

THE THIRTY-FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun.
Nov. 3 **The Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time**
OUR FREEDOM TO ANSWER GOD'S CALL
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- Mon.
4 **Memorial of St. Charles Borromeo**
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A reflection from *Journeying with the Lord*
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- Tues.
5 **Tuesday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time**
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A reflection from a homily by St. Macarius of Egypt
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6 **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
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8 **Friday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time**
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by Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx

OUR FREEDOM TO ANSWER CHRIST'S CALL

A reflection by Bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug

Our Lord called Zacchaeus to come to him from the sycamore tree he had climbed. Immediately, Zacchaeus hurried to come down. He welcomed Jesus as a disciple, even before he had been formally called! What a marvel! Our Lord hadn't spoken to him before, and he hadn't previously even seen the Lord with his physical eyes, and yet he believed in Him. He believed simply on the word of others.

He did this because faith had been preserved in him in its natural life and health. He showed this by believing in Our Lord as soon as he heard that the Lord was coming. The simplicity of his faith is seen in his promise to give half his goods to the poor, and even to restore fourfold anything he had gained by fraud. If Zacchaeus' spirit hadn't been filled with the simplicity that is proper to real faith he wouldn't have made this promise to Jesus!

In a moment Zacchaeus gave and promised to distribute what by labor he had amassed over many years. He may have accumulated it by cunning but simplicity and faith gave it away. Had he gained it by guile? Even if so he distributed it by simplicity and purity of soul. Faith made a public renunciation of what may have been gained by unrighteousness.

The only possession faith has is God. It refuses to own anything besides God. Faith doesn't see lasting value in anything other than God, who is faith's lasting possession. It is implanted in us so we may find God, and so we will be contented in possessing God alone. It enables us to recognize that everything apart from God can be harmful to us.

All who are called by the Lord should obey his summons at once! Only love of earthly things can weigh them down. Worldly ties are a weight upon the mind and the understanding. For those bound by them hearing the summons of God's call is difficult.

The apostles, the righteous people of the past, as well as the patriarchs were not bound by such ties. They were able to act like really alive people! They set out unburdened because no worldly possession held them bound. For others these possessions are like heavy fetters.

Nothing can bind or be an obstacle to those who are aware only of God. If one senses God's presence one is open and ready for God's call. The voice of God is like a light that shows one the Way to God and God's love. Each time it makes itself heard it makes our soul more capable of receiving God's grace and gift, of receiving God.

We are told all of this to help us answer whatever call God causes to sound in our hearts today. Today, if you hear God's voice, harden not your heart!

HOW DO YOU GIVE YOUR LIFE TO GOD?

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

What did St. Charles Borromeo do? He took risks. When he did that he gave his life to God. For example, at one time a plague was devouring the people of his city. He threw himself at this scourge, not isolating himself from the plague-stricken like a hired hand but like a good shepherd he remained with his flock without fear of death.

This is a sample of a thousand other things that Charles Borromeo did as signs of his tireless gift of self to his people. Charles left no autobiography, no spiritual writings telling us his “secret”. He had no secret; his inner life and his prayer were visible to all in his gift of self.

As witness to the intensity of his prayer we have only a few pictures showing him in ecstasy or in tears while he venerated the crucifix. Apart from these, his swiftness in grasping the meaning of the Madonna’s tears he saw at the Shrine of Rho gives a confirmation of the faith he lived by.

St. Charles moved in an atmosphere of intense awareness not only of disasters like the plague but of all the wounds in the living flesh of his city and saw them as the same as the wound in the side of Christ. He was intensely aware of Christ’s suffering and Christ’s sorrows. God isn’t recognized as God, or loved, by people who are lazy as Christians and deaf to God’s Word.

If St. Charles lived his inner life in an inexhaustible capacity for praise and for sharing suffering, he was only living what the Psalmist says are the two basic aspects of human praying. It was probably his capacity for sharing suffering that primarily manifested itself exteriorly.

St. Charles was a person of prayer, of tears, and of penance. He understood this last not as something heroic but as a mysterious and even impassioned sharing in the sufferings of Christ himself. He saw this as a path by which Christ enters into the depths of the world’s sin and finds there the absurdity of refusing God. Christ lived this until his heart almost broke and his soul was torn open.

Today we celebrate one of the great witnesses who have penetrated to the very depths of the mystery of divine sharing in human suffering. Christ drank the last drops of this bitter cup and so was capable of understanding very lucidly his age and ours. This was true also of Charles. He understood the deep meaning of the events and history of his times, as we are called to do in our times. He understood and he loved. This is our call as well.

APPROPRIATING THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE

A reflection from a homily by St. Makarios of Egypt

The prophet Ezekiel has recounted to us a vision of divine glory full of unutterable mysteries. How can we share in the richness which this vision brought to the prophet's own inner life and prayer? Begin by thinking of the vision as representing the mystery of a soul that receives the Lord and itself becomes for God a throne of glory.

One who has received the privilege of sharing in the light of the Holy Spirit and has been irradiated by the beauty of God's unspeakable glory is by these gifts prepared to be God's throne and dwelling place.

God is all light. The one who sees God becomes all face and all eye. There is no part of such a person that is darkness, for through and through such a person has been made light and spirit. Such a soul is full of eyes all over and has no such thing as a back. Every part of such a soul is face forward in every direction.

What happens is that the unutterable beauty of the glory of the light of Christ is mounted and riding upon that soul. Christ drives, guides, carries and supports that soul. Christ graces and adorns such a one with spiritual beauty. The prophet says "*a human hand was under the wing*". The four living creatures that bear the chariot of God symbolize the governing powers of the soul. The eagle is the king of birds in nature, the lion of wild beasts, the bull of tame animals, and human kind dominates all creatures in general. So too the soul has its governing powers—the will, conscience, and soul is directed and controlled by grace and God rests upon them. It is Christ who is carried by the soul and is its guide. It is from Christ that the Christian receives the ability to love. By this is the chariot that is the soul is directed and controlled.

If you have become a throne of God, and if the Heavenly Charioteer has mounted you, if your whole soul is a spiritual eye and has become all light, and if you have been nourished with the food that is the Spirit and given living water to drink and put on the clothing that is ineffable light, your inner self is grounded in the experience and full assurance of all these things. Then you already live and are at rest with the Lord.

On the other hand, if you have no awareness of any of these realities, then weep, mourn, and lament because you haven't yet obtained the eternal spiritual riches. You haven't yet received true life. Be distressed at your poverty and pray to the Lord night and day because you have come to a halt and remain in the dreadful penury of sin. If only we were troubled by our poverty and didn't go on without a care as though we were completely satisfied.

One who is deeply troubled and seeks and prays to the Lord unceasingly will soon be delivered. As the Lord said regarding a certain unjust judge and a widow: "*How much more will God vindicate those who cry to him night and day*"? Pray and turn to the Lord with all your heart.

HOW ARE WE TO FACE MISFORTUNE?

A reflection from Meditations on the Gospels by Bishop Bossuet

In the Book of Jeremiah we hear of a prophet named Hananiah who preached the exact opposite of Jeremiah. He told people that in only two more years all the sacred vessels of the Temple which had been taken away to Babylon would be brought back. On hearing this happy promise, Jeremiah said to him: *“Hananiah, may the Lord do as you say! May your words rather than mind come true, and may the return of the sacred vessels and of all our kin who have been deported to Babylon be soon!”*

Jeremiah was always patient and ready to yield to all who spoke in the Lord’s name unless the Lord ordered otherwise. He only spoke out strongly when the Lord made him do so. He showed himself both the gentlest and the firmest of all people, and so he prefigured Jesus Christ. After Christ was struck in the face he answered: *“If what I have said is wrong, produce evidence to prove it; but if it was right why do you strike me?”* Elsewhere he said, *“I am not possessed by an evil spirit, but I glorify my Father”* and, again, *“You are trying to kill me, one who has told you the truth; Abraham didn’t act in that way, and yet you boast of being his children”*.

That is how, without showing indignation at injustice, the Lord reproached people for their murderous designs. And although he could have taken revenge on them for their disbelief, no one was struck dead—as Hananiah was for contradicting Jeremiah. The Lord Jesus had only gentleness for his enemies. To spare human being, the only time he showed the power that had been given to punish was when the fig tree was withered at his command.

The goodness of Jesus had to shine out above even that of Jeremiah. No one was to perish either in his sight or at his word. It is true that he indignantly tells the leaders who brought about his death that they will inevitably receive a punishment for their infidelity to God. *“You fill up the measure of your fathers. You snakes, you brood of vipers, how will you escape being condemned to Gehenna?”* But all this was no more than foretelling the disasters that would surely befall them and the hope was that they might avoid these.

His prophetic words were to show them their future ruin, and yet as far as he could he tried to spare them death. Even while showing them the storm which threatened, he showed them the safe refuge they might find under God’s wings. *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have wanted to gather your children like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me.”*

Do you, even now, personally fear that punishment will come upon you? If you want to avoid that, are you ready to turn wholeheartedly to God. There is always time for mercy! God is always ready to receive us. We need only trust in God and turn, not to human means of safety, but to our loving God.

WHAT ARE FAITH'S EARTHLY CONSEQUENCES?

A reflection from a homily by St. John Henry Newman

The prophets were always treated roughly by their fellow Israelites; they were resisted, their warnings were neglected, their good services forgotten. But there was a difference between the earlier and later prophets: the earlier live and died in outward honor, though hated and thwarted by the wicked they were exalted among the People. But in later times, they were not only feared and hated by the enemies of God but were cast out of the People.

As the time approached for the coming of the True Prophet, the Son of God, the treatment of the prophets more and more resembled that of Christ. They had to suffer as he was to suffer. Moses was a ruler, but Jeremiah an outcast. Samuel was buried in peace but John the Baptist was beheaded. St. Paul captures it well: "*they had trials by cruel mockings and scourgings, indeed they suffered bonds and imprisonment, and were stoned and sawed in pieces, were tempted, killed with the sword, and they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented—the world was not worthy of them.*".

But of all the persecuted prophets Jeremiah is the most eminent. We know more of his history, of his *imprisonments*, of his wanderings and his afflictions. He may be taken as a representative of all prophets. So it is that he is in a special way a for-type of Our Lord and Savior. All the prophets were types of the great Prophet whose way they were preparing. They tended toward and spoke of Christ.

If this is true of the prophets then what can we expect to experience ourselves? In their sufferings the prophets foreshadowed Christ's priesthood and we have been baptized into that very priesthood. In their proclamations of hope they foreshadowed his prophetic office, and we have been baptized into that office. In their works of mercy they foreshadowed Christ's, and we have been called especially to love others as Christ has.

When our Lord came some thought him Elijah, some thought him Jeremiah and some thought him John the Baptist. He was, however, none of these but the very Son of God. We too have been called to be children of God, and that is what we have been made. We are called to imitate Christ more closely than did any of the prophets. We have been called to imitate his ministry, his charity, and his readiness to suffer, even death, for the sake of the Heavenly Father's will. If our master has been so called, and if we are called to imitate him, then we too have been called to love and to pray for those who cause us to suffer and to work for their good in all the ways we can. It is a gift we are given. The greatest gift we are given is the opportunity and the strength to give ourselves and everything we are to our Heavenly Father. If we are brothers and sisters of Christ then we can do no less. Those who do not take up their cross and follow Christ are not worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. You are worthy! Take up your cross and follow him today.

FILLING OURSELVES WITH CHRIST'S GOODNESS

A reflection from a homily by St. Augustine

Scripture has a great deal to say about the tongue. "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue*" is perhaps the least of these sayings. The tongue, we are told, can be very dangerous: "*Many have fallen by the sword but even more because of the tongue*". The danger is one we ourselves create: "*They have taught their tongues to speak lies*". Who did the teaching? We do it ourselves! We so accustom ourselves to making sure we get what we want that we become used to telling lies—even when you didn't particularly plan to do it.

The tongue is like a wheel. Once you turn it and give it impetus and it goes on turning. It is the same with our tongues. Once we start them they seem to go on of their own accord and in the way that is easiest, to which they are most accustomed.

What are we going to do about this? If you want to use speech rightly you have to make a careful judgment before you open your mouth. Actually, the tongue doesn't wag of its own accord but there is a mind within us that is responsible for moving all our members. The thing is to make sure that mind is filled with good thoughts and gives rise to good desires. We need the help of grace so that the mind, and heart, can overcome whatever bad habits we have developed.

A soldier has weapons but if he doesn't use them they don't do anything. The tongue is our soul's major weapon. Scripture calls it a "*restless evil*". But who makes it such? If you aren't restless yourself then the tongue can't be an evil. If a servant is good within then all the services done will be good. The tongue is a bodily reality and of itself does nothing. It won't wag if you don't wag it.

Clearly when we use our tongues we have to be very careful how we do so. When people are driven by greed they use the tongue to make shady deals. When they want to fool others they use the tongue to swear falsely. They get angry and use God's name, and Christ's name, blasphemously.

The lesson is clear. If your mind is filled with knowledge of Jesus and how he did all things well then you won't use your tongue to help you do wrong things. Jesus spent his life healing and teaching and lifting people up from misery and sin. We have been given the blessing of a command to follow his example. "Love one another as I have loved you!" That's what he said to us when he taught us to celebrate Eucharist. If our minds are filled with that love then the tongue will be used as an instrument to love as Christ loved. Isn't that what we want him to see we have done when we come before him for judgment?

If your mind is filled with thoughts of love then your heart will long only to do deeds of love. In that case, the tongue will be an instrument of love, and so of grace and of God's goodness and salvation.

LEARNING TO GLORY IN OUR WEAKNESS

A reflection from Christ, the Sacrament of Encounter with God,
by Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx

Today we celebrate the Cathedral of the Church of Rome, and in doing this we celebrate the entire Church in its unity. The whole Church is the visible shape of salvation. It is a sign filled with the reality which it signifies. Think of the fact that the Church's members can sin only to the extent that they withdraw themselves from its sanctifying influence. To the extent that any of us is "in sin" we have placed our self outside the Church. That is a terrible thought. To the extent we are "in sin" there is in us a rupture between the Church as sign and the Church as reality—a rupture in us.

It is clear that this means the Church has not yet reached its final state. We can't hold that at the end of time the Church will cease to exist and make way for some purely spiritual community and communion of the saints in grace. In virtue of Christ's incarnation the bodily visibility of grace is not a provisional or temporary reality; it is the definitive reality! Only in Heaven will the Church reach its full maturity, and still be a visible society. The resurrection of all flesh establishes and perpetuates in glory the earthly history of the Church just as does our personal holiness perpetuate each of us as saints who have fought for and won in this life. All we have won will be visible in our risen bodies. All that is weak and sad and troublesome will have disappeared, from the Church and from us individually.

The Church, as the earthly sign of the triumph of Christ's grace, remains now in a state of weakness. It needs to purge itself of all that is sinful. This fact shows us two things: First, the glory of the Church is always a veiled glory, for around it there is still a broad margin of weakness and shortcomings. Second, and more especially, the power of God is fulfilled in and through the weakness and poverty of the Church. The Church is great and glorious, but not on account of any earthly strength or achievements. In the Church Christ's redeeming grace always triumphs in spite of human weakness.

It is in weakness that the divine power comes into its own and becomes visible precisely as divine. The Church is therefore not only the object of our faith but it is also the test of our faith. It can become an obstacle and a danger to faith. Belief, after all, is not a conviction to which a person is forced by things like the glory of the Church or some other manifestation of achievement that we can experience. We always believe in the midst of darkness and confusion. If we look at things in this way, the weakness of the Church is, to use an Easter expression, a "happy fault". It makes us realize that our only boast is in the power of God. Just as Christ was a scandal to the Jews because he set himself up, in many minds, in opposition to the Law given by God, so too the Church must pass through its pilgrimage as poor and despised. The power of redeeming grace alone will bring the victory. This must be our deepest faith. It is one of God's most marvelous gifts.