

THE FIFTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. **The Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
July 14 **WHY ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT GODS COMMANDS?**
A reflection from *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Mon. **The Memorial of St. Bonaventure**
15 **Looking for Fortitude**
A reflection from a conference by St. Bonaventure
- Tues. **The Memorial of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel**
16 **LEARNING FROM THE MOST GLORIOUS VIRGIN**
A reflection from a conference by St. Bonaventure
- Wed. **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
7 **THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN APPLIED**
A reflection from a Gospel commentary by Origen of Alexandria
- Thurs. **A Day of Prayer for the Dead**
18 **THE BLESSINGS OUR DEPARTED GIVE US**
A reflection from texts by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Fri. **Friday of the 15th Week in Ordinary Time**
19 **HANDING ON THE TREASURE THAT IS OUR FAITH**
A reflection from *Against Heresies* by St. Irenaeus of Lyon
- Sat. **Saturday of the 15th Week in Ordinary Time**
20 **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FAITH**
A reflection from a discourse by St. Pope John XXIII

WHY DO WE ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT GODS COMMANDS?

A reflection from The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

There was a lawyer who stood up and to disconcert Jesus asked him: Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus replied: What is written in the Law? What do you read there? This led to a question: Who is my neighbor? Think how often this question has been asked in good faith and out of ignorance. Couldn't any reasonable seeker after truth ask it? Yes, but that isn't the way the lawyer asked it. Jesus treats his question as a temptation from the devil; in fact, that is the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Why do people keep asking but never get a final answer? The reply to this question is that people too often entertain themselves by wrangling over words. That so often leads to disputes that only corrupt peoples hearts and confuse their minds! Such disputes lead to envy, strife, bad-mouthing others, even attributing bad motives where there were none. It is the kind of question one can forever learn about without ever coming to know the truth. It is a way of looking godly without letting God's power into ones life. The problem is obeying Gods word.

Who is my neighbor? Ask rather, when you meet people in real need who is the neighbor? It is the person who can help. Its not a matter of who is ones kin or compatriot or brother or sister in Christ, or even who is ones enemy. Each of these answers can be true, or can be false. God has said we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to obey. If you stop to ask questions about who qualifies as your neighbor you make an excuse for your non-obedience. The question is easily an act of rebellion against Gods command.

I want to do God's will. Hasn't God given me enough information to start doing it? The real question we are asking is: What should I do? God has told you want to do. Someone is right there with you and needs your help. Isn't that true of your next door neighbor? You have as much reason to help the person next door, even those that person has no special title to claim your help, as you have to help any other person you encounter. Stopping to ask if that person has a special claim on you is throwing dust in your own eyes, as the lawyer's question did.

Didn't the lawyer know the commandments? Why would he hesitate to do what he was commanded? To ask what makes someone your neighbor amounts to an effort to excuse yourself from obeying. So get on with the job! It isn't a question of who is my neighbor but of whose neighbor am I? Neighborliness isn't a quality others have but one God commands me to show. Every moment of our lives is a challenge to obedience and action. If others are in need they have a claim on us. We must behave like a neighbor toward others. Do you have to pause and think out what to do? You have to do the good it is in your power to do. You learn how to obey by trying to obey in whatever circumstances you find yourself in. Our consciences are distracted by sin. We are confronted by the call of Jesus to obey spontaneously. A rich young man came to Jesus and asked what to do to be perfect. He was called to discipleship. The lawyer came to tempt Jesus and was sent back to Gods commandment. What is Jesus response if you hesitate when he repeats Gods command? What is the reason for your hesitation?

LOOKING FOR FORTITUDE

A reflection from a conference by St. Bonaventure

How can we come to be clothed in the habit of fortitude, of strength in the Lord? Notice first that it comes down from Heaven. In Scripture we read: Victory is not gained by the size of one's army but strength comes from Heaven. In one of the psalms we pray: The God of Israel will give strength and fortitude to his People. Fortitude is the gift of God.

This gift is given us by God our protector, God our redeemer and God our indweller. God protects us inwardly and outwardly. Nothing is powerful or strong except by the strength of God the First Principle. God is our redeemer through the Incarnate Word. The weakness of God is stronger than what is most powerful among men. God indwells in us and when the spirit of God is not present one is nothing but a dead body. We can't have fortitude without the Spirit of the Lord. This is ours because Christ dwells in us.

Remember the story of Samson. The Lord commanded that he never cut his hair. When it wasn't cut he was the strongest person alive. When it was cut his strength deserted him. He had seven locks of hair, he says, and these signify the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. When these were gone he had no special strength. The same is true proportionately for all the saints. When God's Spirit dwells in them they are strong and no one can overcome them. As long as they cling to the commands of the Lord they are unconquerable.

What is the sign of the Spirit's indwelling? The first is unconquerable faith. The second is unshakable hope. The third is inextinguishable charity. Think of how much people will suffer to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, the desire to be great, and pride in one's accomplishments. But all of these prove weaker than love for the Truth, Christ. In Him is unconquerable faith. From this flows an unshakable hope in the future reward which Christ has promised those who cling to Him. Christ teaches us what to hope and long for and when he accept his teaching our hope is unshakable. Scripture tells us that charity is stronger than death. What, as Paul asks us, can separate us from the love of Christ?

Think of the fact that this gift is given so that we will be able to do mighty things for God. So that we will be able to overcome all the powers of the Enemy. It also enables us to bear the tribulations that come with human life on earth. Recall the tale of the ancient servant of God, Eleazar, who preferred to be tortured to death than to violate the commands of God. No matter how weak you may seem in the flesh you can be strong enough to bear anything for love of God. What is necessary? Only that we pray to God for this gift. Let us pray to the Lord Jesus Christ that by his mercy he will deign to lead us to reign with Him in this mortal life and then come to the indescribable joy of God's Kingdom.

LEARNING FROM THE MOST GLORIOUS VIRGIN MARY

A reflection taken from a conference by St. Bonaventure

Who will find a strong woman for me? O Virgin, pray for us. You are the strongest of women and the holiest. The words I began with were originally spoken to Judith but they are even more appropriately addressed to Mary. We ask her to help us in obtaining the grace of wisdom and knowing the Truth. Then we ask for her prayers that we may do that truth. Left to ourselves we are lazy and always ask too late for what we need. That is why we need to turn to the most glorious Virgin to ask her prayers.

The Virgin was called to give birth to Christ, who is the wisdom of God and the strength of God. That she might give us the best of examples she was filled with the Seven-fold gift; they come from the Spirit. She was given these gifts so that she might know the Truth and so that she might be filled with grace for living it. When one lives by grace one becomes an incarnation of the gift of good counsel. Who can better counsel us about living for and in God than the Virgin? She does it by her own example as shown us in Scripture.

When we look to the Virgin we look to Christ and to the Father. When we look to her we look to her example of obedience to God's word. Everyone who hears the Word of God and does it is a person who is building on a rock. Those who look to Mary see that they too are called to build all their life on the rock which is Christ.

Blessed are those, Scripture tells us, who hear the word of God and do it. When we look to Mary we see one who listened carefully to God's word and spent her entire life in doing it. By doing this she was made the means of our salvation. To look to her is to look to Christ and recognize in Christ the source of our salvation. To look to her is to know that in doing God's will and word we find salvation. To look to her is to know that all salvation is from Christ and that we can bear Christ for others just as she did.

Who made the Virgin conceive that she might bear Christ for the world? It was the Spirit who did this and to look to her is to see that we shall be able to do God's word and command by opening our hearts and minds and lives to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the source of all holiness and to look to Mary is to look to that source and seek our holiness in and through the Holy Spirit.

Mary listened to the Archangel Gabriel and not to the Evil One to whom Eve listened. To look to Mary is to see that nothing which the Evil One brings to the world is for our good. In Mary we see how to turn away from all sin and temptation by turning to God's word brought to use by angel messengers. We see that all which was made vile by turning from God's work is redeemed and made precious by following it.

When our Lord paid the price of our redemption on the Cross, Mary was there accepting God's will and placing herself in harmony with it. To look to Mary is to see how we are to bear our crosses and accept whatever Divine Providence decrees for our individual salvation. Isaiah notes that a good woman never forgets the child she has born. We know that Mary never forgets her Son and never forgets those her Son has commended to her. Can we fail to imitate her?

APPLYING THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN TO MYSELF

A reflection taken from a Gospel commentary by Origen of Alexandria

Some of the Fathers have interpreted the parable of the Good Samaritan as an allegory. The man going from Jerusalem to Jericho is Adam, and that means we are that person. Jerusalem is the house of God and so a symbol of Paradise while Jericho is the world which is without God and so a symbol of life in sin. The priest symbolizes the Law of Moses and the Levite the prophets and the Good Samaritan is Christ. He finds us wounded by sin and cares for us. He brings us to an Inn, which symbolizes the Church, and he gives the innkeeper, those who minister in the Church, two silver coins—the teaching about the Father and the Son and their saving love.

The Samaritan was carrying oil—the oil that makes the face shine, as the Scripture says. The care which Christ gives us certainly brings us joy and gladness. Christ uses it to help heal our wounds, brought about by our frequent disobedience. Oil soothes but is combined with wine, which makes our wounds smart. Christ cleanses us of sin and then applies a remedy that will heal them. He assumed our humanity and so he carries us with him to the Church.

The Church, like an inn, welcomes everyone who Christ brings to it. To all of us the Lord says, “Come to me all who labor and are overburdened and I will give you new strength”. He bore our sins and brought us to a place and a community where we could find a new life. After bringing us to the Church he doesn’t just go away but stays and cares for us. He then entrusts us to some of his ministers and gives them the resources they need to continue the caring he began. What’s more he has promised that all we spend on caring for those he brings to us we will receive in the form of a marvelous recompense when he returns. We are encouraged to help one another, as we think of all Christ has in store for those who love and imitate him.

Christ, as the guardian of souls, was a better neighbor to those who have been wounded by sin than even the Law and the Prophets. He proves this by deeds rather than words. If we are following Christ and ministering to those he has taken to himself we must imitate his deeds and not just repeat his words. Think of Paul’s words: “Imitate me as I imitate Christ”. We are to imitate Christ by showing mercy to all who need it. Who doesn’t need such mercy? We are to go to them, bandage their wounds as best we can, apply remedies to them as we are able, and then pick them up and bear their burdens, even if that burden is the wounded person. The Son of God calls us to do these things. He does it not simply by speaking to the ministers of his teachings but by speaking to everyone. “Go and do likewise”, Christ says. If we do we shall be with Christ in eternal life.

THE BLESSINGS OUR DEPARTED GIVE US

A reflection developed from texts by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Holy people call forth holy people. Saints call forth other saints. What brought about St. Augustine's conversion was the reading of the Life of Anthony by St. Athanasius. Eleven centuries later, Teresa of Avila would read the Confessions of St. Augustine and write: "When I read the words that Augustine heard in the garden, I thought the Lord was addressing them to me, so great an emotion did I feel in my heart". Teresa's life took the turn which brought her to sanctity. Four centuries later, Edith Stein became a Catholic after reading the Life of St. Teresa. She left her academic career and entered Carmel, later to be murdered at Auschwitz for her Jewish heritage. She too is now a saint.

Saints inspire sanctity in others. Each of us must find inspiration in someone's life, often the life of a saint or holy person. This leads us to a simple and very practical conclusion: Let us begin to read or at least reflect about the lives of the saints and holy people who have gone before us. There are so many of them. There are even many fascinating and interesting autobiographies.

In the Book of Revelation, St. John describes the immense multitude of God's witnesses and holy ones. They are our fellow travelers. In God they know of us and care about us and want to support and help us. United to Christ they are united to all others in heaven. We are invited to become their friends. We can become close friends of others still living on earth but there are limits on the closeness we can have. We can experience an indescribably and much more perfect communion with those who have gone before us into God. There aren't the limits upon this love that there are upon earthly love.

The Church speaks often about death. One of these is that there is a death which is like a baptism from which new life is reborn. This was the death of Jesus and he shares this with all those who are united with him in love. Think of what a wonderful thing we do "in memory of Him" as we celebrate Eucharist. How do we remember our brothers and sisters who have died in Christ and so have gone with Him into God? Whatever its earthly circumstances theirs was a happy death. They can lead us too into God by leading us to Christ. That is what most of them tried to do while on earth with us. They haven't stopped trying. Do we think of them and pray with them and with their help prepare ourselves for the time when Jesus will stretch out his hand to us and take us, as he promised, to be with him forever in God?

Parents, relatives, close friends, brothers and sisters in faith and in a life consecrated in so many and varied ways to God, all remember us and pray with us. In heaven their love for us isn't less but more intense. They want us to make the very best use of the holy part of the heritage they have left for us. That is why we set aside special days to think of them, pray with them, and join with them in loving Christ—so far as we are able with all our hearts and minds and spirits. They teach us more and more about our real hope and how wonderful it is. Let us live today filled with this hope and rededicate ourselves to our journey to God.

HANDING ON THE TREASURE THAT IS OUR FAITH

A reflection from Against Heresies by St. Irenaeus of Lyon

The Church, though it is spread over the entire world—even to the ends of the earth, received from the Lord and the apostles and their disciples, the gift of faith. The Church believes in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and the seas and all the things that are in them, and in One Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation, and in the holy Spirit who proclaimed through the Prophets the dispensations of God. We have received the resurrection from the dead, the ascension into heaven in the flesh and the future manifestation of our Lord from heaven in the glory of the Heavenly Father. Yes, he will come to gather all things into one and to raise up anew all flesh and the entire human race. It is all to be done so that every knee should bend to Jesus Christ, our Lord and God and Savior and King, according to the gracious and invisible God. Then everything on earth and under the earth and every people and tongue shall confess the One God.

We believe that all shall come before God and Jesus Christ for judgment. We believe that God will execute judgment upon all, even upon the angels, and all who have done spiritual wickedness and transgressed or become apostates shall suffer the appropriate recompense by unquenchable fire. And he shall in his grace confer immortality upon the righteous and the holy and all who have kept the commandments of love and worship. Some do this from the beginning of their Christian faith and others only from the day of their repentance. But all shall be surrounded with everlasting glory and joy.

The Church is scattered throughout the world and yet it seems to occupy a single house. It carefully preserves the faith that it received through preaching. In the same way, it shows unity of heart and soul in the way it believes. It is as though it had but one heart and one soul. Thus the Church preserves its faith and hands it on as if it possessed only one mouth. Although there are many and dissimilar languages in the world yet the import of what the Church preaches is one and the same everywhere. The churches which have been planted in Germany don't believe or hand on anything different than the churches in Spain, nor those in Gaul, nor those in the East, nor those in Egypt or Libya.

The sun is one creature of God and yet is the same for all throughout the world, and so also is the preaching of the truth about God and God's Christ a kind of light that shines in the same way throughout the world. This preaching enlightens all who are willing to come to knowledge of God's truth. No matter how gifted in eloquence any teacher in the Church may be the doctrines taught will be the same everywhere. No one is greater than the one Master. The faith being one and the same everywhere is neither diminished nor added to by any of its teachers. We too are called to hand on the faith we have received. We must do it in a way that brings all together in love and service around the One God and his one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FAITH

A reflection taken from a discourse by St. Pope John XXIII

You have often heard St. John's declaration: "Whatever is born of God overcomes the world, and this is what wins the victory that overcomes the world—our faith". How do you understand this declaration? First of all, it points out to us that only a person who has faith that inspires charity can rise above the miseries, the meannesses and the malice of this "world", of this way of organizing one's life and deciding how to treat others. One who surrenders to the spirit of this order we live in is likely to seek illicit gain, be filled with hatred, love impurity, and consequently suffer all sorts of inner and outer ills. Such a person can, for instance, never be entirely satisfied.

The lesson is that we need to nourish our faith. It is faith in a God who is just and merciful and loving. Apart from God's love and mercy our lives would be like a day without sun and light. But knowing the truth about God shows you that the world we actually live in is very different from what the "world" thinks. If you have this awareness in your mind and so your heart you will know that peace which Jesus promised to his disciples. After his resurrection Jesus greeted his disciples repeatedly with the words: "Peace be with you!"

When he said this Jesus showed them his wounds. He showed them that peace is born of doing the will of our Heavenly Father. From that comes a patience which always hopes that from suffering life will come—for us as it has for Jesus. Following the selfish desires that are characteristic of those who live by the "way of this world" leads to disorder within and without and so to discontent and frustration.

The Letter to the Hebrews defined faith well as the "assurance of things hoped for and the conviction about the goodness of things not yet seen". Those who don't believe would persuade us to give up all hope for things that are better than this present world order can provide. We have to respond by re-emphasizing the characteristics that marked the Church in its beginnings: We have to study to know Christ and Christ's Gospel, we have to create constructive accounts of revealed truth and of Christ, and we have to show how lived charity transforms people and the lives they lead, and for the good.

We are being led to a truly supernatural life, and one nourished by the many examples of holiness and sanctification God has given to us. They offer us clear understandings of what we can hope for, strong convictions about the saving and transforming power of Christ-like love, and overflowing energies for loving and serving in imitation of Christ and his saints and holy ones. We are called to extend God's Kingdom in an outpouring of enlightened and joyful enthusiasm such as will work for the sanctification of all. Guard in your hearts the search for the "one thing needful".