

THE SEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sun. **The Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Feb.24 **HOW WE CAN IMITATE OUR GOD**
Reflection from an explanation of psalm 60 by St. Augustine

Mon. **Monday of the 7th Week in Ordinary Time**
25 **LET US REJOICE IN GOD'S MERCY**
Reflection from Last Meditation in Prison by
Fr. Jerome Savanarola, OP

Tues. **Tuesday of the 7th Week in Ordinary Time**
26 **WHAT THE CROSS TEACHES US**
A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Wed. **MONASTIC PRAYER DAY**
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TRUSTING WHOLLY IN GOD
A reflection from a homily by Ralph the Fervent

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28 **THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF HOPE**
An extract from a scripture commentary by
Primasius of Hadrumentum

Fri. **Friday of the 7th Week in Ordinary Time**
March 1 **SET YOUR HEART ON CHRIST**
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Sat. **Memorial of Our Lady**
2 **THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF GOD'S WORD**
A reflection from a text by St. Simeon the New Theologian

HOW WE CAN IMITATE OUR GOD

A reflection from an explanation of psalm 60 by St. Augustine

“Be merciful just as your Heavenly Father is merciful!” We have been chosen the path of transformation to become like our God. Recall the words of the psalm: ***“All the ways of the Lord are mercy and faithfulness, for those who keep God’s covenant and will”***. We have just heard two marvelous statements about our God’s faithfulness and mercy and the two go together. It is not what we deserve but divine goodness that our God regards when he deals with us. That is why our sins are forgiven and we are promised eternal life. Does our God ever forget the promises made to us? No, our God is faithful and reminds us of it by deeds; God shows us mercy by forgiving our sins. God’s faithfulness is confirmed by this fulfillment of a promises made to us. If God is merciful and faithful, then we must also be merciful and faithful.

We must show mercy to all who have any kind of need—even if they be our enemies, and we must practice faithfulness, not only by refusing to sin but by loving all in whatever way will help them, especially in helping them find Him and become merciful and faithful like Him. First off, we must remember never to try to bend God’s will to our own. This is what you do when you sin and let yourself think that God’s mercy will overlook it. You are trying to make God act unjustly! God’s mercy never annuls God’s justice. Would it be justice if God gave an obstinate sinner the same place in his Kingdom as a person who has turned away from sin consistently? Do you want to sin, and have God too? Aren’t you trying to make God conform to what you want God to be instead of conforming yourself to who God wants you to be? Bend yourself to God’s will and don’t try to bend God’s will to yours.

Who is it who bends self to God’s will? Scripture says it: ***“The one who perseveres to the end will be saved”!*** This is why we need to listen to this Scriptural question: ***“Who will seek God’s mercy and faithfulness for his own sake?”*** What is the meaning of the phrase, ***“for his own sake”***? Think about the fact that many seek to discover God’s mercy and faithfulness by reading Scripture. But, when they have finished studying, they don’t live ***“for God’s sake”*** but ***“for their own sake”***. They seek to learn not for God but for themselves. Such people are intent on their own interests rather than those of Jesus or of God. A person like that would preach mercy without practicing it.

What a difference when someone preaches in order to lead others to do what God does than preaching aimed at gaining a worldly benefit of praise or money. One must preach to help others become genuine members of Christ. God calls us, in Scripture’s words, to ***“so live that you no longer live for yourself but for the one who died for everyone”***. To do that you must do what is merciful and be faithful to loving others in ways that will bring them to our God. People who do this seek God’s mercy and faithfulness because these are wonderful in themselves and for all who experience them. Our call is to help others experience divine mercy and divine faithfulness by living them ourselves in a way that draws people—to truth and to the One who is the Way and the Truth and the Light.

LET US REJOICE IN GOD'S MERCY

A reflection from Last Meditation in Prison by Fr. Jerome Savanarola

“Jesus said to his disciples: I say to you my listeners, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you!” (Lk.6: 27f). Have mercy on me, O God according to your great mercy! I ask this not according to the world's measure, pitifully small as it is, but according to your measure that is incomprehensibly great, far exceeding all sins taken together. That measure is your only Son! What greater mercy could be imagined? What greater love could there be! Who could despair or fail to have confidence! God has made himself a human being like ourselves and been crucified for us. That is why I cry out: Have pity on me, O God, in accord with that great mercy which moved you to hand over you own Son for us, and though him blot out all the sins of the world!

You, O God, have enlightened the whole human family by Jesus' cross and in him you have restored everything that is on earth and in heaven. Lord, wash me in his blood, enlighten me by his humility, restore me by his resurrection!

Have pity on me, O God, not according to your lesser mercies—things like bodily healings and comfortings—but according to the great mercy that forgives sin and raises penitents by grace. Have pity on me according to this mercy so that I may be entirely converted to you and my sins may be wiped out and I may be justified by your grace.

It is your mercy, Lord, that is abundant pity and has always made you look on the needy with tenderness. Mary Magdalene came to your feet, good Jesus, and washed them with her tears and dried them with her hair and you pardoned her and sent her away in peace. Dear Lord, that is only one of your mercies. Peter denied you with an oath, claimed he didn't know you, and yet one look from you made him weep bitterly, and you pardoned him and confirmed him as prince of apostles! This is yet another example of your mercy, Lord. The thief on the cross is saved by a single word. Paul, a rabid persecutor, is filled with the Holy Spirit as soon as you call him. So great, Lord, are your mercies.

Who could count all your mercies? There are as many as there are men, women and children justified by your grace. No one is saved by a personal achievement. If all the just appeared together—those on earth and those in heaven—and were asked if by their own strength they were saved, all, with one voice and one heart, would reply: Not to us, Lord, not to us! To your name be the glory! It is because of your mercy and faithfulness that we are saved! What a marvelous motive for rejoicing. May we always rejoice together in God's mercy!

WHAT THE CROSS TEACHES US

A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

If there is any single characteristic that one notices when reading about St. Paul and his ministries, it is his capacity to empathize with others, with every sort of person. He personally experienced every sort of trouble and trial and through them he became able to enter into the feelings of every sort of person, of low or high estate and of Jews and Gentiles. He understood where perplexities come from and so he knew how to calm and share the sorrows of the perplexed.

When a person filled with God's grace is confined to bed in suffering, or when such a person has lost all his friends and left wholly alone, or brought into various kinds of pain or distress, that person has experienced what the world can give and take away, and that person can console others with the authority of one who has "been there". He knows that Christ is with us always in every situation.

We all have to pass through pains and trials. We are humble about it and hesitate to claim qualifications as a consoler. We are slow to believe that we are loved in a special way by Christ, or have been blessed to be God's instrument in consoling and comforting others, even in minor ways. But if our hearts and minds have been trained by suffering, we have been prepared to serve and love and care for others. After the image of the Perfect Comforter, the Spirit, we can stand up for others, help them, sooth them and do it with words and deeds. We can help others bear crosses because we too have born the cross.

We can show this by our attitudes, our tone of voice, our way of looking at the suffering. We can be gentle and calm and caring and respectful. Some are rude to those who have nothing and are needy. Some act out of pride or anger, just as some envy the rich or seemingly powerful. But once we have suffered, we know how to befriend others who suffer. We know what it is like to be helpless as are widows or orphans. We perhaps have seen what havoc pride and anger can work, even in the Church, when this is not done. But even such feelings can be calmed and brought under control by kind words and counsels. One can admonish in love and with no sense of superiority that puts others down.

Instead of being selfish, in the way people often seem naturally to be, we can let grace transform our feelings as well as our thoughts. We can in this way become willing teachers and witnesses to the truth of Christ's loving presence. There may have been times when we were hesitant to speak of heaven and grace, even if our hearts were full, we lacked words. But we can now speak from our experience and love is naturally eloquent in sharing and speak from the heart's fullness. That was true for St. Paul and can be for us.

There is a great truth that we must never forget. It is expressed by the Lord's word to us: "Take up your cross daily, and follow me!" It is, after all, a Scriptural truth that "it is through much tribulation that we enter into the Kingdom of God". If the Church doesn't forget its true self, then it knows itself to be a comforter for the afflicted. We know that too. When we suffer or are troubled, we need only remember that we are being prepared to comfort and care for others.

TRUSTING WHOLLY IN GOD

A reflection from a homily by Ralph the Fervent

“Such is the confidence we have in God through Christ—not that we are capable of thinking anything on our own, as if it came from us, but our capacity comes from God.” St. Paul tells us three things about trust. He tells us whom we can trust, through whom we can learn trust, and what sort of thing trust is.

We can have confidence in God; it is God whom we can trust. Paul teaches by his own example. God alone is able to save us and God truly loves us. God is truthful and God’s truth can be trusted. Friends can’t even save themselves and so can’t save us. Listen to the psalmist: ***“Put no trust in princes or in any human person; there is no security in them. Their breath will leave them and they will return to the earth.”*** What’s more, our earthly friends tend not to love us for ourselves but for what they can receive from us. It is only God who loves us, not for any advantage that comes to him, but only that we may gain from him. Friends aren’t always truthful either. Scripture says, ***“Every human is a liar”***. God, however, never lies. Clearly, we must put the whole of our trust in God alone and not in anything that passes away. Relations, friends and all passing realities let us down. God alone never abandons those who hope in him. ***“Has anyone ever hoped in the Lord and been put to shame?”***

Through whom are we to come to this complete trust in God? It is through Jesus Christ! It is only through Christ that we have access to the Heavenly Father. It is Christ who reconciles and mediates between God and humanity. Christ is always interceding for us. He is human and yet, like the Heavenly Father, saves us through his divinity. We must, then, love Christ with all our heart. As St. Paul says, there is no other name either in heaven or on earth through which we are destined to be saved.

What sort of reality is the trust to which we are called? We are shown the first side of this trust when we are taught that we are not capable of imagining by ourselves what God would reveal to us. How, then, could we trust in ourselves or our own power to imagine what real trust is like? We can have total confidence only in God. In this trust we place no confidence in anything that comes from ourselves or other creatures. We can’t imagine or feel in a way that could give us complete assurance. We haven’t the sort of freedom of will that would enable us to surrender ourselves to what we can think or imagine by ourselves. ***“A king is not saved by his own great power, nor can even a giant be saved by his own immense strength.”*** The like is true in regard to every good thing.

We cannot love, let alone enjoy as a possession, anything—whether material or spiritual or heavenly—except what comes to us in God. Only in God are we capable of the trust that God wants to share with us—one that never fails. Our own labors or devotion can’t create such trust. We certainly can’t have total confidence in ourselves. Recall Christ’s words to the disciples: ***“Without me you can do nothing”!*** Are you able to abandon self in trusting God? You aren’t capable of doing it but you can feel it happening within you. That is God doing within you what you can’t do of yourself.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF HOPE

Extract from a Scripture commentary by Primasius of Hadrumentum

“Behold, I make all things new”! A heavenly city will come down from heaven by the grace of God. It first came down when the grace of God came by means of the water of renewal and in the Holy Spirit. This grace came down from Heaven and from this point onwards the number of the citizens of that city ever increases. When, at the end, God’s judgment comes then all will be renewed. Through God’s grace no trace of age or corruption will remain and even our bodies will be made new and pass into a state of incorruption and immortality.

Listen to a promise: ***“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more nor mourning nor crying nor sorrow.”*** In this life, the more holy one is and the more filled with holy desires, the more one weeps in prayer. We read: ***“My tears have been my bread day and night”***. But we also read about God’s promises: ***“These words are most faithful and true”***. Notice that what is a future reality for us is spoken about as though it were a present fact. We are to have no doubt that all will happen just as God promises.

Listen again: ***“To the one who thirsts I will give drink from the fountain of the water of life, and give it freely”***. It is from this fountain that water is given to those still on the journey toward God. It is given to us even if we hesitate in a kind of unbelief. But when the journey has been completed it is given in abundance. No pilgrim needs to falter though thirst in any desert place because there is a kind of rain of grace. This comes down even in bad places and gives those it finds there a special delight and strength.

What is this water? It is hope. We are told that it is given “freely”. That means it is given without charge and that it comes from God. The stream of divinely given hope makes people drunk in that they begin to delight in what they still don’t have because they believe they will have it. They see the way to have all they could want if they only follow God along the path traced out for us by Jesus Christ. This hope is both grace itself and the foretaste of life everlasting. ***“The one who overcomes will possess all things and I will be that person’s God and that person shall be my child”***. This has already begun to happen. Listen to St. Paul: ***“God has sent the spirit of his Son into your hearts and it cries “abba”, Father!”*** Those who are God’s children are heirs of all that is God’s, just as Christ is. They are coheirs with Christ.

How is all this accomplished? The children of God are saved through hope. It is a real hope and not an idle dream. Once we have attained to this hope and its reality God and God’s life are ours. God is there for all the chosen and is for them the reward that is eternal blessedness. Being possessed by God we possess God forever. That is what you already possess in hope. The more fully you live that hope the more fully you possess God. You are being transformed in hope to become in fact citizens of the city that comes down from Heaven.

SET YOUR HEART ON CHRIST

A reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

St. Paul says, *“I have espoused you to one husband; like a chaste virgin I have presented you to Christ!”* He didn’t say this to young women alone. He said it to the Church as a whole. A person who is inwardly pure keeps a kind of virginity, and does this even in the married state. This essential thing is to remain inwardly unsullied and unspoiled. Virginity in the bodily sense is only a shadow and reflection of this genuine virginity. Yes, the virginity which Paul speaks of is the “real thing” in you as in the Virgin. It is a purity that needs to be cultivated so that we will become able to look upon Christ with serenity and unabashed.

Think of yourself as one of the bridesmaids invited to a wedding feast. You have to keep your lamps lit and shining brightly and so you need a supply of oil that won’t fail you. Where do you get this kind of oil? You get it by melting down your gold! What am I talking about? What is this “melting down of gold”? I am talking about your love for one another, and for all others even if they don’t have faith. Your time or your effort are not so precious to you that you won’t give them in order to serve others. You take what is precious to you and you use it up so that your light may so shine before others that they see Christ, the bridegroom, shining from your heart in the deeds of love you do for them with joy. That’s the kind of oil that keeps your lamp burning until the bridegroom comes to call you into his banquet and wedding feast.

How horrible it would be if Christ came and found we had gone off looking for oil for our lamps. If you don’t give yourself in mutual love who will you find to give you the oil you need? Do you ever think of how awful it would be to knock on the door of the Kingdom and hear Christ’s voice utter the terrible words: *“I don’t know you!”* But if we have melted all that is precious to us so we can help others then Christ will recognize us. After all, that is what he did when he chose us and he will see himself living in the chosen hearts of those who were not afraid to give everything for others.

People will go to tremendous lengths to simply catch a glimpse of a very famous person at a parade or celebration. People will spend huge amounts decorating for a wedding or for a marvelous bridal suite. What lengths are you willing to go to come face to face with Christ? Where can you go to see him? You only have to look within at your heart. If we really believe that what labors would we carry out and what efforts would we invest in making our heart the earth’s most glorious bridal suite? Do you have a really powerful longing to see Christ, more to spend time with him? Then you want to make yourself as attractive as you can, you want to preserve that inward virginity I just spoke of. Stop and think! God has promised that you will enjoy more than you can imagine, and that you won’t just see Christ but be his own. God offers you the gift of grace flowering into charity. Accept that gift with all your heart.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF GOD'S WORD

A reflection from a text by St. Simeon the New Theologian

We all believe in the Son of God who is the son of Mary, the ever-virgin and mother of God. As believers we faithfully welcome the Gospel into our hearts as she did. We confess our belief in words, and we repent our past sins with all our heart. The word which we receive when we believe appears within us as a seed. It does this just as truly as the Word of the Father entered the virgin's womb when she consented to God's request.

Are you amazed when you hear the truth about this awe-inspiring mystery? What we hear is true and its truth is guaranteed by God's inspired word in Scripture confirmed in Jesus Christ. We receive this seed, which is Jesus Christ, in a way that is not bodily—as it was for the virgin—but one that is both spiritual and substantial in us and in her. We hold in our hearts the very one whom the chaste Virgin also received. As St. Paul says: *“It is God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to reveal the knowledge of his Son”*. He has become wholly substantial in us and wholly real.

Is this really what God meant to say? Recall the text which says, *“We contain this treasure in earthenware pots”* and in the context it is the Spirit which is meant. But elsewhere the Lord is also called Spirit: *“The Lord is the Spirit”*. And we also hear that if the words ‘the Son of God’ are used we are to think of the Spirit and that we should join the Heavenly Father to the Spirit in thought because it is also said concerning the Heavenly Father *“God is Spirit”*.

We have been constantly taught that the Holy Trinity is inseparable and of one and the same substance. We are taught that where the Son is the Father is also, and where the Father is the Spirit is too. And where the Holy Spirit is the whole of the divinity in three persons is—the One God and Father with Son and Spirit and all of the same substance.

It follows that if we wholeheartedly believe and repent ardently, we receive the Word of God in our hearts, as has been said. This is like the Virgin, if of course we bring with us souls that are chaste and pure. Just as the fire of the divinity did not consume the Virgin, since she was supremely pure, so neither does it consume us, if we bring with us chaste and pure hearts. On the contrary, it becomes in us a dew from heaven, a spring of water, as stream of immortal life.

Are you afraid that you cannot bring such a heart? But that is God's gift to you, as it was to the Virgin. If you have received God's gift by believing and repenting, why should you fear that your heart will not be pleasing to God? God has come to dwell in you by faith and faith has brought forth repentance and these two have brought about an inward transformation that is making you ever more and more chaste and pure.

Why should you hesitate to believe that God is doing in you what God promised? Look within! Do you find faith there? Could you be so hesitant if you were not experiencing the gift of repentance as well? Trust in God's love and gifts. It is transforming you as it did the Virgin.