

THE EIGHTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sunday **The Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Feb. 26 **Where Do You Place Your Deepest Trust?**
 A reflection developed from a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

Mon **Monday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time**
27 **A Call to Meditate on God's Love**
 A reflection taken from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

Tues **Tuesday of the Eighth Week in Ordinary Time**
28 **Walking the Narrow Path Loyally**
 A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Macarius the Great

THE SEASON OF LENT

Wed **Ash Wednesday**
March 1 **The Many Ways of Turning to God**
 A reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

Thurs **Thursday After Ash Wednesday**
2 **Let Us Imitate Those who have Gone Before Us**
 A reflection taken from a Letter of St. Clement of Rome

Fri **Friday After Ash Wednesday**
3 **Why Do We Purify Ourselves?**
 A reflection from a sermon by St. Leo the Great

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4 **How We Please God**
 A reflection from a letter by St. Maximus the Confessor

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WHERE DO YOU PLACE YOUR DEEPEST TRUST?

A reflection developed from a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

On the reverse side of U.S. currency in denominations above \$5 one sees a picture of the Whitehouse with, above it, the statement: "In God we Trust". This goes back to a time when the United States was small, weak and not wealthy. The country had a president, a supreme court and a congress but its citizens knew they couldn't trust in any of these institutions to realize a good future for them. They could think of no one in whom they could place their deepest trust other than God. The Scriptures of this Sunday's Eucharist ask each of us if we have made this decision too.

All of the Sunday readings address some aspect of trust in God. Isaiah reminded his contemporaries that their state had been destroyed in spite of their best efforts. They had lost everything because they placed their trust in human realities and forgot God. But that same God was going to lead them to something new that would be even better. God can't forget us any more than a mother can forget her newborn, and newborns put all their trust in their mothers. Isn't our relationship with God supposed to be like that of a new born child to its mother?

St. Paul reminds us that we are stewards of one another's welfare and that God will required that we give an account of how well we have carried out this responsibility. Are we as dedicated to one another's good as a mother is to that of her newborn? If we imitate God's love for others we will be dedicated even more than a mother is to a new born child. That is why, in the Gospel, Jesus speaks about loyalty and then about trust.

Jesus reminds us that we sometimes place more trust in wealth than in God. He goes on to note that one can't serve God and wealth with equal dedication, seeking wealth after all doesn't focus us on the welfare of all but on ourselves or a particular group. Who will teach us how to serve, and be loyal and trust-worthy in the way Jesus is?

To trust in wealth is to trust in ourselves. Yet we are loyal to people we consider trustworthy because the values to which they are dedicated don't make them self-seeking. We trust most those who don't seek themselves first but work for the welfare of all, including our own. Service to others, as seen from this perspective, evokes loyalty. God serves us unconditionally and without seeking to get anything out of us. God only strives to enable us to receive and share more and greater good.

Trusting in anyone or anything more than in God leads to disaster. We all begin life helpless and needing parents to trust in and to give us the care without which we die. Are you willing to become a genuine "child" of God, and trust God that completely?

A CALL TO MEDITATE ON GOD'S LOVE

A reflection taken from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

God beholds you individually, whoever you are. God calls you by name! God sees you and understands you. God made you and God knows what is in you, all your personal feelings and thoughts, your likings and dispositions, your strengths and your weaknesses. God views you in your times of rejoicing and your days of sorrow. God sympathizes with your hopes and with you in your temptations. God is interested in your anxieties and remembrances and in all the risings and fallings of your spirit. God has numbered the hairs of your head and the inches of your height. God bears you in divine arms and takes you up and sets you down. God notes your expressions, whether you are smiling or in tears, healthy or sick. God looks tenderly upon your hands and your feet and listens to your voice and to the beating of your heart and even to your breathing.

You don't and can't love yourself better than God loves you. You can't shrink from pain more than God dislikes your bearing it. If God lays suffering upon you it is like the burdens you place upon yourself, if you are wise—you accept them for a greater good to come. You are not only God's creature—and for every sparrow God has a care—but a human person redeemed and sanctified. You are God's adopted child, even a favored one, for you were chosen in a way that many others were not in order to draw you close to your loving God. You have been favored with a portion of that glory and blessedness which flows from the Only Begotten Son without end. You are one of those from whom Christ offered up his last prayer. It was for you that Christ sealed this prayer with his precious blood.

What a reflection! We see something so great we can scarcely believe it. We are like Sarah hearing that at 80 she will bear a son. We can hardly stop from chuckling to ourselves in disbelief.

What is a human being, what are we, what am I, that the Son of God should be so mindful of me? He has raised me from almost a devil's state to that of an angel. From my youth I was a sinner and he has made a temple of the Spirit.

These are meditations which come upon a Christian and can console and lift up the spirits. It is as though we were with Jesus on the Holy Mountain. Yet now we descend to our daily duties. Will these reflections give us an inward strength and change our ways of dealing with others? Even though we can't share our personal vision with others we can smile and be cheerful. We can be recollected and serene and even firm in the midst of every sort of trial or temptation—even of persecution or bereavement. This is what we can hope for this very day if we put our trust in our loving God.

WALKING THE NARROW PATH LOYALLY

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Macarius the Great

“Do not worry about tomorrow”, that is what the Lord says. Wishing to lead his disciples to perfect faith he reminds us that whoever is disloyal in a small matter will be disloyal also when it comes to something important. But those who are loyal even in small matters will be loyal also when it comes to important things. So what are the small matters and what are the important ones?

The small matters are things offered us by this world. The Lord has promised to provide for those who trust in him—things like food, clothing and all that is necessary for the body’s well-being. He commanded us not to have the slightest anxiety about these things but confidently to trust in him. On the other hand, the important matters are the gifts pertaining to the eternal and incorruptible world which he has promised for those who believe in him and ceaselessly concern themselves about these things and ask him for them.

He himself commanded us to do this. The Lord said, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be yours as well”. Each of us is tested by the trivial and transitory things to see whether we believe that God will supply them. We are to have no anxiety about such things but are to be concerned solely with the eternal blessings to come. If we do it becomes obvious that we trust in the incorruptible things and really do seek the eternal blessings. Do you preserve a strong faith and trust concerning the minor things?

All who submit to the word of truth should test and examine themselves, or else be tested and examined by spiritual counselors, as to the way they live out their belief and trust and surrender of themselves to God. Are they really living by God’s word, or only by an imaginary belief based on a false notion of faith and righteousness? It is regarding faith in small matters—in temporal things—that each is tested and examined.

Hear how this is done. Do you believe that you have been deemed worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven, that you have been born from above as a child of God, that you are a co-heir with Christ, and that you will reign with him forever, rejoicing like God? Suppose you answer, “Yes, that is the very reason I left the world and gave myself to God as a monk.” But do worldly cares still have a hold on you? Are you preoccupied with eating and clothing yourself, with relaxing and with various tasks? If you are not concerned with such things you have become a stranger to the world. In that case give glory to God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit!

THE MANY WAYS OF TURNING TO GOD

A reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

There are many different ways of showing repentance, all of which lead to heaven. Let's consider five of them, one by one.

The first is condemnation of our own sins. Scripture tells us to begin by confessing our sins. This prompted the prophet's words: "*I said I will confess my sins to the Lord, and you, Lord, have forgiven the wickedness of my heart*". If we condemn our own sin we already have a claim on forgiveness. By doing this we become less likely to fall into them again. We must make our own conscience our accuser of we wish to avoid being accused before the Lord.

There is a second way of showing repentance. It is to dismiss from our minds any injuries enemies may have done us and so to overcome anger and forgive the sins of our neighbors. We shall then be forgiven our own offenses even against the Lord. "*If you forgive others their sins, said our Lord, you Heavenly Father will also forgive yours*".

A third way of showing repentance is open to you if you are willing to take it. It is praying fervently and attentively from your inmost heart.

And if you are interested in a fourth, I suggest you will find an extremely powerful one in the practice of giving to those in need—not only in money but in good words and in cheerfulness.

Of course, and this is a fifth way of repenting, if you live a life of simplicity and humility it will wear down your inclination to sin just as effectively as any of the previously named four ways. Recall the tax collector who had nothing to offer God but his humility. It was enough to free him of a heavy burden of guilt.

We now have a description of five ways of showing repentance. The first lies in withdrawing yourself from sin. The second lies in forgiving the offenses of others. The third is a way of prayer. The fourth is a way of giving what you have of good to those who lack it. The fifth is the way of humility.

This fact shows that there is no room for idleness in the Christian life; one must walk these ways day after day. They are easy enough. Even if you live a life of utter destitution you are able to restrain anger, to be humble, to pray unceasingly, and to condemn your own sins. Remember the widow who had only two cents to give.

The point is that we continually use these ways of turning to God. When we are fully restored to spiritual health, then we will be ready to take part in the Heavenly Banquet with joy. We shall be ready to come face to face with the King of Glory.

IMITATING THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US

A reflection from a letter by St. Clement of Rome

Let us fix our gaze on the blood of Christ and learn how precious it is to God. Poured out for our salvation it has won the grace of repentance for all. We have only to recall past generations to see that the Lord always offers opportunities for repentance. This was the burden of Noah's preaching and those who listened were saved. Jonah told the Ninevites they would be destroyed and their prayers and repentance saved them.

The ministers of God's grace are all inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak of repentance. *"As I live, says the Lord, it is not a sinner's death that I want but conversion"*. So he adds, *"even if your sins are redder than scarlet or blacker than sackcloth, you have only to turn to me with your whole heart and say, "Father," and I will listen to you, as to a holy people"*.

By his own almighty will God has ratified his desire to give all his loved ones the chance to turn to him! Let us throw ourselves on his mercy, and humbly beseech his goodness and compassion. No more energy must be wasted in wrangling and jealousy—they can only lead to death.

Let us, then, be humble and obey the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit says that *"the wise must not boast of their wisdom or the strong of their strength or the rich of their wealth—no, those who boast should should make their boast in the Lord."* If we are willing, we should listen to the words of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord teaches us gentleness and forbearance. *"Be merciful, that you may have mercy shown you; forgive that you may be forgiven. As you treat others, so will you be treated; as you give, so you will receive; as you judge, so will you be judged. If you are kind to others, you also will be dealt with kindly. The measure of your giving will be the measure of your receiving."* Let this rule, these commands, strengthen our resolve to live in lowly obedience to God's sacred words.

"To whom shall I show favor, says Holy Scripture, but to those who are gentle and peaceable and who tremble at my word?" So, inspired by the many and great and glorious examples from the past, we are called upon now to turn quickly to God, and thus to the peace we have always been taught to pursue. Let us cling firmly to this peace, his sublime and all-surpassing gift.

WHY DO WE PURIFY OURSELVES?

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Leo the Great

The earth is always full of the mercy of God. Nature itself is a lesson for all believers in how to worship God since the heavens, the seas, and all that is in them bear witness to the goodness and power of their Creator. The marvelous beauty of all parts of the universe as they obey God calls us to express our gratitude.

And now a season has come marked out in a special way by the mystery of the love of our God as our Redeemer and they summon us to a spirit of purification. After all, we receive new life by our rebirth in baptism when we die and rise with Christ, and we need a daily renewal of this mystery to make up for the shortcomings of our mortal nature, no matter how much progress we have made. Every one of us is called to greater holiness. That is why we need a time for emphasizing purification from all those “same old” sins into which we fall.

What a Christian should be doing all the time is now to be done with greater zeal and devotion. The Lenten fast enjoined upon us is observed not simply by abstaining from food and drink but by renouncing sin and letting ourselves be purified of it. And there is no more profitable practice as a companion to holy and spiritual fasting than sharing what we have. That is what almsgiving truly is. This embraces under the single name of “mercy” all the excellent works of devotion to God’s love.

The good intentions of all believers can be of equal value no matter what they are able to share or give. Nothing can block the path of love—that love we own both God and one another—by preventing us from having good intentions. The angels sang, recall, “*Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth*”. The person who shows love and compassion to others, especially to those in any kind of affliction, is blessed not only with the virtue of charity but with a gift of peace with one another.

The works of mercy are innumerable. This very variety is an advantage to the truly Christian. In merciful sharing, not only those who are rich or those of average means, all can play an equal part. Being unequal in what one can give never affects the love with which it is given. All can be equal in the love which is in their hearts and can let that love bring forth such works of restoring lost dignity. This is as important as meeting the bodily needs of the down-trodden and poor. Who doesn’t need words of encouragement? A good word can be more precious than the costliest gift. No one is so poor as to have no love to give to another. It is living in merciful love for one another that purifies us and prepares us for the Paschal Feast.

HOW WE PLEASE GOD

A reflection from a letter by St. Maximus the Confessor

God's will is to save us. Nothing pleases God more than our coming back to Him with true repentance. The heralds of truth and ministers of divine grace have told us this from the beginning. God's desire for our salvation is the first and most evident sign of God's infinite goodness. It was precisely to show that there is nothing closer to the divine heart than this that the Word was sent, with untold love, to live among us in the flesh. He did and suffered all that was necessary to reconcile us to God and to restore us to the life of blessedness.

Christ healed physical infirmities by miracles. Christ freed from sin, many and terrible as they were. He suffered and died and took upon himself our sins as if he were answerable for them, sinless though he was. Christ also taught us in many different ways that we should imitate him by our own kindness and genuine love for one another. Thus Christ proclaimed that he came to call sinners to repentance—not the healthy but the sick. He declared that he had come to look for sheep who were lost and that had been sent especially to the lost ones of the House of Israel.

In the parable of the lost coin he tells us that the purpose of his coming was to reclaim that royal image which had been coated with the filth of sin. "*You can be sure that there is joy in heaven over one sinner he repents*". To teach the same lesson he revived us after we fell into the hands of robbers and were left left stripped and half-dead from our wounds. He bandaged us, carried us to an inn and, when he had to go away, left enough money for our care and promised to repay those who cared in his place. He will do all this upon his return.

Again, Christ told us of the Father who is goodness itself. That Father was moved with pity for a profligate son. The son repented and the Father forgave him, embraced him, dressed him in fine garments—one befitting the Father's own dignity—and didn't reproach him for any of his sins. Then there was the time when one of a hundred sheep in God's flock went astray. When he found it wandering in the mountains and hills he didn't exhaust it by driving it back to the fold but took it on his own shoulders in compassion.

Christ's teaching was the same when he cried out: Come to me all you that toil and are heavy of heart! Accept my yoke, by which he meant his commands and the whole way of life taught us in the Gospel. But this repentance is not difficult. My yoke is easy and my burden is light, Christ says. Forgive, he says, and you will be forgiven. Treat others as you would want them to treat you. This is repentance.