

TWENTY-SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sun. **Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Sept.1 **THE GIFT OF HUMILITY**
 From Bruno of Segni's commentary on Luke's Gospel

Mon. **LABOR DAY**
2 **GOD SHOWS US HOW TO REDEEM LABOR**
 A reflection from Journeying with the Lord
 by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Tues. **Memorial of St. Pope Gregory the Great**
3 **THE ESSENTIAL WORK THAT IS PATIENCE**
 A reflection from On Pastoral Care
 by St. Pope Gregory the Great

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Wed. **Wednesday of the 22nd Week in Ordinary Time**
4 **OUR CALL TO BE PROPHETS**
 A reflection from an article by Fr. Karl Rahner

Thurs. **Thursday of the 22nd Week in Ordinary Time**
5 **HOW TO RESPOND TO OUR LORD'S INVITATION**
 A reflection from Scivias by Bl. Hildegard of Bingen

Fri. **Friday of the 22nd Week in Ordinary Time**
6 **EMBRACING THE WILL OF GOD**
 A reflection by Fr. Aelred Graham

Sat. **Memorial of Our Lady**
7 **LEARNING HOW TO LIVE SALVATION**
 A reflection from Journeying with the Lord
 by Carlo Cardinal Martini

THE GIFT OF HUMILITY

From Bruno of Segni's Commentary on Luke's Gospel

How do you conduct yourself when you are invited to a dinner or a wedding celebration? Do you concern yourself about where you will sit—whether you are near the head of the table or lower down? Do you want to be honored and especially to receive some sort of recognition that others don't? Jesus had seen this happen, so he told a parable which seems like a guideline for getting as much honor as you can. But since it is termed a parable we know that it has a deeper meaning.

The best way for us to understand is by first asking who Jesus is talking about when he refers to the “invited guests”. The dinner Jesus is talking about takes place every day in our churches. Every day those who believe in Him are invited to the church for various special events. Some come because of a baptism. Some come for a funeral. In the first case someone is coming to faith and in the second someone is going to the reward of faith. But all of us are invited at some time in both these ways, as well as to the Eucharist.

What we are invited to is a wedding. All of us who have received Christ and been given the seal that is baptism are invited to a dinner and a wedding. Scripture says: “*You have prepared a table before me in the sight of those who trouble me*”. Here is what is only symbolized by the showbread, the fatted calf, and the lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Here is the living bread that comes down from heaven, and here is the chalice of the New Covenant. Here we find the gospels and the letters of the apostles; here are the books of Moses and the prophets. It is as though a table containing every delight were before us.

What more could anyone want? What reason can there be for wanting to sit at the head of the table? There is more than enough for everyone, no matter where one sits. Nothing will be lacking to anyone! But suppose you still long to set in the first place. Jesus says you should go sit in the least honorable place. Don't let yourself be infected with pride. Don't puff yourself up, either because of what you know or because of your birth-family's importance. The greater a person is the more humble that person should be. If one is humble one will find grace from God and you will be invited to great honor.

Moses, we are told, sat in the lowest place whenever he had the choice. The Lord sent him to the Israelites and this was like inviting one to a higher place. What did he say? “*I beg you Lord to send someone else; I'm not a good speaker!*” Saul, too, was of small account in his own eyes when the Lord made him king. Jeremiah thought of himself in a similar way: “*Ah, Lord God, I can't speak; I'm only a child.*” Whatever you seek in the Church, then, do it by humility. You don't gain honor in the church by money or any earthly thing. You gain everything simply by humility. Cultivate humility in every circumstance!

GOD'S LABOR SHOWS US HOW TO REDEEM LABOR

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Sacred Scripture speaks of "God's work". The Book of Genesis tells us that "on the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing". The bible doesn't hesitate to describe God as one who works. It shows us that the objective of God's work is creation, the earth and life. We ourselves are works of life and we are to work for life as God did.

We can also ask: How does God work? God's labors are done freely. All that is done is a spontaneous self-expression of God. God's works are inventive and creative. They are good, beautiful, and filled with satisfaction. After each work God pauses and says, "This is good!" And we, for our part, are made in the image of God. So we are called to make our work an expression of freedom and our dignity and we are to create what is good and true.

What makes this difficult for us is that we have so many wrong ideas and habits and values. These can enslave us. But we have to value human welfare and human good before everything that enslaves and degrades human life. If we do this we will not have to make life's journey in sadness or think that bad things can never be changed. God has a plan of redemption that pertains to human labor and its fruits.

We have to begin from what we are told about Jesus' work, and about that of Joseph and Mary. All of us are following them in working for the realization in daily life of the world's redemption. This is the marvelous task before us. It is actually what all the worker's movements of recent times are ultimately about. All people of good will are invited to work together to make human work more like God—free, creative and uplifting and for the greater good of all.

This may seem like a dream but it is rather a long and difficult road we need to travel together. From time to time we think we have reached one of these goals; e.g., diminishing the drudgery of so much labor. But then we run up against the fact that we haven't gotten rid of repetitiveness or anonymity and have to renew our efforts to find ways to realize human dignity through labor and not in spite of it.

This is the more difficult because along the path we have to rethink our ways of living, our ways of consuming, and even our ways of wanting. This is a matter of putting human and humanizing values first. They have to be put ahead of present satisfaction, profit, consumption for its own sake and everything that tends to make work enslaving and degrading.

If we are to convince others to join us we can't try to make our journey in sadness. Neither can we fool ourselves into thinking that some miracle will come from who knows where to bring about what we are striving for without our having to do the work. This journey has been entrusted to us. We set out on it every day as we begin the work of that day. The redemption of human life depends on the redemption of work and that depends on our courage, our hope, and, most of all, our faith. We start again today, and every day.

THE ESSENTIAL WORK THAT IS PATIENCE

A reflection from On Pastoral Care by St. Pope Gregory the Great

All of us are sick, at least spiritually, and we need to be helped to learn patience. We need to think, for instance, of how great were the evils our Redeemer had to bear at the hands of the very beings he had created out of love. Think of the horrible insults and criticisms he had to bear. How many slaps did he receive from scoffers? Yet what he was doing was snatching from the power of the ancient enemy the souls of those he held captive. We have to bear the pain of this process and so we must look to Our Lord for an example of patience.

The Lord silently endured scourging as a way to set us free. He cleanses us with the water of salvation but its power comes from the love that didn't screen his own face from the spittle of treacherous people. He freed us by the mediation of his torments so that we would not have to bear eternal torment. He endured blows to free us for everlasting honor enjoyed amid the choirs of angles. He offered his own head to bear a crown of thorns and didn't shrink even from this to free us. He drank bitter gall so that we might be inebriated with the wine of everlasting sweetness.

Think of the patience that enabled him to endure mocking adoration. He held his peace and in doing it he adored the Heavenly Father for us. Though he was equal to the Father in divinity and was life itself, he was willing to pass through death that he might prepare us for everlasting life and actually bring us to it. We were dead in spirit but by his patience we have been brought to life.

Why do we think it so difficult when he have to bear illness and pain. Aren't these simply punishments that God gives us by way of discipline? We have done evil and deserve what we get. But God himself was willing to bear the same for us when he didn't deserve it at all. If God endured such great evils, and it was as though they were a response to his good deeds on our behalf, then how could we be ungrateful? If we are grateful, how can we fail to patiently bear all that will bring us to our redeemer and eternal lover?

Everyone who would proclaim the Gospel, as our God has called us to, must do so by deeds more than by words. We must do this by our righteous way of life. When we do this we leave footprints that others may follow, and even walk in. If we are to do this then we have to be awakened and stirred up by what we bear for the sake of others and following the example of Christ. If the head languishes the members of the body have neither vigor nor direction. Christ never languished and has always been ready to bear whatever might be necessary to lead us to the Heavenly Father and eternal salvation.

We can only follow in these footsteps if we allow ourselves to be corrected and set in order and on the right path. We should regard all we suffer as only penance done to make us ready to proclaim in our deeds the saving love of our God. We have to lead one another in patience if we are to do what God calls us to do. Let us, then, pray with all our heart to receive the grace by which we may become patient as the Lord was. That is what we can show daily in all we do, and especially in all we suffer.

OUR CALL TO BE PROPHETS

A reflection from an article by Fr. Karl Rahner

The figure of the prophet is a phenomenon in the history and sociology of all major religions. A prophet is always different from a priest and always has a different role. A prophet always comes forward with what may be called a “new message”, one that has not been established by tradition or institutionalized as are the forms of worship. Even when we hear of “disciples” of a prophet, as in Israel, these are not themselves also prophets but servants of the new message the prophet delivers.

A prophet’s authority can’t be institutionalized either. A prophet has to present what we might call “personal credentials”. Hence a prophetic vocation is always, in a sense, unique. It is, for instance, unique to the situation that calls for prophecy. A prophet is an envoy of God and is always more or less revolutionary. Since we bind religion and society closely together, a prophet is always something of a social revolutionary too.

The office of a prophet is not that of making predictions. Especially in Israel, and among Christians, prophets aren’t “seers” or “clairvoyants”, though many times this is what people have wanted them to be. Such predicting is not impossible but it isn’t the central or essential work of a prophet. It is a fact, however, that in the measure a prophecy is accepted it creates a new and forward looking situation in salvation history. What this does is lead us to realize that prophecy is essentially connected to hope. A prophet may proclaim that old ways don’t offer a real hope for the resolution of a problem or a crisis, religious or civic. This includes the declaration that old and familiar ways of organizing society or one’s family or business no longer contain the real possibility of a better or a new life.

What is one to do? The prophet always tells us to turn to God, and to do it with all one’s heart. Hope is connected with the future and with promises. A prophet doesn’t tell those receiving a prophetic ministry just exactly what is going to die and what is going to be born in its place. But the hope the prophet proclaims as real has to be translated into action. God can use this action to realize the new hope and embody it in new ways of living together. A prophecy is not a declaration of doctrine but may be a new application of a doctrine long accepted.

Examine the circumstances of life in your community, or in your nation, and ask what about them holds, when seen in faith, a real hope for a newness of life that people long for but without having a clear idea of the path that can lead to its realization. So the prophet tells people to stop relying on the “tried and true” and to reach out in a new and hitherto unknown fashion. This will perhaps result in the creation of a new institution or social formation. That is not the task of the prophet. The real prophetic task is to lead people to hope for things they had given up hoping for and to hope for them in ways never before tried.

HOW TO RESPOND TO OUR LORD'S INVITATION

A reflection from Scivias by Bl. Hildegard of Bingen

When you are invited to a wedding don't try to use it as an opportunity to show off before others. Jesus cautions us that someone more deserving of honor and attention has always been invited, and seeking attention for yourself never gets you what you really want. Think of the invitation as a divine inspiration to enjoy the reward of your labors in faith. You have been engaged in fruitful labor for the Lord by living as his bride and beloved and he wants you to rejoice with him. You have been called to this way of life in the Church and called to enjoy a reward that involves no sadness or corruption or confusion or degradation. You are like an unopened bud, or maybe even a flower. You need to control yourself and not give in to the calls of pride.

When for love of God you free your body from earthly affairs you begin to grow into a beautiful flower. You will blossom and never wither in the Heavenly Jerusalem. You will be with the Son of God and in him you will find every ornament that can make you more beautiful within. The "old person" we were once was filled with every sort of human ugliness but the "new person" is built up in all sorts of holiness and virtues. When you have come to such holiness ,don't cast yourself out of blessedness as the ancient serpent did.

Suppose everyone else seems more beautiful than you do. Don't think that you need to become even more beautiful or maybe just like those others. Why would you want to exalt yourself. Are you a faithful servant if you exalt yourself? No, you would be provoking your Lord by opposing the him. If you see someone else has been given more than you, don't disparage that person out of envy. If you do that you aren't walking on the straight road but wandering around off that path that leads to God.

The thing is to be eager to serve God in humility. Giving yourself to pride and display is like going mad. Don't engage in foolish pretenses to get attention. If you want to assess things rightly notice that one who burns more intensely for eternal life is the one who shines the more brightly. Those who burn in that way are the ones invited to the height of blessedness by the one who loves all who love truth. You may have been called to humility whereas another has received a gift of charity that shows itself in burning brightly before others. Do you want the Lord to call you to task for trying to usurp the place he intended for another? That is pride seeking vainglory. Submit, rather, to your Lord and his will.

If you try to usurp another's place you will lose even what you have. You will end up seeing yourself as contemptible and feeling depressed. The only thing to do with pride is to throw it down and confound it. We must not try to become what our Lord has not made up to be. Don't let yourself be thrown down by trying to take another's place. Be content with what the Lord has given you. That is your path to blessedness.

EMBRACING THE WILL OF GOD

A reflection by Fr. Aelred Graham

Among the factors that turn the existence of suffering in a “problem” is a tendency to apply to God our own notions of good and evil, right and wrong. The expectation that the Almighty will conform to a moral pattern laid down in advance by his creatures still endures despite the whole weight of biblical evidence to the contrary. We assume that if only one’s conscience is clear God must be on one’s side and this explains a lot of self-righteousness.

A Christian truth which often, and to our harm, we are for some reason reluctant to face, is that God is implicated in created evil. Listen to Scripture: “*Does disaster strike a city if the Lord has not sent it?*” Again, “*I make the light and create darkness; I make weal and create woe! I, the Lord, do all these things.*” These inspired texts need to be explained using a consistent theology, but they aren’t to be explained away!

God has created a universe in which his positive action, the generation of things, implies a corresponding negative corruption or destruction. In order that human beings may live, part of the animal and vegetable world must die. Even more evil, sin, falls within the Divine Plan. Though sin, being a defect in a creature’s will, doesn’t require God’s causality, sin couldn’t happen unless God permitted it. God, having created a race of frail human beings, takes account of the fact that large numbers of them will prove their frailty by their deeds. God’s universe contains the built-in realities of physical and moral evil.

A commonly felt reluctance to face the fact that evil enters into God’s scheme of things is due to a mental confusion. God is supremely good, we rightly say. Therefore, we say, he can have no part in evil. But there is a distinction between the good that is one’s being and the moral goodness that is based on conformity to an objective norm. God is infinitely good in that God lacks no goodness, but God’s actions are regulated only by God’s own inscrutable wisdom. God’s holiness includes all that is positive in moral goodness as we understand it, but what God sees as beneficial to the universe as a whole may involve what is bad for or evil for individuals.

If we are to discover our true self, which is our being as in harmony with God, then we must learn to look upon types of evil, not with approval but calmly and dispassionately. What God tolerates we have no business to find intolerable. Or to state the point in more positive terms, we should seek to become the attitude of Jesus words, when he says: “*Your Father in Heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and equally on the good, and makes his rain fall on the just and equally on the unjust*”. Can we trust God to care for us in a way that will redeem all evil, as well as redeem us?

LEARNING HOW TO LIVE SALVATION

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

There is a person who has already accomplished all that humanity longs and hopes for, a person in whom the work of Christ is perfected. It is the Virgin Mother of our Lord.

Each person can look to her and say: Here is God's work made perfect. Here is the place of true joy and true peace. And since Mary is the Mother of the Church, all those who conform themselves to her in the Church, live in the measure of that correspondence, the splendor of God's gifts. But what do we mean when we say that we should imitate Mary's adherence to God, and express that in our lives?

It simply means three things: To listen to the Word, to say "Yes!" to God, and to serve. Take the first of these. Mary is a person who made space in her life so that the Word of God could enter in. Mary let the Word resonate within, from the first words of the angel until the last words of Jesus on the cross. Mary created a zone of silence within and about her so that she could hear: "She treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart".

Mary said "Yes!" to God. From Mary's contemplative silence is born the second characteristic I mentioned—the ability to say "yes" to God. It is an ability to put oneself at the disposition of the divine call. "He called those he intended for this; those he called He justified, and with those He justified He shared his glory". These somewhat obscure words of St. Paul mean to tell us that we have nothing to fear when we say "yes" to God in our lives. He guides us, but always in his fidelity.

Mary served! Jesus' mother demonstrates her adherence to God because she allows God to manifest his reign in her, through her humble service as though she were a slave girl, extending from the Incarnation to the Cross. And then she did this in and for the early Christian community.

The Church was born out of this openness and readiness to serve. And the Church is continually supported and advanced by the generous service of all the baptized. This includes the service of the bishops and the priests, each one in his or her right place. And it is also out of this spirit of service that civil society is served and supported as well. But this also includes all religious and monastics and lay persons. We are all called to imitate Mary in service. She serves because the Incarnation itself is an act of supreme service. With Mary our lives too can be acts of love and service.

