

# THE SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sun.      The Second Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Jan.19    OUR LIFE IS TO BE SHAPED BY CHRIST'S PRESENCE  
            A reflection from St. Cyril's Commentary on John ch. 2

Mon.      Memorial of Bl. Cyprian Michael Tansi  
20        SERVING GOD IN HIS PEOPLE  
            A reflection taken from "My Catholic Faith & I" website

Tues.     Memorial of St. Agnes  
21        GIVING ONESELF ENTIRELY TO GOD  
            A reflection developed from a Wikipedia article

Wed.      Day of Prayer for Legal Protection of the Unborn  
22        THE VOCATION TO PROTECT LIFE  
            A reflection from "How to Build a Culture of Life"  
            on Christ Our Hope (official) website

Thurs.    Thursday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time  
23        OUR SACRIFICE TO GOD  
            A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

## MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri.        Memorial of St. Francis de Sales  
24        OUR SEARCH FOR THE KISS OF FAITH  
            A reflection from Treatise on the Love of God by St. Francis de Sales

Sat.        Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul  
25        WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD ISN'T  
            A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard

## **OUR LIFE IS TO BE SHAPED BY CHRIST'S PRESENCE**

A reflection taken from St. Cyril's Commentary on John ch.2

***“When John saw Jesus coming toward him he said: Behold the Lamb of God; he takes away the sin of the world.”*** Notice that he doesn't call us to *“prepare”* for Christ. That would be out of place because the one we were preparing for is present; we see him with our own eyes. This fact calls for an explanation and of a different type than when we were preparing.

What we need is an explanation of the one who is present, of why he has come down from Heaven to us and what we are to do because he is here. In effect, that is what John's words begin. ***“Behold, the Lamb of God!”*** This reminds us of Isaiah's words: ***“He was like a sheep being led to the slaughter; he was like a lamb before his shearer; he didn't open his mouth.”*** He came to save. In the past the Law of Moses was the instrument of salvation but it was only a foreshadowing because it was partial in not reaching out to embrace the entire world. Its mercy was extended only to Israel. But now the *“true”* victim lamb, one without blemish, has been led to the slaughter. What was partially prefigured is revealed to all and banishes sin from the entire world.

Think of what this means. Christ is to overthrow the one who destroyed the world; he has abolished death by dying for the entire human race; he has released us from a curse. The words ***“Dust you are and to dust you shall return”*** were just a statement of fact but it was made a curse by our sin. The sin was following our own will about what for us will be good or bad and not God's will. It destroyed our right relationship with God. So Christ has come as a Second Adam, not merely of earth but of Heaven. He delivers us from the death our sin brought upon us and from the corruptibility that goes with mere dust. He persuades us to be reconciled to God's word and so to God, and so secures eternal life for us.

If that is to be true in fact and for us we have to live upright lives. That is the path to the Kingdom of Heaven. One Lamb died for all of us. He died to do the Father's will when he said it would be good for him to die on the cross. He died to bring us all into reconciled harmony with God's will for us. We are now subject to God. Christ died for us *“that all might live no longer for themselves but for him who died and was raised to life for them”*. That is who we are and how we are to accept Christ.

Our many sins made us subject to death and corruption. The Heavenly Father gave his Son as our redemption, one given for all, since all are to be in him and he is greater than all others. The one died so that all might live in Him. Death, in effect, swallowed the Lamb of God but in forcing death to disgorge him he forced it to disgorge us all with him. That is why it is so important for us to be one in and with Christ. Death was destroyed because sin was destroyed and it had been brought into being by sin.

Sin is being destroyed in us as we do the Heavenly Father's will even to the point of death. Death is, as it were, the branch of sin, which is the root. When the root is torn up the branch can't survive. ***“O death, where is your victory! O Grave, where is your sting?”*** As the psalmist says, ***“all wickedness shall hold its tongue”!*** From now on there will be no one to denounce sinners for their weakness. God is the one who acquits us! Sin caused a curse to be made of our origin in dust but *“Christ has redeemed us from the curse”*. He took upon himself its consequence and did it for our sake. For us there is no more curse where there is no more sin. Life by the Heavenly Father's word as Christ lived by it. He is saving us.

## **SERVING GOD IN HIS PEOPLE**

A reflection from “My Catholic Faith and I” web site

Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi was the second son of a father obsessed by getting his family out of poverty. As part of this effort, he sent Michael to a mission school. There he learned about Jesus and decided to be baptized. He used this education to become a teacher and worked his way up to being head of a local school. At this point he decided he wanted to be a priest, which his father opposed for economic reasons, and which required twelve years of schooling under exceedingly strict discipline. Black seminarians were mistrusted because their cultures were seen as pagan and those who lived them were mistrusted. Nevertheless, he managed to stay in the seminary and was ordained in 1937.

He thought for himself and was totally dedicated to what he saw as right. Most priests in his area were Irish missionaries who insisted living in the same comfort they would have at home. Thus, it was expensive for people to have a priest and support his lifestyle. Michael lived at the poverty level of his people and learned how to help them, for instance, build better houses. He identified with his people, shared their poverty, and visited his large parish on foot or riding a bicycle, and worked to help them live better and for these reasons was a very successful pastor. He refused to follow those who became priests or nuns in order to live more comfortably. His lifestyle amazed and even shocked other priests and many Catholics. He, however, went on to become a community organizer and promoter of development. He worked very hard to help the poor and needy.

He was widely known for opposing cultural practices that abused women or used them sexually and taught women parishioners to fight back against those mistreating or trying to rape them. He physically helped one parishoner fight off such an attack and then persuaded her to take the attackers to court. She won the case and this came to be considered a milestone in the Nigerian struggle for women’s rights. He opposed traditional beliefs in witchcraft—his own mother had been accused and killed as a witch. On the other hand, he was considered a perfectionist and this caused resentments.

At the beginning of the 1950s Fr. Michael felt drawn to monastic life and his bishop helped him join a British trappist monastery with the hope that he would return and found such a monastery in Nigeria. Even in this he was seeking to serve God’s people. He did succeed in making solemn vows, though he found the system in the novitiate psychologically painful in a way that led him to reject his previous perfectionism. He was still a person who went his own way—for example, he didn’t memorize the psalms as he was asked to do, but made up words for himself as he sang quietly in choir. In the end, he wasn’t able to return to Nigeria due to serious illness. He bore this with great fortitude. One of his doctors sought help in working with him: “This man”, he said, “must be in terrific pain but will only admit that he has “a little” pain.” He died in 1964 and was beatified in 1998. He died as a monk of Mt. St. Bernard Monastery.

## **GIVING ONESELF ENTIRELY TO GOD**

**A reflection developed from an article in Wikipedia**

**It seems that Agnes was born in 291 CE and martyred at the age of 13. She was raised a Christian and very early determined to give herself to God by refusing marriage and dedicating herself to prayer and good works. The Acts of her martyrdom (which was written only in the fifth century) says that she was denounced as a Christian during the persecution of Diocletian. Exactly how she died is not known though it seems probably that she was beheaded. A host of legends has grown up concerning her condemnation to a brothel and the circumstances that made it impossible for the sentence to be carried out, resulting in her head being cut off in the courtroom.**

**The daughter of her nurse, we are told, was found praying at her tomb in one of the catacombs and, refusing to leave, was martyred there. This girl, name Emerentiana, is coupled with Agnes in popular veneration. Agnes is patron of young women generally and a prime example of the practice of consecrating oneself and one's life to God. All the legends focus on the belief that God cares for those who love him with their whole heart and will not allow anything to draw one away from him.**

**It was customary for the children of the wealthy, like Agnes, to be espoused at the age of 12 or 13. It was this custom in which Agnes refused to participate. Since the status of wife and mother was the highest to which most Roman women could aspire, this renunciation was viewed as a very impressive act of self-denial and of losing one's life in order to gain it in God. One was "renouncing the world" as fully and concretely as was ordinarily possible. She was, in the mind of her contemporaries, simply refusing to allow herself to be treated as a sex object or used as a means to gain wealth and social position. That means Agnes' refusals were seen as directed against practices which used religion and marriage to gain ordinary "worldly" advantages and so devalued these realities. She insisted that her identity as a Christian was more important than any such advantages.**

**In this sense, her martyrdom makes a point about the sacredness of human life as such, and about the way Christian faith values life for itself as seen in God. There is no age which is unable to respond to God's grace and love by giving oneself whole heartedly. Agnes has always been seen as a model for all to imitate. Seek God and do not bother to worry about the cost. You, O God, give us what is greater than any good we could lose by making to a complete gift of self to you.**

## **THE VOCATION TO PROTECT LIFE**

From “How to Build a Culture of Life” from “Christ our Hope” website

To understand more fully how to defend and protect human life we must first consider who we are and at the deepest level. God creates us in his image and likeness, which means we are made to be in loving relationship with God. The essence of our identity and worth, the source of our dignity, is that we are loved by God. We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the gifts the Father’s love has given us and our real capacity to become the images of his Son.

We are called to divine intimacy, true communion with God, and we can grow in this closeness with him through daily prayer, reading the Scriptures and frequent participation in the sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist.

The knowledge and realization of how deeply we are loved by God elicits a response of love that simultaneously draws us closer to God and impels us to share his love with others.

Embracing a relationship with God means following in Christ’s footsteps, wherever he may call. Being a disciple of Jesus naturally includes sharing the Gospel with others and inviting them to a deeper relationship with God. As Christians, our identity and mission are two sides of the same coin. We are called to be missionary disciples.

When we live in union with God, open to his promptings, we’re more able to see the opportunities for witness and his guidance in responding to them. We may fear doing the wrong thing or saying the wrong word but we don’t need to be afraid. Jesus is with us until the end of the age.

As a society and as individuals, we often measure ourselves by false standards. But God’s love is the true source of our worth, identity and dignity. It really isn’t a question of who we are but of whose we are. God’s love will never change and nothing can reduce our God-given dignity.

When a woman becomes pregnant and her boyfriend threatens to leave if she continues the pregnancy, we need to lovingly walk with her. When family members or friends become seriously ill, we need to assure them that God offers them something marvelous and that they still have purpose.

This is how we answer our missionary call. This is how we build a culture of life, one that joyfully proclaims the truth of God’s love, purpose and plan for each person. Changing the culture is a process of conversion that begins in our own hearts and includes a willingness to be instructed and a desire to be close to Jesus—the deepest source of joy.

When we encounter Christ, experience his love and deepen our relationship with him, we become more aware of our own worth and that of others. Our lives are often changed by the witness of others, so too other’s lives may be changed by our witness and authentic friendship. Let us not be afraid. God is always with us.

## **OUR SACRIFICE TO GOD**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine**

If you want to please God you need only turn to Scripture to know what you should do. The fiftieth psalm says: *“Had you desired a sacrifice I certainly would have offered one, but you take no delight in burnt offerings”*. These negative words need to be complemented by positive ones: *“A sacrifice acceptable to God is a contrite spirit, a broken and contrite heart God will not despise”*. We can always find something to offer.

Indeed, we are not asked to offer animals as in the days of the patriarchs. But you people through generations have the same faith even though the sacramental signs have been modified. Changes in the outward signs of faith have not affected the underlying truth. Rams, lambs, calf, and goats—whatever the victim once was it foreshadowed Christ. He is the one who leads his flock, and it is Christ who offers himself instead of the son of Abraham. Both the ram and Isaac were foretypes of Christ. As Isaac carried the wood for sacrifice so Christ carried his cross, but whereas the ram whose horns were caught in a thicket was offered in place of Isaac there was no substitute for Christ.

Behold the Lamb of God; behold Christ! He takes away the sins of the world. The ancient patriarchs believed in Christ, their Lord and ours. Not only did they believe him to be the Word of God, but they also believed that the man Christ Jesus is the mediator between God and humanity, and by word and prophecy they handed on that faith to us. That is what St. Paul means when he says: *“We have the same spirit of faith and therefore it is written: I believed and I have spoken accordingly.”*

King David, in the psalm I have already quoted, spoke of sacrifices which are no longer offered to God. However, he showed the vision of a prophet in that same psalm. Setting aside the practices of his own day, he looked into the future and taught us that *“The sacrifice acceptable to God is a contrite spirit”*.

Well, then, we have a sacrifice to offer. No need to go in search of a flock of sheep or sail to distant lands to bring back spices. Search your own heart and let it be broken and contrite. Are you afraid that such breakage will be the death of your heart? Don't be afraid! In the very psalm I have been quoting we find the words: *“A pure heart create in me, O God”*. Yes, create a pure heart in me, Lord. And that it may be created let the old, unclean heart within me indeed be broken!

## **OUR SEARCH FOR THE KISS OF FAITH**

**A reflection from Treatise on the Love of God by St. Francis de Sales**

**Under the rays of the noonday sun we are no sooner aware of its brightness than we feel its heat. So it is with the light of faith; no sooner has it shed the splendor of its truth on our mind than straightaway the will feels the glowing warmth of charity. With infallible certitude faith gives us knowledge of God's existence, shows us that God is infinite goodness, that God is capable of sharing his life with us ... indeed, not merely that he can do this but that he wants to. With this in view, he has provided, with indescribable tenderness, all that we need to attain the bliss of eternal glory.**

**We have a natural tendency toward the supreme good. As a result the human heart knows an innermost eagerness, a constant restlessness, which it has no way of quieting. It has no way of hiding its lack of perfect satisfaction, of utter contentment. Once faith has pictured to the mind the beauty of the goal of its natural tendency, God alone knows how we thrill through and through with joy and happiness. As though caught off balance by the sight of such superlative beauty, we cry out with love: "How fair you are, my true love, how fair!"**

**Abraham's servant Eliezar went in search of a wife for his master's son. He was not certain of finding anyone as fair and gracious as he hoped. But when he did discover her by the well, when he saw her beauty, her charm, and most of all when she had been given to him to take to his master, he fell to worshiping and praising God with a joyful gratitude that knew no bounds.**

**The human heart is drawn to God by a natural tendency, even though a person has no clear knowledge of who God is. When we discover God at the well of faith, when we see how good God is, how beautiful, how kind, how gracious toward everyone, how ready to give himself as the supreme good and to all want him—heaven knows the gratification we feel, the inspirations we have to unite ourselves to him forever with a goodness so supremely loveable!**

**I have found him at last, cries the person moved in this way. I have found the one I have been looking for, and now I am satisfied. But just as Jacob wept for joy after he had seen the fair Rachel, after he had greeted her with a kiss, even so the human heart melts with love when it has found God, when it has received from him the first kiss of faith. It has had the first sight and taste of the infinite treasures that are supreme beauty!**

## **WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD ISN'T**

**A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard**

The apostle Paul is usually brief in words and rich in meaning. The Kingdom of God is not, he says, food and drink but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Listen to these words: "*Food for the belly and the belly for food, but God will destroy both*". Why, then, do so many love vanity and despise truth?

If the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, then what is it? It is justice and peace and joy in the Spirit. Is this what you strive and struggle for? Indeed, there isn't anyone who doesn't want to be glad. The first goal is to do justice so as to be eventually embraced by joy. But what all want, even the angels, is that peace which surpasses all understanding.

O Heavenly Jerusalem, praise and redouble your praises because your gates have been closed with the safest bars and unshakable bolts. No enemy enters, no friend exits. You contain no temptations, no squadron of evil thoughts upsets you. All gaze upon the essence of divinity, not deceived by any imagination of the corporeal. Behold, in the end joy, and joy without end.

God spoke and all creatures were made. After that, his Majesty being inflamed with a most fervent love for you, redeemed you. Nailed to a cross, doomed to death, regarded as a laughingstock, your God was made your brother. He also added something more special in that he has dragged us from the broad way that leads to death and has placed us in the congregation of the just. But here and now we must make peace. We aren't immune to scandals, so if you remember your brother or sister has anything against you, be humble enough to beg pardon. Learn of me, says the Lord, for I am meek and humble of heart.

The beginning of the joy we long for comes like a little drip splashed from the river that flows through God's city. When will we be plunged into that spring of divinity with its everlasting joys? When shall we come and appear before the face of God? So look at all that is with the eye of your heart. Let us faithfully pursue the happiness of justice and peace and joy in the Spirit. Why have we come here? We have come to serve the King who is blessed forever. That is what St. Paul did. Let us imitate him in fervor and labors and we shall be like him in joy.