

THE SEVENTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME



Sunday **The Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
July 30 **What Is Your Deepest Desire?**
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Mon **Memorial of St. Ignatius of Loyola**
31 **Discovering Hidden Treasures**
A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. E.A. Armstrong

Tues **Memorial of St. Alphonsus Liguori**
Aug 1 **Salvaging Our Past**
A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. E.A. Armstrong

Wed **Wednesday of the Seventeenth Week of Ordinary Time**
2 **Contemplation and God's Word**
A reflection developed from Origen's Commentary on Matthew

Thurs **Thursday of the Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time**
3 **Christ Always With Us**
A reflection from Life in Christ by Nicholas Cabasilas

MONTHLY MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri **Memorial of St. John Mary Vianney**
4 **On Prayer**
A reflection from a catechetical talk by St. John Vianney

Sat **Memorial of Our Lady**
5 **The Model Mary Gives Us**
A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant



WHAT IS YOUR DEEPEST DESIRE?

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

The tale of Solomon's dream is known to all of us but not all have seen its application. If you had a dream of God coming to you and asking you to put your deepest desire into words what would you say? Solomon asked "an understanding heart to distinguish right from wrong" and he asked it so he would be able to serve the People of Israel as ultimate appeal judge for all the most difficult cases. He wanted to fulfill the duties of his vocation as perfectly as possible. That's something we all want to do, but is it our deepest desire to serve God by serving one another? And the service is to help people find out what is right or wrong, good or bad, for them! What about you?

Now put this question together with the parables about the Pearl of Great Price, the Hidden Treasure and the Drag Net. What would be for you the ultimately valuable pearl or the treasure that would make your life perfect? Is your life like a dragnet bringing you all kinds of things but leaving you unable to sort them into what is and isn't to be kept? Is God your perfect pearl and treasure? Do you decide what to seek and keep by figuring out how each thing can help you draw closer to God? The Dream of Solomon and the three parables ask us this?

The point of the parables of the pearl and the treasure is to ask you what is so important to you that you will give up everything else for it. For Jesus the answer is God as my Heavenly Father. So Jesus does everything he sees as God's will for him and refuses to do anything that doesn't seem to him to be God's will. Are we ready to follow Jesus, or do we seek something else more?

Are you like Solomon seeking unselfish service of others? Or like St. Paul seeking Jesus as your model for serving God and others? Have you ever deliberately answered this question? Or do you hide the answer even from yourself? God has come to us right here and now and asked us this question: What do you really want more than anything else? God asks us to be honest, first of all with ourselves.

God has called us. God loves us so much he is ready to suffer anything to win our love. God is never going to give up. Does that amaze you and attract you or does it frighten you and make you want to hide? Are you ready to face the opportunity to find the fulfillment of all you have worked for through a lifetime? A perfect pearl, for one who has made of life of dealing in gems, is the fulfillment of everything. Or will you throw over everything and begin anew from the beginning? What opportunity is God offering you today, deep in your heart?

DISCOVERING HIDDEN TREASURES

A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. E.A. Armstrong

Rabbi Judah lived among very poor people whom he constantly helped when health emergencies arose. At one point he discovered that he had nothing left but a cow and a field for her to graze in. And then the cow stepped into a hole in the ground and broke her leg. When he went to help the cow he discovered that the hole resulted from the collapse of a buried chest which contained a great treasure. Now he could help the poor more than ever.

St. Ignatius, as all know, had adopted the military profession and was determined to become a victorious and heroic soldier, attractive to all the ladies. But he was gravely wounded and had to spend months in bed in order to regain use of one of his legs. He wanted to read stories about gloriously heroic soldiers but there weren't any in the house and nowhere to buy them. So he ended up reading the lives of saints. As he read he came to realize that the saints were heroes in a more wonderful way than military conquerors. He realized that God was speaking to him through his old dreams and showing him a better way to be heroic and glorious. Hidden in some rather shabby dreams about attracting women by his military exploits he discovered something much more wonderful. After making arrangements for the care of a child he had begotten out of wedlock he set out to seek the path to sanctity and God that led him to found the Jesuit order.

Jesuits may be allowed to make a special vow to go wherever the Pope tells their service is most needed. So they make a vow to accept the most difficult opportunities to advance the Gospel. It is a vow to act heroically to meet others spiritual needs. Ignatius never forgot his first understanding of his vocation and passed it on in a new form. He believed it would lead him and his companions to a vastly richer life.

You don't have to be a Jesuit to respond to God's call by giving your entire life and self to God and in service of others. The heart of this service is leading others to give themselves to God along with you. But it isn't obvious how you can or should do this. Ignatius had to walk a long road before he discovered how he could do it. What God calls us to do is to invest ourselves as whole-heartedly as Ignatius in seeking how to lead others to God in the circumstances of our life and the opportunities it opens to us. This is what we are to invest our minds and hearts in discovering, and then in living.

SALVAGING OUR PAST

A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. E.A. Armstrong

Alphonsus Liguori as a young lawyer was dedicated to helping the poor by bringing them justice. He was a very good lawyer but found he could do comparatively little in this way. Perhaps, he thought, helping them spiritually is a better way. So he became a priest and sought to be sent to the poorest and most neglected rural parishes—ones that most avoided because they couldn't pay a priest enough to support himself.

This situation can be compared to that of a person who made his living by buying and salvaging whatever he could from dilapidated buildings. One of them had been left run down and leaky by an old man who died seemingly with nothing. His heir looked at the house and the trash that filled it and sold it for salvage. But after clearing out the trash the salvage operator examined the structure carefully and discovered that several of the inside walls had been used to hide money. He invested a few thousand dollars and found several million.

Alphonsus Liguori discovered that the church in his day was trying to help people discover their Christian duties by treating each new set of circumstances like a legal case. Since there were so many ways of looking at each case there was a forest of opinions about what was obligatory and what was not. There seemed no way out of this impasse. Using his skills, Alphonsus found a way. It was so helpful that he has earned the title of a Doctor of the Church.

When we hear God's call to love him above all else and to love our neighbors as ourselves we often don't know how we should answer this call in the concrete. Perhaps we are in a situation a bit like that of St. Alphonsus and the people of his time. But God has given us both experience and intelligence. We can use this to find good ways of serving others, and so serving God. This is God's Providence. God always gives us what we need in order to know and do his will.

St. Alphonsus may seem an entirely active person. In some ways that is what he was. Yet he thought very hard about how to use his skills and experiences to help others find the way to God. A vocation to a contemplative life is, among other things, a call to careful thinking about what we can do for those with whom we live, about how we can love them so that they see their vocation and opportunities for love more clearly and live them out more faithfully. That is part of what a contemplative prays for. God's first call to us all is to such prayer. But that is only the start.

CONTEMPLATION AND GOD'S WORD

A reflection from Origen's Commentary on Matthew

Scripture gives us many consoling words to carry with us along the path that brings us to God's Kingdom. "Seek and you will find!", for instance, gives us assurance that God will guide us to all the resources we need to know and do his will. This is reaffirmed by the text, "Everyone who seeks finds". We are seeking, so to speak, pearls of great price and God tells us that the search will never be in vain. Paul said, "I have accepted the loss of everything in order to gain Christ"; in speaking of "everything" he refers to things like ordinary pearls but to speak of gaining Christ is to speak of one supremely precious pearl.

See how precious are the Scriptures, especially to you who would seek to love God with all your heart and soul and strength. That is why Scripture is often called a lamp. Its light is so precious to those in darkness but it isn't what they seek. They seek dawn and sunrise. They seek the sort of radiance the Israelites once saw on the face of Moses, and which seems to shine from the prophets too. But these are only a hint of the glory revealed on the face of Christ revealed to us on the mount of transfiguration. As Paul said, "compared with his glory what formerly was glorious now seems to have no glory at all". We seek and need, a perfect light, one that will supersede all others.

Every one of us will think, "I am only at the beginning of a spiritual life. I need teachers and guides, maybe even guardians, until the time arrives for me to enter into the full inheritance God has prepared." The inheritance, the pearl of great price, is the maturity that is Jesus Christ living fully in me. But it will only come if we can see what that maturity demands of us. It is a matter of knowledge, but not only knowledge. It is a matter of practical love and the knowledge we see in our study of Scripture and our prayer and all our thinking and striving to understand are but means and preludes to that love.

The Law and the prophets prepared for the coming of the fullness in Jesus Christ. Our studies and prayers too are preparations for that fullness. It has come but we have to enter into it and God leads us through arduous and prolonged exercises to help us accept what entering into it will involve. Do not be afraid! Once again we need to hear these words and believe them! If God is for us who can successfully oppose us. Perhaps we will have to bear a cross as we struggle in our darkness and pray for the Dawn. Don't be afraid. Christ is with us, even to the end of the age. He has given us his word to help us walk the way to his Kingdom.

CHRIST ALWAYS WITH US

A reflection from Life in Christ by Nicholas Cabasilas

The interior life of a new man or a new woman, created in the image of God, develops in the womb that is our world and, after being shaped and formed, is born into the perfect and ageless world beyond. An unborn child is formed according to the order we call Nature and in the darkness of an ordinary womb and everything which happens is intended to prepare it for a future life in the light of Christ.

The Apostle Paul implied this in writing to the Galatians: “My little children, it is for you that I experience again the pains of childbirth—until Christ is formed in you”. An ordinary unborn child has no perception of this process but for a Christian there are many indications of what is going on, and of what the next world will be like. This is because this life is not yet a present reality for a child in the womb. It pertains solely to that person’s future. No ray of sunlight penetrates to the child’s dwelling place before its birth, not does anything pertaining to our ordinary life. With an adult this isn’t so.

The life to come is actually brought into this life and mingles with it. With the loving kindness the Son has shown us and then a heavenly perfume is poured into this world’s foul air, just as the bread of angels is given to us. It is this fact that makes Christians able to prepare themselves for the life to come even while they live in this life. Yet they try to live and act as though they already possessed the next life.

Listen to the Apostle Paul: “Now it is no longer I who live but Christ is living in me”. Scripture is filled with such sayings, and over and above all of them is the promise of Christ to be with the holy ones forever. “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” When God provided to the earth the seeds of life, and allowed also fire and the sword, he didn’t go away and leave us to tend the seeds—let alone kindle fire or take the sword. Christ himself is present truly, giving us the will and the power to act, just as Blessed Paul said. Christ himself kindles the fires of love and then feeds it. No one does anything good without the help of the Supreme Good. The way of living that leads to eternal life and its blessedness is a life lived in Christ and as Christ’s own life.

While we live thus we live in Christ and Christ in us. As long as we experience the life of Christ in his Body, the church, we know Christ is with and in us. We don’t even have to turn to do more than let ourselves be conscious of Christ presence. This is a source of strength and goodness. It is a beginning of that life which will be ours forever. All we have to do is cultivate this life day by day. His presence is grace and grace is a sharing in God’s strength and life.

ON PRAYER

A reflection from a catechetical talk by St. John Vianney

The glorious duty of a human being is to pray and love. My friends, reflect on this: A Christian's treasure is not on earth but in heaven. Let our thoughts be where our treasure is. If you pray and love you know that is where your happiness lies.

Prayer is nothing but union with God. When one has a heart that is pure and united with God, one is given a kind of serenity and sweetness that makes one ecstatic. A light seems to surround one with a marvelous brightness. God and the soul are fused like two bits of wax that no one can pull apart, ever. This union is a lovely thing. It is happiness beyond understanding.

My friends, your hearts are small but prayer stretches them and makes them capable of loving God. Through prayer we receive a foretaste of heaven and something of paradise comes upon us. Prayer never leaves us without sweetness. It is honey that flows into the soul and makes everything sweet. When we pray properly sorrows disappear like snow before the sun.

Prayer also makes time pass very quickly, and with such great delight that one doesn't notice its length. Once while I was a delivery boy in Brest and most of the other boys were sick I had to make a long journey. I prayed to my Good God and, believe it or not, the time it took didn't seem long.

Some people immerse themselves as deeply in prayer as fish do in water, just because they give themselves totally to God. There is no division in their hearts. O how I love these people! Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Colette used to see our Lord and talk to him just like we talk to one another.

How unlike them we are! We often come to church with no idea of what to do, or what to ask for. And yet if we were going to see another human being we would have a definite idea of why we were going. Still worse, it seems as though some speak to God as if God were a bother. "I only have a couple of things to say to you, Lord, and then we will be rid of one another." I often think that when we come to adore the Lord we would receive all we ask if we only asked with living faith and a pure heart.

Once someone asked John Vianney what he did during all the hours he spent before the Blessed Sacrament. "I look at Him and He looks at me", was his reply. Perhaps we can do likewise.

THE MODEL MARY GIVES US

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

The Gospels, most especially that of St. Luke, present Mary as the model believer and the model believers should follow as they seek to do God's will in imitation of Jesus. Every time we pray the Rosary we learn that no sooner did Mary know that her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant, in spite of her age, than she set out on the relatively difficult journey required to go and help her deal with her condition and the birth of her child. Mary was herself pregnant and it may be that this created some discomfort for her but she paid no attention to her own comfort, her attention was on helping Elizabeth in any way she could.

Once we realize what a self-forgetful, helping and decisive person Mary is we are not surprised that her journey is that of a Christ-bearer. She brought Jesus to the one who was to announce him. She knew his birth was God's special gift and that God wanted her to help Elizabeth, because otherwise God's angel messenger wouldn't have spoken about her. God brought together two dedicated and loving servants to help each other fulfill the words they had believed would be fulfilled. Mary's motto seems to be: If it's God's will then it's my will.

It is easy for some to think of Mary as just an uneducated peasant girl. Yes, she was that, but she was never "just" that. She knew she had a role to play that was of world-wide, even cosmic, importance. That is how the Book of Revelation presents her. The child she bears is the fulfillment of all Israel's hopes, even if some won't accept this during their earthly life. She knows all who oppose God's plan for mankind want to frustrate the mission of her son and even kill him. That too is part of Revelation's presentation of her.

God's presence in the midst of his people is the Lord Jesus, and while Mary bears him in her womb she too is that living presence. But Luke's Gospel makes it clear we mustn't think only about her. We are to use what is said of her to realize we too are what she is, if in a lesser way. We are called to be Christ-bearers for others, for how many others we have no way of knowing. Based on what our God did in and through Mary those whom we will help are probably very many! Mary gives praise to God for all the marvelous things done through her, and even with her. We are called upon to do this with her every day. The prayer we call the Magnificat thanks God for all that is done through each of us. We too are blessed for all the ages. We too are concerned for others, and especially for the lowly and those who haven't much to live on. We too are to pray for all. We too are to make God's will our will. Amen!