

THE SIXTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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GOD'S SELF-REVELATION

A reflection from Abandonment to Divine Providence by Fr. J-P Causdade

All creatures that exist are in the hand of God. We perceive creatures only by means of the senses but faith sees something more. Faith grasps that all things live in Jesus Christ and that God's working in them lasts to the end of time, embracing even each tiny atom in its least motion. The actions of creatures are a kind of veil covering deep mysteries of Divine working.

Jesus took his disciples by surprise after his resurrection due to the various guises he used to make himself known as well as because he disappeared in the very act of making himself known. Jesus still takes us by surprise, ever working and living and testing our weak faith. There is no single moment in which God doesn't reveal himself under the guise of some pain to be born or some consolation to be enjoyed or some duty to be done. This takes place within us and around us and through us as he conceals and reveals his divine action.

We need to be attentive and watchful so that God's continual self-revelation will show us how he acts in everything that happens to us. We are to rejoice in it. At each moment we should exclaim: It is the Lord! We are to accept every new circumstance as a gift from God. Creatures are simply feeble tools in the hands of an able worker so that we can discover through them the fact that nothing is ever wanting to us because the constant providence of God bestows on us without ceasing everything we require.

Will you pursue this beloved one who, caring for us, passes from one end of the heavens to the other as with giant strides? If we are content, nothing hides God from us. God moves in the smallest blades of grass just as in a mighty cedar. The grains of sand are under God's feet just as are the hugest of mountains. Wherever we turn there we find the foot prints of God, and if you follow them perseveringly you will come to God. The present moment is God's ambassador and the heart must listen and say, "*let it be done according to your will*". We never need to stop but can sail ahead using every wind that blows, knowing that all will bring us to the shore of eternity. Everything is a help and instrument for our sanctification.

That is what happened to Mary of Bethany when Jesus came to her home. She sought only to hallow the name of God and to adore and love God's holy will at every moment. Like Job we need to bless God, even in utter desolation. God is present with us now. We must not permit ourselves to ignore this but use the opportunity to praise God and bless the Providence that has brought us to this place and moment. God gives us as many joys as trials and perhaps this is one of them. Let us simply bless God's holy name now, as in whatever befalls us and whenever it comes.

NEVER FORGET GOD'S FORGIVENESS

A reflection taken from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Scripture presents Jesus to us speaking words of consolation: "*Many sins are forgiven her, for she has loved much*". Scripture singles out three person in speaking of penance and love. One is Mary Magdalen. Many believe her to have been the person who bathed the Lord's feet with her tears and dried them with her hair and anointed them with precious ointment. She came into a room as though to a party but did a marvelous deed of repentance. It was a formal dinner honoring Jesus and yet she came in, young and beautiful, as if to honor that festival, as was the custom for women in that time, by pouring ointments and perfume on the forehead and the hair of special guests.

The proud Pharisee who was giving the dinner let her come in, so long as she didn't touch him, for he thought her a sinner destined for perdition. She herself was nothing to him. He might, as Scripture elsewhere says, cross sea and land to make a proselyte but he wasn't interested in looking into that proselyte's heart to pity the sin there and to try to heal it. That didn't even enter his thoughts.

But what a wondrous thing! A poor child of guilt draws near to crown Jesus with her ointment. Was it a sudden inspiration or a mature resolve? Was it an act of the moment or the result of a long inner conflict? She looked and discerned the one without stain or sin, the brightness of eternal light and the spotless mirror of God's majesty, and recognized the Lord of Life, her judge. She looked again and saw a sweetness and serenity. She looked timidly but eagerly and caught his eye and in his smile she saw loving-kindness and tenderness and compassion and mercy.

She looked at herself. How vile and hideous she seemed. Yet she was attractive, but with a withered beauty—though her admirers didn't notice the fact. She felt only the seven evil spirits that dwelt within her. And she felt trapped, and would have stayed trapped and wrapped in confusion and despair, had she not seen his loving face looking at her as a shepherd looks for a lost sheep. And that lost sheep surrendered herself to Him.

He didn't say a word but his eyes drew her. She ignored the scorn of the proud and the whispered jokes of the profligate and drew near wanting only to be received and saved and not sure what would happen. She knows him as the fountain of holiness and truth, and of mercy. To whom should she go except to the One with the words of eternal life? He didn't shrink from her lips or her kissing of his feet. As she wet them with her tears, love for Him grew stronger within her and lit a flame that would never die, from that moment forever.

What happened when he declared her forgiven and tenderly praised her love? "*Many sins are forgiven her, for she has loved much! One to whom less is forgiven responds with less love.*" Then he crowned these words with peace: "*Your sins are forgiven! Your faith has made you well. Go in peace!*" He means these words for us as well. We need only turn to him with our love and watch it grow in the light from his love for us.

ATTUNING OUR HEARTS TO THE MELODY OF CHRIST'S LOVE

A reflection from No Man is an Island by Fr. Thomas Merton

A saint isn't a person who likes suffering and declare this preference before God. Saints may hate suffering as much as anybody. Nor does a saint accept suffering in order to get a great reward. A saint is one who so loves Christ as to accept whatever happens as a way of proving a love that needs no reward but itself. We don't see Christ in the ordinary way; we live by faith. We don't do this as though it were an achievement but because the charity of Christ living in our hearts demands that we accept all that happens as an opportunity to love with Christ.

A saint is a person so attuned to the spirit and heart of Christ as to feel compelled to respond to what seem the demands of love by a love which matches that of Christ. This is a personal need so exacting that it becomes the whole of one's destiny. The more one responds to the secret action of Christ's love in one's own heart, the more one comes to know this love's inexorable demands.

The love of a Christian must always be a thing whole and simple and complete and incommunicable. The saints sometimes seem to desire even suffering in a universal and abstract way, but actually the only suffering anyone can validly desire is suffering that comes as a special trial that we see as demanded of us in Divine Providence's design for our lives.

Some are picked out to bear witness to Christ's love in lives overwhelmed by suffering. These have proclaimed that suffering was their vocation. That shouldn't lead us to believe that in order to be a saint one has to go in for suffering in the same way a college athlete goes out for a sport. No two people have exactly the same trials or experience them in exactly the same ways. And no one is ever called to suffer merely for the sake of suffering.

What is more personal than the feelings each of us experiences? It is futile even to try to convey the reality of what we feel. Suffering is a fine example of this. We can't convey such inner realities to others and the compassionate or empathetic response of another is never adequate. Suffering is one of those incommunicable realities.

As a result, things like suffering have to make sense to us in a vague universal way. It is necessary we experience such realities, and as a result of our own personal destiny. When I see, for example, my trials as not merely the collision of my life with a blind machine called fate but as a sacramental gift of Christ's love, given to me by God the Heavenly Father along with my identity and my very name, then I consecrate these things and myself to God.

I realize that my sufferings are not simply my own. They are tendrils from the vine that is the passion of Christ stretching into my own life. They will bear rich clusters of grapes. It will perhaps make my soul dizzy with the wine of Christ's love but it is part of God's work of pouring that wine—a wine as strong as fire—upon the whole world. Christ's redemption continues through you and me.

EMPTY YOUR VESSEL SO GOD CAN FILL IT

A reflection from On Divine Comfort by Meister Eckhart

No vessel can hold two different kinds of drink at the same time. If it is to contain wine we must pour out the water. The vessel must be bare and empty to receive. If you would receive divine joy and God, you must pour away creatures that don't fill you with God. St. Augustine said, "*Pour out what is within in order that you may be filled; learn not to love that you may learn to love; turn away that God may turn toward you.*" To take in and be receptive a vessel must be empty.

The Spiritual Masters say that if the eye were colored it couldn't perceive color; since it is free of all color itself it can perceive all colors. A wall has a color in it and it can't perceive that color or any other. The eye has no color of its own but is able to rejoice in every color. It is the same way with the soul. The more perfect and pure the soul's powers are the more perfectly and fully they take in whatever acts upon them. They have greater delight in what they receive and become more wholly one with what they receive as they have less. So much is this the case that the very highest of the powers of the soul, which is bare of all things and so has nothing in common with any particular thing, receives nothing less than God's very self.

The Spiritual Masters show us that nothing can equal this union with God, this fusion and bliss, in its fullness of joy and delight. Think of the Lord's words: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit*". One is poor who has nothing. "Poor in spirit" reminds us that of the fact that as the eye is poor and bare of color it is receptive of all colors, and it implies that as one is poor in spirit and bare one is also receptive of all that is spiritual and that the supreme spirit is God.

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, and peace. Bareness and poverty, having nothing and being empty, transform nature. This makes many miracles and wonders possible. If, then, you would seek and find perfect joy and comfort in God, see to it that you are free of all creatures and all comfort from creatures that do not fill you with God rather than filling you with the creatures themselves. Something like this happens when we receive the sacraments. In creatures as such you can never find true comfort but you can through the Eucharist.

When nothing can comfort you but God, then God will comfort you. With God and in God you will find all that is bliss. If what is not God comforts you, you will have no true comfort here or hereafter. When creatures give you no comfort you have no taste for them. When this is true you are empty and you will find God and comfort in God, both here and hereafter.

SEEKING PEACE AND FACING HARDSHIP

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard

“Blessed are the peacemakers”. These are the words of Jesus. He said that peacemakers will be called children of God. Consider attentively that it is not peace-preachers who are praised but peace-makers. There are some who preach but don't practice what they preach. It is the same as with those who hear the law, and are righteous in this sense, but don't do what the law commands.

If only those among us who today seem to be Pharisees—and perhaps that's what they are—could at least preach what they ought to, even if they don't practice it. If only those who aren't willing to proclaim the Gospel free of charge would at least offer something solid and true for the fee they demand.

St. James was a leader of those who called for all Jewish Christians to keep the entire law in reality. He was also a true peace-maker helping to bring about harmony among Jewish and Gentile believers. He was such an effective witness to the truth of Christ that he was the first of the apostles to receive the gift of martyrdom. He wasn't a hireling, who works only for a wage and flees when the wolf comes.

If only those who today do not behave like true shepherds would at least give genuine service and teaching for their fee. If only they wouldn't flee when no one is chasing them! If only they wouldn't leave the flock unprotected before the wolf comes. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to support them if at least they don't trouble the flock and lead it astray from the pastures of truth and righteousness. Trials will come and they will separate the hirelings from the true shepherds. Persecution came and reveal who like St. James is a true shepherd.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, Jesus said. Theirs, he went on to say, will be the kingdom of heaven. This is a beatitude for shepherds and not for hirelings and still less for robbers and wolves pretending to be shepherds. We see people who will undergo all sorts of dangers for the sake of greed or ambition. They aren't afraid to cause scandal even if they have to ignore curses. Such ill-will is no less harmful than the cowardice of hirelings. How can we help those called to be shepherds become true shepherds? We can only show them the Good Shepherd who didn't spare even his own life when the wolf came. The hireling, the one who doesn't genuinely care for the sheep but only seeks a wage puts the welfare of the sheep at risk. We celebrate a good shepherd today.

There are many good shepherds who have modeled their conduct on that of Christ. Why would anyone fear thieves if they are laying up their treasure in heaven? So if your treasure is with Christ you needn't be disturbed by tribulations. Indeed, the recompense increases the more one suffers for following Christ. Those who love Christ above all things, and serve others to help them love Christ in the same way, dance and leap for joy because they suffer for the sake of Christ and lay up for themselves a greater reward the closer they are to him.

Listen to Jesus' words: *“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?”* A sure statement of undeniable truth has it that adversity will not harm a person on whom no evil has a grip. Indeed, it brings great and ever-increasing benefit, so long as we have justice in our intention and Christ in our hearts. In Christ the hope of the poor isn't disappointed. We are gathered together in community to help one another even as the Good Shepherd helps us. We have nothing to fear as long as that is our goal in all we do. With Christ is glory, now and in the day of eternity.

HONORING THOSE WHO FORM US

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

Sts. Joachim and Anne are the patrons of grandparents and are honored because they raised and formed Mary, the mother of Jesus. The beautiful life of this couple has been highly venerated since early times. The so-called “Gospel of James”, from the second Christian century, describes them and their influence on their daughter, said to have been born due to a special grace of God. These two saints can’t be separated from one another or from Mary, and so can’t be separated from Jesus.

A tradition tell us that they were advanced in years when they received the gift of being the parents of Mary. We learn from this how important it is to respect the elderly and learn from their accumulated wisdom. They possess real treasures and graces to share with those who look to them and share life and conversation with them. They have walked a long road and the Lord has given them much. Respect and care for these elderly, and especially for our grandparents, is a wonderful form of love and calls upon us for a special generosity and self-forgetfulness.

A first lesson concerns the way God chooses to give us the gifts we need if we are to love others as Christ. This gift most often comes to us through those who raise us and provide a loving and supportive presence for us as we too pass through life’s trials. In them we can observe what is and isn’t of abiding importance for living a good life and that is always more convincing than mere words. We learn that giving the gift of life, and especially of spiritual life, is the most important way we can bring blessings and joy to others. How important our Christian ancestors thought this can be seen in the fact that some 150 copies of the Gospel of James have come down to us. It is a lesson about loving one another and learning to love from our seniors.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also mother of the whole human race as saved. The entire race looks to her spiritual heritage as its own. Mary, and therefore, the entire Church must hold out arms to all peoples, everywhere. Its task is to present to all peoples a new hope that can unite all and lead all to the one God from whom all spring. We need to learn how to expand our own conceptions of hope and of love so they can embrace all those whom God calls to be citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom.

The faith of a humble woman was accepted as appropriate to represent the faith of all humankind. It is not enough to speak out against evil and speaking out against it certainly can’t eliminate it. Evil takes as many different guises as there are cultures and ways of living what we hope will be a human life. We have in Mary an example of a pure conscience and a pure love for God, beyond all the limitations that different peoples and cultures place upon their ideas about God. Our grandparents all come from a particular culture, as did Joachim and Anne, they their arms to many who were quite different from themselves. The love we experience in family includes so many of the guises humanity takes on. It involves tenderness in so many forms. Whatever forms we experienced in our growth and formation prepared us to know the tenderness of God. Family tradition is embodied especially in grandparents and it teaches us the openness that will allow us to receive the authority and tenderness of God. We have a hint of this in Mary’s parents, because Christ himself, in making her our mother, gave us grandparents too. In them we embrace Israel, as the model for all Peoples and cultures, showing us how to open our arms and hearts wide enough for all those called to God’s Kingdom.

THE GLORIOUS VIRGIN SHOWS US WISDOM

A reflection from a conference by St. Bonaventure

Who can pay the price of our salvation? Only Jesus Christ. Who can bring us to Christ? The Blessed Virgin, by her spiritual fortitude and her prompt obedience. The commandments of God in the heart of a holy woman are like everlasting foundation resting on solid rock. This refers to the Blessed Virgin. She is not lazy and she not only listens but acts on what she hears. So the commandments of God were in her heart as the foundations of her life. Jesus said, *“whoever listens to my teachings and puts them in practice is a wise person who builds a house on a rock foundation”*. Eve violated the command of God and so destroyed the foundations of the home intended for our salvation; the wise Virgin restores these and so prepares us for salvation.

Again, the Blessed Virgin shared in paying the price of our salvation by being filled with good will. Listen to Gabriel: *“Blessed are you among women; the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and so the Holy One to be born of you will be called the Holy Son of God.”* St. Augustine tells us that the Holy Spirit is love and that there is no gift one can't lose except this gift of love. All other virtues can be found in the good and the evil but love of God and neighbor can only be found in the good and the pious. This is the gift that makes one holy. Hugh of St. Victor says, *“because the love of God burned so powerfully in the Virgin's mind wonderful things were done in her body”*. Through that fire, light came to the world and wasn't put out. Fleshly love of a man and woman give birth to a fleshly child but from the Virgin's love for God was born God's Son. Our love should be like hers.

Whoever would be holy ought to imitate the holiness and the uncorrupted chastity of the Glorious Virgin together with her ready obedience and abundant good will. In imitating the Glorious Virgin we become like her instead of like Eve. We do this when we join her at the Cross. She was there accepting the Divine Will and conforming her own will to it. St. John tell us that Jesus saw his mother there and confided her to St. John, a virgin confided to a virgin, in order to teach us how to accept God's will. She shows us how to give ourselves to God with Christ. God had laid upon Eve the curse of pains in childbirth. The Virgin didn't know that pain but knew spiritual pains after childbirth. Ordinarily the pains of childbirth are physical but in the Virgin they are spiritual. We too can share such pains.

In a spiritual way the entirety of the Christian People was given birth from the womb of the Glorious Virgin. She represents the Church. While Adam slept God formed Eve from his side and while Christ slept on the Cross God formed the Church from the blood and water that flowed from his side—i.e., by the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. This was possible because Christ was formed from the Virgin and she was formed anew by him as he hung on the Cross. It was so that she might become mother of us all and we might imitate her love and obedience and readiness to share in all that Christ does to reform our race for God. Mary considered as nothing all she suffered with Christ for our sake and we must imitate her in this by suffering for one another's salvation. Indeed, we see how the Glorious Virgin united herself with Christ through the Holy Spirit to share in paying the price for the world's salvation. She shows us true wisdom that is the Spirit's gift through love.