

EIGHTH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME

THE SEASON OF LENT

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- Sun. **The Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
March 3 **THE FRUIT OF GENUINE CHRISTIAN LOVE**
 A reflection from Works of Love by S. Kierkegaard
- Mon. **DAY FOR REMEMBRANCE OF THE DEAD**
4 **WAITING UPON THE LORD**
 A reflection from On Conduct by St. Cyprian
- Tues. **Shrove Tuesday (in the 8th Week in Ordinary Time)**
5 **HOW SORROW IS TURNED INTO JOY**
 A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman
- Wed. **ASH WEDNESDAY**
6 **WHAT IS SUPREMELY IMPORTANT**
 A reflection by St. Thomas More
- Thurs. **Thursday After Ash Wednesday**
7 **LET GOD STRECH YOU AND BECOME LIKE JESUS**
 A reflection by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller
- Fri. **Friday After Ash Wednesday**
8 **PUT ASIDE EVERYTHING BUT CHRIST**
 A reflection from On the Incarnation by Henry of Friemar
- Sat. **Saturday After Ash Wednesday**
9 **LEADING ONE ANOTHER TOWARD SALVATION**
 A reflection from The Life of Moses by St. Gregory of Nyssa

THE FRUIT OF GENUINE CHRISTIAN LOVE

A reflection from Works of Love by. S. Kierkegaard

“A good tree doesn’t bear bad fruit nor does a bad tree bear good fruit, but every tree is known for what it is by its fruit”. Every tree is recognized by its proper fruit. It may happen, however, that two fruits are very much alike and that one is healthy and the other poisonous. Sometimes too the healthy fruit is bitter tasting and the poisonous one good tasting. In a like way, genuine love is known and distinguished from false love by its proper fruit.

Why do people make mistakes? Either they do not know love’s fruit or they do not know how to discriminate the genuine from the false. For example, one may make the mistake of calling what is actually self-love “genuine love”. One may loudly protest that it is impossible to live without one’s beloved, but such a one may not want to hear about love’s demands and tasks. Such a person has to practice self-surrender and give up calling things such as erotic self-indulgence love. One may easily make the mistake of calling such weak self-indulgence love, or that of calling what is merely spoiled whimpering or a corrupting attachment or an indulgence in vanity or self-flattery or momentary attraction or a passing relationship by the noble name of love.

There is a flower which is named “the flower of eternity” and another which is quite remarkably called “the everlasting flower”. But these, like all perishable flowers, bloom once a year at a definite time and perish. What mistaken names! The flower, however, is so beautiful at the time of its blooming that people want it to last always or at least symbolize the beauty of the eternal. They exaggerate.

As every tree is identified by its proper fruit so the love of which Christianity speaks of is known because it reveals that it has within it the truth of an eternal beauty. All other loves are passing, whether humanly speaking they withers soon or lasts for years! All other loves merely blossom in their hour, even if the hour lasts 70 years. Then they are gone. Christian love is really eternal.

If a Christian has genuine self-knowledge there is no possibility that person will say the love proper to Christianity is merely a passing blossom. No poet with true self-understanding would think of celebrating passing love in a song. When a poet celebrates something passing it must have a kind of anguish in it, and just because it is like a passing blossom.

Such love is like our present life. It is meant to blossom and perish. But Christian love abides. That is a reason why it is Christian love in its proper and special sense. It is a reality which has being always. We don’t just sing about it, we believe in it, and we live it.

WAITING UPON THE LORD

A reflection from On Conduct by St. Cyprian

How often has it been revealed to us, the least and the last, that our brothers and sisters who have been summoned from this world should not be mourned in any ordinary way? How frequently, how manifestly the Lord has commanded us to bear constant witness that the dead are not “lost” in any sense but simply sent before us. We are to proclaim that we are all travelers, voyagers, toward something that is supremely worth longing for. So those who have arrived before we do are not to be lamented except in that we miss them. Why would one wear dark colored clothing here when they have put on white robes and stand before God there where we too long to be? We mustn’t give non-believers reason to criticize us for inconsistency with what we proclaim we believe?

Those who have no faith often believe that the dead are lost and gone forever. We lie about our hope and our faith if we seem to act as though we too had lost them. There would be no gain if we declare our virtues only in words and didn’t do the truth in deeds. In a certain sense, St. Paul rebukes and blames those Christians who are sorrowful at the death of dear ones. Listen to his words: “We wouldn’t have you ignorant about those who are asleep in death. Don’t be sorrowful like those who don’t have any hope. If we believe that Jesus died, and yet rose again, it is the same for those who have fallen asleep in Jesus; God will bring them with Him to new life.”

We live in hope; we believe in God and have faith that Christ suffered for us and then rose again. We abide in Christ and so we rise again through Christ. Why, then, should we be unwilling to leave this world? But if we are willing then why do we mourn and grieve for those who have already left? Listen to what Christ says: *“I am the resurrection; the one who believes in me, even if dead, shall live. Everyone who believes in me shall never die!”* Since we believe in Christ let’s have faith in his words and promises. We aren’t going to die permanently but will come to Christ in joyful security and with Him conquer death and rise to reign with Him for eternity.

A person who will come to the dwelling of Christ, that glory which is the Heavenly Kingdom, has no good reason to grieve and mourn. We are to be ready—with firm faith, with rugged virtue, and with sound mind for every way in which God makes known to us his will. We have been freed from the terror of death that afflicts others. We think of the immortality which follows earthly death.

It is a matter of showing by our actions what we believe. When God summons us then we will answer his call without hesitation and filled with gladness. What is better than to come to the Lord at his call? The same is true for our loved ones. It is a matter of how we think of them and of ourselves. The gift of faith teaches us how to think about death and how to answer every call that comes from our Lord.

HOW SORROW IS TURNED INTO JOY

A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

The Gospels promise that all sorrow will be turned into joy. They promise that sorrow will prove to be a doorway into joy. Thinking of this prepares us to find pleasure even in desolateness, weakness and contempt. As St. Paul says, “*We glory in tribulations because the love of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us*”. It is the Spirit who tells us to take comfort even in our bereavement and sorrows.

Is there any sorrow which seems just a misery? If there is such a misery, one that remains even for those who seek to live under the gospel, then it consists in an awakened sense that we have abused the gifts of God and the gospel, that we have sinned. Yet if that is pure misery wouldn't it make awareness that God is present with us something intolerable? When such an awareness breaks in upon us vividly, we see what it means that we have rebelled against our God. Wouldn't that make anyone feel wretched?

Yet repentance can't exist without a sense of God's presence. It has to be the very thought of God that leads us to seek him. Why do our thoughts of God call out to him and want him present, even if we are sinners? Isn't it because even our thoughts of God are made alive with love? Even sorrow has to have a kind of sweetness if it is filled with love.

What is repentance? It is a surrender of self to God—one that seeks not only pardon but punishment, just in the measure that this is appropriate. We love God's presence simply because it is God. Punishment from God can seem better than even worldly peace and rest.

Think of St. Paul's account of the repentance of the Corinthian Christians. There was in them abundant sorrow. There was even anguish. But there wasn't any gloom or dryness of spirit or even sternness. The penitents do afflict themselves, for penance is done out of a fullness in their hearts. It is done out of love, from gratitude, from devotion, from horror of past failure, from a longing to escape one's present state and become holier and more heavenly. Paul talks about earnest desire, mourning, and fervent minds directed toward God. He rejoices not because they sorrow but because they use sorrow to repent. It is, he says, a “*godly sorrow experienced in a godly way*”.

This is completely different than “worldly sorrow”. That works spiritual death. That is because if one fails to take one's sorrow for sin to God, the fountain of life, then one remorsefully feeds on one's own wretchedness and it increase in the measure one shares the sorrow with no one. Such people can't disburden themselves by confessing their sin. They won't turn to God and no one else can help them. It is when we are locked up within ourselves in this way that we are wretched.

Perhaps we don't know what or where our pain is. We need relief for our hearts so they won't stay dark and sullen or go on feeding upon themselves. We need to escape from ourselves and nothing short of God's presence can be our genuine refuge and relief. To turn only to self is to make oneself an idol. Let's turn to our God with all our hearts. That is what the season ahead is all about.

WHAT IS SUPREMELY IMPORTANT

A reflection by St. Thomas More

When we are in tribulation what could be better than to long for God's help and comfort? But when we do this we should leave to God's Providence and love the way in which these helps and supports are given us. When we leave all to God we mustn't doubt in any way; God's high wisdom sees what is best for us and we must learn to see this ourselves. God's sovereign goodness always gives us that which is best for us; if, after all, we try to insist on something we ourselves choose we may foolishly choose what is not best at all. Suppose that we do this, and God grants our prayer! Then we will find that what we thought was good actually harms us. How many times have we made such choices!

There are many people who pray fervently for health of body, and then find it had been better for them spiritually not to have received it. Many get out of prison and then find that they fall into worse things than they suffered in prison. How many have been in anguish about losing their earthly goods and preserved them only to lose their life in the process? That is how blind we are, not simply because of sin but because we are only human. We don't know what will happen or how things will occur or how we will react. We can't even foresee tomorrow. God could not punish a person more severely than by giving that person just what he or she wants and asks for.

Remember how St. Paul himself tells us that he prayed three times for God to grant him freedom from an affliction. Yes, God answered his prayer, but by telling him he was asking foolishly and that all he genuinely needed was the help of God's grace to bear his tribulation. This was better than to remove the trial. God has given us all experience of a similar kind. He has thus given us a lesson that we are not to tell God exactly what we need but ask God's help and leave the way that help is given to our God's good pleasure.

The Holy Spirit longs for us to give our will into God's hands. The Spirit not only groans within us but groans for us. Remember again St. Paul: "*We don't know what we ought to pray for but the Spirit prays for us with inexpressible groanings*". We don't know what was held back for our good even though we prayed mightily to have it. I say that it is never good for us to ask of God for exactly what we think we need, or precisely what we think will set us at ease and free us from trials and difficulties. What we must do is pray that God will help us by sending what is best. That makes even our request holy.

When we think that way, we can be sure that what we ask is of God. We can be sure that God works with us even if we ourselves seem at times to flee from Him. God will not delay coming to us and abiding with and within us. If God is dwelling within us then what trouble can harm us? As St. Paul says: "*If God is with me, who can stand in opposition to me?*" There is nothing more important than God's presence within us! There is nothing more important than God!

LET GOD STRETCH YOU AND BECOME LIKE JESUS

A reflection by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Today's reading from Deuteronomy tells us that obedience with love brings life. Today's reading from Luke tell us that we must take up our cross daily in order to follow Jesus; i.e., to live in the same obedience in which he lived. Of all the books of the Bible, Deuteronomy reflects most often on obedience and the choice it requires to be obedient. It also repeats that the choice is really that of life or death, whether we pause to realize this or not. After all, at the heart of Deuteronomy is the prayer and command: "*Hear, O Israel, The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength.*"

Wherever love is total, spontaneous and springing from the depths of life, its every wish is a command. Obedience expresses the deepest law of existence in the person who loves as God loves and commands us to love. Disobedience, even in a small matter, can be disastrous. It disrupts a basic attitude, a fundamental disposition.

Love normally expresses itself in small, delicate ways. Not to obey such impulses in ourselves is to tear out of ourselves the roots of Jesus' way of life. "*Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live by loving the Lord, your God, by heeding his voice and holding fast to him.*" That's how Scripture puts it.

Jesus tells us in today's gospel passage not to choose life in just any sense of the phrase, but to lose our lives because only in this way will we find them. When Deuteronomy calls upon us to choose life it doesn't mean we should seek a selfish, narrow, biased existence but rather a life of compassion concern, and help for one's neighbors. When the laws of Deuteronomy are compared with law in other books of the Bible, Deuteronomy is marked by exquisite thoughtfulness. It modifies the third commandment about resting on the Sabbath—even if one is a slave, by adding the reminder that "*you too were once slaves in Egypt*" and you too longed for a day of rest.

Perfection and loving obedience brought Jesus to the cross, seeming to lose his life, that a new and greater life rise again at the end of that way of the cross. Jesus loved to quote from Deuteronomy and brought its message to a new fullness. It calls heaven and earth to serve as witnesses to love and obedience as calling us out of tiny, narrow, selfish ways of living into the breadth of all heaven and earth. We are to die to narrow concerns and prejudices. Break down barriers to justice and neighborly love. God tells us to come to total love! The narrow minded and false life leads to death. But we must rise from the dead to true life. "*Happy are they who hope in the Lord; they are like trees planted near running water, that yield fruit in due season and whose leaves never wither*". That is God's call to us this Lent.

PUT ASIDE EVERYTHING BUT CHRIST

A reflection from On the Incarnation by Henry of Friemar

The Eternal Word willed to stoop to great poverty in order to enrich us in great abundance with heavenly gifts. He enriched us precisely by his poverty and endowed us through his indigence. We should take this very seriously. We should reflect on the ways that he did this. Listen to St. Paul: *“Brethren, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: though he was rich he became poor for our sake so that we might be enriched by his poverty”*.

St. Paul teaches us this II Corinthians: “You know the race of our Lord Jesus Christ; that though he was rich he became poor for our sake, in order that we might be enriched by his poverty”. It is truly marvelous that by poverty and need he has enriched us in bodily as well as in spiritual ways.

He enriched us in bodily ways because there is nothing more precious in the entire treasury of the Church than the mean and worthless rags in which not only the poor Christ but poverty itself is wrapped. Is there anything more precious than the manger in which Christ was laid? Is there anything more glorious than the cross on which he suffered?

That is why Bernard rightly says in a sermon: The poverty of Christ is our wealth; the Savior’s rags are more precious than any purple; the manger is more glorious than the gilded thrones of kings, and the poverty of Christ is richer than all wealth and treasures.

Christ’s poverty has also enriched us spiritually, because by handing himself over for us and shedding his blood for us and by laying down for us the life he loved, he poured out all heavenly blessings upon us. For when the tiny purse which was his body was pierced in five places it poured out upon us in abundance the heavenly treasure it contained, and gave us generously of it.

All this is clear from the fact that he unsealed five fountains of grace and blessing in himself and we may drink freely from them all sorts of heavenly blessings. At our own pleasure, we can draw ceaselessly the waters of saving grace from these fountains.

Isaiah tell us of this invitation: “Draw water with joy from the wells of the Savior!” Once we have tasted fully of this water, it utterly kills all transitory thirsts in us, as St. John also says quite clearly. May the Lord Jesus give us a taste for this water. It is the water offered to us during the Lenten season when we busy ourselves in putting aside all other things that people imagine can satisfy their bodily and spiritual thirsts.

The Lord Jesus laid aside every sort of earthly advantage and yet brought benefits to the world which are immeasurable. He invites us to follow him. This requires effort and much training. That is one of the gifts that the Lenten season offers us. Lay aside all things except for obedience and love toward the Lord our God. His Only Begotten Son has become incarnate to teach us how to do this, and to do it with gladness and joy.

LEADING OTHERS TOWARD SALVATION

A reflection from The Life of Moses by St. Gregory of Nyssa

If all the inner impulses of our hearts and minds could be led like sheep are led by their shepherd we would be living in peace. But only Christ is a shepherd who can lead us inwardly like this.

It is a fact that God is the truth. Once this was manifested in a vision to Moses. It isn't without significance that it was through a burning thorn bush that his illumination came to the prophet's mind and heart.

God is truth and God is light. It is a virtuous life that leads a person to this light and knowledge of this truth. It came to us in our very human nature. And so, it wasn't from a star or some other heavenly reality that it comes to us but from an ordinary earthly bush.

This reminds us of the mystery of the Virgin through whom the incarnation came and with it the divine light and truth. These shown from the bush without damaging it or burning it up but emanated from it without causing it to wither in any way. This was so with the Virgin as Mother of the Divine Savior.

This sort of revelation teaches us what we have to do to stand in the rays of the Divine Light. But if one's feet are in shackles one can't run toward that light. We have to free ourselves from inward shackles and take off our feet the coverings of dead deeds which have covered them since we sinned against our God and Lord.

What we must do is free our minds from Assumptions regarding things which aren't real. He who is immutable, who doesn't increase or become less, who is subject to no change for better or worse, but is perfect and needs nothing from anyone but is utterly desirable and good. All else shares in this God without in any way lessening what God is. To know this and God is to know perfect truth.

This is who Moses approached. We all approach him. But we must like Moses, free ourselves of earthly coverings and shoes. We must look only toward the light coming from that thorn bush, at the rays shining on us from its thorns. They remind us of the flesh. As the Gospel says, that ray is real light and the truth that has no sin or imperfection in it.

What does God ask of us? He calls us to become like Moses, and even more like Jesus who is the perfection Moses only imitated. Those who become like Jesus will be able to help others find the way the cleansing that brings us to salvation. They will open themselves to God who comes to us in Jesus Christ and who alone is capable of destroying every trace and force of evil within us or within others. It is Jesus Christ who offers us the liberty of genuine children of God. Come to Him and receive this liberty. Struggle for it in faith and by love and you will receive it—and every other Divine Gift besides.