

THE FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sunday** **The Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Feb. 5 **What Do You Bring to Others?**
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant
- Mon** **Memorial of Sts. Paul Miki & Companions**
6 **Convincing Testimony to Good News**
A reflection developed from Butler's Lives of the Saints
- Tues** **Tuesday of the Fifth Week in Ordinary Time**
7 **Let Our Light Shine for All**
A reflection taken from a catechesis by St. John Chrysostom
- Wed** **Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Ordinary Time**
8 **A Mystery Fulfilled in Christ and Us**
A reflection by taken from a commentary on Matthew by St. Hilary of Poitier
- Thurs** **Thursday of the Fifth Week in Ordinary Time**
9 **Blessed Those Who Suffer Persecution**
A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa
- Fri** **Memorial of St. Scholastica**
10 **We Come to God Through Love**
A reflection developed from the Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great
- Sat** **Memorial of Our Lady**
11 **Rejoicing in God's Gifts in Christ**
A reflection developed from a homily by St. Anselm

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WHAT DO YOU BRING TO OTHERS?

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Who am I? If we genuinely believe the Gospel message each of us is light and salt. What does it mean to be light and salt? Let's start with salt. For the people of Jesus' time salt was primarily a preservative. It kept food from spoiling and kept people from dehydrating. For the people of our time salt primarily brings out flavor and makes things taste good. Applying these meanings to ourselves, we see that God has called us to preserve the goodness of life and the things that fill it, so all may taste its joy and zest.

If we were called only to be light our task would be to show people where goodness lies. But because we are to be salt as well it is to show others how to bring out the full goodness of life, and of one another. If we don't do the second then what we say about the first won't be convincing. If we give the impression that following Jesus is a burdensome and painful process and nothing more, then others won't be drawn to it. The message we have wouldn't sound like "good news" if we were only light and not salt.

The first reading at the Eucharist this Sunday is from the prophet known as Second Isaiah. His prophecy was directed to people who were just returning to Judah from exile in Babylon. They found Jerusalem was nothing but a heap of ruins. Their spontaneous reaction was that their hands were full just caring for their own and their family's needs. But the prophet told them to get busy caring for others, because the restoration a good life for each family and for all Israel depended on the way all cared for one another.

Only in charity and love does life become really good. One can't make life good by having comforts or even basic physical goods but only by acting as Jesus did in caring for others. Life is made good by the way we treat one another.

One effort to help people remember what is most important for a Christ-like life is the list of "works of mercy", some "spiritual" and others "corporal". The list, however, can cause confusion, because what are listed as "corporal" works affect the spirits of both givers and receivers as much as or more than their bodies. Giving food and drink and clothing, traditionally listed as a "corporal" works, actually helps create a spiritual community of mutual support and love. This shows graphically how a healthy spiritual life transforms us and our communities and turns sorrow into joy. That is what Christ came to do.

The Gospel reminds us that we are light and salt in order to make us more aware of how the power of God working within us can transform not just the "world" but each human community by filling it with joy. Light is the symbol of that which shows the way to this joy. When people see how we live, and most of all how we treat each other, then they realize that to follow Christ is to bring savor and goodness to life. That is how we show that Jesus and all those who follow him are themselves good news.

CONVINCING TESTIMONY TO GOOD NEWS

A reflection developed from Butler's Lives of the Saints

The martyrs we celebrate today include three Japanese Jesuits, two European Franciscans, and fifteen Franciscan Tertiaries, some of whom were Japanese & others European. The best known is perhaps the Jesuit Father Paul Miki. The common Japanese-style crucifixion, which took place at Nagasaki, served him as a platform from which to proclaim the Christian conviction that all peoples are called to blessedness and everlasting life through Jesus Christ. He exemplified this by his loyalty to his people and even to the emperor, who was supporting the killing of Christians, and to call all Japanese to look to Christ to find a new and better way of life than they had up to then known, and without ceasing to be Japanese.

If we consider our present situation from the same perspective that gave him his vision of Japan, and the opportunity given its people in Christ, then what we liturgically call “ordinary time” is above all a time for showing how faith in Christ and the call to live Christ’s love for all others transforms both individuals and the way they live; they are changed for the better.

It is a great act of love to show another how to live well and make every-thing one does a service of others in love. This claim was illustrated by the death of these twenty martyrs. That their witness was convincing is shown by the fact that Christian faith went underground and survived more than two centuries of persecution.

The fear which motivated persecution of Christians was that they would open Japan to the corruption of its culture by European culture and might even bring a European invasion and deprive Japan of its independence. In short, the Japanese leaders were afraid of losing the values which made them who they were and showed them the way to what they thought a good life. The martyrs sought to proclaim that nothing genuinely good is harmed by Christian faith but that everything is made better by learning to love as Jesus’ had loved. It turned out that only centuries of Christian living precisely as Christian as well as Japanese could establish it. What martyrs began, the “hidden” Christians completed.

Many of us live what seems to be a hidden Christian life. Yet when we live the love of one another which Christ revealed we live as a light that is never wholly hidden. Light, simply by being itself, shines. The more light is light the more it makes itself known. Paul Miki and his companions were placed on a cross as a lampstand. They shined brightly for the people of Nagasaki—whom the persecutors required to witness the martyrdoms.

We do not know how God will cause our light to shine out for our neighbors but we do know that God will cause this. God has called us to be lights and so he will cause us to shine in ways that others can see. If we are joyful in our shining, many will be drawn to God and to Christ. Recall the song: “This little light of mine, I’m going’ to make it shine”. Let God make his light shine in us. Trust God’s grace to do what seems impossible.

LET OUR LIGHT SHINE FOR ALL

A reflection taken from a catechesis by St. John Chrysostom

When we were clothed in Christ we were made fit for God's Kingdom by having Christ dwell within us. This enables us to show everyone—if we choose—the power of this new life that dwells within us. We do it simply by the love that shows itself in a new discipline which shapes our way of life.

Jesus tells us: Let your light so shine before all that they may see your good works and praise your Heavenly Father. This light is born of God's love living in us. It lights up not just our bodies but our minds and souls as well. It cuts through the darkness of ignorance and confusion and frees us from every sort of evil. It also invites those who see us to let this light shine within them as well.

When Christ said "Let your light shine before all", the words "before all" were included to summon us to let this light shine not just for ourselves but for all those who need help to live well. The light our senses perceive puts darkness to flight in a way that enables us to walk in a straight line as well as not to run into things. A spiritual light, something that shines forth from a person's behavior, helps people who have lost their spiritual sense of direction see clearly how to lead a life that leads to a good end.

Christ tells us to let light to shine out so that people may see our good works and be inspired to follow our Master and to praise God. That is why I beg each and all of you to strive to live the Lord's ways so perfectly that this may happen for all who observe you. The grace of the spirit will overflow from you and attract others to itself and to God.

Indeed, the more you experience this kind of living the more you yourself will be attracted to the Lord and the more you will pray fervently for this grace of the Spirit for others. In this way the Lord of all creation will be glorified and many will be made fit for the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is all a matter of the grace of mercy. This is the result of the goodness of God and of his Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. If others do not see it in us they have only the things and pleasures of this earthly life to turn to as making life good. We are commanded to show them something better.

We don't need to do extraordinary things or live in an extraordinary way. We simply need to live the mercy and love of Jesus Christ in all we do. It has been revealed in Christ and is revealed through us to show to everyone the way to God and to everlasting and satisfying good. That is possible even when we live an otherwise quite ordinary life. It is our duty and our privilege to radiate this clear light to all we meet in all we do.

A MYSTERY FULFILLED IN CHRIST AND US

A reflection taken from a commentary on Matthew's Gospel by St. Hilary of Poitiers

The Gospel tells us that Christ "will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire". This doesn't mean simply that in Christ salvation comes and that he brings to the world a time of divine judgment by fire. Indeed, the Lord does discriminate between those who have born the perfect fruit that is faith from those who have not, and so bear no good fruit. But more is fulfilled in Jesus than these things alone.

The entire human race is present mysteriously in Jesus Christ and he has drawn us all into the service of the Spirit's mission. He was born of the Virgin Mary, he went to John to be baptized and in that moment perfectly gave himself to God the Heavenly Father. He had taken humanity upon himself, both as our human nature and as the entire family of man-kind, and called us to give ourselves to God without reserve. It was through this that he purified us all and then called us to be co-workers with him in the task of purifying and leading our whole race to God.

The heavenly mystery was revealed with due order. When Jesus was baptized the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit was sent forth in the visible form of a dove, and Christ received the anointing of the Father's love. Now He calls us to do and receive all this. A voice came from Heaven saying, You are my Son, today I have begotten you. So he was revealed as the Son of God, sent to call us too to become children of God.

When we contemplate what was accomplished in Christ we are led to realize that when we ourselves were baptized the heavens were opened and Spirit came down upon us and anointed us and gave us the first fruits of the heavenly glory that is to be ours. The voice of the Father marked us as adopted children. What took place once in the Lord was a prefiguration and beginning of what takes place continually in us and through us.

The Lord Jesus was sent to a people many of whose members lacked faith and had proven disobedient to the prophetic testimony they heard continually in the reading of Holy Scripture. We are sent by the Lord Jesus to people who are likewise often lacking in faith and unheeding of the Good New proclaims by Scripture Sunday after Sunday. Many know what the message is but do not heed it with the response that is faith and conversion. We are sent to them by Christ even as he was sent to us by the Heavenly Father.

Whenever anyone hears this message, God makes of that person yet another messenger of Good News. In us and in our living this good news is realized. It is shown forth in acts of mercy and care and love. As the apostles did, we must respond to the Lord's call and give our lives to God in whole-hearted conversion and living of the new life. What we have seen in our Lord, Jesus Christ, the world must see in us.

BLESSED, THOSE WHO SUFFER PERSECUTION

A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa

“Blessed are those who suffer persecution for my sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”. What do we all strive for if not to be found fit for the Kingdom of Heaven? The Lord sees our frailty and in order to help us tells us what the outcome of all trials will be. Is your hope for the Kingdom weak? Perhaps it is easily lost by passing experiences of pain, mental or physical. Perhaps you feel you have nothing like the hope which enabled great St. Stephen to rejoice as he was stoned. He even prayed that the sin of those who murdered him might not be held against them. Can you do this?

God’s call to us is that we respond to persecution and trials with blessings and prayers. Stephen first saw a great promise and then he saw the Heavens opened and that hope realized. He knew without any hesitation that those who suffer persecution for the Lord’s sake will enter the Lord’s Kingdom. That gift is for us as well.

This is certainly what we need to pray for. We have heard the same assurances that Stephen did. When the time of our torments comes, even though they are more commonly only hardships, will we run away, or will we rejoice that God’s will give us strength to run the course of trusting hope no matter what we must endure? Can we use Stephen’s eyes, so to speak, to behold the Heavens opened and Christ at the right hand of the Heavenly Father?

There is a mysterious significance in all this. It assures us that the presiding Presence and Organizer of the entire cosmos also presides over and organizes our contest to keep faith and finish our course in victory. We see that not only does our God place us in what seem to us very difficult situations, but if we trust we know that He is with us and supports us in every difficulty. Could one who suffers persecution or hardship for the Lord’s sake have any greater consolation or blessing than this knowledge?

Each of us must live in a definite place and faces trials there. But that place is now seen to be the anteroom of heavenly glory. What now seems harsh and difficult to bear will soon be because the cause of great happiness. As St. Paul says, *“Discipline is never pleasant...but in the end it bears a fruit that is peace and goodness.”* Affliction is only a blossom that comes before a much longed-for fruit. We must pluck the flower if we would gather the fruit.

So let us welcome hardship and even persecution. Let us run our race in hope and confidence however exhausting it seems. Before us lies the prize that is our heavenly home. This is the assurance of the one who promised blessedness to all who suffer persecution for his sake. Ours is the Kingdom of Heaven by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

WE ALL COME TO GOD THROUGH LOVE

A reflection taken from the Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great

We are told that once every year St. Benedict and his twin sister, St. Scholastica, met to share with one another the news of God's graces as given to each of them in their monastic life. According to their rule of life, each brought a companion and they met in a small building, a little way below Benedict's monastery on Monte Cassino. When Scholastica came, for what she thought would be their last meeting on this earth, she was filled with longing for God. She was more than ever anxious to share the wonders of God's grace she had experienced and to learn of those given to her brother. She so lost herself in speaking and listening to stories about God's love.

Then she was brought back to earth by Benedict's saying he must return to his monastery, for the Rule forbade him to pass the night outside it, and it was getting late. She begged him to excuse himself from this strictness and prolong their conversation about God and about the Heavenly joys prepared for those who love him. Benedict refused. But that did not discourage Scholastica; she turned to our God in prayer.

Scholastica placed her head on her hands and began to weep tears of distress at having to bring their delightful conversations about God to an end. She wept because it was so wonderful to talk about the God they both loved more than anything or anyone else. God heard her prayer. He responded to her tears with a rain storm the like of which neither had ever seen before.

The effect was to make it impossible for Benedict and his companion even to try to return to their monastery. Benedict, inspired by God, had made a Rule for Monks, and was determined to keep its observances. God, who had inspired Benedict, suspended the application of that Rule against his servant's wishes. Benedict was distressed and said so. Scholastica was filled with joy and said so.

We know that Benedict was a man of wisdom. This very wisdom compelled him to recognize that the purpose of monastic living is to enflame us with love for God. He seeks always to increase his creatures' love for him. That they find joy in this love is God's gift in response to such love. The rule of all rules is that love of God comes before every-thing else. So God corrected Benedict by showing him that meeting the demands of mutual encouragement in such love and joy are more important than any human observance. Through Scholastica God restored the balance between our works and our need for support in responding to divine love. Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you!" Hadn't Benedict written his Rule to strengthen that love? Through Scholastica's loving prayer God taught Benedict a new lesson in discerning the demands love makes on us to support one another in experiencing the joy given us by our beloved.

REJOICING IN GOD'S GIFTS IN CHRIST

A reflection developed from a text by St. Anselm

All things rejoice, O Mary, that you have been made the means of restoring their lost beauty and filling them with a new grace. God is the purpose of all creation and all was created to praise God and to be of service to others who praise him. Through sin they all suffered a kind of death by losing this dignity; they lost it by putting aside their true nature as God's servants. Now all this is changed and all things are restored and exult in the inestimable grace of God's recreating them. It is all done through the One who has become visibly present among creatures through Mary. All these wonderful things have come to pass for us and our world through the blessed fruit of the womb of Mary.

God gave you the fullness of grace, Mary. All things rejoice in their liberation and in their restoration through your glorious Son, the child of your virginity. All the just who died before your Son's life-giving death, now rejoice in release from their captivity. O Lady, full and more than full of grace, I praise you. You have been favored by God and blessed. In your blessing every creature is blessed by its creator and even the creator is once more blessed by every creature.

God gave to Mary that very Son who alone is begotten in God's inner life, equal to the Heavenly Father. Him the Father loves as he loves Himself. From Mary God made himself a Son, not other than the eternally begotten Son but that very same Son. In this way God achieved his purpose, for this one Son became not only God's but Mary's Son. All nature is created by God, yet God chose to be born of a creature and made himself the son of Mary. In doing this God re-made all that he had made. The One who was able to make all things out of nothing has remade them through Mary and through her cooperation.

If God is able to do such wondrous things through Mary do not forget that this same God wills to do wondrous things through you, even if you haven't been willing to receive the fullness of God's grace as Mary was. Even through this fault God is not hindered in the work of re-creation and redemption.

God begot in Mary the One through who all things were given being and through her became the one through whom all things can now receive well-being. Will we turn away from the grace of being God's instruments in bringing all to this well-being by bringing them to that One through whom they were made and re-made? It is in saying our "Yes" to this purpose of God that we find our re-created being and well-being. Through it we are renewed and re-created. Rejoice in God's gift to you and let it fill your life. It is the gift of becoming like Mary, and through her like Jesus Christ, her Son and our Savior.