

THE TWENTY-FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sun. **The Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
15 **BECOMING SHOULDERS FOR CHRIST**
A reflection from a homily by St. Peter Chrysologus

Mon. **Memorial of St. Pope Cornelius & St. Cyprian**
16 **EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER TO MARTYRDOM**
A reflection from a letter by St. Cyprian

Tues. **Monthly Remembrance of the Departed**
17 **OUR COMMUNION WITH OUR DEPARTED**
A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by
Carlo Cardinal Martini

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Wed. **Wednesday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time**
18 **WATCHING JESUS COMING TOWARD YOU**
A reflection from a Commentary on Luke's Gospel
by Fr. Juan of Avila

Thurs. **Thursday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time**
19 **THE LOVE THAT IS SACRIFICE**
A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by
Carlo Cardinal Martini

Fri. **Memorial of SS Andrew Kim Tae-gon & Companions**
20 **PREPARING OURSELVES TO CONQUER WITH CHRIST**
A reflection developed from a homily by Bl. Gueric of Igny

Sat. **Feast of St. Matthew**
21 **PREFERRING NOTHING TO GOD**
A reflection taken from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

BECOMING SHOULDERS FOR CHRIST

A reflection from a homily by St. Peter Chrysologus

The story about the lost sheep and its shepherd is not about an earthly shepherd but a heavenly one, Jesus Christ Risen from the dead. The story doesn't portray a merely human activity by a divine mystery. The one who owns a hundred sheep is Christ. Christ is the good and loving shepherd. In a single sheep, Adam, he formed the whole human flock. He led that sheep to a place of rich pasturage, paradise with all its joys. But the sheep wouldn't listen to his voice and guidance; for some reason it preferred the howling of a wolf, and so lost paradise and couldn't any longer hear the shepherd. There we all were, seeming without a shepherd or a sheepfold and pierced and torn by deadly wounds.

Our God didn't forsake us, though. He actually became one of us by means of the Virgin's womb, and so assumed all our humanity. By letting himself be raised on the cross he, as it were, took us on his own shoulders. He bore the consequences of our sin and so found us, took us upon his shoulders and brought us back to God. That was his intense joy, the joy he fulfilled in his resurrection.

You know that if we loose something very precious to us and then find it we experience a joy more intense than we had before we lost it. That is a pale reflection of the joy God knows when Christ brings us back to our heavenly homeland. Jesus' parable is more concerned with this divine tenderness than with what we did in going astray or getting lost and wounded. A human shepherd would be so worried about losing the 99 sheep that didn't go astray as not to dare to go and seek the lost. But that isn't true for God. Our Lord can keep the 99 safe even while going to seek the lost. And when he finds us he puts us on his shoulders and calls together the angels to rejoice with him.

Brothers and sisters, Christ asks us to go with him as he seeks those who have gotten lost and been hurt. He asks us to lift them up onto our own shoulders and so bring them back to the Heavenly Father and his paradise. You have to have strong shoulders and you mustn't be afraid! If we go with him we will also share in the joy of the party God gives when any lost one is found. The angels didn't feel any jealousy because God did such wonderful things to save our race and each of us; all jealousy was banned from heaven with the devil.

Brothers and sisters, Christ sought us so let us seek him where he is now in Heaven and let us bring all those who are poor or injured to him. He tells us that what we do for them we do for him. More, he tells us that his shoulders are our shoulders when we take up another to bring someone to God and joy. We have been found and now we can help others to be found as well. It can only mean joy for all of us, and it will be a sharing in the joy of our God.

EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER TO MARTYRDOM

A reflection from a letter by St. Cyprian

Each Christian must prepare for the struggle of keeping the faith untainted. The thing is to think of nothing except life eternal and the crown that goes with confessing the Lord. Don't concern yourself with familiar things, as those heavenly realities were going to be the same. An especially difficult struggle now threatens us. Like soldiers preparing for battle we need real courage and trust in God. Don't forget that you drink the cup of Christ's blood daily just so that you may be capable of shedding your blood for Christ. This is what it means to long to imitate Christ, not only in what he said but in what he did. Listen to St. John the Apostle: *"One who says, I abide in Christ!, ought to walk in the same way Christ did"*.

The Lord wants us to rejoice and even leap for joy when persecutions come. That is how we gain the crown of faith. Doing this opens the gates of heaven to us as soldiers of Christ, and most of all to martyrs. Don't think only of peace and draw back from the struggle of spiritual warfare; the Lord didn't turn back from it. He taught us humility and endurance and suffering and so He did first what he was teaching us to do in imitation of him.

In this world those who are chosen to fight for their people undergo much and hard training. They receive great rewards if they are victorious in battle. Here before us is a high and marvelous struggle and the offer of a heavenly crown. This is how God makes us his own children! He rejoices in the spectacle of our victory, as do his angels and saints. What a great dignity we are given, and what a great happiness, to fight in the very presence of God and of Christ, and to be crowned with Christ himself.

Prepare to fight with all your strength and with minds untainted by worry about what we may lose. Let those who are healthy put on their armor. Let those who have lapsed see that they can regain all they had lost, and let the longing for honor stimulate us all. Remember what St. Paul tells us: *"We don't wrestle against ordinary powers by against the princes of this world of darkness and against spirits of wickedness in high places. So put on the whole armor of faith so you may be able to stand fast the evil day. Let yourself be belted with truth, and put on the breastplate of righteousness with the preparation that is the Gospel of peace as you boots and carry the shield that is faith so even fiery arrows won't be able to hurt you. Wear the helmet that is confidence in salvation and the sword that is God's word."*

We all need to take this armor and these armaments. We need to strengthen ourselves with these spiritual safeguards. Then we will be able to endure any evil day of testing and of threats. We can't be hurt if we stand firm in the gospel teachings but will tread upon the serpent without being bitten or tripped up. Faith makes us brave and protects us from spiritual harm. Our ears will never have to hear condemnatory words and we will not be injured by any evil sights or images. The tongue that confesses Christ conquers! We the Gospel at hand we will never do any evil deed or compromise the purity of our faith. If we are aware of the Eucharist we know that the Lord embraces us and we embrace Him. We have received the Lord's body and by being faithful we make ourselves able to receive from the Lord the reward that is like a heavenly crown. Fear not! Only trust in the Lord!

OUR COMMUNION WITH OUR DEPARTED

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Those who have died in the Lord haven't forgotten us. They know us, and as in heaven with God, they know the world we live in and that they have left behind. Most of all, they know us and everything in relationship to God and to God's eternal plans. They can contemplate this fully now. We believe that they know from God our affairs and problems and speak about them among themselves and with God.

They don't simply know us but are near us. Yes, they live with Jesus and Mary in glory—outside and beyond this universe. They still intervene in the world and are near us with their prayers and their love's power and through the inspirations they offer us. By their remembered examples they remind us of all that we need to know and do.

The departed haven't lost the affection that they had for their loved ones, for us! They keep all this in heaven, transfigured by a glory never to be done away with. Recall what St. Therese of Lisieux said: "I want to spend my heaven doing good on earth!" This isn't true only of saintly Carmelites. It applies to all who have been received into the fullness of God's mercy.

Parents, relatives, close friends—all speak to God about us and present our intentions and interests, especially in the things that really matter. They have left this knowledge as a heritage in which they educated us. They pray for us so that these interests and intentions and values may mature in us and reach the perfection that will allow us to enjoy the face of God as they do.

But let me emphasize that the deceased are close to every tabernacle and every altar on which the Eucharist of the Risen Lord is celebrated. All the saints are always with the Risen Lord. This is true for all who have died in Christ. They are present adoring and loving the Lord and loving us who are also gathered around the Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Aren't we especially close to those whose love of Christ and for us is inseparable?

A kind of veil remains between the visible and the invisible worlds. But love is stronger than death and than this veil. The love of the Risen Christ fills all the hearts that belong to him and so our beloved dead. The same charity that is in them is in us, and in them it exists in all its fullness. How could they not reach out to us? In faith, in prayer, and in the Eucharist we have the means, the place and the setting for a real and loving communion and communication with our beloved dead.

WATCHING JESUS COMING TOWARD YOU

A reflection taken from a commentary on Luke's Gospel by Fr. Juan of Avila

Could you ever see a starry sky that was as beautiful as the sight of Jesus coming toward you with a small sheep on his shoulders? It doesn't matter if that sheep is a bit rebellious and wiggles around or if it wants to be put down—Jesus doesn't get angry. But what we want is to do what Jesus does when he puts a sheep on his shoulders. It means the same thing as when Jesus washes a person's feet. Remember that after washing the disciples' feet he asked them if they understood what he had done. When they didn't answer he told them that he wanted them to do just what he had done.

Jesus tells us: I want you to realize that if I, your Lord and Master, wash your feet, you too are to wash one another's feet. So if we see Jesus coming toward us with a little sheep on his shoulders he is telling us to bear one another's burdens and toils and difficulties. And we aren't to do it as though our shoulders were made of wax or some soft stuff that won't stand up to a heavy burden.

Suppose you were told you had to be a peacemaker. Would you want to respond by asking: Why should I involve myself in someone else's business? I don't want to involve myself in other people's quarrels. However, if you are on Jesus' shoulders you will find you can do things you never thought you could. If you are supported by him you are being made able to fast, give alms, and pray in such a way that God will be present in grace and mercy to help both you and others. If you are to do what he does you have to rely on him, you have to get up on his shoulders, so to speak.

Jesus has won our salvation by carrying all our sins on his shoulders, and if you are on his shoulders then surely you don't have to fear being punished in some way for your sins. If God wanted to punish us would Jesus things like the following? Father, if you won't forgive them just because they are my servants, consider the fact that they are my brothers or sisters and spouses, and if that isn't enough think of the fact that they are members of my body. They are my flesh and no one hates his own flesh; I and my flesh are yours, Father.

If you opened your door and saw Jesus standing there knocking wouldn't you invite him in and try to give him whatever he needed. But when you see a person in need you see Jesus. This is something Jesus himself has told you. Wouldn't even a wicked person be willing to do whatever he needed to if he knew he was helping Jesus? They wouldn't even think they deserved special praise for doing this.

If you receive the poor because he demands it and because they belong to him and are really one with him, this is a sign of genuine love. He has taken us on his shoulders and brought us to the Heavenly Father. As he has done so he wants us to do. We are asked to take our brothers and sisters on our shoulders. He wants us to strengthen our shoulders day by day so that we can take up any burden his Providence may send us. What we have to do is day by day work to grow stronger so that we may be ready for any burden.

THE LOVE THAT IS SACRIFICE

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

St. Augustine explains Christian sacrifice as any action that is done in order to enter into loving communion with God. To sacrifice is to enter into divine territory. What is important is not the thing done but the reason it is done. This means it springs from faith and is done by the grace of the Holy Spirit stirring a person us to love more deeply and whole-hardheartedly. Sacrifice in an objective sense is a human person's action when moved by love aiming at passing from concern with many things to a single-minded focus on God. It gives the person's entire life the meaning of an act of love for God.

If we are to call our life Christian we have to reach the point in which our sacrifice is inseparable from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But what Christ did on Calvary was offer himself and the entire Church to the Heavenly Father. That was shown most completely in the response; i.e., the Resurrection.

In the Eucharist all these realities are brought together. That means that our life, precisely as a Christian sacrifice, is related to the Eucharist and so to the Cross, the perfect sacrifice. But now we must ask how sacrifice enters into our daily life? That depends on the way we orient our hearts through our intentions. This is the heart of Christian asceticism. The challenge is to "get our hearts right" in relation to the Eucharist. We begin by seeking to concentrate our entire existence on pleasing God alone. This is what leads us to enter into the sacrifice of Christ and so into the Heavenly Father's Kingdom.

In our time the "right orientation of the heart" has been given another name. It is called our "fundamental option". The word 'option', moreover, has to be understood dynamically. We can't just direct our hearts to God in Christ at one moment and then be done with the task. What we have to do is live out the daily tension that arises because we are determined that our entire life will be shaped by a loving longing for God. That is why we seek to do what pleases God, what God likes, rather than pleasing ourselves. Traditionally this attitude is called a disposition and is seen as a steady orientation which informs, shapes, the whole of a person's life & choosing.

This option is something that we renew in prayer each day, and principally at the Eucharist. This act becomes a kind of living flame that gives vigor and meaning to all the choices we make during the day. Our goal is to make them truly Christian choices. This makes our fundamental option what shapes all our other options, choices. If that is difficult at times then we experience why Christian asceticism is really and truly an asceticism! This is why anciently monks were often seen as non-bloody martyrs. They do day by day and every day what a martyr does when he refuses to back away from his choice to follow Christ. The refusal is transformed into a deed of love.

PREPARING OURSELVES TO CONQUER WITH CHRIST

A reflection developed from a homily by Bl. Gueric of Igny

“Since the days of John the Baptist the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent are even now seizing it!” That is what the Gospel tells us. We see this declaration coming true whenever we hear or thinking of the martyrdom of one of our brothers or sisters in Christ. That is what we celebrate today. We haven’t merited to receive the grace of martyrdom but we rejoice to see the Kingdom of God triumph in those who have. What couldn’t be accomplished by the justice of the innocent has been grasped by the violence of the repentant. This violence is a matter of seizing what has not be granted to nature so that people who by nature were children of wrath may be brought into the inheritance of the saints in all God’s glory.

Recall the story of the Patriarch Jacob and his wrestling with God during an entire night. He held fast and refused to let go without a blessing. Happy the struggling through which God makes a human being the victor and gives a new life to replace what was old and worn out. It is very like the phrase repeated so often to us: “I have loved wisdom more than health and beauty”. What shouldn’t we be willing to give in order to receive the sort of blessing Jacob did. The mortification of our bodies which we have learned from prophets and the holy ones who have gone before us is brought to completion by the surrender into God’s hands exemplified by martyrdom.

Our purpose is to win heaven and to do it by a kind of violence exemplified in our monastic way of life. We are wrestling, in effect, with the angel who guards the way to the Tree of Life. It is in every way necessary that we should wrestle thus both in a persevering way and until we have died to everything but Christ. But no one can achieve this except by the strength that is God’s grace. We all experience that we cannot overcome by our own strength or perseverance. Day by day you pray and God seems to resist your prayers. He is washing you in something that feels like frigid mountain water. This is actually what you wanted when you set out to acquire wisdom.

O Divine Mercy, I know that you are concealing yourself and I know that you love those who struggle with you. You want us to overcome as Jacob did. God forbid that the one who willed to become weak and even die for us should refuse to struggle with us so that we might come to Him. Love is indeed stronger than death for God’s own strength is turned into weakness for our sakes. This weakness has proven stronger than even death.

Truly, those who do this kind of violence and do it to their own weakness and infirmity for God’s sake, are the ones Scripture talks about when it says: ***“In toil we struggle and do violence to our own perdition”***. This isn’t doing violence to our life. We see our perdition transformed into salvation. That is what happens for a martyr. This is likewise what happens for those who subject themselves to penance for the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is at hand. Our leader is red with his own blood. By his example and his merits he helps us just as he does the martyrs we celebrate today.

PREFERRING NOTHING TO GOD

A reflection taken from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

According to the rule of the Gospel, the lack of wealth is, as such, a more blessed state than its possession. This is illustrated in the call of Matthew to discipleship. There is an obvious danger posed by worldly possessions. One may end up treating them as a substitute in our hearts for that One to whom supreme devotion and love are due. Possessions are present and seen but God is unseen. They are ready and at hand for us to use in accomplishing what we want. Whether or not God will our prayers for the fulfilling of those same wants is uncertain, or perhaps even certain in the negative. This is the case when we use wealth to satisfy the corrupt inclinations of our nature or heart. Worldly wealth promises and is actually able to do deeds as gods might, but they are gods that require no service. How easy to chose to serve such a master instead of the Lord who leads us to a cross.

Worse yet, wealth can fill us with notions of our own power and security and self-sufficiency which are wholly false. This is their constant and primary mischief. People who would live in God are not always able to eliminate from themselves all sinful desires, all the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, all gluttony and drunkenness and the like. They may continue to love mere entertainments and frivolous pleasures and putting on a show. One can't easily rid oneself of a feeling of self-importance and superiority. As a result, they get attached to this world and lose sight of the duty of bearing the Cross. One can become spiritually dull and near-sighted and lose the inner delicacy that alerts one to opportunities to love as Christ loves and to serve.

Does it seem somehow unnatural to risk everything for the sake of imitating Christ? Does this seem extravagant and give one a morbid preoccupation with death. Isn't it better to act graciously and give good things to others with a liberal hand? What happens to the contemplation of death and the thought of going to God and facing God's judgment? Doesn't a dedicated Christian contemplate all these things willingly and with a kind of joyous anticipation? But people attached to this world are all too often content to remain as they are. Even if some do serve God in intention, and even in fact, they do it without the noble enthusiasm and elevation of heart and soul that marks the Christian who has given self into God's hands.

What if you didn't think there was anything after this life? Perhaps you "*would eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a happy heart, seeing that your clothes always indicate joy and gladness and that you are anointed with sweet smelling perfumes and oils, living joyfully with one's spouse and loving one another all the days of your life—a life which is vanity even as you enjoy the good things won by your labor*". This is not even an indirect criticism of the good things God gives us. But it is a warning that these things are not the "One Spouse" who wants to be the One to whom all our love and devotion are directed. There is much more to come after death. To close one's eyes to these things is to misunderstand the Gospel. Everyday, turn always toward God and toward the marvels to which God calls those who love him above all else.