

FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun.** **THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**
Feb. 9 **BEING LIGHTS TO THE WORLD**
A reflection from a catechesis by St. John Chrysostom
- Mon.** **Memorial of St. Scholastica**
10 **INSPIRING OTHERS TO LOVE GOD**
A reflection in the form of a traditional prayer
- Tues.** **Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes**
11 **THE FAITH THAT SAVES & HEALS**
A reflection developed from an article on Catholic Online
- Wed.** **Memorial of Bl. Humbeline**
12 **HUMILITY AS THE LAMP STAND FOR GOD'S LIGHT**
A reflection developed from an article on Catholic Online
- Thurs.** **Monthly Memorial of the Dead**
13 **THE LIGHT SHINING ON US FROM OUR DEPARTED**
A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Fri.** **Memorial of SS. Cyril and Methodius**
14 **CHRIST'S LIGHT SHINES THROUGH WORLDLY EVENTS**
A reflection developed from an article on Catholic Online
- Sat.** **Memorial of Our Lady**
15 **THE MAGNIFICAT AND THE CHURCH**
A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

BEING LIGHTS TO THE WORLD

A reflection from a catechesis by St. John Chrysostom

All of us have been clothed in Christ. That means we have been made fit to have Christ dwelling within us. We have divine light dwelling within us. If we choose to do so, we can show others this light and we can do it without saying a word. This can be done by the strict discipline of our lives. This is what Christ was speaking of when he told us: *“Let your light so shine before all that people may see your good works and praise your Father in Heaven”*.

Notice carefully that Christ light isn't one that reaches the bodily senses. What it does is illuminate the beholder's mind and heart and soul. What it does is rid them of the darkness that evil engenders. Those who encounter this light are invited to accept the light of Christ themselves and then let it shine forth from their lives. Christ is light that has become our light. He does this by helping us follow his example of virtue.

What Christ wants is that his light, become ours, should shine so brightly that it will illuminate both each believer and those who need special help. Sensible light drives away darkness and enables all who travel to follow a straight course in this sensible world. The spiritual light which shines from blameless conduct illuminates people who can't see clearly how they could live a virtuous life. Their spiritual eyesight had been blurred by error. Christ's light shines through our conduct in a way that purifies the inward vision of all who see us. Henceforth they too know how to walk in the path of virtue.

Christ wants our virtue, the perfection of our living and the good works that we do to inspire all who see us and our works to praise our God and our common Master. There is nothing that I think more important than that we answer this call to be lights. But that means there is nothing more important than striving to live so perfectly like Christ that all who see may praise God and take new courage to walk in his way.

The perfection of a human life is a work of the Spirit. As you let the Spirit fill you and live in and through you the effect is to open doors for the Spirit in others. You glorify the Lord of all creation. You are made fit to live the life of the Eternal Kingdom. All this is accomplished by the grace, mercy and goodness of God's Only-Begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. If you have experienced Christ in the Spirit working in you what more could you want than to thank and glorify Him. That is what you are doing now by opening your heart to this instruction I am presenting to you. Don't fail to accept this grace and let it unfold within you as an ever new openness to showing forth how life is transformed by faith in Christ. You need no promise of reward to motivate you. The experience of living and rejoicing in Christ is its own reward.

INSPIRING OTHERS TO LOVE GOD

A reflection in the form of a traditional prayer

You have left this world, Scholastica, but you have neither left nor forgotten us. Our souls don't yet have the same spiritual beauty in God's eyes as your does. Yet we are called to the same Kingdom as you dwell in. It may be that many years have yet to pass before we are fit for the Heavenly abode where we shall see both God and your glory in God. We ask that your prayers rain down upon us as earthly water did on that night when God forced your brother to spend the night talking about the wonders of the Kingdom still to come. By your prayers may we obtain a like faith and love, and that we may indeed received these gifts obtain for us the grace of repentance.

You sought only such conversation as was about God and eternity in God's Kingdom. Help us to love and seek only that talk which leads to God and to shun all useless and idle chatter. Your heart had mastered the secret of charity toward all, so we ask the grace to let our hearts be softened in the same way to love our neighbors fully. Let all coldness and indifference be banished from our hearts and make us love one another as God would have us love.

You are a Dove of Holy Solitude, Scholastica! You remember the cloister that, like a tree, gave shelter here on earth. All those who live a cloistered life according to the Rule of St. Benedict honor you as a spiritual daughter of St. Benedict. This tree has been filled with vigor but in our times seems to have withered. Pray that the first vigor of this monastic life be restored. Protect is by the motherly care of your prayers and cover those who seek to live in the way a shelter from storms and the blessing of honoring above all the Heavenly Father who calls us to live this life of perfection.

Blessed Scholastica, heaven has received you, and with a joyous welcome like that given to your brother, Benedict. You now live at the very source of that love which fills the holy souls in God's Kingdom. You have gained everything you asked of our Divine Master. Drink of that fount of life to your heart's eternal content and obtain this marvelous grace for us. But don't forget this lower world. For you, as is the case for us, it was a place of trial. But these trials led you to the Heavenly Homeland, and there, like a Dove in a cleft in the Holy Rock, your soul abides. Nothing on this earth succeeded in drawing you to pursue it rather than our Heavenly Spouse.

Who was it that gave you such sublime knowledge and made you so wise in love? On that last day of meeting with your brother, the Spirit made you even wiser than he was. It was God who wished to show that a holy and tender charity is dearer to Him than even the most careful fidelity to rules that are only human. So you and your brother were soon lost in contemplation of Infinite Beauty and in gratitude for Divine Guidance and Providential Care. The Heavenly Lord himself had given you both a proof that he would have you neglect all else for the sake of true Heavenly Charity. Creatures could teach you no more about seeking our God above and beyond all other things. He was shortly to take you to himself, O Scholastica. By your prayers aid us in learning to seek God first and to love God and the work of helping others long for and find God and do this above every other human thing. May we learn to honor you in seeking our common Spouse. To God be glory and praise for ever! Amen!

THE FAITH THAT SAVES AND HEALS

A reflection developed from an article of "Catholic OnLine"

In the Gospels Jesus often tell those who have asked him for healing that it is their faith which has saved them and made them well. That faith has often required a fair bit of stubbornness to overcome obstacles coming between them and the Lord. This is the case for Bernadette Soubirous and her role in establishing the shrine to Our Lady of the Rosary at Lourdes.

Bernadette, a sister and a neighbor were out looking for firewood that could be sold in order to buy bread. The families involved were clearly very poor and the children were able to help support their own families for doing such work. They were near a grotto joined to a kind of spring. The ground was muddy with pools of water. No wonder other wood gatherers hadn't collected all the sticks lying there. Bernadette tells us that she saw our Lady while she was taking off her socks before going through the water and mud to pick up those sticks. As can be seen from a photo taken of her just before the apparition, she seems a serious and very down to earth young girl, not the kind of person one would expect to "see things".

When the story of what had happened got back to the girls' parents they were spanked and disciplined. They were also told not to go back to that place again. But Bernadette disobeyed. Three days after the original apparition she went back, this time equipped with holy water to throw at any apparition so that if it were diabolical it would disappear. But when Bernadette did this the Lady only smiled and invited Bernadette to pray the rosary. Then the Lady asked her to dig in the muddy ground and, when a spring appeared, she was told to drink some of the water. This became known and things began to take their course. Those who heard about the apparitions and believed they were from God began to use the water as a faith symbol of God's presence and some were cured. Some of these turned out to be fakes but others seemed genuine.

Matters were now beyond Bernadette's control. The civil and Church authorities got involved. The authorities had a water sample analyzed by a chemist who declared it was ordinary water but fit to drink. The Church decided to ignore what was happening and wait to see what came of faith in the curative properties of the spring's water. The grotto was put behind what we would call a police line and people were forbidden to go to the spring. The order became so controversial that the central government intervened and ordered that people be allowed to do as they would. Eighteen years later, Pope Pius IX approved the devotion and had a statue of Our Lady which was now at the grotto crowned as a sign of this.

Bernadette was told by the Lady that she wouldn't be happy in this life but would find never ending joy in the next. The message was always that people should pray and turn to God in repentance. She last visited the grotto only six months after the first vision of Our Lady. She did continue to trust in God and in the Lady as God's messenger but didn't make a career of the visions or the miraculous spring. She lived an ordinary life of faith and insisted that is what all were asked to do by the Lady. In short, we are all to turn to God and make prayer a central feature of our relationship with God. Bernadette herself remembered the Lady as very beautiful and as radiating a marvelous light. In effect, that light continued to shine through those who came in faith to Lourdes to seek healing and a transformed life from God and Jesus Christ.

HUMILITY AS THE LAMP STAND FOR GOD'S LIGHT

A reflection developed from various OnLine sources

Blessed Humbeline was the youngest sister of St. Bernard. She married and had children but was unsatisfied with her life as a way of serving God and so decided to seek counsel from her brother. St. Bernard, misjudged the reason for her coming to him, and refused to see her until she humbly sent him a message explaining that she had come to ask his advice about her way of best serving God. His advice was that she should obtain her husband's permission to become a nun and so spend the remainder of her life seeking God above all else.

Humbeline had to work for some years before she was able to obtain her husband's permission to leave married life and enter a monastery. She went to Jully, whose abbess was the sister of her husband. She remained there for the rest of her lifetime, though she was later elected abbess, or prioress—the sources don't make it clear how the community at Troyes saw the matter. The sister-in-law went away to found a new monastery and Humbeline was elected in her place.

She devoted her life to loving service of her sisters, and seems to have been a good and faithful superior. Her monastery lived the Rule of Benedict but was not joined to the new order of Citeaux. As far as we know, St. Bernard and others had nothing but praise for the life of the nuns living under the guidance of Humbeline. She had made the humility with which she responded to her brother's harsh judgment the rule of her life and ministry to her sisters.

We are told that St. Bernard was present at his sister's death and that she told him she was tremendously grateful for his advice that she leave married life and take up instead the monastic life. She had found it a choice filled with joy and inner peace. This, no doubt, is a word for us even more than for St. Bernard. One who lives the monastic life fully, without looking back at what has been left behind, finds it a source of joy and mutual help that leads one to a spiritual fulfillment not found in any other way. That is what Humbeline experienced and what she recommended to many others.

St. Benedict presents humility as a key virtue for those who choose to walk the monastic way toward God. Humbeline gives us an example of a person who wasn't filled with self-concern or self-importance. She was willing to rely on others whom she could see where dedicated first of all to loving God and all the others who choose to seek Him as well.

She knew that Bernard had made this choice and so was fully prepared to hear and follow his advice, as long as that advice was consonant with fulfilling the obligations to God and others she had already undertaken. That her husband eventually gave his permission for her to enter monastic life meant that she had his support and his willingness to give up all the types of support he had received from her through out their years as husband and wife. She hoped what she did would also lead him to place God even more practically at the center of his life. All of this exemplifies what humility looks like practically. Removing self from the center of one's life makes room for God to fill that place. That is what can bring us all to God and to God' light. It makes us ready to live the life of the Kingdom of Heaven. Like Humbeline we become lamp stands from which the light of Christ shines.

THE LIGHT SHINING ON US FROM OUR DEPARTED

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Second Vatican Council reminds us that every intercession on the part of the saints depends on Christ and is linked to him. He is the sole mediator between God and human beings. That means we depend very much, granted our weakness, on the inseparability of our departed and Christ. They intercede for us together with Christ and in virtue of his power as mediator. It is to their total gift of self to Christ that they owe their sanctity and their intercessory power.

Those who have passed through death and are with God vividly manifest to human kind the presence and the countenance of Christ. God and Christ speak to us in and through Christ and in that way are a kind of visible manifestation of the presence of God and God's Kingdom among us. They, for instance, don't have moments of doubt or uncertainty about God and God's love. They know the truth of the Gospel's teachings and promises.

The council also reminds us that "it is in regard to death that the human condition is most shrouded in doubt". This is the anxiety and poverty, so to speak, of humanity in the presence of the mystery of death. It is not an abstraction. Death causes very painful ruptures in our relationships with those who are now departed. To think of them is to be filled with memories of days and places and their love. Even great saints, as St. Augustine, lived through this agony—as he tells us in speaking of his mother's death.

All the same Christ's Passover from death to life makes a great difference for us. By his own death Christ has destroyed our death. Christ's resurrection has given us too the gift of never ending life. We thus remember our departed both in sadness and in gladness. We are separated but in Christ we are not separated. In faith we know all this. That means that it is by means of our faith that they communicate with us even now. Even now they teach us that the relationships which have made life on earth precious to us still exist in God and in Christ. This strengthens our faith even in times of doubt and distress.

The Second Vatican Council underlined the Gospel teaching about the "universal call to holiness". All Christians are called to the fullness of life in God and to the perfection of love shown us in Christ. We know that our departed share this call to us, and we know that they have responded to it in the measure of the grace that God gave, and gives, them. Everlasting life is an everlasting gift! That means it is an everlasting grace. Our life of faith already shares in this everlasting grace. That is what our departed perpetually remind us of. As we remember them we don't simply call to mind what once was but that all the best of what was still exists and is yet to come to greater fullness than it has ever had as yet. To think of them, to intercede for them and with them, is to participate in this grace, even if only partly. We join them in giving thanks that God is bringing to fullness all the beauty and goodness that we have tasted so far only in part. To remember them is to feel this grace grow stronger in us even now.

CHRIST'S LIGHT SHINES THROUGH WORLDLY EVENTS

A reflection developed from an article on Catholic Online

Cyril and Methodius must have often wondered, even as we do today, how God could bring spiritual meaning out of worldly concerns. Every mission they went on, every struggle they fought, was a result of political battles and not spiritual concerns. Yet the political realities have long been forgotten and the two saints work lives on in the faith and life of Slavic peoples everywhere.

We are told that Methodius and Constantine (who took the name Cyril only when he became a monk) grew up in Thessalonica as members of a prominent Christian family. They were familiar with the Old Slavonic language because many Slavic people had settled in the city. Methodius entered Imperial Service and worked without any special distinction. Constantine studied at the Imperial University in Constantinople but refused a political career and was ordained a priest. He was official librarian for the Hagia Sophia cathedral and taught philosophy at the Imperial University for some time. He was even sent on an embassy to the court of the Muslim Caliph in order to discuss theology with his scholars.

Meanwhile Methodius has become a monk in Bythinia, across the Bosphorus from Constantinople and shortly Constantine decided to join him. Four years later the Patriarch of Constantinople sent them to Russia to strength the faith of the Khazar people. Soon afterward the King of Moravia (modern Check Republic) asked for Byzantine missionaries because he feared the political influence of Charlemagne's Western Empire. Its authority was spread by Latin speaking missionaries and local rulers opposed this.

The two brothers worked hard to build up a Christian community but were accused to Rome and had to go there to defend their work, especially the liturgical use of Old Slavonic. The issue behind the scenes was political but ecclesiastical issues were raised to conceal this fact. Cyril and Methodius, however, won the support of Pope Nicholas I and he approved their liturgical practice and ordained them bishops. But Cyril died before they could return to their mission and left Methodius to face the continuing difficulties with Latin missionaries. This went on for the rest of his life, due primarily to the political power issues that shaped the thinking of missionaries from the Western empire.

Keep it in mind that all the struggles against Western missionaries were political and the political infighting used liturgical difference between East and West as so many excuses. The Latin missionaries wanted to bring Eastern Europe into the empire of Charlemagne while Constantinople, and its patriarch, opposed this. Indeed, it is thought that Pope Nicholas ordained the two brothers to give him more influence in Eastern Europe, as competing with the Patriarch of Constantinople for influence.

Methodius was given jurisdiction over Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian and Moravian territories. The German bishops intriguing against him got him imprisoned and he was only released when German military forces were defeated in Moravia. But to appease the German bishops the Pope forbade Methodius to use the vernacular (Old Slavonic) in the liturgy. His opponents failed to appreciate how important vernacular liturgy and preaching could be to strengthening a people's faith.

A culture and its language, can serve as a kind of lamp stand for the Light of Christ even while it renews that culture. Political power cannot do this, though missionaries from Germany were very slow to admit it. The Gospel prospered through Methodius' recognition of these facts and it became an integral part of Slavic culture.

THE MAGNIFICAT AND GOD'S PEOPLE OF FAITH

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

It is important that we notice the Magnificat begins with a reference to Mary's individuality. "My soul" proclaims the greatness of the Lord and "my spirit" exults in God "my Savior". It is Mary, an individual and historical person who speaks of herself and her destiny in a way that involves us all. Yet, this canticle, so rigorously individual in its beginning, ends with a "collective" reference to the entire People of God.

Mary expresses the historic consciousness of God's People. "God has come to the help of Israel, his servant, mindful of his mercy—according to the promise he made to our ancestors—of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever". Mary is the glorious slave girl of the Lord and her destiny is what we sing of in this hymn. But that means she has become the "servant of Israel", that means the servant of all who are united with her faith and are thus Children of Abraham. We are all God's People and inheritors of the Covenant.

These facts are the reason why we read in the Magnificat the prophecy of the Church to come. This is exactly what the Fathers of the Church saw in this part of Scripture, and, indeed, in many pages of Scripture. They believed that the mystery of the Church was in Scripture from its very beginning. This mystery comes to light in a special way through Mary. She reminds us that our perfect completeness has to come to be through history and within God's People.

The Magnificat isn't only a lyric expression of a personal grace. It is about the epic of a people. In the same way as the Assumption isn't merely Mary's personal destiny, the hymn is a promise and prophesy of what all members of the Church are called to. Notice that we are called to this destiny as a Church, and so was Mary. The Assumption shows us ourselves as God's New Creation. We see the new community as reconciled and at peace with God; all are living in "shalom"; i.e., a right relationship with God and with one another. Mary has attained to this fullness and peace in and with Jesus as we must.

What do we pray for? We pray that all humanity—call them Mary's people and the historic People of Israel—can now understand the ways of God and of God's peace. We pray in order that each of us may collaborate in this work of making peace. We are called to put aside all resentment and to realize the promise of God's mercy for all. God promised it to our ancestors—e.g., to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—and to their offspring not only of flesh but of faith. It is the mystery of the one for all; of Jesus for all and of Mary and each of us as in Jesus. How can we fail to rejoice and give thanks and pray with jubilation, just like Mary did and we hear her doing each time we pray the Magnificat.

