

THE THIRTY-FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

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- Sun. The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King
Nov.24 **GRATITUDE TO GOD IS OPENNESS**
 A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Mon. Monday of the Last Week in Ordinary Time
25 **THE CROSS & JESUS' KINGSHIP**
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26 **THE CROSS WE FIND IN OURSELVES**
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27 **PREPARING FOR THE LAST THINGS**
 A reflection from Christ & Us by Fr. Jean Danielou
- Thurs. **THANKSGIVING DAY**
28 **GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE**
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29 **THE GIFT OF CARING FOR OTHERS**
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GRATITUDE TO GOD IS OPENNESS

A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard

When the Lord's angel came to Mary he announced that "*The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David*". What does it mean from the Lord to receive the throne of David? He didn't receive in the sense that the kings who came after David did. But the Lord was not to reign in the earthly Jerusalem but in a heavenly city that would take the place of the earthly one. Nor did he sit on an earthly throne for as God he was already seated upon the cherubim; that is, the Lord receives a real and eternal throne and not a merely symbolic and temporal one. We have to discern the realities that lie behind and beyond earthly symbols!

The like holds for the word: "*He shall reign over the House of Jacob forever and his kingdom shall have no end*". Christ won't reign over a kingdom that is earthly, and so temporary, but over an eternal kingdom. We are that eternal reality and the Lord will reign in our hearts and over us forever! To speak of the House of Jacob reminds us that the name 'Jacob' means 'supplanter' and that Christ will supplant the devil and all that is the devil's in our love and affection. He will struggle against the vices and evil desires in human hearts so that sin may no longer be said to reign in our bodies or minds but Jesus alone will reign there through grace. He does now and he will do so for all eternity.

Blessed are those in whom Jesus will reign for ever. They shall reign with Him. Of his kingdom in us there will be no end. Think how glorious that kingdom will be where all ordinary kings gather together to give united praise and honor to the King of kings and Lord of lords. In contemplating His splendor the just will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father.

Lord Jesus, out of the love you have for your people, remember me! When Jesus delivers his kingdom into the hands of his Heavenly Father may he save me! Grant that I, and all of us, may see that joy, the joy of all the chosen ones! Grant that all of us may rejoice with the gladness of God's People. Then I too will be able to praise him together with all of you.

Now, Lord Jesus, come and remove all stumbling blocks from within that Kingdom that is my heart and soul. You ought to reign within it so let that happen! Greed may come along and try to claim a throne in me. Or arrogance may try to dominate. Pride would be my king. Comfort and pleasure want to reign in me. Ambition, detraction, envy, anger and the like struggle within me to be supreme. Help me resist! I will win if I have your help! Jesus, my Lord, will keep me for himself if only I acknowledge his rights over me. He is God and he is my Lord and I declare that I will have no king but the Lord Jesus! Be my king!

THE CROSS AND JESUS' KINGSHIP

A reflection from New Wineskins by Sr. Sandra Schneiders

“People were watching Jesus and their leaders jeered at him: He saved others so let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One”. The true royalty of Jesus has nothing to do with human understandings of royalty. His royalty was rooted in his being God’s son and being identified with the Heavenly Father. Kingship was not something he could claim during his public life because he knew false ideas of royalty were at work in all hearts. Ordinary people wanted to make Jesus king because they wanted to replace current institutional idols with a new idol. As Jesus said: “You seek me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves.” They didn’t see him as a new divine revelation but as one who could fulfill their immediate needs better than any current ruler.

Jesus refused a royalty already corrupted by false ideas of what a king should be. He functioned openly only as a prophet. As such he reminded them of the past but declared a new kind of hope. There was the covenant God had made with his People. In poverty and powerlessness he energized them to hope for an alternative future. The reign of God would belong to the poor, the meek, the hungry, the dispossessed. It will be a reign of mutual love among equals. It will replace hierarchical relationships built on inequality, on relations of domination and power such as structured pagan society and oppressed the People of God.

Jesus didn’t just promise a future but inaugurated it in the present. He broke the grip of the religious establishment by declaring all religious laws except that of love bringing about human good and giving all free access to divine forgiveness—especially to those who didn’t qualify for it according to current institutional requirements. He broke the grip of the political establishment by declaring the equality of people as children of God called to mutual love. He announced the relativity of all political domination and the inevitability of its future demise. We are to look forward to the fullness of God’s reign. He broke down the barriers of stratified society by eating with sinners, associating with Samaritans and even pagans, and calling women to be disciples and messengers of the Gospel.

Jesus the prophet reminded people that God’s covenant was still effective and announced the reign which was coming even while he inaugurated it among them. He avoided identifying himself publicly as a king until he was beyond the corrupting reach of current false images of kingship. Only when he was definitely involved in the ultimate reversal that characterizes the divine reign, in the poverty and powerlessness of death from which only God could save him, did he claim his royal identity. From the cross he could reign as king, as one who reigned as a king should over all people living only under the law of mutual love such as he had lived.

THE CROSS WE FIND IN OURSELVES

A reflection from The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis

The words of our Savior may seem hard and grievous when he says, *“Forsake yourselves, take up the Cross and follow me”*. But it will be much more grievous to hear, *“Go away from me you acursed ones into the fire that shall last forever”*. Those who gladly hear and follow the words of Christ now won't need to fear hearing words of everlasting damnation. The sign of the Cross will appear in heaven when our Lord comes to judge the world and the servants of the Cross who conformed themselves in this life to Christ crucified on the Cross will go to Him, even as judge, with great faith and trust.

Why do you dread to take up his Cross? It is the way to the Kingdom of Heaven and there is no other way. In the Cross is health, life, the fullness of Heavenly sweetness. In the Cross is strength of mind and joy of spirit, the height of virtue and the perfection of holiness. There is no help or hope of everlasting life except through the power of the Cross.

Take up your cross and follow Jesus! You shall have life everlasting! He has gone before you bearing his Cross. He died for you upon that Cross so that you should in like manner bear the Cross with him. It is now one of penance and tribulation and you should be ready to die with Him as he has died for you. If you do then you will live with Him. If you are his companion in pain you will be his companion in glory.

Even if you arrange everything as you will it to be you will still find that you must of necessity suffer, either according to your will or against it. You will always find the cross. You will either feel pain in your body or have trouble of spirit. You will sometimes seem forsaken by God and sometime much vexed by a neighbor and, what is even more painful, you will at times be a burden to yourself. You will find no deliverance until it pleases Almighty God to so dispose things. God desires that you learn to suffer tribulations without consolation, so that you may learn to submit yourself wholly to Him. You will thus be made truly humble.

The cross is always at hand and it awaits you everywhere. Wherever you go you will always have yourself and so the cross. Turn in whatever direction you wish and you will find this cross. It is necessary that you always cultivate patience. It is fitting for you to do this if you would at last have inward peace. It is necessary to bear this cross if you seek a perpetual crown in Heaven.

PREPARING FOR THE LAST THINGS

A reflection from Christ & Us by Fr. Jean Danielou

The coming of Christ has as its purpose a set of divine works. Those to come won't be less mighty than those already completed but they will be more glorious. These take place in the sequence of God's mighty works throughout salvation history.

The first of these works is Judgment. It is the work by which righteousness, which is God's faithfulness to himself, is brought about fully. This righteousness is entirely positive. It is the fulfillment of the promises made by God. Judgment is that fulfillment and its manifestation. In other words, it brings to a completion the order of present things. Now true values are hidden but false values are everywhere put forth. Judgment exposes the nothingness of all that which is not founded upon God. It necessarily condemns that which is not founded on God. It reveals, on the other hand, that what is truly founded upon God has been established forever. Thus judgment is the manifestation of truth. It manifests the fact that the truth is Christ. It bears witness that those who have believed in Christ have lived in the truth. That is why it will "*prove the world wrong about sin and about rightness of heart; for I am going back to my Father*".

The second divine work is the Gathering. "*The Son of Man will send out his angels with a loud blast of the trumpet, to gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other*". This gathering, as presented in the Hebrew Scriptures, was one of the essential promises made by God through the prophets to a scattered people. Christ has already gathered together in Himself not only the scattered children of Israel but all the groups into which mankind has divided itself. These are made one in a single Church. The ancient liturgy provides a description of the day of the Final Gathering of those who are united in Christ but seem separate: "Gather, O Lord, your Church, from the towns and cities and markets, from the four corners of the universe". This is to be the fulfillment of the priestly prayer "*that they should all be one, as we are one*". Unity is a divine work. It is the distinguishing mark of Trinitarian life. The unity of the Church is its visible epiphany.

The final work is the resurrection. This is the repercussion in bodies and the entire cosmos of that which was already accomplished in the Person of Christ. Resurrection isn't merely the bringing back to life of bodies for the purpose of judgment. The general resurrection is of the just and the unjust; it is the divine act which bestows incorruptibility upon the bodies of the saints and delivers them from the slavery of spiritual death. The action of God reaches out to the utmost bounds of creation. God the Redeemer is also God the Creator. He intends to lose nothing of the creation in so far as it is his. Thus the cosmic meaning of the "parousia" is revealed in its entirety. Beyond humanity, God reaches out to the whole cosmos and raises up a new heaven and a new earth. We are part of that new creation forever.

GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE

A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard

We know many persons who ask insistently for what they know they lack, but we know exceedingly few who give proper thanks for all they have been given. It is right to pray insistently, but if we are ungrateful the effect of the prayer is, so to speak, negated. It may actually be a kindness to refuse ungrateful sinners what they ask lest they be judged more harshly for lack of gratitude.

How many monks do we see, and weep over, because they suppose that all is well for them so long as they persevere in monastic life. A worm of ingratitude is eating away their inner self but is careful not to let itself be seen lest they correct themselves out of shame. It isn't always beneficial to be cleansed of the leprosy that is a worldly life, as when an ulcer of ingratitude is destroying one. Only one out of nine lepers the Lord healed returned to give thanks. The grateful Samaritan knew that he possessed nothing that he had not received. By the act of thanksgiving he gave all he had received to God. Happy are those who return each gift of grace to the One who is the fullness of all grace!

It is ingratitude that gets in the way of progress in the life of grace. A gift is, in a sense, lost when it is received ungratefully. The one who considers self undeserving responds even to small kindnesses with large gratitude. Such a one neither doubts nor ignores the free gift bestowed.

In our own beginnings we came to count ourselves as strangers to God's kingdom. We acknowledged this and so found the humility and reverence that made us devout enough to be accepted by God as his own. How easy it is, and how soon we forget how much we have received. Whatever we have is a gift. It is wrong to take it for granted. This is especially so where our very friendship with God is in question. The Lord's enemies, Scripture tells us, belong to the Lord's own household. If we receive too lightly all we are given we can only expect to be judged more gravely.

I ask you all to humble yourselves more and more under the mighty but loving hand of God most high. Let us strive to keep far away from the most wicked vice of ingratitude. If we turn with all our devotion to giving thanks we gain the grace of our God and this alone is able to save us. Not only "by word or tongue, but by deed and truth" we need to show ourselves most grateful. God asks of us not only lip service by genuine acts of thanksgiving. What is most grateful than following our Lord in the deeds of love by which he drew us to God and to salvation. We gather around the altar as at the Lord's Last Supper and listen to his loving words and begin to see the loving deeds by which he loved us even to the very end that is the love by which a friend gives life itself from others. Our lives are gratitude when they are the very love with which Jesus loves the Heavenly Father and gives himself for us.

THE GIFT OF CARING FOR OTHERS

A reflection from a sermon by St. John Henry Newman

From the time of Adam to that of Christ, a shepherd's work has been marked out with special divine favor. Righteous Abel was a keeper of sheep and brought firstlings as offerings. "*The Lord has respect for Abel and his offering*". To whom did angels bring the news that a savior had been born? God took David away from a sheepfold to reign over Israel. When brought before Saul, David gave an account about how a lion and a bear had taken a lamb from the flock and how he killed them both and saved the lamb. Shepherds of old were persons of peace and of struggle. Their duties were rough and they had to suffer, but also had opportunities for exploits.

All of these were "figures" in comparison to the Good Shepherd, the truth. If shepherds live simple lives unknown in kings' courts or the halls of commerce, how much more the carpenter's son who was meek and lowly of heart? If shepherds suffer, how much more the one who was a man of sorrows and laid down his life for the sheep? David defended his father's sheep at Bethlehem; Christ, born and heralded to the shepherds of Bethlehem, suffered on the cross in order to conquer.

Friends, we say daily that "we are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture". We also say that "we have erred and strayed from God's ways, like lost sheep". We mustn't forget these twin truths. We mustn't ever forget, on the one hand that we are sinners. We mustn't ever forget, on the other hand, that Christ is our guardian and guide and is The Way and The Truth and The Life. Christ is a light for our paths and a lantern to guide our feet in the darkness.

Christ is our shepherd. Christ's sheep listen to Christ's voice! Because we are Christ's sheep we know Christ's voice. We hear and we recognize this voice and we follow it. We obey what Christ tells us. We must beware of not following when Christ goes before us and leads us to a place we have not been before. When does he do this? When he tells us: "Love one another as I have loved you!" We know how he has loved us even to dying for us to save us from Satan's wolves. We are to follow our shepherd in this as well.

Have you not be called to follow Christ in caring for others? That is what his "new commandment" asks of us. We belong to Christ's flock and he asks us to help care for one another with the same love he shows in caring for us. This is a great gift. We are to give what we have been given and to give of ourselves just as Christ has given of himself. As he is our shepherd so we are to be shepherds to one another. The gift you have been given you are to give just you received it—freely and with a loving heart.

BECOMING GOOD FISH AT THE MASTER'S TABLE

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

In celebrating the glorious triumph of Blessed Andrew we exult in the words of grace that came from him as he was taken to the Cross. He said he wanted to die on the cross that he had always loved. So he would enter the Kingdom of God. Yes, it is true. If you reflect you will realize that the wood of the cross always brings forth life. Why should we wonder if the Lord gives sweetness through the cross when he also give it the blessing of calling forth the fire of love. Let there be joy even in tribulation and the devil will have no means of alluring us. Those who are fed by fasting have no desire for ordinary delicacies.

The Law of Moses decrees that fish who have scales and fins are clean. The great sea of the Church holds many fish fit for the table in the Master's kingdom. Andrew was a master of fishing and knew how to catch clean fish, in this case fish whose scales are like a coat of mail that turns aside all the arrows of temptation and makes them ready to follow their Lord wherever he leads. These are chosen to be the Lord's faithful stewards. Some, like those of the Order of Preachers, don't stay in one place but go to many lands with the Gospel. There are other clean fish, however, who live as it were in ponds; they serve the Lord in cloisters.

It is right that monasteries should be compared to ponds where fish can't wander but are always ready for the spiritual feast the Lord prepares. They are always saying, "When will he come and bear me away?" These have scales that are woven into a single coat of mail by the virtue of patience. In different trials patience manifests itself in different ways. Its triumph brings joy and lightens life so the fish can swim more gracefully and happily. Indeed, they need a twofold joy, as a fish needs two fins. They rejoice in hope and they rejoice in suffering.

But consider the journey that is growth in Christ. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Hope is in the middle. The fulfillment is charity. The one who begins with fear bears the cross of Christ with patience. The practitioner of this virtue bears it with glad hope. The perfect follower of Christ embraces all ardently and with love. If I reflect on the charity of Christ I find myself astounded by his compassion. It is not only the robust like Blessed Andrew whom the Lord takes as his own. He was sent to those who need a physician. Indeed, when the Lord suffered in the garden an angel of the Lord was given the blessing of being sent to strengthen him. I ask you angel, whom do you console? He is the great comforter who is sent to comfort all others. How, then, should I despair no matter what my tribulation because you will comfort me as you have been comforted. What are we told? "*The sufferings of this present time aren't worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed!*" Knowing this I am prepared to keep the commandments and am not troubled.

Let us never lose hope! Let the memory of Andrew who reached the summit of love comfort us and help us. Don't say, "But I'm not an apostle!" No one reaches the top of a ladder instantly. You reach the heights by climbing and not by flying. Let us climb, then, with the two feet that are meditation and prayer. Meditation teaches us what is lacking and prayer takes care that it does not continue to be absent. The one shows you the way and the other enables you to walk the way. By meditation we learn of the dangers we face. By prayer we avoid all dangers and arrive safely. This is what Blessed Andrew shows us. He began as we do and he shows us the height to which God's grace enables us to climb. We will find ourselves at the Master's table and find that we are also the Master's delight.