

THE THIRD WEEK OF EASTER

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Sunday **The Third Sunday of Easter**
April 30 **Recognizing God's Presence**
 A reflection by an anonymous 12th century homilist

Mon **Memorial of St. Joseph the Worker**
May 1 **What God Requires for Becoming Holy**
 A reflection inspired by a sermon by Theodore of Ancyra

Tues **Memorial of St. Athanasius**
2 **How God is All in Everyone**
 A reflection derived from a letter by St. Athanasius

Wed **Feast of SS. Philip and James, Apostles**
3 **Following the Way of Justice & Mercy**
 A reflection developed from a sermon by Isaac of Stella

Thurs **Thursday of the Third Week of Easter**
4 **Our God Is Always With Us**
 A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri **Friday of the Third Week of Easter**
5 **Singing a New Song to the Lord**
 A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

Sat **Saturday of the Third Week of Easter**
6 **Letting Ourselves Be Healed By Christ**
 A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

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RECOGNIZING GOD'S PRESENCE

A reflection by an Anonymous 12th Century Homilist

Jesus accompanied two disciples who had almost given up, and by his conversation he restored their hope and so their faith. Now notice what happened. *“Their eyes were opened and they knew him when he broke the bread.”* Think about the fact that Jesus is the bread he gives to us and, in effect, he breaks himself before us as part of his emptying of himself for our salvation. In doing this he gives us knowledge of himself, and so of ourselves if we are one with Him.

What can it mean, then, when he calls us to imitate him? Consider that you break yourself in one way by the labor of obedience, by humiliations you accept you break yourself, and you do it especially by repentance. We are called to obey in doing the opposite of what Adam & Eve did in deciding for themselves what they would consider good and evil. But there are yet more ways in which we are called to “break ourselves”.

When we break our bread for the hungry, we break ourselves in just the measure we have identified with the things we have and must now give or share with others. But if Jesus himself is bread and is broken then we are to share what we have received from him in order to become like him. We are to share all that we have and even all we are.

Notice that if we do not break ourselves in sharing we do not really know Christ. There are many who study Scripture and teach theology. They teach in Cathedrals, they preach in Churches, but they can't truly break the bread of the word if they don't break the bread that they are. With words we may claim to have knowledge of God but we show we lack real knowledge if we don't do the deeds of Christ. The Lord became our bread, and we are the Lord's bread given to others.

Jesus ate his bread in the sweat of his brow, as Adam did after this fall, but Jesus ate with joy. Anyone who doesn't live as Christ lived can't rightly claim to break the bread of life which Christ wants to give us and so can't have the joy he had. The Kingdom of God consists not in words but in power and deeds and joy.

If we would follow Christ we must accept the condition of a servant and not even seek that of a superior. It is when you have emptied yourself as a servant that you know the Lord through the “breaking of the bread”. True humility opens our eyes and teaches us that we ourselves are nothing. When we humble self more and more we grow more and more in lived knowledge of Christ, our God for this knowledge is love. To know God is to love as God loves. To gain such knowledge go to Christ and learn to break yourself as bread for others.

WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR HOLINESS

A reflection inspired by a sermon of Theodore of Ancyra

The Lord of all has come in the guise of a servant and a poor person. This was not pretense. He lived as poor and died as poor, and powerless. He had no special distinctions. For instance, he was born in an obscure town and lived in a very humble home and, from the world' point of view, neither of his parents were great persons. Yet they are and were God's holy ones and among the greatest of the holy. All God did in sending his Only Son among us was done for the sake of our salvation.

What, then, was the purpose of all the lowliness and poverty of Joseph and Mary and Jesus? It has often been pointed out that God showed in them the exceedingly great value of humility and lowliness. But we must not miss God's showing what is required for holiness and for its effects. Do we have to accomplish some great thing—as, for instance, becoming a great preacher or evangelist or founder of churches or works to aid the poor or the oppressed—in order to be holy? In Joseph and in Mary the Lord, Our God, shows us that nothing of the sort is required. Rather it is through holiness great things are accomplished for the salvation of many.

Are you a lowly person, a citizen of a lowly town, and do you earn your living doing very lowly and ordinary things? Isn't that what did Joseph did? He was a '*tehton*', one who made things for his fellow citizens. He was perhaps a carpenter and perhaps what we would call a "handyman". Yet he is among the greatest of God's holy ones, entrusted with the human formation of God's Only Son.

What could Joseph teach Jesus? He taught him that in doing ordinary things for ordinary people, while all the time seeking to do God's will, one draws close to God and accomplishes God's will. The point is not that lowliness brings one close to God. Of itself it does no such thing. There are as many sinners among the lowly as among the rich. No, we learn from Joseph, as Jesus did, that steady unassuming love for God and for our neighbor is what enables God to do great things through us, whether we know it or not. The point is that we entirely put aside concern for accomplishments and for the particular things we do for one another in seeking to love them as God, in Jesus, has and does love them.

If only all Christian believers could learn this lesson and cease to try and use their role in the Church as a means to power or wealth or other merely worldly good! Then the Church would become fully what God calls it to be. We would find that by doing nothing special we had been given a place among God's very special holy ones, as was Joseph. This is your vocation.

HOW GOD IS ALL IN EVERYONE

A reflection developed from a Letter by St. Athanasius

Consider our ancient tradition and so the teaching and faith of the Catholic Church. It is something revealed to us by the Lord, proclaimed by the apostles and guarded by the Fathers. The message is that faith is built on the teaching about the Holy Trinity and if anyone departs from it that person is no longer a Christian.

The Godhead consists of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and all are perfect God and perfect unity. The Trinity is a wholly creative and energizing reality, self-consistent and undivided in its active working. The Father makes all things through the Word and in the Holy Spirit and so the unity of the Holy Trinity is made perfect and preserved.

In accord with this faith of the Church one God is preached, one God who is above all things and through all things and in all things: Above all things as Father, as principle and source, and through all things as through the Word, and in all things as in the Holy Spirit.

Even the gifts that the Spirit dispenses to individuals are given by the Father through the Word and in the Spirit. All that belongs to the Father belongs also to the Son and the graces given by the Son in the Spirit are true gifts of the Father. This means that when we act in faith we know that we do nothing of ourselves but only act from the Father's gift given us in the Word by the Holy Spirit.

When the Spirit dwells in us, the Word who bestows the Spirit is in us too, and the Father is present in the Word. This is what Jesus meant in saying: "*My Father and I will come to you and make our home with you*". Where there is one of the Trinity there are all.

All that we do in faith is done by grace. Grace is the gift of the Trinity and is given by the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. We are never alone in what we do with and for our God, and none of the three in the one God is ever without the others. All we do is a communication of the gift that is the Godhead.

Be of good cheer. You need do nothing except what God gives you the grace to do. If God inspires you to perform some good work then God gives you the grace to perform it. Do not be afraid. Our God is always with us. Let us wish one another what St. Paul did: "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*" Keep these words in your heart throughout your daily labors and they will be filled with God.

FOLLOWING THE WAY OF JUSTICE & MERCY

A reflection inspired by a sermon of Isaac of Stella

Those who seek happiness can't withdraw from the obligations of justice and mercy. As Christians such persons must subject themselves to that justice that comes of faith. Jesus, our Master, tell us: "First seek the Kingdom of God and his justice". St. James explains further, "If one has faith but doesn't do any deed what good is that faith?" He goes on to tell us that faith which produces no fruit isn't really faith, because real faith has to reveal itself by the deeds it motivates.

You must not seek justice for the sake of the Kingdom but seek the Kingdom for the sake of justice and justice for the sake of love. That is St. James' message. We need, therefore, to pay attention to the text: "Happy are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy." Who would ever think justice a great matter apart from the works of mercy? The merciful will have the joy of hearing the words: "Come, O blessed of my Father, take the Kingdom for your heritage". They receive this gift because those who are merciful obtain mercy.

Suppose you think that because you have left everything you have nothing to give and so cannot practice mercy. What must be remembered is that mercy has a two-fold expression. It gives and it forgives. The measure you give, and the measure in which you forgive, will be the measure of the mercy meted out to you.

There are three degrees in giving and in forgiving. You may give some, you may give everything, you may give your very self. You may share, you may share what is external without limit, you may share your very self without limit. But the expression of mercy, and so of justice, is not merely external or material. We can, for instance, forgive an injury, or we can give our prayers and counsel, or we can give a good example. In fact, St. Bernard finds 50 times 12 different ways of giving and forgiving.

The culmination of all effort in seeking God is found on the Mountain of Beatitudes. You must pray to God that you may receive eagles' wings to fly to the summit of this mountain. What do you have to fear? Every day we are called to give ourselves by praying, "Abba, Father, not what I will but what you will". When you truly pray thus you practice the highest mercy and justice, because what you give to God he immediately gives to others.

Here we have the gist of what those heard who climbed the mountain of beatitudes with the Lord and listened to his words. If they do what they have heard they are on the way to happiness and walk the way by works, inner and outer, of mercy and justice.

OUR GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

We have heard much about the difficulty of accepting a Savior who has to suffer. Jesus told us this was a matter of the set plan & foreknowledge of God. But this difficulty goes with another—that of accepting the twin Scriptural teaching that God is immediately present to his people in their sufferings and pain and yet that God loves them without doing away with their suffering and pain.

Those who pray the psalms regularly hear texts like this: “If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I sink to the nether world of the dead, you are present there; if I say, “Surely the darkness can hide me and night will be my light”, then for you darkness itself is not dark and night shines like day”. (Ps.139) In Scripture darkness is often a metaphor for violence, sin and disorder. So God is present to us even in our sin and violence and self-created chaos and in love!

Throughout the Bible God is immediately present even with sin and death. Job, for instance, is “unclean” because of his disease but goes directly to God and is answered, yet without God’s giving a justification for what He has done in afflicting Job. Scripture even presents God as “wrestling” with chaos and evil rather than abolishing them. Why? Perhaps it is because it is what actually happens & we don’t understand.

Think of the story the two disciples walking toward their home in Emmaus and finding Jesus walking with them as they struggle to come to terms with what had happened to Jesus as well as the rumors that he has risen. Wasn’t the Messiah supposed to do away with all struggle and usher in glory? Jesus helps them find their way through the texts of Scripture that present the Messiah as suffering and then entering into his glory. But he doesn’t explain why his “glory” is so different than what they wanted. Our loving God doesn’t do what makes sense to us.

Our God is bringing people, the entire world, to himself in a way that doesn’t make sense to us because we can’t see that it’s working! What happens to all those evil people who seem to die unrepentant? How are they drawn into God’s Kingdom and love? We aren’t told. We are in a sense shown how God works only in Jesus’ case. But is his case typical? Our faith, and every thinking person’s faith, is tested thus.

The Risen Jesus calls us to accept this testing and go on walking forward proclaiming God’s salvation and mercy and love, whether our prayers are heard or not. Do you believe that God’s wants all to be saved? That’s what Scripture says. Are you ready to accept God’s way of accomplishing what he died to achieve? God is always with us and even shares our pain, but doesn’t end it. Are you walking in faith?

SINGING A NEW SONG TO THE LORD

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

“Sing to the Lord a new song; God’s praise is in the assembly of the saints.”

What is the new song we are urged to sing? It is the song learned by the new person who has been re-created in Christ. Obviously, it is understood to express joy, and, more profoundly, to express love. Is this true because the person who has learned to love in the new way that Christ shows us, has thereby learned to sing a new song? If so we need to be constantly reminded of the nature of the new life that is ours in Christ so we can sing the new song in our deeds and not just in our words. We need to recall that those who sing it also belong to the new covenant and find their true home in the new heavens & earth.

Everyone loves something. The question we constantly face is what to love. Scripture tells us to choose carefully the object of our love. But how can one do that unless one is first given love and shown what a loving person is like? We can’t love unless we have first been shown love and we can’t know whom to love unless we have been loved by that person or another like him or her.

As the apostle John says: We love God because God first loved us. God has given his very self to us as the source from which may learn love and as the object of our love. Since we have, in fact, received such a gift and so are sure we are loved by God, we want to love God with the same love God has given to us. As John n says: All who dwell in love dwell in God and God in them. God cries out to us: Love me and you will have me! Scripture tells us: God is love. To have God because we love God means loving God with the love which God is. But one can’t love God with this love unless one has received it as a gift, the gift of God!

You have been born again in Christ. Christ’s life is from above and is God’s own love. This has been given to us. Believing this is true faith and that is a holy seed planted in you and springing up to life in God’s Kingdom. Now listen again to the call: Sing a new song! You know now that it means you are to sing with your love! Sing with your entire life as an act of love.

You must make sure your deeds don’t conflict with your words, though. You claim to be God’s beloved. So live that love. When you do this you will indeed sing a new song to the Lord. It is the same song Jesus the Christ sings. God sings it in creating and redeeming us.

LETTING YOURSELF BE HEALED BY CHRIST

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

Our faith assures us that our “head” is the Church’s head, the head of the Body of Christ, Christ Jesus himself. He has died for us and has been raised up to serve as the head and guide of the entire Church. He has told us so. So it is in him that you we have all placed your hope!

You also realize that the health of a member of this body depends on its unity with Christ. If you let your love grow cold, for instance, you have become an unhealthy member of Christ’s Body. But the one who has been raised from the dead certainly has the power and will to raise us up again by healing us. As long as one doesn’t deliberately cut oneself off from Christ one can find healing. If a limb has been injured seriously healing is possible as long as it remains attached to the body.

Since the whole Christ, head and body together, has already had its head raised from the dead, and because we know he intercedes for all his members in Heaven, we know, as Scripture says, that our sinless and immortal head is even at this very moment offering himself to bring us to oneness with God. He wills that we too rise as he has risen, and has told us that where the head is there the members are to be as well.

This means we are to be transformed, and that he has already begun to transform us. We must never give up hope that we shall follow our head and be where he is in glory and everlasting life. We know how our head loves us. We know too that we are called to love one another just as He loves us. We know that we are to help one another accept the transformation that will fit us for life with Christ for ever. We have to cooperate in this transformation.

Here among us Christ is often hungry and thirsty and naked and made to feel a stranger and suffer sickness or be in prison. The way we treat each such fellow member is how we treat our head. That means that we love Christ just as we long one another, and especially those who are in some need that we can help them deal with. The wonderful thing is that as we care for one another we are being transformed.

To be with Christ forever we need to be one with Christ. But we become one with him by loving others as he loves them. If one of us chooses not to help Christ in a needy brother or sister, that one chooses not to be with Christ in his Kingdom and glory. So how can any one of us pass by a person in need when we can help? And how will we know if we can help unless we ask? It may be that our help will be rejected or we may be told we can’t give the kind of help that is needed. We must offer what we have. Only thus do we become one with Christ. In every deed, we judge ourselves or let ourselves be healed & transformed.