

THE THIRTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. **The Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Nov.18 **THE NECESSITY OF HOPE**
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- Mon. **Monday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time**
19 **ACCEPTING GOD'S LOVE AS IT IS**
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20 **FACING THE FACT OF GOD'S PLAN FOR US ALL**
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- Wed. **Memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin**
21 **PRESENTING WHAT WE HAVE**
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- Thurs. **THANKSGIVING DAY**
22 **HOW GRATITUDE CONFIRMS US IN GRACE**
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23 **COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS BY GIVING THANKS**
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 A letter from one of a group of 117 Vietnamese martyrs

THE NECESSITY OF HOPE

A reflection from The Divine Milieu by Fr. Pierre de Chardin

One day, the gospels tell us, the tension gradually accumulating between humanity and God will reach a kind of limit set when the world was created. The end will come. The presence of Christ will suddenly be revealed like a flash of lightning, shining from pole to pole, smashing through all the barriers which hid this presence or kept it confined. It will invade the earth. The attractive power of the Son of Man will lay hold of everything and unite it in his Body.

The Gospel warns us it is vain to speculate about the hour and the modalities of this formidable event. But it equally warns, it calls, us to expect it! Maybe expectation is the supreme Christian characteristic, and the one most distinctive of our faith. It is an historical fact that expectation has never ceased to guide the living expansion of our faith; it is like a torch raised on high. The Israelites were constantly expecting God's coming. So too were the first Christians. Special times, like Christmas, may seem to turn our gaze toward the past but actually they only fix our attention more firmly on the future. The Messiah appeared for a moment in our midst, but allowed himself to be seen and touched only briefly before vanishing again, more luminous and ineffable than ever, into the depths of the future. He came, yet only to call us to expect him!

We Christians follow Israel. We have been charged with keeping the flame of hope-filled longing ever alive in the world. Only twenty centuries have passed since the Ascension. In practice, what have we made of our expectancy? We say we are keeping vigil in expectation of the Master but we must admit that in reality we act as if we no longer expected anyone or anything.

The flame of expectation must be revived at all costs. At all costs we must renew ourselves in longing and hoping for the Great Coming. But that can't happen unless the expectation is incarnate! What body is to be given to our expectation today? It has to be a fully and completely human hope! Look at the earth around us. Our race is visibly passing through a crisis of growth. All are becoming dimly aware of our world's short-comings as well as its capacities. We have a sense of premonition as well as of expectation. Those who follow Christ mustn't hesitate to harness this historical force. It needs us and we need it.

Under pain of allowing this moment and its force to be lost, and perishing ourselves, we have to share the aspirations which make people today feel so strongly about the greatness of the human task, of our mind's task in the immensity of our world.

These aspirations are fundamentally religious. A sacred value is at stake. The development of the universe, and that of the human universe in particular, doesn't take place in competition with God but expresses God's call. We mustn't squander the energies we ought to devote to God's plan. The more our race develops and grows, the better we can care for our world and all its beauty and variety, the more conscious we can become of our own and our worlds' potential to serve and love and adore God. With us and through us a body worthy of resurrection is being prepared for the coming of Christ. Look forward to it. Work for it. Hope mightily!

ACCEPTING GOD'S LOVE AS IT IS

A reflection from The Lord of History by Fr. Jean Danielou

The Bible's first mention of God's jealousy is found in Exodus. We are forbidden to commit idolatry and the passage ends with the words, "*I, your God, the Lord Almighty, am jealous in my love*". The text is as clear as can be. God doesn't tolerate idolatry. We are to hope in God alone and turn only to God. Our God won't have us make any creature the focus of our hope for life or look to any created thing as the source for such hope. There is one entire category of human thoughts and feelings that are to be directed only to God. These are the thoughts and feelings that constitute adoration. We are not in any circumstances to "adore" any created thing.

The same command is found throughout the books of the prophets. The strictness of God's demands upon those who believe is much emphasized. It is inadmissible that God's people, with whom God has made a special covenant, and so become their personal and unique God, wander about looking for other ultimate hopes and sources of life. This is what Scripture calls "adultery", indeed the prophet Ezekiel calls it "brothel-keeping". Listen to one such passages. "*There is no medicine, says the Lord, that can heal a heart like that of one who follows a whore's way of life. You who do this will be punished like an unfaithful spouse. You will have to make amends to my jealous anger.*"

Texts like this show us God's love is terrifyingly strong. In them all the violence the Bible attributes to our Loving God, and which we find so unwelcome and scary, faces us squarely. Many call it "anthropomorphizing", probably because they prefer a God who is abstract and won't make such demands. They want God to stay in "Heaven" and stop giving us so much trouble. The God of Scripture is very different than that. Our God is a God of love, and to God's passionate love it is unbearable that the beloved should be false. In these passages we see God's love in action as fiercely intolerant in the face of betrayal. God will not put up with this sin—even though we try to overlook it. God doesn't get used to such sin.

All this corresponds in some mysterious way to an actual suffering by God. We say that God is "impassible", and it is true, yet the holiness and purity of God's love finds this sin unbearable. We can't give to another what God has given to us alone in order that we might share this reality called love with God. God "chastises" but not in vengeance and it isn't sweet to God. It is intended to bring the faithless to guilt and so to turning again (repenting) to God and away from sin. The heart of the matter is to help us recognize that sin is "bitter". It is a kind of lover's stratagem to bring us to our loving God. We are God's! Our God is not going to give us to any other. That would be to let us condemn ourselves to a never-ending and hopeless bitterness. Genuine and deep love is not a game. It is the very heart of life. If we don't know this, we don't yet know what whole-hearted love is or that God really loves this much!

FACING THE FACT OF GOD'S PLAN FOR US ALL

A reflection from a homily by St. Gregory Palamas

All those who hold to true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, all who show proof of their faith by doing the works of love, all who guard themselves from sin, or labor to cleanse themselves from the stains of sin, and all who confess their sins and repent in deed, these are to be gathered together into the one Christ who sits at the Heavenly Father's right. Do you, then, practice the virtues opposed to your past sins? Do you practice temperance, and chastity, and love, and almsgiving, and justice, and fair dealings—do you act out all these virtues?

Why do I ask you these questions? Because if you *are like that you will rise again from the dead to hear the King of Heaven saying: "Come, my Father's blessed one—come and inherit the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world!"* This is God's plan for all of us. The Lord Jesus longs to speak these words to you and me.

All who hear these words spoken to them will reign with Christ. They will receive as their inheritance that heavenly kingdom which cannot perish. They will live forever in the indescribable light that knows no ending and is never interrupted. These will be joined in joyous fellowship with all the holy ones who have lived from the beginning of time. They will enjoy delights beyond description and all pain will be gone and grief and groaning will be over forever.

Just as there is a harvest for sheaves of wheat so there is one for the "rational wheat" that is our race. There is a harvest which clears away all weeds and gathers together all who accept the Good News of God. The reapers of this harvest are Christ's apostles together with all those the Lord sends in the course of the ages to call his beloved to their Heavenly Father. "*A reaper receives a wage, and gathers a crop for eternal life*". Teachers who instruct others in living the Gospel will receive such a reward. It is fitting for those who have obeyed God and gathered God's people together in love and peace and adoration.

Of course, there is another harvest. It is the bringing of each one of us through death and from this present life into that world which is to come. The reapers of this harvest aren't apostles or any human agents but angels. They, indeed, have an even greater responsibility than apostles or teachers because they have to separate out the good from the wicked as ordinary harvesters' separate weeds from good grain. This is a harvest we should both long for and dread. We long for the Kingdom and fear hell.

But all of us in this present age are God's chosen ones. We belong to a priestly race which is the Church of the Living God. We are not united with the impious and the ungodly and unbelieving. We long to be separated in our living and acting from those who live like the weeds that diminish the growth of all around them. Let us hope that all may be found worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us strive to so live that even the wicked may be won from their evil ways and become helps rather than hindrances to all called by God. Isn't this what God has called us to do? Will our God not help us, even to do what seems humanly impossible? What can't faith do, even if it seems as small as a mustard seed?

PRESENTING WHAT WE HAVE

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

Every Christian heart is glad to be reminded by the liturgy of the sacred event commemorated today. We think of Sts. Joachim and Ann going up to the temple of God with their child, Mary. We think of her as the purest of all creatures—pure of heart in a way that opens eyes to see God. When we think of Mary, we think about God's choice of her to become the Mother of his Only Begotten Son, the Mother of God.

I can't remember these things, however, apart from what may be the very first memory I carry with me from my childhood. It is a memory of my mother's taking me to visit a small shrine dedicated to Mary, one built on land belonging to my native town. It is dedicated to Mary precisely as Mother of God and this title is associated especially with the Feast of Mary's Presentation. The small chapel is set among the trees at the end of a small country lane.

When I came there with my mother we couldn't get into the chapel because it was already so filled with people. But my mother wanted to share with me her love for Mary, symbolized by the statue in the chapel. She got me to the front of the building, where there were two small windows—the only windows in this chapel. They were barred and were located just above my mother's head. She lifted me up and said to me, "Look, look at our Lady! She is our special lady on this feast day! She was presented in God's Temple today."

What a wonderful way to remember my mother and her love for me. She lifted me up so I could see Blessed Mary, whom she taught me brings Christ to us all. Look at the one who most of all brings us Jesus, who brings us to the Heavenly Father, and to the love that saves and blesses us forever.

Today I am pope and I want to take you with me to that little shrine and lift you up so that you too can see Mary and know you are close to Jesus, to whom she looks with all her heart and soul. Can anyone do more for another than this? Isn't this a ministry that our Good and Loving God has called all of us to? If you can't see God's deep love for you, because you can't see God, then you can look to Jesus, who reveals God for you. But how will you draw close to Jesus in such a crowd as fills our world? Look first to Mary and ask her to bring you to Jesus.

Perhaps you only see Jesus as shown to us in images like those in cathedrals. Then you only see him resplendent and glorious and clothed with power. But that isn't the sort of person you would go to with your pains and puzzles, your needs and nonsense fears. Mary can show us the Jesus to whom we can bring everything. She can remind us of our own mothers and how they tried to share their faith with us even when we were too small to understand. Mary bears the light who is Christ and she wants to share that light with us and help us in turn share it with one another. There is no more wonderful thing to do, whoever you are and whatever titles you bear or don't bear. Turn to a divine love that is as gentle as a mother's love for her child, and as rich as the entire world of beauty our caring God's love has given us. God would have you play in it and share it with others, as perhaps your own mother did with you.

HOW GRATITUDE CONFIRMS US IN GRACE

A reflection inspired by a sermon of St. Bernard

Great is our God's mercy to us, very great! If only we would recall the disgraceful image of our former life, we could gauge more rightly the greatness of God's liberating mercy. If we could remember, not only that which we have avoided, but that to which we have called, as well as what we have received, we would be filled with endless gratitude. People live lawfully in marriage and work for the good of our families alone, but God calls us to do more and greater things, following the example of the Lord Jesus. So why do we so often complain as if God's mercy and love had fallen short? Are we like the nine lepers who never returned to thank the Lord for their healing? Why aren't we filled with thanks?

There are many who ask insistently for what they know they lack. But we know how few are those who know how to give thanks for all they receive. Would it be a kindness for God to refuse our prayers in order to spare us the sin of ingratitude? It is not necessarily beneficial to cleanse away the leprosy of worldliness when the ulcer of ingratitude eats away at our inner self.

Our God has given us so much! God has given us the entire world and all the good things that fill it. It would only be gratitude on our part to keep beautiful and serviceable all these gifts. Happy is the one who returns each gift, and especially each gift of grace, to the Lord who gives all good gifts. This is the gift of gratitude. Don't show yourselves ungrateful to God for all we have received.

Surely, it is only our ingratitude that gets in the way of our progress in conversion. And we know that God views what is given as though it had been lost if it is not returned in by prayers of thankfulness and gratitude. From that point of view, the more our God gives us without receiving our thanks the more things God has to write off as a loss.

In the beginning of our conversion we were more grateful than we now are when for now we take all God's gifts for granted. When we confessed ourselves sad and wretched and admitted that apart from God we had nothing, God's generosity seemed to overflow. We even received the gift of being God's friends. When we cease to give thanks, aren't we bringing it about that one belonging to the Lord's own household is acting like one of the Lord's enemies?

I beg you all, be humble and humble yourselves more and more under the powerful hand of God most high. Strive to keep far away the most wicked vice of ingratitude. If we turn to God with a complete devotion, shown by giving thanks with all our hearts, then we gain the grace of our God, that grace which alone is able to save us. Not only by word or tongue, but in deed and truth we need to show ourselves grateful. But God expects from us much more than just lip service. We must perform genuine acts of thanksgiving, loving not just in words but in deeds. It is by living deeds of love that we become like God. Thanksgiving makes this happen; we become like God and like God's Only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Giving thanks confirms us in such great grace!

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS BY GIVING THANKS

A reflection taken from On the Lord's Prayer by St. Gregory of Nyssa

I think that even if we spent the entirety of our lives in constant prayers of thanksgiving and praise, we should still be endlessly far from having made an adequate return to God for all we have been given. Even to begin giving thanks is yet another gift, as is every thought and word of gratitude. The harder we try to thank our God the more gifts we have received from God's generosity and love.

We measure time in terms of past, present and future. In all of them we constantly receive good in more than munificent measure from the love of our God. Consider the past. You didn't even exist until God created you. Your very growth in your mother's womb was a gift and so was your safe birth. Once you had been born you were showered with gift after gift, right up to now. Think, then, of the present. It is through God that you have life at this very moment. It is through this gift that you can have a future, with all the gifts that you know will fill it. Now turn your attention to that future. You hope that your longings for God and God's Kingdom will be fulfilled. That hope is founded on God. Because you know God you are sure that God will know and love you forever and that by simply clinging to God you can be sure of endless goods and benefits. Your future is not a limited but an unlimited hope. It come to pass no matter what!

We are masters only of the present. In this present, as St. Paul says, it is in God that we live and move and have our being. This present is the unfolding of the gift of new life you received by simply answering God's call to believe. You know that all the gifts of the past and the present are facts. They are the result of the same divine love that you believe is offered you forever. You know, therefore, that you will never cease to have reason to thank God from the depths of your heart and mind. No, none of us will ever finish thanking our God. That is the one thing we know is impossible since life that continues eternally.

Why are we so far from being able to thank God properly? It seems as though we didn't even have a good intention in this. But who spread out the earth beneath me? Whose wisdom made the waters and made it possible for us to pass over them to so many distant places. Who spread out the endless expanse of the heavens? Who gave us the sun and caused it to light each of our days? Who gave life when I was lifeless earth, and gave me a mind and a heart to know and to love? Who gave me so many kinds of tamed animals to work with me and serve me? Who, after all, am I if left only to myself?

God fashioned clay into the likeness and image of divinity. Even if this divine image was tarnished by sin God provided the means to restore it to its former beauty. When I was exiled from paradise, deprived of the fruit of the Tree of Life, I got myself lost in an ocean of earthly goods, but wasn't it God who brought me back? There is no one who really understands all this, says Scripture. But we do understand that we are gifts and that all life is a continual gift. We do understand how wonderful the universe is. We do understand that we are loved beyond our ability to understand. Let us give thanks.

LET US THANK GOD EVEN FOR THE CROSS

A letter from one of a group of 117 Vietnamese Martyrs

St. Paul wrote from prison and chains to praise the name of Christ. How can we do less? We want only that you too be inflamed with love for God and join us in praise. God's mercy is forever! God is with us in tribulation and has even made tribulations sweet, for God's mercy is forever!

In the midst of torments which usually terrify people we are filled with joy and gladness. We are not alone! Christ is with us! Our Master bears the entire weight of the Cross and leaves us only a tiny share. He isn't a mere onlooker but a contestant in the struggle, and a champion and victor. On his head be the crown!

Beloved brethren as you hear many horrible things give endless thanks in joy. From God every good comes. Bless the Lord with us! "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has looked on me with favor".

O praise the Lord, all you nations, acclaim God all your peoples! God chose what is weak in this world to confound the strong and the philosophers, disciples of the wise of this world and not of God. For God's mercy endures forever!

I write these things so that our faith and yours may be one. In the midst of the storm let us cast our anchors toward the throne of God. What is that anchor? It is living hope in the hearts of all who suffer and yet look to God and God's Christ in trust.

Beloved, for your part run so that you may attain the crown. Put on the breastplate of faith and take up the weapons of Christ for the right hand and the left. This is what St. Paul has taught us. Isn't it better to enter life with one eye or crippled, than with all members intact to be cast away? Come to me with your prayers. Grant us the strength to fight the spiritual fight according to the Gospel law, and so fight a "good fight". Let us finish our race with victory.

It may be that we shall not see one another again in this life. We will have the great happiness of seeing each other again in the world to come. Then, standing in triumph and at the throne of the spotless Lamb, we will together join in singing God's praises and exulting for ever in joy.