

## **THE TWENTY-FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**

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- Sun.      The Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Sept.22   GIVING TO GOD THAT WHICH IS GOD'S**  
              **A reflection by Fr. Karl Rahner**
- Mon.      Memorial of Padre Pio**  
**23        TRUST IN GOD & PRAY ALWAYS**  
              **A reflection from the Padre Pio Net site**
- Tues.     Tuesday of the 25<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**  
**24        KEEPING OUR HEARTS FIXED ON HEAVEN**  
              **A reflection from a sermon by Bishop Gaudentius of Brescia**
- Wed.      Wednesday of the 25<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**  
**25        HOW JESUS DRAWS US TO OUR GOD**  
              **A reflection from a Gospel commentary by**  
              **St. Cyril of Alexandria**
- Thurs.    Thursday of the 25<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**  
**26        HOW GOD SHOWS US LOVE IN JESUS**  
              **A reflection from a homily by St. Gregory Palamas**
- Fri.        Memorial of St. Vincent de Paul**  
**27        GOD DRAWS ALL WITHIN US INTO ONE**  
              **A reflection by St. Francis de Sales**
- Sat.        Memorial of Our Lady**  
**28        GOD'S IMMENSE LOVE FOR US**  
              **A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by**  
              **Carlo Cardinal Martini**

## **GIVING TO GOD THAT WHICH IS GOD'S**

A reflection from a biblical homily by Fr. Karl Rahner

*“Jesus said to his disciples, A rich man had a steward who was reported to him as misappropriating his wealth...”*. Our lives are a series of unexpected changes. By turns we feel happy and then unhappy. One moment we're full of life and the next exhausted. First, we're young, and then old. Now encouraged by success and then crushed by utter failure. First grateful for all the good things we've received and then depressed by the thought that we're going to lose everything! What do you do in the face of all these ups and downs? More important, what can we learn about ourselves from the way we cope with these changes?

Do you meet each moment with faith, with a humble mind but a stout heart? More, are you docile to God's Providence? Does every change seem to you an opportunity to bring forth fruit for eternal life and to show you love for God? Or do you think only of how you can use each change to gain some advantage for yourself—so you don't lose anything basic!

Our God asks us to be patient and even courageous, unassumingly devoted to service and mutual love. Are we ready to see God's will in each situation? Before we can make up our mind, God will likely have sent us another such challenge. We have to respond quasi-automatically with a willing, loving God and service centered prudence quite different from the steward pictured in the Gospel. Each moment is a call from our God! We need to accept changes as God's good pleasure and get on with loving God and others. Whatever happens can be accepted as a grace and a blessing.

Of course, that supposes having a heart that is well-disposed and humble, that listens and obeys. Why don't we ask God for that gift? Isn't it better to pray than complain? Call on God rather than blaming someone! In every heart there is an unhealed wound. We would be saints in the literal sense if we always and in every way were at one with God and God's will. That is just the reason for the parable of the imprudently-prudent steward. Our lives include situations, relationships and burdens that we can merely cope with if we turn to God's grace—if we are prudent enough to do that. This fact to is a call from God to be courageous and loving like Jesus.

It is not only the goods of this world which belong to God but all the moments of every life. We are stewards charged with using these times to love God and one another. Into God's hands we are to commend our lives. That we can do right now. We are only giving again to our God what God has given to us.

## LIVING IN PRAYER & LONGING FOR GOD

A reflection taken from various Padre Pio websites

***“Pray, hope and don’t worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer.”*** This quotation sums up Padre Pio’s attitude toward his life. From the early days of his life as a Capuchin friar people were drawn to him as to a holy person. They raised many questions and these led to his being forbidden to exercise any public priestly ministry, including the hearing of confessions. A series of investigations was ordered by Vatican authorities, including several popes. The earlier ones were critical of Padre Pio, making the accusation that his stigmata were fake. At one point he was even excommunicated. However, he simply attributed the attacks against him as due to the work of the devil and continued to live the religious life in obedience. ***“The most beautiful act of faith is one made in darkness, in sacrifice, and with extreme effort”.***

The restrictions on Padre Pio’s ministry were first lifted by Pope Pius IX and this policy was continued by his successor, Pius XII. The fact was that no matter what was done people wanted to come to Padre Pio as a confessor and to obtain his spiritual counsel. He placed special emphasis on prayer. At the time of his canonization there was a count of “Padre Pio Prayer Groups” around the Catholic world and some 3,000 existed. He continues to lead people to prayer and to entrust themselves to God. ***“Prayer is the best weapon we have; it is the key to God’s heart. You must speak to Jesus not only with your lips but with your heart. Indeed, on certain occasions you should speak to him only with your heart”.***

After World War II there was a great outburst of interest in Padre Pio’s ministry to the suffering. A special hostel was built near his monastery. Pope Pius XII dispensed him from any impediment that might arise due to his vow of poverty. This led enemies to accuse him of misappropriating funds. His answer was: ***“The life of a Christian is nothing but a perpetual struggle against self; there is no flowering of the soul to the beauty of its perfection except at the price of pain”.*** ***“The longer the trial to which God subjects you, the greater the goodness in comforting you during the time of trial and in the exaltation after the combat.”***

Padre Pio had a very sensitive conscience and confessed weekly and often consulted his Spiritual Director. Some belittled his intelligence and claimed the director was putting ideas in his head. They got his superiors to forbid him to consult this priest. He accepted this too until the prohibition was lifted. He himself heard a vast number of confessions. His formula for a healthy spiritual life was weekly confession, daily Eucharist, and then constant meditation and prayer.

He conceived of his vocation as contemplative and did only such ministry as his superiors assigned him. ***“Have courage and don’t fear the assaults of the devil; remember this forever—it is a healthy sign if the devil shouts and roars around your conscience, since that shows he is not inside your will”.*** As long as one’s will is fixed on God and on love for God and neighbor all is well. Everything is to be given into God’s hands: ***“My past, O Lord, to your mercy; my present to your love; my future to your providence”.*** His life continues to lead others to God.

# KEEPING OUR HEARTS FIXED ON HEAVEN

A reflection from a sermon by Bishop Gaudentius of Brescia

The Lord Jesus is the supreme teacher of the way to salvation. He constantly called his disciples to help those who are in need or have been rejected by society. This is why he told us the parable of the wicked steward. He wants us to recognize that nothing in this world really belongs to us. We have been entrusted with administering whatever goods or property we have. We have to share everything, and with thanks-giving, and must not squander anything on evil projects or on superfluities. The Lord will come and when he does, will require an accounting of how we have used and administered what we have been given.

The Lord said: *“Use worldly wealth to make friends with the poor, so that when this wealth perished the poor may welcome you into eternal dwellings”*. He is reminding us that what we do for the poor we do for him. He announces that he himself received the acts of kindness done to them. Think of the fact that the friendship of those whom people take to be of no account will assure salvation for you. These poor ones won't welcome us into heavenly bliss in their own name but in the Name of Jesus. Those who have exercised such a ministry of love will be received into the eternal dwellings of heaven by Jesus. Listen to what our king will say: *“Come blessed of my Father, and take possession of the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world; for I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink”*.

What is our genuine wealth? Listen to the Lord: “If you have been untrustworthy in the administration of worldly wealth, who is going to trust you with true riches?” The wealth of this world is never ours but is always God's, and only entrusted to us as administrators. What if you use it to do bad things? Then how can you be trusted with the true wealth that comes directly from God? What we do here is training for what we will do forever with God. In the Kingdom our true wealth will be Divine Love and our task will be sharing that love. We learn how to share this by learning how to love those who are poor or despised. God can't trust us with this love if we have been able to share the goods of this world without trying to set some aside for ourselves?

Nothing in the world genuinely belongs to us. We are told to live in this world as though we were strangers and pilgrims. Such people can't claim a right to dispose of anything simply because they wish to make it their own. But we do have a genuine treasure and we have it through faith. *“Our homeland is in heaven”*, as St. Paul reminds us. That treasure is our sharing in God's everlasting love. Where our treasure is there our hearts are.

# HOW JESUS DRAWS US TO OUR GOD

A reflection from a Gospel Commentary by St. Cyril of Alexandria

In the prophets exhortations usually start from threats of punishment such as God supposedly inflicts on the disobedient, an effort to frighten people into changing their way of life so that they seek to acquire virtues or they begin from talk about the good things God has promised to the just, an effort to make people eager to live a good and upright life. That is how we see God working when we read the Gospels. We think God is threatening those who have gone astray with wars and disasters and exile from their homes and being at the mercy of their enemies. But Jesus never ends any exhortation in that way.

Jesus calls upon us to give things that have proven useless and have brought us, or our ancestors, nothing but misery. What we are asked to do is choose to act in ways that are more likely to bring us good and benefit us than useless ancestral ways. We are to be like tillers of the soil. In Genesis our race is given the task of gardening, of keeping God's paradise beautiful and fruitful. Now we are called to cultivate spiritual growth. Listen to St. Paul: "*Whatever we sow that is what we will reap. Those who sow evil reap evil*". Those who sow justice and mercy and mutual love will reap salvation and life in abundance. They are the people who will shine out and prove worthy of imitation. They are the kind of people who will gather the grapes to make a wine that gladdens the human heart.

What we are to do is open our hearts and minds to receive the light which is truth. Those, for instance, who worship creation instead of the Creator don't know what brings lasting good. What Jesus does is teach us how to go about sowing justice and reaping the fruits of life. Isaiah said it long ago: "*Seek the Lord until the fruit of justice comes to you*". There isn't, of course, any special place we have to find in order to seek God. The Godhead isn't contained in any place. But God especially wants to make his presence felt in our soul, in our inward parts.

When we have developed an inner eagerness for God and the things of God, an eagerness of heart as well as of mind, then we have begun to please our Lord and Heavenly Father. Then there is no room within us for anything that brings one blame. When we find God in this way then we are rich in the sort of possessions that bring with them every blessing. You see the problem is that of knowing what will really bring us what our heart desires. Jesus wants to show us what does that. He shows us God's love in his love for us. He invites us to imitate him. Let's us both love our God with all our hearts and then love our neighbors with that very love. It is from this that comes all joy and gladness. That is what draws us, and everyone, to God. Don't be afraid! Rejoice now and always in the Lord.

# **HOW GOD SHOWS US HIS LOVE IN JESUS**

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Gregory Palamas

Before creating us, our Maker brought the entire universe into existence from nothing. It is from this creation that we receive our bodies and that which sustains our bodily existence. In addition, is there anything that the Lord in his love and goodness hasn't done for us so as to guide us to what is most excellent for us? God has made the entire perceptible universe a kind of mirror of Heaven. The objective is that we might be led to spiritual contemplation of what is perceptible and so be led to Heavenly things. The world itself is a kind of wonderful ladder for us to climb to God.

Our Lord has implanted in us what we call Natural Law. It is a kind of infallible judge and unailing teacher. We experience it in our consciences. If we look deep within ourselves, we find this teacher, and we don't need any other to show us what is good. Thus, even when we look outside ourselves, we find the invisible God through visible things, through all that God has made, and are led to God's law. That is one of the things St. Paul teaches us.

After providing a school of excellence in our own nature and in the created world, God gave us angels to protect us. God raised up the patriarchs and prophets to guide us. God showed us signs and wonders to lead us to faith. God gave us the written Law as a supplement to the law implanted in our rational souls so that the world around us could be our teacher. Finally, even after we had scorned all these signs of care out of mere laziness—and how different this attitude is from the continually working of his love for us, then God gave us himself.

Our loving God has poured out the wealth and wonder of divinity into our lowly state and condition. God took our nature and became a human being like us. God became our teacher as one of us. What are we taught? We are taught the greatness of God's love! More, God proves it by both word and deed. He leads those who are ready to obey to imitate divine compassion and not be hard-hearted.

People who make their living by managing worldly affairs get to feel a certain love for what they care for. So do shepherds develop a kind of love for their flocks. It is the same kind of affection we all come to feel for what we consider our own. But these feelings can't even be compared with the love people feel for their spouses and children. So, to make us realize how much God loves us our God became one of us, putting on our flesh and blood. God became one of our children, even as he created us his own children. There is no human love greater than God's love for us, and it is itself greater than all human loves. The same point is made when God calls himself our Father. And now, through the grace of the Holy Spirit and the waters of Baptism, God calls us to be born anew. We are called to enter fully into the Godhead and become one with God in the highest way possible. That is how much God loves you and me!

## **GOD DRAWS ALL WITHIN US INTO ONE**

Taken from Treatise on the Love of God by St. Francis de Sales

Beauty is ineffective, useless, and dead if clarity and splendor don't make it live and give it power. Hence, we describe colors as "living" when they have brilliance and luster. But with regard to things that have soul and life, beauty in them is not achieved without true grace. In addition, to that harmony of complete parts which produces beauty, such grace adds that harmony of movement, gesture and action which is, as it were, the life and soul of beauty in living things. Thus, in God's supreme beauty we recognize union and unity of essence in distinction of Persons, together with an infinite clarity, joined to A harmony of all the perfections of act and movement present within God.

Since God wishes to make all things good and beautiful, God has reduced their plurality and distinction to perfect unity, and, as it were, brought them all under himself as sole king. God has caused all things to contribute to one another and all of them to be subject to himself as their sovereign. God reduces all our members to one body under one head. Out of many persons he forms a family, out of many families a city, out of many cities a province and out of many provinces a kingdom. Thus, over the countless multitude of acts, movements, feelings, inclinations, habits, passions, faculties, and powers that are in any one of us, God establishes a kind of unity. This is done through the will. It dominates everything found in this little world. But this unity is established through love.

Since love is the initial complacency that one takes in the good, it necessarily precedes desire. In fact, what else do we desire except that which we love? It comes before delight, for how could one take joy out of the enjoyment of a thing if we didn't love it? It precedes hope, for we hope only for a good that we love. It precedes hatred, for we hate an evil only because of the love that we have for the good, whereas an evil is evil only because it is contrary to the good. All the other passions and affections issue from love as their source and root.

This is why the other passions and affections, for they all issue from love as their source and root. They are good or bad, vicious or virtuous, according as the love from which they proceed is good or bad. Love diffuses its qualities through all these in such a way that they seem to be identical with love itself. Augustine says, Love, as striving to possess what it loves, is called "concupiscence" or "desire"; as having and possessing them it is called "joy", and as fleeing from what is contrary to it is called "fear". These passions are evil if the love is evil and good if the love is good. If all the affections are good, they are righteous.

Christian doctrine subordinates' reason to God and passions to reason, so that it may guide and help, restrain and moderate them all, to the end that they may serve justice and human excellence. A righteous will is good love; a bad will is evil love. The will is moved only by its affections. It causes all the movements of the soul. The will, moreover, only loves while it wills to love, and of the many loves that present them-selves it can cling only to that which it recognizes as good. In order to make love of God reign and live within us, let us put aside self-love. We can at least weaken it that it doesn't rule over us.

# **GOD'S IMMENSE LOVE FOR US**

A reflection from *Journeying with the Lord* by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Virgin Mary presents us with the perfect case and example of the dignity of life received from the beginning as grace, and expressed throughout its existence as obedience. This dignity is the fruit of grace, which means the fruit of God's love. As the Gospel says, Mary is full of grace. This expression in Greek is actually in the passive mood, which expresses something received. Even more it is in the remote past. Therefore, we could interpret the phrase in this way: "O Mary, you have been loved for a long time!" This is the dignity of Mary—forever immensely loved.

With the help of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, which speaks of God's eternal plan, we can realize in our contemplation the dignity of every person—each person born, each person conceived, each of us. Just as the words applied to Mary, they apply to us. We are creatures forever loved, forever present in love and in God's plan. "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ."

"Before the world was made, God chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence, determining that we should become God's adopted children". Human dignity, seen in this mystery, is grace and gift and being loved.

But to be loved also means letting oneself be loved. It therefore concerns obedience: listening to God's Word. The sincere and loving acceptance of that Word—which has always spoken our name and which always loves us—is perfectly expressed by Mary's response to the angel: "Let what you have said be done to me". This is how our dignity is received and how it is expressed in obedience.

At the center of God's plan, we find a woman, and with her we find ourselves. This is the key to our understanding of our dignity and hers. Mary is the first in the chain of human believers. She is the beginning of the Church, the Mother of the Church. God himself was interested in her from before the beginning of all things. This is her human sacredness.

Such sacredness calls for respect, love, protection, and defense of human dignity—in ourselves and in Mary and in all human persons. From the beginning all human persons are beings forever loved by God! God puts his love into our hearts. We are all called, invited, to listen to the voice of love that God puts there as the very source of our life. That is what we venerate, what we learn from Mary to venerate. We evoke all this each time we speak the "Hail, Mary". We proclaim the certainty of a life and a love that is eternal. We proclaim it best when we too respond to God, moment by moment, as Mary did in the moment when she heard the voice of the angel.