

THIRTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME



Sunday The Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 2 Making Necessary Choices
A reflection by Fr. Romano Guardini

Mon Feast of St. Thomas, Apostle
3 Sharing the Light we have Received
A reflection developed from a treatise by St. Chromatius

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Tues Tuesday of the Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time
4 Freedom to Follow God
A reflection developed from a discourse by Bishop de Smedt

Wed Wednesday of the Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time
5 A Hospitality Born of Faith
A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

Thurs Thursday of the Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time
6 Trusting in God's Abiding Care
A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri Friday of the Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time
7 How the Cross Looks to Eyes of Faith
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine

Sat Memorial of Bl. Eugene III
8 Nor My Will but Your Will Be Done
A reflection made up of extracts from a letter of St. Bernard to Pope Eugene III



Making Necessary Choices

A reflection by Fr. Romano Guardini

“Jesus said to his disciples, “Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me”.” The message of Jesus is one of good will. He proclaims the Father’s love and the advent of his Kingdom. He calls people to the peace and harmony of life as lived in the divine will. Yet the first reaction isn’t oneness but dividedness. The more profoundly Christian a person becomes the deeper the gap between that person and all who refuse to follow Christ.

The width of the gap is proportionate to the strength of the refusal. And this split runs right through our most intimate relationships. Genuine conversion isn’t a matter of natural dispositions or personal histories but the most personal and private decision one can make. One makes a decision for Christ and another doesn’t. Hence the possibility of a kind of schism even between father and son, friend and friend, one member of a household and another. When it comes to a choice between domestic peace and Jesus one must value Jesus more, even more than the most dearly beloved person.

This can mean cutting into the very core of our life. Temptation presses us to preserve our human ties and abandon Christ. But Jesus warns us that if we hold onto “life” as we have had it, and sacrifice Jesus to do this, we will end up losing the life we want to keep. If we let go for Jesus’ sake we will find ourselves and in the heart of an immeasurably rich reality. This is difficult. It is the cross.

Here we touch the mystery of Christian faith. It is inseparable from Calvary. Ever since Jesus walked the way of the cross it is firmly planted across every Christian road, for every follower of Christ. Each of us has a personal cross. Something in us revolts. We want to preserve the self we are. We try to go around the Cross. But Jesus says unequivocally that if we hang on to life as we already have it then we will lose genuine life. One who surrenders to the Cross will find a new self and new life and one that is immortal and shares in the very life that is Christ’s.

On the last journey to Jerusalem, shortly before the Transfiguration, Jesus’ words about the necessity of the Cross are repeated. *“For what is the profit if one gains the whole world and loses one’s life? What will a person give in order to buy life itself?”* Here the point of the sword plunges deep. Here is the dividing line between one person and another, between the one who wants most of all to believe and everyone else. It cuts between me and my very self. The lesson of the Cross is the great lesson of self-surrender, and self-conquest.

SHARING THE LIGHT WE HAVE RECEIVED

A reflection developed from a Treatise by St. Chromatius

The Lord tells us: *“You are the light of the world; a city set on a hill can't be hidden, nor do people light a lamp in order to put it under a basket.”* He said this to his disciples, and perhaps especially to his apostles, before he said it to you. Do you feel yourself too weak for this noble task? So were the apostles. We hear a good deal of St. Peter's weakness and St. Paul's but today we add a celebration of the weakness of St. Thomas. Isn't it odd to say we “celebrate” weakness? It isn't because it is precisely in weak people that God has chosen to show his strength and glory. God plans to do marvelous things through you. Because you are weak no one who sees these things can mistake them for your deeds but must see God through you. And that is precisely how Thomas saw God; he saw God in Jesus.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Sun of Justice. So those who are like him are called lights for the world. He pours out his light through us and he begins by inundating us with the light that is knowing him as our Lord and our God. Those are the words that the light of faith tore from Thomas' heart and lips as he fell to his knees before the Jesus he finally saw by faith. His confession has become that of the entire Church, each of us included.

We too have been enlightened, even if once we walked in the darkness of doubt or unbelief. We have been made light out of darkness. *“Now you are light in the Lord, so walk as children of the light”*. What do we have to do? We need only proclaim that God has become human and saved us, and we do it even more effectively by our deeds than by our words. St. John tells us that doing this simply means loving one another as Jesus loves us.

If we fail to live in the light we veil over a light everyone desperately needs. The light in us is like a talent and we must not hide it but use it to help others find Christ, everyone's light. The brilliant lamp which has been lit for the sake of salvation should always be shining through us. We have as light the commandments, the grace that is the Spirit, and our brethren in the community of faith to help us. Set the light that is in you upon the lampstand that is the Church and your own community. Let others see the beauty that is the light and love of Christ shining in and through you. What you have been given, give freely to all you meet. St. John says, *“Little children, let us love one another!”* You are no weaker than Thomas was. Accept the same gift he accepted and accept it with all your heart and mind and strength.

FREEDOM TO FOLLOW GOD

A reflection taken from a book by Bishop E.J. de Smedt

Humanity seeks progress along a way that leads to happiness. It is a universal urge and the way to pursue it is indicated by a law written in us as a natural tendency to seek God. It works as a law leading us to balance and unity. All creatures seek to preserve their own unity as a being and humans seek a higher unity that requires they serve humanity. Christ perfects this. No one can achieve real happiness unless they bring their actual conduct into line with the plan of their Creator and attaining a union with God their ultimate end.

All of this is endangered by sin, whose essence it is to destroy humanity's unity and ability to work together in service of life and God. Rebellion against God's plan brings about humanity's enslavement to its own passions. That is followed soon enough by pangs of conscience, disruption of families, insecurity, social conflicts, wars, and the break with God. If all this is to be avoided we must be free to follow Jesus in worshipping God and serving God's plan for creation and for humankind. It is a freedom worth celebrating and one that must be treasured and protected.

We all know that Jesus came to restore unity with God to sinful mankind. His mission was to re-establish the created order's orientation toward its Creator—raising up fallen humankind and restoring the union between humanity and God. But the work entrusted to Jesus by the Heavenly Father doesn't stop there. All men and women are called to be children of God, to live in Christ, to find a place in a society of which Jesus is the head. None of this can happen if Christians are not free to worship as God calls them to and they can't have this freedom if others don't have it too.

Freedom to worship according to one's conscience is freedom to follow the conscience which faith in Christ forms in us. We see we are obliged to enact the order of mutual love and service willed by God and to use this as a springboard to true union with God. The essence of power, as God shows it to us, is not subjecting people to ends that are not their own. Jesus' power is to draw all to love and serve each other and humanity and its God-given destiny and do it freely Christ appeals to the whole community of his chosen ones to spread his Kingdom effectively. It is to be a Kingdom of love and mutual support in carrying out our God's loving designs for human welfare and happiness. This is the meaning of our celebration of human freedom and, in particular, the freedom to worship God as our conscience shows us we should.

A HOSPITALITY BORN OF FAITH

A reflection inspired by a text of Sr. Dianne Bergant

Hospitality is considered in Scripture to be a very serious obligation. In fact this was true even in pagan religion. With this fact in mind recall the first Scripture reading, the story of Elisha and a Shunammite woman. She freely offered hospitality to the prophet and his servant and even had a room set aside for his use when he was in her neighborhood. In wondering what he could do to repay her he was alerted to the fact that she had no son; i.e., she had no heir and so no one to care for her in her old age. In asking God to give her a son Elisha was offering her the equivalent of Social Security and a pension, besides taking away the social stigma that went with barrenness. The duty of hospitality was one of carrying for strangers who otherwise would have no safe place to stay and no one to care for their well-being as travelers.

Jesus has strong words to address to us about our duty to be hospitable. "*One who receives you*, he tells them, "*receives me.*" By contrast, if we deny hospitality to anyone who needs it we are denying it to Jesus. This reminds us of Jesus' picture of Judgment Day when all will be judged by the way they have treated others, especially those who were helpless to take care of themselves. If you follow this line of thought you realize that Jesus' expects those who proclaim the Gospel, those who seek to witness to God's love, to be helpless to care for themselves. He expects us to rely on others to take care of us while we witness to God and to Jesus as God's savior.

Why did Jesus expect this to be the case? Because to serve God and the Good News he expected us to have to leave behind the family ties we had grown up depending on for security and the satisfaction of our ordinary needs. We have to be a light to the world of people who haven't seen or believed in Jesus and the love he reveals to us. We have to find people who will stand in for the ordinary social supports that we grew up with and used to discover Jesus and his message, and so follow the call of faith. It can be scary to leave everything and follow Jesus. Who will help us? Generally, people have to turn to a community of believers. Paradoxically, we need one another's support to leave behind ordinary human supports. Jesus tells us very strongly that we are called to support others in just this way. It is part of what it means to love and Jesus loves. It is what he did for his disciples and we must follow him in doing the same.

TRUSTING IN GOD'S ABIDING CARE

A reflection developed from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

Elijah had thought he was all alone when he fled from Queen Jezebel, though he was not. He was ministered to by angels and sustained by miraculous interventions he seemed to himself to be one against many. He prayed, "I alone am left and they seek to take my life". The Lord responded that actually he had a host of faithful worshippers, symbolized by the number 7,000 of those who had never worshipped Baal.

Elisha, by contrast, was given the privilege of knowing that he was one of a great host who were fighting the Lord's battles, even though he might seem to be alone. When his servant thought they were surrounded by Syrian soldiers Elisha prayed that the Lord might open his eyes. "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw that the mountain where they were was full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha." To him was revealed one of the most consoling of beliefs, that in the communion of saints.

His eyes were purged so that he could see and he could even share this vision, if only by a special grace. We have received such a grace. The vision seen by Elisha's servant matches the blessed privilege St. Paul tells us we are given. "*You have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the assembly and church of the first-born and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than that of Abel*".

We dwell in the midst of an innumerable company of angels and of the spirits of the just! We have been baptized into their fellowship. We are given them as our guardians. We are remembered in their prayers. We dwell in the very presence and court of God and of the eternal Son, our Savior. He has died for us and rose again for us and now intercedes for us before the throne of the Heavenly Father. The truth is that we have graces and privileges far greater than Elisha's.

Angels are among us and do wonders, even if we and the world don't realize what is happening. Our faith tells us this is how things are. We have only to believe. Everything we need is ours. We shall have clear vision and even now have clear and deep-seated conviction of the reality of the unseen world. What we need to do is pray for the grace of communicating this faith knowledge to those around us. We don't need to explain how all this can be because we believe. We must ask God to help by his grace to share our daily faith.

HOW THE CROSS LOOKS TO EYES OF FAITH

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

Let us be humble and gentle and keep to the straight path the Lord has laid down for us. A psalm says, “He guides the humble in the right path and teaches his way to the poor”. But we find ourselves subjected to many trials. How can we persevere in humility, and do it gently, unless we learn to keep all our hopes fixed on Jesus and our faith knowledge of where he leads us?

The humble person doesn’t resist the providential will of God. Such a person knows Christ’s yoke is easy and Christ’s burden is light. But this is so only for the shoulders of faith. Besides, we are humble only if we seek only God’s consolations and view all hardships as training given by a loving parent to a beloved child. We cannot see how it will help us become what we know it will, because it comes from one who loves us. If we let our faith show us this way of seeing things we know we are walking with Christ no matter what happens. He says, “I am the way.” We want more than anything else to learn to walk in this way.

The Heavenly Father didn’t spare the Only Son but asked him to “empty himself and assume the condition of a slave”, all for our sake. Thus he gave himself up to be insulted, scourged, and crucified and so show us how we too must walk in order to come to life’s fullness. If we show our humility by waiting patiently for something we don’t yet see we can rest secure in the knowledge that the Son rose from the dead and will raise us up too.

The key to our humility, as to our hope, is the faith engendered confidence that “the Lord disciplines those he loves and lays the rod on every child whom he acknowledges as his own”. That is the confidence and hope that faith teaches us. We know the Heavenly Father didn’t spare his Only Son any of the trials that seem so difficult to us. He was not punishing the Son for disobedience because we know he was sinless. So let’s not allow ourselves to be afraid of what may befall us. Do not be afraid! That is what our God tells us again and again. Believe that everything happens for your good and to fit you to share the life and love that is our God’s.

It is written of us: “You are the Body of Christ!” It should not surprise us, then, if we walk the same way Jesus did. We have been baptized into his dying and this did not end at the baptismal font. We walk with Christ to the Cross and we ourselves do it bearing our own cross. He told us that we must do this in order to follow him. But don’t forget that the cross is a door to life beyond our imaginings.

NOT MY WILL BUT YOUR WILL BE DONE!

A reflection made of extracts from a letter by St. Bernard to Pope Eugene III

You chose to be lowly in the house of your God and you took the lowest seat. But it has pleased God to call you up higher. So you have gone up to the highest place and you must fear it rather than enjoy it, lest the Lord cast you down from the high place he gave you. You have been chosen for a high place but it is not a safe place; what is more sublime is not for that reason more secure. It is an awesome place because it is Peter's place. The Lord has made you the steward of his house and placed you over all that he has. You must not depart from the Lord's way!

May you seek nothing as your own, except perhaps giving your very life, if that should be required of you. If Christ has sent you then you have been sent to minister to others and not to be ministered to. You must minister not only with your possessions but by giving your very self. You minister to one who is no servant but a spouse and a most beautiful one. You must embrace her and love her. From whom can your spouse hope for the liberty she needs if not from you?

Who will grant me before I die to see God's Church as she was in ancient days, when the apostles lowered the nets to catch not gold or silver but souls! How I long to know that you have inherited not only the chair of Peter but the voice with which he cried out to Simon Magus: "May your money go to hell with you!" That's the kind of thunder that is needed.

This is what the Church who is also your mother hopes for and looks for. Let every planting which was not set out by the hand of the Lord be torn up. This is why you have been placed over peoples and kingdoms; you are to tear up and destroy but also to plant and to build up! Many want to hear that the axe is cutting into the roots of the bad trees. I and many others would rather hear that flowers have appeared in our land and that the time for sowing has come. Let the vine be pruned so that it may bear more fruit and so that what was sterile may become fruitful again.

Do not be afraid. Be strong! Claim for yourself constancy and vigor of spirit. God has given you a part of his inheritance which has not fallen to your brethren. But remember in all your doings that you are a weak human being. Keep ever before your eyes a reverence toward the one who takes away the life breath even of princes.