

THE EIGHTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun.** **The Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Aug. 4 **JESUS PREPARES US FOR FAITH'S STRUGGLE**
 A reflection from The Lord of Fr. Romano Guardini
- Mon.** **Monday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time**
5 **BEING PREOCCUPIED WITH SHARING FAITH**
 A reflection from a text by Pierre Charles
- Tues.** **FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD**
6 **GOD'S PRESENCE REVEALING ITSELF THROUGH US**
 A reflection from a text by Max Thurian
- Wed.** **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
7 **Wednesday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time**
 A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE
 A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Basil the Great
- Thurs.** **Memorial of St. Dominic**
8 **An Apostle of Prayer**
 A reflection developed from a text of the Catholic Encyclopedia
- Fri.** **Memorial of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross**
9 **SHARING THE GIFT OF THE CROSS**
 A reflection from the Vatican Website
- Sat.** **Feast of St. Lawrence**
10 **WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN'S TREASURE**
 A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Peter Chrysologos

JESUS PREPARES US FOR FAITH'S STRUGGLE

A reflection from The Lord by Fr. Romano Guardini

When Jesus tells us the story of the wealthy landowner who is a fool in God's eyes he confronts us with the distinction between what is essential and non-essential. Life is more essential than food because when I'm dead I don't eat. Are eternal possession more essential than temporal ones? What, then, should a person do? Should one concentrate on the things of Heaven and let earthly things go as they may? But faith enables one to carry something of earthly existence over into immortality!

The more deeply people realize that Christ is the essential the less concerned they will be about everything else. That arms us for the struggle we must face. Don't be afraid! We may think ourselves forsaken but we aren't. We will be in the hands of Divine Providence. To the extent that a person recognizes God as Heavenly Father one places all trust in God and makes God's Kingdom the primary concern of one's heart. To precisely the extent that one does this a new order of being unfolds with and about one. In this order it is the case that all things work together for those who love God, and they work together for good.

But those who love God in this way are those who hold fast to God's Son. This is a tremendous truth. Christ is the condition for the realization of the providential order established by God. In telling us the story of the wealthy landowner Jesus is trying to anchor the hearts and minds of disciples in reality! Jesus wants us to know what counts in God's eyes and what doesn't. Jesus wants us to know what God sees as acceptable and what God sees as "fallen". The disciples are to complete the revaluation of existence that Jesus has begun.

If we as disciples will do this then we will be prepared for anything. If, for instance, the property they have grown up considering the foundation of wealth—and this varies from culture to culture and is understood in many ways—should be taken away from them because they love Christ, then for them there is no basic loss. Of course, this holds only for disciples whose faith is alive and active. Otherwise the words of Jesus are just words. Faith makes a huge difference.

This is one way that Jesus roots those who follow him in what is indestructible. Very gently, Jesus is immunizing us to all "unreality". Faith enable us to distinguish between what is "real" enough to last forever and what is not. Those who seem today to be authorities and determine for those who follow them what is "really important" are endowing what is actually unreal with a fake reality. This is how "worldly wisdom" gets established. That is the fake wisdom of a prevailing social and economic order. That is how many decide what sort of property mustn't be lost and what is or isn't a threat to oneself or one's life. If we follow Jesus in faith we become invulnerable to worldly wisdom and its values. Jesus is the Truth and that makes Jesus the Way who leads all who follow him to real Life.

BEING PREOCCUPIED WITH SHARING FAITH

A reflection taken from a text by Pierre Charles

Where are the people who rejoice most when Jesus comes into their lives? Above all, where are the people who rejoice particularly when they can help bring closer the hour which Jesus will come into the hearts of those who still don't know him? If we have experienced personally the wonder of Jesus' coming how can we fail to want above all else to hasten the day when He will be known and loved by every human person? Shouldn't this be our chief longing and the cause of great joy? Think of how many people live in anxieties that rob them of sleep because they are concerned for a friend or family member. There are many among us who also wait in silence and in vigil to hear the steps of the Redeemer walking the roads of our world in search of lost sheep.

We have created for ourselves fairly comfortable lives and so we don't mind the delaying of the Second Coming. It doesn't cause us inconvenience that the present state of things is prolonged. We may cause earthly life a "Valley of Tears" but for most of us it isn't that bad a valley and we don't shed too many tears about it except when we get the news of some tragedy or terrorist horror. How would you feel if you were told by an angel that you would be permitted to continue the life you live on earth indefinitely? Would you ask only that it be permitted to bring down heaven to our earth? What is it that you long for when you truly long for Christ's Second Coming?

The arrival of Christ is joyful tidings only to the genuinely pure of heart, and perhaps to those who are tired of the infirmities that go with growing old. Which tends to be most important to an individual—the problem of our weaknesses and disabilities and strained relationships, etc. or the opportunity to be in the transfigured and glorious presence of God in Christ Jesus? There is so much illusion and falsehood that keeps us from longing for Christ and for his coming.

Our earliest ancestors in faith watched for God's coming with impatience. They watched for our God as people watch for dawn when they are tired of night. Christ will come at the end of time, in the hour set by the Heavenly Father. God chooses the hour when each of us, and the world in general, will be ready for judgment. They were especially concerned to obtain God's pardon. They wanted to remain on their knees in prayer until they obtained some sign that they had been pardoned. The gift they needed most was that of perseverance; they could not give up until they knew that God had come to them and made them his own by cleansing them from all sin, and from everything else that comes between one of us and our God.

What does it all depend on? We must know that you hide as a priceless pearl beneath all that seem bitter or empty or bereft of God's transforming presence. But are we your chosen ones? All we have to do is prepare ourselves to live fully and joyfully in God's revealed glory. We need to live in Blessed Expectation. "Oh, my God, cut away in me all that serves as a screen to blind me to your loving presence. Oh, my God, triumph over all that keeps me from you and distracted by things that are not going to last forever. Come into my heart and my life today and at this hour and make it the hour when I give myself wholly in the care of your love. Let me love others so much that I will seek always to draw them with me into your loving embrace."

GOD'S PRESENCE REVEALING ITSELF THROUGH US

A reflection from a text by Max Thuriann

Peter, James and John are present at the Transfiguration of Christ and they see his glory. Moses and Elijah also appear “in glory”. Jesus is the revealed glory of God as dwelling among God’s People. This is the same glory that filled the tent of meeting where the Ark of the Covenant was. As this is described in the Second Letter of Peter this reminds us of the revelation of God on Mt. Sinai. “For when he received honor and glory from God, the Father, and the voice spoke from the majestic cloud “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased” we heard this voice born to us from Heaven for we were with Him on the Holy Mountain”. Peter sets the Transfiguration in the context of the revelation of Sinai as Luke puts it in the context of God’s appearing above the tent of meeting. God dwells in Christ, the Beloved Son, and appears above him in a cloud.

In the Gospel account we hear Peter wanting to put up tents for each of the three, as we might wish for ourselves so that we might always meet God there. The glory of God is present on earth in Jesus who is transfigured as well as Moses and Elijah who are glorified. The cloud comes as a sign of God’s presence above all three. When the three disciples came under the cloud—the same expression (came-under) as used in the Exodus account of Sinai and of the tent of meeting—they felt terror. The glory they experienced in this fear is intended to remind us of God’s coming to Mary in the annunciation and tie this to the transfiguration event. Peter would like to capture this glory and presence by putting up a tent for each of the disciples.

We are presented with the same theme in the accounts of Exodus, of the Annunciation and of the Transfiguration. In all of them a cloud is the symbol of God’s presence and of the awe which we feel when we sense that presence. God comes, fills, indwells and transfigures the place or the persons involved. As God came to Sinai and then to the tent of meeting, God has come to Mary and to Jesus, and now to Jesus’ disciples. Just as the mountain and the tent of meeting revealed God and God’s power to transform, so do Mary and Jesus and—even if that surprises us—the disciples. But in the last instance God shows us that there is no need for a special dwelling or tent or place. But God’s glory is in a way hidden in the tent of meeting and the Temple which came afterward and there is no need for this. Christ reveals that glory and that it radiated from him. What was hidden in the Tent and Temple is revealed in Christ! St. John writes: “The Word became flesh and “tabernacled” or “tented” among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father full of grace and truth”.

Today’s Biblical text deliberately echoes the texts speaking of God self-revelation, both in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. The flesh which is the Son of God incarnate in Jesus as in his tent and temple, is also continued in the Body of Christ—i.e., in us. God is truly in the midst of his People through us. His glory is intended to be revealed through us as it is through Christ. How? It is revealed in our loving others as Christ loves them. The eyes of our faith have to pierce the veil which our flesh can be and it is our love for God and for one another that guides faith—our faith as much as that of others—to what we truly are. It guided us to discern God’s present in Jesus and now, due to Jesus’ prayer for us, it guides people to see Christ in us.

A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Basil the Great

“There was a rich landowner whose property produced abundant harvests, but he thought to himself: What am I to do to store my harvest?” God gives to all a share in created goods. God’s kindness extends to everyone, even to those like the rich landowner who don’t know how to use them because they aren’t like God. Scripture says: **“God sends rain on both the just and the unjust and makes the sun rise for the wicked and the good alike.”** God does good to all.

But Jesus gives us a parable which shows us a person who doesn’t think of doing good to all, or even to those who are in special need; this person thinks only of self. One imagines that the parable must be about a person who dislikes others and so is unwilling to share. God is that person’s benefactor and doesn’t that mean we are to do to others as God does to us? But some feel no obligation to do this and so when they have more than they need they don’t share. What about you?

The parable presents a person who has even more than he can conveniently store but the only problem this person is aware of is finding a way to store up goods for himself, and for the foreseeable future! His storage space was fully used and something needs to be done. If you find yourself in such a situation do you think only of creating more storage space? Are you never satisfied with what you have?

Suppose that, year by year, you become richer. You are always added new wealth to what you already have. Does this cause you anxiety? Look carefully at the kind of anxieties you feel. What if your wealth doesn’t bring you inner peace but only anxiety? You could eliminate that by sharing your surplus. Can’t you hear the cry of those who are poor and don’t have enough even to survive on?

Do you recognize who has given you your wealth? It is really a gift and it has been given to you so that it can be used to care for all God’s children. If you have been given more than most you have a greater obligation than most to share from what you have been given. All of us are stewards of the property of God. What we have wasn’t given us just for ourselves. God has commanded his stewards to share what has been entrusted to them with the other members of the household of God.

Jesus’ parable reminds us that we only live for a relatively short time. The unfaithful steward who kept everything for self and wouldn’t share as God has commanded was about to die. In effect, God was calling that steward to give an account, as though by an audit of the books. What are we to do? The answer is clear enough: I will use what God has given me to help the poor and hungry. I will act like the Patriarch Joseph did when famine came; I will open my storage facilities and share what I find there with those who don’t have all that I have. What God gives each of us is a resource given to enable us to help others. God wants us to be benefactors too.

Isn’t it a wonderful thing to share in God’s goodness? We aren’t all landowners and we don’t all have more food stuffs than we know what to do with but we all have been given something to share. How do you fulfill the commandment to love others as Christ as loved us. If we have seen Christ’s love we have seen the Heavenly Father. God is love and God calls us to let our lives be love just as his is.

AN APOSTOLATE OF PRAYER

A reflection developed from a text of the Catholic Encyclopedia

St. Dominic came from a family very much devoted to God and God's service. His mother has been beatified and two brothers have also been beatified. He himself was appointed by the bishop of his diocese to the Cathedral's college of canons with the goal of helping them rededicate themselves to their work of prayer through his edifying example. This proved effective and he spent nine years as a canon developing a great reputation as a person of prayer. He had a great love for the praying of the Divine Office and passed on this love and dedication when he founded the Dominicans. He called for them to live in a community which would gather to pray the Divine Office each day.

What seems to impressed people was the fact that Dominic love prayer and the praying of the psalms so much that most other things seem comparatively unimportant. He lead a very simple life and put much emphasis on prayer and abstinence. This was so much the case that he led the Cistercian abbots, whom the pope had sent to preach to Albigenian heretics, to live a greater poverty than even they were accustomed to. This proved to be effective in making their preaching more credible and effective.

Dominic's life was filled with preaching missions. He was transparently in love with God and this led him to care little or nothing for worldly wealth or influence. Three times he effectively refused to accept calls to become bishop of various diocese. He felt the qualities that make him attractive to the electors were incompatible with the life that bishops led in the society of his time.

Apart from his example of prayer and his dedication to preaching Christ he was deeply aware of the sufferings of the poor and those who had no secure place or way of making a living. Although he loved books he was known to sell all he had, with the exception of a copy of the New Testament, to help the poor who appealed to him. He saw preaching itself as an act of charity and directed his preaching to those who were poor or on the margins of medieval society. All are commanded by Christ to share what they have been given and so he shared what he had learned from his family. He saw his special education as a deepening of the faith that came to him through his parents. Probably it was due to his inspiration that his brothers gave away the inheritance they had from their parents and also dedicated themselves to lives of service to the poor.

St. Dominic's life story illustrates how attractive Christian sanctity is when lived with all one's heart and without holding back. He believed that sanctity was the key to all apostolic activity and thought of the nine years he spent as a canon—which he considered a "hidden life"—seemed to him the seed bed from which everything else sprang. He was never reluctant to withdraw for prayer and reflection and spent his time "on the road" memorizing and meditating on the New Testament. If you would effectively share your love for God do it by sharing the love for prayer and helping the poor which Jesus taught, not just be word but by deed. Faith is God's gift and faith naturally expresses itself in love of God and others. But this faith depends on one's relationship with God and that depends on prayer and on time spent in prayer. Seek first the Kingdom of God in prayer and all else will be given you besides.

SHARING THE GIFT OF THE CROSS

A reflection developed from the Vatican Website

“When night comes and you look back over the day and see how fragmentary everything has been, and how much that you planned that has gone undone, and all the reasons you have to be embarrassed and ashamed: just take everything exactly as it is, put it in God’s hands, and leave it with him.” That is what Edith did which her entire life when she stepped out of the chaotic world of Nazi Germany and into a Carmelite monastery. That is what she did on the day a squad of Nazi soldiers came to the monastery and arrested Teresa Benedict and her sister, Rosa, and made them take the first step on their way to Auschwitz and its gas chamber. Her birth had taken place as her very observant and devout Jewish family was celebrating Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. ‘Atonement’ is often interpreted as “at-one-ment”. She died because she was one with her family and the People of Israel and wouldn’t deny that unity but saw it as consecrated by her and Rosa’s death. Her death was a cross but it came because she refused to flee the cross of being Jewish. ***“Usually one gets a heavier cross when one attempts to get rid of an old one”***.

“The motive principle and the end of the religious life is to make an absolute gift of self to God in a self-forgetting love—to end one’s own life in order to make room for God’s life”. That neatly says why she followed St. Teresa of Avila into the Catholic Church and why she continued to follow her into Carmel. She was a promising young intellectual with a doctorate in philosophy and had become an atheist by reflecting on the horrors of the First World War. But when she read St. Teresa’s autobiography she knew she had encountered the truth. Philosophers seek the truth but she had just discovered that ***“anyone who seeks truth seeks God, whether or not one realizes it”***. God gives a call to let go of oneself knowing that one will find one’s true self in God.

“Each finite creature can reflect only a fraction of the divine nature; thus, in the diversity of his creatures, God’s infinity, unity and oneness appear to be broken into an effulgence of manifold rays.” As Edith Stein St. Teresa Benedicta wrote quite a few books. They were directed to pointing out the wonders of God’s creatures and call all to realize and share the beauty God has placed within them. One of these books was about the place of women in the world. ***“A woman’s soul is fashioned as a shelter in which other souls may unfold.”*** ***“Woman naturally seeks to embrace that which is living, personal, and whole; to cherish and guard and protect and nourish and advance growth—that is her natural, maternal yearning.”*** ***“The soul of a woman must be expansive and open to all human beings; it must be quiet so that no small, weak flame will be extinguished by stormy winds; warm so as not to benumb fragile buds, ... empty of itself in order that extraneous life may have room in it; and finally, mistress of itself and also of its body so that the entire person is ready, at the disposal of every call.”*** That was how she had viewed her call while she was in the world, and she was given permission to continue to write after her profession in Carmel.

“We will always find the fundamental compulsion to become what our soul should be”. ***“The deeper one is drawn into God, the more one must ‘go out of oneself’; that is, one must go to the world in order to carry the divine life into it”***. ***“Let go of your plans. The first hour of your morning belongs to God so you can tackle as the day’s work what he charges you with; he will give you the power to accomplish it”***. ***“One can’t find freedom from the cross when one is especially chosen for the cross”***.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN'S TREASURE?

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Peter Chrysologus

Today is special because Lawrence, a deacon of the Church of Rome, received the glory of finding his crown of baptism turned into the crown of martyrdom. He was a young man whose youthful handsomeness became the beauty of one who sheds his blood in witness to Christ as the highest goodness and beauty. With the Lord's help, I shall briefly narrate his story.

Lawrence was an archdeacon when Blessed Sixtus II was bishop and his martyrdom took place three days before Lawrence's. Lawrence actually walked with Sixtus on his way to martyrdom and they sustained one another by their faith. Sixtus looked at Lawrence and prophesied, "Don't be sad, you will follow me three days from now!" Because he longed for the gift of martyrdom Lawrence proceeded to prepare himself spiritually.

In not too long a time, Lawrence was arrested and led before the prefect of the city. As an archdeacon it was supposed that the resources of the church were in his possession or control. The prefect seemed more motivated by the prospect of getting his hands on wealth than eliminating Christians. Lawrence, however, was actually poor personally though rich in holy virtue. He didn't deny that he had the wealth of the church in his control but asked for a three day delay in order to gather them and bring them to the persecutor.

He assembled groups of the poor and when summoned to his trial he showed what he had. The prefect asked him where the riches were. He pointed to the horde of poor people and said, "These are the riches of the Church." What he said was true but it was bitter to the persecutor. He not only felt ridiculed but his avarice enraged him. Instead of executing Lawrence by the sword he ordered a fire kindled and a gridiron brought so he could torture the one who had mocked him. In effect, he was going to dry out Lawrence as one does to grain and kill him in that way.

There is no torture for a condemned person who has not sinned. The most blessed martyr, showing how peacefully he rested in God, even on a red hot bed of iron, said to the onlookers: "You can turn me over now. One side is cooked so you can begin your meal". People admired this perseverance in trusting God. Indeed, it is a great gift. The fire of faith that burned within Lawrence was stronger than earthly fire that enveloped him and it didn't cause him pain but consoled him as he was being roasted alive. How did it console him? It kept him faithful to the One who had promised him eternal life. God bestowed this gift on him so that he might not fail and might not have his hope put out so that charity might be kindled all the more brightly within him. It is much more powerful than any earthly fire or its burning.

There are many historical examples of people giving their lives heroically for their people or nation or cause. What is important here is that we see how what we share with Lawrence has brought him to God. It can bring us to God as well. We see in Lawrence the wonder of faith and hope and love which have been given to us as they have worked in him, our brother. Don't be afraid! Trust always in God! We too have a treasure that will never fail and always brings those who possess it to God and eternal life.