

# THE TWENTY-NINTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sunday The Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Oct. 22 Divine Ways and Human Ways

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Mon Monday of the Twenty-Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

23 Bringing all Creation to Christ

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Lawrence of Brindisi

Tues Tuesday of the Twenty-Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

24 Witnessing to True Values

A reflection from Politics & Poverty by Barbara Ward

Wed Wednesday of the Twenty-Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

25 Blessed are the Makers of Peace

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

## Day for Remembrance of the Dead

Thurs Thursday of the Twenty-Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

26 Our God Brings Life From Death

A reflection from a Scripture Commentary

by St. Cyril of Alexandria

Fri Friday of the Twenty-Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

27 Whom Do You Worship

A reflection taken from Christianity & Money

by Fr. Jacques Leclercq

Sat **Feast of Sts. Simon & Jude, Apostles**

28 Trusting Wholly in the Spirit

A reflection taken from On Religious Freedom issued by the  
Second Vatican Council

## **DIVINE WAYS & HUMAN WAYS**

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Jesus' opponents believed there are often conflicts between what human laws require and what is required by God's law. For instance, all those subject to the rule of the Roman Empire had to pay a tax and had to use a coin that bore the likeness of one of the emperors. But hadn't God forbidden the use of "graven images"? So how could one escape guilt if one paid the tax to the emperor? Wasn't it necessary to refuse to pay? The question, as the Gospel context makes clear, was an effort to catch Jesus in a dilemma that would make him a rebel in either Roman eyes or those of the Jewish religious authorities.

The response Jesus gives reminds his opponents that they are looking at things only superficially. Every human being is an "image" of God, as Scripture itself says. The coin that has to be used to pay the tax bears an image of the human being who ordered it made. So give yourself to God and return the emperor's coins to him. The law about graven images was given to ensure that people give themselves only to the One God to whom they belong. Don't distract yourself from this huge task by focusing our attention on the little task of finding a coin to give the emperor. Actually, there were many such coins right in the temple at the money changers' booths, since one could only buy sacrificial offerings using non-pagan coinage, and so had to "buy" the right coins. Is it any more complex to buy what is needed to make sure the emperor gets what is "his own"?

The Scriptures tell us that God, so to speak, takes advantage of the actions of unbelievers to create conditions in which more and more people can come to know something more of the truth about who God is than their present religious beliefs encompass. Thus God had used the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, for the sake of many Babylonians who were drawn by the Jewish faith and worship they witnessed and expanded this by means of Persian king, Cyrus, who permitted the reconstruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. God does not need what human beings think to be necessary conditions for saving and freeing and forgiving people, and even drawing them to love and care for neighbors. Jesus constantly makes the point that we can get in the way of God's love by insisting on attitudes and practices that are merely "necessary" from the point of view of our culture or community's history. Cooperate with God and don't get in God's way.

Paying taxes to the Roman emperor seemed to many to place human authority above God's. Actually that isn't true, as Jesus points out. What Pharisees required of fellow Jews was directly from God and there needn't be a conflict. What is crucial is personal loyalty to God. Human rules and traditions can't be replaced by God's law but do enable us to show we are loyal to God first, as Jesus is and calls us to be.

# **BRINGING ALL CREATION TO GOD**

**A reflection by St. Lawrence of Brindisi, Doctor of the Church**

In the Gospel's picture of Christ confronting Pharisees about loyalty to God we behold two perspectives on this issue. The Pharisees are thinking only about the present world where Christ has a wholly heavenly way of looking at things. They brought Christ a tribute coin when he asked and he then turned their perspective upside down by asking, "Whose likeness is on this coin and whose name is inscribed on it?" The obvious answer was that it was Caesar's—i.e., the emperor's—likeness and name. Does this fact call attention to a genuine problem? Jesus says that to each, to earthly and to heavenly authorities, one must give what properly pertains to each.

This is a judgment full of heavenly wisdom. It teaches that authority is twofold, with an earthly, human face and a heavenly, divine one. We owe twofold obedience, to human and divine laws. Always give the coin stamped with the image of God who made it. We are that coin and bear the imprint of the Lord's glorious face! We are made in the image and likeness of God.

A Christian as a human being is God's tribute money—a little coin bearing the image of the divine emperor. You have to ask when you think there may be a conflict between the divine and human, "whose likeness and inscription is this?" If your answer is "God's!" then give that to God. If we really want to be God's image we must be like Christ. God fore-ordained that those chosen should take on a likeness to the Son. He fulfilled to perfection the precepts of both laws and he shows this perfectly on the Cross. He gave himself to fulfill both laws fully.

It is not just that each reality belongs only to God or the world but that many, perhaps all, belong to both. When Peter was asked whether Jesus paid the temple tax and replied that he did, Jesus relied wholly on God to receive the coin necessary. He had Peter catch a fish and find the coin in its mouth. But Jesus himself was subject to human law, even when it was misused to kill an innocent person and God's son, and would not let that subjection prevent him from giving himself wholly to God. He gave himself wholly to Caesar and to God. We may find ourselves in circumstances like those of Jesus. Then we must offer ourselves, as it were, twice. That's way of giving to God all that exists.

# **WITNESSING TO TRUE VALUES**

A reflection from Poverty & Politics by Barbara Ward

Shouldn't we leave to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's? Should Christians engage in political action? Because of how God has made us there is really no escape from involvement in politics. On every possible occasion Jesus tells us to see human beings as they are. We are constantly reminded of the need to feed the hungry, shelter those without homes, and give help to those in danger of death. God would never have taken a human body if God didn't care for it. He didn't create human bodies to be starved.

Yet God leaves us with an enormous leeway of intelligence and free will. He left decisions about how to live to us. Thus we have the incredible dignity, and the appalling risk of being creators of our own societies. We can't create without being fully involved in politics. As creators of the human order we Christians face a challenge.

We in the West are extremely rich as compared to the rest of the world. The national communities in which nominal Christians are a majority have the resources to prevent starvation throughout the world. It is not necessary for people to starve but the result of a choice made by human persons.

But free choice is at the heart of morals. We choose whether or not children die of hunger or are abused and we often make the choice in spite of our religious protestations to the contrary. We carry the brand of Cain.

An equally alarming fact is that the brotherhood of humankind is now a physical and technical fact. The people of our planet are now neighbors. Our technology can be used to promote friendship or escalate violence, to re-create or destroy the face of the earth. We have the resources and unity necessary for political action to create a united and fraternal international society. Whether we create one depends on our perspective and engagement. Are we going to be the salt of the earth and a city set upon a hill? All the small ways in which we can act cannot be resisted if we never give up. I think we can do what needs to be done. I know that I will try, and I hope you will too. Do you trust that God is acting with us?

# **BLESSED ARE THE MAKERS OF PEACE**

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

You who desire life and long for happy days, turn away from evil and do good, seek the peace which everyone longs for. Let everyone seek peace—seek it and really perseveringly pursue it! Where is it? It is in you. Peace has, so to speak, passed through you. But did it remain in you? Look at the fact that peace has passed through the human race. But where did it go? When you realize what peace really is then you will be able to notice where it has gone.

Listen to what St. Paul says about Christ. “He is our peace. He has made both of us (i.e., Jews and non-Jews) one.” So peace is Christ. Where has he gone? He has been crucified and buried; he has risen from the dead and ascended into Heaven. Now you know where peace has gone. So how shall we follow Christ? Lift up your hearts! You hear these words every day that you come to worship. You are called to raise your thoughts to what we call “higher things”. But there is more to learn if we are to follow peace—our own individual peace and the peace that can embrace all. You probably need to start by praying with Christ: “Father, forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing!”

There was a struggle and peace “passed away” on the Cross. He ascended into Heaven. How are we to follow? Listen again to St. Paul: “If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Turn away from worldly concerns for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” That is where happy days are. Let us all long for them, live for them, give alms for them!

When the Gospel about Zacchaeus is read we all seem to be one with him in wanting to welcome Christ into our home. Oh how blessed was that man! But can the same thing happen to us? Read the New Testament to me, who am Christ. You will hear your future judge say, “What you did to the least of those who belong to me you did to me!” You hope to receive Christ, enthroned in heaven. So care for him as he lies sick at your doorway, so to speak. Do for the hungry, the cold, the needy, the stranger what you would do for me. Continue what you have done but begin to do what you haven’t yet done. You know what is needed. By doing this we welcome Christ, and so welcome peace!

Peace consists in right relations. Relations are right when they realize love. Love your neighbor, whoever needs your help, as you do love yourself and want others to love you. Then you will bring true peace not only to your heart and home but to your town, and to our world. If you want peace seek it with all your heart. If you want peace be Christ to others. It is Christ who brings and is the peace we seek. When he truly comes, peace comes truly.

# **OUR GOD BRINGS LIFE FROM DEATH**

**A reflection from a Scripture commentary by St. Cyril of Alexandria**

The Lord of Hosts will come to crown those who have hoped in Him. It is hope for the blessings to come as much as for present good things just as it is hope for the glory in which the blessed reign as much as in the good those who have gone before us have done that teaches us to hope in God. Aren't those who have attained their heavenly reward our admiration and envy, as well as that of the entire world?

For those who hope what could equal the glory of being crowned in Christ's Kingdom? As Isaiah said, "you will be a beautiful crown, a royal diadem in the hand of your God". Christ will crown those who believe in Him with an everlasting glory, just as Christ refreshes us who hope to be made like them with a wondrous anticipation. There will be a share in these things for those who do not lose hope. Let us all cry out with Isaiah: "Lord you surround us with favor as with a shield".

It has pleased God the Father that Christ should become for us an unbreakable shield. Placing himself between us and the arrows of the devil Christ saves us from being wounded or harmed by the devil's malice. Some such meaning is implied, I think, in the words spoken about the people God had won—that is those justified by faith. They will be preserved by a spirit of justice, for the One who sits in judgment gives us courage and simultaneously thrusts back the attacker.

Once, long ago, Satan almost destroyed earth's children by flinging them into the pit of sin. There was no one who did right, not a single one. All had left the right path and were depraved—everyone. The psalmist says this but he had not yet known the only-begotten Son, the Word of God become human. But God has judged between us and Satan. This one God consigned to destruction and removed him as destroyer of earth-dwellers and as a murderer.

Now is the hour of judgment for this world. Now is the ruler of this world cast out. But Christ, lifted up from the earth is drawing the entire world to himself. Do we wish to be drawn? Have we not seen so many of our friends and brethren drawn up to God? Do not lose hope. You are in no worse case than those who have already been taken to God. Look at them and trust in our common Lord and Savior.

# **WHOM DO YOU WORSHIP?**

A reflection from Christianity & Money by Fr. Jacques Leclercq

The average Christian seems to worship money. They want as much as they can get and would prefer to keep what they have. But I think that the word 'money' is just a stand in for all the things people worship and try to get hold of using money. That is why a certain divine law disturbs us. It does so because it represents a very different scale of values than ours. We try to reason out ways to seek whatever seems most important to us without violating God's law. It is an evil type of "casuistry", as we call it.

This way of thinking seems quite remote from the Gospel point of view. The life to which Christ calls us is a life of whole-hearted and self-forgetful love. Its whole-heartedness is incompatible with constant calculation about the exact extent of our obligations. When we say that the average Christian worships money we are claiming such a person is a calculating casuist, especially when called to give rather than get. Perhaps it would be true to say that such a person is ruled by covetousness.

Christ's attitude is clear and it has to do with one's attitude of mind. Worldly goods or money, if they are our highest objective in practice, make us worldly minded. But our call is to detachment. Detachment is difficult. We live surrounded by things we "have". Never for a moment do we forget the enjoyment we get from such things. They demand attention and provide satisfactions. They give us self-esteem by reminding us that we are succeeding at whatever style of life we have chosen to live.

It is not simply that worldly goods control us like a tyrant but that they put us beyond real poverty, even poverty of spirit. If you don't believe this try to give up the things or the places you love and feel most comfortable with. Then recall the saying: "Where your treasure is there your heart is also". What we have to do is turn this around and consider where our heart is. Then we will see what and where our treasure really is.

The life of a Christian is about serving rather than having. And the service that is all-important is the service of God. If we do not make one created thing our treasure we shall find it easy to let go of them. The rich young man who came to Jesus seeking perfection realized to his chagrin that he really sought possessions and what they brought him. He went away in sorrow. His treasure was not in Heaven and he could not give away all the things he had so that he would have no treasure but God.

Jesus tells us: It isn't enough to give part, to share yourself with God only in part. Renunciation of all that one treasures is only a symbolic deed. The essential is complete self-surrender to God. Do you dare to have no one to turn to except God? Can God's grace make that possible for ME? If not, maybe what you worship is ME.

# **TRUSTING WHOLLY IN THE SPIRIT**

A reflection taken from On Religious Freedom by Vatican Council II

When Christ completed on the Cross the work of redemption, by which he achieved salvation and true freedom for all, he brought his revelation to completion. He bore witness to the truth but refused to impose that truth upon those who spoke against it by force. Not by blows does he assert his claims to rule. This reign is established by apostolic witnessing to the truth and by the hearing of that witness. Its dominion is extended by that love whereby Christ, lifted up on the cross, draws everyone to himself.

Taught by the word and example of Christ, the apostles followed the same path. From the very origins of the church, the disciples of Christ strove to convert others to faith in him as Lord. They didn't, however, use coercion or any device unworthy of the Gospel. They drew others by the power of the Word of God. Above all, they steadfastly proclaimed to all the plan of God, our Savior: "*He wills that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of truth*". But they did it in a way that shows respect for even the weak, and even though they are in error. It is thus made plain that "*each one of us is to render an account to God*". The duty that pushes all is that all are therefore bound to obey God in their conscience.

Like Christ himself, the apostles were unceasingly bent upon bearing witness to the truth of God. They showed the fullest measure of boldness in speaking the word with confidence before Peoples and their rulers. With a firm faith they held that the Gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. Therefore they rejected all "carnal" weapons; they followed the example of the gentleness and respectfulness of Christ. They preached the word of God in the full confidence that there was resident in this world itself a divine power able to destroy all the forces arrayed against God and to bring all peoples to faith in Christ and to his service.

As did the Master, so too the apostles recognized legitimate civil authority. For "*there is no power except from God*", as St. Paul teaches, and therefore he commands "*Let everyone be subject to higher authority. ... One who resists authority resists God's ordinances*". At the same time, however, they did not hesitate to speak out against governing powers that set themselves in opposition to the Holy Will of God.

"*It is necessary to obey God rather than human being*", as the apostles said to the Sanhedrin. This is the path along which the martyrs and all the other faithful have walked throughout the ages and over all the earth. Clearly this required that they trust wholly in God's Spirit.