

TWELFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME



Sunday **The Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
June 25 **Trust that Christ is with Us!**
A reflection from St. Augustine's Explanation of the Psalms

Mon **Monday of the Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time**
26 **Accepting the Gift of Integrity**
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Tues **Tuesday of the Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time**
27 **Believing in God's Presence with Us**
A reflection from Julian of Norwich's Showings

Wed **Memorial of St. Irenaeus**
28 **The Salvation God Works in Us**
A reflection from Against Heresies by St. Irenaeus

Thurs **Solemnity of Sts. Peter & Paul**
29 **The Work of Building the Church**
A reflection from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

Fri **Friday of the Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time**
30 **Letting all our Hope be in Christ**
A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

Sat **Memorial of Our Lady**
July 1 **What Mary Shows Us about Ourselves**
A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant



TRUST THAT CHRIST IS WITH US!

A reflection from St. Augustine's Explanation of the Psalms

“Don’t fear those who kill the body!” Thanks be to God’s only Son, who freely chose to become a grain of wheat and die that there might be a multitude of such grains! Jesus didn’t try to avoid enduring death — because his enduring it would enable us to share divine life. Notice how alone Jesus was before passing through death. This reminds us of the psalm verse, *“I am alone until I leave this place”*. Before death Jesus was a solitary grain, who contained an immense fullness, a capacity to be multiplied beyond measure!

How many other grains of wheat have imitated the Lord’s passion? We get acquainted with some of them when we celebrate martyrs feasts. They are members of that one grain, Jesus, but are all united by bonds of peace and charity with him as their one head and Savior. They form one single body with Christ—as you have heard times without number. We can, as it were, hear their voices as we call on God when we pray the psalms together. As though a single speaker were talking all call out to God in one voice. In God all are one.

Listen to that voice! In it we can hear the words of the martyrs who found themselves in such very difficult situations, surrounded by dangers and violent storms of hatred. They knew that their faith was in danger—for, after all, everyone has to part with this life sometimes but one must never let go of faith. What if they had given way because of torture or persecution or an unfounded love of the life they were living? Then they would forfeit the reward promised us all by God.

Hasn’t God taken away every good reason to give in to fear? The Lord himself, before he was killed, said to us: *“Don’t be afraid of those who kill the body but aren’t able to kill the spirit”*. Then he gave us a personal example and did what he counseled; he personally carried out the precept he enjoined for us. He didn’t even try to evade the violence of those who scourged him, struck him and spat on him. He didn’t resist the crown of thorns pressed into his head or the cross the soldiers nailed him to. He didn’t try to avoid any of these torments. He endured them for us.

The martyrs followed this example. They would have failed without Christ’s presence in their hearts and spirits. We too need to remember his promise: *“Know that I am with you always, until the end of time!”* If we let ourselves experience his presence in us we will never fail. This presence is the Church’s foundation.

ACCEPTING THE GIFT OF INTEGRITY

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

The readings of this past Sunday reminded us that those who are faithful to God and proclaim rightness of life often face insults and persecution and even death. They remind us as well that God knows our plight and is with us to deliver us. But God doesn't deliver his faithful ones from human death but from all that threatens their entering into the fullness that is divine life.

Jesus encouraged his disciples to stand firm in the face of difficulties. We are to proclaim the Gospel message fearlessly and without regard to the price we may have to pay for doing it. The trials not only come from without but from within ourselves; they come as ways of thinking and coping that have shaped us turn out to be obstacles to obeying God's call. God is aware of even the fall of a sparrow and in God's providence its death is made to contribute to the coming of fuller life for many.

"Don't be afraid, Jesus says, you are worth more than many sparrows."

The grace and love of God can overpower anything that opposes it—whether the opposition comes from within oneself or from others.

Recall the world's response to the death of Pope St. John Paul II. Every sort of person, of many or no religious beliefs, joined to mourn his passing. The response of young people was especially impressive, even though many of them had not done what he had called them to do. What was it that captured the hearts of so many, even though they disagreed with him practically on very basic values and beliefs?

The answer seems to be that people found in him a kind of integrity in love and service for others. They couldn't help be drawn to it. He cared for all; everyone knew it and knew that came first for him. He cared not only in words but by coming to them and trying to share something of their life even while calling them to a new kind of life. Everyone knew he did this out of genuine love for them, and that he wanted what was best for them even when they ignored his claims about the best way to follow Jesus, about repenting and beginning to live in a new way. What do people see in us? Is it Jesus' love for them—one that never turns away no matter what they do or don't do?

Do we live integrity in "loving as Jesus loves"? Do we respect others, deal with them honestly, act for their good unselfishly? This is the integrity that is expected of us as followers of Jesus. The world desperately needs people with this kind of integrity. We can have it by trusting Jesus Christ and following him.

BELIVING IN GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US

A reflection from Showings by Julian of Norwich

“Jesus said to his disciples: Don't be afraid of human beings. Everything that is now hidden will be disclosed and everything will be made clear.” I saw that God rejoices to be our Father, and to be our Mother, and to be our true spouse, and to be our brother. And Jesus rejoices that he is our Savior. These are five great joys in which God wants all that will be saved to share. Because of them we are to give praise and thanks, and love and endlessly bless our God.

During our lifetime here we have in us a marvelous mixture of both well-being and woe. We have in us our risen Lord Jesus Christ, and we have in us the wretchedness and harm of Adam's fall. Dying, we are constantly protected by Christ, and by the touch of his grace we are raised to genuine trust in salvation. We are so afflicted in our feelings — by sin and pains—and are made dark within and so blind that we can scarcely accept comfort. But in our intention we wait for God and trust faithfully God will have mercy and grace. This is God's working in us.

In goodness God opens the eyes of our understanding to give us more or less sight, according to our ability to receive it. So we are raised to well-being but also permitted to fall into woe. The mixture is so marvelous that we scarcely know what condition we are in, either ourselves or our fellow Christians. Our conflicting feelings are so extraordinary! We need the grace of each holy act of assenting to God's provident care. We make these when we feel God and truly will with all our heart to be with God.

When we do it with all our soul and all our might then we hate and despise our evil inclinations, and everything that could be an occasion of spiritual and bodily sin. Yet even so, when sweetness is hidden we fall again into blindness and so into woe and tribulation. And our comfort is that we know in our faith that by the power of Christ, who is our protector, we never assent to what is bad but complain about it and persevere, even in pain and in woe, praying until the time that God shows himself to us again.

We remain in this mixture all the days of our life. Yet God wants us to trust that he is constantly with us, and in three ways. God is with us in heaven, a true human in his own person, drawing us upward. This has been revealed in our spiritual thirst. Likewise God is with us on earth, leading us. God is with us in our soul, endlessly dwelling, ruling and guarding. Don't be afraid! Trust God's love.

THE SALVATION GOD WORKS IN US

A reflection from St. Irenaeus' Against Heresies

Salvation isn't a purely spiritual reality. If our flesh isn't saved then the Lord hasn't redeemed us with his blood, the eucharistic chalice doesn't make us sharers in Christ's blood, and the bread we break doesn't make us sharers in Christ's body. There can be no blood without veins, flesh and the whole substance of a human being, and that is what the Word of God became. As St. Paul says, "*In him, through his blood, we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven.*"

We are Christ's members and nourished by creation as God's gift to us. Christ declared the chalice, which comes from creation, is his blood and that the bread, which comes from creation, is his body. When the chalice we mix and the bread we bake receive the word of God these eucharistic elements become the body and blood of Christ, by which our bodies live and grow. As we grow we serve God leading others to Christ and to salvation.

How can anyone say that the flesh belonging to the Lord's body and nourished by his blood is incapable of receiving the gift of eternal life? In the Letter to the Ephesians we read that we are members of his body. Paul isn't speaking of some spiritual and incorporeal kind of person, for spirits do not have flesh and bones and the risen Lord does. Paul is speaking of a real human body composed of flesh, sinews, and bones, nourished by the chalice which is Christ's blood and receiving growth from the bread that is his body. He goes on to speak of bodily labors by which all are led to immortality.

The slip of a vine planted in the ground bears fruit at its proper time. The grain of wheat falls into the ground and seems to decay only to be raised up again and multiplied by the Spirit of God who sustains all things. The wisdom of God places these things at our service and when they receive God's word they become the eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ. In the same way our bodies, which have been nourished by the eucharist, will be buried in the earth and decay, but they will rise again at the appointed time. The Word of God will raise them and our mortal nature will be clothed in immortality.

God's power is shown most perfectly in weakness. God's glory is perfectly realized in the redeemed substance of a complete human being. Don't be afraid. Rejoice in all that you are and in all that you can do for our brothers and sisters working in the flesh and in the spirit.

THE WORK OF BUILDING THE CHURCH

A reflection from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

You know, brethren, that of all our Lord's apostles and martyrs the two whose feast we celebrate today seem to possess special grandeur. Nor is this surprising, since to them the Lord entrusted the Church in a special way. When St. Peter proclaimed that the Lord was the Son of God, the Lord told him, "*You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.*" In a way the Lord put St. Paul on the same level, as Paul himself says, "*He who worked through Peter in the apostolate also worked through me among the Gentiles*". These two are among the ones of whom the Lord promise—"in place of your fathers, sons are born to you"—applies.

The first fathers of the Church were the holy patriarchs and prophets who first taught the Law of God and foretold the coming of the Lord. Our Lord came, and chose to replace them by the apostles.

Let's meditate on the Lord's words, "*in place of your fathers, sons are born to you*". These words show us the responsibility of the apostles was greater than that of the prophets. The prophets were leaders of a single people and lived in a single nation and one part of the world, whereas he said of the apostles, "*You will make them princes over all the earth*". Indeed, brethren, is there any place on earth that has not seen the power and grandeur of these apostles? They are the pillars that support the church by their teaching, their prayers, and their example of patience. Our Lord strengthened them.

In the beginning these pillars of the Church were very weak. They couldn't support either themselves or others. It was wonderfully arranged by God's Providence. If they had always been strong, one might have thought their strength was their own. But now all know that their strength was entirely from God. Again, they were sent to heal the weak but they would be unable to pity weakness if they hadn't first experienced it. St. Peter was very weak indeed. The Lord strengthened him by asking him three times, "*Peter, do you love me?*" This was followed by another strengthening when the Holy Spirit was sent. Likewise, Paul was weak at first but he was made strong. "*I am certain*", he said, "*that neither death nor life nor angels nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate me from the love of God*".

Something very like this is true of all of us. We were weak but we have been given strength in Christ to build up the Church in our community and nation. Don't be afraid! Trust in the Lord always and follow in his footsteps. The Lord gives strength to do his will.

LETTING ALL OUR HOPE BE IN CHRIST

A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

The Church has experienced many storms of controversy, and from its very beginnings. The Church was born in persecution, first of Jesus and then of those who believed in and followed him. The fact that it has survived, and even flourished, is not due to the strength let alone the holiness of its members. Indeed, many of the storms have been caused by attempts to import worldly ways and values into the Church. At different times people try different ways of adapting the Church to the circumstances of the time in order to make it more of a success in their eyes—political or cultural or economic ways, or whatever. Yet the Church's only real hope of "success" is Jesus Christ its Lord.

Jesus commissioned Peter, and all the apostles, to go to the ends of the earth preaching the Gospel, teaching people to live in the way he shows us and judging things by the values that guided him. So wasn't it simplistic to think Peter's confession of faith would lead the world to God if one simply trusted in God's guidance? The years have shown, however, that no human strategy can bring everyone to Christ and lead them to live according to his teaching. We can't take matters into our hands but have to leave them to God.

Yet God does build up the Church through human instruments called in each generation. What God does is reveal in each age more about the message of Jesus. We have to keep asking: Who is Jesus and who has he called me to be and do for the sake of the Church? Jesus posed the question first: "*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*" There have been many responses, each likening Jesus to someone who had been God's special instruments in the past. Peter alone say that Jesus is "*the Son of the Living God*", and without understanding what this means practically. He was told his declaration was the work of the Heavenly Father yet he hadn't been given a full understanding of it and Jesus has to call him a Satan to make him realize this.

The foundation of the Church aren't merely human responses to Jesus, even God inspired ones. Yet they can be starting points for the divine work of transforming each of us. This won't stop until the Kingdom is fully realized. The time hasn't come and we don't know when it will or how God will lead us to it. This Church's foundation in Jesus Christ as God will reveal him. He is our hope and we are called to a transformation of all other hopes in Jesus. It seems an impossibility, humanly speaking. But for God everything is possible through Jesus.

WHAT MARY SHOWS US ABOUT OURSELVES

A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

In the Book of Revelation we are shown a Woman clothed in the powers of heaven (the stars) but dominating (the moon is under her feet) and giving birth to Jesus. He is taken to God and she has to flee into the wilderness. Christians have long interpreted this as an image of Mary, though also one of the Church and even of ancient Israel. But then in the Gospel According to Luke we see Mary as an excited, over-whelmed teenager, pregnant out of wedlock but on the way to help an elderly relative who is impossibly pregnant some 25 years after menopause. And then in the Gospel According to John, we see Mary standing in agony near Jesus' cross, watching the son she bore die, and being given by him as mother to all those who will believe in him. More people will pray to her than to anyone but Jesus and the Heavenly Father. Did Mary understand herself in any of the above three ways?

Can you put these ways of seeing Mary, all these messages about God's working in our history and in individual lives, so they form a coherent message about how you should live?

Mary gave birth to Jesus, the founder of the Church, so isn't she the founder of this Church more than anyone else but her son? Yet Mary is given us as a model to imitate and how can her way of building up the Church guide us? One has to wonder if even Mary herself could sort it all out. When she found herself standing before God in her risen humanity did she recognize herself any better than the first disciples recognized Jesus after his resurrection? Will we recognize ourselves?

When she conceived Jesus Mary couldn't imagine what would happen to her when he began his ministry, and at his death she couldn't image the Church that came to be in the next decades, and she certainly couldn't imagine the role she would play in building up that Church over its first two thousand years after her death. She is a model for us and we too are called to believe that God will accomplish wonderful things through and with us both in the years of our earthly life and in the life to come. As she walked in faith we must walk.

We are called to believe God accomplishes wonderful things in us if only we trust Jesus and walk as he and his mother did. We are not called to make sense now of everything we do and are. God makes sense of us and our lives and of our world in ways we cannot imagine. We have only to believe and walk with our God confident that he will make wonderful things come of our living in trusting faith.