

# THE FIFTH WEEK OF THE EASTER SEASON

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- Sun.    **THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN THE EASTER SEASON**  
May 10 **OUR ONENESS IN CHRIST'S LOVE**  
          reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine
- Mon.    **Holy Abbots of Cluny, Memorial**  
11       **THE HOLY ABBOTS OF CLUNY**  
          from an audience by Pope Emeritus Benedict
- Tues.   **Tuesday of the Fifth Week in the Easter Season**  
12       **WORKING WITH GOD AND JESUS**  
          From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Wed.    **Wednesday of the Fifth Week in the Easter Season**  
13       **GOD INCARNATE IN OUR HUMANITY**  
          From Discourses Against the Arians by St. Athanasius
- Thurs.   **Saint Matthias, Feast**  
14       **THE LATECOMER**  
          Deacon Keith Fournier
- Fri.     **Saint Pachomius, Memorial**  
15       **LESSONS ON PRAYER**  
          **FROM THE DESERT FATHERS AND MOTHERS**  
          Kim Nataraja
- Sat.     **Saturday of the Fifth Week in the Easter Season**  
16       **GOD IS NOT "OUT THERE "**  
          Fr Richard Rohr OFM

*Sunday*

## **OUR ONENESS IN CHRIST'S LOVE**

**A reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine**

The Lord Jesus calls himself The Vine and goes on to tell the disciples that they are branches. We ordinarily make this point by saying that Jesus Christ is head of the Church and we are his members and that Jesus Christ is mediator between God and the human race but Jesus' metaphor expresses a fuller reality.

A vine and its branches are one and the same living reality. Christ possess a divine nature which we, of ourselves, can't share but are made able to share by being made one with Christ. He became human and The Vine so that human beings might share in divinity. Dwell in me, he says to us, and I will dwell in you. Notice that the benefit is ours and not his. The branches of a vine don't give life to the vine but vice versa. Branches that are attached to a vine stock draw from it their vital nourishment. This is something the vine stock gives to its branches. Christ's presence in his disciples and their presence in Christ are for their good. Listen again to the Incarnate Truth! *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Anyone who dwells in me and I in him yields fruit in abundance, but without me you can do nothing!"* These words are to be pondered very seriously.

One might think Christ's branches can produce some fruit of themselves. Yet our Lord doesn't say, "You can do little without me" but, "You can do nothing without me". Even a little fruit is impossible without Christ. More, if a branch doesn't bear much fruit the vinedresser prunes it. If severed from the vine stock the branch can't stay alive, so vinedressers prune branches without cutting them from the vine. That way they will bear more fruit than otherwise. The basic truth is that apart from a vine a branch can't bear any fruit.

Christ couldn't be our vine if he weren't human; he couldn't offer us the grace he does if he weren't divine. That grace enables us to love as he does and with him. Without the vine one dies. Jesus himself says, whoever doesn't dwell in me will be thrown away and will wither. Such branches are gathered and then thrown into a fire to burn up." On the other hand, *"if you dwell in me and my words dwell in you, you will ask for whatever you long for and it will be yours"*. Those refusing to dwell in Christ have shame; those dwelling in him have glory.

If you dwell in Christ you can't long for anything that conflicts with his love. The very fact that people dwell in our Savior means that they love nothing that is out of harmony with their salvation. Yet it happens that a person may desire one thing due to union with Christ and another due to still being in the world. We are ignorant of what is genuinely good or bad and want something that can't be good for us. Christ gives us what we long for only if it helps us love as he does. Don't be saddened if you don't receive what seems good but receive only what is really for your welfare. If we let Christ's love dwell fully in us then we will ask for only what God wishes to give us and is for our true good.

*Monday*

## **THE HOLY ABBOTS OF CLUNY**

**from an audience by Pope Emeritus Benedict**

The Order of Cluny at the beginning of the 12th century had almost 1200 monasteries, a truly impressive figure. At the time of the growth of Cluny, Western monasticism was experiencing a severe decline especially because of the dependence of abbeys on the local nobles who controlled all that belonged to the territories under their jurisdiction. In this context, Cluny was at the heart and soul of a profound renewal of monastic life that led it back to its original inspiration.

At Cluny the Rule of St Benedict was restored with several adaptations which had already been introduced by other reformers. The main objective was to guarantee the central role that the Liturgy must have in Christian life. The Cluniac monks devoted themselves with love and great care to the celebration of the Liturgical Hours, to the singing of the Psalms, to processions as devout as they were solemn, and above all to the celebration of the Holy Mass. They promoted sacred music, they wanted art and architecture to contribute to the beauty and solemnity of the rites; they enriched the liturgical calendar with special celebrations and they intensified the devotion to the Virgin Mary. For the monks of Cluny great attention was given to the Liturgy because they were convinced it was participation in the Liturgy of Heaven. And the monks felt responsible for interceding at the altar of God for the living and the dead, given that large numbers of the faithful were insistently asking them to be remembered in prayer. To preserve and foster this atmosphere of prayer, the Cluniac Rule emphasized the importance of silence, to which discipline the monks readily submitted, convinced that the purity of the virtues to which they aspired demanded deep and constant recollection. Numerous princes and Popes asked the Abbots of Cluny to extend their reform so that in a short time a dense network of monasteries developed that were linked to Cluny. Thus, a spiritual Europe gradually took shape in various regions of France and in Italy, Spain, Germany and Hungary.

Also, of significance were the benefits that monasteries inspired by the Cluniac Reform contributed to society. At a time when church institutions alone provided for the poor, charity was practiced with dedication. In all houses the Almoner was bound to offer hospitality to needy wayfarers and pilgrims, travelling priests and religious and especially the poor, who frequently came asking for food and a roof over their heads for a few days.

The Abbots of Cluny were elected without interference from the civil authorities and thus truly worthy people succeeded one another at the helm in Cluny. I think of Abbot Odo, and other great figures such as Eymard, Majolus, Odilo and especially Hugh the Great, who served for long periods, thereby assuring stability and the spread of the reform. As well as Odo, Majolus, Odilo and Hugh are venerated as saints.

*Tuesday*

## **WORKING WITH GOD AND JESUS**

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Book of Genesis speaks of God working and says he completed his work on the Sixth Day. God is one who works. And the object of God's labor is the earth and all its creatures, especially ourselves. We are the fruit of God's labor.

How does God work? God works freely and uses work to express his love for others. God is inventive and loves to produce beautiful and good things. After each phase of work in creation God pauses and reflects, "This is good!" Thus, after making us God reflects, "This is very good!" God produces works that are good and beautiful, and they bear fruit in new works of love. All the works give great satisfaction.

This tells us about ourselves as made in God's image and likeness and expressly charged to care for the earth and its creatures. What we learn is God's plan. God labors for us now and always. We are placed in a beautiful world and are asked to imitate God. We too are intended to work in love and in joy. But this plan has to confront the reality of sin in human life and history. As a result, our work is often unfree, even a form of slavery; it may be imposed by circumstances beyond our control and require that we do what we don't want to. It often isn't creative or self-expressive or joyful. We often feel no satisfaction in doing it. Moreover, we often don't see the fruits of our labor or how it helps bring more abundant life to others. We often can't pause to reflect, "This is good!" Has God's plan for free, spontaneous, personally expressive, creative and fruitful work been destroyed?

Even if we think we are "condemned" to work at this or that, even when we think it's not good, yet God has a plan of redemption and it relates to human labor. The labors of Joseph, with the work of Jesus and Mary, show us the path to redemption. The task to which we too have been called is to help bring work closer to what God had in mind in creating us. Our responsibility is to work with God in such a way that, in our own person, work may become expressive of our humanity at its best and, as in Jesus, divinized. Energized by the love Jesus shows us, we can find ways to make work fully human and humanizing. This may seem like a dream, but it is only a long and difficult road.

It is especially difficult because at times we think we've reached an objective and then run up against barriers like monotony or repetitiveness. We then have to renew our efforts to work "better"—i.e., make our work more expressive of our freedom and lovingness and human dignity. We mean we have to find ways to put human values first, even ahead of profit. That means we have to rethink our ways of living and enjoying and using things.

We can't do this in sadness if we want to draw others into this task. Nor can we expect God to do it all by a miracle. It is our God-given task. We must do it by our faith, our courage, our hope and our love. Above all, it is a matter of making every task a work of love. In God all things are possible if you begin today.

*Wednesday*

## **GOD INCARNATE IN OUR HUMANITY**

Developed from Discourses Against the Arians by St. Athanasius

God assumed a created, human body that he might renew it and might deify it in Himself. The purpose was to introduce us all into the Kingdom of Heaven after his own likeness. We would not have been recreated anew if we had been joined to a merely human creature or if the Son weren't true God. We wouldn't have been freed from sin and its curse had it not been human nature which the Son assumed and we could not have been made divine unless the Word who is God had put on humanity.

In ancient times God sent his word to holy individuals but when The Word came among us through Mary and in the fullness of times, he took flesh and became a human being. In that flesh he suffered and rose. On account of this, the properties of human flesh are his—so he hungered and thirsted and suffered and was tired. And because he was nevertheless divine, he raised the dead, restored sight to the blind, and cured the woman with a hemorrhage. In him all that is of human flesh became an instrument for ministering the works of God.

We are told in Scripture that he “carried”, “bore”, our infirmities and “bore” our sins himself. He took no hurt; for this reason, we are redeemed and shown the way to love our God. We were filled with the righteousness of the Word who did the works of God through his flesh to show us we too can do, God's works. He did the works of the Father and he told us that we would do these works and works even greater.

When there was need to raise up Peter's mother-in-law from her sickbed, he stretched out his hand humanly but stopped the illness by divine power. In the case of the man blind from birth the spittle he used was human as an instrument of divine power. In the case of Lazarus, He used a human voice to call him forth from the grave by divine power. These deeds show that he had a human body, not merely in appearance, but in truth. It was wholly fitting that in putting on human flesh God should put on all that is proper to it. The Word became flesh.

It is in a different way that we put on divinity by becoming one with Christ. But the results of divine power working through our flesh are not less or other than in Christ. Our task is to allow God's power to so permeate us as to make us instruments of works not less than those of Jesus.

Are you afraid? God took on all that was ours by his creation, in which gave us all we are. Don't be afraid of losing anything if you allow God to make your flesh and your entire self like that of Jesus Christ for his glory and for the salvation of all human kind. God became human without losing anything of his divinity. God makes us divine without taking away anything that is genuinely human. Why should we be afraid? God cannot lose anything of himself and God gives us everything that makes us ourselves. Glory be to God for ever.

*Thursday*

## **THE LATECOMER**

**Deacon Keith Fournier**

How does one qualify to be an apostle? The first act of the apostles after the Ascension of Jesus was to find a replacement for Judas. With all the questions, doubts, and dangers facing them, they chose to focus their attention on finding a twelfth apostle. Why was this important? Twelve was a very important number to the Chosen People: twelve was the number of the twelve tribes of Israel. If the new Israel was to come from the disciples of Jesus, a twelfth apostle was needed.

But Jesus had chosen the original twelve. How could they know whom he would choose?

One hundred and twenty people were gathered for prayer and reflection in the Upper Room, when Peter stood up to propose the way to make the choice.

Peter had one criterion, that like Andrew, James, John, and himself, the new apostle be someone who had been a disciple from the beginning, from his baptism by John until the Ascension. The reason for this was simple, the new apostle must become a witness to Jesus Resurrection. He must have Jesus before anyone knew him, stayed with him when he made enemies, and believed in him when he spoke of the Cross and eating his body, teachings that had made others melt away.

Two men fitted this description, Matthias and Joseph called Barsabbas. They knew that both these men had been with them and with Jesus throughout his whole ministry. But which one had the heart to become a witness to the Resurrection? The apostles knew that only the Lord could know what was in the heart of each. They cast lots in order to discover Gods will and Matthias was chosen. He became the twelfth apostle and the group was whole again as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

That's the first we hear of Matthias in Scripture and the last. We have to presume that he embraced what it meant to be an apostle so he would have understood evangelization, persecution and maybe even death in the service of the Lord.

Clement of Alexandria says that Matthias, like all the other apostles, was not chosen by Jesus for what he already was but for what Jesus foresaw he would become. He was elected not because he was worthy but that he would become worthy.

Perhaps at times Matthias felt like a latecomer, an afterthought. Maybe even, like we sometimes do, others resented this newcomer. But the apostolic community was not complete without the newcomer. Perhaps it's the same in our communities and groups

*Friday*

## **LESSONS ON PRAYER FROM THE DESERT FATHERS AND MOTHERS**

**Kim Nataraja**

It is interesting to note what a widespread and influential Christian movement the Desert tradition was. First there were only a few hermits, but by the end of the 4th century there were at least 30,000 men and women living in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine and Syria. Anthony's words persuaded many to take up the solitary life and so from then on, there were monasteries in the mountains and the desert was made a city by monks.

This was essentially a lay movement, even Anthony was not a priest. Only as time progressed some of the elder hermits became priests. They lived alone, in pairs or in small groups. They would meet on Saturday or Sunday for common worship in a central community building that was used for many purposes called "ecclesia". Apart from that, they would regularly be engaged in private prayer in their cells, learning by heart the passages of Scripture they had heard. They did this by meditation-the solitary repetition of a passage from Scripture without reflecting on its meaning. Meditating on Scripture as we may do, analyzing it linguistically and textually was not part of their culture at all. Their meditation did not mean thinking about Scripture but interiorizing it, becoming it. In this oral culture this repetition was done aloud. Abba Amoun said about Abba Achilles "We heard him meditating". Moreover, they would know all the psalms by heart and would repeat all of them. So, at times the desert was a noisy place, with psalms coming from every direction.

They did not stop when they started work; they combined work and prayer, an attitude of prayerfulness pervaded their life. The passages of Scripture they had interiorized in private prayer might come to mind and reveal its personal meaning to them during work. This prayer life was fueled by their wish to do what St Paul taught "Pray continually ". Evagrius even said "Life is prayer".

Pachomius' vision of monasticism was quite different to that of Anthony. He moved from the anchorite to the cenobitic life. His call came in the form of a voice saying " Pachomius, struggle, dwell in this place and build a monastery; for many will come to you to become monks with you and they will profit their souls ". Later he experienced another revelation when an angel told him "The Lords will for you is to minister to men and women and unite them in prayer". And so Pachomius began extending the walls "because of the crowds which would come to him ".

Thus, Pachomius came to be regarded as the founder of Christian cenobitic monasticism.

*Saturday*

## **GOD IS NOT “OUT THERE “**

**Fr Richard Rohr OFM**

Incarnation is the overcoming of the gap between God and everything else. It is the synthesis of matter and spirit. Without incarnation, God remains separate from us and from creation. Because of Incarnation, we can say, “God is with us “. In fact, God is in us, and in everything else that God created. We all have the divine DNA; everything bears the divine fingerprint, if the mystery of embodiment is true.

2000 years ago, God incarnates as Jesus of Nazareth, when humanity was ready for relationship and to personally comprehend that this mystery could be met, engaged with, and even loved. So, matter and spirit have always been one, ever since God decided to manifest Godself in the act of creation.

It is crucial that we understand the importance of incarnation. The belief that God is “out there” is the basic dualism that is tearing us all apart. Our view of God as separate and distinct has harmed our understanding of our sexuality; of our relationships to food, possessions, and money; and of our relationships to animals, nature and our incarnate selves. The loss is foundational to why we live such distraught and divided lives. Jesus came precisely to put it all together for us and in us. He was saying, in effect, “To be human is good! The material and the physical can be trusted and enjoyed. This world is the hiding place of God and the revelation of God”

The final stage of incarnation is resurrection. This is no exceptional miracle only done once in the body of Jesus. It is the final and fulfilled state of all embodiment. Remember we say in the Creed “I believe in the resurrection of the body”. It is not enough just to believe in the eternal nature of the soul. The Lord is the lover of life, of our souls, of our bodies, all that exists. His love keeps us alive. May we live in that love.

Living the new life involves living by a new perspective. The old remains but we don’t live by it because we have eyes to see. The “new day” isn’t like past days. Jesus said: “*I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God.*” Jesus has brought our humanity and all it involves to the Heavenly Father and with it has presented us too. Our new eyes let us see this reality and use it as the touch stone by which to determine what has priority and importance for living the New Life. Let us use this gift always to love even as Jesus loves us.