

LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR
THE THIRTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun **OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE**
Nov. 26 **Longing for What our God has Prepared**
 A reflection by Hippolytus of Rome
- Mon. **Monday of the Thirty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**
27 **Spreading the Kingdom of God**
 A reflection developed from a talk by Bishop E-J. de Smedt
- Tues. **Tuesday of the Thirty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**
28 **The Quest for Peace**
 A reflection based on a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant
- Wed. **Wednesday of the Thirty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**
29 **The Call to Judgement is a Call to Conversion**
 A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Thurs. **The Feast of St. Andrew, Apostle**
30 **Take up the Cross and Follow Christ**
 A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Fri. ***DAY OF REMEMBRANCE OF OUR DEAD***
Dec. 1 **Learning the Culture of Life from our Dead**
 A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Sat. **Memorial of Our Lady**
2 **Mary's Gift of New Life**
 A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

LONGING FOR WHAT OUR GOD HAS PREPARED

A reflection by Hippolytus of Rome

The Holy Gospel clearly proclaims that the Son of Man will gather together all the nations and divide them into two groups, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats, and will say to the sheep: “Come, you lovers of the poor and of strangers. Come, you who fostered my love. I am love and peace and I bid you come, you who shared peace and love. Come, my Heavenly Father’s blessed ones, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.”

You didn’t make an idol of wealth. You gave alms to the poor. You helped orphans and widows. You gave drink to the thirsty. You gave food to the hungry. Come, then! You welcomed strangers. You clothed the naked. You visited the sick. You comforted prisoners and helped the blind. Come, you who kept the seal of faith unbroken and were swift to assemble in the churches to listen to my Scriptures. You longed for my words and observed my law day and night. Like good soldiers you shared in my sufferings because you wanted to please me, your heavenly king. Come, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!

Look, my kingdom is ready paradise stands open, my immortality is displayed in all its beauty. Come now, all of you, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. When we hear this will be astounded by such a great and wonderful thing. We will be addressed as friends by one who the angelic hosts are unable to behold clearly. And you will replay, exclaiming: “But, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you? Master, when did we see you thirsty and give you a drink? We hold you in great awe and how could we have found you naked so as to clothe you? You are creator of all, so how could we see you a stranger and welcome you as though you were not always in your own place? How could you who are immortal be sick or in prison and needing a visit?

You are the Eternal, without beginning like the Heavenly Father, you are co-eternal with the Spirit. You are the One who created all things from nothing. You are the king of the angels. You make the depths tremble. You are clothed in light as in a robe. You are our maker who fashioned us from the earth. You are the creator of the world invisible. How could we possibly have received your Lordship, your Royal Majesty, as our guest?

Then the King of Kings will say in reply: Inasmuch as you did this to one of the least members of my Body, to my brothers and sisters, you did it to me. Inasmuch as you received, clothed, fed and gave drink to those members of mind, about whom I have just spoken and described as the poor, you did it to me. So come and enter the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Enjoy forever the gifts of my Heavenly Father, and of the most holy and life-giving Spirit. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him.

SPREADING THE KINGDOM OF THE LORD

A reflection by Bishop Emile-Joseph de Smedt

Humanity seeks progress as a path to happiness. It is a universal urge and may indicate a kind of law written into our nature, and perhaps that of all living things. By calling this into existence, God has given to all a law of balance and unity. That is, everyone seeks to preserve life and make it better. Everyone is oriented toward something higher and better. In our case, this call destines us to service of the human race. Men and women are called to use their freedom to achieve the kind of balance and inner harmony that will allow them to use reason to guide all they do with and for one another. We can't achieve real happiness unless we bring our conduct into line with God's plan. We are led through an earthly probation to a final unity and harmony that is found in God.

All this is endangered by sin. Sin's essence is to be a force destroying humankind's unity. Rebellion against God's plan brings about our enslavement to our material world and to our own passions. This is followed by pangs of conscience, disruption of our family life, insecurity, social conflict, wars and further distancing of ourselves from God. His mission was the re-establishment of the created order's orientation toward its creator, the raising of fallen humankind and the restoration of unity between God and humanity. But the work entrusted to Jesus by the Heavenly Father doesn't stop there. The Son of God was to open up new possibilities to our race. We are called to be children of God, to find a place in a mystical society of which Jesus is the head, and which will be the family of God, the People of God. But it was not only to humanity that God would communicate gifts. God also wants to communicate gifts to all things! All creation is to be directed toward this divine goal. Step by step creation is to recover the order originally willed by the Creator. It will finally serve human beings as a springboard enabling them to attain an ultimate destiny.

It is God's good pleasure, Scripture tells us, to re-establish all things in Christ, both those in the heavens and those on the earth. God purposes all this in Christ. This will be the complete and perfect Kingship of Christ. The essence of genuinely royal power is not subjecting others. Its prerogative is to orient people, and things too, toward the end that will make each and all flourish. Jesus has received this power. Jesus makes laws destined to transform all creatures, and to do this as head of humanity. Having received this power Jesus will effectively establish it by having all creation share, step by step, in his resurrection and glorification.

Christ appeals to the whole priestly community of his Chosen People to spread this Kingdom effectively and throughout all creation. He wishes to establish his kingship through you and me. By collaboration with Jesus in freeing ourselves from the chains of sin we take part in this process of establishing the rule of Christ, and so the transformation of all.

THE QUEST FOR PEACE

A reflection based on a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

One of the phrases that stands out as you read the St. Benedict's Rule for Monks goes: "Let all be at peace!" Superficially read, it reminds every member of a monastic community that they must work together so that all are free of anxiety and have their basic human needs met. But St. Benedict wanted us to hear this quasi-command in a deeper, Biblical sense. In this sense, peace (shalom) means a way of life in which all relate to one another so that God's plan for human life will be realized. That includes thriving and even being happy but these are not a Christian's primary goals, and so not the primary goals of monks.

In this final week of the church year, we are directed to Christ as our king, as guide to life in its fullness. Recall St. Irenaeus' famous saying, "The glory of God is a living human person". That glory is most fully realized in a fully human person working to love others. It is attainable in Christ, our good shepherd. When the Lord is our shepherd there is nothing that makes life richer and fuller which we have to go without.

Jesus guides us even more lovingly and carefully than a good shepherd cares for sheep and leads them to good pastures. Our king is a personal protector and provider and not simply "an authority". Jesus is particularly attentive to those who have strayed. He reminds us of the many straying and needy persons he has led to God and to a way that makes their lives full and humanly rich. Think of the price this shepherd was willing to pay, and has actually paid, to bring us to "peace". His death and resurrection bring life, as Scripture itself emphasizes.

How do you react to the Gospel picture of judgment? A shepherd separates the different kinds of animal—anciently sheep and goats. We are to visualize ourselves as a sheep or a goat. Unless one has cared for both the difference doesn't make much sense. The bottom line is that goats are very different in their social lives, if I may use that phrase, than are sheep. Goats don't worry about the same ways of relating to each other that sheep do. Which means they don't live by the same social rules, to use a human metaphor. So to talk about judgment as a separating of sheep from goats is to talk about separating those who know how to care for and love one another as Jesus does from those who don't.

The Kingdom of God is Peace! To live in God's peace is to live by caring for and loving one another in the way Jesus shows us. When we come to judgment we come to Jesus and we see how our way of living with one another matches that of Jesus, or doesn't match it. To enter the Kingdom of Heaven is to enter a never-ending way of life. If we don't want to live as Jesus does, which is how God calls human beings to live, then we don't want to enter that Kingdom. At judgment we discover what we actually and really want. We prepare for this by doing all we can to live in God's peace with others. We show this by genuinely caring for them.

THE CALL TO JUDGEMENT IS A CALL TO CONVERSION

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

You have come together to hear the Word of God. What else could make us so eager to flock together as we have, leaving all else behind in our eagerness? I congratulate you all on this zeal for what is of God. Blessed the hearers of God's word. Of course, there is more to this saying. Blessed are those who hear God's word, if they do what they hear. Blessed, then, are those who are mindful of God's commandments and obey them. Only obedience makes one blessed. That means that hearing God's Word is hearing a call to conversion. Jesus has the words of eternal life. But the hour is coming—indeed it is already here—when all will hear the Word of God, even the dead! But those who hear it are thereby alive. To hear our Lord is to receive the gift of life and of obeying him.

To hear and do God's will is life. God's will is life, and it is life for all and forever. Let us listen to him carefully: Is it my will that the wicked shall die? Isn't it rather my will that all should be converted and live? From these words we realize that there is no true life except in conversion. But there is no means for entering into life except conversion. Jesus says, "Unless you are converted and become as little children, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven".

It is most fitting that only little children should enter. The Son of God became a little child and it is he who lead us. This is why Jesus was born and was given to us. So let us seek the voice that even the dead are to hear and by which all who hear will live. We need only hear one pithy phrase said by Jesus: "Be converted, children of men!". Think of the fact that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So all need to be converted.

The word of God is living and active. God's voice is powerful and majestic. God spoke, and all things were created. God said, "Let there be light!" and it was created. So now God says, "Be converted!" All are being converted. Simon Peter was called to fish for people, and yet he toiled all night and caught nothing until Jesus came and by his word told Peter where to cast his net. Isn't this what we long for. When we proclaim God's word don't we hope above everything else that God will cause a great shoal of fish to enter our net?

What is important? It is necessary that we speak the Word of God and not simply our own words. How do we know we speak God's word? We know it is we live by God's word, already spoken to us in and as Jesus Christ. Let us ask our God for this great gift and let us ask by our lives more than by our words or thoughts or feelings. May I suggest that each of us prick up our ears, especially the ears of our hearts, so that we can hear the inner voice of God speaking deep within us. That is much more important than hearing human voices speak outside of us. It is God's voice which shakes wilderness, pierces all secret things and drives away all sluggishness of soul. It is God's voice that calls us to conversion and causes us to follow Christ. It is this voice that leads us to the life that never fails.

TAKING UP THE CROSS TO FOLLOW CHRIST

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

If we celebrate this feast of St. Andrew lovingly we will find much that builds us up. Have you noticed how St. Andrew, when he reached the place where a cross had been prepared for him, began to utter burning words through the Spirit? The love that burned within him flashed forth like a flame, expressed in these words: "O cross, so long desired and now ready for my eager spirit! With joy and confidence I come, so receive me gladly as the disciple of one who hung on you, for I have always been your lover and have longed to embrace you!" Those are words all of us would want to utter if the grace were given.

What is the source of such unheard of joy and exultation? Where does such great constancy and confidence come from in the midst of human fragility? How can a mere human experience such spiritual ardor and such burning love? Certainly it doesn't come from Andrew's own strength! It is a perfect gift coming down from the Father in Heaven who is the source of all light and alone does such great wonders. It was indeed the Spirit who came to the aid of Andrew's weakness and poured into his heart that love which was stronger than death. Grant that God give us all a share in it!

If we grow weak and fall asleep instead of praying then our own fragility explains it. But what God did for Andrew, on the cross and in his death, God will do for us in our toil and our penance and our efforts to pray. Not only will these things no longer seem a burden but they will become a delight. My spirit, says the Lord, is sweeter than honey. Nothing can take away that sweetness if only our Lord will give it to us.

So we seek this Spirit. Let us do our utmost to receive the gift. Don't we want to possess Jesus, and his Spirit, more than anything else? He is already dwelling in us and now we ask him to dwell there more and more fully and completely. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of God, Scripture says, is not God's and doesn't belong to Christ. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God. It is given so we may understand and live the gifts bestowed on us by our God.

What we have to do is take up our cross along with St. Andrew, and even more with the One whom Andrew followed. He is our Lord and Savior. The cause of Andrew's joy and exultation, even as he prepared to die, what not only for having Jesus as Lord but for being give the gift of suffering and dying with Jesus. Do you want to be crucified with Christ? Listen to Christ's words: "If anyone would come after me, let that one take up the cross and follow me" (Mt. 16:24). In the cross is our salvation, provided we cling to it firmly. The cross, as St. Paul reminds us, is folly to those who are perishing. But to all who are being saved it is the power of God! Accept the gift of that power and you too will be with Christ in joy forever.

LEARNING THE CULTURE OF LIFE FROM OUR DEAD

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Second Vatican Council, in its document “Joy and Hope”, reminds us that death is one of the realities surrounded for us with doubts and anxieties. Death is a mystery before which we feel helpless. This is not due to abstract ideas but to the painful breaks in our human relations that death causes. When we think of our departed names, faces and various incidents come to our minds, some pleasant and others frightening. We recall times spent in their company and especially their loving presence. Now it is over.

Great saints too have lived through the agony of such separations. St. Augustine described the death of his mother thus: “As I closed her eyes an immense sadness pressed heavily on my heart and turned into a flood of tears. The raw wound caused by the sudden breakup of our sweet and dear life together, to which we had grown so accustomed caused this”. If saints feel such separations so deeply how can we expect things to be different for us?

At the same time, the saints show us the way which has been opened before us when we are confronted with the mystery of death; it is the way of Christ’s Passover. Christ, by his death has destroyed our death and by his Resurrection has given us the gift of life. We remember our departed not only in the sadness of separation but also in the gladness of Christ’s Resurrection. In Him our dead live and will live forever. They are with us now and live in our presence and we in theirs. We sense this unity in our prayer. They speak to us in Jesus’ words.

Our world needs what might be called a “culture of holiness”. The Second Vatican Council underlined the universal call to holiness. In its words, “all Christians in any state of walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love”. It is a holiness that one might find in the streets, on buses and in subways, in factories and offices and in one’s family. It is a holiness that brings the Church into the reality of everyday life—a quiet and unacclaimed holiness. It brings with it a spirit capable of conserving life and the hope for life in a world which feels itself inevitably moving toward death.

Scripture teaches us that there is such a thing as a good death. It is a death from which life is reborn. Such is the death of Jesus. He goes to meet it with a purpose. “He had always loved those who were his own in the world and he showed how perfect his love was.” Jesus gives his own death using words that dissolve death’s bitterness. This is what we renew in our hearts when we celebrate what he said and did over bread and wine. He gives us a word and a hope that clothes death in a new meaning. When we die “in Him” and his gift of self our death thereby becomes a source of life for those we love. This is what we especially remember as we think of and pray with our dear departed ones. This is their continuing gift to us that lives in our shared faith. They speak to us of God and the hope we have in God and Jesus Christ. This a joy.

MARY'S GIFT OF NEW LIFE

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

There is a person who, under the cross fully lives the reality of our redemption. That person is Mary. She represents an immense treasure that Jesus wishes to share with us. Jesus makes her the custodian of this gift, a saving gift, and shows in her and through her a fully human response to unlimited divine love. As we seek to contemplate Mary at the foot of the cross when need to try to grasp what happened to her at that moment.

Mary is experiencing surrendering her son to God's will and she does it for the sake of all humanity. In that deed she receives all humanity as a gift; i.e., she loves all and so she receives the gift of being the mother of all. She has followed God's plan completely and made it her own; it is her way of reaching the total giving in faith to which all are called in the footsteps of Abraham. She has placed her entire self into God's hands and abandoned herself entirely, together with all that she could ever think of as her own. That includes her own dear son. She receives from God what is most dear to God; i.e., the Church as the Body of the Son. This Son will live in the Church born from the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Mary is given to us as the one who more than any other understood the personal meaning—for her—of Jesus' sacrificial offering, of Jesus' love for humanity and of the fullness of dedication to God's plan that this offering implies. More than anyone else she can thus receive the gift of a new humanity and a new way of being fully human.

Human history is moving towards an ideal unity and harmony with God but is shot through with conflict. Progress is made only through a clear determination of history's goal, by a constant effort for good against all adversity and misunderstandings and by recognizing all the disguises of evil and rejecting them. What part does the woman play in this vision of history? She represents all humanity because she is the one who receives the Word of God and from whom the Son of God is born in Jesus. In her we see our point of departure and our arrival in reconciliation and eternal life. We are all called to share these with Mary. She is the living symbol of humanity on the move. She is a woman reconciled with herself and her mission. She is the sign of renewed humanity, one in which woman regains her place and role and leads all to universal reconciliation—with God and with one another. We are to learn how to do this in our own life and mission. She is a living model for us to follow as we journey toward our goal, the goal with share with her and all humanity.