

# **FOURTEENTH WEEK OF ORDINARY TIME**



- Sunday**    **The Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**July 9**     **Learning from a Gentle God**  
                  A reflection taken from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom
- Mon**        **Monday of the Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time**  
**10**         **You Are My Beloved!**  
                  A reflection by Abhishiktananda
- Tues**       **Solemnity of Our Holy Father Benedict**  
**11**         **Learning from Saint Benedict**  
                  A reflection from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx
- Wed**        **Wednesday of the Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time**  
**12**         **The Struggle to Live in the Spirit**  
                  A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx
- Thurs**      **Thursday of the Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time**  
**13**         **Seeking God above All Else**  
                  A reflection from a homily by St. John Chrysostom
- Fri**         **Memorial of St. Kateri Tekakwitha**  
**14**         **Letting God Lead Us**  
                  A reflection taken from various web sites
- Sat**         **Memorial of St. Bonaventure**  
**15**         **The Task of Spiritual Progress**  
                  A reflection drawn from two works of St. Bonaventure



# **LEARNING FROM A GENTLE GOD**

A reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

*“I am gentle and humble of heart.”* Our Master is always the same, gentle and kind. Our God’s constant concern is for our salvation but notice how he describes himself in calling us to salvation: *“Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.”* How marvelously our great God has bent down to us as fallen servants. Our Master has come to console all of us even though we have fallen! Yet we don’t feel shamed. That makes God’s words all the more impressive: *“Come, learn from me.”*

Now we know how Christ treats us. He shows pity and mercy even when we deserve punishment. Humanly speaking, you would think that a race which is like ours would have angered God and deserved to be done away with. Yet God says, *“Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.”* We are proud yet God is humble! The judge is gentle and the one who is to be judged is arrogant. The potter speaks peaceably to the clay and it talks back as though it were king.

How many times we need to hear and reflect on the words, *“Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.”* Our Master could beat us but only seeks to heal us. Reflect on this fact of unimaginable kindness! Why don’t you love this Master who never strikes a servant, even a bad one? Why aren’t we amazed at a judge who persuades us to do good rather than condemn us as criminals?

I am the Creator and I love my works. I am the sculptor and I care for all that I have made. If I thought of my dignity I wouldn’t rescue my fallen servants. But if I never treated your incurable illness you would never recover your strength. If I didn’t console you, could you do anything but die in misery? So I apply the salve of kindness to your wounds. Compassionately I bend down low enough to raise you up.

No one can lift a fallen person without stretching down at least a hand. *“Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart.”* I don’t make merely a show of love. I have given you proof of it in my deeds. You have experienced my gentleness and humbleness of heart. Didn’t I become one of you, asks our God? Think of where I came from and where I am as I speak to you. I am in Heaven, seated on a throne. Yet I have spoken as if standing next to you on the earth. I am not angry with you. Come to me! I am in very truth gentle and humble of heart. Yes, I love you. You are my beloved. Don’t be afraid. Only learn from me how to love your neighbor as I love you. Learn to be gentle and humble of heart. It is the way of love.

# **YOU ARE MY BELOVED**

**A reflection by Abhishtikananda**

*“Jesus exclaimed, “I bless you Father Lord of Heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and insightful and revealing them to children”.*” Yes, Father, for this is what it pleases you to do. The Kingdom of Heaven is actually hidden from the wise of this world, even from many who declare themselves spiritual. Many are too rich to accept the constant giving of God, too intelligent to say simply “Yes, Father” and say it with the same joy which was in the heart of Christ in finding in everything the love of the Father.

For one who has faith everything comes from the Heavenly Father and everything leads to the Heavenly Father. Health, sickness, wealth, poverty, success and failure—they all manifest the holy will of God. After all, was the Father showing less love to the Beloved Son when he was condemned and crucified than when he gave him to Mary to be caressed and fed by her?

It is a prayer—it is contemplation—to look at the sun, the stars, the sky as faith reveals in them the presence and love of the Creator. Through them God prepared the earth to be humankind’s cradle as well as the place of incarnation. Isn’t it through the sun, in particular through its light and heat, that life is made possible here on earth? It is life for God’s children, and especially for the First-Born, the Lord Jesus who blessed the sun forever simply by his divine glance. There is nothing in the world whose impact on our senses should not blossom into prayer—when it is seen through the eyes of faith, the eyes of Christ, the one who knows everything in the Heavenly Father. One could say that through our senses God looks at creation and takes delight in it.

To pray without ceasing is not so much a matter of consciously thinking of God as one of allowing Jesus to live freely in us the life of God’s Son. It is to be attentive to the Heavenly Father who comes to us by any path he may choose. It is to hear in all creatures and every event the call which comes to us from the eternity of God. The “you” which the Heavenly Father addresses mysteriously to each of us is spoken within the “you” he speaks to the Beloved Son. God says to each of us “You are my beloved!” To pray is simply to answer with Christ in the Holy Spirit, “Abba!”. This is the love of our hearts and it can express itself in every act and moment of conscious living. This is our prayer. To love in this way is to pray always.

# **LEARNING FROM SAINT BENEDICT**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx**

**Do you realize how useful it is that we celebrate feast days like this? Whoever lives badly is led to consider a life lived well and is roused to penitence. Whoever lives well begins to feel more vividly the great hope we have of salvation. Because they understand more clearly what a weak human being like themselves can do, they begin to love God more ardently, learning from the one who has already done so much.**

**St. Benedict walked in the Holy Spirit and so didn't satisfy the "*desires of the flesh*", as St. Paul calls them. The entire Rule of St. Benedict cries out with St. Paul: "*Walk in the spirit and do not satisfy the desires of the flesh!*" The spirit leads us to fasts, manual labor, and vigils. There is great security in following these counsels of the Holy Spirit, and there is no doubt but that the Holy Spirit has instituted the Rule of Blessed Benedict. One who imitates his life follows the Holy Spirit's counsels.**

**On this feast of our Holy Father Benedict we need to consider from how many dangers, how many vices, we are snatched by his teaching and example. He lived in the world not only for himself but for us. This fact should set us afire with love for God who has given us such a father and leader, such a teacher. Think of the glory God gave Benedict and you will love the one who has prepared such good things for all those who serve him**

**What is Saint Benedict like more than a burning piece of wood on an altar before God? What are we like more than pieces of wood, cold until today? Do we feel the wonderful fire of divine love with which he burns? Let us join ourselves to him. Let us live in charity and fervor of life. Let us press upward, from this very moment! We cannot conquer all that goes against the desires of the Spirit better than by letting ourselves be kindled to divine charity.**

**The desires of the flesh are like inward rust. Take the fire to it. There is a fire of tribulation and a fire of love. Each destroys the rust of the soul. David was cleansed through the fire of tribulation and Mary Magdalen through the fire of love. Yet I think both had to be cleansed by both fires. If we wish to be truly cleansed we will patiently submit to both. Living the Rule of Benedict we will be cleansed in both ways, but most of all through charity. Through the one we come to the other, and through both to God. To such perfection our Lord Jesus Christ called us when He called us to the monastic life.**

# **THE STRUGGLE TO LIVE IN THE SPIRIT**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx**

**What was Saint Benedict like? He was like you and me. His flesh was the same as ours. So why was he able to do what we can't? When he was still a school boy he fled the world but we, who have renounced it, dream of enjoying it. You can't blame it on your temptations since he had the same kinds of temptations as you. If that's what we are like, then celebrating his feast had to put us to shame. How can a boy put away every attraction but God while we seek soft living and delights? We are so often lukewarm, so often impatient, so often proud, while he was the opposite. How did he do it? He walked in the Holy Spirit and did not satisfy the desires of the flesh. We must walk in the Spirit.**

**St. Paul says, "*The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, and peace...*" The flesh gives us counsels to draw us to bad desires and the Spirit gives good ones to draw us to good desires. The flesh counsels laziness and talkativeness. It counsels us to let our eyes and minds wander and see things that might awake covetousness. The flesh counsels us to seek special foods and to eat to satiation. It counsels sleep, indolence, soft blankets and nice clothing.**

**In order that we might not be led astray by such desires the Spirit counsels that we never be lazy, or wander about, or waver, or be profligate in words, but always move toward some good work. The Spirit counsels us to be serious, mature, love silence and quietness and to spurn gossip and hanging around with people just for company. The Spirit counsels that we mortify our body by abstinence, vigils and hard work, and that we keep our heart directed to meditation, prayer, sorrow for sin, and devotion.**

**Whoever follows the counsels of the flesh ends up satisfying the desires of the flesh. Whoever follows the counsels of the Spirit conquers the desires of the flesh. The flesh moves to envy and following one's own will. It seeks to feel close to the high and mighty and wants one to be consulted and share in the handing out of offices and authority. Such a person begins to envy those who have what he doesn't. But the counsel of the Spirit is that we love nothing of this world and always seek the good of others rather than our own. When tempted gravely by the flesh Benedict threw himself into thorns and thistles. He entered the Kingdom of God through tribulations. Whoever visualizes himself doing what the saints, especially Benedict, did makes progress in hope and love for God. Such a person has a great hope for arriving at holiness. He walks the way of the saints.**

# **SEEKING GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE**

**A reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom**

**Has anyone ever lived in greater poverty than the prophet Elijah? He chose his poverty, great as it was, because he was rich in spirit, because of his greatness of soul. He valued all that fills the world as nothing compared to God who made all. Compared to the truths of religion everything else is of little value. If he had valued worldly things he wouldn't have been content to have nothing but a cloak. He owned only the one garment because all the things the world uses to hide our lowly reality seemed to him no more valuable than mud. Even gold meant nothing important to him!**

**Kings, who valued gold above human life, hung on Elijah's words. They had need of that poor man, though they had much gold and all sorts of other things. It seemed that the man's poor cloak was more resplendent than the purple the kings wore. Even if he lived in a cave it was more glorious than a king's court. So when he was taken up into heaven he left to his disciple only his prayer shawl. He said in effect, "With this I wrestled with the devil. Take it and it will also protect you against him!" Poverty undertaken freely for God is a powerful weapon, an unconquerable defense and tower.**

**Elisha received the prayer shawl as a most precious inheritance. That is indeed what it was. It was worth more than any amount of gold. Though this gift to his disciple it seemed that there were two Elijahs, one on earth and one in heaven. Now I know that all of us consider the righteous to be blest. All of us would like to be such persons. What, then, if I tell you that all of us who partake in the Holy Mysteries have received an inheritance that is even greater than the one Elisha received?**

**When the Son of God ascended into heaven he left us his very body and blood. He ascended with it but also left it to us. There are to be as many Christs as there are believers in Christ and partakers in his Mysteries. So why are we ever downcast and why do we weep and lament or feel fear when difficulties come to us? What will God refuse to do to bring us to salvation when the Only Begotten Son didn't refuse to give his body and blood? We trust in this and the hope it gives is ours. What can be better than to call on God continually, devoting ourselves to prayer for others as much as for ourselves? Christ shows us how to do this while living all other virtues and coming to endless blessings. May God grant us all these graces and blessings through our Lord Jesus Christ!**

# **LETTING GOD LEAD US**

## **A reflection taken from Catholic Web Sites**

**Tekakwitha (in Mohawk the name means “One Who Bumps into Things”) lost her immediate family to smallpox and her sight was damaged. She was raised by her father’s clan and very early learned about Christian faith from a converted clan member. She decided very quickly that she wanted to be a Christian and that she was not to marry but to belong to God. She kept to this decision in spite of persuasion and pressure, and not long after baptism (at the age of 19) she went to an all-Christian village near Montreal. She lived there with some clan relatives. She made a private vow of virginity as a way of giving herself wholly to God, and lived as devoutly as circumstances allowed. She and a peer formed a spiritual friendship to help each other do whatever seemed to lead them to God. She died in her friend’s arms at 25/26.**

**No one knows how or why this young woman conceived the idea of being God’s spouse. The missionaries had not told their converts about consecrated life for women. Nevertheless, that is how she and her friend wished to live as their way to God. They prayed much, went to Mass and catechism classes, they supported one another in doing the daily tasks that were expected of women to support those of their longhouse (family and clan). They used Mohawk tradition to express their devotion to God; e.g., by using the traditional Mohawk practice of sleeping on thorns that would draw blood). They fasted and ate plainly things that were not especially flavorful and, in general, denied them-selves. They did all this with a minimal knowledge of Christian theology and European religious practices.**

**All this means that they were not so much imitating what Europeans did as expressing their gift of self to God in ways that made sense for a person of their cultural background. They were guided by God in a more radical way most of us might find comfortable. What is important is shown to be giving oneself to God and doing it in a way that helps others. Because the Mohawk peoples had lost a large part of their population to smallpox, had been defeated in war by the French (of Canada) and forced to accept missionaries and accept the intrusions by which these tried to alter their culture, Kateri’s people were in a very difficult place culturally and in their self-understanding. It was important that converts show they could be loyal Mohawks as well as Christians. What persons like Kateri did is still controversial among Mohawks. They were in a world but not of it, letting God guide them, and so their people, through the example of their lives.**

# **THE TASK OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS**

A reflection developed from On the Triple Way & On Perfection

Negligence in making spiritual progress can be understood only as negligence in using the means and opportunities God provides. It can arise from weariness and discouragement due to repeated failures, to a distorted idea of perfection, or to a disregard for practices that lead one to perfection.

In considering discouragement, one must distinguish between a careless and a fervent pursuit of closer union with God. It is easy to be discouraged when we realize how far short of our ideal we are and how painful progress is. But there is a healthy dissatisfaction with self and we can use it to motivate ourselves to greater efforts. We must let ourselves be motivated primarily by love for God. Do we want perfection for ourselves or simply because God wants it?

This is connected with erroneous ideas of Christian perfection. One must not think of it as a matter only of what one does. That is pharisaic externalism. Nor is it a matter of multiplying formal prayers, practicing more mortification, or cultivating external mannerisms. Ask yourself: With what do I equate perfection? Is it a matter of special spiritual experiences or of seeking “religious” prestige and so authority? Do I seek “sweetness” in prayer rather than the God of all sweetness? Am I discontented by spiritual dryness? It is easy to seek human benefits from our supposedly spiritual strivings, but perfection is a matter of loving God and not of gaining benefits from efforts to be close to God.

If humility is the foundation of our spiritual life then we will use every opportunity to practice it. Do you seek to avoid humiliation? How can one be humble without accepting it gladly? Further, as long as charity remains a purely human matter of living without conflict, or in an atmosphere of mutual respect and praise, one has not gone beyond the merely human. I need the mercy of God and this motivates me to be kind, gentle, understanding, and merciful to others. One has to be ready to make sacrifices, even for those whom one doesn't like.

In order to make progress we must know ourselves as thoroughly as possible. Do I seek to discover not only my faults but the motives behind them? It is often more important to know why we fall than to know we have. Let's never allow ourselves to fall into “spiritual senility” but keep ourselves spiritually alive and youthful. St. Francis said, “Brethren, let's begin now, for up to now we are as though we had done nothing”.