

THE TWENTY-NINTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. The Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Oct. 20 PRAYING IN GRATITUDE
 From “On the Lord’s Prayer” by St. Gregory of Nyssa
- Mon. Monday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time
21 LEARNING TO JUDGE CHARITABLY
 A reflection from Kindness by Fr. Frederick Faber
- Tues. Memorial of St. Pope John Paul II
22 THE EUCHARIST IS OUR LIFE
 A reflection from Church of the Eucharist by St. John Paul II
- Wed. Wednesday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time
23 GUIDING OBEDIENCE RIGHTLY
 A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman
- Thurs. Thursday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time
24 FAITH AND WHAT IT REQUIRES
 A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman
- Fri. Friday of the 29th Week in Ordinary Time
25 STANDING FIRM IN THE LORD
 A reflection from a text by Denis the Carthusian
- Sat. Memorial of Our Lady
26 IN MARY THE WORK OF GOD IS PERFECT
 A reflection from Journeying with the Lord
 by Carlo Cardinal Martini

PRAYING IN GRATITUDE

A reflection from “On the Lord’s Prayer” by St. Gregory of Nyssa

People who don’t unite themselves to God through prayer cut themselves off from God! The first thing we have to learn from God’s Word, then, is our need to pray continually. We must not lose heart! Prayer brings us close to God and when we’re close to God we’re far from The Enemy. Prayer is the safeguard of chastity; it controls anger, and it restrains arrogance. It is the seal of virginity, the assurance of marital fidelity, and the shield of travelers. It protects us while we sleep and encourages us if we keep vigil. It brings the farmer a good harvest and keeps sailors safe. I think that even if we spent our entire lives in communion with God through thanksgiving and prayer we would still be far from having repaid adequately our God and Benefactor as we should.

Time has three dimensions, past and present and future. In all three of them we experience the Lord’s gentle healing touch. If you consider the past you realize that you wouldn’t have existed if the Lord hadn’t created you. Your birth is God’s generous gift to you. If you consider the present you realize that you live in God. Life is God’s kindness continued for you after your birth for in God, as St. Paul says, we live and move and have our being. If, then, you turn to the future, reflect that your hope to attain whatever you look forward to depends on God. Our future is in God’s hands and they are gentle hands.

It is only in the present that we seem to have any control at all. What better way to use this power than in giving thanks to God! If we do this unceasingly, throughout our entire lives, will our thanks be in proportion to God’s gifts? Our debt even for present blessings is more than we can pay—then think of those of the past as well, and those of the future! You and I will never find a way to repay what we owe our God!

Why are we so reluctant to show proper gratitude? We don’t even give thanks to the best of our ability. Do you set aside an entire day to thank God? Think of what a small part of a day we spend with God consciously and deliberately.

You and I were created in God’s image. What did we do in response? We blurred and disfigured that image by sin. Who restored that image to its original beauty? Who is it who draws us back to the blessedness our first parents knew before they were driven out of paradise? We were deprived of the fruit of the Tree of Life. Worse, we drowned ourselves in the abyss of worldliness! As Scripture very rightly says: “*There is no one who understands!*”

We are gathered together to hear these truths. If we realize all that has been said will we begin to give thanks? Will we give it continuously, endlessly, starting now and using the rest of our lives? The Lord Jesus taught his disciples, and so taught us, how to pray. The Lord’s prayer gives us enough to reflect on and more. Let us go aside with the Lord Jesus and pray with him. As God filled his heart and was his heart, so let God live in ours and even fill it.

LEARNING TO JUDGE CHARITABLY

A reflection from Kindness by Fr. Frederick Faber

People are so used to judging others that merely seeing someone's actions usually generates an inner commentary on them. It is so common to pass such judgments you would think that our own duties overlapped everyone else's so that simply doing anything begs for us to pass a verdict on it. All the human beings who come within the reach of our acquaintance—and this is a great many even for those who live away from the hustle and bustle of life—get treated like prisoners standing before a court. Whether or not we are unjust or ignorant or arbitrary in our judgments it remains that we are indefatigable judges; we never stop judging.

What we are doing is ruining our souls. We have to find a way to put an end to this sort of inner conduct. It can easily earn us an everlasting condemnation by God. Think of the standard by which the Last Judgment is made in Jesus' picture of it. We should pause and reflect that the standard we use in judging others will be used to judge us. Our present way of judging others probably reveals to us the kind of sentence that would be passed on us if we died right now!

Does this reflection leave us content? Are we ready to accept such a judgment from God? But if not then we need to ask if it really possible for us to stop judging others. What we do know is that it is possible for us to stop judging unjustly. What can we do? We can begin to change inwardly by learning to judge others kindly! Think of this as an intermediate stage on the path to judging with perfect charity. If we want to put aside the judges robes we have worn for so long we can now see how to begin. What we need to do is to cultivate, and with as much dedication as possible, a habit of kind interpretations.

It is very difficult to judge others' actions rightly. The real character of an action depends properly on the motives which prompts it. These motives are invisible to us. Appearances are so often other than what we discover was really done or attempted. What was a deed of virtue may look like something else. What is more, a line of conduct isn't created like a process of logical reasoning. There are all sort of apparent or not so apparent inconsistencies that deform what in reality is good and consistent.

No one can judge people in a wholly right way other than God. God judges always with perfect knowledge and unconfused certainty and, above all, unfailing compassion. Kind interpretations are imitations of the merciful understanding of the Creator in seeing reasons for his creatures' behaviors. It is almost a revelation to us to realize that God is so merciful precisely because God is so wise. From this realization it is a short step to the realization that kindness is our best wisdom in dealing with others and their actions. Our kindness is an imitation and perhaps an image of the wisdom of our God. Can we do better than this as we walk with Jesus along the path that leads to charity?

THE EUCHARIST IS OUR LIFE

A reflection from The Church of the Eucharist by St. Pope John Paul II

The many places and settings in which I have celebrated the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and even cosmic character. Even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a small country church it is always in some way celebrated on the altar that is the world. It unites heaven and earth; it embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became human in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing. He, the Eternal High Priest, who by the blood of his cross entered the Eternal Sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all creation, but now as redeemed.

The Lord Jesus does this through the priestly mystery that is the Church, giving all to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. This is indeed the “mystery of faith” which is accomplished on the Cross. *“He was crucified, he suffered death and was buried; he descended to the dead and on the third day he rose again”*. The words of the profession of faith are echoes by the words of contemplation: “This is the wood of the Cross, on which hung the Savior of the world! Come, let us worship!” This invitation is not confined to Good Friday.

In these and similar words, the Church points to Christ in the mystery that is the passion and in doing so reveals her own mystery. By the gift of the Holy Spirit the Church was born and set upon the pathway of the world, and this is also a decisive moment in shaping the institution of the Eucharist. The Church’s foundation and wellspring is the whole of the Paschal Triduum but it is, as it were, gathered up, foreshadowed and concentrated for ever in the gift of the Eucharist. In this sign Jesus Christ entrusted to the Church the work of perennially making present the paschal mystery. With it Christ brought about a mysterious oneness in time between the Triduum and the passage of the centuries.

The thought of this leads to a profound amazement and gratitude. In the paschal event and the Eucharist there is made present throughout the centuries a truly enormous capacity to receive the graces of the redemption. This amazement should always fill the Church assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist. But there is a special way in which it should fill those who celebrate it. These are the people who must say with conviction, *“This is my body which is given for all; this is the cup of my blood which is poured out for all..”*. Our voices must be placed at the disposal of the one who first spoke these words and who wants them to be repeated in every generation and by all those who share in his priesthood for the world. I would like to rekindle this Eucharistic amazement! Let us contemplate the face of Christ, and let us contemplate it in the faces of all who suffer and long for redemption.

To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize Christ wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence. Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. *“Their eyes were opened and they recognized him”*. They recognized him in the breaking of the bread. Let us learn to break this bread daily, for one another and for all those in whom Christ comes to us, especially as needy and in distress.

GUIDING OBEDIENCE RIGHTLY

A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

We have read much from the Books of Kings. It gives the life of King Josiah a special attention. Reflect, however, that he was only eight years old when his father was killed. He wasn't old enough to think for himself. Yet "*he began to seek after the God of David his father*". Blessed are those who seek God for they shall find the one they seek.

He was surrounded by diverse kinds of idol worship and by the sophistries of unbelief and the seductions of sin; he had every temptation to go wrong. Had he done so he would not have sinned against the light because he knew no better. Yet he had light enough to go right and so he would have sinned against that light if he hadn't. What, then, was it that guided him? Where did his knowledge come from? He had, I think, as every person has, a natural sense of right and wrong and he didn't blunt it. His heart was tender and he acknowledged a constraining force in the divine voice within him; he heard and he obeyed.

Amid all the forms of worship offered to his acceptance, this very inward sense of his, strengthened by practice, unhesitatingly chose out the true way, the worship of the God of Israel. Then at twenty he began his reformation. At first he didn't have a book of the Law to guide him. He took such measures as natural conscience suggested. He put away idolatry generally. Thus he set out without knowing where he was going, but it is the rule of God's providence that those who act upon the light they have are rewarded with clearer light. To the one who has, more will be given. He set out repairing the Temple and it was in the course of this work that the high priest found a copy of the Law of Moses in the temple.

"*When the king had heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes*". He thought far more of what he had not done than of what he had done. He felt how incomplete his reformation had been; and he felt how far more guilty his whole people were than they had supposed. They had received such precise guidance about what to do and such solemn commands that they do it. He learned, moreover, about the fearful punishment which was hanging over them all. He assembled all Judah at Jerusalem and publicly read the words of the Book of the Law. Then he made all the people renew the covenant with the God of their fathers. He now proceeded more exactly in the work of reformation. He celebrated the Passover.

Josiah's greater knowledge was followed by stricter obedience. "*There was no king like him before him; he turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses*". This is a model for all of us. Think what a great light we have received! Is our obedience to God in proportion to that light?

FAITH AND WHAT IT REQUIRES

A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Scripture tells us that King Josiah sought the Lord with all his heart. What was the outcome of all his efforts? *“The archers shot at King Josiah and the king said to his servants: Take me away for I am badly wounded. So his servants brought him to Jerusalem and he died. He was buried in one of the tombs of his ancestors”*. Is this all that came of his work? Was the fate of the best of Judah’s kings, identical to that of Ahab, the worst of Israel’s kings? It seems we have little capacity to judge God’s pleasure or displeasure by such outward appearances.

God had continued his promised mercies to his people through David’s line, till they were too corrupt to receive them. Josiah was cut off prematurely, as we see things, and was followed by a display of God’s wrath shown in the captivity of the nation. Josiah was taken in death and the people were carried off to Babylon. But Josiah was remembered. Listen to Scripture.

“His remembrance .. is sweet as honey in all mouths, and as music at a banquet of wine. He behaved himself uprightly in the conversion of the people and took away the abominations of iniquity. He directed his heart to the Lord, and in the time of the ungodly he established the worship of God. All, except David and Hezekiah and Josiah were defective; for they forsook the law of the Most High, even the kings of Judah.” You see there was a result beyond the appearances, a remembrance.

I would ask you to observe that Josiah’s chief excellence lay in his character. This is spelled out when he is first mentioned in Scripture. *“He did right.. in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the ways of David his father, and turned neither to the right or to the left”*. He walked the straight way of the Lord. He kept to the narrow way. He left this example.

What do we call this virtue of his? We call it faith. It is a fact that some prefer to call it conscientiousness but I think the substance of his character is equally well presented by either term. Where there is genuine faith there is conscientiousness, and where there is conscientiousness there is faith. The two may be distinguished from one another in practice only verbally. In actually living they aren’t separated but belong to one another.

There is a habit of mind and heart we call dutifulness and it shows itself in both faith and conscientiousness. The two, indeed, also show themselves in obedience. They show themselves in the careful, even anxious observance of God’s will, however one learns it. St. Paul tells us that *“the just shall live by faith”* and this is true under all the dispensations of God’s mercy. It is called faith when we emphasize a reliance on the simple word of the unseen God as overpowering the temptations we see.

Whether we read and accept God’s word in Scripture, as Christians surely do, or if we receive this word in our conscience as a law written in our hearts, as unbelievers do, in either case it is by following it, no matter the outcome or the seductions of the world around us, that we please God. That is what is most important: That we please God and please God day by day and always. It was by this example that King Josiah ultimately saved his People.

STANDING FIRM FOR THE LORD

A reflection from a text by Denis the Carthusian

Anyone who is truly a Christian declares: *“I will stand on my guard”*. That means standing guard over your heart and with your mind fully alert. That is how one keeps oneself pure and makes oneself a worthy dwelling-place for God. Recall the psalm text: *“I will keep watch over my ways”*. Wisdom adds: *“Guard your heart with great vigilance for it is the source of all life”*. Ecclesiastes fills this out: *“Unless you keep yourself constantly in the fear of the Lord your house will soon be destroyed”*. The Book of Deuteronomy presents Moses warning us: *“Keep a careful watch over yourself so as not to forget the words of the Lord, your God, or to let them pass out of your mind.”*

Purity of heart is another name for unmixed contemplative delight, an innocent and delightful contemplation of God. This is the aim of all asceticism. It is for the sake of such contemplation that we curb our outward senses, our tongues, and our appetites. We ought, then, to be continually intent on obtaining, persevering in and perfecting our purity of heart. We ought to be mindful of the Savior’s words: *“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God”*.

Remembrance of the presence of God undoubtedly contributes more than anything else toward watchfulness. The Psalmist says: *“I have kept your commandments and your precepts, for my whole life lies open before you.”* Let us follow in these footsteps. Let us do as St. Paul advised the Philippians: *“Work for your salvation with fear and trembling”*.

“I will station myself”, that means I will control the motions and impulses of my heart and stand firmly on the ramparts, strengthening the defenses of my soul. I will always make sure I am inwardly armed so that I may never be conquered by the enemies of my salvation or overcome by sin. St. Paul warns the Ephesians: *“Put on the whole armor of God so as to be able to withstand the wiles of the devil”*.

“I will watch”, that is, concentrate my mind in order to see what God will say to me; i.e., to grasp what God commands me in the Scriptures and what encouragement God will give me, and what counsel. I will also listen to what God says in my heart with his own voice or through an angelic spirit. Proverbs says: *“Listen to instruction; for by listening the wise will grow wiser and the intelligent will receive instruction”*.

IN MARY THE WORK OF GOD IS PERFECT

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

There is a person who has already accomplished all that humanity desires and hopes for, a person in whom the work of Christ is perfected. It is the Virgin Mother of our Lord. Each of us can look to her and say: Here is God's work made perfect, here is the face 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 that they do r correspond to her, the splendor of God's gifts.

But what is meant when we say that we should imitate Mary's adherence to God, and express that in our lives? It means three things. It means listening to the Word, and it means saying 'Yes' to God, and it means serving.

Listening to the Word comes first. 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 her, 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*". She said "Yes" to God. From Mary's contemplative silence is born the second characteristic already mentioned, the capacity to say 'Yes'. She puts herself at the disposition of the divine call. "*He called those whom he intended and those he justified and with them he shared his glory.*" This somewhat obscure saying of St. Paul means to tell us that we have nothing to fear when we say "Yes" to God in our own lives. God guides us always and is always faithful to his words of love and choice.

Then there is the matter of service. Jesus' mother demonstrated her adherence to God. She allowed God to manifest his reign in her through her humble service as his servant, and she did it from the incarnation to the cross. And then she did the same in the early Christian community.

The Church was born out of this openness and readiness to serve. The Church is continually sustained and advanced by the generous service of all those baptized into Christ. The service of bishops and priests is part of this but not all of it. Each person serves in what God see as the right place for him or her. It is out of this spirit of service that civil society too is served and supported.

God calls each of us as God called, and still calls, Mary. We imitate her by doing the same three things that she did. Though this obedience comes salvation to the whole world. It comes, notice, through our obedience, just as it did through Mary's.