

# **THE FIFTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**



- Sunday**    **The Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**July 16**    **Working with Our God**  
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant
- Mon**        **Monday of the Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time**  
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A reflection taken from a homily by St. Gregory the Great
- Tues**       **Tuesday of the Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time**  
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A reflection developed from The Parables of the Gospel  
By Fr. Leopold Fonck
- Wed**        **Wednesday of the Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time**  
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A reflection from a Bible Commentary by Archbishop Rabanus  
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A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman



# **WORKING WITH OUR GOD**

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

*“Jesus left the house and went to the lakeside, but such crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there. He told them many things in parables...”*. (Math 13:1-2) Jesus’ parables are mostly about the coming of God’s Kingdom and present it as a process of growth. We aren’t to focus our attention on the Last Day but on our response to God’s grace in all the ordinary days of our life. Jesus asks us to make our lives sincere efforts to accept God’s grace and its leadings as shaping all our choices and deeds.

To do this we need to pay careful attention to the fact that Jesus chose to teach us specifically in parables. We have just heard one about how people react to God’s graces and words by growing or failing to. He gives examples to push us to see our own living in a new light. A parable deliberately leaves room for many interpretations, and each human life, each human person, is an interpretation of the graces given and the words spoken by God to that person.

All of us pay some attention to growing things, and many of us have grown various flowers or garden plants. Jesus asks us to think of what makes the difference between success and failure, then apply that to evaluating our efforts to grow in and for God. This means (e.g.) helping others grow. For instance, some of us are concerned for the environment and the ways its degradation can affect all living things. We feel a responsibility for preserving living things and their habitats. Jesus, in effect, asks us if we accept responsibility for living and growing in a way that will make us capable of helping to protect and preserve our earth’s ecosystem. Genesis makes us God’s gardeners. This is how we can apply a parable to ourselves and see what our responsibilities to God are.

Jesus asks you to think of God’s word as a seed, and then to think of yourself as the earth in which that seed has to grow and bear fruit. You need to ask what makes you receptive or partly unreceptive to that seed. Many are used to thinking only of the kind of fruit they want their lives to bear and of how much they want to bear. Jesus points out that these matters depend on what seeds God has planted and how we respond to God’s grace. We are given gifts and they will not bear just any fruit but only particular kinds. We have to consider the kind of soil we provide, because that limits what plants we can raise and so what fruits, and how much fruit, we can hope they will bear. The coming of God’s Kingdom depends on learning to know yourself and what God calls you to do. Are you open to these words?

# **WHY THE LORD WARNS US**

**A reflection from a homily by St. Gregory the Great**

We have heard the parable of the sower many times. It doesn't seem to require an explanation, granted the the Truth Himself has explained it. But what we may too easily miss is the fact that it is a warning. The Lord, for instance, told us that the seed represents the word of God, the field the world, the birds represent demons, and the thorns riches. How many of you would have believed me if I had been the one to represent wealth as a thorn? After all, thorns pierce a person and cause pain but wealth seems only to cause pleasure.

How can wealth be like a thorn? It can because the thought of wealth can pierce the mind and torture us with the desire to have more or to find better ways to use it to make life more pleasant. In many cases, such thoughts and desires lead people into sin. As St. Paul says, the search for wealth, or its use, can be a form of idolatry—putting wealth in a place in our lives that God should occupy. If we let this happen then either the thought or the reality of wealth has pierced us like a thorn and drawn blood.

I have commented on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, but one of the Gospels clarifies the Lord's meaning by speaking of "deceptive" riches; they function like thorns because deceptive. Wealth can be deceptive because it can't be held onto, or because it can blind us to our spiritual poverty and doesn't show us how to relieve it. It doesn't tell us that if we aspire to the heights of "true honor" we should strive to become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, or if we want "true fame" we should seek membership in Heaven's Court.

These applications of the parable are only a few of the ways we may find spiritual nourishment in the Lord's words. And we must warn one another that it is not enough just to remember the words, just as it isn't enough to fill the stomach with food if it can't be digested. Doctors despair of the life of a patient who is unable to keep food down. We have received food in the form of a warning and it is not enough to store it in memory; we have to apply it to our own way of living. If you can't grow in righteousness and love of neighbor you are in danger of everlasting death. Be careful the words you have received don't fail to grow within you, and bear the fruit of holy and good deeds. Patience brings forth good fruit even in tribulation. Indeed, the more we grow in God the more hardships we have to endure to keep growing. They come so we will grow more. What shall we do? Trust in God's grace and work with God to learn to grow so as to bear much good fruit.

# **OUR RESPONSIBILITIES**

A reflection taken from a book on Jesus' parables by Leopold Fonck

By his many parables Our Lord teaches us manifold lessons. He most often teaches us that God works in people's life in quiet, almost unnoticed ways, but in doing this simultaneously teaches us about responsibilities God gives us, both individually and as a community.

Consider the parable of the mustard seed, initially a seed so small one can hardly see it. Yet it becomes something great and important. Yes, the fact that God begins small explains why many don't accept what comes to them as God's gift. So the parable teaches us to look for God in everything and not put many obstacles in the way of a seed's growth because we don't think it can come to anything great.

It helps us if we interpret the parables about growth in terms of the growth of the unbelief that is so common in our world. It was also common enough in ancient Israel. What are its causes? Take the instance of the parable of the sower as an answer to this question. By his explanations of the parable the Lord simultaneously explains why there is unbelief and shows us what God expects us to do in response to unbelief. Because we have not always believed, or believed whole heartedly, we should be able to sympathetically enter into the situation of those who openly declare their unbelief, and perhaps help God make them receptive to his gifts and calls.

So the words of our Divine Master contain for each of us an exhortation to self-examination as well as a call to evangelization. Take, for example, the hardness of the soil upon which God's seed falls. Why are people's hearts so often hard? Why are our own hearts sometimes hard and impervious to what God says to us? Because we can work so hard to make their lives good, by means of our own plans, that no other ways of living can win acceptance and put down roots in their hearts. Or one may have such deeply ingrained ways of thinking that anything which goes contrary to them isn't allowed to take root or can't be understood in a way that makes its goodness apparent. Often times people don't want to consider anything that isn't part of their present understanding of how life works; they won't even take God's words seriously because it doesn't fit how they are living.

Such causes of unbelief afflict all to a greater or lesser extent. We have a responsibility to help and seek help in such situations. We are responsible for how our human "soil" responds to God's seeds. We need one another's help to do this. It is a basic form of mutual love of neighbor.

# **BLINDING ONESELF TO GOD'S WORD**

A reflection inspired by a Bible Commentary of Archbishop Rabanus Maurus

Consider why the Pharisees so opposed Jesus. They said: *“Look, the whole world is going after him. If we let him go on like this, every-one will believe in him.”* That is our dream yet it seemed a disaster to the Pharisees. Why? Because they might lose the authority in the Jewish community and the influence over its beliefs and practices that they had labored so hard to gain. They were sure God approved of what they stood for and so saw Jesus as opposing God. Jesus, in fact, told us that this kind of thing would happen. People can see only what they already believe is best and won't listen to any alternative.

There are other ways of arriving in such a situation. King Ahab wanted to plant a vegetable garden next to one of his palaces. He was so determined to have it that nothing else seemed to matter. When his neighbor refused to sell he got depressed and wouldn't get out of bed or do anything. His wife cured him by arranging to have the neighbor killed on false charges. As soon as he was dead, Ahab recovered and went to claim the property. Is a vineyard worth a life? Is such a thing so important as to be worth forcing others to commit perjury and judicial murder, while doing such grave injustices? People get so preoccupied with their “projects” that they can't see the importance of the moral and religious norms they ignore just to get it done. Their determination blinds them to God and God's word.

Scripture says: *“The chief priests and the whole Council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death.”* They finally found two individuals who would testify to something they could use as an excuse to condemn Jesus. They knew what needed to be done and truth was not going to be allowed to stand in the way. Since Christians have done the same we can't be too censorious. Didn't Jesus say, for example, that whatever one does to the least of his brethren one does to him? So when we wrong others or slander them or get them in trouble for something they haven't done, we are doing this to Jesus. Whether a great matter or a small one it is a wrong we do to Jesus and make ourselves blind to this fact.

These examples of blindness to God's word, and of the refusal to open oneself to the Spirit, show us the tragedy of blinding oneself. Jesus accepted death and was resurrected. What he was killed to prevent, happened anyway. The whole world is believing and learning to follow Jesus by putting God's word and Spirit first. Don't blind yourself so you can't help. You will end up wronging Jesus himself.

# **LEARNING TO OPEN OURSELVES TO GOD**

Developed from a Bible Commentary by Abbot Rupert of Deutz

In the Book of Kings we find a story about the prophet Elijah which can teach us an important lesson. Elisha was with an army marching out to defend Israel from a Moabite attack. The army's water was gone. What was to be done? It seemed best to consult God, and so Elisha was summoned. Bring me a musician, he said. "*And when the musician played the power of the Lord came upon Elisha...*".

We don't know why music enabled the prophet to open himself to God's word. It was vital, nevertheless. What things help you open yourself to the influence of God's Spirit and to understand what God would have you do when you turn to God in prayer?

From this story we learn two lessons. The first is that the Spirit is not always present even for prophets. The second is the effectiveness of beautiful music in helping divine praise open us to God's presence and counsel. The grace of experiencing God's presence doesn't stay with us always, any more than it did for Elisha. Only with Jesus was this presence never absent, except perhaps on the Cross when Jesus cried out against feeling abandoned even by the Heavenly Father. But there are created things, like music, which can touch the human spirit to its depths and, when suitably joined to words and thoughts of divine praise, can revive in us the sense of God's presence and of our access to the grace of God's spirit. David says in one of his psalms: "*I opened my mouth and drew the Spirit toward me*".

There are many seemingly ordinary things which can help us open ourselves to God's Spirit and presence. We need to seek out the things that best help us. God can use anything as an instrument, after all God has created absolutely everything. These things do not cause the Spirit to be present but prepare us to receive the Spirit when it chooses to come. We should not despise the ordinary means God provides for each of us in our efforts to be open to God.

The Heavens declare the glory of God, says another of the psalms. Whatever part of creation you are sensitive to is a door or window opening on God's omnipresence and is God's gift to you. If it draws you to God it will also draw you to charity and to sharing the grace of sensing God's presence with others. We are commanded to love one another even as we have been loved by God. God has created all the beauties of the world to show love for us and shown us how to use them to live and to praise our creator and redeemer. Do not despise the gifts of God if you truly would fulfill the great commandment of love.

# **BECOMING A NEW PERSON IN CHRIST**

A reflection from Mother of Salvation by Aemiliana Lohr

God, Scripture tells us, created human kind male and female—as an image of God. Both the male and the female, then, have their prototype in God. An early Christian liturgical poem speaks of Mary as “mother of fatherly love”. The fruit of divine love is human love and love is wholly itself only as both male and female. It is this love of God, both maternal and paternal, which has become visible in the Only Son, and must become visible in us. We recognize this whenever we speak of the Church as maternal because we only find ourselves in her.

Christ always had the Church at his side, at first in a hidden way then made explicit by the Cross. Christ is enveloped by the Church as his spiritual body, so to speak. He suffered, endured and conquered as God’s servant and our Lord, and he placed the distribution of what had been won at such a cost in the hands of the Church in the form of sacraments. Only if we accept both the maternal and paternal into our way of living faith in Christ do we embody the “whole Christ” and make it present as living sacraments for the world of our day.

It is the Church, manifest image of what is motherly in God, which the author of the Book of Revelation portrays for us as the great sign of The Woman in labor. Yet it is Paul rather than John who proclaims the mystery by explaining in words what John presented in image. Paul is aware of the virginal marriage-bond between Christ and the Church—the great mystery from which all earthly marriage receives its meaning and consecration. He is aware of the Jerusalem above which he calls the “free woman” who is our mother. This is because he no longer knows Christ in a merely human way, but as glorified.

Paul speaks of Mary as the mother of a spiritual body, the Church. She is, like Christ, Paul’s great and only love, and it is only as together that we become the “whole human person” whom God desired and gave a preliminary expression in Adam and Eve. It is brought to fullness in the New Adam and the Church. This is the new humanity which we put on when we become one with Christ. It is simultaneously Christ’s body and spouse. In this unity we see the true and eternal ideal for humankind, as God had planned from the very beginning. It is the perfect and indissoluble unity of male and female as realized both in men and in women. This is new. Our task is to learn how to live this newness in new ways of loving and so relating to one another. It is a newness our world needs if all are to come to life’s fullness and the self we are in God’s sight. It depends on how men and women love each other.

# **THE PRICE OF FREEDOM IN CHRIST**

**A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman**

*“Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in righteousness and true holiness.”* This is St. Paul’s statement of what must happen to us if we are to be freed from the power of evil and of Satan. We celebrate a feast in honor of St. Mary Magdalene, about whom we know only that she was freed by Christ from seven demons, and that she so loved him as to stand by the cross and refuse to leave the empty tomb until she met the risen Lord. When she was freed from the demons’ power she began to put on the new person offered us in Christ and her entire life was a continuation of that letting go of the old and putting on the new. She is an example for us.

This call is found in every part of the New Testament. The Gospel covenant into which we enter is the means of introducing us into a state of life so different from that into which we were born that it is fittingly called a new creation. It is what differentiates a Christian from all ordinary people. By birth we were enslaved to sin, full of darkness, under the wrath of God, and we lack peace, hope, love, faith, and purity. But in Christ all these blessings are given us—the light of faith, the knowledge of faith, the will and power of heart that comes with faith. We are created anew without losing our ordinary identity.

Here we see the new creature which is the Gospel’s perfect work. It is the fruit Adam and Eve couldn’t bear when left, by their choice, to their own devices. We are given a new state of salvation that Christ brings into being in all whom God chooses. *“He delivered us from the present evil world and the power of darkness and has transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son”*. These are St. Paul’s words. Christ does this through the Holy Spirit and so makes us holy too, if we will abide in the state of grace. To be in this kingdom is to live in obedience, breathe the air of truth and love and so to be righteous.

Of course, we are not wholly secure from the peril of gross sin. Of course, we are continually defiled by small infidelities and sins of weakness. But what we are mainly concerned with is how to fulfill our calling and respond to the grace given us. How shall we increase our talents and attain to a life of complete regeneration? Faith has gained pardon but this work of letting grace transform us is what brings us our reward. We must stand by the Cross and we must ever seek the Risen Christ and his presence and love. That is the price of becoming the New Person such as we see ourselves to be in Jesus Christ. Mary Magdalen shows us the path.