

THE THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sunday The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Jan. 22 Showing Forth Fulfillment
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine

DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE PROTECTION OF UNBORN CHILDREN

Mon Monday of the Third Week in Ordinary Time
23 The Strength to Choose for Christ
A reflection developed from a text by Bishop C. M. Martini

Tues Memorial of St. Francis de Sales
24 The Source of Prayer's Power
A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Francis de Sales

END OF THE OCTAVE OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Wed Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul
25 Clinging to Christ Alone
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

COMMEMORATION OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE CISTERCIAN REFORM

Thurs Feast of Ss. Robert, Alberic & Stephen
26 Trusting in God
A reflection taken from the Exordium Magnum

Fri Friday of the Third Week in Ordinary Time
27 How Jesus Calls People to Follow Him
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SHOWING FORTH FULFILLMENT

A reflection developed from a Sermon of St. Augustine

Scripture tells us that the sight of God's Word will fulfill all our longings. It also tells us that all God's promises are fulfilled in Christ. These words are a kind of preparation for the task God gives us. At today's Eucharist we hear about the beginning of Jesus' preaching in Galilee and are told it is the fulfillment of one of the prophecies of Isaiah. Immediately we hear about Jesus' choosing certain individuals to accompany him and learn how to draw others to God. For a time comes when these these chosen ones, like us, will have to convince others that God's promises of fulfillment are realized for each and all through Christ.

Now who is there who can claim to know all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ? Not only are they hidden by Christ's humanity but by the poverty and ordinariness of his human condition. When Christ assumed our mortality and destroyed our death, it was not because anyone robbed him of his divine wealth or condition but because he was keeping great promised richness of life in reserve. How great is the goodness that Christ holds in store for those who fear him. He shows it to those who trust him!

Even we ourselves know this goodness only in part; the fullness is yet to come. It was to make us capable of receiving it in its entirety that he took the nature of a slave. He assumed our likeness in order to remodel us into the likeness of God. He has given us our freedom, and the capacity to see him in his divine nature. If we don't glimpse this, how can we convince others that fullness of life is in him? We can't share what we have refused to accept.

How could these treasures of wisdom and knowledge and joy be insufficient for us? Yet we know that only when the final revelation does take place will we reflect God's likeness fully, because only then will we see him as he is. In principle, there is no way that abundant goodness can fail to satisfy. But we find ourselves praying with Philip: "Lord, show us the Father and it will be enough for us!" Yet in reply we hear Christ say, "I and the Father are one". Those who see me see the Heavenly Father!

Until all this is accomplished in us, and we are given the vision that will satisfy us, until we are able to drink deep at the fountain of life, until then and while we are still absent from Him and walking by faith, we hunger and thirst for righteousness and are consumed with longing to see beauty's fullness. We don't yet see all but we see in part. Until fullness comes we humbly and devoutly celebrate salvation in hope. We meditate on Christ's birth from the Virgin, and are made aware of our still incompletely satisfied longing. The full joy we seek can come only as a grace unearned. We have not yet been given that fullness but we can and must share what we have been given. In God's mercy and through God's grace, this will be enough—not only to sustain us but to draw many others to Christ's table.

THE STRENGTH TO CHOOSE FOR CHRIST

A reflection developed from a text by Bishop Martini

In all the Gospels, but especially in that of Matthew, we see ourselves confronted by opposites and the need to choose one of them and then act on the choice. First we are faced with a series of contrasts. For instance, there are Magi on one hand and on the other King Herod. The Magi are filled with extraordinary and uncontainable joy. King Herod is disturbed and filled with anxiety and suspicion. More, not only is Herod disturbed but the whole city of Jerusalem. Why? There was news was about a child. Would he be the fulfillment of long-cherished hopes or cause the loss of what makes life good for us?

I think we see here a painful choice that pertains to every age. People tend to be passive and incoherent. They tend to go along even with what they all complain about and so treat real evils as though there were no real alternative to them and so one simply had to adjust to what is bad or wrong. In our world and milieu, just as in ancient times, there is a way of looking at life that distracts and misdirects people's attention from truth and from seeking the truth, let alone finding and acting on it. It led Herod to slaughter innocent children, lest a child disrupt the satisfactions he had created for himself at great cost in labor and even in lives. So he spent more lives to preserve this.

How different is a way of looking at things from the perspective of the growing power of the Gospel. We are all on a human journey toward the truth and it has series of stages. To continue Matthew's reflection, there are Magi who arrive and make enquiries about a child that will radically change people's lives and ways of thinking and behaving. When they are told where to look for this bearer of newness they rejoice. Their joy is only a little less than that which they feel when they actually see the baby and adore God's gift. As they did, we go through a long process as we seek the truth about ourselves, and contemplate the possible changes in our ways of living that a baby can bring about. Do we react as Herod did?

The tension between these two possibilities is that between selfishness and unselfishness. No self-interest moved the Magi to seek the new born Messiah whom they believe to be a turning point in human history. Theirs was a journey to a new life based on accepting truth about themselves as well as about their, and our, future. The stages are moments of facing up to what is essential. The necessary thing is to learn who Christ is. In doing this we learn how we are to live so as to come to lasting joy. We have to keep looking for the "star" that caused us to set out on our journey toward and then with Christ. We have to look more to the joy that newness can bring than to the old satisfactions that newness will replace. We have to change old attitudes and ways of treating others change, and change for the better—become more welcoming of Christ and new life.

Will we accept the grace of strength to act in a way that befits newness?

THE SOURCE OF PRAYER'S POWER

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Francis de Sales

What St. John's Gospel calls the Lord's first miracle was wrought by changing water into wine and his last miracle was changing wine into his Blood in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. When God created Adam he changed mud into a human body and now the Savior has come to re-create a human kind which had been so twisted by sin as to no longer appear to be what it had been originally. Our God chooses such correspondences again and again. Jesus was born naked, for instance, and he chose to die naked on the tree of the Cross. After his death he was taken down and wrapped in cloth just as he had been wrapped in swaddling clothes at his birth. He performed his first sign at a special meal, at a wedding feast in Cana, and he solemnized God's marriage with human kind at the special meal which was his Last Supper.

Consider the wedding at Cana, a small rural town and a wedding of poor people. In connection with most weddings many falsehoods are spoken about both the bride and groom. Believing them a marriage is concluded, only to discover that much of what was said is not the case. The marriage at Cana was not like this because where the Lord is there is no falsehood or deceit. I can't imagine how the wine began to run out, since they no doubt prepared well but perhaps it was their poverty showing itself in truth. Our Lord delighted in the poor and being with them and always favored them. The Virgin approaches her Son, who had no money but who can meet this need by his power. She didn't need to make a long case but uttered a most excellent prayer that simply presents the need. The point is clear: We can and ought to ask God for both spiritual and temporal needs.

The Virgin prays simply out of her love. To love God ourselves no special feeling is necessary; you can be very humble and love God very much without feeling either of these things. Here below is not the place for such things; you will know them in heaven. So the Virgin presents the need and when our Lord observes that his hour has not yet come she doesn't understand this as a refusal but replies to the servants: Do whatever he tells you. It is true that there are special moments ordained by Divine Providence but from all eternity this hour had been foreseen to teach us about prayer. The Virgin simply placed things in the Lord's hands to do as would be best. He supplied more wine than they had begun with. In this he links prayer especially with the Holy Eucharist, a banquet to which the Lord and the Virgin are always invited and show us how to bring our prayers and needs to such a meal. If we want Our Lady to ask her Son to change the water of our tepidity into the wine of love we must do whatever He tells us. Let us fill our hearts with the water of penitence and it will be changed into the wine of fervent love. Do you wish to make long and fervent prayer, to be recollected in prayer, to understand a mystery of God's grace—such as the Incarnation? Practice what you have been taught and rest in the Providence of God. God will never fail to supply what is needed.

CLINGING TO CHRIST ALONE

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

In the First Letter to the Corinthian Christian community Paul had some very pointed things to say. He begins by warning us of the danger of clinging so strongly to people or opinions which we respect and reverence that we end up being disciples of some human person more than of Christ. He points out that some in the Corinthian community were claiming religious superiority because of their relationship to (say) Peter or a famous preacher named Apollos or to Paul. But aren't all of us disciples of Christ, and isn't Christ alone everyone's savior? So all of us are disciples of Jesus Christ and any other relationship is very secondary relative to our relationship to and with Christ. All are "members of Christ"? Can membership in a party founded on what somebody other than Jesus has said or done be more important than that membership?

The problem was one of jealousy and the attempt to feel oneself more important than others. Hasn't Jesus said that those who want to be important should do so by making themselves servants of others, acting indeed like the slaves of all the other members of their community? We are no different. We sometimes boast of a relationship with a certain theologian or bishop or spiritual leader or claim that advocating certain interpretations of Jesus' teachings makes us in some way superior to those who don't? Some take pride in maintaining traditional ways of worship or of acting out their faith while others want to boast of being led by the Spirit into new ways. Paul challenges us all to remember that we have not been called to partisanship but simply to Jesus Christ and to his Heavenly Father. "Is Christ divided?" he asks. Should we ask ourselves the same question?

Despite all sorts of differences we must remember that it is Christ himself who calls us and to whom we owe allegiance. It is up to each of us to discover how to use the gifts our One God has given us individually so that we might proclaim the coming of the Reign of God. If we let ourselves become preoccupied by merely human differences we put ourselves in danger of becoming deaf to Christ's own call to us.

Those who use cell phones almost exclusively sometimes have to look for a "sweet spot", a place which allows the phone to pick up signals to it without interference. Many years ago an advertisement for a certain phone service was built around the question, "Can you hear me now?" If you are consumed by partisan concerns you may find there is no longer a spot from which you can clearly hear Christ calling you. All that we need, all that God has promised, is given us in Jesus Christ. But we have to keep ourselves in an inner posture that allows us to hear Christ's voice clearly. The crucial thing is that nothing at all should be allowed to become more important to us than what Christ has to teach and show us. He intends this to bring us all together in Him.

TRUSTING IN GOD

A reflection taken from the Exordium Magnum

Once when the house of Citeaux was in dire straits of poverty, the venerable abbot Stephen called one of the brothers and spoke to him by the spirit of God saying, "Dearest brother, you see how hard-pressed we are by need and that our brothers will be risking cold, hunger and other hardships unless something is done quickly. So go to the fair at Vezelay, which is nearby, and purchase three carts and for each three strong draught horses, which we badly need to carry our burdens. Load these carts with bread, food and other things that are needed and return to us bringing them with you in joy and prosperity."

The brother answered him and said, "I am ready to do what you command, Lord Father. If you will give me the amount by which all this may be procured." The venerable abbot answered him, resolutely presuming in his poverty on God's mercy, "Brother, you know very well that although I have sought anxiously and carefully to find something to provide for the needs of the brothers, only three pennies could be found in the whole house. Take those, if you want, and whatever is lacking our Lord Jesus Christ will provide. Now go in safety, for the Lord will send his angel with you and make your journey successful."

The brother set out and when he arrived at Vezelay he received hospitality from a certain God-fearing and faithful man. When this man realized the reason for the monk's journey and the brother's destitution, he went to the man next door to urge him to bequeath his goods to the poor, for he was very rich, hopelessly ill, and near death. When he has told the sick man about the penury of the monks of Citeaux, who were already famous in that district for their holiness, the man called the brother into the house, and he received from the dying man a sum of money that enabled him to purchase everything the abbot had commanded.

When he drew near Citeaux he sent a messenger to tell the abbot about his success. Calling the brothers together he said, "God has bestowed his mercy freely and generously." Then they formed a procession and went to meet the returning brother. They welcomed the alms, not as a gift from men but as a blessing from the Lord. Abbot Stephen wanted to point out to his sons that they should meditate continually on the grace of the miracle so as to learn to trust in the mercy of God in all their needs. God never forsakes those who trust in him and is always the most loving and kindest of consolers and helpers of his poor ones in all their circumstances and tribulations. From that day forward they had no lack of temporal goods, while they, according to the constitutions of the Order, conformed to moderation in all things.

HOW JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM

A reflection by Fr. J-M. Tillard, OP

When one gives careful thought to what the gospel accounts tell us about those who welcomed the word of Jesus and became his disciple, we discover that the most common way to follow him was to stay at home among one's ordinary duties. Indeed, we find that Jesus ordered some to do this and even refused to allow them to leave their homes and folk and follow him wherever he went.

Remaining at home is, in fact, the usual way of welcoming the good news and responding to it wholeheartedly. One doesn't forsake one's usual lifestyle but stays at home and continues in one's trade or occupations. They were, in fact, disciples like Mary, the mother of Jesus, and like Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus.

Who would venture to say that these three didn't love Jesus in the deepest way imaginable? Who could say that Mary, his mother, in her everyday life as a woman in an obscure village was not leading a life of holiness? On what grounds could one argue that Martha, Mary and Lazarus were less holy than the sons of Zebedee whom Jesus called to leave everything in order to follow him?

The Gospels point out that some of those who stayed at home remained unswervingly faithful to Jesus, whereas Peter and the apostles took to their heels and betrayed him. The stay-at-home group may seem mysterious and elusive to us because we have heard again and again about leaving everything for Christ, but those he calls to follow him while remaining where they are when called to be disciples are also with him as they do this. It doesn't seem that those called to leave everything are always more perfect on this account. Indeed, rivalries sprang up among the Twelve, one of them handed Jesus over to his enemies, and Peter three times denied being Jesus' disciple at all.

What is supremely important is declaring and living in a way which says, "One thing alone is necessary!" Jesus is that one thing necessary. He can fill the whole of one's life, leading one to everything one longs for and desires. It is not words that proclaim this, nor even extraordinary actions, but obedience to God and to living as a person who dwells in God's kingdom in obedience.

There are, then, at least two distinct ways of living the Good News that this kingdom has been inaugurated. Both are ways of holiness. Indeed, in many ways the monastic life combines both of them; one gives up everything and then proceeds to live in a settled way doing ordinary occupations. It seems that no matter what we do and what we leave or don't leave behind, the important thing is that all be done in service of the Kingdom of God and as a way of praising and give glory to our God and Savior.

KEEPING THE SABBATH HOLY

A reflection by St. Thomas Aquinas

We are commanded to keep the Sabbath holy in part to strengthen our faith in the promise of eternal rest and to foreshadow its fulfillment. Scripture says, "It shall come to pass that God will give you rest from all your work, from your vexations and from your bondage". Again, "my people shall sit in the beauty of peace, in the tabernacle of trust and in the wealth of rest". We hope for rest from three things: labors, struggles and servitude to the Devil. Christ promises such rest to all those who come to him. However, as we know, the Lord worked for six days and on the seventh rested because that was necessary in order to do a perfect "work". Eternity is rest exceeding anything one can know here on earth.

We are also commanded to keep holy the Sabbath to increase our love. Unless one takes time to raise oneself above ordinary things one always tends toward the earthly. One has to have time for raising oneself up. Scripture even suggests we do this continually: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall be ever in my mouth" it says. But we can also do it during a portion of each day, "Seven times a day I give you praise" Scripture says. In the same way many find it necessary to have affixed day for worship. Thus the Sabbath is not set aside for games but to pray and praise the Lord. St. Augustine even says that it is a lesser evil to plow on the Sabbath than to play on this day.

We are commanded to keep the Sabbath holy as a time to exercise acts and works of kindness, especially to those we govern or hire. Some are cruel to themselves and force themselves to labor continually and ceaselessly. We must have mercy and be kind to ourselves so we can be such to others.

But remember that God did not simply say "keep" the Sabbath but "keep it holy". 'Holy' signifies pure and also consecrated. In these two ways we celebrate feasts by purifying and giving ourselves to divine service, whether in avoiding or doing certain things.

Thus we are not to do "servile" work, usually considered bodily labor, but mental work can also be done in a servile way. However, such labors can be done on the Sabbath if necessary due to charity, if in service of the Gospel, if for the good of neighbor and if commanded by God, as in baptizing. What we must avoid above all is sin. It may seem paradoxical that idleness is to be avoided on the Sabbath and because it goes with evil doing. Always do some good work lest the Devil find you unoccupied.

We should do all that makes us holy on the Sabbath. We should offer sacrifice by offering ourselves to God and by praising God. This includes the giving of alms. We should hear the word of God and contemplate the divine realities, learning to rest in this and so avoiding sin. In all these ways we rest in God and make the Sabbath a delight. This is truly a foreshadowing of eternal life and delight, when we shall dwell with God always.