

THE TWENTY-SIXTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. The Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sept. 29 **IMITATING OUR GOD'S UNIVERSAL LOVE**
A reflection from a homily by St. John Chrysostom
- Mon. Memorial of St. Jerome
30 **BRINGING PEOPLE TO GOD'S WORD**
A reflection taken from Franciscan Media
- Tues. Memorial of St. Therese of the Child Jesus
Aug. 1 **THE INSEPARABILITY OF PRAYER & LOVE**
A reflection taken from letters by St. Therese
- Wed. **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
2 Wednesday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES OF GRACE
A reflection by Fr. Helmut Thielicke
- Thurs. Thursday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time
3 **PRAYER & THE CAPACITY TO LOVE**
A reflection from a homily by St. Macarius of Egypt
- Fri. Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi
4 **WALKING IN PATIENCE TO THE GIFT OF SPIRITUAL JOY**
A reflection the Little Flowers of St. Francis
- Sat. Memorial of Our Lady
5 **MARY & THE CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY**
A reflection from *Journeying with the Lord*
by Carlo Cardinal Martini

IMITATING OUR GOD'S UNIVERSAL LOVE

A reflection from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

Have you ever asked why the rich person consigned to hell saw Lazarus in Abraham's arms? Why wasn't Lazarus in some other righteous person's arms? The reason is that Abraham was characterized by his hospitableness! The sight of Abraham was meant as a correction for that rich person because his inhospitableness brought him to hell. Recall the story of how Abraham actually ran after a stranger passing by and almost dragged him to his tent so he could show him hospitality.

By contrast the rich man ignored a poor and sick person lying right at his door. He had within his grasp a great treasure, the very opportunity to win salvation! He ignored it day after day. He could have helped but he didn't. Abraham was certainly not like that; he was just the opposite sort of person. Abraham actually sat in the doorway to his dwelling so he could catch passers-by. He acted like he was fishing for people. When you fish in the sea you often find things other than fish in your nets. Sometimes you find pearls or even gold coins. Abraham cast a net to catch people and, so we are told, he caught angels instead. He didn't realize what had happened but that wasn't necessary. It was what he did that counted.

St. Paul marveled at this tale and gave us some necessary advice: "*Remember to welcome strangers into your homes, for some by doing so have entertained angels without knowing it*". If Abraham had welcomed those he made his guests because they were special people he wouldn't have done anything special. He is praised because he didn't know who the passers-by were and took them to be ordinary travelers. But look at the good will with which he welcomed and saw to their needs and comfort.

This is true for you and me! If you are eager to welcome famous or distinguished people you don't do anything out of the ordinary. The high rank of a person can even "compel" even inhospitable persons to show courtesy and special respect. We do something great and worthy of admiration when we give a courteous welcome even to society's outcasts and to those of very humble social standing. That is why Christ praises those who do this. Listen to his words: "*Whatever you did for one of these poor people you did for me*". Then he reminded us of an important truth: "*It isn't your Heavenly Father's will that one of these "little ones" should perish!*"

Throughout the Gospel Christ speaks a great deal about "little people" and those of no social importance or standing. That's how Abraham conducted himself too. He didn't ask who travelers were or where they came from. He didn't act like us! He simply welcomed people. If you want to show kindness to a stranger don't ask about their past or how they have lived. Jesus only came to lighten people's burden of poverty and help meet their needs. This is also what he commanded us to do: "*Imitate your Heavenly Father who causes the sun to rise for the good and the bad and sends rain for people who are unjust as well as unjust.*" You have opportunities to do good for people today. Don't ignore them.

BRINGING PEOPLE TO GOD'S WORD

A reflection taken from Franciscan Media

St. Jerome spent twenty years translating the Gospels and much of the Hebrew Scriptures into Latin. He began this work at the request of the Pope of Rome but continued it on his own. We are often told that he was irritable and not at all charitable but this reflects the attacks upon him by those who rejected his translation in favor of what they were familiar with. For instance, St. Augustine tells a story about the bishop of Tripoli who read Jerome's translation of the Book of Jonah in church; his people responded by rioting in the streets because it was too different from what they had been used to.

Jerome was merciless, and even abusive, to scholarly opponents but was a kind and gentle friend and one who gave much to the needy. He founded a school for poor children in Bethlehem when he lived there and gave shelter to refugees who had fled Rome after the Vandals sacked it. He spent a good deal of time in giving spiritual direction to monks and nuns who settled in Bethlehem.

Jerome translated only the New Testament Gospels and that part of the Old Testament which was written in Hebrew. He also used a "sense for sense" rather than a "word for word" method of translating. Biblical language in the Latin of his day wasn't open to accepting newly coined words for ideas still unfamiliar to Latin speakers and Jerome both borrowed words from Greek and invented new ones. Thus he avoided what today is called "literalism" in Biblical translation. The "Old Latin" which St. Jerome's translation was to replace had been translated from a pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament and he rejected this and worked directly from Hebrew texts. He also realized that a translator will convey his own interpretation of Scripture whether he wants to or not. Jerome is probably most famous for his commentaries on Scripture and by reading them one can learn about the perspective which guided his translating work. He preferred what came to be called the "allegorical method" of interpreting Scripture. This means one gives less attention to what is merely seen as historical fact and more attention to the application of Scripture to the task of living the Christian life. This is called a "spiritual" interpretation.

Jerome worked very hard to keep himself in harmony with the teachings of the Church's magisterium. This caused him to treat those who were not faithful to what was considered orthodox in his day as stupid. In fact, he seems to have very much enjoyed a good argument and it was customary in his time to argue "*ad hominem*" by speaking abusively of opponents. He tells us that he had a weakness for good rhetoric and style and had a hard time with Hebrew texts that weren't written with Latin or Greek rules of good style in mind. Our characteristics come from our upbringing or education and that end up getting in the way of Christian charity. We can find it as difficult as Jerome did to put these aside when they get in the way of communicating God's love. That love is at the heart of all Scripture and so when we want to help others understand God's Word we have to step away from what seems natural or good to us and try to speak and act in ways that can attract others to God and an understanding of God's word. This is a struggle which everyone faces to a greater or lesser extent. Our personal struggle, then, is to daily put aside what we like and speak and act in ways that others can experience as loving and caring.

THE INSEPARABILITY OF PRAYER & LOVE

A reflection taken from letters of St. Therese of Lisieux

The efficiency of prayer is a most extraordinary thing. Prayer has access to God's presence at all times. It can get whatever it asks! It is certainly a mistake to imagine that your prayer won't be answered unless it is well-phrased and comes from a book. We don't need splendid formulas of words that have been specially composed to deal with an emergency. If that were true I would find myself in a really terrible situation. You see, I recite the Divine Office with a great sense of unworthiness. But then I can't face the strain of hunting about in books for splendid prayers that would seem worthy. If I do that my head spins. There are such a lot of prayers to choose from.

Even if I could select the right prayers from all these books I would end up reciting them about like a child who hasn't yet learned to read. So I tell God what I want quite simply and without any special turns of phrase. Somehow, God always manages to understand me. For me, prayer means launching out of my heart toward God. It means lifting up one's eyes quite simply to heaven. It is a cry of grateful love, whether from the crest of a wave of joy or from the trough of a feeling of despair. It is a vast supernatural force which opens my heart and binds me close to Jesus.

The soul that is enfolded by Divine love can't remain inactive. It may simply sit at Jesus' feet, like Mary in Bethany, and listen to his words. His words are so filled with fire! They are so filled with comfort. This doesn't seem to contribute to doing anything. Yet it contributes so much in reality. Martha is hurrying distractedly to and fro and wants her sister to do the same. But what Mary does actually contributes more than what Martha does. No, our Lord doesn't have any fault to find with Martha's exertions. His own mother, the Mother of God though she was, put up with humble work of just the kind Martha did. Didn't she get meals ready for the Holy Family? Martha was a devoted hostess. Yet she couldn't keep calm; that was the trouble.

All the saints have seen the importance of Mary's attitude. This is perhaps true in a particular way for the ones who have done the most to fill the world with the light of the Gospel teaching. Surely those great friends of God, people like St. Paul and St. Augustine and St. John of the Cross and St. Thomas and St. Francis and St. Dominic, they all went to prayer to find the secret of wisdom. It was a Divine Wisdom that left even the greatest minds lost in admiration.

Give me a lever and a fulcrum, said a man of science, and I will move the world. Archimedes wasn't talking to God, so he could actually do what he said. In any case, he was thinking of the material world. But the saints really have enjoyed the privilege that he could have asked for. The fulcrum God would have told him to use would be God's self, nothing less, and the lever would be prayer. Yet it must be the kind of prayer that sets the heart all on fire with love. That's how the saints move the world in our own day. That's how they'll do it right to the end of time. That's something God can do with us!

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRACE

A reflection from *Waiting for the Father* by Helmut Thielicke

The mercy of God is boundless. We all live by the grace of God and the merit of Christ. But one day the end of our life will come. Then we can't even look for Lazarus to come to us with a drop of water on his finger. Father Abraham won't be able to send anyone to us if we haven't used the time and opportunities given us. Lazarus once waited for something to eat from us! People are waiting for something nourishing from us right now. This is the acceptable time. This is the hour of salvation.

In the tale of Lazarus and the rich man it is only in hell that the one who never cared for Lazarus seems to feel love. He is thinking of his brothers who are still alive. But he can only feel a kind of compassion and can't do anything about it. All it can do now is cause him greater torment. He imagines them stumbling onward with their lives and lacking the slightest notion that their eternal destiny is at stake in each moment. What a torment to know that they too are headed for hell! He is like an older person who has learned so many lessons about life but can't find a way to get young people to take those lessons seriously.

You and I, each of us, is one of the rich man's brothers or sisters. That's the main message of that Gospel parable. You may be gallivanting down the path that is your life and thinking you've got plenty of time and its opportunities ahead of you. Do you think that the present moment, which is a crossroad in your life, will always be there? Do you think much about the goal to which this road leads? Do you imagine that a messenger will come to you from the beyond at some necessary moment so you can set yourself straight? Are you reading Moses and the prophets with care?

If you don't think of these things, you are, in effect, trying to evade God's presence. But if that's what you're trying to do then even an apparition from the death would only strike you as a delusion of your own mind. Heaven is not going to be torn open and God is not going to appear to you and perform some miracle you can't deny. God loves you as a parent loves an only child but it's your heart that God wants and you have to give that freely by accepting the graces of the present moment.

So there won't be anyone coming to you from the other world. There won't be a voice from heaven. There won't be any miracle. You are one of the brothers or sisters of a rich man who waited for such things but found himself in hell. What we have is the Word, the Word made flesh! We have the one who was crucified for us. We have a seemingly quiet Word who comes to us in those we look down on as unsuccessful and poor. And Christ is before us in them, like Lazarus was to the rich man, and wanted you to be his brother! How do you react to that? You are supposed to be the brother or sister of a person who is nothing and nobody and covered with boils and sores. Well, let the dogs go ahead and try to help him by licking and healing his sores but you're not going to do any such thing! But you do want Christ to be your brother, don't you. Then you know what you need to do, and you see one of those you need to reach out to.

PRAYER & THE CAPACITY TO LOVE

A reflection from a homily St. Macarius of Egypt

Those who approach the Lord must first of all force themselves to do good, even against the inclination of their hearts. Then, when God sees them engaged in that struggle, and constraining themselves by force even though their hearts are reluctant, God will grant them the true prayer of the Spirit. They will receive real love, true gentleness, deep compassion, genuine kindness, and in a word will fill them with the fruits of the Spirit.

However, if any are unable to pray let them strive to obtain the grace of prayer, making no effort to be gentle, humble or loving, and simply observe the rest of the Lord's commands. Let them not toil to gain those virtues as far as determination and free-will may do so/ The grace of prayer may at times be given them with some of the refreshment and joy of the Spirit but in character they will remain as they were before.

They aren't gentle because they shirked the preparation necessary to become so. They have no humility because they haven't asked for it or made an effort to obtain it. They don't love everyone because they haven't tried to do so, asking for this in prayer. Not knowing themselves, they are unaware of their lack of faith and don't strive by self-denial to obtain it from the Lord. Only the Lord gives firm faith and real confidence.

Just as people have to force and compel themselves to pray when their hearts are reluctant, so they should do the same to gain trust in God, humility, love, gentleness, sincerity and simplicity and all fortitude and patience with joy. This is what Scripture teaches.

They should make every effort to think little of themselves as poor and among the least of all. They should avoid speaking of matters that bring no spiritual profit. They should always meditate on the things of God and then speak of what is in their hearts. So too, they should restrain themselves from anger and shouting, according to the advice of St. Paul. *"Don't nurse grudges or lose your temper or raise our voice or slander anyone or do evil in any way"*.

When we are in this situation we should force ourselves to follow all the ways of the Lord. We should practice every virtue according to our ability. We should live good lives and be well-behaved. We must have the deep humility that is shown in gentleness. We must never exalt ourselves, be proud or conceited or speak ill of anyone. These things are made possible by prayer and that leads us to prayer. The way of prayer is the way to excellence and so the way to love.

WALKING IN PATIENCE TO THE GIFT OF SPIRITUAL JOY

A reflection from The Little Flowers of St. Francis

On day St. Francis was going from Perugia to St. Mary of the Angels. It was winter and he was suffering much from the cold. He called to Bro. Leo who was walking ahead of him: Brother, holiness and edification are not the sources of perfect joy. He kept calling out such things until Brother Leo ask: Father, tell me what is the source of perfect joy.

St. Francis answered: “When we arrive at St. Mary of the Angels soaked with rain and stiff with cold, covered with mud and exhausted with hunger, and we knock at the friary door, and the porter asks angrily, “Who are you?” and we answer that we are two brothers and he says, You are liars! You are a couple of rogues who wander about deceiving folk and robbing the poor of alms. Be off with you! And if he refuses to open the door and forces us to stand outside all night in the snow and rain, hungry and frozen, then if we bear such ill-treatment, abuse, and dismissal patiently and calmly, without complaint, humbly and charitably thinking that the porter recognizes us for the kind of persons we are and that God moves him to denounce us—write down Brother Leo that here is the source of perfect joy.

“And if we go on knocking, and he comes out angrily and drives us away as importunate rogues with abuse and blows, saying--”Be off, you dirty thieves! Go to the poorhouse, for you’re not going to eat or lodge here!” And if we bear this patiently, cheerfully, and charitably, Brother Leo, here is the source of perfect joy.

“And if driven by hunger, cold and darkness, we continue to knock, begging him with tears to open and admit us for the love of God, and he, more furious than before, says, “These are persistent rascals! I will give what they deserve!” And if he rushes out with a knotted stick, grabs us by our cowls, throws us to the ground and rolls us in the snow, belaboring us with every knot on his stick; and if we bear this patiently and cheerfully, remembering the sufferings of Christ the Blessed, and how we should bear this for love of Him, then Brother Leo you can write down that here is the source of perfect joy.

“And now listen to the conclusion, Brother Leo. Above all graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit that Christ gives to his friends is the grace to conquer self and willing to bear any pain, injury, insult, and hardship for love of Christ. For we cannot glory in any other gifts of God except these because they are not ours but God’s. Therefore St. Paul says: “What did you possess that was not given to you by God? And if you have received it from Him, why do you glory as thought you had it from yourself?” But in the cross of suffering and affliction we may glory, because this is our own. That is why St. Paul says, “I will not glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”. To Him be everlasting honor and glory for ever.”

MARY & THE CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY

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

The Second Vatican Council teaches as follows: *“In celebrating the annual cycle of Christ’s mysteries, holy Church honors with special love the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. She is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son. In her the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption and joyfully contemplates it in a faultless model.”* (SC 103)

This statement contains three key affirmations. The first teaches that all Marian feasts are a part of our celebration of Christ’s mysteries. This is actually the only cycle that the Church celebrates in its liturgy. Mary is strictly bound to Jesus’ redemptive action because she is the most wonderful fruit of his salvific work. We pray this every time we pray the “Hail, Mary”. She is joined to Jesus inseparably because she received everything from Him.

Second, the Church affirms that Mary opened herself and her heart to receive the fullness of God’s gift, Jesus Christ. In this way she is the model for every Christian. This is our duty to God. We must let ourselves be loved by God! “The Almighty has done great things for me!” Mary recognizes that everything about her and in her is a gift from God. She knows herself fully loved by God in Christ.

The Church praises God for the gift God has given in Mary. It uses the same words with which she praised the work of the Lord: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my savior”. We celebrate the lived identification between Mary and the Church and we as Church know ourselves understood by and represented by Our Lady.

The third affirmation is even more explicit than the others. The Church “joyfully contemplates” all that Mary is by God’s gift. She herself seeks and longs to be nothing but God’s. That is what she hoped to be and what God gave her. In other words, the Church, and each of us, looks beyond self and beyond the events that fill our days and we look to Mary as she is in God’s glory. Mary is the concrete image of all that the Church longs to be, of all that we ourselves long to be. She is what we hope to be.

Mary is totally dedicated to the Lord. Mary is totally attentive to the work of Christ. Mary is totally caught up in God’s great mysteries. Mary represents our hope in all these ways, but in her it is already realized. Mary, glorified in body and soul, is with the Father in Heaven. In her our body is transfigured and so is our daily historicity. She shows us God’s goal for all humanity and for each of us. All are called to share in the fullness of the glory that God has given her. She shows us how we come to that glory in the seemingly simple deeds of each day—like today.