

THE TENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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THE LORD'S CALL TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH

A reflection from Our Lady & the Church by Fr. Hugo Rahner

We are about to hear the Gospel tale about a family's concern for a member who seems to have lost balance and begun to behave strangely. It is Jesus' family. He has been so busy ministering to people's needs for drawing closer to God that he doesn't even take time to eat. So, his brothers get Mary to come with them so they can confront Jesus. But when they get to the house where he's teaching and can't get close due to the crowd someone tells him they want to talk with him.

“And someone said to him: “You mother and brothers are outside, asking for you. But he responded: Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And pointing to his disciples he said, These are my mother and brothers; everyone who does the will of my Heavenly Father is my brother and sister and mother.”

The Fathers of the Church had a special fondness for connecting this aspect of the mystery of Mary and the Church with our response to the call to grow in holiness. Is Jesus devaluing earthly and human relationships? Since of all humankind Mary is the one who most perfectly fulfilled the Heavenly Father's will that doesn't make sense. She had become Jesus' mother precisely by her “let God's will be done in me”. What seems to be highlighted is the echo of Mary's “fiat” that needs to be heard in the hearts of all who would be close to Jesus. To follow Jesus is to do the Heavenly Father's will. Jesus points this out by calling his disciples his brothers and sisters and mother. We are called to belong to a new kind of family and structure our lives in terms of a new set of relationships, all of them centered on the Heavenly Father as revealed in Jesus.

Spiritually and really the Church is the company of those who do the will of the Heavenly Father as completely as Mary. She is the Mother of Christ who continues to give birth by drawing others to Jesus and so to the will of the Heavenly Father. But we have to grow to become able to surrender our lives and selves to God as Mary did. Mary wants, in effect, to give birth to Jesus in our hearts and to do it daily. She wants Christ in us to grow to his full stature and maturity, as evidenced in his own complete gift of self to the Heavenly Father on the cross. From this comes the resurrection into a life of self-gift and service.

All this can be found, for example, in Origen when he writes of the spiritual life. For him a Christian's life after baptism is an inner growth of Christ toward what St. Paul described as full maturity. Our hearts are to be “motherly” precisely because Christ is conceived and grows in them. *“Just as an infant is formed in the womb, so it seems to me that the Word of God is in the heart of a person who has received the grace of baptism and then forms within itself the word of a faith every more glorious and full.”* In this way Mary not only gave birth to our new life but announces by her simple presence the call to grow in the spiritual life. She shows us, in going to help her cousin Elizabeth and in helping the newly married couple at Cana, what sort of love flows from and manifests this spiritual growth. Becoming like her is becoming like Christ and becoming like Christ is becoming like our Heavenly Father. Spiritual maturity is a maturity in freely given and practical help flowing from love.

THE COURAGE TO RESPECT OTHERS' VIEWS

A reflection developed from a text by St. Pope John XXIII

The name 'Barnabas' means 'Son of Encouragement' and reflects the way St. Barnabas related to others. For example, when the Church at Antioch was inundated by gentile converts he went to Tarsus and effectively encouraged St. Paul to take up this work. What a gift this was to the Church! But this didn't mean that Barnabas didn't need to watch out for misunderstandings and disagreements. Think of the great misunderstanding that caused Barnabas and Paul to cease to be able to work together. It arose because they judged John Mark's value as a fellow missionary so differently. They failed to respect one another's views in practice and so couldn't work together. This is something the feast of St. Barnabas draws us to reflect upon.

We have to beware of misunderstandings. They constantly arise and this challenges us. If people don't handle them with care they can even come to blows. So, we must be on our guard. If we can't avoid them, at least we mustn't cultivate them. We have to be ready to put forth the effort to set relations right and disentangle misunderstandings if we are to work well for Christ and the Kingdom. Most of all we have to keep ourselves free from feelings of resentment.

Even among cultivated and spiritual people there are differences of opinions. This does no harm to charity and peace as long as we preserve mutual respect and value moderation in the way we relate to those who differ from us. The Lord, in fact, can use such disagreement to bring about great good. That seems to be what he did in the case of Paul and Barnabas after they had separated from one another due to their different views of the value of John Mark as a fellow minister of the Gospel.

How did it happen that a person Paul would at first have nothing to do with became later one of his valued collaborators? Those who disagreed so violently were both holy and good people. No doubt that is what enabled them to settle that disagreement in a loving and respectful manner. Barnabas gave John Mark a "second chance" after he had turned back from the work of evangelization and as a result he became a brave and successful herald of the Good News.

Jesus taught us that it brings much joy and peace to the heart to believe and to renounce even our own views of people and behaviors. We must never forget that message. A great mystery, both in regard to life and to our relations with others, is found in the Our Father. It teaches us about the triumph of God's Name, about the Kingdom of God and about God's will. What we thus learn is a kind of daily bread for the spirit. We especially need the spiritual nourishment of the call to forgive one another as we ourselves have been forgiven. We must not turn away from growth in practical love for one another but that growth is possible only if love can accept the differences that so easily divide us. We are in God's hands and God will lead us to eternal life and joy beyond all the differences that can seem so important now. It is through this love that we cultivate mutual respect and without that we can never come together in God's love and Kingdom.

LIVING OUR JOY IN ALL GOD'S GIFTS

A reflection by an unknown Greek of the Fifth Century

There are signs in persons that evidence the effects of the Lord's resurrection. For instance, deception ceases, envy is banished and strife is despised while peace is held in high honor and war is done away with. We need not spend time bemoaning the First Adam's sin because our lives have been refashioned by the Second Adam. We don't waste time reproaching Eve for his sin but instead bless Mary for becoming the Mother of God. We don't turn away from the sight of the wood of the cross because it is the Lord's cross and our salvation. In effect, we no longer fear the devil, the ancient serpent, because we have received the Holy Spirit. We don't need to fear descending into the earth in death because we know we will ascend to heaven with Christ.

Think of what it means that we aren't exiles from paradise but citizens of heaven. In the Holy Spirit we sing: "*This is the day that the Lord has made! Let's keep it with gladness and rejoicing!*" Why should we rejoice? Because the sun is no longer darkened but everything is bathed in light. The veil of the temple is no longer rent because all eyes are turned to the Christ that manifests Christ's presence. We don't even bother to carry palm branches because we bear with us the newly enlightened.

This is the day that the Lord had made! Let us keep it with gladness and rejoicing. This is the day! This day and no other is filled with the Lord. There is only one king and not a mere throng of princes and princesses. It is the day in the truest sense because it is the day of triumph. We think of Sunday as the day custom consecrates to the celebration of the resurrection. But it is not only on Sunday that we live the reality of the resurrection even on this earth. Everyday we adore ourselves with grace and joy. Every day we partake of the spiritual lamb. Today the milk of new life is given to all those who have been born again. It is today that the Lord's plan for raising up the poor is realized.

How shall we observe this day of gladness and rejoicing? We don't do it by running off to a tavern. We hasten to church and to the shrines of the martyrs. We don't praise drunkenness but temperance. We don't dance in the streets but sing psalms at work and at home. We celebrate by leading a risen life rather than by debauchery. No one can ascend to heaven as a drunk trying to dance. None of us must dishonor today!

This is the day on which Adam is set free and Eve delivered in us. It is a day on which cruel death shudders because its strength is shattered and the seals on the tombs of believers are broken open. Those who were long dead have been restored to life. Heaven stands open because the Risen Christ has entered it. The fruitful tree of resurrection is sending its shoots out over the whole world. The world is becoming a garden of paradise once again.

This, then, is the day the lord has made so that we may keep it with gladness and joy. We keep it in the grace of Christ. By his resurrection he has illuminated the entire world. In this light we know what is good and right. Glory is given to us. Let us adore him through whom the Heavenly Father has given us the Holy Spirit. This is today's task for all who live in Christ.

THE APOSTOLATE OF GOOD EXAMPLE

A reflection by St. Pope John XXIII

The seed we call grace is planted in baptism and flowers in a life given to God. This we see in the life of St. Anthony of Padua bore such wonderful fruits in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and in the virtues that made him not only a great preacher but a person who drew others to him by a charm that flowed from this utter dedication to God in Christ and to love of neighbor.

The seed of grace planted in Anthony was the seed that is planted in each of us. They are meant to transform us, in Scripture's words, from one degree of glory to another" and this comes from the same Spirit. A kind of by-product is what St. Paul calls an aroma: "*We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved*" (II Cor. 2:15). It is a marvelous aroma and those who sense it are drawn to the one from whom it comes. That was how it was with St. Anthony.

There is, then, for each of us an essential duty. We are to live according to the promises made when we were baptized. On our part it is a promise of willing fidelity to divine grace, including the practice of that which draws people to Christ. He is the source of goodness and beauty, of truth and of purification and perfection. This is a perfection in beauty and loveliness.

Everyone is to act according to the promptings of grace and these come through one's own personal call. All share in the same firm determination to bear witness to the Divine Founder of Christianity. This is essentially the life of God in us, and it is the source of our expectation of life in heaven.

Anthony's living of his vocation, his mission, was very pleasing to God. The proof was seen in special displays of divine power. These didn't make him holy but came from the holiness God gave him as he struggled to remain faithful to his baptismal vows. We do not need to ask God to work such wonders through us but we do know that we have a share in the work of bring in God's Kingdom. That is already a great privilege and even a miracle. This is what God and the Church expects of each of us. Know that God can make you a person who will be a good odor of Christ for all who come near to you.

You and I will always be able to carry on the apostolate of good example. We live in a world that is not even ashamed of bad examples but for the very reason has the greater need for good one—indeed, for very good ones! This is the call given to all who received the gift of Christian faith. Do it without fear or anxiety. Do it graciously. Spread around you the warmth of God's love and of your convictions about that love's saving and healing power. Live in a serenity that is born of such faith.

It is very pleasant to refresh oneself, to renew our minds and hearts, in the work of those who have left behind them such wonderful proofs of the fruits of directing all one's self to God. It isn't some personal achievement of extraordinary people. It is the fruit of God's free gift. Open yourself wide to receive, and live, that gift and let others be refreshed by the goodness and joy God will give to you.

THE EXAMPLE THAT IS A HOLY LIFE

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

A servant of the Lord is dead, a devoted brother and servant of all died in my arms. We saw how death devoured him and also saw that it could kill only the flesh. It took from us a dear friend and brother, a wise counselor and a strong helper who spoke of himself as a “freeloader” in our community. Such was his humility and goodness.

But death has taken only the flesh and the soul has gone to its creator. He longed for this most ardently and walking all his days along the path that leads there. Death will one day have to give back even that flesh and it will cry out with joy and clap hands in gladness. The Only-Begotten of the Heavenly Father will come and see our brother and reconfigure him to the brilliance of his own heavenly glory.

This servant of God displayed for us a kind of lived sermon composed of every sort of holiness. It was as long and inclusive as was the length of his days. It was sublime. If you remember as well as I do that sermon it is engraved on your hearts. He lived so many years in service of the One who makes our service a way of reigning with Him. He lived with us almost from the foundation of our monastery and he lived not only blamelessly but with grace. His memory will be a blessing, not only for us but for generations to come.

He passed his life in this world as a pilgrim and a stranger, since he knew that he was not of this world. Here he had no abiding city and he looked steadily toward the future and the prize of a Christian’s upward calling. He accepted from the world its resources in so far as there was need and would have taken less except for the call of obedience. He was gentle and lowly of heart and has a special grasp of gracious mildness. He loved humility and so was affable to all and was intensely loveable.

Did anyone ever hear from him a petty remark or an unkind word, a boast or an envious comment? Did anyone hear him judge others or agree with those who did? Did he indulge in foolish talk? Truly, he guarded his way lest he should offend with his tongue. He always showed a bright countenance and sought not to be a burden to others but he never completely gave way to laughter either. You saw his fervor in the worship of God, right up to the day of his death.

What was he like in giving advice? He was clear and discreet. It was not only I who knew that but you all did. What of his charity? He found excuses for everyone; he intervened on everyone’s behalf, even when those concerned didn’t know it. He was lowly of heart and mild in speech, diligent in his work, burning in charity and faithful in all that was entrusted to him. He planted his feet in the way of Jesus Christ. He was as poor as Jesus was. He lived a life in labor as the Lord did. Practice these virtues and aim for the ideal his example gives us. You saw and heard him and know that as you come to Christ you will come to him as well. Let us all live thus in Christ now that we may be with him forever.

WE MUST LIVE EUCHARISTIC UNITY

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Not long ago we heard St. Paul's warning to the Corinthian Church that their failure to show the charity of Christ as renewed in the Eucharist was endangering them. They act out divisions among themselves by failing to share with each other and giving offense to their poorer members by treating them as unimportant. A right celebration of Eucharist is not possible unless all who celebrate live out pure charity toward one another. Hence the Eucharist is incompatible with disunity in the community that celebrates it.

If we cannot, or worse will not, show a non-discriminatory charity to one another then we make ourselves deaf to what Christ shows us by his death for us all and as long as this lasts we are unprepared to celebrate it. With this in mind, think of the kinds of tensions that so frequently appear in faith communities and disturb their members. The Eucharist, in fact, draws all aspects of life into the mystery of Christ and his total gift of self to the Father. Celebrating it is a call to total fidelity to the reality of God's union as Trinity and a summons to make the institutional structures of the community serve to help us answer that summons. At the same time, it calls us to realize a like unity among ourselves.

A less than full understanding of these facts about the Eucharist hinders us from interpreting community tensions and differences of view point and opinion in terms of this call to unity with one another in God. Instead of organizing our community's life by a vision derived from the Eucharist. When we don't see this, we tend to base our ways of relation to one another on various prejudices or on idiosyncratic ways of understanding the life of a Christian community.

Different perspectives and views within a community need to be made to complement one another. If this is not accomplished we begin to make hasty or bitter judgments, behave unlovingly toward certain others, and fall into factions marked by stubbornness. If, however, we are willing to accept a concept of community life based on the Eucharist we can come to a truer evaluation of the value of our differences and judgments of others. This is the path to experiencing the power of the love of Christ drawing us into the Heavenly Father's heart and winning the victory over our sin and sinfulness.

Now recall that St. Paul began this letter praising the Corinthian church for its fidelity to the traditions and usages he had handed on to them and which derive from Jesus himself and to the Last Supper. What Jesus did then is unrepeatable unless it is re-enacted sacramentally. All have to remember what Christ did and then do the like. The Corinthian community is to be praised because it wants to do this but it has not actually done it. Its celebration of Christ and all he has given is blameworthy because it doesn't act out the unconditional, total love for God in unconditional love for one another. That means doing exactly what Jesus told us not to do. You can see why St. John's Gospel places Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet where the other Gospels recount the institution of the Eucharist. To fail to serve one another as Jesus has served us is to become unable to celebrate the Eucharist in a way that "remembers" what the Lord has done for us.

ST. LUTGARD AND THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S HOUSE

A reflection based on a sermon by St. Bernard

Once upon a time that glorious king and prophet of the Lord, holy David, judged it intolerable that the Lord of Hosts should have no worthy dwelling place on earth. We too need to consider the same matter carefully and bravely. We live in a lofty house that was built for us by God and we call it our body. God planned that we should live in our houses with delight and give him glory. But even for our bodies he made a lofty house, totally suited to us and beautiful. I am referring to the perceptible and habitable universe. Do you think, then, that what God has made a house for you, you should fail to make a temple for God?

Certainly, we have houses now but they will fall down before long. Unless we make preparations now what will happen? Happy those who repeat the words, "For we know that if our earthly house falls apart, we have a building from God, a house not made by human hands, eternal and in heaven". Therefore, my soul, take no rest until you have made a dwelling-place for the Lord that will last always. But, of course, we have no power to do such a thing of ourselves. We need to remember the words, "*The Father and I will come to you and will make our home with you*". Where God builds the house it never falls down.

How does the Lord God come to dwell within us? God does it through our love and surrender to divine love. "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word*". How marvelous that the Lord who needs nothing should order that a temple for himself be made within us. The Mother of God has shown us our part in the construction of this temple. It is the surrender of love we make in prayer. Today we remember the example of Lutgard's dedication to prayer. She was neglecting the inner temple in flirting with a young man and saw a vision of Christ telling her to put frivolities aside and dedicate herself to loving him, her only and eternal spouse. She did exactly as the Lord commanded.

Let our soul be watchful, then, if we desire Christ to dwell by faith in our hearts. Take great care that your inner members—reason, will and memory—don't waste their time loving things which will fall down just as will our bodies. What's more, since each of us is of the same mind we must be linked and bonded together by mutual charity, which is the bond of perfection. Perfect mutual understanding is not to be had in this life but only in the heavenly house. Here knowledge brings delight and if it is true then we make no mistakes. We will come to know how the house of our community is to be firmly joined together unto eternal life.

This community is to be a house of prayer and of praise. That makes it a strong city and a city of rest. If we are victorious in building, with God's help, such a house within ourselves we will be glorious in heaven. In the meantime, it is better to be hard pressed by inward labor and even struggle, and to bear the weight of all the implements of our spiritual warfare, than to fail. In this we trust in God, know that God never fails those who turn to him in their hearts and never cease from prayer and praise. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. They were as weak as we but in the Lord's strength they conquered. God who conquered in them will conquer in us. We need only trust in his love, which itself is a marvelous gift of love for our God.