

THE THIRTY-FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. **The Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Nov.4 **LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR**
 A reflection by St. Francis de Sales
- Mon. **Monday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time**
5 **THE SOURCE OF OUR DISTRESS**
 A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Tues. **Tuesday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time**
6 **LOVING ALL THAT PREPARES US FOR GOD**
 Developed from a commentary by Denis the Carthusian
- Wed. **Wednesday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time**
7 **SEEING OURSELVES AS SIGNS AND SYMBOLS**
 A reflection developed from St. Jerome's
 Commentary on Jeremiah
- Thurs. **Thursday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time**
8 **REDISCOVERING THE MEANING OF GOD'S CALL**
 A reflection developed from a homily by John Henry Cardinal
 Newman
- Fri. **THE DEDICATION OF THE LATERAN BASILICA**
9 **CELEBRATING CHURCH**
 A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Sat. **Memorial of St. Pope Leo the Great**
10 **HOW WE MUST CELEBRATE GOD'S GRACE**
 A reflection taken from a homily by St. Pope Leo the Great

LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR

A reflection by St. Francis de Sales

Because God created us in his own image and likeness, he ordained that our love for one another should be an image and likeness of the love we owe him, our God. God said: *“You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart; this is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it; you must love your neighbor as yourself.”*

Why do we love God? It is because God is supreme and infinite goodness. Why do we love ourselves? It is because we are images and likenesses of God. All of us possess the same dignity and we love this in all as we do in ourselves—each and all are living and holy images of the Godhead. That is why we belong to God, and through a kinship so close, a dependence so lovable, that God doesn't hesitate to call each of us children. As God's children we are capable of sharing with God in the fulfillment that is God's own sovereign joy and goodness. As children we receive grace and our spirits are bound together with the Holy Spirit, and made, in that sense, sharers in the divinity's goodness and joy.

It is one and the same charity that gives birth to acts of love for our God and for neighbors. Jacob saw it was one and the same ladder that touches heaven and earth and that the angels use to ascend and descend. That shows how one single charity cherishes both God and neighbor. It raises us to spiritual union with God and it brings us down to love and share with neighbors. Recall the reason for loving our neighbor: Each person is made in the image and likeness of God and each has been created to share God's goodness, God's grace, and joy in God's glory. To love neighbors is to love God in them and love them in God.

When we look at a neighbor we see a person created in the image and likeness of God; shouldn't we say to one another: Look at the people God has made; aren't they like their maker! How could we fail to be drawn irresistibly toward them, how can we fail to embrace them and be moved even to tears by love for them? Shouldn't we call down on them a hundred blessings? Why? For love of them? Yes and no. We can't be sure whether they deserve love or hate because of what they do to others and themselves but the image of God is always in them and that draws our love.

Everyone can share in God's own goodness, grace and glory. We can see this capacity in them knowing God created them in the divine image and likeness. They exist for God. They exist from God. They exist through God. They exist in God. They exist unto God. They resemble God in a very special way. This is why divine love not only commands us, and repeatedly, to love our neighbor but produce this love in us and pours it into our hearts and our actions.

Others bear God's own image and likeness! Just as we are God's image and just as we love ourselves in seeing that in us, so we love others in the same way. If we are the image of God we must love like God does—so we love one another as we are loved. Our love itself then becomes an image of God's divine and heavenly love, for us and for all. This is what we experience now, and all the more marvelously the more fully we experience God's love.

THE SOURCE OF OUR DISTRESS

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard

In the Book of Jeremiah, we hear a great deal about how Israel mourned and wept on account of the destruction of God's Temple and exile from the land the Lord had given. The prophet responded by trying to console his contemporaries: *"Don't weep! Your salvation will come quickly!"* But quickly meant 70 years and, in the meantime, they could only bring themselves to hang up the harps that were symbols of rejoicing and celebration, and weep by the waters of Babylon. What does 'Babylon' mean? It means, we are told, confusion. Indeed, the mourners were confused in their thinking. Their mourning meant their eyes and hearts were turned to something earthly instead of toward God, who alone makes what is earthly holy and a sign of the divine presence with us who have been chosen.

We do likewise when we keep our minds and hearts turned toward bad habits which we have had to renounce. They often seem sweet in memory and this makes them like a river whose current within us can sweep us away, if we let it. *"But thanks be to God, we have been given victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"* For even if we sit beside these inward rivers we don't give in to their allurements and fix our hearts on what is merely earthly. Rather, we weep for the heavenly home for which we long and we try to fix our hearts on it. We have been given a foretaste of the sweetness of life there, and the joy of seeing God face to face. *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because you are with me, Lord!"*

This is our hope. How can we dare to hope like this? We can because the Lord constantly corrects us and helps us stay on the right road, and not only by the Scriptures but by the words and examples we receive from one another. At times it may seem that the Lord has humbled us almost to the dust of death, but God has sustained our lives and supported us and we haven't sunk into the place of the dead. I hope because *"I know that all things work together for the good of those who love God"* and I try never-faillingly to love God more and more.

We don't give up *"because of the One who made creation subject in hope and we know creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God"*. How long must we wait? Until we have been prepared to live the life of loving and caring which is that of God's Kingdom! Our God has not only sent us to a community of others who will care and instruct and correct us as we need these gifts, our God has also sent us to a community within which we are given opportunities to love one another practically, even as we love ourselves, even as we love our God. Don't weep! Rejoice for God comes and what seems like a thousand years to us is only a day to God. He uses this time to shape us for a life of everlasting love and its joy.

LOVING ALL THAT PREPARES US FOR GOD

Developed from a commentary by Denis the Carthusian

People appreciate health more after they have recovered from a serious illness. Indeed, opposites are most clearly distinguished when they are placed side by side. All the bad things we bring upon ourselves should lead us to rejoice in the corrections we receive from God and one another. Scripture has much to say about the punishments received by those who wander from God. Actually, these are not simply punishments, since God gets nothing from our suffering, but are ways God forms our minds and hearts to be like those of Jesus.

Unfortunately, we forget that when God takes things from us it is so we will change the orientation of our heart from them to God and the things of God. There was no point in living in Jerusalem, or in the Promised Land, if one didn't turn continually to God and place God over everything the world holds. There is no point in living in a monastery or in a Christian land if we are not drawn more deeply into God's love by it. Consider the apostles and the Christian community of Jerusalem. *"You shall be my people and I will be your God."* What is God's purpose in promising this? *"I will give you one heart and I will be your God."* God calls us to become and be of one heart. Listen to two other Scriptures: *"Let there be no divisions among you"* and *"Honor God with one voice and one heart!"* Now recall Christ's prayer: *"Holy Father, keep in your name all whom you have given me so that they may be one even as we are one"*.

No wonder St. Paul repeats this: *"Be careful to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"*. We are to realize this unity in our loyalty to the covenant God has made with us. *"I will make an eternal covenant with them"* God says. This obviously refers to the Law of the Gospel. That law is stated clearly: *"Love one another as I have loved you!"* Doing this is how we prepare, how we become fit, to enter God's Kingdom and live there. All God does, all that Providence sends us, prepares us for this culmination of our life's journey and of our calling to love and serve. Scripture presents God saying to each and all: *"I will never cease to do good for you"*. No matter what happens it is intended for our good. But we have to accept this in loving loyalty. This is the reason for what happens.

"I will put reverence for me in their hearts". It is a pure and loving reverence and whose purpose is *"that they may not leave me"*. When we have to bear some cross do we cling more tightly to God and to Christ because of it? Do we put less trust in ourselves and more in God? That reverence for God is loyalty and an effect of God's love; it includes that love. Our call is to learn to respond to this love with all of our own love! We have been called together by God so we may help one another respond in this way. We are learning to see the face of God not only in holy things, not only in one another, but in every last thing that happens within us and to us. That is how we prepare to see God's face itself. How can we complain because God can only teach us this if we do it? Our God comes to us in our weakness and makes the very weakness a door and window through which we can come to God and see God's very face. You are to be such a door and window through which others see God.

SEEING OURSELVES AS SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

Developed from St. Jerome's Commentary on Jeremiah

“The Lord says this: I will restore the dwellings of Jacob and have compassion on them and my city shall be rebuilt on its hill.” This was Israel's hope and it contains our hope within it. It first seemed no more than a hope that God would send someone to rebuild Judah and Jerusalem and the Temple. Zerubbabel and Ezra were examples of how many expected this hope would be fulfilled. They began to rebuild the city and renewed the observance of the Law, and the Temple too we gradually rebuilt.

But we find that our Lord Jesus and the apostles and the communities they founded fulfill this hope in yet another way. ***“A city built on a hill can't be hidden”***, and we're building a city on a hill. The life of that city is intended to be one of rejoicing in the Lord, of finding life's fulfillment in living as Jesus lives. All that has gone into its building, all that remains of the past, is intended to give us reasons for joy and gladness. ***“Then songs of thanksgiving will come from them”***. That is what Scripture tells us, both as a promise and a command. What fills that new home are sounds of people dancing and singing rather as David danced before the ark of the Lord. How else can the word be fulfilled: **And they shall increase and not diminish**? The whole world is drawn to believe in God the Savior by the joy with which we lead our lives.

This is the sort of community that we are to build. In it God will be honored so that what was written may be fulfilled. Think of the text: ***“Glorious things are told of you O City of God!”*** What will draw people to God if not the goodness of a life lived in God's praise and in obedience to God's loving Word?

Now listen to yet another Scripture: ***“And their leader will be one of their very own!”*** You can see this fulfilled in our Lord and Savior, who was born an Israelite and became their king, and ours. Our leader will come from our own number and we now see how we will be led. Have you been called to any form of leadership? Then the prophesy is about you. But how could you fulfill it if you do only what seems right to you? Our Heavenly Father has sent the Only Son to be with us and to show us how to love God and one another in a new way.

What hindered Israel's leaders of old? They followed the ways, the customs, of their time and place. They couldn't believe or persuade their fellows to believe that the Lord had called them to put all this away and live in a new way, not following any merely human guides but Jesus Christ. Is this easy? Far from it! We have invented many ways of following Jesus which seem good in our eyes, and may even be good in a given time and place, but we must cling simply and solely to God's Word. Jesus declared: ***“I am in the Father, and the Father is in me”***. Who else can say that? Who can help us understand rightly how Jesus' example applies now? We must help one another. Our leaders are like us and must help them. Our differences aren't obstacles but opportunities to discover what is new and will help all cling to Jesus and so to God alone. Don't be afraid. Jesus himself will always be with us, even to the end of the age. This is how we too become signs and symbols of God's love and grace and truth and joy.

REDISCOVERING THE MEANING OF GOD'S CALL

A reflection developed from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

No prophet began his labors for God with a better encouragement than did Jeremiah. A king after God's own heart, Josiah, had come to the throne. He was young and so had time to accomplish great things for the Lord. Whether or not such thoughts encouraged Jeremiah's initial efforts, that cheerful hope was soon overcast and he had to labor in the dark. Josiah died an early death and his successors sought worldly answers to what they thought were merely worldly problems. Soon Jeremiah had to suffer persecution. Even when his prestige was restored by Jerusalem's fall he was carried to Egypt by people who pretended reverence for him but in the end put him to a violent death.

All of us live in a world that promises well but can't fulfill its promises. But, then, we too began life thoughtlessly if joyously, seeking great things in various ways and having only vague notions of what good we could achieve. But we were seeking satisfaction merely in this world. It is our nature to hope in this way, but life's nature is to lead us to many disappointments. This is, in some way, the human lot. We begin life with health and, for the most part, end it with sickness. When life ends in this way, has it been a failure?

It is in this context that God himself offers us aid, especially by the Word and in the Church. Left to ourselves, we seek good from the world but cannot find it. In youth we look forward, naively and in old age we look back, often bitterly. It is well that we learn from these two facts. We need wisdom to face disappointing or evil days. Do you still seek great things? Then you must seek them where they are really to be found. You must seek them as God sets them before you.

God came into our world to enable us to do and attain great things. Are we willing to give up present enjoyment, give up this world for the invisible world? Then we must prepare for disappointment and even suffering. That befits us as sinners and is necessary for us as saints. It enables us to do a great thing.

We mustn't turn away from trials when God brings them upon us, nor must we play the coward when our faith is tested. "*Watch, stand fast, be strong!*" These are Scripture's words and God's words, as St. Paul tells us. But how are we to help one another find hope in such words? Yes, we know that such things are means of preparing us from God's Kingdom and for helping one another cling to God. Do you know also that this is the greatest thing anyone can do?

We must pray for grace to proclaim his word by our lives in a way that persuades those who see us to follow God as we do. We can't live this way from our own wisdom, which is always in a measure worldly. It has been so with all those who have gone before us. We must strive to live purely by God's word, praying to see its import more clearly than our predecessors. But are you ready to trust God to bring this about? We know God's way is no human way and that God only reveals himself to us through the way we bear our crosses. Let's help one another to trust God to reveal this ever more clearly, even though human beings. It opens us to the meaning of the divine call to us today.

CELEBRATING CHURCH

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard

Today we celebrate Church. We celebrate a glorious feast. But what is it that we celebrate when we do this? We say that we are celebrating God's Temple. We say we are celebrating the City of the Eternal God. We say that we are celebrating the Bride of Christ. But if we think carefully that means we celebrate ourselves. I say this with both awe and reverence. We are Christ's Bride, God's Temple, and the City of the Eternal God. But we are all these things in the heart of our God. We are all this in God's grace and by God's election.

We aren't celebrating anything we have made ourselves or anything we deserve to be. We must beware of appropriating for ourselves anything that belongs to God. We can take any glory that is God's as though it were our own. If we exalt ourselves God will only humble us and bring us down to the level on which we belong—we have to be lowly to be what we celebrate today!

The proper celebration of the Church, and of ourselves as Church, is a humble acknowledgement of our weakness and sickness and of all that arouses God's compassion. We are celebrating what we are to grow into because in our helplessness God will feed us as a mother feeds an infant. Because of who God is we will have all we need in abundance; in God's house nothing is ever lacking.

Bear it in mind, however, that God's House is described as a house of prayer. Holiness befits such a house. It is a house filled with tears of repentance and with the purity of self-restraint. "*Be holy, says the Lord, because I am holy.*" St. Paul says this very nicely: "*Don't you realize that your bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you?*" Yet even this isn't enough. According to St. Paul peace is also necessary. "*Strive to be at peace with everyone, and so achieve the holiness without which no one can see God!*" It is peace that makes us children of one family, brothers and sisters to one another. Dwelling in unity builds the true Kingdom of peace, the new Jerusalem.

There is a mystery in what we celebrate. How can the greatest king become our bridegroom? How can a city become a bride? All this is possible only for divine love. It is stronger than death and can do everything. Lack of love brought us down but divine love can raise us up again. If abundance of everything children need shows that we are in our Father's house, if holiness shows us to be God's Temple, if the sharing of a common life shows us to be the city of the Great King, if divine love shows us to be the bride of the immortal bride-groom, then we can say without hesitation that today's feast is our feast.

Don't be surprised that we are celebrating on earth. The celebration takes place in heaven too! There is joy in heaven and among God's angels when a single sinner repents, so today's joy must be many times as great since so many sinners are repenting as they celebrate it. Our repentance is our joy! Share this joy with one another as you do with God and with God's angels. That is how we can celebrate filled with thankful repentance. The more whole-heartedly we celebrate, the more we make the repentance our joy. What better way to glorify our God and Savior.

HOW WE MUST CELEBRATE GOD'S GRACE & GIFTS

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Pope Leo the Great

The sublimity of God's grace lies in this, that daily in our hearts all our longings are transferred from what is earthbound to what is heavenly. And yet it remains true that our present life is part of God's providence and bounty and is lived only with our Creator's help and care. It is one and the same Lord who gives us present blessings and who promises eternal life. There is a bond and a unity between what we do here and what we are invited to do forever with God. The mere fact that we are promised such a fulfillment of life carries us along. Hope gives speed and fervor to what we do, both for God and for one another. Clearly, we must honor and praise God for all the good things we are given through the fruitfulness with which he has endowed our earth.

Whatever benefits flow from the harvests are for the use and benefit of all. Every-thing flows to us from God's goodness. In his delicate way God helps the hesitant and the bold, God encourages the farmers and enables them to sustain us all. He does the like for everyone in whatever occupation they contribute to building up their community. The wind and rain, the cold and heat, day and night, all these serve our needs. If the Lord doesn't give growth by divine planting and watering human effort and forethought wouldn't be able to care for each and all. That is why it is so right and just that we help one another, and do it using the things our Heavenly Father mercifully bestows on us.

There are many who have no share in fields, vines, olive groves and much else. It is worth remembering the poverty of these people so that out of the plenty God gives those who have such goods the poor too may bless God. All are intended to rejoice at having been given a share of what God has given for the good of all. These things are the common good that God's has designed for rich and poor, for pilgrims and for the sick so that all may have what they need and be satisfied.

God's justice arranges for those who labor under various disabilities to find what they need through the love and generosity of others. God blesses them through their patient and trusting hope, and blesses those who help them through their very kindness and mercy. God blesses all through their contribution to the common well-being and for the way each helps build up a community of mutual love and concern.

The most effective way of praying for forgiveness is sharing. Almsgiving and fasting and prayer must be united. What we ask of God in these ways is certainly heard, and especially if we ask only that all be blessed and come to the eternal joy and life God calls us and try to help this happen. As it is written: The merciful do good to themselves. Nothing does greater good than the good of sharing with neighbors in need. That transfers what was only earthly into heaven and makes it an eternal wealth. The merciful, as the Lord teaches, have mercy shown them by God. God is the highest of all rewards and God's gift of self is for those who give themselves as God does.