

SIXTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. **The Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
July 22 **OUR RESPONSE TO JESUS' CARE FOR US**
 A reflection from St. Bede's Commentary on Mark's Gospel
- Mon. **Monday of the 16th Week in Ordinary Time**
23 **WHAT JESUS ASKS OF US**
 A reflection from Christian Life Day by Day
 by Leon Cardinal Suenens
- Tues. **Tuesday of the 16th Week in Ordinary Time**
24 **OUR NEED FOR A DOUBLE PORTION OF GRACE**
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- Wed. **The Feast of St. James, Apostle**
25 **ARE WE TRULY READY TO SHARE IN THE PASSION?**
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- Thurs. **Memorial of Sts. Joachim & Anne**
26 **WHAT GRACE WILL GOD GIVE THROUGH US?**
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OUR RESPONSE TO JESUS' CARE FOR US

A reflection from St. Bede's Commentary on Mark's Gospel

“The apostles returned to Jesus and reported to him everything they had done and taught.” Jesus said to them: ***“Come away to a place where we can be alone by ourselves and rest awhile.”*** Another passage in the Gospel shows us why there was a real need to give the disciples some rest: ***“Many were coming and going and they had no time even to eat”***.

That there was great happiness in those days is seen from the hard work of those who were sent to teach and heal, and even more from the enthusiasm of those who were learning. What a joy it would be in our days if there were such a concourse of listening believers pressing around the ministers of the word so eagerly as not to give them even time to attend to their own needs!

Should we attend only to the fact that those who lack time to look after themselves will thus have less opportunity to fall into temptation? No, in fact, people from whom a word of faith and a saving ministry is demanded, both in season and unseasonably, will have an incentive as well as a need to meditate on heavenly things without neglecting earthly necessities. They must watch carefully that what they teach is not contradicted by what they do. So they need time apart from their ministry and service to care for themselves spiritually.

“They got into the boat and went away by themselves to a deserted spot”. The disciples didn't go alone; they went with the Lord. The evangelist makes this very clear. That is what we must do as well. Yet this may not be enough. ***“Many people saw them set out and recognized them and from all the towns people hurried on foot to the place to which they were going and reached it before them.”*** The fact that people on foot got there first shows that they weren't going very far but to a place within walking distance. We need to remember that we don't have to go far to find a place to be alone with the Lord.

“When Jesus landed, he saw a large crowd and he took pity on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and so, he began to teach them many things.” Matthews adds to Mark by telling us that Jesus cured their sick. That is what it means really to take pity on the poor and those who have no guide. One needs to open the way of truth to them by teaching, and heal their physical infirmities as well, and then one leads them to praise the divine generosity, especially by feeding the hungry. This is what, as we are told, Jesus did.

In a sense, Jesus tested people's faith in going away so they would have to follow him quickly if they were to obtain his help. He wanted to see if they would go to real trouble to follow him. Their effort showed how concerned they were for salvation. Jesus responded by welcoming them, instructing them, healing them and feeding them. This is what our Lord has done for us.

What sort of devoted trust ought we to show Jesus in response to his love for us? What sort of effort should we make to find time to be alone with Him? How should we respond when others' demands take that time away from us? We must hurry to find Jesus now, when he is near!

WHAT JESUS ASKS OF US

A reflection from Christian Life Day by Day by Leon Cardinal Suenens

Life is lived at high tension today. Nerves get frayed and our pace of life becomes very intense. But whatever it may cost, we have to learn to stop and draw a quiet breath. That means we have to learn to recognize our need. We have to learn that an ordinary vacation isn't enough. Going to different places and trying to have fun isn't the same as relaxing. And to learn to relax we must learn how to avoid inner imbalances. The word 'recreation' implies that one is doing something that re-creates, creates one over again, and gives a new life and a fresh start.

Humanly speaking, to acquire the art of balanced relaxation we need to learn to take advantage of little opportunities that life offers us to again become at heart children. To be relaxed, for instance, doesn't mean avoiding others but being accessible to others in a positive way. For people of faith this starts with being accessible to Our Lord. He didn't want his disciples to live in a state of perpetual tension. We have heard the Gospel passage in which Jesus calls upon the disciples to "*come away into a quiet place and rest a little*". What we need is to take such opportunities when they are offered. We are offered the best of Jesus and of his message in moments like the present.

We often stand in need of rest in the ordinary sense of that word. But we need even more to rest in God. In the bustle of our days we need to discover the little times which give us the opportunity to be with Jesus. Perhaps it is a matter of individual prayer. Perhaps it is a moment of meditative reading. It is like our need for oxygen. It is no luxury. It is a vital necessity.

How good it is to sit down like Mary of Bethany at the feet of our Master. We need it especially if we are bustling about in order to complete indispensable daily tasks. In the midst of our work we must keep our hearts open to God. We talk about opening a window so fresh air can come in. We need even more to keep a window open to Heaven!

This is a matter of learning to keep things in their proper relative proportions. Each task has its importance, and all are not equally important. Giving each its proper place is possible only if we have a standard of importance. The need to be with God is of supreme importance and gives us that standard. Without this everything one does is imbalanced and given undue importance.

Faith enables us to see how to judge the relative importance of different things and tasks. Faith trusts first in God. If that is so, then faith tells us to give first priority to being with God and second priority to learning from God during these times. This not only enables us to bring balance to our lives but to relax and open ourselves to genuine refreshment and re-creation. Take time for Jesus! Jesus always had time for God! Paradoxically, that time is always now.

OUR NEED FOR A DOUBLE PORTION OF GRACE

A reflection from A Retreat for Priests by Fr. Ronald Knox

You may remember that Elisha asked for a double portion of his master's spirit. Now what made him ask for a double portion, for a more intense outpouring of the Spirit than that given his master? I think it was that he saw lying ahead of him a very difficult task, one that needed a yet greater divine assistance than that given Elijah. He would need this to carry Elijah's work through to its completion.

One of the things most noticeable differentiating Elijah's ministry from that of Elisha was that Elijah was, so to speak, a free spirit and a wandering prophet, whereas Elisha lived a settled life, ever at the disposal of persons who wanted to consult him and even the habitual counselor of kings. In Elisha's time the position of a prophet seems to have become a fixed thing, an institution so to speak, and a recognized feature in the life of the nation of Israel. Elisha lives in his own house and sends out a servant to interview visitors at the door instead of dealing with them himself. When he goes on a journey he is entertained and stays with the great people of the town he stops in.

And then the "sons of the prophets" are continually mentioned in relation to Elisha. They seem to live in communities which were centers of prophetic inspiration, and perhaps of training for those who would themselves become prophets. They are forever consulting Elisha. At one point they want to enlarge their quarters and ask Elisha about the project. One of them drops an axe into the water and they go to Elisha. They haven't enough food to go around and they ask Elisha. Food is suspected of being poisoned, and they go to Elisha.

Prophecy, instead of being an occasional phenomenon, as in the desert, has become the occupation of a caste and a center of a special kind of community life. In other words, prophecy had been institutionalized.

I have sometimes wondered if Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's grace precisely because it is harder to keep an institution going and alive once it has been founded than it is to found it. An inspiration leads to the establishment of an institution.

The founders of great religious orders, for instance, have been individuals who kept things going by the inspiration of their personal influence, at least during their lifetimes. They left to others the difficult task of preserving what they had begun and making it a tradition capable of ever-renewed life. Even if the founders were great legislators it is inevitable that fresh situations should arise and the tradition should need to be interpreted afresh, perhaps accommodated to contemporary needs.

You have to go aside to be with the Lord and ask for the double grace needed to do this kind of task. We pride ourselves on being the successors of great believers. We need to pray for a double portion of their spirit, and then we need to hold ourselves open to going wherever the Spirit may lead.

ARE WE TRULY READY TO SHARE IN THE PASSION?

A reflection adapted from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

The Sons of Zebedee thought they had to be devious in asking Christ for the two most powerful positions in government of the Messianic Kingdom. *“Command that we may sit, one at your right hand and the other at your left.”* As the psalm says, with the devious the Lord is devious. Of course, the Lord is also wholly honest. *“You don’t know what you are asking for!”*, he tells them. Those who are greatest in the Kingdom are those who have given themselves most completely in service of others. Speaking indirectly, perhaps so as not to frighten them away, Jesus asks whether they are willing to drink the cup he will drink and be baptized in the way he will be.

James and John were thinking of power and prestige but Jesus could only think of hardships and service, of struggles and sweat. What do we think of when we imagine our life in God’s Kingdom? Do we think clearly and carefully about the struggles and sweat it will cost us even to enter that Kingdom? James and John thought that with the Lord’s resurrection the Kingdom would come, and in the way most Jews of their time imagined. It would be an earthly Kingdom with God’s commands enforced strictly. For those in charge, under God and Jesus, there would be rewards and honors. These are what they wanted. But Jesus thinks of the Kingdom differently. Just as he will die for us, so many will die for the sake of that Kingdom before all struggle ends.

Notice how Jesus corrects and draws James and John to seek to share what he is about to undergo. If they can drink the cup they can shed their blood and if they can share Jesus’ baptism they can give their lives as he is about to do. He is not speaking only to James and John but to us as well. We have our eyes fixed on rewards and what our Lord and Savior sees is the self-sacrifice that makes us capable of living those rewards.

God is love and utter self-giving. We are to become as God is. Without understanding, perhaps any better than they did, we will reply as they did. Yes, we are willing to drink Jesus’ cup and be baptized as he was. Haven’t we said this? Yet it’s easy to talk about “dying with Christ” but that doesn’t make it easy to do. Jesus treats martyrdom as a blessing and itself a kind of reward. Is that how we think of it? As for the positions, they don’t involve the sort of power or prestige James and his brother imagined. God will show them what it is really like to have a “high” place in the Kingdom. He will show us as well. We must not look away when he describes it.

When the other special disciples of Jesus heard about this conversation they were immediately jealous. They didn’t understand. They all thought that prestige in the Kingdom was competitive matter; and if one is raised up someone else is put down. That isn’t the way things work with God. Jesus went to the cross, died and was raised up. What they expected didn’t happen. James’ high position in the Jerusalem church only made him die for Christ the sooner. Is that a special grace? Jesus speaks to all of us, inviting us to long for every suffering that can advance the coming of the Kingdom. Now it’s our turn.

WHAT GRACE WILL GOD GIVE THROUGH US?

A reflection adapted from Discourses by St. Epiphanius

It was from the “root of Jesse” that King David sprang. He was a flower that came as prepared by great graces, as we read in the Book of Ruth. From Judah and David sprang the Holy Virgin. This came about through holy parents, Joachim and Anne, prepared for by all the graces involved in the history of their people. These were brought to flower through the holiness of the Virgin Mary’s parents, as given the grace to please God by their lives and, by special grace, bring forth a daughter to receive their faith and utter devotion to doing God’s will.

Joachim and Anne clearly offered to God a sacrifice of praise. The name ‘Joachim’ means “prepared of the Lord” and the name ‘Anne’ means “grace”. These two by their holy marriage prepared the way for God’s grace, revealed to mankind in the Virgin Mary, who became by her conception the truest Temple of God. How did they bear such a fruit for God, and for all of us? It was by prayer.

Why was there such a long wait for the coming of the Messiah? Because he came through grace and this grace needed to be prepared by many previous graces. God prepared a handmaiden who was prepared to accept the call to bear God’s own Son become human. Jesus is the first born of God and is true God. O blessed Joachim and Anne! How all creation is indebted to you for accepting such a marvelous grace. This is who the one “filled with grace” is and so that from her might be born grace incarnate.

Rejoice, Joachim, for from your daughter a Son is born to us, and his name shall be “Angel of Great Counsel” and “salvation of all the world”. Let all who deny this be put to shame and cover their mouths in silence. This child is God and pure grace. Therefor Mary is truly the Mother of God. If anyone fails to acknowledge this that person is far from God. Knowing this clearly is a gift and grace we all have given through the graced efforts of Gregory the Theologian.

See how grace has abounded! “*By their fruits you shall know them*”, as Jesus himself has told us. All that is pleasing to God and all that is fruitful for human salvation and everlasting happiness is given us through the graces imparted to our ancestors in faith and trust.

Each of us has received an office that is a grace. It enables us to share the graces we have received. We are like Abraham and Moses and David and Joachim & Anne, and the apostles, and our parents; all have been channels of God’s grace and goodness. That is our call too. Receive this gift in gladness and live it in gratitude and joy. Know that God is preparing to do wonderful and saving things through you.

THE HEALING THAT WE NEED MOST

A reflection from a biblical commentary by St. Ambrose

You no doubt recall the tale told about Naaman, a Syrian general, who came to the prophet Elisha to be healed of a skin disease that made him ritually unclean. When Jesus visited his own town of Nazareth and found that its people refused to believe in him, he reminded them of this story. These people, by their unbelief, refused to let God do great things for any of their townspeople. They refused to believe that Jesus could be even a prophet. Who is to help such people?

Naaman came to the prophet because of the faith of a girl who had been captured in a raid on Israel and enslaved. She knew about the disease her owner was struggling with and in the sort of faith that leaves no room for doubt she simply asked why he didn't go to Elisha and get healed. This is meant to be a challenge to our faith, because one greater than a prophet has come to us, Jesus.

Jesus reminded the Nazarenes that there had been many who suffered from this disease in Israel and asked them why all these people weren't healed by the prophet's word? Perhaps it was because they didn't have the sort of faith that saves. The king of Israel, to whom Naaman came seeking healing, thought the King of Damascus, whom Naaman served, was looking for a reason to go to war by setting him an impossible task. The prophet had to hear about this from gossip and send a messenger to the king so he would direct Naaman to him.

Are you prepared to direct people to Jesus when they need something that seems humanly impossible? Do you dare to believe that Jesus both can and will do what is needed? Naaman came to the prophet, who simply sent a servant to him telling him to go to the Jordan river and wash seven times in it. But Naaman was so offended by this order that he was going to leave in a huff. His own servants had to persuade him to believe and do what he had been told to do.

This too is certainly a lesson for us. If Jesus tells us to do something, and says that obedience to his command will save us, are we ready to believe? Naaman had to have faith to be healed, but without the slave girl and his other servants he didn't have it. Who helps us believe?

Part of the problem is that humility is needed for faith. 'Jordan' means "going-down'. To find the healing we really need, an inward one without which outward healing can't take place—we have to be will to go down humbly, and for however many times this may be needed, that is what the number 7 signifies. Naaman had come to the prophet seeking bodily healing. He quickly discovered that he needed an inward healing before he could be healed outwardly. He had to be cleansed of an inward disease in order to be healed of its outward form.

How do we know of his inward healing? Because he vowed to worship no god but The Lord and God of Israel after his outward healing. He came seeking bodily health and he received that, but also the gift of inward and spiritual health. This was given as the gift of faith. We might say of him what Jesus said to many who sought healing from him: Go in peace; your faith is what saves you. And we are invited to be instruments leading people to such faith, as was a little girl. It may be that we are more like the people of Nazareth than we want to admit.

WHAT WE NEED TO LEARN FROM MARY

A reflection adapted from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Little is told us in Scripture about the Blessed Virgin. Yet there is one grace that the evangelists see as a pattern for us all. In one word, it is faith. Zachary questioned the angel's message. Mary said, "*See, I am the Lord's slave; let it be done to me as you have said*".

When Mary comes to visit her, Elizabeth seems to allude to the contrast between her husband and Mary. "*You are blessed among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb*", and then she continues: "*Blessed is she who believes that the things the Lord has told her will be fulfilled*".

Yet Mary's faith was not mere acquiescence in Divine Providence or in the revelations made to her. As we are told, she pondered what she heard and saw and experienced. When, for instance, the shepherds told of the vision of angels they had seen and repeated the announcement one of them made about the birth of "*the Christ, the Lord*", they experienced only amazement while Mary "*kept all these things in her heart and pondered on them*".

Another example is given by the story about Jesus being found in the Temple. Her son and savior was twelve, and was entering upon official adulthood as a believer and keeper of God's commands. He had left her for awhile for "his Father's" service. She had been surprised to find him in the Temple learning from the doctors of the Law, asking them questions and answering theirs. When she complained of the distress looking for him had caused her and Joseph he pointed out that there had been no need to search anxiously for him because it was only to be expected that he would be in his Father's House.

His mother kept all these things in her heart. How she used what she pondered is shown by what she did at the wedding celebration in Cana. There her faith anticipated his first miracle and she said to the servers, "*Do whatever he tells you to*". She says it to us as well.

All these tales show Mary as the pattern for all who believe. She shows us how to receive divine truth and how to meditate on it.

She doesn't think it is enough to accept. She dwells on what she is told and sees. It is not enough just to possess it but it a way to use it is needed. It is not enough to assent but it is to be dwelt on. It is not enough to submit reason to God's word but, believing without reasoning and accepting the word with love and reverence. No, she had to develop her understanding of it. She reasoned after she believed.

This symbolizes for us not only faith, whether it is the faith of the unlearned or that of the Church's learned teachers. She shows us all how to use faith to guide all that we do, and how to meditate upon it constantly. Blessed Mary is the pattern for all. This is something we should ponder in our hearts. We can learn from her how to believe and make our faith the source of our life.