of Nola

Tues. **Feast of All Saints of the Benedictine Family**
13 **CELEBRATING THE SAINTS OF THE BENEDICTINE ORDER**
A reflection by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

Wed. **Wednesday of the 32d Week in Ordinary Time**
14 **WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN SEEKING GOD**
A reflection taken from a homily by St. Makarios of Egypt

Thurs. **Thursday of the 32d Week in Ordinary Time**
15 **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TRULY RICH?**
A reflection from The Teacher by Clement of Alexandria

Fri. **The Memorial of St. Gertrude the Great**
16 **SEEKING GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART**
A reflection from Spiritual Exercises by St. Gertrude the Great

Sat. **A Memorial of Our Lady**
17 **LEARNING FROM MARY TO LOVE GOD WHOLLY**
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THE GIFT OF UNENDING JOY

In November of 1949 twenty-nine monks from Gethsemani Abbey arrived at Mepkin to found the Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Fifteen were novices, supposedly flexible enough to adapt to the hardships that go with founding a new community. An ancient motto to help us along the path to God says: “Through hardships, to Heaven”! Monastic life provides the hardships and God provides the grace to bear with them and persevere. Brother Boniface summed up the challenge and the grace by pointing to two of Mepkin’s huge live oaks: “Those great big oak trees were once just little nuts that held their ground!” Monks are nuts for Christ putting down roots into monastic life and persevering until death, as St. Benedict says, they show the Church and the world the inner beauty that grows in one who walks the monastic way with Jesus. It is a matter of seeking the face of God in prayer, work and community living. Only 10 of the 29 founders persevered to be buried at Mepkin.

All Christians are called to pray, to work, and to live in a community of mutual love, and monks seek to do this in the most thorough way possible. It is hard. Everything begins and ends with prayer—no matter how hot the summer heat or how hard the drudgery of turning what contained only a summer home into a property able to feed and cloth an entire community. Trappist tradition insists that monks support themselves by the work of their own hands. It took many experiments for the community to find success in raising chickens for their eggs, and then mushrooms.

This makes it difficult not to let prayer slip from the center of who you are and what you do. Besides, you live in silence and a kind of solitude; you rise early so you can get prayer and meditation in before the day’s work begins. Many of our human ways of finding encouragement and support are deliberately given up in monastic life. A monastery is a kind of half-open door through which one can glimpse the life and joy of the Kingdom of God. The name ‘mepkin’ is said to mean “beautiful place”. To translate natural into spiritual beauty it is important to have a beautiful church and liturgy. The monastery became the “Abbey of Our Lady of Mepkin”—Our Lady of the Beautiful Place—to show that beauty leads to joy. The present award-winning church was dedicated in 1993 with this in mind.

Mepkin Plantation didn’t put prayer first but focused on work, done by slaves. Monks work to become wholly free and make the fruit of their work a free gift to others. It is a life of turning from all that enslaves people and leads them away from love of God and loving respect for others. This is the path to God’s Kingdom and unending joy. The twin blessings that are the Mepkin community and its church remind all of God’s call to live now the life of charity that will last forever. Those who have gone into glory remind us who remain to keep death, and God, daily before our eyes. We show that we too can share God’s unending joy. The special thing our founders did was love one another in God for an entire lifetime. Deeper than hardships, and even sin, is the joy given us in Christ. It shapes each monk’s life as a witness for all to see and an invitation to follow Jesus. It is a response to the call that is faith and our call to celebrate on earth the Day of Unending Joy.

GIVING EVERYTHING TO GOD

A reflection by Paulinus of Nola

We have all heard the story of the poor widow who gave to God everything she had to live on. What does this mean to us? Listen to St. Paul: “*What do you have that you have not received as a gift*”? The giver of that gift is God and everything we possess is part of God’s gift. In effect, all we have has been entrusted to us as to administrators charged with using it for the common good. What we have isn’t given us only so we can please ourselves. We can see this clearly from the fact that nothing has been given to us as a permanent possession, as “private” property. If we accept and live according to these truths it will be possible for us to obtain something everlasting.

Recall once again the widow who forgot herself in her concern for God and God’s poor. Perhaps she was thinking only of the life to come when she gave away all her means of subsistence. The one who will judge us all witnessed this gift and testified that she had given more than anyone else. Others gave what they could do without while she gave herself, placing her very life in God’s hands.

Aren’t we called to give all we have and so open ourselves to receive spiritual riches? Those who are rich spiritually have more than all the wealthy of this world. Where our heart is shows where our treasure is. A poor widow cared only for heavenly treasure and showed it by giving her heart to God. Let’s each of us invest what we have with the Lord! Let’s invest our very selves. We are actually dependent on God for our existence. What’s more we are in debt, so to speak, to God, not only for creating us but redeeming us. We were slaves of sin and God bought us freedom and so made us members of his own household.

We ought to rejoice beyond measure. We are not only God’s but God bought us at a price greater than was ever before spent to buy a person’s freedom. We are purchased with the Lord’s own blood. What is more, we weren’t purchased into slavery but out of it. We were once worthless slaves because we didn’t care about anything but ourselves and our pleasures. Now we have the opportunity to live in a freedom that enables us to dedicate ourselves to something more wonderful than self—to justice. Our freedom is not from justice but to justice. If we are gifts by our creation we have become gifts in a new and greater way by redemption. We need to give back to the Lord the gifts we have been given. This doesn’t deprive us of those gifts but makes them even more our own.

This is the same thing that happens when we give ourselves and give of what we have to help and love others. What’s more, by doing this we come to possess the greatest of all rewards. Can you possibly turn away from all this? Only a crazy person would do that! Let us, then, turn to God and God’s wisdom—not to lose anything but to find everything!

CELEBRATING THE SAINTS OF THE BENEDICTINE ORDER

A reflection by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

We often celebrate feast days in honor of saints. These celebrations mustn't be without fruit. They don't benefit those we honor, so the benefit must be ours. If (e.g.) we live our life badly the celebration awakens shame and even fear. If we are weak, do we let desire for what is only of this earth drive us? If so, how do you react to hearing about St. Benedict's struggles, and how he cast himself into a thorn bush rather than give in to sin? Why should he be able to do what you can't, and even as a young man? Do you remember, then, what it means to walk in the Spirit—not your own spirit but the Holy Spirit. The Spirit creates good desires to overpower those of the flesh. Listen to what St. Paul says: "*The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, and peace*". By the Holy Spirit we desire charity, chastity, peace and so on, and by the flesh we desire fornication, uncleanness and other like evils. Who hasn't felt both sorts of desires within?

If we follow the counsels and desires of the Spirit then we walk in the Spirit. The flesh counsels us to seek fine foods and eat to satiation; it counsels us to seek more sleep, warmer blankets and softer clothing. The Spirit counsels us never to be lazy or wander about, not to talk a lot but to move always toward good works like seriousness, love of silence and inner quietness, to spurn gossip, mere hanging around with people, and to prefer to mortify ourselves by vigils, by abstinence, manual labor, prayers, compunction, devotion, and the like.

Today we celebrate a vast crowd of those who have walked in the Spirit and even now pray for us to walk in the Spirit as well. By remembering, and by celebrating, these holy ones we are aroused to the warmth of charity. Looking to them we can make progress first in hope and then in love. If you visualize yourself doing what these saints did you begin to long to make progress by means of such spiritual exercises as I have described.

What St. Benedict did he taught to others, and they are teaching us right now. The Holy Spirit instituted the Rule through St. Benedict and so its counsels are those of the Holy Spirit for us. Think of how many dangers we avoid by following these teachings. See how useful that is for celebrating today's feast. It takes away every excuse for not living them and shows us how they can lead us to love for God and for one another. To see you living these counsels will enkindle hope in many others.

We are like pieces of wood on an altar waiting to be burnt up in sacrifice. The fire that will make the sacrifice complete is love. Let us take that fire to our wood. There is a certain fire we call tribulation but it is not as great as that of love. Both cleans us and destroys what is bad and imperfect in us. All these saints we now remember were cleansed in this way. If we too want to be cleansed then we must submit patiently to the fire of tribulation and ask God to help us burn as hot as we can with the fire of love. The fire of tribulation is a beginning and the fire of love perfection. Listen to St. Paul: "*Tribulation works to produce patience, patience enables us to undergo testing, and testing brings us hope. Hope will never be discredited because the charity of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit*".

WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN SEEKING GOD

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Makarios of Egypt

Monks live a life of seeking God. Do you too want to live a life-long search for God? Then you need to know what is and is not important.

There are people who struggle with Satan and endure affliction. They are contrite of heart and they mourn and weep in anxiety. If they persevere the Lord protects them; they are earnest in seeking and knocking until the door opens to them. Such people are sustained by grace.

There are also people who have no fear of God. They are undisciplined and aren't contrite of heart. They don't keep watch over themselves. Without any self-control such people haven't even entered the spiritual battle and don't know what it means to fight spiritually.

Satan may say in your heart: "Look at how many sins and wrongs you've committed! Look at how full of evil desires you are and how weighed down by sin! You can't even hope to be saved!" Satan's purpose is to reduce you to despair and make you think your repentance hasn't been accepted by God. Your reply has to be: "I have the Lord's testimony in Scripture that God longs for repentance and not for a sinner's death; God wants me to turn from my wicked ways and live".

The Lord came to earth to save sinners. The Lord came to raise the dead and bring to life those who were dead in sin. He came to give life to those living in darkness! By coming the Lord really called us to be adopted by God as God's own children. We are called to the Holy City and it is always at peace. In it we live a life that has no end and is immortal glory.

Our task is to accept this and bring the struggle to live according to God's way to a good end. We need to persevere in poverty of spirit, in looking upon ourselves as exiles from our true home, and to practice mortification and prayer. Our task is to knock on God's door with shameless persistence!

As near as a body is to its soul so near is the Lord to us—and even nearer. The Lord is more than ready to open the locked door of our heart and give us all the riches of the Kingdom. God is good and loves humankind. God's promises are never deceiving. What we have to do is persevere to the end! We have to keep seeking God no matter what happens.

Glory be to the mercy of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Let that glory fill you. Never stop knocking at the door, never stop seeking, never stop hoping! Live seeking to love your God and your neighbor with all your heart. Nothing else is so important.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE TRULY RICH?

A reflection from The Teacher by Clement of Alexandria

We have all heard it said that people who are temperate and just thereby store up treasure in heaven. They have let go of worldly possessions and, in one way or another, given what they don't really need to the poor. That is what one needs to do in order to find an imperishable treasure. It is a treasure that no moth can destroy and no thief can steal. Such people are truly happy and fortunate.

A person may be of small account socially. A person may be weak physically or intellectually. One may be obscure and live a sort of hidden life. But none of these facts prevents one from having the greatest of all riches.

A person may be as rich as Midas or any other fabulously wealthy person but unjust and arrogant. One may be like the rich fellow we are told of in the Gospel, who dressed in royal garments and banqueted every day of the year and despised a poor and very sick man named Lazarus who begged at his door but was ignored. But such a rich person is actually miserable and wretched, and much more so than Lazarus. This is true because such a person never attains genuine life.

It seems to me that having wealth is rather like handling a snake. Unless you know how to handle a snake it may coil around your neck and bite you. One who is in the know handles the snake by grasping the end of its tail and keeps at a safe distance from its mouth and its coils. That's the way it is with being wealthy. If one doesn't handle wealth carefully it can shock you and bite you and wrap you in a coil that will kill your spirit.

What does one have to do to handle worldly wealth safely? One has to use the Word of God like the charm of a snake handler. That is the only way to stay unharmed. Recall the praise given to a widow who gave all she had to live on as a free will offering to God. You have to use wealth to love others as God does.

A person who is spiritually rich is probably unaware of being rich at all. Such a person may still think that precious stones, money, clothing and physical beauty are genuine wealth. But the fact is that virtue, a disposition to be devout and dedicated to service of others, is the genuine wealth.

Spiritual wealth is given us by our Teacher. He is the Word of God and what he asks of us is that we renounce self-indulgence, work with our hands to help others, live frugally and seek self-control. Listen to what the Word says: *"Receive my instruction and value it more than silver; seek knowledge rather than gold. Wisdom is better than precious stones and no treasure can compare with it."*

If a person wants to make distinctions well needs to be righteous and honest and honorable. Honesty includes observance of due measure in administering the goods entrusted to us. It also includes proper generosity. You may doubt this, but notice what Scripture says: *"Open-handed they gave to the poor; their justice shall endure forever."* God's teaching is that it isn't those who have much and keep it who are rich. The genuinely rich are those who share. It is sharing rather than possessing which makes one happy. It is the door to the Kingdom and its happiness.

SEEKING GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

A reflection from Spiritual Exercises by St. Gertrude the Great

O My Love, what fulfillment to be one with You. The joining of the Word and a soul is the most worthy and marvelous of all unions. It achieves perfect union with God. It is a way of being intertwined in God. To enjoy you, O Word of God, is to be one with God.

You, Lord, are the peace which surpasses all understanding. You are the road by which a person comes into the inner chamber, the bridal chamber. Oh, if only someone like me, someone who seems so miserable as I do, could rest just for a moment wrapped in your cloak, as Ruth was in that of Boaz. Yours is a cloak of cherishing love. You wrap us in it so our hearts might become bold beyond measure in your love.

What a consolation it would be to hear one word from you, a word of your Living Word. Oh! that I might hear from you the good and wondrously pleasant word: I am your salvation! Behold, now the bedchamber of my heart is open to you!

Don't let me be disappointed in what I hope for. Grant that I may find rest for my soul in you! I know of nothing that is more desirable than you! I can't think of anything that is more lovable than your embrace. I want to rest under the wings of my Jesus! I want to dwell and abide in the tent that is your divine love.

Oh love! O radiant noonday of love! I would die a thousand deaths to be able to rest in you in this way. Please, bend down, look down, bring your wonderful face close to me. Oh, give me the experience of your cherishing love. You are indeed my dearest one.

Grant me to come so close to you that nothing closer is possible. I don't want just to be near to you but to be within you. Then all sorts of virtues and spiritual flowers could spring up in me, for you are the Sun of Justice. Even though I am only dust and ashes, where you are every sort of life springs up and abounds.

If you are my husband, my Lord, what fruitfulness would enter my soul. Oh that I might bear the offspring of total perfection! Grant that it be born in me! Then, indeed, I would be snatched out of this valley of misery! Then I would be able to glory in you forever. I would be right there in front of your so marvelous face!

Grant that I may glory in you forever! You are a mirror without defect and you haven't scorned to be united with a sinner like me! Let me be wholly yours!

LEARNING WITH MARY TO LOVE GOD WHOLLY

A reflection from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

St. Paul knows full well that mere flesh is of no help in accomplishing anything truly good without the Spirit that gives life. At a certain point he refused to be content with knowing Christ in the flesh. What was his goal? He sought to give himself wholly and with ever greater zeal to that Spirit which gives life.

Mary too seems to have had a deep understanding of the need to do this. She wants everyone to love the beloved Fruit of her Womb according to the Spirit. He is the object of her love and her prayer. So she describes him according to the Spirit. It is as though she were repeating St. Paul's words: "*Even though I once knew Christ according to the flesh yet now that's not how I know Him!*"

Mary wishes to form her only begotten son in all her adopted children. Through the Word of Truth, they have already been begotten and brought forth. That is true. Yet in loving and very real longing she wants to bring them forth daily and surround them with loving care. She wants them to attain to the perfection of their human nature by bringing them to a maturity measured only in relation to the fullness that her Son by God has.

This is a kind of fulfillment of some words spoken long ago by Isaiah: "*Before she came to labor, she gave birth!*" This is a childbirth which brings with it none of the ordinary labor pains. Indeed, what she brings forth is an eternal joy that is to be shared with all.

Mary commends to us this fruit when she says, "*I am the mother of fair love and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope*". Is this, then, your Son, O Virgin of Virgins? Is this you Beloved, O fairest of women? Yes, such is my Beloved, such is my Son, O daughters of Jerusalem (cf. Song of Songs, 5:16).

Mary's Son is not only the object of our love, our fear, our knowledge and our hope. He is the one who makes all of these exist and live within us. It is through these virtues that we live like members of a single body. As we grow in this way that one body takes substance in us. Christ will be perfectly formed in you!

This will begin in this life. It is only partly possible now but in the Kingdom his truth will at last find full expression in each and all of us. Of course, we must first learn to recognize Him as The Truth. We must begin by glorifying Him in reverential fear and hope.

So that this hope isn't disappointed the charity of God has to be poured into our hearts. That is what forms Christ fully in us. We learn to love as The Lord loves. That is what Mary prays most fervently for. That is what brought her to the perfection of her Son. We are invited to imitate her.