

THE SEVENTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun.** **The Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
July 28 **WHAT OUR GOD ASKS OF US**
A reflection from a homily by St. Bede the Venerable
- Mon.** **Memorial of SS. Martha, Mary & Lazarus**
29 **MAKING OUR HOME A PLACE FOR JESUS**
A reflection from a talk by Pope Francis
- Tues.** **Tuesday of the 17th Week in Ordinary Time**
30 **WHAT DO WE WANT BESIDES GOD?**
A reflection from a letter by St. John of the Cross
- Wed.** **Memorial of St. Ignatius of Loyola**
31 **KNOWING JESUS BETTER & BETTER**
A reflection from a talk by Fr. Karl Rahner
- Thurs.** **Memorial of St. Alphonsus Liguori**
Aug. 1 **WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST?**
A reflection from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII & Catholic Online
- Fri.** **Friday of the 17th Week in Ordinary Time**
2 **ARE YOU CONTENT TO BE APPROVED BY THE LORD?**
A reflection from a homily by St. Bernard
- Sat.** **Memorial of Our Lady**
3 **CHRIST'S LOVE IN GIFTS OF LIFE**
A reflection from The Reed of God by Caryll Houselander

WHAT OUR GOD ASKS OF US

A reflection from a homily by St. Bede the Venerable

Our Lord and Savior wants us to attain the joy of the Heavenly Kingdom. That is why he taught us to pray. He promises we will receive the gift of the Kingdom if we pray for it. *“Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened for you.”* Begin by asking to understand what these words mean for you personally. It is clear that they warn us not to be lazy do-nothings because only those who pray for the Kingdom, seek it by upright living and persevere in doing these things will enter that Kingdom.

Words aren't enough. We also have to work hard at discovering how we are to live so as to become suited to live in that Kingdom. We have all heard: *“Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord! Will enter the Kingdom of Heaven but only those who do the will of the Heavenly Father!”* So we have to pray without ceasing, constantly! We have to fall to our knees before our God and Maker with tears. Then we have to think carefully about how our Maker has commanded us to act and live. *“Let's seek the Lord and his strength; let's constantly seek his face”*. That's what we are told in Scripture. To become able to find God and even see God Scripture says we have to *“cleanse ourselves from all defilement of body and spirit”*, for only such persons are raised up to heaven on the day of resurrection. Only the pure of heart can contemplate the glory of the Divine Majesty.

If we want to know clearly what the Lord wants of us we need to listen to the Gospel: *“Seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice, and all these other things will be given you as well.”* To seek the Kingdom of God and its justice is to long for the graces of our heavenly homeland by giving constant thought to them and to the kind of upright living that obtains them. Listen to Scripture: *“The upright live by faith, mercy surrounds those who hope in the Lord, and to love is to fulfill the law for the whole law is summed up in the command: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* It is in this context that the Lord graciously promises that *“the Father will give the good Spirit to those who ask him”*.

The Lord says all this in order to show that those who of themselves are evil can be made good by receiving the grace of the Spirit. So he promises that the good Spirit will be given by the Father. Whether we pray for faith or hope or any other virtue that we long for we attain it only through the grace of the Holy Spirit. As we do our best, then, to follow in our Lord's own footsteps, let's ask God the Father for the grace of the Spirit to lead us along the path of the true faith—that faith which works through love.

This is the way we become to kind of persons who are fit to receive what they have so longed and prayed for. We have to strive to live in a way that will make us the kind of persons fit to be children of such a Father. We must strive to preserve inviolate in body and spirit the sacramental rebirth of our baptism. It made us children of God! So if we keep Almighty God's commandments then God will certainly gift us with eternal blessings. From the very beginning God has prepared these blessings as our heritage. God has done this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Jesus himself, with the Holy Spirit, is not only our help but the gift we are to receive in everlasting joy and glory.

MAKING OUR HOME A PLACE FOR JESUS

A reflection from a talk by Pope Francis

In the Gospel of Luke we hear that Jesus visited the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. He and his disciples were welcomed enthusiastically into that home. All receive him but St. Luke wishes to point especially to the work of Martha and to Mary's sitting at Jesus' feet and listening with rapt attention to all he said. She is shown to us as leaving whatever she was doing to be close to Jesus. She doesn't want to miss any of his words. When Jesus comes to visit us shouldn't everything else be put aside? Don't his presence and word come before everything else?

The Lord is always surprising us. When we truly listen to Him the clouds vanish and the doubts give place to his truth, fears give way to serenity and each of the tasks that go with the many situations of life finds its rightful place. When the Lord comes He always rearranges things, us included. In picturing Mary at Jesus' feet, Luke shows the praying attitude of believers who are able to be in the Lord's presence and listen to Him and be in tune with Him. It's about pausing during the day, recollecting oneself in silence for a few minutes, making room for the Lord who is "passing by" and finding the courage to stay somewhat aside with Him. One can then return with more serenity and efficacy to everyday things. Praising Mary for "choosing the better part" is something Jesus means for us. Let's not let ourselves be overwhelmed by the things we have to do but first of all listen to the Lord's voice so we can do the tasks that he assigns to our lives.

Then there is Martha, whom Luke says received Jesus. She certainly had the charism of hospitality. She is wholly taken up with that service. Jesus reminds her that being concerned with many things requires ordering them so the one thing necessary gets first place. Jesus doesn't condemn the attitude of service but the breathlessness with which it is sometimes lived. We are to share Martha's concern and, following her example, we need to cultivate the sense of hospitality and fraternity as lived in our families and communities. The goal is that each person feels "at home", and especially the little ones and the poor, in our home and when they knock at our door. Nor must we miss the fact that Lazarus is there and is seeing that all the things necessary for hospitality and feeling "at home" are there for those who come.

The Gospel passage we are thinking of reminds us that wisdom of heart lies precisely in being able to combine contemplation, active service, and a certain oversight that brings all together in peace and comfort with one another. If we truly relish life lived with joy and a welcoming spirit we must keep all these realities, and the attitudes that make them real, together. We have to be able to be at the feet of Jesus and we have to be deeply concerned with hospitality, and we have to make sure that everything is in order so both these can be realized for each of us according to our needs at the time. This is what is genuinely needed if we are to live the Gospel with and for one another and for all. That is how we prepare a place where all can be with Jesus and meet their greatest need.

WHAT DO WE WANT BESIDES GOD?

A reflection from a letter by St. John of the Cross

Everyone of us passes at some time through a state of “darkness” and a feeling of “emptiness” when Jesus, and even God, seem absent. This is actually a part of what may be called spiritual poverty. You think everyone and everything is gone from you. But that also means that you have nothing to worry about and nothing at all that you have to concern yourself to do or be. You realize that all the usual concerns are only things we suppose, groundlessly, to be important.

One who seeks nothing but God doesn't walk in darkness. No matter how unfortunate or impoverished one seems you own will doesn't have to get involved in trying to change what you can't change. If you don't live on presumptions or in your own desires but only desire for God, there is nothing to cause you to stumble.

When something like this happens you know you are making real progress. Don't get upset but rejoice! Who are you that you should worry about yourself on account of what you can't change? You would do well to stop. If you do, then you have never been in a better spiritual state than the one you are experiencing. You have never been so humble, so submissive, taking so little account of yourself and all the things that fill the world. You have recognized your own evil deeds and recognized God as wholly good, and if you wish you can now serve God in purity and disinterestedness.

What is it you want? What life, or what way of going about life, are you picturing yourself as pursuing? What do you think it means to serve God without doing evil, keeping God's commandments? Are you walking God's way the best you can? If you do this what need can you have of ideas or delights or sweetness from other sources? In those ordinary things there is no lack of pitfalls and dangers for the soul. We are so prone to letting ourselves be deceived and enraptured by our own notions and desires or enamored with our own abilities. How often do they lead us astray? So it is a great favor from God when one finds these blocked out and weakened so as to seem non-important.

You are in a state in which you can't wander off with things other than God. Since you can't go astray, what is left for you to do? You can only go forward along the straight road, the one laid down by the Law of God and of God's Church. You can only live in faith. It is obscure but it is true and it brings a very certain hope. Better it will bring you a flawless charity. One hopes for the good things that are there with God and lives here as a pilgrim like poor people, exiles, orphans and strays live. You are no longer hoping for things here.

That is why I say, rejoice and trust in God. Look at the signs God has given you of how well you can follow Christ, and how you must follow Him. If you do otherwise it couldn't be surprising to find that God would show you displeasure because you have been so foolish. You were led to a way that fit you perfectly—if you really wanted God alone. You were led to such a secure place but you wanted what you had left behind. Long for nothing but this “way of progress” I have described and you've experienced, and be at peace within yourself. All is well.

KNOWING JESUS BETTER & BETTER

A reflection from a talk by Fr. Karl Rahner

What are we about when we make a retreat? Are we setting aside some time in order to reflect on ourselves? Are we trying to be more recollected and so living a time of silence? Do we want to become more fervent and so seeking to renew our life of prayer? Spiritual exercise like these are praiseworthy and helpful. But they aren't what St. Ignatius has in mind in giving us the Spiritual Exercises. He sought to give us the experience of drawing close to Jesus and choosing to make Jesus the center of our lives.

But what can this goal have to do with "annual retreats"? The choice of Jesus as the heart of our life can't be imposed on us from without and it can't even be repeated annually. Our lives have what is now called an "historical character" and this means that each moment is unrepeatable and, in a sense, definitive. Spiritually, we strive for choices that will be irrevocable, and how can this be compatible with something we do repeatedly?

Of course, it might be the case that when we make a retreat we are looking to make a basic decision for or against God or even the choice of a vocation. But that supposes that our past choices have been fully honest and not just apparently so. It can be advisable to enter once again into one's election-situation in order to examine its genuineness. Even more, though, our freedom is finite and can never embrace the totality of our life in one action. Every decision we make leaves room for further decisions. They will be conditioned by those that went before but add something to them also. So annual retreats place us in an election-situation and we can see this if we move aside the debris accumulated inwardly by our everyday life.

Let's ask the question: What does God want from me now? Is God pleased with the way I meditate, choose my reading material, pray, and so on? What about my personal determination, my standing commitment, to make progress in the spiritual life? This question brings us to a kind of Archimedes point, from which the whole of our life-world can be moved or shifted.

No other human person can tell me precisely what God is asking of me. St. Ignatius presupposes that God says to each and every person in a very personal way where his or her choice and election should begin. This is a shocking presupposition. It means that God manifests to me—e.g., as a retreatant, and going way beyond what a retreat master could say or do, what can only come from God. Ignatius knows well that each person can't build a life on publicly revealed propositions. They are important, but Ignatius believes that God says to each and every person something that goes beyond the fruit of such a one's personal reflections: I want this and that particular thing from you!

Do I have the courage and the vitality to believe? This is something that I can't accomplish on my own. God is going to say to me during my retreat something that I will never be able to disregard in the future. If we are prepared to hear that then our retreat is really "Ignatian". That supposes, of course, that God is ready. From our perspective, however, preparing oneself and waiting upon God are always worth the trouble. That is something God asks of you today. Jesus was always doing that. Are you willing to know Jesus in this way? Are you ready to know him better and better? Let him lead you into this special grace of God.

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST?

A reflection from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII & Catholic Online

One day, Alphonsus Liguori, a young lawyer, went to visit a local hospital for people considered incurable. He had an experience in which he heard God telling him to consecrate his life to God. He came to see that as a call to become a priest and work as a secular missionary. He was constantly opposed by members of his family but gave missions in Naples and then in rural areas. He knew he couldn't do all that was needed and tried to found a religious community, eventually found the Redemptorists, though he had to start over twice because those who came deserted him. He was ordered under obedience to become bishop of the Diocese St. Agatha of the Goths, where he found 30,000 Catholic who didn't know their faith and 400 priests whom he judged indifferent to the tasks God had called them to. His life work, apart from the writings that made him a Doctor of the Church, was to lead the people and priests of that diocese to Jesus.

Speaking to each of you from my heart (said Pope John) I want to remind you that the Son of God, in the sacrament of his love, has sanctified you with the touch of his own pure body and has stilled the desires for all that is not his will. He has consoled you in your sorrows, soothed your angry hearts, and strengthened you wavering resolution to follow God. How long does each of us have to live? We don't know. But whether the road be long or short the Eucharistic food will always be unfailing food. It will keep you in good company on your way to the Lord's Kingdom. There are many who for a long time don't respond to the Lord's invitation to partake of this bread. What should we say? Take courage! The Lord's love will always draw you because he loves you. But we must present ourselves as the Lord's instruments and be willing to be made fit instruments.

Alphonsus found ways to instruct people who were being ignored. He created special programs for families. He reorganized the diocese's seminaries. He helped religious houses live more fully their own rules and charisms. He taught theology and he wrote. He created an approach to Christian morality which avoided what was called Laxism (moral permissivism) and Rigorism (symbolized by Jansenism or Puritanism) and it was adopted by the Catholic Church. He did all this while living a very ascetic life and suffering an increasingly severe form of rheumatism. He began unable to raise his head to drink and had to use a straw to drink and was very bent. An attack in 1768 left him paralyzed. Yet he was refused permission to resign his office as bishop for another seven years, and so had to do what he could in spite of his physical condition.

Dissension in the religious community he had founded reached such a pitch that he was tricked into signing away all authority regarding it. Learning this he became depressed but was able to rely on his faith during the eight years that passed between his rejection as superior and his resignation as bishop and his death. He remained a charismatic figure to all who sought him out. His people considered him a saint and this was confirmed by official beatification a little more than 20 years later. There was nothing he was not prepared to suffer for Christ and for the salvation of the poor and needy.

ARE YOU CONTENT TO BE APPROVED BY THE LORD?

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

St. Paul tells us, “Don’t judge before the time when the Lord shall come to shed his light on what is hidden in the darkness”. What is done then will secure that each one receives praise from Almighty God. Now we can’t even properly judge ourselves. We can only glory in being children of the Lord because the Spirit bears witness to this. Whoever is to boast, then, shouldn’t boast in personal merits, for all that we have is from the Lord and not from ourselves. So let all boast of the One from whom come all good things. If one is great, it is God who brings that about. One must boast as one does who has received everything one has. Note that St. Paul doesn’t forbid boasting but teaches us the right way to do it.

Yet, what does Paul mean in saying: It isn’t the person who commends self who is worthy of being believed but one whom God commends? Who is it whom God does commend in this world? How can Truth itself commend someone who is still found worthy of blame? Listen to what God says: “Those whom I love I admonish and chastise”. But can such a commendation be whole-hearted? Completely! What could be a better or stronger commendation than the pledge of divine love toward us? There is no more certain testimony in this life of God’s love than the prophet’s yearning desire: “Oh, that the one who is just in mercy would admonish me; in that mercy God reproaches me for my sin”.

This is a kind of reproach that the Spirit of Truth is continually giving us, usually through hints and in secret. We are reproached when we become aware we have fallen and this keeps pride at bay. It reveals our negligence and ingratitude. But almost everyone who would follow Christ in a dedicated life is at risk of these sins. One is more at risk to the extent that one becomes less attentive to the promptings of one’s heart so that they fail to perceive what the Spirit of Truth is saying to them. The Spirit touches each of us outwardly and inwardly. Why are so many deaf to this? Unless I am mistaken, this is because those desirous of their own glory can’t find rest anywhere and find nothing within themselves to glory in, not even a little.

Nevertheless, we trust in and even glory in the Lord. God’s mercy is so great for us that we are protected from the graver sins—those which lead to spiritual death. Instead God corrects us by showing us our imperfections and shortcomings and even grossness in our behavior. God always pardons what is acknowledged as wrong. Such is God’s mercy that once we are firmly rooted in this humility, gratitude and eagerness for learning to do what is right, then we find we are no longer seeking to glory in ourselves. We walk humbly with our God and glory in God alone. This is what God seeks and approves. Isn’t this enough for us?

CHRIST'S LOVE SHOWN IN GIFTS OF LIFE

A reflection from The Reed of God by Caryl Houselander

"I have come that all may have life and have it more abundantly". (Jn 10) Have you ever considered how this is realized in the case of Christ's mother? *Even* before Christ was born his presence gave life and his mother found joy in it. With what piercing shafts of joy the story of Christ unfolded in his mother's life! First in the conception of her child, and then in the fact that her child brought joy to another mother and child, making that child leap for joy in his own mother's womb. A quickening of life can be felt as a leap of joy.

If we practice the contemplation taught and shown to us by Our Lady, we will find that our experience is like hers. If Christ is growing in us, if we are at peace, if we are recollected then we know that however insignificant our own life may seem to be, Christ is forming himself in us and that is never insignificant.

If we go with eager wills, in haste, to wherever our circumstances compel us, because we believe that is what He wants—that He wants to be in that place, we will find that we are driven more and more by the impulse of his love.

And there are the answers we get from others as the Christ life in us awakens impulses of love in them. They are awakened to into a leap of joy at the life they find is growing within them as well.

It isn't necessary, at this stage in our contemplation, to speak to others about the mystery growing in us. It is only necessary to give ourselves over to that life in all that we are. We pray without ceasing, almost without noticing it. It isn't a continual effort to concentrate our minds but a growing awareness of Christ taking form within our lives and transforming who we and what we are becoming.

We must trust Christ in this because the time hasn't yet come to see his face. We must possess Christ in secret and in darkness, as the earth possesses a seed. We mustn't try to force Christ's growth in us, but let ourselves be filled with deep gratitude for the light burning secretly in our darkness. We must fold our concentrated love upon Christ like the earth as we nourish the seed within.

We need to be swift to obey the impulses of Christ-love as we carry Him to wherever he longs to go. Those who recognize his presence will be stirred by a new life within them. They will know Christ's presence, not by anything special about us, but in the way the bud knows the presence of the light, by an unfolding in themselves. They are putting on the new beauty God is giving them as bearers of Christ.

It seems to me that this may be Christ's favorite way of being recognized. He prefers to be known, not by his own human features but by a quickening of his life in the hearts which respond to his coming within them.

After the Resurrection he wasn't known by the familiar features people had once known. He was now known by the love in the hearts of others, as in the heart of Magdalene. He was known by the fire in the feet of the travelers to Emmaus as they hurried return to Jerusalem to tell about him. He was known by the wound in his side and heart, as touched by Thomas. He is known in the deeds of love he does in and with us. That's how we imitate Our Lady in showing him to all the world.