

# **THE TWELFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**

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Sunday

## **OUR CALL TO SEIZE THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**

### **A reflection derived from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny**

Since the days of John the Baptist, Scripture says, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence and the violent seize it. How is it that the Kingdom of Heaven is open to being seized by people like us who can't merit it? God brought this about through the birth of John. That's why we celebrate it. John shows us the sort of violence by which the Kingdom is seized. It is called repentance.

Think of the Scriptural examples. Didn't the patriarch Jacob do violence in his wrestling with God? Doesn't he teach us we must persevere until true day breaks and until then exert all our strength? That is a good kind of violence and God yields to it and rewards those he vanquishes with the grace of a blessing. Scripture says, "*I have loved wisdom more than health and all beauty*". Can we all make such a sacrifice and receive the reward Jacob received? Don't all of us have as our purpose to win heaven by force? Don't we join ourselves in a community to better wrestle with the angel who guards the way to the Tree of Life? Don't we know that our toil will make it possible to succeed only if God gives us strength and grace?

We must show our perseverance will never give up. For instance, we wrestle with God when God resists our impatient prayers. O Mercy, what unrelenting kindness you show in resisting those you struggle to draw to yourself! You love those who love you and so we mustn't despair but persevere. Be happy that God has come to you so you can wrestle with Him. God loves to suffer violence from you. God forbid that we should forget how the strong God willed to become weak and even die for us! Pierced with so many wounds, how can he find the strength to resist those who ask what is pleasing to him?

God can't resist charity. Wasn't it charity that led him through every kind of weakness and even death on a cross? Love isn't merely as strong as death but stronger than death! So be armed with the power of love if you would force an entry into the Kingdom of Heaven! Be assured that you will easily conquer the King of Heaven himself. If He seems to oppose you, know that he seeks only to give a finer edge to your spirit and to exercise your strength and reveal your constancy. He would multiply your victories and so increase the number of your crowns. Gird yourself, you people of strength! Follow your leader, John.

It was in the days of John the Baptist that Heaven was opened to be seized by force. Like David John became a prince of holy robbers and a leader of devout bandits using a holy and praiseworthy violence. He leads an army of publicans and sinners into the Kingdom of Heaven. His battle cry is: Do penance, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! His standard is red with his own blood. He will commend you by his intercession as he draws you by his example. Among those born of women none is more pleasing to the King of Heaven—except Jesus Christ our Lord. We have every help we could need

*Monday*

## **A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT**

**Sermon by Rev Dr. Martin Luther King**

In the parable of the man who knocks at the door of his friend at midnight looking for bread, Jesus is talking about the power of persistent prayer yes, but it may also serve as a basis for our thoughts concerning many contemporary problems and the role of the Church in tackling them. It is midnight in the parable; it is also midnight in our world, and the darkness is so deep that we can hardly see which way to turn.

Midnight in our external collective is paralleled by midnight in our internal, individual lives. It is midnight within the psychological order. Everywhere paralyzing fears harrow people by day and haunt them by night. Deep clouds of anxiety and depression are suspended in our mental skies. More people are emotionally disturbed today than at any time in human history.

It is also midnight within the moral order. At midnight colors lose their distinctiveness. And become a sullen shade of grey. For modern people right or wrong are a matter of what the majority is doing. We have unconsciously applied Einstein's theory of relativity, which applied to the physical universe, to the moral and ethical realm.

When the man in the parable of Jesus knocked on his friend's door and asked for loaves of bread, he received an impatient reply, don't be bothering me. How often people have experienced a similar disappointment when at midnight they knock on the door of the Church. Millions of Africans, patiently knocking on the doors of the Christian church, where they seek the bread of social justice, have been either ignored or told to wait until later, which always means never. Millions of American Negroes, starving for want of the bread of freedom, have knocked again and again on the door of so -called white churches, but they have often been greeted by a cold indifference or a blatant hypocrisy. Even the white religious leaders, who have a heartfelt desire to open the door and provide the bread, are often more cautious than courageous and more prone to follow the expedient rather than the ethical path. One of the most shameful tragedies of history is that the very institution which should remove man from the midnight of racism participates in creating and perpetuating that midnight.

Midnight is a confusing hour when it is difficult to be faithful. But the dawn will come. Disappointment, sorrow, and despair are born at midnight but morning follows. Our faith tells us that joy comes in the morning.

*Tuesday*

## **THE CONTEMPLATIVE IN THE WORLD**

### **Abbot Francis Kline OCSO**

The monk is inserted in the monastic community by the imitation of Christ. But the monastery is part of the Church in the world, because of the baptism into Christ of its members. The monastic community is a Church in its own right, and is therefore inserted into the Church universal, whose confines in space and time, no one can fix. Thus, the contemplative in the Church is present to the whole world, not just by desire, or social or prophetic stance, but by insertion into the body of Christ, and by a particular position in that body.

The Church allows the monastic-contemplative to assume a stance of prophecy and forgiveness for the society at large. The contemplative becomes a sign to the world of the conversion of the human heart. The contemplative goes to the depths where dreams speak the truth. We look to Christ, the contemplative, for a countenance of truth and liberation, and for reassurance that humanity cannot reach its goal without putting on its own unique and qualified obedience. Our place is in the heart of Christ, and our lives point to his ultimate meaning.

For the monk, having loved the place he first gave them, they now find that place to be infinitely wider than any geographical place. With the vow of stability still intact, though not in the eyes of the small minded, the place which they love is now the world for which Christ died. Here is prayer, contemplation and cloister. Here is home, examen and discretion. Yet, here is also the noble human family housed in a place of wealth, and the monastics serve the palatial home like servants from the carriage house out back. Here the monastics bless and approve, affirm and take notice, even if their ministry is hidden.

As lovers of the place and the world the monastic tradition should share its riches more easily with the Church under the guidance of the bishops. In the vast assembly hall where the heavenly liturgy takes place, the monastics are in full and tantalizing view of everybody who thirsts for God. A more obvious sharing of gifts and a more comprehensive benediction of the world must take place within and without the vast assembly hall which is the Church.

*Wednesday*

## **PROPHECY AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD**

**Sr Joan Chittister OSB**

The Holy Spirit inspired John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit, God's energizing presence among us, the life-force that drives us beyond ourselves, that whispers us into greater quiet within, that makes life alive with a purpose not seen, but deeply, consciously, stubbornly felt, even in the midst of chaos, even at the edge of despair, sounds the truth in us that we are more than we seem to be.

Do I believe in the prophetic gifts of the Holy Spirit? You bet I do. Either the Spirit of God who created us is with us still, either the presence of Christ who is the Way abides in us in spirit, or the God of creation and the redeemer of souls have never been with us at all. The Spirit of God never abandons us, can never abandon us, if God is really God.

If we are to understand emerging consciousness as a manifestation of the Spirit of God alive in the land, then never before has an age seen revelation, consciousness, and wisdom working more clearly than in this one. The signs of new awareness of the human relationship to God are everywhere, in all peoples. The Holy Spirit has spoken through married couples about the true meaning of love, for instance. The Holy Spirit has spoken through women and other eminent theologians, theological societies and male Scripture scholars as well about the role of women in the Church. The Holy Spirit has spoken through laity and bishops and multiple other rites about the ordination of married men.

The problem for John the Baptist was that no one wanted to listen to him at the end. It's the same problem today. The Holy Spirit in people of goodwill is a voice crying in the wilderness, rejected, ignored, and reviled.

The Spirit of God moves us like John to new types of witness, to new dimensions of life needed in the here and now. We do not live in the past. We are not blind beggars on a dark road groping on our separate ways to God. There is a magnet in each of us, a gift for God, that repels deceit and impels us towards good. We are all in this together. No one group has a monopoly on insight and grace, on the prompting of God in this place at this time. The Spirit of God is a wild thing, breathing where it will, moving as it pleases, settling on women and men alike.

*Thursday*

## **Encountering God in the Divine Office**

### **Fr. Anthony Delisi OCSO**

A fundamental “Flame” to pass on to future generations is the belief that God is looking for you and me. St Benedict in his Rule offers us a valid and authentic way of living the Gospel. It is he who teaches us the value of early rising in imitation of Jesus in order to commune with our Heavenly Father. What do we do when we rise early in the morning for Vigils? We proceed at once to gather as a community for the major work of the monk: the praise of God through the Liturgy of the Hours.

Benedict teaches that the Divine Presence is everywhere and in every single place the eyes of the Lord watch the good and the bad. But he tells us that beyond all doubt this is true when we celebrate the Divine Office. So, we gather in the early hours to encounter the Divine Presence. God is there and we are invited to encounter Him. What does this mean for you and me? Are we willing to call this a value that needs to be passed on to future generations?

Why does Our Father look at us? Because He sees in you and me the continuation of that prayer of His Son, Jesus, who also rose early and went to quiet, lonely places to pray. As monks we are called each day to continue that prayer. What a dignity, what an honor.

St Benedict outlines in detail the psalms that are to be recited or sung at the Divine Office, although he allows for local flexibility. I have heard monks on occasion complain that there is not enough of Jesus in the Liturgy of the Hours. My answer is that the psalms are a part of what makes a Cistercian monk. The psalms are the prayer book of the church inherited from the synagogue. If one feels that the psalms are not Christocentric, then I suggest he ponder the commentaries on the psalms by St Augustine, St Jerome and St Athanasius.

The psalms were an integral part of the prayer of Jesus and of every practicing Jew. We find the psalms on the lips of Jesus as he was dying on the cross. So, in the way that the psalms are the prayer of Jesus, so the psalms are the songs of the monk and a great part of who he is.

*Friday*

## **THE EXODUS TO WHICH THE LORD'S CALLS US**

**A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini**

After asking Peter for the third time, "Do you love me?", Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep" and then added: "I tell you most solemnly that when you were young you put on your belt and went where you liked: but when you grow old you will let someone else put on your belt and take you where you don't want to go." We are told that these words were an announcement of Peter's martyrdom.

That isn't all they are. Jesus was announcing Peter's final exodus even as he called him to one more among his many exoduses. When he threw himself at Jesus' feet and said "I am a sinful man!" he heard the call "Come, follow me!" It had happened again, perhaps an hour before, when Peter jumped out of the boat to swim to Jesus. It had happened when he had confessed Jesus the Christ and Son of God, and when Jesus asked the disciples if they would leave him and Peter responded "To whom shall we go?" Each incident was a break with Peter's past, some riskier and others more comfortable. Each came with an invitation to go beyond self.

That happens to each of us and happens repeatedly, as it did for Peter and for Paul. The final leap of faith that Peter and Paul, and all of us, have to make will be that of dying for and in the Lord. Surrounded by events, conditionings, and situations forcing themselves on us and out of our control we have follow the Lord. We feel a kind of resistance and our spiritual efforts won't be enough, most likely, to enable us to encounter our final exodus serenely. We will face something that is very like Jesus' agony in the Garden and will have to pray, "Your will be done, not mine!"

Think about this in relation to Paul's experience, as you have in relation to Peter's. "Because of Christ", Paul confesses, "I have come to consider all my "advantages" as disadvantages." But God has helped him to face this fact by believing that nothing can outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Jesus Christ. We, like Paul, will be asked to accept the loss of everything and put all our hope in Christ.

When Paul encountered Christ on the road to Damascus he had to accept a wholly new vision of the meaning of his life, and everything else. It was a kind of revelation or enlightenment. When Jesus asked him, "Why are you persecuting me?", Paul suddenly understood that he had mixed up truth and error. Seeing who Jesus really is required that everything change for Paul, and especially his understanding of himself. How do we feel about having to accept something like that? More, this experience brings a realization that I am being sent!

This happens to each of us as we are gifted with news and knowledge not due to any effort on our part. And because of this each of us has been made a sign of mercy and grace! The rest of our life has to become a response to this grace, and one we share with others. This is what we celebrate when we join in the Eucharist with Peter and Paul, joined with them in graces that we don't chose but show us the path God would have us walk. It is a gift marvelous beyond words, but also scary. Look what responding made of Peter and of Paul! Will you let God make of you a like blessing for many others?

*Saturday*

## **WHAT OUR MOTHER TEACHES & SHARES WITH US**

### **A reflection derived from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny**

When Martha tried to call Mary from the feet of Jesus he told her: “Mary has chosen the better part!” What Jesus said of Mary of Bethany he equivalently said to Mary of Nazareth. The Blessed Virgin Mary chose the better part and now she, as well as the other Mary, has entered into the unending possession of it. Both have entered into the closest of closenesses with the Lord. Mary of Bethany welcomes the Lord under the shelter of her roof and the Blessed Virgin welcomed him to the bridal chamber of her womb. “He who created me”, we read, “has rested in my tent.” The one sat at his feet and listened and the Blessed Virgin treasured up all that concerned Jesus and pondered it in her heart.

It seems that when Jesus went around the towns and villages Mary accompanied him. She followed him to the Cross and stood there beside him. How could she be frightened of death when her love was stronger than death? There he acknowledged her as mother and entrusted her to a suitable protector. Loving her as he did, Jesus loved her to the end; he spoke almost his last words for her benefit. Mary was to rejoice in all she remembered of Jesus and it was not to be taken away from her but brought to perfection.

I say these things so that if anyone feels a longing for that “best part”, which Jesus praised, such a one may know that this is the reward of those who can’t be blamed for failing to do Martha’s part—as Mary had done in all the years she spent with Jesus in Nazareth. Let it be known that this too is a gift and a grace. The toil involved in work and its anxieties are the seeds of justice, through which joys are reaped from the fruits of consoling mercy. One who sows sparingly will reap sparingly and Mary sowed without stint or hesitation. She reminds us that those who sow with a blessing will also reap a blessing. Who can miss this truth who know the one “blessed among women”.

The Virgin Mary was graced with a life that is essentially like ours. We too are called to allow Jesus to enter into us and to grow there until he is ready to come forth for the salvation of many. We too are given the opportunity to keep our gaze fixed steadily on Jesus and on all that has to do with Jesus. And if we accept this gift how could we fail to contemplate all that we come to know? How could we fail to store it up in our hearts and even to share it with those God calls into closeness with us, as God called St. John into intimacy with Blessed Mary?

We too share his passion, as we will share his resurrection and glorification. In following Mary’s lead, we too will be blessed, and all nations will be blessed in and through us. She has been filled and yet had enough left to give us little ones much of what filled her table. The gifts of God are enriched by being shared, that is their nature. Who would not be glad to be a dog under her table? Where do we find her, and all these marvelous things? We find them at the table of the sacrament of the altar. May these gifts lead us to the table of everlasting joy!