

# **TWENTY-FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**

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**Sunday The Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Sept 17 Remembering God's Forgiving Love**

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine

**Mon Monday of the Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**

**18 The Heart of Forgiveness**

A reflection taken from a sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King

## **Day of Remembrance of the Dead**

**Tues Tuesday of the Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**

**19 The Goal of Dying in Christ**

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

**Wed Memorial of Sts. Andrew Kim, Paul Chong, & others**

**20 The Crown that Comes of the Cross**

A reflection from a letter by one of the Korean martyrs

**Thurs Feast of the St. Matthew, Apostle & Evangelist**

**21 The Spirit Comes in Tongues of Fire**

A reflection developed from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny

**Fri Friday of the Twenty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**

**22 The Gift of Sincerity of Heart**

A reflection taken from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

**Sat Memorial of St. Pius of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)**

**23 The Humility that Accepts Suffering**

A reflection taken from a letter by St. Paulinus of Nola

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# **REMEMBERING GOD'S FORGIVING LOVE**

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Augustine

*"I tell you that you must forgive not seven times a day but seventy times seven".* (Mt. 18:21f) The Lord puts the parable of the unforgiving debtor before us so we may learn to forgive as we have been forgiven. God doesn't want us to perish but he will judge us by the same standards we have used to decide how to treat others. The Lord Jesus gives us the parable and then says: This is how your Heavenly Father will deal with you if any of you fail to forgive a brother or sister from your heart. Do you want to live in God's Kingdom? Learn to imitate God.

This is not a meaningless exhortation or idle warning. We have to learn both to obey God and to imitate our Lord. We are all debtors to God, just as many are in debt in some way to us. Have you been so unloving as to have no one in debt to you? Have you been so utterly pure in life as to have committed no sin and not to be in debt to God on that account? Again, has no one ever wronged you and have you never wronged another? The answer to these questions is that all of us are debtors both to God and one another. God, who is just, has told us how to treat those in debt to you, and warned you that he is going to treat you in the same way.

There are various works of mercy which set one free from one's debts. The Lord himself has told us about two of them. Forgive and you will be forgiven, he says. And then he adds, Give and you will receive. The first of these words is about pardon. It simply reminds us that just as we want and need to be forgiven so someone is in need of our forgiveness. Then he talks about giving and receiving to teach us what generosity is. When someone begs something from you how do you respond? We are all beggars in relation to God. We stand before him, or perhaps fall prostrate before him, and we beg with tears to be helped or forgiven. We long to receive these gifts.

What have people begged you for? Perhaps it was bread. Didn't Christ say to you, and to all of us, "I am the living bread that has come down from heaven"? Have you been given this bread? How can you refuse bread to another? If we think of our sins and how many they are, then we turn to God and ask to be forgiven and drawn close to God. But don't forget you have entered into an agreement with God while you were praying. Didn't you say, *"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us"*? Were you thinking of only a few sins or of all of them? All, no doubt. So you have to do exactly that with all those who have offended you. Notice there was no limit to the agreement you made with God in your prayer. We are to forgive "all", no matter how many the offenses are and how often they are committed. You have already agreed to be judged according to this standard. We have to learn to do what we have promised to do. Love, remember, can make it easy.

# **THE HEART OF FORGIVENESS**

A reflection developed from a sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King

*“Peter went up to Jesus and asked: Lord, how often must I forgive one who wrongs me? As many as seven times? Jesus replied, “Not seven times, I tell you, but seventy-seven times.”* During his ministry in the sunny villages of Galilee, Jesus talked passionately about forgiveness and his strange sounding doctrine awakened question in Peter’s mind. Peter wanted to be legal and statistical but Jesus reaffirmed his teaching that there is to be no limit to forgiveness. You probably will never have the chance of forgiving four hundred and ninety times in one day but forgiveness can become a part of the habit structure of your very being. It can become a permanent attitude.

Jesus admonished his followers to love enemies and pray for people who treat them spitefully. To many this sounded like strange music from a foreign land. They weren’t attuned to such amazing love. They had been taught to seek revenge on their enemies. Yet Jesus taught them that only through a creative love for enemies could they become children of their Heavenly Father. That love and forgiveness were to be absolute necessities for spiritual maturity.

Let’s be practical and ask a question. How do we love our enemies? First, we have to develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. One who is devoid of the capacity to forgive is devoid of the capacity to love. It is impossible even to begin to love enemies without the prior acceptance of the necessity of forgiving those who inflict evil and injury upon us. More, the forgiving act must always be initiated by the person who has been wronged, the victim of some monstrous injustice, the absorber of some terrible act of oppression. The wrongdoer can request forgiveness but only the injured neighbor, like the loving father welcoming a prodigal, can really pour out the cleansing and healing waters of forgiveness.

Forgiveness doesn’t mean ignoring what has been done or putting a false label on an evil act. It means that the evil is no longer a barrier to relationship. Forgiveness is a catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start and a new beginning. The saying, “I’ll forgive but I’ll never forget” never explains the real nature of forgiveness. One never can forget if that means erasing something totally from one’s mind. We forget in that the evil deed is no longer a mental block impeding a new relationship. Further, forgiveness means reconciliation, a coming together again. Without this no one can love enemies. The extent to which you are able to forgive determines the measure in which you are able to love your enemies. That is what Jesus calls us to do. That is the heart of forgiveness.

# **THE GOAL OF DYING IN CHRIST**

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard

*“Here we have no abiding city, but we seek one which is to come.”*  
(Heb.13:14) Once a pilgrim sets out it is necessary to turn neither to one side or the other but to go straight ahead. Happy the one who knows the way to the Heavenly Home and never turns aside from the path that leads to it. One mustn't engage in activities that have a worldly goal and nothing beyond that. But what does this mean in practice?

St. Paul says, *“You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God”*. (Col.3:3) A pilgrim can easily be held back, oppressed by the burdens of a time that are inseparable from a journey. A dead person will not even feel the lack of a tomb! Such a one might hear others heaping on blame for this or that, or some who were heaping on praise instead and a dead person doesn't pay attention. The dead pay no attention to any such things, as pilgrims may. Does death keep one unstained by separating one from this world? If so it is an altogether happy thing to be dead.

Christ must live in one who no longer lives in self, if such a person is to have life at all. St. Paul says, *“I live, yet I don't live, for Christ lives in me”*. It is as if he were saying that he has died to everything but Christ. I don't feel or notice or get concerned with anything but Christ. If anything is truly of Christ then I am alive and ready for action in its regard. This is a great step along the pilgrim way to God's Kingdom. Yet perhaps there is a greater step.

St. Paul says, *“Let me not glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world”*. (Gal. 6:14) Paul is not only dead to the world but crucified to the world. Everything the world loves, if it is not Christ's, is a cross to me. I passed by all such things as a pilgrim, although at times with suffering or hardship.

We have many brethren who have completed their pilgrimage and their dying with Christ and being crucified with him. We must listen to the teaching that is their now ended life among us in this world through which we make our own pilgrimage and seek to let Christ alone live in us. They bid us seek ever to live in purity. Be careful at all times to maintain this purity. You must not lose hope because at times you are negligent or even wander from the straight path which is our Christian life. Remember, says St. Paul, that you aren't any longer only strangers and aliens but are citizens of the Kingdom of God with all the saints. Do you want to be joined with those you remember, who have gone from this world and into God's Kingdom? They show us the way, the many ways, of following the Lord and letting God's life bear fruit within us. Surely, we must press onward in the spiritual battle that is our pilgrimage. They reach out loving hands in prayer to help us over the rough places on our road. That is

God's gift. Do not refuse it but walk bravely forward for the sake of the glory of our King and salvation.

## **THE CROWN THAT COMES WITH A CROSS**

A reflection from a letter of one of the Korean martyrs

My dearest friends, think often on the fact that God rules over all things in heaven and on earth and does this from the beginning to the end of time. So all things exist by God's choice, including ourselves. Why were we chosen, then, to be God's images and likenesses? First consider how a farmer cultivates a field. This involves plowing, fertilizing and planting and then much labor to nurture the growth of the seeds that have been planted. If, when harvest time comes, the crop is abundant the farmer rejoices and exults. God created us to grow and flourish and multiply life on the earth. He has chosen to share his labors as a farmer and to work with him that the crop of those who love and serve him may be abundant.

Yet this world is filled with perils and hardship, at least at times. If we didn't recognize God as our Creator and realize God has chosen to create us as co-workers in cultivating life what benefit would be brought into being by our births and our lives? But we know the truth and we know we have come into the world by God's love and grace. It is by that same love and grace that we received baptism, were accepted into the Church, and are Christians. But it will do us no good if we are Christians only in name and not in our deeds. It would be as though we had not come into the world or the Church or been given so many graces! To receive the call and grace of God and to turn away from God and labors God shares with us would be like not existing.

The Lord is like a farmer and we are like a field he is cultivating and fertilizing and seeding with genuinely good seed. God waters this field with the very blood of Jesus in order that we might grow to maturity and bear much fruit. Even if a crop is sparse God doesn't give up. An ordinary farmer might turn his back on an unfruitful field with disgust at all the wasted labor. God never does this.

When harvest time arrives we will find that his grace has enabled us to grow into maturity, even if we didn't notice it. We will find that we are God's adopted children and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

My dearest friends, when the Lord Jesus was in this world he bore many sorrows as well as a passion and death, and so founded the Church. He continues to give it new growth through the sufferings of those who are faithful to Him and his Gospel. Hold fast, then, to the will of God and fight the good fight with all your heart under Jesus' leadership. Do not fail in your love of one another. Support one another and stand fast until the Lord delivers us. We will soon reach Heaven! I embrace you in prayer and in love. Never lose hope in God and in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

# **THE SPIRIT COMES IN TONGUES OF FIRE**

**A reflection developed from a sermon by Guerric of Igny**

**When the time had come the Spirit came upon the apostles in tongues of fire. The Spirit's goodness is an anointing by which all are "taught by God". Blessed are such persons. You teach them the spotless law which is charity. It sets our hearts on fire and, as with your apostles, sends us to spread that fire of love though the entire world. Even in the apostles' utterances there is fire and to read Matthew's Gospel can set us afire with the same fire that God caused to burn in his heart and mind.**

**I feel that I scarcely have the tongue of a dog with which I could lick my own sores and those of others as the dogs did for sick Lazarus lying at Dives' door. My soul, famished and suffering hunger, will accept even what is bitter. Can I satisfy it by licking the wounds sin has left in others? The sore of sin is ugly and disgusting to look at and yet one who hungers for others salvation doesn't turn away from it. I pray for a tongue with which to praise God and tend to the sores and diseases of sinners.**

**My words may be the example I offer to others. Haven't we all been given the gift of helping others in this way? We long for the groanings of the Spirit within us as, teaching us to pray for that which is not yet but which we grasp in hope. Can we do a greater thing for one another than enkindle such hope and longing. I don't know of any other spiritual gift that is more helpful. It leads to the moaning that is so helpful to prayer from the heart. What could be more useful to those who are themselves bound by weakness and wretchedness as we are? The Lord shows us ourselves so we will long for him and be healed.**

**The Lord gives us the apostles to show us what we are to busy ourselves in doing for the healing of others and the advance of his Kingdom. We have to help one another surrender the longing for the physical presence of our Lord and begin to long most deeply for his spiritual presence. As ourselves in want and yet enriching many, we must drink in, so to speak, the bridegroom's absence. If we have known Christ according to the flesh we know him in that way no longer. But it is our very sorrow and longing for the Lord that bring us to Him. The apostles had lost their Lord and were huddled together in prayer when all was made new for them by the Spirit. Now they knew what to long for and found it a joy. Devout and religious longing and mourning occupies the first place and it is outstanding in its spiritual usefulness.**

**This is the highest wisdom of the saints, the safeguard of the just, the sobriety of the moderate, the first virtue for beginners, the spur of the proficient, the crown of the perfect and the salvation of those who are perishing. It is to this longing that the Apostles and their words lead us. As they proclaimed Christ who was to come, and so engendered hope we**

must do likewise, imitating them. It is this we celebrate as we remember the Apostle Matthew, read his words, and drink in his longing for our God.

## **THE GIFT OF SINCERITY OF HEART**

A reflection taken from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

Great is the difference between sincere and insincere Christians. All sin, even after receiving the grace of God. God's true servants sin and are sorry, while hypocrites sin and are not. The two sorts of people look like one another but the word of God discriminates between them by a straightforward test: Christ dwells in the consciences of the one and not of the other. Those who belong to the first group open their hearts to God and the others do not. The one views God as the Lord and owner of all that is and the other admit the Lord only for, as it were, a night or some brief period of time.

We are all filled with stains and corruptions. We don't see them because they are as invisible as the air is when the sun is shining. But God sees all. God pervades us as sunbeams do the air. We cannot hide ourselves from God and our wisdom as our duty lies in embracing these truths, accepting them gladly, and acting upon them.

Our first need is to beg God to teach us the mystery of his ever-presence in us and in all things. By acknowledging it begins to be real to us and to have effects in us. We must confess it with faith so that we may possess it unto justification. Let us so own it as to set God before us in everything. The Psalmist declares: I have set God before me for God is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall. Let us in all circumstances look to God.

Even if we have sinned let us not dare to keep away from God in our thoughts or actions. With the prodigal son, let us rise and go to God. Or, if we are not conscious of anything, still let us not boast in ourselves or justify ourselves. Let us feel that the One who judges us is the Lord. In all circumstances, of joy or of sorrow, of hope or of fear, let us aim at having God in our innermost heart. Let us have no secret that is for us apart from God. Let us acknowledge God as enthroned within us at the very springs of all our thoughts and feelings. Let us submit ourselves to God's guidance and sovereign direction. Let us come to God that God may forgive us, cleanse us, change us, guide us, and save us.

All this is God's great gift of love to us. Let us accept it and let us do it with all our heart. That is the gift of sincerity. To receive it we need only pray as did the publican in the Lord's parable. It is the first expression of humility and of the truth.

# **THE HUMILITY THAT ACCEPTS SUFFERING**

**A reflection developed from a letter by Paulinus of Nola**

**From the beginning of the world Christ has been suffering in all his people. He is, you see, the beginning and the end, veiled in the Law and revealed in the Gospel, the Lord ever wonderful in his saints and he both suffers and triumphs in them. Today we remember St. Padre Pio, one who was truly humble and whose sharing in the suffering of Christ made his and Christ's humility shine forth and reveal themselves as saving love.**

**In Abel Christ was killed by a brother, in Noah mocked by a son, in Abraham a wanderer, in Isaac a sacrifice, in Jacob a servant, in Joseph a slave, in Moses a refugee, in the prophets one scorned and stoned and sawn in two, and in the apostles slapped and whipped and killed. It is the same Lord who endures our sufferings and sorrows today.**

**Jesus has identified himself with us and our race and has continually borne the mistreatment we inflict on each other. He knows how to suffer and to endure. Power is brought to perfection in Christ's weakness. The tragedy is that when we hate each other we hate him. Was anyone ever so humble as to accept so much without complaint or desire for revenge?**

**Thanks be to God that Christ has been vindicated and in him we see for the first time what suffering truly is and what humility accomplishes. As we read in Scripture, the Lord triumphs in us through living as a slave among us; he gains, for all who follow and serve and imitate him, a new kind of freedom the world never knew before. He clothed himself in the nature of a slave for our sakes, even when we make ourselves slaves.**

**Christ humbled himself even to the point of accepting a cross and all the suffering that went with it. Christ dwelt with us in lowliness. Christ won for us an endless exaltation. In this light, consider the position from which we have fallen. When we do we begin to realize that all has come about by God's design; i.e., by divine wisdom and love. We see ourselves and our world with new eyes and a renewed mind. Thus we are beginning to be restored to the life God wished to give us from the beginning.**

**In Adam we were ruined by pride. In Christ and Christ's saints we are restored by humility. The more we become like Christ the more humble we become. The more we suffer with Christ the more our humility gives birth to exaltation. In humility Christ washed away all the guilt of foolish pride by living the depths of humility. Having offended by ignorant arrogance, we are forgiven and restored by knowing and deliberate humility.**

**Rejoice! Stand firm with Christ! See, Christ has overcome the world! What overcame it was suffering humility. Do not be afraid of either. Follow Christ even in this way, if he invites you. It is a way that leads to all good and all joy and all fulfillment and peace.**

