

THE FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER

- Sunday** **The Fifth Sunday of Easter**
May 14 **Obedience At Its Most Difficult**
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Ambrose
- Mon** **Memorial of St. Pachomius, Abbot**
15 **Striving for Excellence in Christ**
A reflection taken from the Life of Pachomius
- Tues** **Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Easter**
16 **Trusting in Jesus**
A reflection from Bossuet's Meditations on the Gospel
- Wed** **Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Easter**
17 **The Interchangeably Hidden & Unhidden**
A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman
- Thurs** **Thursday of the Fifth Week of Easter**
18 **Perseverance & Repentance**
A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Bernard Haring
- Fri** **Friday of the Fifth Week of Easter**
19 **Humility Imitates God**
A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Bernard Haring
- Sat** **Saturday of the Fifth Week of Easter**
20 **We Are Becoming a New Creation**
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa

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OBEDIENCE AT ITS MOST DIFFICULT

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Ambrose

What command could the Lord give that is more difficult than “Don’t be disturbed!”? He immediately tells us what is required, “Believe in me”! To believe in deed is to march straight ahead without fear. If we do what will happen? We will meet our Redeemer, Jesus. If we want to be with Jesus we only have to keep going on the path we have set out to follow. Jesus tells us it is his path! It leads to the Father, and so to the assembly of all the holy ones. They are our forebears and they have already completed this very journey. What God’s grace can do for them God’s grace can do in us.

Let’s recall those who taught us our faith—that faith which comes to our aid and keeps safe what has already been entrusted to us. Even though we may have no good works to show when we keep marching with Jesus our very perseverance makes us a light to all those who see us. What’s more, the Lord Jesus has said he is preparing a dwelling place for us where he is, with the Heavenly Father. *“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places”* and he promises that *“I will come and take you to be with me, so where I am you will always be”*.

Some think this only applies to Jesus’ first disciples. Do they imagine he was preparing only eleven dwelling places? Hasn’t he said that people will come from every corner of the world to sit at table with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven? That is what Christ wants but for Him to want is to accomplish! He has carefully shown the way to his Table. He is the way because whoever walks as he did, whoever lives as he lived on earth, comes to sit at his table and share his dwelling place.

Christ prays to the Heavenly Father for this! The promise came first and then the request. Conscious of his authority and knowing the gift is at his disposal he makes the promise. Then he asked the Heavenly Father to grant what he had promised. This is confidence in prayer prayed “in his name”—standing before the Father in his person.

Yes, Lord Jesus, we will follow you. But we know we can only do this at your command. So teach us to keep your beginning command: Don’t be upset! No one can ascend to the Heavenly Kingdom without you, Lord. You are our way and blessed are those who know the truth that is this way, that is your life, and your love, and your strength. Give us confidence. That is itself a great reward. Be the way not only that we walk but that receives us, the truth that not only shows us the way but strengthens us, not only the reality that is eternal life but the life by which we live and praise and love you eternally. Don’t be disturbed!

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE IN CHRIST

A reflection from the Life of Pachomius

When Pachomius sought to become a monk he went to the place of the holy elder Palamon. “Why are you knocking”, the old man asked. “Father, I wish you would allow me to become a monk in your company”, he replied. The old man said, “That which you seek is not simple. Many come and can’t bear it. Yet Scripture commands us to fast, keep vigils and make numerous prayers so that we may be saved. Consider the measure of monastic life.

“We always spend half the night in vigils and reciting the words of God. We do manual work lest we become sleepy and to earn bodily subsistence. Whatever is beyond our needs we give to the poor. We always fast until evening in summer and in winter eat only every other day. We pray sixty prayers during the day and fifty during the night, not counting ejaculatory prayers. We are commanded to pray always. Go test yourself with all this and if you can bear it come back.”

Pachomius replied, “I have been doing this.” Then Palamon opened the door, gave him a holy kiss and said: Do not do these things for vainglory. It is only a matter of teaching you how to work at your salvation. Every pure thing is luminous and it is by doing violence to yourself that you enter the Kingdom of Heaven. After the old man had tired him for three full months and had seen his courage and determination he took a monk’s habit with its belt and placed it before an altar. They prayed the whole night then the old man clothed him with it at daybreak. He continued thus for seven years.

One day when going to collect wood he came to an abandoned village and entered it to pray. A voice came to him and said: “Pachomius, struggle and dwell in this place, and build a monastery, for many will come to become monks with you and this will benefit their souls.” In fact he established an irreproachable life-style and traditions profitable for their souls using rules taken from the Holy Scriptures: absolute equality in clothing and food and decent sleeping arrangements. When the brothers came to number 100 he built a church in the monastery and the clergy would come to celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday morning. He wanted no clergy in the monastery lest envy, jealousy and even schisms arise. A person, he said, has no other hope in this world but to do good before departing from the body and being led to the place of judgments and reward. So he lived and so he taught never relaxing his struggle to be a perfect monk.

TRUSTING IN JESUS

A reflection from Bossuet's Meditations on the Gospel

“Jesus said to his disciples, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust in me”.” How can we enter with humility and even with trembling into the depths opened before us by the words of Jesus Christ? For instance, he tells us that ***“the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father”***. One who could be seen by bodily eyes as a human being, appears to the eyes of faith as the Son of God, as God’s very self, the same God as the Father. ***“Hear, O Israel, the Lord Our God is one Lord”***. God is Unity itself and the Father and Son are inseparable.

It is clear why Jesus could say that one who sees the son sees the Father. What do we see when we see Jesus? We see God’s love made visible. As Jesus himself said ***“a little while and you will not see me”*** and that has come to pass. We no longer see Jesus with bodily eyes and yet we see with the eyes of the Spirit. To deny that would be to deny our faith and our hope. Besides, he says that he and the Father and the Spirit will come to one who believes and make their abode with such a one. He really has gone away and yet remains. Thus when he returns to the Father he remains no less with us.

In the One whom we see, and who has given himself to us in making himself human, we can possess the One who is eternally with the Father, who is in the Father and in whom the Father is. We shall see that One, as we shall love that One and shall possess that One. We shall possess Father and Son. Recall the words: ***“I am the way, the truth and the life”***. I am the way as Son of God and as human. I am the same truth, the same reality, that is God and that is Father. I am the same life that is God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

Behold the mystery. Behold the hope. Behold the faith of Christians. To possess the Son who has become visible in order to elevate us through him. We find in him the invisible truth of God. How close God is to us! God with us is the Son’s name. He invites us to sit at his table. Let us eat even now at our earthly and yet heavenly table. Let us be refreshed. Here is our nourishment. Here is our life. You have only to accept the gift of belief. It is given you this day. Do not let yourself be troubled. Believe and all disturbances will vanish from your heart. You can follow in his footsteps in confidence and peace, trusting wholly in God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit come to dwell with you.

THE INTERCHANGEABLY HIDDEN & UNHIDDEN

A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

What is the nature of Christ's presence in the Church after his resurrection? He came and went as he pleased and fastened doors were no impediment. Yet when he was present his disciples didn't know him. He appeared to two disciples who were going toward Emmaus and while he talked with them their hearts burned within them yet their eyes and hearts were somehow unable to recognize him. They weren't conscious of what was going on when it was happening but later they did remember. People received impressions but were unable to see what reality they pointed to.

Now let us observe when it was that their eyes were opened. It was especially, but not exclusively, when the Lord broke the Bread. Stress is laid on this in the Gospels, especially in St. Luke. When the two disciples returned from Emmaus "*they told what things had been done on the road and how he was recognized in the breaking of the bread*".

The disciples had not recognized Jesus during his ministry as both Son of God and One who was to suffer and die and rise again. It is as though the Resurrection had so united the One who appeared as a human being, and was really divine. They were united in such a way that after the resurrection Jesus could only be recognized when both were recognized.

So it was ordained that Christ should not be both seen and known unless he was "seen" and "known" in the two ways at once. First his disciples saw him, but only later was the full truth known truly. Only by faith do we know Christ to be present and we do not see him at all in the bodily way. But he never was recognized in his reality by ordinary sight alone. In the case of the two disciples, when he opened their eyes to see him by faith he at once vanished.

Christ removes his visible presence now and leaves us only a memorial. He vanishes from ordinary sight that he might be present to us in a sacrament. In order to connect his visible presence with his full presence invisible Christ, for an instant, manifested himself to the bodily eyes of two disciples, and then to The Twelve. He manifested himself, if I may speak in this way, as he passed from the hiding place of ordinary sight, but a sight that gave no knowledge, to a knowledge of his truth but without ordinary sight. That is his gift to us. He bids us not to be disturbed but to believe.

PERSEVERANCE & REPENTANCE

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Bernard Haring

One aspect of perseverance is staying power. It was highly valued by the first Christians and grew even more important as it was realized that the Lord's Second Coming was not just around the corner. It doesn't involve stubbornly clinging to the old ways but leaning to respond with fidelity to changing circumstances.

Christians pray unceasingly for the grace of "final perseverance" but this implies readiness to change, to be faithful we have to continually repent and let the Lord lead us to new things. This was how monasticism came to be and led those who gave themselves to this "new" way of following Christ to reflect creatively on perseverance. They had to keep their inward eyes fixed firmly on the ultimate goal by finding ever new paths toward that goal because circumstances were continually changing.

For example, the early monks discovered that perseverance isn't just an individual matter but something that is strengthened by community and calls for solidarity and mutual support, especially in encouraging one another. The early Christians, and the early monks, experienced a continual testing of their ability to persevere. That was because their hope in Christ was almost always visualized in terms of worldly events, as we see in the Book of Revelation. But when it became clear that God was not going to realize our hope in the ways visualized it was necessary to find ways to re-imagine what the Lord asks of us in calling us to remain faithful.

Think of the transformation of ancient monastic living from its original anchoretic form to what became the standard community-oriented form. No less a change was required of Christians as the Church developed ever new forms of organizing Christian living. The only thing that makes it actually possible to persevere is love and a sense of responsibility not only to God but for one another. Thus transformation has to take place if we are to persevere. It is not like running in place but more like running the longest of all marathons. Readiness to undergo transformation, which we call repentance, is a necessary grace for those who would persevere. Our God is always offering us this grace.

HUMILITY IMITATES GOD

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Bernard Haring

Humility is an imitation of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' liberating love humility implies maintaining spiritual courage on behalf of truth, of thankfulness, and of faithful solidarity with others. The essential words of Christian faith are "God is love" and they imply, in a very challenging way, "God is humility".

God is love that bends down to lift another up. God created the world by giving and revealing all that creatures can accept of what and who God is. God did not make the world out of neediness but from an overflowing and all-embracing, all-giving selfless love. God is self-giving love pure and simple. God calls us into existence as conversation partners. Creation is a kind of echo of the Trinitarian sharing that is Godhead. Creation may be thought of as the revelatory radiance of triune love and as the giving of an eternally blessed gift of self that is never complete.

We can say that God reveals divinity as humility and the source of all humility among creatures. It is not just a matter of a child in a manger or Jesus accepting death on a cross. It is Jesus revealing that God is one of us. He bends down to us in order to lift us up and we bend down in love to others for the same reason. What we see on the Cross, for instance, is love unmasking what pride truly is and how destructive it is. This death on the Cross is what pride would work in each of us if our God did not show us the truth so vividly and unmistakably. It is by the humility of his Cross that God in Jesus grants us the insight and courage to face the liberating, and unifying, truth about ourselves and our lives.

We emerged out of nothing. Pure grace calls us to live together with the One who is the origin of all life and joy. The gracious humility of God bridges the chasm between our nothingness and God's fullness. We have been throwing away our freedom and our selves and God's humility has freed us from this. The realization of this incomprehensible humility of God becomes a source of heavenly happiness and blissful praise. Those who would use and enslave others sink themselves into a worse slavery. Only Christ can liberate us; Christ teaches us to love as he loves. To do that is to bend down in humility so as to be lifted up.

WE ARE BECOMING A NEW CREATION

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa

The Kingdom of Life has begun. A new birth begins a new life and a new way of existing. We are being transformed! Not by human action but by God. But perhaps you wonder what this amounts to.

Faith is, so to speak, the womb in which the new life is conceived and baptism brings it into the light of day and entrusts it to the care of the Church, whose teachings are the milk we need to grow and mature. She feeds us with the bread from heaven and its effect is seen in our growth in virtue. More, we are espoused to Wisdom from birth. Think of the hope this gives us to live in the Kingdom of God and its joys. It is a Kingdom of everlasting life for all who grow to be like Christ.

This is the day the Lord has made, a day far different from those made when the world was first created. These days of creation are measured by the passage of time and of our growth. The new creation is that new Heaven and new Earth which God creates. What is it? It is the Kingdom of Faith in Christ. That is the “new heaven”. And the “new earth” is the new heart that the Lord gives to all who believe and which, like good earth, bears a rich harvest.

In this new creation purity of life is our sun and the virtues our stars. We breathe transparent goodness like air and so experience the depths of the riches of wisdom and knowledge, as Scripture puts it. It surrounds us as the sea surrounds all lands and is like an all-pervasive knowledge of sound doctrine and practice. These teachings feed us as grass and plants feed ordinary living things, except that they are the food of God’s flock and of no one else. They bear the fruit which is the keeping of the commandments, just as ordinary trees bear fruits that are good to eat and sustain life.

This is but a metaphor of the recreation of human persons into the image and likeness of God. It is this which initiates a new world. As the prophet said, this world is not like the previous one because in it there is no death. When Christ rose from the dead this new creation and its new day dawned. “I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God”, said the Lord Jesus. What wonderful news! He who for our sake became like us and made us his own brothers and sisters now brings us to our true Father. He shows us his own humanity and fulfills the transformation of our humanity into what we see in him. The more we become like Christ, not just in theory but in practice, not just in word but in deed, the more fully we begin new life. Begin it! Choose life! Begin to live this life today!