

THE NINETEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Aug. 11 OUR MISSION TO BRING LIGHT

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OUR MISSION OF BRINGING LIGHT

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Our world is divided. It is a creation of God that has failed to achieve its full and proper perfection. There is evil and darkness and a doorway to hell in this world where God's creative design and humanity and its cultures should realize salvation. In fact, in our creative labors and all our earthly achievements—in cultures, in philosophy, in science and in literature and the arts—we are too often seduced into falsity by a spirit of darkness. We are tempted to create a culture that is diabolical. From this fact comes our mission to exorcise our culture and bring light into darkness.

We are in great danger of deceiving ourselves about this. We tend to see the hand of the devil at work only when we sin against the commandments of God. When we don't sin in that way we think everything is in order. We may then drift with the tide and accept as right cultural creations that have been rendered diabolical by forces causing debasement, luxury seeking, wild and senseless and unhallowed sexuality, and by the demons of covetousness and pride; we may self-imprison ourselves in the things of earth. If this is not to happen to us we can't let ourselves think that because something is widespread and "everybody does it" therefore it is right and proper.

We mustn't think that because many widespread debased cultural practices are presented as acceptable that it is right for us to go along with them. What is more, when we fight against them we mustn't let ourselves think we are doing this in the name of what we call "traditional values". Then we often end up fighting to preserve what was evil in the "old days" and making it seem better than today's evils. We Christians can't fulfill our cultural mission either by saying "Yes!" and "Amen!" to current cultural trends or to appeals to the past. That too is subject to judgment and to a discernment of spirits.

A Christian must be a discerner of spirits. We must have the courage to say yes or no to both the old and the new alike. We must have the courage to develop a Christian culture, one that belongs not only to the present but to God. What is needed is a Christian, an exorcised, and a purified culture. To fulfill this mission we need courage and light and, especially, strength from above. Yet even if this Christian yeast is mixed with the world's dough it may not permeate it wholly. We don't know that we can make our world's cultures pure and radiant and entirely aflame with divine charity.

We are laborers in God's vineyard and must bear the heat and burden of the day even if we never fully achieve the mission's goal and our God-given duty to make all perfect in Christ. That's why the vineyard owner in Jesus' parable kept going out to hire more laborers. We are to work continually to purify our cultures from the power of darkness and evil and leave the rest to God.

The world will reach its fulfillment only in the Kingdom of God. Before that comes we are like so many fingers of God serving as signs and symbols of the fact that the Kingdom has already come into the world and is growing. More than this we can't do. But even this is a noble mission and well worth doing. We are set against the darkness and sent to enkindle the faith that the Kingdom of God is among us. Through such faith it grows until all God's purposes are accomplished. That is enough for us!

FIDELITY TO GOD'S COMMISSION

A reflection from On the Song of Songs by St. Gregory of Nyssa

Our Lord tells us to gird our loins and light our lamps. He isn't only warning us to stay awake and alert but telling us to put on our work clothes. He shows us a light and when it shines in our eyes it drives away sleep and lets us see to fasten our belt and get ready for the work he wants us to do. Look at the parable in a spiritual way. It reminds us that a person dressed for work must be clothed in self-control and temperance so as to live before God with a clear conscience and by doing God's will.

We have the light of truth. If we let it keep us awake, it will draw us away from the illusive fantasies, the evil dreams, that easily trap people in worldly ways of thinking and acting. If we follow the guidance of the Word of God we will complete the mission God has given us and our lives will become like those of angels. Didn't the Lord compare us with angels when he said: "You must be like people waiting for their master to return from a wedding and ready to open the door immediately when he comes and knocks". It was the angels who were waiting for the Son's return from his wedding with humankind. They sat unsleepingly at the heavenly gates so that when he returned the King of Glory could pass through those gates into heavenly bliss.

He had gone forth from this bliss as a bridegroom from his tent to take to himself the virgin bride which is our restored nature. Once it had prostituted itself to idols but now is restored by a sacramental rebirth to the incorruptibility of unfailing faith. He who has the bride is the bridegroom, says Scripture, and it is the bridegroom who is admitted to the bridal chamber by the sacred mysteries. This is what we went forth to accomplish and why the angels waited sleeplessly to admit him to Heaven and the blessedness which is God's by nature.

Our Lord says that our lives should be like those of the waiting angels. They live in a way that keeps them far from sin and error and if we are ready to receive our Lord at his coming to us then we should show it by laboring for the spread of his Kingdom. That is how one keeps watch at the door of the Lord's house. He had charged us to care for one another while he is away and to see that each receives what is needed to accomplish the particular task assigned. "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds doing their proper work properly when he comes".

Our proper work is love. But love is not doing only what we want or what brings us delight. Love is keeping God's commandments. But remember how Our Lord interpreted the fulfillment of these commandments: "Love one another as I have loved you". Remember all the Gospels tell us about how the Lord went among us doing good and doing all things well. We must learn to imitate him always more completely and ever better.

SHOWING US WHAT WE HAVE TO HOPE FOR

A reflection by Fr. Karl Rahner

The whole history of the salvation of our race is a single tremendous drama. We already know that by the coming of the Word of God into the world this sacred history has entered upon its final phase. Though the lot of individuals may still be undecided, God had stamped the totality of our world and its history with a mark of triumphantly saving love. The decisive and dominating truth given us in our Christian faith is that the Lord is truly risen.

Further, he rises in our humanity, in our flesh and blood, and with him humanity has been taken into heaven and the glory of the Heavenly Father. This fundamental doctrine of Christianity proclaims that eternal glory is now a possibility in the history of our world, of our humanity and our flesh and blood. In the flesh and blood of Christ, which is a part of this world, our reality is already in eternal glory.

How are we to think of this possibility and promise personally. We can begin from the perfect achievement of the work of redemption, we can think of Mary. The perfection of the grace given her is in its final stage because she has left earthly life, the life of ordinary space and time, and entered into glory. Nothing more takes place for her as events take place on earth but the harvest sown in her and through her within the fields of this world is gathered into God's eternal barn.

In her life on this earth Mary was the highest and unmatched realization of God's redemption of humankind. It was the redemption of a human person endowed with the grace of being the Mother of God. Consequently she was the perfect type and perfect representative of the very essence of redemption. She has already attained the perfection of beatitude, has accomplished her earthly course. What is more, in the chronology of sacred history the hour is far advanced in such a way that the perfection and beatitude of soul and of body is already possible. That is what it means to proclaim that Mary has been taken up into heaven in body and soul. That is what is promised to us who believe in the Risen Lord Jesus and entrust ourselves to God in and through Jesus.

Mary did what most women do, she gave birth to a child. What was extraordinary was that this child was God's Only Begotten and Eternal Son. We too are called to give birth to God's Son in the way that fits our special vocation from God. That is how we contribute toward the fuller and fuller realization of the Kingdom of God which came among us in Jesus and continually grows to its final fulfillment. God called Mary to another vocation in taking her into Heaven to be with her Glorified Son. She became the mother who prays for all of us, for our whole race and each of its members. God doesn't call us into heaven to be there like trophies in a display case. He calls us to share in divine life, a life which is love in a kind and fullness we have yet to experience. But we know that we will live that life which is love, just as we see that Mary lives it. What are we called to become and to be? We begin to see the answer when we look to Mary and ask her to pray with and for us.

PRAYER, MORTIFICATION AND CHARITY

A reflection based on a conference by St. Maximilian Kolbe

Sometime a person can't sleep even though it is the time appointed for sleeping. We like to look upon everything that we are told to do as a responsibility we owe to God but here some find it impossible to fulfill it. But we can then turn this into a time for meditation and this is mortification. Think of the ways Mary spent her time when Jesus was a baby. She was continually thinking of him and of the care she needed to give him. Can't we imitate her even when we find we can't sleep or fully carry out other responsibility? Thinking of Mary's constant concern for Jesus helps us think of self as constantly occupied with God and with the tasks given us by Jesus.

Thinking like this often brings us the grace of an inspiration. We never know when such an inspiration may transform us and our lives. The Holy Spirit breathes whenever and where ever it wills. We have a duty to hold ourselves ready for such a Divine Inspiration. The condition for this is recollection. That is why we keep silence. We keep our minds and hearts fixed on God—whether through the sort of meditation we see in Mary or in some other way. We are always doing tasks that are intended to benefit others, our community, or a particular task of mission we have been given. We don't want to be distracted from it and reflecting on this and on how to do it in the best way—the way that will help others in their journey to God—is recollection. When we are absorbed in such recollection we are silent. Silence is a practice that promotes and aids recollection and that keeps us focused on active love.

The key is to avoid whatever isn't any part of our responsibilities to God and to the love of others. The goal is to fulfill the Will of God. Because we love God we give voice interiorly to brief ejaculatory prayers. This is very important in the spiritual life and helps us imitate Mary. Slowly one gets used to such practices and that will bring us interior peace. Exteriorly there is work but interiorly there is peace. This is a state of recollection. The more perfectly we are led by our Lady's example the better.

We belong to a kind of Militia. We show this in practice by the ways we lead our lives. It is all directed to making us actually instruments in God's hands and in Mary's. What we need to think about is how we can teach this sort of recollection to others. This is easier if we let ourselves dwell on the kind of thoughts Mary had in caring for Jesus. Her thoughts are on the will of God. We can think the same thoughts and in doing it we imitate her. What is the orientation of her thoughts? They are all directed to Jesus and his mission from the Father. There is constant work and at the same time there is the opportunity for recollection and even prayer. We need only turn our minds and hearts to God whatever we are doing. This is our consecration of self. We live this in recollection, silence, prayer and doing everything for God and God's glory.

The first page in God's book of life is Jesus Christ and his ministry and the second is the imitation of Mary in her love and service to Christ. That second page is where we find our call to God and to service, especially of the brethren. We can help this happen by giving as much of our attention as possible to what Our Lady willed and attended to before Jesus left home to begin his ministry. No matter what our state of life may be this practice can make us saints. We may be led by God to resolve to do something but then find we can't. That is all in God's will. Relax into God's will and do it as best you can. The weaker we are personally the better grace can work through us.

THE GIFTS GOD SHARES WITH US

A reflection taken from a homily by Nicolas Cabasilas

It was fitting that the Holy Virgin should share in every aspect of her Son's providential care for all of us. Just as she had given her flesh and blood to Jesus and had received in return a share of his graces, so likewise she shared in his pains and sufferings. When his side was pierced by the lance as he hung on the cross, a sword pierced his mother's heart, just as saintly Simeon had foretold. After our Savior's death, she was the first to conform herself to the Son who resembled her; she shared in his resurrection before anyone else.

When her son broke the tyranny of death by rising from the grave, the Virgin saw and heard his greeting. When the time came for him to depart for heaven, she escorted him on the way as far as she could. When, finally, he had gone she took his place among the apostles, uniting herself with the other companions of the Lord by means of her good works. In all this she benefited the entire human race, teaching us by her example and obedience to God's will.

It was also right for the Virgin's most holy soul to be separated from her hallowed body, but it was so released only to be united with the soul of her Son. The second light was united with the first and primary one. For a short time, her body remained upon the earth and then it too departed. It had to go everywhere the Savior had gone and shed its light on both the living and the dead. It had to sanctify nature in every respect. Then, at last, it could take its appointed place.

Thus, the grave received her body for a short time but heaven soon took it from the grave as a new earth, a spiritual body, a treasure of our human life more revered than the angels and holier than the archangels. His proper throne was restored to the King, paradise to the tree of life, the sun's orb to the light, the tree to its fruit, the mother to her son. In every respect she was in accord with her Child.

O blessed one, what words can adequately praise your virtue, let alone the graces you received from Our Savior for the benefit of our entire race! It is impossible to give you fitting praise! It would be so even if one could speak in all the tongues of human beings and angels.

It seems to me that part of the eternal happiness in store for the righteous will be really to know and proclaim your graces in a fitting way. These graces no eye has seen nor ear heard of. To adapt St. John's words: The world could not contain them. The only place where your marvelous gifts can fittingly be displayed is the new heaven and the new earth, where the sun of Righteousness lives. No darkness is there and there is no evening. The Savior himself will proclaim the worth God has graced us with and the angels will applaud.

THE EXAMPLES GIVEN US IN SCRIPTURE & BY OUR DEPARTED

A reflection taken from a homily by Basil of Seleucia

In the Second Book of Kings we are given the story of Elisha's raising of the dead son of a woman who had received the boy as a gift from God through Elisha's prayers. We can look at this story as a kind of parable of God's giving new life to Gentile peoples. God had given them natural life but through Christ God gave them in addition a super-natural life. The same is true for us. We were spiritually dead. Our mouth was dead in that it didn't praise God, our eyes were dead in that they never turned to the God of the universe but worshiped created things, our hands were dead in that they sought to make what would satisfy us and make our lives good when that was impossible, and our feet were dead in that we ran after things that could never give us real life. Then Christ came and gave us life.

We, as a whole, were like a corpse in need of a physician who could raise even the dead. That was the "spiritual Elisha", our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He found us thoroughly dead and did spiritually what Elisha had done physically. He placed his whole being over our entire dead body. In other words, the whole fullness of the Godhead was clothed in the whole of our human nature. In Christ, as St. Paul says, the whole fullness of the divine nature dwelt embodied. He had eyes and hands and feet and it was no illusion that we beheld when we looked at him. Life wore a dead garment so as to transform death into life, mortality into immortality. When the Godhead came down into the human body, all its members were sanctified and transformed.

But we had to learn how to live the new life we were given. Jesus taught his disciples and they taught disciples in turn, and finally, when we were born, some of his later disciple taught us. Think of how many there have been who have helped us learn to walk the way of Christ as far as the Kingdom of God. They taught us to accept the gift of faith. They taught us the commandments of the One God who has given us every good thing we have or can hope for. "*Lord, open my lips and my mouth will proclaim your praise!*" This is what we have learned to pray, and even more to live day by day. They have directed our eyes, outer and inner, toward Our God and Lord: "*The eyes of all creatures look to you, and you give them their food in due time*". Those who brought us to God and taught us to pray have also pointed to the signs of God's presence and care and led us to praise their giver. Their refrain was: "*Lift up your hands in the holy place, and praise the Lord through the night.*" "*Let the lifting up of my hands be like an evening sacrifice*". Those who dedicated themselves to God led us in dedicating ourselves and in prayers of thanksgiving and praise. They have shown us the path that leads to God and to realize that we are in our God's presence every moment.

Those who taught us didn't do it only in words but by example. They prayed for us, and they continue to pray for us as they stand now before God in the Heavenly Temple. We pray for them too and this shared prayer binds us together as members of Christ, who himself ever stands before the Heavenly Father interceding for us. We lift up one another's hands in never ceasing prayer. We never forget all we have received, nor do we forget those through whose hands we have received so much.

SOME LESSONS FROM MARY'S ASSUMPTION

A reflection from The Seat of Wisdom by Fr. Louis Bouyer

Mary should be looked upon as the living pledge of Christ's promises to the Church. The first of these is that where He is we shall be. The second is that he will give us the glory given him by the Heavenly Father. As a result, it goes almost without saying that Mary's Assumption is the pledge of the perfect and wholly virginal purity to which creatures like us, sullied by sin, are to attain. We are to be the spouses of Christ and we need to begin to understand this.

Mary's assumption wasn't at all a dispensation, so to speak, from the common human destiny. That isn't true any more than her Immaculate Conception was an abnormal privilege emancipating her from the conditions of human life. Mary, by means of the grace of redemption won for her by her Son, was called to open herself to the whole of humankind through her prayers before God. She was, so to speak, the first to be saved. That grace saved her more perfectly in saving her from sin and not just cleansing her from it. It also saved her from some of the consequences of death. She is the pledge and promise of what we are all called to be and will, by God's grace, actually become.

As St. John says: "It hasn't yet appeared what we shall be. We know that we shall be like Christ when he shall appear because we will see God as God is ". For Mary this condition is already realized. Her faith passed directly into sight of God. In her we are given the pledge that this will happen to us, even though in the way proper to our lives and our responses to God's calls. We shall be like what Mary already is. She is the statement of God's intent and promise to us. St. Paul says, "we shall be taken up together to meet Christ and so we shall always be with the Lord". This is what has happened to Mary.

Christ's ascension doesn't mean that he has left us to our present condition or to our own resources. He has gone only to prepare a place for us. Christ wants us to be with him where he is. Clearly, Mary's Assumption doesn't mean a separation from us any more than Christ's Ascension does. Christ stands always at the right hand of the Heavenly Father interceding for us. Mary stands there with him and sharing in this intercession. This is not a human imagining but an expression of God's own will. That is what the Church assured us of when we celebrated Mary's Assumption.

Already, Mary's blessedness is perfect. She is directly present to God. It is God who has placed her in his divine delight. Her contemplative prayer surpasses that even of an angel. It is the bliss of the eternal Eucharist which Christ, her son, forever offers to the Heavenly Father and with all the members of his Body. Why does God give her this gift? It is because God wills that all sinners be redeemed and come to share in the joy and gladness that is God's eternally. In Christ all the redeemed are united with God. This includes Mary. She only wants to share her everlasting intercession of praise and thanksgiving with each of us. As she has been called so we too have been called. It isn't only a call but a promise. Let us rejoice!