

TWENTY-SEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. **THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**
Oct. 7 **OUR UNION WITH GOD IN CHRIST**
A reflection by Bishop Jacob of Serugh
- Mon. **Monday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time**
8 **THE BOND THAT KEEPS GOD'S FAMILY TOGETHER**
A reflection by Fr. Charles de Foucauld
- Tues. **Tuesday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time**
9 **YOU CAN LEARN TO LOVE LIKE JESUS**
A reflection from a homily by Simeon the New Theologian
- Wed. **Wednesday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time**
10 **LEARNING TO LOVE AS GOD LOVES**
A reflection from The Silent Life by Fr. Thomas Merton
- Thurs. **Memorial of St. Pope John XXIII**
11 **WHAT DOES "DOING ALL IN CHRIST" MEAN?**
A reflection developed from homilies by St. Pope John XXIII
- Fri. **Friday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time**
12 **THE CANTICLE OF FIDELITY TO LOVING LIKE GOD**
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13 **PRAYING FOR THE GRACE OF LOVING GOD**
A prayer composed by St. Anselm of Canterbury

OUR UNION WITH GOD IN CHRIST

A reflection by Bishop Jacob of Serugh

“What God has joined together, no one must divide.” The Heavenly Father created us to be one in faith and love and a beauty that makes us God’s People and bride. If the Spirit grants you prophetic sight you can see all this in the Scriptural words just spoken. God becomes one with us in baptism and makes us yet more one, as a bride of the Only Son. It is written in the Book of Genesis that men and women are to leave their birth families and be joined to one another in such a way that in truth the two become one. When we contemplate this mystery, we contemplate ourselves and our lives.

Scripture speaks of men and women in this way as a foretelling of the union of Christ and the Church. Christ becomes one with us first through the water of baptism. Christ has been drawing us to himself from the very beginning of his life in human flesh as from the beginning of our life in faith. As the Church responds in whole hearted love it too, so to speak, draws Christ to itself. Bridegroom and bride are joined and wholly united not simply with and in one another but with and in Christ. Scripture says that the two are to become one.

All of this is presented to us in Scripture in a veiled way. But after the marriage ceremony took place on the cross, God began to unveil this mystery. St. Paul entered into it and became God’s special instrument to reveal these wonderous truths to the entire world. In an outburst of inspiration, he cried out: **“What a great mystery!”** The union of two human persons is seen as a revelation of the union of Christ and the Church. We were many and are now made one.

A wife and a husband aren’t united to one another as closely as the Church is to the Son of God. He died for us before we loved him or had any idea of becoming one with Him. What bride ever chose a crucified man as her husband? Who ever gave his own blood as a wedding gift to his bride? The only one who ever did this was the one who died on the cross and sealed the marriage bond with us through his wounds and dying. Who was ever seen lying dead at his own wedding banquet with his wife at his side seeking to console herself by embracing him? At what other wedding celebration, or at what other sort of feast, is the bridegroom’s body distributed to the guests in the form of bread?

Clearly, we are become part of a great mystery! Ordinarily death separates wives and husbands. But in this case alone it is death that unites them. The groom died on a cross and bequeathed his body to his spouse. Now she consumes it daily under the form of bread and wine, food and drink. In this way the Church proclaims to the entire world that we are no longer separated from our God but are one instead of two. But there is yet a further mystery. Having been joined with Christ in this way we are called to live out the mystery of our oneness with God by living and loving each other as one with one another. This is the consummation of our marriage union whereby our union bears fruit and realizes the fullness of the love that binds us. It is through our love for one another that we enter into joy as in a marriage banquet. We do it symbolically only so that we can do it really as we bear our crosses with the one who has married us into unity with God in Him and through love for one another.

THE BOND THAT KEEPS GOD'S FAMILY TOGETHER

A reflection by Charles de Foucauld

What does our God ask of us who are one with him in a mystical marriage? Love your enemies, God says. Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who wish to harm you. If someone strikes you on your right cheek, offer the other cheek to be struck as well. If anyone wants to take your outer garment let him have your other clothes. Give to anyone who asks and if anyone takes something from you don't ask to have it back. Do to others all that you would have others do to you. Forgive and you will be forgiven by God. Don't be concerned about the speck of dust in another's eye but look at the blocks to your own ability to see clearly.

All these commands have to do with charity. There is nothing difficult to understand about any of them once you realize, finally, that all human persons are, taken together, members of a single family with God, the Creator and Guide, as a sort of father. God is our Heavenly Father but in such a way that God loves all and loves each incomparably more and more tenderly than any human parents can love each of their children.

Since our God loves each of us in just this way, and loves all and each without any exception, God wishes to see among us that same love and tenderness, and when it is needed, that same leniency and yielding gentleness that loving parents always long to see among their own children. God would have you give in to one another, helping one another without stint. Each of us should yield where our own rights are concerned and no one of us should insist on one's rights. Let one who is wrong or unfair have his or her way. The hope of correcting such a person lies in gentleness and keeping peace. We simply pray for the erring person that the mistake may be seen and corrected.

You can see from my recommendations about mutual love that I have only one purpose in mind. I want to keep peace with all my brothers and sisters in God's one human family. If we all observe these precepts the principle from which they flow will be engraved deeply on us and within us. All are, in truth and in fact, brothers and sisters in God. God is our parent and God wishes all of us to regard and to love one another, and treat one another in every way and at every moment, like persons we love most tenderly.

Be compassionate with one another. Think of Jesus' compassion for you. How did he suffer with all sufferings and pity all those who suffer! For you and me he suffered, and he asks us to suffer with those who mourn, with the sick, with the anxious, with the hungry, with the weak, with the ignorant. He not only did good to others while he was on earth but he opened his Sacred Heart to them, and does so for us even today. Compassion is part of the love that lives in every heart; it is part of all human love. In Christ we can find new strength for compassion and for every dimension of genuine love. That is what Jesus offers us every day, always. What else can bind us together and make us one in truth and not just in words or wishes?

YOU CAN LEARN TO LOVE LIKE JESUS!

A reflection from a sermon by Simeon the New Theologian

We are called to strive to love and worship God as Jesus does. Every spiritual effort which doesn't lead to this is vain. It is by living such love and adoration that the disciples of Christ are recognized. It was because of love that the Word of God became human and dwelled among us. The Son of God became one of us freely and gladly. That involved accepting the sufferings which brought us life. It was the key to remaking us human creatures. This is the true and irreproachable wisdom of God and it seeks only what is true and good. It seeks to show us how to be kind to others and how to do good. These are the marks of that charity uniting us among ourselves and simultaneously with God.

I once got to know a person who made it a chief aim in life to rescue others from evil thoughts and actions. The person was always on the lookout for opportunities to do this and always looking for new ways of accomplishing it more effectively. The best way had proven to be one of kindness. I experienced this person's concern for others expressed in weeping over them, mourning for them. One can actually take on another's burdens in this way and feel distress at faults one hasn't committed but has seen acted out in others. It is possible to learn to identify with others in this way. If another can do it, why can't I?

I once knew a person who rejoiced so completely when others overcame in some inner struggle as to show as much pleasure in their progress, including progress in virtue, that one would think the progress wasn't another's but was the person who had become so one with them in love. It seems that this person was going to receive a reward rather personally and not some other person. It is possible to learn to identify with others in this way. If another has done it why can't I learn?

I once knew a person with such a burning longing for a neighbor's salvation as to intercede and beg the Divine Goodness to draw that neighbor. It was done with tears and with that person's whole heart. It went so far that this person was ready to imitate St. Paul or Moses by sacrificing himself so others might come to God. In the Holy Spirit this person felt so bound to others as to be unwilling to enter the Kingdom of God without those others. It is possible to learn to love in this way. If another has learned how why can't I learn?

I have told you about some of my acquaintances and how they edified and built me up in love. They showed me, as Jesus has, how we too can be shaped by God's own ways of loving so that they become ours. Isn't this one of the great reasons why God chose to become human? Jesus learned these things—perhaps from Mary and from Joseph. Why can't we learn them from the same sources? As it happens our God has loved us so much as to lead us to know people who have been wholly made over by the love shown us in Jesus and in Mary and in Joseph and to show us that this love was not only for them but for us all. Who knows if God does not intend our efforts to learn this love as a bridge for leading others to salvation. We can all learn to do this too.

How wonderful are God's gifts to us! How can we not adore and praise God with all our hearts?!

LEANING TO LOVE AS GOD LOVES

A reflection from The Silent Life by Fr. Thomas Merton

The love, the joy, which we can and indeed must take in created things, depends entirely on our detachment. As soon as we take things to ourselves, appropriate them, hug them to our hearts, we have stolen them from God. They are no longer treated as his but our own. Then they are seen in a new light: They are seen in reference to ourselves, as if we were their first cause and last end. It is as if they had to serve us the way all created things serve God, their creator.

That means we expect the impossible. Just as created things reflect the beauty and goodness of God, so we too avidly seek to find in our friends and in things we love a reflection of our own interests and excellence. Why are we always disappointed? Why do our very possessions give us the lie? Our friends evade our importunate expectations, embarrassed by our unseemly hungers for what we lack and by a pride which they know could never find satisfaction even if they allowed themselves to be consumed by it.

Before a human person can taste true joy in all the beautiful things that God has made, that person must develop the delicate interior sense which enables one to learn the lesson of the wisdom that all modest creatures teach to those who have ears to listen. They say to us: You can use me, and God created me that I might be used in this way. You can use me as God's messenger, sent to tell you the way to God. I contain a little of God's goodness hidden in the depths of my being.

But in order to perceive my goodness you have to respect my dignity as a creature of God. If you seek to possess the integrity of the being in which my beauty is given me, if you seek to take me to yourself as if I could be fully possessed by another, then you will destroy that very beauty. The beauty that is God-given will disappear and that is what you wanted.

When that happens, you don't gain anything and you destroy me as God's messenger. In the process you defile yourself because you lose yourself as you really are, God's gift. But if you respect me as I really am and let me be what I am—if you renounce selfish possession—then I will bring you joy. I remain what I am until by God's will I am changed, perhaps by the very service in which you use me. But I won't be destroyed by that change. Respectful use of things as they really are doesn't destroy them. If you cut me off from God you no longer have access to God through me. For a Christian worship and prayer cannot be divorced from service of others. But they can only serve you as messengers of God. If one despises another as what and who that other actually is in God then everything becomes unreal.

Using others as what they aren't defiles you and them. Using them as angels of God honors them. When we fail to respect others, we open ourselves to anger and contempt and we refuse to love and serve others with God. The fact that there is someone who has been hurt, damaged, or disgraced by our wrongly "using" them, erect a barrier that separates from God. That is why we must examine ourselves. By using others "in God" we consecrate them and ourselves to God. We then are able to help one another to become genuinely holy in God.

WHAT DOES “DOING ALL IN CHRIST” MEAN?

A reflection developed from homilies by St. Pope John XXIII

We are all living members of the Mystical Body of Christ. That means we are all members of God’s Church. St. Paul reminds us that “just as the body is one ... and all are members of the one body, though many, so all are one in Christ”. I am pope and so I am called to plead with all of those who are Christ’s members to live the life of Christ. “I am the vine, you are the branches”, says our Lord.

Now if we actually do everything “in Christ” then all our activities, even if they seem merely worldly, are redemptive. They are made a continuation of Christ’s work of redemption by the fact that they are done “in Christ”. You see why it can be so important to understand what it means to do things “in Christ”.

Consider the good and joyous activities we participate in. The triumphs of our poor human life seem, from one perspective, to be puny things, vain and fleeting satisfactions that are wonderful one day and the next day are gone and seem empty. But think of how many of them Jesus did. And yet we think of all he did as inspired by the Holy Spirit and as redemptive as well as pleasing in the Heavenly Father’s eyes.

Part of the explanation is that Jesus did all this in love. He loved good work. He loved Mary and Joseph and the life they lived together. He loved helping others by making things that would help them and bring them joy. He even loved parties, and blessed them by making more good wine for a wedding than anyone there had ever seen before. And he loved all these things because all are gifts of the Heavenly Father and ways in which God shares his own goodness with us.

The angel told Mary that Jesus would save his people from their sins. That means, among other things, saving them from viewing and doing things selfishly. Jesus saves us from delighting in things only to the extent they meet what we think are our needs and doing them to show forth the glory and love of our God.

God has given us so many good things! We have them to share. As God shares Divine Goodness with us so we share it with others, not only other people but all the creatures God has placed upon the earth. Adam & Eve decided to view things from the perspective of their desires instead of God’s plan of sharing. We are saved from that in the measure that we share as Jesus does and love as Jesus does and thank God as Jesus does. Jesus has shown us the fullness a human life can have—not “for self” but for God and for others. In fact, living for God is living for others.

There was a young woman of Nazareth who said a whole-hearted “Yes” to God’s call to love and live as God would have us do. She is now in heaven and is now able to help uncounted billions of people to love God and so love themselves and their lives in a freeing and redeeming way. What God has done for her God can do for us. We only have to say “Yes, Lord”. If we live for God then indeed God is all “Yes”! Today is just one of the days on which God asks us for this “Yes!”

THE CANTICLE TO FIDELITY IN LOVING LIKE GOD

A reflection developed from a text by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The last page of the Song of Songs might well be entitled: ‘The Canticle of Fidelity’. It begins with the beloved call to the one she loves: “Set me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm”. A seal—especially if we relate it to a person—is an indelible sign of belonging. When it is placed upon your heart, and not just on a piece of paper—it shows that the belonging it symbolizes is real and total. It has to do with the very core of who one is and can’t perish unless that person perishes.

The lover in the Canticle wants to be a seal on the heart of Christ. One who loves Christ wants to be indelibly marked and marking on Christ’s heart. The bond will be unbreakable! Think of the examples used in the Canticle to speak of the indelible

Love is as strong as death. Love possesses an irresistible power which nothing can stop, just as nothing can resist death. Neither death, nor life, nor angel, nor principality, nor anything that exists can ever come between us and the love of God make visible in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Love is tenacious. Love becomes a need that the loved one can’t be distracted from or removed from one’s mind by other things. This power of love is jealous of everything that competes with it for our attention and devotion. As years pass so circumstances change but love persists and grows stronger than ever.

Love flashes out like fire. It is God’s flame and God’s very self, coming to us and becoming one with us. Love burns. Its flames are passed on. It warms and gives light and nothing can put it out. It is a spark in us of the very love of God. No earthly flood can extinguish this flame! God’s love is a love so great than nothing created can abolish it or cause it to cease.

We often get preoccupied by another’s love for us and our love for that other. Yet nothing can separate people who love with the love of God and love in God. God is not a competitor for any love we can show merely to one another. Indeed, by loving one another we learn to love our God as God loves us. Nothing can separate a person from Jesus if that person genuinely loves as Jesus does.

The Canticle says: “Were a person to offer endless wealth to purchase love all that person would get would be contempt and mockery!” Love from God and love for God is a precious pearl whose value can’t be matched by any created value. If you are offered this pearl the only sensible thing to do is accept, even if that means giving away everything you have or could ever have.

Who could be unfaithful to such a gift once it has been accepted. God keeps offering it to us. Now that we know what is involved in accepting it let’s not hesitate.

A PRAYER FOR THE GRACE OF LOVING GOD

The prayer was composed by St. Anselm of Canterbury

O Lord, son of my lady, and Lady, mother of my Lord, if I am not worthy of the blessing of loving God with all my heart, even then do not refuse what I ask. I confess I am not worthy of this grace but I know that your mercy will not be able to refuse it. Do not hear my prayer according to what I deserve, but by your mercy make me one who can worthily love you and love God with all his heart.

Unworthy as I am, give me what will enable me to worthily give myself. I know that I ought to give all that I am, so I ask you to give me the ability to give what I ought.

Perhaps I am presumptuous to speak like this, but your goodness makes me bold. So I speak to my Lord and Lady, because I know that it is much more merciful if you give such a gift to one who doesn't deserve it. Give me the grace I need to give you what your goodness deserves. Show me your mercy, for I need it so much and it is right for you to do this.

Be merciful to me simply because I ask it. Kind Lord and Lady, help me to pray rightly. Give me your love that I may give it fully to you. Give me the gift of no more being ungrateful for all the good gifts I receive from your hands.

Jesus, Son of God, and Mary, Mother of God, surely you both want that all love what you love, that all love the Lord Our God with all our heart and strength and will. Both of you love the Father wholly and always, so give me this grace too.

Good mother, I ask you for the love you have for your Son. I ask to learn from you how to love him as I love our God. Good Lover, ruler of humankind, you loved those who falsely accused you, and those who condemned you unjustly to death, so how can you refuse my request when I ask you as humbly and whole-heartedly as you give me the grace to pray?

I venerate you both, as far as my heart and mind are able and worthy to do so. I love you both as far as my heart is equal to such a love. I prefer you above every good except the good you yourselves place above all others, our Lord and God. In this prayer let me be consumed with the love you have in your hearts. Let me sing with you forever: Blessed be the Lord our God! Let me sing it forever.