

# THE THIRTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

---

- Sun.     **The Sunday of Joy Never Ending**
- Nov. 17 **The Anniversary of the Founding of Mepkin Abbey**  
A reflection: The Gift of Unending Joy
- Mon.     Monday of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time  
18       **THE CALL TO PATIENT ENDURANCE**  
A reflection taken from a Letter by St. Nilus of Ancyra
- Tues.    Memorial of St. Mechtilde  
19       **THE RADIANCE OF A MONASTIC LIFE**  
A reflection developed from the Catholic Encyclopedia
- Wed.     Monthly Remembrance of the Dead  
20       **The RADIATING THE WITNESS OF OUR DEAD**  
A reflection developed from a text by St. Pope John XXIII
- Thurs.   Memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
21       **THE MEANING OF MARY'S PRESENTATION**  
A reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII
- Fri.     Memorial of St. Cecilia  
22       **THE WITNESS OF THE LIFE & DEATH OF CECILIA**  
A reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII
- Sat.     Saturday of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time  
23       **WHAT CHRISTIANS EXPECT & OFFER**  
A reflection from the Gospel of Liberation by J. Moltmann

# THE GIFT OF UNENDING JOY

In November of 1949 twenty-nine monks from Gethsemane Abbey arrived at Mepkin to found the Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Fifteen were novices, supposedly flexible enough to adapt to the hardships that go with founding a new community. An ancient motto to help us along the path to God says: “Through hardships, to Heaven”! Monastic life provides the hardships and God provides the grace to bear with them and persevere. Brother Boniface summed up the challenge and the grace by pointing to two of Mepkin’s huge live oaks: “Those great big oak trees were once just little nuts that held their ground!” Monks are nuts for Christ putting down roots into monastic life and persevering until death, as St. Benedict says, they show the Church and the world the inner beauty that grows in one who walks the monastic way with Jesus. It is a matter of seeking the face of God in prayer, work and community living. Only 10 of the 29 founders persevered to be buried at Mepkin.

All Christians are called to pray, to work, and to live in a community of mutual love, and monks seek to do this in the most thorough way possible. It is hard. Everything begins and ends with prayer—no matter how hot the summer heat or how hard the drudgery of turning what contained only a summer home into a property able to feed and cloth an entire community. Trappist tradition insists that monks support themselves by the work of their own hands. It took many experiments for the community to find success in raising chickens for their eggs, and then mushrooms.

This makes it difficult not to let prayer slip from the center of who you are and what you do. Besides, you live in silence and a kind of solitude; you rise early so you can get prayer and meditation in before the day’s work begins. Many of our human ways of finding encouragement and support are deliberately given up in monastic life. A monastery is a kind of half-open door through which one can glimpse the life and joy of the Kingdom of God. The name ‘mepkin’ is said to mean “beautiful place”. To translate natural into spiritual beauty it is important to have a beautiful church and liturgy. The monastery became the “Abbey of Our Lady of Mepkin”—Our Lady of the Beautiful Place—to show that beauty leads to joy. The present award-winning church was dedicated in 1993 with this in mind.

Mepkin Plantation didn’t put prayer first but focused on work, done by slaves. Monks work to become wholly free and make the fruit of their work a free gift to others. It is a life of turning from all that enslaves people and leads them away from love of God and loving respect for others. This is the path to God’s Kingdom and unending joy. The twin blessings that are the Mepkin community and its church remind all of God’s call to live now the life of charity that will last forever. Those who have gone into glory remind us who remain to keep death, and God, daily before our eyes. We show that we too can share God’s unending joy. The special thing our founders did was love one another in God for an entire lifetime. Deeper than hardships, and even sin, is the joy given us in Christ. It shapes each monk’s life as a witness for all to see and an invitation to follow Jesus. It is a response to the call that is faith and our call to celebrate on earth the Day of Unending Joy.

## **THE CALL TO PATIENT ENDURANCE**

**A reflection developed from a Letter by St. Nilus of Ancyra**

**We undergo many times of trial. In such times it is of great advantage for us to endure them patiently relying on the help of the Lord. Scripture says, “By patient endurance you will win life”. It did not say that you will win life by fasting, or by solitude or by silence or by singing psalms; yes, these things are very helpful in finding life with the Lord. But Scripture actually said: “by patient endurance” in every trial that overtakes you will find life.**

**We have many afflictions. They may come from being treated contemptuously or even insolently. They may involve all sorts of disgrace, either minor or major. They may be bodily and due to physical weakness or they may be spiritual and due to the inimical attacks of Satan. It doesn't matter whether they are trials caused by other people or by evil spirits. What matters is that “by patient endurance you will win life”.**

**Of course, we must also be prepared to give wholehearted thanks to God for trials. We must turn to God in prayer. This is part of being humble. God is our benefactor, God is our Savior—and the Savior of the world, and it is God who disposes all things in such a way as to bring about what is good, or certainly what is for our benefit.**

**St. Paul has written: “With patient endurance we run the race of faith that is set before us”. What has greater power than virtue? And what virtue has greater firmness and strength than patient endurance? Of course, I am speaking of endurance for God's sake.**

**Enduring for God's sake is the queen of virtues and even the foundation of virtue. It is for us a haven of tranquility. It is peace in time of war. It is calm in rough waters. It is safety even amidst treachery or danger. It makes those who practice it stronger than steel! No weapon, no bow or arrow, no troop of worked up soldiers, no siege engine, no flying spear, no enemy advance can harm such a person.**

**Do you fear an entire army of evil spirits? Do you fear the organization that promotes Satan's ends and sees you as an enemy? Do you fear the devil himself, even when he stands in front of you backed up by all his armies and devices? Do not be afraid. None of these things have power to injure a man or a woman who knows how to be patient and endure everything for the sake of God.**

**This is your daily task. It is your task this very day. Be confident and trust in the Lord.**

## **THE RADIANCE OF A MONASTIC LIFE**

**A reflection developed from an article in the Catholic Encyclopedia**

**Mechtilde fell in love with the monastic life when she was taken to see her older sister, Abbess Gertrude, when very young. Eventually, she was permitted to live in her sister's monastery and be educated there. After she made vows she was appointed Choir Mistress, both because of her beautiful voice and because she considered worship and praise the most important tasks she could do to please God.**

**Even as a girl, Mechtilde had the gift of respecting and caring for others. She liked people and they liked her. She loved to share what she experienced in seeking God, not only with her sisters in monastic life but with the girls who were sent to the monastery to be educated. One of these with the future St. Gertrude the Great.**

**This Gertrude, together with another nun who was close to Mechtilde, collected her stories about her experiences of God in prayer. When this became known it disturbed Mechtilde, who was eminently humble and wanted to live a kind of hidden life. So she took the problem to Jesus in prayer. She heard him say in reply: "It is by my will that all this has been committed to writing. You have no good reason to be concerned about it." In fact, the Lord told her that the book was to be entitled, The Book of Special Graces" and that reading it would move many to seek to love the Lord more deeply. When she realized that the book would be for God's glory she began to cooperate with its authors and even proof read what they had written down.**

**Mechtilde was very enthusiastic about liturgical music and singing and loved to make the community's worship more solemn and beautiful. The schola under her direction practiced a great deal but no one complained about this because she was very good at communicating her own enthusiasm and dedication. She was constantly sick but she never let this make her sharp or unpleasant. Her sisters nicknamed her "God's nightingale" and supported her consistently even when she held many choir practices.**

**Although she never advertised herself she had a great reputation as a guide to those who needed consolation or help to find light amid puzzlement and spiritual darkness. She was especially sought out by learned Dominicans and they saw to the translation of her book and promoted her teaching. Thus it became famous in Italy and in Florence people copied her ways of addressing the saints and praising them. She was quickly recognized as one of God's saints after her death and her death day (November 11<sup>th</sup>) became her feast day. She shows how dedication to God and joy in worship and prayer can make the christian and the monastic life radiant and attractive.**

## **THE RADIATING THE WITNESS OF OUR DEAD**

**A reflection developed from a text by St. Pope John XXIII**

**The Church is always called to bear witness to Jesus Christ. This is a call to help others because all that God would have them be for others, as well as for himself. It is only in Christ that we discover ourselves fully and recognize what wonderful gifts God has given us. God has created us to become persons who will radiate the beauty and love he gives us continually.**

**Each Christian is called to share in this vocation of the Church. It is not a vocation which ends at death. Rather, it only begins to assume its true dimensions when one enters fully into the Kingdom of God. It is only then that we enter fully into the beauty and goodness that God wishes to share with each of us. Think of the flowering of the vocation of the Mother of God which began when Jesus gave her to us all on the Cross!**

**In the immense field of activities which opens before the Church, and all who are her members, all people are embraced. All are invited into God's redeeming and perfecting love. Do we want to persuade all to accept this message and the vocation that goes with it? If we do we have accepted a direction for our living and one which continues even beyond the grave.**

**You know how many gifts you received from your parents, and from your brothers and sisters, and from the many others who reached out to you over the years of your growth as your full humanity began to flower. These gifts have not ceased to form and enrich us. Their influence will continue as long as our life lasts! We have been created for everlasting life, so how long will these gifts continue to enrich us and shape our own sharing with others?**

**The Church doesn't claim that it daily brings about the sort of transformation that the apostles experienced after Christ's resurrection or on the day of Pentecost. But the Church doesn't deny that God continues to work such transformations in individuals, and does it through the love and kindness of every one of those Christ has called to redemption. This is what he has called our dead to do for us, not only before but after their deaths.**

**How long has it taken you to begin to appreciate the gift of life that you received so many years ago? Those who are with God in God's Kingdom are only now beginning to fully appreciate the wonderful things God means to do through them. That means we too have not yet fully appreciated, or entered into, the love and gentleness and kindness and sternness which have been part of our upbringing and our lives. Let us ask these friends who have gone before us to teach us more and more deeply the lessons our departed have given us. Let us ask God to fully open our hearts to the love of those who gave us life and taught us how to live it in Christ! What better way can we find to honor them and to work with them in loving and sharing Christ with others.**

## **THE MEANING OF MARY'S PRESENTATION**

**A reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII**

**The Feast of the Presentation of Mary originated as a celebration of her gift of her total self to God, and her call to lead us to make the same gift of our selves. The feast originated in the tale told in an apocryphal gospel about the offering of Mary to be raised in God's Jerusalem Temple. This didn't happen historically and doesn't reflect genuine Jewish practice from the time of Jesus but the Church has seen in the tale an opportunity to call all God's people to the same sort of gift of self that Mary made, and that God used to make her the Mother of Jesus, and of us all.**

**Mary's vocation was a "religious" vocation. This is not to be taken in the technical sense the phrase now has. It means that with an eager and trustful heart Mary offered herself to God. No doubt she learned to make this gift from her parents. In effect, then, they led her to God and helped her offer herself to God. In this sense, Mary and her parents provide a model for all believing families, Christian and Jewish.**

**We don't all grow up, any more than Mary did, with a clear idea that we are called to help draw more and more people into God's Kingdom. But we now know that we are called to share our faith in God and in God's saving Kingdom with those given us as family members and, especially, as our children.**

**The voice of Christ continues to ring out over the entire world. Christ gently and firmly draws to God all who are open to becoming God's special people through prayer and self-gift in works of love and in fostering the fullness of life. What does it mean to respond to this call? It means losing oneself and in this very loss find oneself again. God repays those who give everything for his sake and for the sake of the salvation to which he calls all mankind a 100-fold recompense for giving themselves 100% to his love and service.**

**Think of how many ways of consecrating oneself 100% to God are offered to people throughout the world. The ancient monastic and contemplative orders and styles of life are only the beginning of these many ways. Each of us must answer the call of God in a unique way. Each life is unique and each has a unique witness to God's leading to the full flowering of our humanity and our many human talents. This is what Mary did and consider how vast God has made her opportunities and capabilities for sharing her love for God! What God did for Mary God would do for each of us, each in a special way.**

**Be courageous! Don't be afraid! God's love conquers all obstacles. We need only begin now, or continue now, to make our self-gift to divine love and watch it flower into a life of love and service, joy and peace.**

## **THE WITNESS OF THE LIFE & DEATH OF CECILIA**

**A reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII**

**The liturgy has much to say about Cecilia the virgin and martyr. She is an example of the singular beauty that Christ gives to those who love Him. She sheds upon so many the heavenly light and sweetness of faith in God. She was deeply conscious of the truths of her faith and of the duty to God which they taught her.**

**It has been said of St. Cecilia that wherever she went she bore witness to the Gospel. How blessed are all those who are able to do this following her example. Above all, how blessed are those who show us what a great honor it is for a follower of Christ to find the inner strength to sacrifice everything, even life itself, when faced with the choice of choosing justice and fraternity and mutual love and peace by obeying the teachings of our Redeemer. Jesus has given these ideals new and deeper meanings than ever before and shown us how to so live them that all the world will be redeemed and saved.**

**I can only wish that all might find within their hearts the divine gift of a desire to live frankly and generously in obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. Wasn't Jesus' new commandment a call to love others even as he has love them, and loved us? It isn't a path to personal or inner narrowness but to honor and openness and service. It is a path that multiplies care and concern and action on behalf of all that is good.**

**Cecilia was wealthy. A young man wanted to marry her, but not for herself. He lusted after her money and property. When she decided to give all she had inherited to the poor he denounced her as a Christian. He hoped this would cause her to turn back from her purpose out of fear for her life. It only caused her to make the even greater gift of her life to God. She went ahead and gave away her wealth and property but in giving it she gave her very life and self. This is the call that her feast proclaims. It is a call which God makes to all of us—whether we have any property or wealth or not.**

**What we give is not important unless the gift is yourself. You may give it in a lifetime of dedication to God and to love of others. You may give it by refusing to turn away from what you hear as God's call to you. Whatever that call costs, refusing to turn back is your path to God and to God's Kingdom.**

## **WHAT CHRISTIANS EXPECT & OFFER**

**A reflection from the Gospel of Liberation by Jurgen Moltmann**

**Everyday we look at the news. Every day we read the Bible. We want to participate in the history of God's coming into the world. We want to be involved in the fate of our world too. How can we bring together the community of those who hope in God and the community of those who share so many of the sorrows of our earth?**

**Two things concern us daily. The first is the future of God's coming. The second is the future of our earth, of the place where we live and work and have children and strive to teach them to live with others in a human and humanizing way. We recognize that a famine has come, a famine of hope. We want to meet this famine by sharing our own Christian hope and we want others to know that this doesn't free us from the need to share and suffer with those who have no hope.**

**Whoever perseveres in hope remains in love. Because we hope in Christ we refuse to let ourselves be embittered by all disappointments. We persevere in the love of Christ for the degraded and wronged. We bring friendliness into a world of cold indifference. We are fools for love because we always give an advance of trust.**

**And then there is this: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come". Perseverance until the end means going on ahead with the message of freedom and of the Kingdom as penetrating to all places and circumstances with the conviction that the final end is the Kingdom of Christ. The only persons who will remain until the end are those who, on God's account don't stay standing in place but go on ahead. They go to meet the coming of God into the world.**

**Christians don't have a point of view to defend but must travel in a direction that exists right now. Their battle line is the real suffering of the world that exists right now. We are to ignite the world with Gospel hope. It is a hope in an open and outgoing life that awakens faith. We must spread friendliness and love through our solidarity with all the suffering.**

**Isn't this the "end" the world needs? This is the "last" thing! It doesn't require wars, catastrophes, famines or any of the other evils. We experience such things because the "end" hasn't been reached. The Gospel of the Kingdom is proclaimed to all for to bring them hope! This hope is certain and definitive, and for the first time in history! Then the "end" will come.**

**Christian hope is that love will overcome sorrow. In the Kingdom peace and joy will laugh together. And Christ is coming as the judge who comforts all the deeply afflicted and gives the suffering freedom. Not as the world imagines but in a new way. Dare to hope and to share your hope.**



