

THE THIRTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sun The Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Nov.19 **Using Our Gifts Responsibly**

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom

Mon Monday of the Thirty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

How Our Good Lord Encourages Us

20 A reflection taken from a mediation by Bishop R. Challoner

Tues Memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

21 **What Virtues Do We Look for In Ourselves?**

A reflection from On Virgins by St. Ambrose of Milan

Wed Memorial of Saint Cecelia

22 **What St. Cecelia Has to Teach Us**

A reflection taken from a sermon by Fr. Ronald Knox

Thurs **THANKSGIVING DAY CELEBRATION**

23 **Remembering How Grateful We Should Be**

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

Fri Memorial of Saints Andrew Dung-Lac and Companions

24 **Giving Thanks Even for Suffering**

A reflection taken from a Letter by St. Paul Lee-Bao-Tinh

Sat Saturday of the Thirty-Third Week in Ordinary Time

By their Fruits You Shall Know Them

A reflection developed from The Pastor by Hermes

USING OUR GIFTS RESPONSIBLY

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom

In the parable of the Talents the Lord entrusts a certain amount of money to each of three slaves, tells them to use it to earn more money, and then leaves on a journey. It is obvious that this is a metaphor designed to remind us of the way God has entrusted each of us with various gifts and told us to use them to advance the cause of the Kingdom of Heaven and to help our fellows. It is also a story intended to tell us how much our God trusts us and expects us to use our gifts well; i.e., not just for our own benefit. The parable is addressed to everyone and not just to a certain group of people, like rulers or slaves or Jews or Gentiles.

Eventually the Master returns, just as the Lord Jesus has promised to return on the Day of Judgment. The judgment we will face will be accomplished when we bring to our Lord the results of our ways of using our gifts. The one unacceptable result is not to use them but to avoid risk by simply to keep them safe but unused. The unacceptable attitude toward the Day of Judgment is mere fear; fear mustn't paralyze us. We may be a failure in achieving the goals we set ourselves, but that doesn't get us condemned. It is only inaction and refusal to risk anything that brings condemnation.

In the parable most bring some profit, proportioned to the gifts they received to begin with. They present these and thank God for trusting them with so much. They are extremely grateful and seem to attribute to the Lord all their success. Without gifts they could have done nothing but with them they did many things. And the Lord thanks them, and tells them they will be given new tasks, even more challenging than those connected with using their original gifts.

God always has new gifts to give us and they always require us to serve in some new and challenging way. Think, for example, of those who have been given the gift of faith. All are told to use it to lead others to faith. Some are also given gifts of explaining or teaching or even preaching. It would be a tragedy if anyone failed to use every gift given. And the Lord tells us that part of the tragedy is to lose the unused gift. In fact, we discard what we don't use. It may also mean being thrown out of the Kingdom and left in outer darkness crying in distress and grinding your teeth. There are only two options and we must take the good one by using our gifts to help one another, to help all those we can reach by reason of the gifts we have received. "To everyone who has more will be given, and that person will have enough and to spare. But the one who has nothing will forfeit even the little he was given". Is there anyone of us who has no gift? We have been given life, and love, and opportunities of many kinds. Is there anyone who cannot show love or mercy to others?

HOW OUR GOOD LORD ENCOURAGES US

A reflection by Bishop Richard Challoner

By his ascension Our Lord has gone into heaven. It seems a far country because it is so much more excellent than this earth. We are told in Scripture that “he gave gifts” to us all. He has distributed good things and to all his servants so that we might use them to improve matters during the time of his absence. But he tells us as well that he will come again and require an account of how we have used what has been entrusted to us. All that we have, as to soul or body, nature or grace, all belongs to Our Lord. We have nothing but what we have received from the Lord’s hands, but what we have received we are accountable for. Does this frighten you or give you courage?

Perhaps this depends most greatly upon our attitudes. For instance, those who have received much have nothing to be proud of. What has any one of us that we have not received. So those who receive much should be especially humble. If we don’t rely on ourselves what have we to fear? Do we think the Lord demands what he has not made it possible for us to do? Yet perhaps you think: Where more is given more will be required. Yet what the Lord requires is only that we made a consistent and dedicated use of the talents we have received.

The Lord shows us three persons and tells us what they did with his gifts. Two of them are proposed for our imitation. They were industrious and strove to correspond with divine grace. They employed what they had received in a proper manner and laid hold of every opportunity to do good. Like these good and faithful servants, we may improve and even double the stock in trade we received. How happy shall we be if we work in the way they did. No matter how much each one gained as fruits from this labor both we rewarded in the same way. One who labors much and finds blessing in this work is given more opportunities to do the same. “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

There is great encouragement here. It doesn’t matter how many talents one has received. What matters is making use of them just as well as we are capable of. One who accomplished less is reward just as is one who accomplished more. What is the proper use of the talents we have been given? It is a matter of discovering ways in which to use them for the Lord’s plans and for our neighbor’s benefit. Isn’t it a greater joy to have good things to do than to sit idle? The one who did nothing had only a long period of boredom and perhaps anxiety. Our Lord does not require hectic labor but calm and joyful exertion in seeking to do good. This is of itself a blessing. And how sublime is the reward that is set before us in these examples. “Enter into the joy of Your Lord!” Who could ask for more?

What is the joy of our Lord? It is nothing less than the everlasting possession of the Lord’s very self! We are to share the universal, incomprehensible and eternal good that our Lord and God knows! Rejoice that you are offered so much, and simply for doing your best with the gifts you have been given. It is a gift of one joy piled upon another.

WHAT VIRTUES DO WE LOOK FOR IN OURSELVES?

A reflection developed from On Virgins by St. Ambrose

The life of Mary was such that everyone can take her as a model. If an ordinary author's work pleases us we look for other like works to enjoy, and that is how we see Mary. She was a supremely pleasing work of God and so we look to her to find what will help us in our journey to God.

Think of how consecrated virgins imagine Mary. She seems to live a hidden life, one devoted to the practice of a faith that is both ardent and courageous and yet she is also devoted to service, as can be seen in her journey to help Elizabeth as well as to be with her son while he is on the Cross. She seems solitary in her home yet she is surrounded by family members and helps them in every way. She is eager to pray and to serve.

When one lives consecrated virginity, one imagines being presented to Our Lord and finding that Mary has led one to one's spouse. Mary says, in effect, here is one who has remained spotless, looking forward to the union with Christ in the heavenly nuptial chamber! Mary wants more than anything else to lead others to Jesus, her Son. What could be a better model for those who live a hidden and faith-guided life like hers?

When we decide to live a consecrated life we imagine Mary living it too. Wasn't she frugal, used to doing with little, and that without complaining? Didn't she live the life of one of God's poor ones? Wasn't she constantly working to make what she had adequate for the needs of all in her household? With this in mind, legends were created saying she fasted regularly and ate just enough to meet her physical needs. Didn't she often fast two days at a time, and without for that reason slackening her labors for others? She didn't eat, in other words, for the pleasure of eating but to remain alive for the services God had entrusted to her.

We imagine a consecrated life in terms of the monastic ideal. So, we look to Mary to find a model of eating and sleeping and working and praying, and so imagine her as sleeping only insofar as it was necessary. She didn't try to escape from her work by sleeping or resting. It was not a burden to her but an opportunity to offer herself to the Lord. Most importantly, she constantly meditated on what the Lord had given her and asked her to do. Her soul keep watch before the Lord no matter what her body was doing.

Mary reflected on what she had done and on what she still had to do, and saw it all in relation to her love of God and dedication to doing God's will. Her entire life had become the expression of her response to God's angel: Let what you will be done in me. Could any Christian find a better model? Even her beloved Son was given to her, in her own eyes, as a gift to be returned to God. When we think of her today we see all the virtues we must look for in ourselves. This is imagining how we can serve God.

WHAT SAINT CECILIA HAS TO TEACH US

A reflection taken from a homily by Fr. Ronald Knox

All we know about Saint Cecilia, except for her holiness, comes to us as legend. Yet whatever historical truth they give us is less important than the simplicity of character they picture. We are told she had been married to a pagan named Valerian but got him to respect a previous vow of virginity she had made by telling him her guardian angel would attack anyone who violated it. He wanted to see the angel and Cecilia talked him into becoming a Christian as a condition for being granted this grace. Then he saw, and as a result became an apostle of Christ, converting first his own brother.

In Cecilia we see the call of every Christian to witness to our Lord and lead others to faith in Him. We see also that this witness had to come from a deep personal faith. In Cecilia's case this had been expressed in a secret vow to remain a virgin so as to be united first of all with Christ. What secret promises to you and I made to our Lord and our God in the secrecy of our hearts? How do we live out our promises? Just as in Cecilia's day, the people of our times can't make sense of vows of virginity and, as they think them, mere fantasies of mystical marriage with Christ. But are we prepared, if God so wills, to die rather than renounce our beliefs and our way of seeing ourselves united with our God and Lord?

But for Cecilia to envisage the gift of herself to God as a virgin she had to build on ideas her culture had taught her. The vow was intended as a sacrifice and it was felt necessary for the victim in a sacrifice to be spotless, the best of its kind. You must offer not what you can well afford but what costs you something, perhaps painfully. When we offer ourselves to God we don't give up sin or sinful pleasures but what is good and gives pleasures that can be holy and right. If you are convinced of such things then the sacrifice of self in virginity is one of the holiest things any person can offer God.

What was impressive about people like Cecilia was that they not only stood for a holy reality but that they kept what they had promised. She is presented as 100% convinced that God wanted her to keep her secret vow—one made in spite of what her parents wanted, as we can see from the fact that they forced her to marry—and she wanted with her whole heart to keep it. Her purity was not forced but expressed the deepest longing of her heart. What effect would our purity have on the world if it could see that all who vow celibacy keep it whole heartedly and not as any sort of imposition from without?

Saint Cecilia reminds us to take our Christian vocation very seriously, especially if we have in some special way consecrated ourselves to God. We must do with our lives exactly what our heart's lips profess. We follow our Master when we do this, just as we follow Mary, the mother of all believers as St. Luke reminds us perpetually. We strive to come before God on that Last Day as spotless offerings, for love of God and one another.

REMEMBERING HOW GRATEFUL WE SHOULD BE

A reflection developed from a sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny

Whenever we come to a time of special celebration it is good to consider and state as plainly as we can how much God has given us in Christ. Why did our forbears go out into what seemed a wilderness except that they might better serve God? We hear in Proverbs, “A poor thing, such a poor thing, people say, and then go off and brag about their bargain”. Won’t we be able to boast rightly about the unbelievable bargain we have obtained—an immeasurable and eternal weight of glory, and for no more payment than such minor afflictions as we actually bear? “The sufferings of this time aren’t worthy to be compared with the future glory to be revealed in us.”

I could easily be carried away by unrelenting wrath against ingratitude and faithlessness, if I were not reminded of the holy and blessed times in which we live the gift that is Jesus Christ. Yet the two realities come together. We live a time of grace and of wickedness. “Behold, now is the acceptable time!” When the world’s wickedness had almost reached its peak God sent us the Only Son. Now we are graced to live a mature and adult faith and through grace and truth we live in a time of fullness. It is God’s grace that makes this the happiest of times for us. The Book of Sirach reminds us not to waste our opportunities: “*Don’t be defrauded of the good day!*”, he shouts out. This is a good day because it is a day of godly gifts. We have received the best gift of all and we only have to live the grace received.

My friends in Christ, haven’t we received the Spirit which is of God? Don’t we have the knowledge of what has been given us? Thanks be to you, Father of mercies, who has given us our daily bread, who has opened your hand with such generosity to fill every living thing with blessings!

How wretched, how brutish and unfeeling, even more how harmful and grudging is the person who defrauds self and others of the godly gifts God has given. Such a person has no share in those gifts, no share in heavenly grace. So much has been set before us. We celebrate a day of refreshment and joy. Could we do it with a sad heart? Wisdom calls out to us, “*A person with a jaundiced eye never has a full meal but always sits hungry and pensive at the table*”. We must consider with devotion and with faith all the things that have been offered us.

If we don’t turn our face away from Christ we can feed most happily and wonderfully from merely looking upon Him. “*The Lord feeds me and I lack nothing; God has set me in a place of green pastures*”. Yes, we yearn for the fullness of time and even so we are filled with such a plenitude of good things! What can we do but give thanks to the One who has given us all and will give us endlessly more? Let us give thanks, now and through the endless ages. This is the Day of Thanksgiving. Give thanks to God.

GIVING THANKS EVEN FOR SUFFERINGS

A reflection developed from a Letter by St. Paul Le-Bao-Tinh, martyr

I am in chains for the name of Christ. I want to relate to you the trials that beset us daily in prison so that you too may be set on fire with love for God and we may all join our voice in God's praise. "God's mercy is forever!" Even though the prison is a true image of everlasting hell, God who once freed the three Hebrew children from the fiery furnace is with us always. Everywhere there are shackles, iron chains, manacles, and added to them hatred, vengeance seeking, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing and cursing, not to mention anguish and grief. God makes all such tribulations sweet. Indeed, God's mercy is forever!

Such torments and evils usually terrify people. By the grace of God, I am filled with joy and gladness. It is because I am not alone but with Christ. Our Master bears the entire weight of the Cross. I am given only a tiny share. The Lord isn't a mere onlooker in this struggle but the main contestant. That is why the crown of victory is on his head.

Each day emperors and mandarins blaspheme God's holy name. As I see things, I would prefer to be torn to bits on account of the burning love I have for you, Lord, if only you will hold me up and show your power in my weakness. Grant that I may do nothing to help your enemies hold up their heads in pride. Beloved friends in Christ, as you hear all this may you too give thanks in joy. It is from God that every good gift comes. His mercy endures forever.

O praise the Lord all you nations; acclaim God all you peoples. God has chosen what is weak in this world to confound the strong. God chose what is low and despised to confound the noble. Through our mouths God confuses the philosophers who are disciples of the worldly wise. God's mercy is forever! I am writing all this so that your faith and mine may be one. In the midst of this storm I cast my anchor toward the throne of God, the anchor which is the lively hope in my heart.

Let us all so run as to attain the crown. Let us put on the breastplate of faith and take up the weapons of Christ. As my patron saint, Paul, has taught me, "It is better for you to enter life with one eye or crippled than with all your members to be cast away". Come to my aid with your prayers. May I have the strength to fight according to the Law of God and to fight the good fight. Let me do it right to the end, and so finish the race. We may not see each other again in this life but we will have the happiness of seeing each other over and over again in the world to come. We will stand by the throne of the Spotless Lamb and together join in singing God's praises and exulting forever in the joy of God's triumph.

BY THEIR FRUITS YOU SHALL KNOW THEM

A reflection taken from The Pastor by Hermes

Lord, how are we to distinguish a true from a false prophet? Listen, the Lord replies, and note carefully to what I tell you about all who claim to speak in my name. To test whether a person speaks by the Holy Spirit or some merely worldly spirit know that one who genuinely has the Holy Spirit is gentle, peaceable and humble. Such a person refrains from evil and vain desires and acts like one who is inferior to all others. Such a one gives no reply when questioned and doesn't speak independently. The Holy Spirit doesn't speak at the will of any human person but only as God wishes.

Some claim to possess the Spirit and exalt themselves. When their claims are accepted they claim high rank and immediately become bold and impudent and loquacious. They like to live in luxury and suffer from many delusions. They accept payment for what they say in God's name and unless they are paid refuse to speak at all. Can the Divine Spirit really accept or demand payment for what it says or does? A prophet of God cannot possibly do this. Those who claim otherwise are possessed by a merely earthly spirit.

The answer to the question I posed is that those who claim to be inspired by the Holy Spirit must be tested by their deeds and their lives. When you see they act as God tells us to then you can trust their claim. Only a Spirit that comes from God has authority. The spirit that is earthly is vain and has no authority but comes from the devil.

Let me provide an illustration. Pick up a stone and throw it at the sky. Can you hit the sky? Take a syringe and squirt a jet of water at the sky. Can you make a hole in it by doing this? In fact, neither of these things is possible. Just as this is true so it is the case that earthly spirits are weak and powerless to affect anything on high. But now contrast these facts with some others. Hailstones can be very small, like pebbles. But when they fall on a person's head how painful they are! Again, think of the drops of water that drip from a roof onto whatever is below. If the dripping goes on long enough it will wear a hole even in a rock. The point is that even the smallest thing that come down from above has great power. There is likewise great power in the Spirit that come from on high.

In whom shall we trust when we seek truth? Trust in the Holy Spirit who comes down from the Father of Lights and of all truth. Put your trust in God but have nothing to do with what is merely earthly. You want to know the straight path, that path that leads to God and life everlasting. Watch the lives of those who speak in God's name and obey only those who live as God directs.