

THE TWENTY-FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sun. **The Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Sept.23 **STANDING FAST WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND**
A reflection from a homily by Fr. Karl Rahner

Mon. **Monday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time**
24 **THE ESSENTIALS FOR OUR JOURNEY TO GOD**
A reflection from Bishop Theophylact's
commentary on Mark

Tues. **Tuesday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time**
25 **DON'T LOSE YOUR HOPE NO MATTER WHAT!**
A reflection from a text by Hilda Graef

Wed. **Wednesday of the 25th Week of Ordinary Time**
26 **THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIFE**
A reflection based on Fritz Schumacher's
Small is Beautiful

Thurs. **Memorial of St. Vincent de Paul**
27 **TEACHING THE ENTIRE GOSPEL MESSAGE**
A reflection developed from texts by St. Pope John XXIII

Fri. **A Day for Remembering our Dead**
28 **WHAT IS MORE NEEDED THAN GOOD EXAMPLE?**
A reflection based on a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

Sat. **Feast of St. Michael & All the Angels**
29 **GLIMPING THE RICHNESS OF GOD'S WORLD**
A reflection from a homily by John Henry Cardinal Newman

STANDING FAST WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND

A reflection from a homily by Fr. Karl Rahner

“Jesus and his disciples came down from the mountain and began to go through Galilee. He didn't want anyone to know about this because he was teaching his disciples that the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and put to death and that three days later he will rise” (Mk.9:30ff). The Twelve Apostles, the foundation stones of the Church, Peter and the other eleven, those Jesus had chosen and called, didn't understand him. Yet they were to be the beginning of the new People of God!

They can't grasp the fact Jesus must suffer. They aren't even willing to try to make sense of what he has said, even the part about rising after three days. Yet they remain with Jesus! They do that even when they see they don't understand him. They remain steadfast, faithful and are patient. Jesus, for them, is a kind of advance payment of confidence. They give him time to grow in their hearts! More, God bears with them. Their hearts are darkened; they don't understand. They are stuck and scarcely even want to leave their ignorance behind.

The thing is that they are undergirded by God's mercy and faithfulness and providence and love. Uncomprehended mystery stands between them and the Lord but doesn't separate them. Neither abandons the other and both cling to each other. Why is this? It is because God loves and is faithful and because the humans involved realize that even if they don't understand what seems a mystery, God and God's grace are found only where Jesus, that mystery, is.

There is a lesson for us in all this. Compare all you grasp and understand—all that is clear and straightforward—with the obscure and baffling things, the hidden and not comprehended ones, all that is mysterious and unspeakable. When we do this, we understand that what we do see is like a tiny candle shining in endless darkness.

How could anything else be possible, granted that we are on a pilgrimage. We are making our way through things that seem only parables rather than realities. We are on the way toward the everlasting light. But it is an unapproachable light! It is God. What we seek only God can give.

Wouldn't it be foolish to expect that everything will be intelligible? Wouldn't it be foolish to accept only so much as we can understand? God is for us incomprehensible, and God must lay hold of us. Only when God does, can we be made open to God. God is infinite and we must be open to that. But only if we are open wholly is there any hope for us. More than hope, however, we have the promise that we will find everything. And so we cling to God, even in darkness. We must be faithful and patient and loving toward God, as our God is toward us.

THE ESSENTIALS FOR OUR JOURNEY TO GOD

A reflection from Bishop Theophylact's commentary on Mark

“As Jesus was teaching his disciples he said to them: The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will put him to death, but after his death, on the third day, he will rise again” (Mk.9:30f). The Lord always alternated prophecies of his passion with signs and wonders so it would not be thought that he suffered only because he lacked power to prevent it. So after Jesus gave them the grievous news that he would be killed he added the joyful news that on the third day he would rise again.

This is a way of teaching us that joy always follows sorrow in God's plans. We ought not to allow ourselves to be uselessly distressed by painful events; we should have hope that better times will come. That takes faith and trust in God. *“He came to Capernaum, and after entering the house he questioned the disciples: What were you arguing about as we walked along?”* The fact was that the disciples still saw everything from a very human point of view. They had been quarrelling among themselves about which of them was going to be greatest and most esteemed after Christ has risen and was distributing the places of power and honor in his Kingdom.

In fact, the Lord does want us to aspire to what is most exalted. Yet he doesn't want us to try and seize what is greatest. He wants us to win the highest honor by humility!

Jesus stood a child among the disciples as an example of what he wants. He wants us to become childlike. That is what is most necessary for our journey to God.

A child doesn't long for honors. If we don't, then we won't be jealous of others and quarrel like the disciples. A child doesn't resent injuries that are past. You mustn't resent what others have received and that you lack. A child simply wants the attention of those who love and care for it. If you become like that, Jesus said, you will receive a great reward.

Yet more, you must learn to honor others who are like a good child and seek only to please our Lord and God. Do this and you will receive the Kingdom of Heaven. At least, you will receive it if you do all this for Jesus' sake, out of love for Jesus.

When you receive the Kingdom, you will be receiving Jesus. In receiving Jesus, you will be receiving the one who sent him. That is, you will receive both Father and Son if that is what you most want.

You see, then, what a great thing humility is and how necessary for our journey to the Kingdom and to our God. It goes with simplicity—knowing how to want only the one thing that is God and God's love. It goes with guilelessness like that of a child; a child is very honest about what it wants and it is direct.

Humility, simplicity, guilelessness and longing for God and God's love bring it about that both the Son and the Father dwell in us, and with them comes the Holy Spirit. This is God gift of self to us. To receive it we only have to become as little children, God's little children.

DON'T LOSE YOUR HOPE, NO MATTER WHAT!

A reflection by Hilda Graef

All of us have been called to a prophetic office. We were told this at the very beginning of our life of faith—when we were baptized. The framework for every prophetic vocation is the antinomy between God's holiness and human unworthiness. Think of the call of the prophet Isaiah. He had a vision of the Lord seeking someone to carry a message of destruction and of salvation. What had been was to perish and it would be replaced by something that would bring new closeness to God. Angels cry out "Holy! Holy! Holy!" and knowing this Isaiah grasped his unworthiness and need to be cleansed. But he realized that he was not alone in unworthiness. His people and community stood before God as unworthy and needing God to cleanse them. But what does that involve?

At the very beginning of Scripture God says it is not good for us to be alone; we need a community but one that points us toward God. Prophets have to live the message they proclaim and let go of many things to accept a new way of life. God sent an angel to symbolically purify Isaiah for this and in accepting it he was made worthy and given the gifts needed to prophesy—as we are.

The difficult part of this is that we have to call on our friends and neighbors to turn from their own projects and accept whatever God calls them to do. No one likes to let go of the projects they have constructed; these things are supposed to bring them a good life! But we have to remind them that only God can give us a life that is worth living, one that genuinely brings good—to us and to many others. Are we willing to pay the price of letting God do this?

The scary fact is that if we don't let go of our own projects and plans God will take them away to make room for the one's he wants to give us. Think of what Isaiah had to prophesy; he had to tell people that their entire community and nation were going to be destroyed. We like to believe that nothing like that will happen in our case. But what about the Christian believers called to declare that the Nazi project was going to lead everyone involved to lose everything? What of those sent to prison camps in Soviet Russia? What is there about our own community or our country that leads people away from God's Kingdom and toward a vision of the future that ignores God? Perhaps we have to say what won't be welcomed or even believed.

The prophets of Israel in ancient times proclaimed a new hope. But to accept that hope, to allow it to be realized, they would have to watch what they were working so hard at come to nothing. We often think of them as prophets of destruction. But that is not what they were. They were prophets sent to clear away everything that was getting in the way of renewal. God's compassion and mercy and love are the driving and forming forces renewing communities. We are called to just such tasks. But we can only do what God asks if we trust God no matter what happens to us and our community. Don't try to call others to what you aren't willing to do!

THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIFE

A reflection based on Fritz Schumacher's Small is Beautiful

In our excitement over our scientific knowledge and technological skills people have developed we build a system of production and consumption that ravages nature and mutilates human beings. If only we have more wealth and more power we could put everything right! But can we use these achievements to acquire justice, mutual harmony, beauty or even health? If we can't, won't it be possible to circumvent these non-material needs? If we let ourselves think like this we make wealth and technological prowess our prime values and all other goals receive only lip service.

This way of looking at things is called Materialism and it is a philosophy which is now being challenged by events. There has never been a time without sages and prophets to challenge this sort of thinking and self-reliance. They are always pleading for a new set of priorities. Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these other things will be given you as well. That doesn't mean seek God's Kingdom so that you will get the things you already want, yet it does mean you will receive good things even now and not just in some unimaginable life beyond death.

The interesting and terrifying fact is that today we not only hear this message from sages and prophets but it is forced upon our attention by the course of events. We can't avoid the lesson of terrorism, genocide, pollution, the exhaustion of natural resources, the breakdown of ecosystems, and the menace of climate change. We live in a time of convergence when the words about the Kingdom of God are not simply words but describe what is happening.

Unless we seek first the Kingdom of God these other things that we need will cease to be available to us. We shrink back from the truth about what is actually happening. We tell ourselves that the destructive forces operating in our world can be "brought under control" by mobilizing more wealth and resources. We tell ourselves that education and awareness campaigns will enable us to effectively fight pollution, preserve wildlife and nature, discover new and non-polluting forms of energy and arrive at better ways of living together in harmony.

Who could deny that education, research, resources and wealth can help us do many things. They are necessary for our civilization and its culture. But what we most need is a reorganization and reordering of the ends we pursue and the kinds of means we use to pursue them. This means we have to put material things in their proper and very secondary place. This means putting non-material and humanizing values and goals and means in first place.

Only in God do we find a life that is rich and satisfying and fully human and everlasting. We can begin by asking what is really beautiful. Is it a life of wealth that fails to bring real inward satisfaction? What is beautiful is the Kingdom of God. Materialism has many prophets. We are called to be prophets of God's Kingdom.

TEACHING THE ENTIRE GOSPEL MESSAGE

A reflection based on homilies by St. Pope John XXIII

It has been asserted that in this era of the triumph of science and technical skill we are able to set up a civilization that leaves God out. But the truth is that scientific and technical progress themselves give rise to new human problems of world-wide dimensions that can only be resolved in the light of a sincere and active faith in God.

This situation calls for teaching the entire Gospel of Jesus Christ and not just in words but translated into concrete realities. This is a truth which St. Vincent de Paul saw clearly and dedicated his life to making incarnate in practical love for the poor and marginalized. Christian social teaching has as its objective justice and its motive power is love. We must draw attention to the need to educate all Christian believers, starting with children, about this fact and how it relates to effectively dealing with social problems.

Christian formation has to be integral. That means that it must extend to all the kinds of duties we have as responsible Christians and must help all such people feel bound to do something practical to carry out these duties. All have to feel an obligation to behave socially and economically according to the Gospel's teachings and precepts.

The passage from theory to practice often seems difficult. That is due to the selfishness which is so deeply rooted in today's culture. It is difficult for many to grasp clearly and precisely the objective requirements of justice that need to be realized in each individual case. Therefore, it isn't enough to bring people to consciousness of their duty to act in a Christian way in the social and economic fields of life; they must be helped to know how they can carry them out.

A free heart and a pure intention give birth to generous love, which is the core of every virtue and the strength behind every sacrifice. If you find you are eager to love God and love your neighbor then you know you have God dwelling within you. Follow charity. This is the most effective means to overcome the danger of distrust and indifference. This is a message that touches the hearts of all and will recall many to the Gospel of Christ.

The commandment to love in this way brings us face to face with the need not to steal, not to deprive people of their just wages, not to oppress the poor, not to cherish an immoderate appetite for wealth. This value forces us to confront the crucial problem for our entire world, both social and economic. There are many honest people, but the temptation to covet and even steal is everywhere. It must be overcome by charity, by love which seeks only the good of all.

St. Vincent de Paul made the primacy of charity more than obvious when he told his disciples that the service of the poor and needy came before even prayer. "*Offer the deed to God as your prayer*", is what he said. Charity enacted is the greatest prayer. It can bring us face to face with God. But that is what Heaven is. We begin now to live the life of heaven when we live a life of love like that of Jesus.

WHAT DO WE NEED MORE THAN GOOD EXAMPLE?

A reflection based on a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

Devotion to the memory of our dead—of those who have gone before us with the sign of faith—is particularly important. It is above all a meditation on eternal truths. This helps us perceive what it is that passes away and what it is that is destined to last forever.

This is not a day to simply pray for our dead. Yes, we pray for our dead; we ask that they may be in the full joy of the vision of God face to face. But they are already in the loving arms of divine mercy, beside which our compassion and mercy are so little! Indeed, our prayers for them are as much prayers that we may trust in our God's love and mercy even as those who have gone before us already do.

What we are actually doing is renewing the bonds of mutual love, of reinforcing for one another fidelity to our loving God, and strengthening the gratitude to God which inspired us to live and struggle together to live the love that Jesus shows us. Love grows by actual loving. Others make this happen.

Remembering our dead is not simply a matter of honoring them. It renews the rich and deep love that has motivated us all our life long to keep struggling, to keep rising from our falls and asking pardon, to never stop trying to learn to give ourselves for another—and even for many others.

All those who have taught us love will further teach us by awakening the longing to love and to serve that was their constant unspoken message during our living together. Parents renew bonds with children and children with parents, spouses renew the deep love that bound them to one another. Those who taught us special lessons about loving and serving are present to us and we to them.

Those we remember today are people who helped us in special ways. They didn't give up on us, and we are determined to repay that gift in some small way. How can we repay it except by loving? We all remember the precious examples and lessons we have given one another. These memories cheer and encourage us. Our dead now bless God in a way impossible perhaps while on earth. They thereby remind us that our bonds are always strongest in God and through God.

Perhaps no prayer is more contemplative, more totally directed to God, than the prayer we pray with our beloved departed. We only have one another in God. Yet we don't love God simply to love one another more deeply. What we learn is that our love for one another grows richer and deeper as it finds its natural and everlasting home in our common union with our God. It is in God that all are drawn together. This too is a gift for which we need to thank Our Lord; it is one which God has given us through these others we now remember. Remembering in God is a new way of being one with each other. It is a new way of learning love. That is the point of this special day of remembrance.

GLIMPING THE RICHNESS OF GOD'S WORLD

A reflection taken from a homily by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Angels, we believe, are inhabitants of a world invisible. The fact that they exist tells us how many wonders we cannot see though they have been created for our good and joy. Indeed, we are told much more about angels than about the faithful departed. Our departed rest from their labors but the angels are active among us all the time. The Letter to the Hebrews calls them "*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are to be heirs of salvation*" (1:14) No Christian is so lowly as to lack an angel companion and helper. Those who live by faith and love are especially open to their comforting presence.

If we may judge from what is written in the Scriptures, should one of us catch a glimpse of an angel we would fall to the ground in fear and trembling. Yet they are our fellow servants and fellow-workers and companions. That they form part of an unseen realm is conveyed to us in the vision that the Patriarch Jacob saw when he was fleeing from the brother he had defrauded. "*He came upon a certain place and spent the night there. When the sun had set he took a rock and put it under his head as a pillow, and lay down and went to sleep.*" He didn't see anything special about the place, other than that it was a holy place of sacrifice for the peoples of the area and he would be safe there. It was not an especially comfortable place to sleep but there was no building. Night had come and he had to sleep where he could.

Yet how different was the truth than what ordinary eyes could see! More was there but it was revealed to him only in a dream. In that dream he saw a world that is not usually seen but is real for all that. "*He dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth where he lay and its top reached heaven. And, behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on that ladder.*" (Gen. 28:12) Now he saw another world and saw how deeply involved our daily world is with this unseen one.

Persons often speak as if they doubted the existence of the world Jacob saw. Many treat it as something that will become real to them only after death. No! It exists now, even if we do not see it. It is among us and around us. Jacob was shown this in his dream. Angels were all about him, though he hadn't realized it. What Jacob saw in his dream Elijah and his servant saw by God's grace. The shepherds at the time of Christ's nativity not only saw it but also heard the voices of blessed spirits praising God. It is what angels do always throughout our nights and days.

When this is shown us, either by faith or by some graced sight, we see that wonderful creatures are always going about on God's errands and doing whatever is God's good pleasure. The name 'angel' means "messenger". Like these blessed ones we too have been called to be God's messengers, ministers of God's word and blessing. Faith tells us that. It tells us too that we should imitate the angels as best we can, as God gives us the opportunities. Today is one of those opportunities.