

FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. **The Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Feb.10 **GOD CALLS US TO GO INTO DEEP WATER**
 A reflection from The Green Hill by Fr. Gerald Vann
- Mon. **Monday of the 5th Week in Ordinary Time**
11 **GOD CALLS YOU BEYOND YOURSELF**
 A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Tues. **Memorial of St. Humbeline**
12 **HUMILITY FINDS GOD'S WORKS EVERYWHERE**
 A reflection from Life & Teaching of St. Bernard by Fr. Luddy
- Wed. **Wednesday of the 5th Week in Ordinary Time**
13 **TRUSTING IN THE PROVIDENT LOVE OF GOD**
 Reflection by St. Procopius of Gaza
- Thurs. **Memorial of Sts. Cyril & Methodius**
14 **HELPING OTHERS FIND GOD IN THEIR CULTURE**
 A reflection developed from a text on the Internet
- Fri. **Friday of the 5th Week in Ordinary Time**
15 **HELPING ONE ANOTHER SEE GOD'S BLESSINGS**
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- Sat. **Memorial of Our Lady**
16 **MARY AS A MODEL FOR MONASTIC LIFE**
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GOD CALLS US TO GO INTO DEEP WATER

A reflection from The High Green Hill by Fr. Gerald Vann

“Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret with a crowd pressing around him to listen to the Word of God, and he caught sight of two boats close to the shore with the fishermen who had gone out in them washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, Simon’s.” (Lk.5:1-11) Do you remember our Lord’s words to Simon once he had finished proclaiming God’s word? Go out into the deep water, he said. There is always a temptation to think of religion as something added on to the main business of life, like an addition to a building. But if we think like that, we miss the whole meaning and adventure to which God calls us. Living our faith isn’t something added on to life but the revelation of a wholly new dimension of life. We are invited to plunge into it like a diver plunges into the sea. The temptation we face is to live on the surface of life. We concern ourselves with the jobs and joys that every day brings without bothering about what lies beneath them. But that means we don’t live fully! If we go on like that there is no depth in our lives. Our Lord says to us, Go into the deep water!

This can be a frightening thing. Remember the first time you went into the water, especially if it meant going into the sea. It can be scary. The first time you go in you find yourself in a new and strange element. But if you go on you can forget your fright and enjoy a new thrill. You find a sense of freedom; what was strange begins to seem friendly and the water buoys you up and supports you. But if it is the sea, it still has the feeling of overwhelming immensity!

That is what the life of faith is meant to feel like. It isn’t a matter of knowing more things than you would otherwise but of knowing something underneath and deeper than everything else. You know the secret heart of everything because you know that Presence which is Love Divine. You know what surrounds and is in all things. You plunge into Divine Life rather like a diver does into the water. This is why Our Lord said that he had come that we might have life and have it ever more abundantly. If you plunge into faith you escape the narrow confines of selfish and shallow living. You move into immensity. It can be scary. Remember what Jesus tells us: Don’t be afraid! His hand is always there to hold us up and his voice to encourage us, even as he encouraged and held up Peter when he lost faith and began to sink in the stormy waters.

Remember now what Simon said to Jesus after Jesus finished teaching and told him to go into deeper water. ***“Master”,*** he said, ***“we worked all night and didn’t catch anything!”*** Isn’t that how we often feel about prayer? Yet we know we have to go on and say what Simon did: ***“At your command I will try again!”*** St. Luke tells us that when he did, the net brought up a huge number of fish.

Sometimes people fail because they try to pray in a way that does suit them. That is the experience we call “dryness”. It means we have more to learn. God is teaching us in a way that really makes an impression. We are learning to pray as a way of loving God rather than achieving some other result. Nobody expects an adventure to be easy. The life of faith and that of prayer are an adventure. It brings us to God and to trusting wholly in God. The adventure is always worth the effort! Obey the Lord’s word and learn the truth.

GOD CALLS YOU BEYOND YOURSELF

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

When he went up a mountain to be transfigured Jesus took three disciples with him, James and John and Peter. They heard a voice from heaven: *“This is my beloved Son, I am well pleased with him, listen to his voice!”* They never forgot these words. They are quoted in the Letter of Peter in order to make us compare God’s ways, as just shown to us, with human ways.

No one has greater riches than God, nor more power. When the very rich want to eat fish, they don’t personally go to a fish market or to the dock where fishing boats come in with their catch. Such people send an employee to do what is necessary. The same is true with powerful people. They only deal with fishermen when they are looking for votes.

The three disciples who saw Christ transfigured were all fishermen. The Heavenly Father chose them to hear a message he wanted proclaimed to the entire world. Who would expect people to leave their jobs and boats and become God’s heralds? Now think of what St. Paul said to you! *“Brothers and sisters, remember what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by ordinary standards and not many of you were even influential or considered special. God chose people ordinarily thought of as nothing in order to shame the wise and special; God chose people the world regarded as beneath contempt and of no account in order to overthrow the very order of the world!”*

God has chosen you! I am repeating the words of our Heavenly Father who is our God. If Christ has brought this call only to skilled public speakers they might have said, “I was chosen for my speaking ability!” or if he has brought the message to high public functionaries they might have said, “I was chosen because of my position or because of the power I wield”. But Christ didn’t come only to people like this. Christ doesn’t despise or disregard them but speaks to ordinary people to show that everything depends on Divine Power and nothing on merely human advantages.

Christ says to you, come! I know you haven’t a special education or experience or influence or special skill. Give me yourself, that is all I want! I will work with you! I will call special people with special skills as I have called you but they won’t have any advantage over you because what you accomplish is my work and my gift! What is really important is humility! You have nothing to boast about except me! But isn’t that enough!

Everyone may come to you and find Christ. Everyone may come to you and receive a lesson in humility. Christ is working in you to cast the net of faith into the depths of our world and the number of those he catches is beyond counting! This was prophesied even before he came. You have in yourself a confirmation of this prophecy. Don’t be afraid! Follow Christ even into deep waters that seem excessively dangerous. That’s simply a call to humility. And humility is no more than utter reliance on Christ instead of your own or any merely human resources.

HUMILITY FINDS GOD'S WORKS EVERYWHERE

A reflection developed from a Life of St. Bernard by A. Luddy, O.Cist.

When Humbeline, St. Bernard's sister, came to visit him some years after her marriage, she came as a great lady surrounded by servants. Bernard and Andrew, her brothers, thought she was showing off and so refused to meet with her. His message to her was harsh: *"Why so much solicitude to embellish a body destined for worms and rotteness, while the soul that now animates it is burning in everlasting flames?"*

When her brother, Andrew, told her this she burst into tears: *"I deserve this because I am a sinner. Yet it is for such as I that Christ suffered on the Cross. Indeed, it is because of my sinfulness that I seek counsel and encouragement from holy men. If my brother, Bernard, who is the servant of God, despises my body, let him at least have pity on my soul. Let him come! Let him command! Whatever he thinks proper to require I am prepared to do."*

Bernard and Andrew realized that they had made a hasty judgment. They hadn't reminded themselves that God works in all hearts. They went quickly to talk with their sister so as to strengthen her in her good intentions. Indeed, Bernard wanted her to enter monastic life. Yet he knew this was impossible without her husband's permission, and so what he counseled was that she should live as simply as possible, as though a recluse, and avoid all sorts of vane display. She could dedicate herself to helping the poor, as her mother had done. She promised to do just this, and indeed, to ask her husband for permission to become a monk.

It took her five years to persuade him to give this permission. In 1122 she entered the Benedictine monastery of Jully, where her sister Elizabeth was prioress. When Elizabeth went to found another monastery in 1130, Humbeline was appointed to succeed her. The monastery flourished under her leadership. She eventually made some twelve new foundations, all Benedictine though some later joined the Cistercian reform.

As a monk, Humbeline was known for her love of the cross. She was very dedicated to fasting and restricted her sleep time to what seemed necessary. She wore the poorest habits and served her sisters whole-heartedly and liked to do the humblest and most ordinary things. Her practices frightened her sisters and they asked her to treat herself a bit more gently. Her reply is recorded as: *"For you, my dear sisters, whose lives have been consecrated to the service of God, this is an excellent bit of advice. But for me, who has lived so long among worldly vanities, no kind of penance can be excessive!"*

When she became ill Bernard, together with Andrew and Nivard, came from Citeaux to be with her at her death. Her words to Bernard were: *"How happy I am to have followed your counsel and consecrated myself to God. What a beautiful reward I can expect to receive for the love I had for you in this life. It is to that love that I owe the joy and glory that are awaiting me in our homeland."* She died praying psalm 121: *"I rejoice at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the House of the Lord"*.

TRUSTING IN THE PROVIDENT LOVE OF GOD

A reflection from a scripture commentary by St. Procopius of Gaza

God pours gifts upon us. But God does more in drawing good out of the evils that befall us. Think of what Genesis tells us about Jacob's son, Joseph. If Joseph had remained in his father's house Egypt would have had no one to prevent the full effects of famine from ravaging it. How much more disastrous if the Son of God had remained hidden in the Heavenly Father and had not revealed God's saving love and the resurrection! Joseph was born to Jacob in his old age and by his most beloved wife. He loved him especially for these two reasons. This is only a human shadowing of the immense love of the Heavenly Father for the only-begotten Son. Just as Joseph was sent to his brothers, in the fullness of time the only Son was sent to us. He came at the end of a long line of prophets and saints and yet he was met with hatred by his own flesh and blood, the Pharisees. He was clothed in light and he was the life. He cleansed those who were dead in sin and healed them. Yet the fire of envy burned against him.

He came to share the Heavenly Father's inheritance with the entire world. Yet a small group thought they alone should possess it. They killed him and cast him out of their community and tried to appropriate all of God's gift of salvation. Jesus, our Joseph, was handed over to people who didn't believe in him. He was persecuted, falsely accused, unjustly condemned, and handed over to be killed. God's Provident Love gave to many new life through Jesus.

Now let's compare ourselves with Joseph, son of Jacob, and with Jesus. When Joseph arrived in Egypt he was treated as nothing, sold as a slave, and worked in the house of a royal guard with an unchaste wife. Think of the constancy of mind and the unswerving trust Joseph showed in these trials. Though oppressed and reduced to servitude he had true inner freedom and refused to do what was wrong. He was condemned for this and had to wait till God's power arranged for him to receive freedom. God even clothed him in a royal dignity. This points to how Jesus and God's work in our lives.

God freed Joseph because Joseph never surrendered his trust in God's power working in him to help others. He was given a gift of interpreting dreams, which amounts to a gift of prophecy, showing others what hopes they could have. He used this to save them from misfortunes or help them prepare to meet God. Not only did Jesus do the same but he told us that, trusting in him, we too can serve in like ways. When you heard the story of Joseph did you notice that when his brothers came to him seeking help for their families, they didn't recognize their own brother? Perhaps it was because envy blinds one to the truth, and they had rejected him as their brother and condemned him out of envy.

Those who are mired in envy and small mindedness can't recognize Christ as their own brother come to help and save them from disaster. What are the weaknesses that keep us from recognizing Christ in our brothers who are poor or crippled? Are you ready to let God free you from all such things? Listen to Jesus: These poor ones are my own and I love them. I live in them. Do you believe in God's love working through you to help others?

HELPING OTHERS FIND GOD IN THEIR CULTURE

A reflection developed from a text found on the Internet

In 861 CE the ruler of Great Moravia (the present-day Czech and Slovak republics, Serbia, part of Hungary and a fragment of the Ukraine) asked for missionaries. The pope didn't respond so he turned to Constantinople and the patriarch sent Constantine (he later took Cyril as his monastic name) and Methodius, two brothers with missionary and academic credentials. They stepped into a violent political conflict between one of Charlemagne's successors in West Francia, as Eastern Europe was called, and the local slave ruler—a duke to the Franks but a king to his people. These conflicts brought the brothers much suffering, false accusations of heresy made to the pope twice and opposition to their use of Old Slavonic in a new liturgy. Even when cleared, one of them was imprisoned. Churchmen from the Frankish Empire wanted only Latin used in the liturgy, probably to reduce Slavic cultural, and so political, independence.

These details are important for understanding how political agendas often influence missionaries and lead some to reject local cultures as instruments for communicating the Gospel effectively. That was the method Cyril and Methodius used with great success. It has shaped the Church in Eastern Europe down to the present day.

The two brothers were terrifically hard workers. As they preached the Gospel, they also reshaped the culture and languages they had to use to do this. They enriched the Church at the same time as they enriched the peoples and cultures to whom they went. What should a missionary do in order to bring Christ to people who have never encountered him before? The answer of Cyril & Methodius gave consisted in the creation of a new alphabet, a translation of as much of Scripture as they could into a new language, the construction of a liturgy using the language and culture of the new evangelized people, and the setting up in cooperation with the pope of a church organization for Great Moravia.

They did all this without creating tension between East & West; e.g., they got two popes to authorize a liturgy not in Latin and one pope ordained Methodius archbishop of a new ecclesiastical province, and they created a clergy, and tried to promote peace between contending factions representing Francia and Great Moravia. They also promoted monastic life and its mission of teaching prayer and seeking God.

Cyril died during one of their trips to see the pope but Methodius continued to labor at the multitude of evangelical tasks they had initiated. His enemies never gave up, even after his death—exiling his clergy to Romania and suppressing Slavonic in the Liturgy. He continued the mission he had begun, practicing forgiveness of enemies and charity toward all. Methodius had been a monk and abbot before being sent on the mission to Moravia and he lived a quasi-monastic life with his clergy at his cathedral. Whatever the circumstances in which one finds oneself the important thing is to live the Gospel, seek to draw closer to Christ, and help others find God and Christ through the tools which their own culture and history provide. He left the example of making this one's priority as a Christian believer who would practice genuine love for one's neighbors.

HELPING PEOPLE SEE GOD'S BLESSINGS

A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

If one examines Scripture carefully one sees that it is God's practice to bless us in a way that seems silent and even hidden. It is only when we look back on events and see them in the light of faith that God's working for us becomes evident. In daily life, events happen that may be pleasant or painful and we don't see God's hand in them. We don't find a meaning in them and we don't see God blessing us through them. Yet in faith we confess that everything comes from God and we struggle to accept events that seem to harm us as from God. We might cry out as Jacob does in Scripture: "Everything is against me!" because one of his sons had disappeared, another had gone to Egypt to get food and now sat in a prison cell, and the last child of Rachel, Benjamin, had to be taken to Egypt if food was to be obtained and the imprisoned son freed.

Yet, in truth, all these things were working to bring a later blessing. It was like the fate of Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, resisting temptation only to find that it landed him in prison, helping fellow prisoners who promptly forgot him, and having to wait upon the Lord. How many times does Scripture present people crying out to the Lord but having to wait a long time before any help comes? We are told that "the Lord was with Joseph" but he saw no signs of God's presence or help.

It was only afterwards that Joseph understood what previously had been so very mysterious. Indeed, when his brothers came to buy grain, they didn't recognize him. He revealed himself to them and then found they were overwhelmed by fear rather than joy. Joseph had to use his faith to help his brothers find God in what was happening. Listen to him: "*God sent me before you to preserve life. It wasn't you who sent me to this place but God; and God has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of his house and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt*". God's Providence had been working wonderfully but in such silence.

Yet God has been marvelously effective! Do you trust that you have been serving God in an acceptable way for quite some time? Why don't you look back at the critical moments in your life and ask whether you saw God's guiding and caring hands working in your affairs at those times. What was the importance of the school to which you were sent and the teachers you encountered? Who were the persons who did you the most good? What were the events, the accidental occurrences, that had the greatest impact on your life and your choice of a career and your hopes for a good future?

Can you now see that God's hand has always been guiding and guarding you? Can you see how God has led you forward in a way that was a puzzle to you and seemed all wrong? Can you now believe, and by your faith show others what they missed completely at the time it happened? Can you help them see that God was taking them in the right direction? Can we learn from these facts to trust God better as our life continues? Can we learn to help others believe and even see God's love working for them, as Joseph did for his brothers? This is a gift and a task that is given us today and for all our lives long.

MARY AS A MODEL FOR MONASTIC LIVING

A reflection from a text by Fr. Thomas Merton

The goal and perfection of the monastic vocation is finding Christ. He is God's Word and to cling to him in the purity of perfect love and unalterable peace of heart is to say with the bride in the Canticle of Canticles, "*I have found him whom my soul loves; I hold Him and I will not let him go!*" (Song 3:4)

From this text we can come to see that the life we live unrolls with Mary, the Virgin Mother, who has given to the world God's Word Incarnate. Mary is the model and the summary, as it were, of the heart of monastic spirituality and of all Christian spirituality. Some of the Church Fathers spoke of her as "Mary the rule for monks".

The monastic life is a life lived "in the Spirit". For instance, monks live according to a "spiritual virginity". The point is that one should be moved not by personal desires or tastes or talents or feelings or human nature as such but by the will and love of God. This is a life like that of Mary. If one is conformed to the Virgin Mother of God one lives by a perfectly simple faith. By this faith she received into her Immaculate Heart the full light of God's Word. She enclosed that Word in her virginal flesh through the action of the Holy Spirit. That is how she gave Jesus to be the Savior of the World.

To live "in the Spirit" is to live like Mary. She is the "bride of the Holy Spirit". Life in the Spirit is the life she lived. As mediator through Christ of all grace, she has been the instrument by which the Spirit and its grace comes to us in Christ. All that she does "in the Spirit" is done from a heart filled with motherly love for Christ loved in the Heavenly Father. The movements of our life in the Spirit need to be directed by the same love. Our hearts are then, in effect, also conformed to hers. To treat Mary as our queen, is to abandon ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit sent us through her Son.

If Mary is our queen and our "rule", we are living under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a way that should more and more produce in our lives the detachment and pure love of God we see in Mary. That is what led her to surrender her entire being to the will of God. Monks see their consecration to a way of life under a rule as a replica of Mary's "fiat"—"*Let it be done in me in accordance with your word*". We are not only striving to give ourselves to God continually but we will and long to give ourselves as Mary did.