

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD THE SEVENTH WEEK OF THE EASTER SEASON

Sun. **THE SOLEMNITY OF THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD**
May 24 **LOVING CHRIST IN HEAVEN & ON EARTH**
A reflection from a homily on the First Letter of John by St. Augustine

Mon. **The Memorial of Bede the Venerable**
25 **THE LIFE OF TRANSFORMING PRAYER**
A reflection developed from a text by the Venerable Bede

Tues. **Tuesday of the 7th Week of Eastertide**
26 **COMING HOME TO THE FIRST LOVE**
Fr Henri Nouwen

Wed. **The Memorial of St. Augustine of Caterbury**
27 **GOD IN SEARCH OF US**
George Basil Cardinal Hume OSB

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28 **LEARNING TO SAY THANK YOU**
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29 **LOVE IN ST BENEDICT'S COMMUNITIES**
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30 **WHY IT IS GOOD THAT CHRIST LEAVE US?**
A reflection from a homily on John's Gospel by St. Augustine

Sunday

LOVING CHRIST IN HEAVEN & ON EARTH

A reflection from a homily on the First Letter of John by St. Augustine

On the fortieth day, at his Ascension into Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ entrusted us with the body in which he would remain among us here below. He saw the many would honor him because of his Ascension but this honor would be worthless because at the same time they were trampling on his members. He wanted to prevent the error of worshiping the heavenly Christ and simultaneously trampling on the earthly Christ. Do you remember his words to St. Paul: "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*" Christ has ascended into Heaven but he remains on earth in the members of his body.

We have his last words on earth as he was about to ascend. The Head of the Body that is Christ entrusted to us the other member of the Body. They are on earth. Yes, you can no longer find Christ speaking to you on earth but will hear only words from Heaven. Why does he speak to us from Heaven? He does it to complain that we are trampling on his feet, on the members of his body here on earth, at the same time we praise him. That is why he spoke to Paul, the persecutor, as he did.

What does he say to us? Here I am at the Heavenly Father's right hand, he says, but I am still hungry and thirsty and without shelter. You see how Christ entrusted to us the members of his Body that are still on earth and at the very moment of ascending into Heaven!

Recall that a disciple once asked: "*Lord, has the time come for you to reveal yourself? When will sovereignty be restored to Israel?*" His response was: "*It is not for you to know that time which the Heavenly Father has reserved to his own authority; but you will receive authority when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and it will make you my witnesses in Jerusalem, and the whole of Judea ad Samaria and to the ends of the earth.*" This tells us where Jesus remains on earth. This tells us where Jesus doesn't want to be trampled on! Take care not to hurt my Body, to violate it, to strike it, or to oppress it.

These are Christ's words, Christ's last words! Think, now, of the words of one who is preparing to die. They are so important to us, and especially to heirs. If the words of one who is going to the grave are to be treasured what about the words of one who is going to Heaven? When a person has finished life and is dying, that person's soul is born away to God but the body is laid in the ground. Such a person isn't worried whether a last wish has been carried out or not. That person has other things to do and to suffer. A corpse is left behind to be buried and it won't feel anything. Why is it, then, that the person's dying wishes are so important and so carefully obeyed?

What will be the lot of those who hear the parting words of Christ, who is looking down from heaven to see whether those words are being obeyed? He remembers on the Day of Judgment all that his members have suffered and all the help they have received. Are you keeping this in mind whenever you see Christ's Body in need of help and kindness? The measure you use in deciding what to give is the measure that will be used when God decides what to give you.

Monday

THE LIFE OF TRANSFORMING PRAYER

A reflection developed from a text by the Venerable Bede

After the Lord's Ascension we are told that the disciples persevered in prayer, and that they prayed as a community. Without their realizing it, God was preparing them for the coming of the Holy Spirit. God prepares us in the same way. God wishes to proclaim to the whole world the coming of the Holy Spirit and so the glory of the indivisible Trinity, made visible in prayer and in works of mercy. The disciples received the Spirit while praying. God sends us the Spirit as we pray together.

It is not easy to open one's heart and mind to the Spirit unless one raises them from merely worldly matters and concentrates on the things of God. This is something we need to do many times a day. Scripture tells us, for example, that Daniel bent his knees and prayed to God three times a day. The Church interprets this as meaning we should pray at the third, the sixth and the ninth hour of each day. It does this because these hours remind us of the way God works our salvation and transformation. It was at the third hour that the Holy Spirit was sent. It was at the sixth hour that our Lord was nailed to the Cross. It was at the ninth hour that our Lord yielded up his spirit and breathed the marvelous words: "It is accomplished!"

We have the words of a prophet to tell us: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh". God "pours out" the Spirit lavishly, as the words themselves intimate. The grace of the Holy Spirit is not granted simply to individuals—as to prophets or priests as individuals. The Spirit is poured out lavishly to everyone in every place—regardless of sex or of state in life or of social position. In effect, all are made prophets because all are filled with a new hope in God and proclaim that to all God puts in their paths.

A prophecy also reminds us of what God intends: "I will do prodigies in the heavens above and signs on the earth". When the Lord was born a new star appeared in heaven. People believed that what happens in the heavens indicates what God is working among us and so the new hope for the whole world was indicated by the appearance of a star never before seen. Likewise, when the Lord ascended the Cross the heavens were clothed in darkness to indicate that this new hope was being rejected. When the Lord died the earth trembled violently and tombs were broken open and the bodies of many holy ones were given new life out of death. These are all symbols of what God is doing and wants to do in and for us. The new persons we are becoming will appear as prodigies to those who only knew us as we once were.

The Church likes to remind us of God's working in us through the Holy Spirit by telling us that we are saved through blood and through fire and through a steamy vapor. The Blood is that of the Lord, which came from his side when he was pierced by the soldier's lance. The fire is the Holy Spirit. The steamy vapor represents our tears, not only of repentance but of merciful compunction. The heat of the Spirit makes our prayer fruitful of transformation, not only for us individually but for those with whom we live.

Tuesday

COMING HOME TO THE FIRST LOVE

Fr Henri Nouwen

Words for “home” are often used in the Old and New Testaments. The Psalms are filled with a yearning to dwell in the house of God, to take refuge under God’s wings, and to find protection in God’s holy temple; they praise God’s holy place, God’s wonderful tent, God’s firm refuge. We might even say that “to dwell in God’s house” summarizes all the aspirations expressed in these inspired prayers. It is therefore highly significant that St. John describes Jesus as the Word of God pitching his tent among us. He not only tells us that Jesus invites him and his brother Andrew to stay in his home, but he also shows how Jesus gradually reveals that he himself is the new temple and the new refuge. This is most fully expressed in the farewell address, where Jesus reveals himself as the new home “Make your home in me, as I make mine in you “.

Jesus, in whom the fulness of God dwells, has become our home. In making his home in us he allows us to make our home in him. By entering into the intimacy of our innermost self he offers us the opportunity to enter in his own intimacy with God. By choosing us as his preferred dwelling place he invites us to choose him as our preferred dwelling place. This is the mystery of the Incarnation.

Here we come to see what discipline in the spiritual life means. It is a gradual process of coming home to where we belong and listening there to the voice which desires our attention. It is the voice of the “first love”. St. John writes: “We are to love.....because God loved us first “. It is this first love which offers us the intimate place where we can dwell in safety. The first love says” You are loved long before other people can love you or you can love others. You are accepted long before you can accept others and receive their acceptance. You are safe long before you can offer or receive safety “.

Home is the place where the first love speaks to us. It is a gentle speech where the first love dwells. Prayer is the most concrete way to make our home in God and to listen to the first love.

Wednesday

GOD IN SEARCH OF US

George Basil Cardinal Hume OSB

If we ever feel depressed or downcast, or feel like abandoning the Faith, then go to a quiet place, take with you the New Testament and turn to Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel and read it slowly and prayerfully.

There are 3 stories told by Our Lord himself. They are addressed to you personally by him. Each of the stories tells of something that was lost: a coin, a sheep, and most important of all, a son. In all 3 cases there is a search on the part of the person who has lost the precious object. A woman sweeps out the house frantically; the shepherd leaves the other 99 sheep; and the father waits for his errant son to return.

These are no ordinary accounts. We are concerned here with the Word of God, with one of the clearest revelations of the truth of God's love for us. He is always present, waiting for us to return to him. When we do, He is there to embrace us and to shower us with His gifts. A wonderful mystic Julian of Norwich has written "The love of God most high for our soul is so wonderful that it surpasses all knowledge. No created being can know the greatness, the sweetness, the tenderness of the love the Master has for us. By His grace and help therefore let us in spirit stand and gaze, eternally marveling at the supreme, single-minded surpassing love that God, in His goodness has for us. Then we can ask reverently of our Lover whatever we will. We shall never cease wanting and longing until we possess Him in fullness and joy. Then we shall have no further wants".

The mercy of the Father is strong. That mercy is both tenderness and fidelity to those He has created for unity with Him. Tenderness and steadfastness are a powerful combination, and they are the reasons for God wanting to be involved so closely with us. Because He so loved us, He became, in Jesus Christ, a pilgrim like us, a pilgrim who in His mercy is always in search of us.

Thursday

LEARNING TO SAY THANK YOU

Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens

“We give thanks to God always “St Paul tells the Thessalonians. Two words are reckoned among the shortest in our vocabulary; two very short words, but if you think about it they go a long way: the words “Yes “ and “Thank You”. And yet when you think of gratitude it looks as if people often find it difficult. Jesus drew attention to this serious failing in the Gospels. Do you remember the story of the 10 lepers who were made clean? Jesus healed them and they went away happy and pleased. Only one thought of going back to say “thank you “to the Master. Jesus wondered about the other 9, they had simply forgotten to say “thank you “

It is vital that we learn to thank God. What for? For being God in the first place .”We give you thanks for your great glory” we say in the Gloria of the Mass. Thank God for being God .Charles de Foucauld expressed his gratitude in the midst of suffering and personal crosses by saying to God those words which are an expression of adoration in its purest form and which put everything into perspective “My God ,your happiness is enough for me “. We must thank God for everything we owe him. Here we have a permanent motive for joy and gratitude. We can never finish counting our blessings. Let it suffice to say that we must thank God for being our Father, for we have the joy of being in all truth his children. We are divine by naturalization, sons and daughters by adoption.

And we must thank God for being our Brother, for having become one of us, so that in him and through him we might enter the divine family with full rights and a whole share.

And we must thank God for being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, the life giver, who wants to make us penetrate into the very depts of God and associate us with the power of his love.

We must thank him too for the ordinary things he has put at our disposal: the roof that shelters us, the table, the bed, the armchair, the books, everything. Over all else we need to say “Thank you Lord for having created me “.

This spirit of thanksgiving must also flow into our neighbor. Do we take for granted the things people do for us, as if they were due to us? We must start by saying “thank you” to those in whose midst we live; our near and dear ones, to begin with. There is a real danger of forgetting them, if we are not careful. From time to time we must pause, stand back a little and say the words which are too often left unsaid and need to be spoken aloud.

Were not 10 healed, where are the other 9?

Friday

LOVE IN ST BENEDICT'S COMMUNITIES

Sr. Carmelita OSB

The love of God overflows by interaction, co-operation, mutual striving and unified helpfulness, giving the Benedictine community the characteristics of a family. Love of God inspires and preserves the bond of unity in the community. It enables consecrated religious to share in the life of God. Benedictine community life means love experienced in giving and receiving. Community life means a peaceful sharing of members who "have been chosen by love to live in God's presence" (Ephesians 1,4). When speaking of humility St Benedict exhorts us never to lose the consciousness of the Presence.

Love increases the individual's energies for virtue; it is productive of joy and expansive of soul; nourishes conformity to God's will; develops abandonment to the designs of God, a supreme fruit of love which engenders a profound peace. This abandonment, this surrender means loving His will which is rewarded by an identification of ourselves with God which leads to a Divine intimacy.

Fraternal charity in its many phases is the subject of 25 instruments of the Spiritual Art by St Benedict. Interpersonal relationships in community are sanctified and supported by this love of God. Understanding, compassion, are engendered by this charity which is nourished by common prayer. Community service of God is one of the main building forces in monastic living. A Benedictine community lighted by the lamp of God's love is a true City of God.

The Cistercian St Gertrude the Great lived her monastic life in the 12th century as we do today, in the realms of primacy of prayer and supremacy of love. St Gertrude placed in her hands and ours 11 lamps of love: the lamp of generous love, the lamp of humble love, the lamp of chaste love, the lamp of obedient love, the lamp of fraternal love, the lamp of zealous love, the lamp of suffering love, the lamp of holy love, the lamp of unifying love, the lamp of transforming love and the lamp of transporting love.

These lamps of Gertrude's love were kindled by the Divine Furnace of Love itself. We are not alone. We can carry these lamps in our communities when we remain faithful to the liturgy and the Rule of St. Benedict

Saturday

WHY IT IS GOOD FOR US THAT CHRIST LEAVE US

From a homily on the Gospel of John by St. Augustine

“I tell you the truth: it is for your own good that I am going away, because unless I go the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.” Christ dwelt among us in the condition of a servant, as Word made flesh, but he won’t go on loving us with a merely natural affection. We aren’t to be content with baby’s milk but must long to grow up fully in Christ. Unless I wean you, Jesus says, you will never have an appetite for adult food. As long as you cling to my bodily presence in a natural way you will remain incapable of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Did the Lord mean that it was impossible to send the Holy Spirit while he was still on earth? Of course not! He had never left the dwelling place of the Spirit nor had he left the Father in such a way as no longer to be with Him. Indeed, we know that Christ himself received the Spirit at his baptism. We know that the Son and the Spirit are inseparable.

The Gospel passage you have just heard means that the disciples couldn’t receive the Holy Spirit as long as they only knew Christ according to the flesh. That is what is behind the assertion by St. Paul, made after he had received the Holy Spirit. Here it is: “Even if we used to think of Christ in a human fashion, we don’t do this anymore.” When we know the incarnate Word spiritually, our knowledge, even of his humanity, becomes more than merely human. This is the lesson the Master wanted to give the disciples that it was good for them that he was going away. If he didn’t change their way of thinking the Spirit wouldn’t come to them.

The withdrawal of Christ’s bodily presence from the disciples meant not only that the Holy Spirit would come to them but that the Heavenly Father and the Son would dwell with them in a spiritual way. Christ’s departure didn’t mean that the Holy Spirit would simply take his place. It meant rather that together with Christ the Spirit would make his home in the hearts of the disciples. If this weren’t so what would become of our Lord’s promise to be with his disciples always?

Here is another promise: “The Father and I will come to you and make our home with you”. The fact is that the Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit in just this way so he would always be with his disciples. When their purely natural and human affections had become spiritualized—through the Spirit—then they would be capable of the indwelling of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let this give us hope and courage and confidence.