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Sunday

HOW CHRIST'S REAL PRESENCE TRANSFORMS US

A reflection from God's Way to be Human by Fr. G. Preston, OP

Christ offers himself in the Eucharist as food and drink. When we eat at this table we declare we are ready to feed on him in all the ways he offers himself. The Imitation of Christ talks about the table of the word as well as the table of the sacrament. Ignatius of Antioch tells us that faith itself is the substance of the Christian life: "Believe and you have fed", says St. Augustine. We "eat" the flesh of the Son of Man sacramentally in the Eucharist, at the table of the Word, and by caring for his suffering members.

Now this can't be done one time and that's enough. The Eucharist, for instance, feeds desire and longing; we have to keep eating at all these tables continually. We are longing for the Kingdom of God. What we do when we eat and drink Christ is deeply linked to that coming. Whenever we eat and drink Christ, we, as it were, hold up a placard proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes. Christ is food for our journey and Christ is the end of the journey. As we pray for his coming, He does come, in signs. But the signs realize Christ's real presence. The signs are transformed into Him really. We go on telling our God we are waiting for the final coming of Jesus Christ and as we do this, we are made aware that He is with us now. We go on doing this until the end becomes "now".

Now we eat together. We eat the banquet God has prepared for us and we wish peace for one another in ways that realize not only peace but unity. These are proper to the Kingdom of God where Jesus and we live forever. What we do now is a prophetic sign by which we act out his real presence now even as we wait for its fullest real presence. That brings us into a situation where what unites us is the Word of God, one loaf and a common cup and one service and a shared love. All this finds its significance from the death of Jesus to the world and his living for God. Jesus is thus God's way of being human. The loaf and the cup are the way to a new and true humanity embodied in our world and this is what makes us one.

The Kingdom of God is the unity of mankind in Christ. That unity will be Christ. He is the lamb of the Book of Revelation with the marks of slaughter still upon him, the one hanged bearing wounds that were never healed but glorified. Here and now we are invited to let ourselves be taken into that unity and live as though we were already transformed in Him. In doing this we fix our destiny more and more fervently. We already feel ourselves at home in what is still to be and more and more disposed to live like Jesus in what still has to be accomplished. This is the realization of the sacrament of peace and unity. It may feel like a game of pretend but like the games of childhood it prepares us for the adulthood in which we put on the full humanity of Christ.

Monday

St Lawrence

A reflection from Butler's Lives of the Saints

St Lawrence was one among the seven deacons who served the Roman church; this was a charge of great trust, to which was annexed the care of the goods of the Church, and the distribution of its alms among the poor. There are few martyrs in the Church whose names are as famous as that of St Lawrence, in whose praises the most illustrious among the Latin fathers have written, and whose triumph, to use the words of St Maximus, the whole Church joins in a body to honor with universal joy and devotion.

According to tradition, as Pope St Sixtus was led to execution, his deacon Lawrence followed him weeping, and said to him "Father, where are you going without your deacon?". The Pope answered "I do not leave you my son. You shall follow me in three days". Lawrence was filled with joy, hearing that he would be so called by God and so soon ; he set out immediately to seek all the poor, widows and orphans, and gave among them the money which he had in his hands; he even sold the sacred vessels to increase the sum, and employed it all in the same way.

Emperor Valerion heard that the Church had wealth and ordered Lawrence to bring the treasures to him. Lawrence replied, without showing any concern "The Church is indeed rich; nor has the Emperor any treasure to equal what it possesses. I will show you a valuable part, let me make an inventory". Then Lawrence went all over the city and gathered the poor who were supported by the Church. On the third day he assembled a large number of them, and placed them in rows, the decrepit, the lame, the blind, the maimed, the lepers, orphans and widows; then he went to the Prefect and invited him to come and see the treasures of the Church

The Prefect saw all this and was furious saying "You mock me! You insult me." He determined that Lawrence would be punished with a slow death. He had a gridiron made ready, and glowing coals put under it so that he would be severely punished. As he was being roasted, he turned to the judge and said with a cheerful smile 'Let my body be turned; one side is broiled enough". When this took place, he said "It is cooked enough. You may eat". Then he prayed for the conversion of the city of Rome and gave up his spirit.

Tuesday

St Clare of Assisi

Her own words to her sisters

We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing. Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ, rather it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation. This means we are to become vessels of the compassionate love of God for others.

When you have followed a good road, you can truly go forth in peace. There is no reason for fear, for He who made you created you holy, has protected you and loved you like a mother.

Our labor here is brief, but the reward is eternal. Never be disturbed by the clamor of the world, because it passes like a shadow. Never let the false delights of a deceptive world deceive you. Your body is not made of iron. Your strength is not that of stone. When you live try to hope in the Lord, and let your service be according to reason.

You will of course suffer in this life. Remember that love which does not know of suffering is not worthy of the name. Always place your mind before the mirror of eternity. Always place your soul in the brilliance of glory. And above all transform your entire being into the image of the Godhead. This will happen through contemplation.

Our great call is to love one another with the charity of Christ. Let the love you have in your hearts be shown outwardly in your deeds so that compelled by such an example, the sisters may grow in the love of God and charity to one another.

Above all else we must live poorly and simply. Poverty is a blessed thing which bestows eternal riches on those of us who love and embrace her. Behold Christ's poverty even as he was laid in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. What wondrous humility, what marvelous poverty. Blessed is the Lord who created us and blessed are we to be poor.

Wednesday

Death

Pope Francis addresses young people in Mexico

Dear young people gathered from so many nations of the world. I greet you as you conclude your meeting and so I wish to dwell on this: the end.

What would become of this encounter if it did not have an end? And what would become of life if it did not also have its end?

I know some will say “Father, please don’t put on a funeral face”. But let us think this through. I know from a good source that you kept the question of death burning throughout the entire meeting.

Good! I celebrate and thank you for this. Because you know what? The question of death is really a question about life. And keeping the question of death open, perhaps, is the greatest human responsibility towards the question of life.

Just as words are born out of silence and return to it, allowing us to hear their meanings, so it is with life. This may sound somewhat paradoxical, but... It is death that allows life to remain alive.

It is the end goal that allows a story to be written, a painting to be painted, two bodies to embrace. But, watch out, the end goal is not found only at the end. Perhaps we should pay attention to every small purpose of everyday life. Not only at the end of the story, we never know when it ends, but at the end of each word, at the end of each silence, of each page that is being written. Only a life that is conscious of the fact that this exact instant will end works to make it eternal.

On the other hand, death reminds us that it is impossible to be, understand, and encompass everything. It comes as a slap in the face to our illusions of omnipotence. It teaches us throughout life to engage ourselves with mystery. This gives us confidence to jump into the void and to realize that we will not fall, that we will not sink, and that there is always Someone there to catch us. Both before and after the end.

Many cultures deny death. But the very oblivion of death is also its beginning. When we forget about death we begin to die within. The person who forgets death has already begun to die.

Have the courage to confront the three deaths, the death of every instant, the death of the ego and the death of one world which gives way to a new one. So, remember, if death is not to have the last word, it is because in life we learned to die for one another.

Thursday

GOD'S GRACE NEVER SLEEPS

From The Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary by Modestus of Jerusalem

How much should we meditate on God's grace given through Mary? Should we ever cease to declare the goodness of our God? Never! Mary lived as a beautiful ship sailing through life toward the port where God would receive her and constantly meditating on God's goodness. When she had completed her voyage, she reached the haven of perfect peace and lived in the perfect presence of the helmsman of our world. He had by her grace-inspired help saved the human race from a flood of godlessness and sin and given it new life. So, the One who gave a law on Sinai now issued another decree that the ark which had rested among his holy people should now come to Him. "Go up, Lord, to your resting place, you and the ark which you have sanctified." This prayer of David speaks of Mary rather than of the earthly Ark of the Covenant.

This new ark wasn't drawn to God by oxen, like the ark of old, but it was guided and guarded by a heavenly army of holy angels. It wasn't an ark made by human hands and plated with gold. It was a living ark created by God and completely radiant with the all-holy light and life-giving Spirit who had caused her to conceive. Within her was no container of manna or the stone tablets of the covenant but the bestower of manna and of a blessed promise of eternity. She contained the Lord of the old and new covenants who had come into the world as a child and freed all who would believe in Him and follow him. This ark didn't go before the Hebrew people but followed God who had come on earth in human form and in a body received from her.

What does she say to us? "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior!" She fell asleep in the body but was taken by God to himself and to full wakefulness. She was taken up so as to proclaim the greatness of her Lord and God, and ours, unsleepingly and forever. Aren't we called to do the same? Aren't we called to wake up and praise the Lord so that all the earth can know God's glory and God's love for all human kind? What God called Mary to do was to bring Christ into the world for the world's salvation. What God calls us to do is receive Christ and to show him to all the world. To see Christ in truth is to seek the God who reveals himself through Christ. That is salvation. To show salvation to the world is our vocation as it was that of Mary.

In order to shine out brightly, the light-bearing spiritual dawn came to rest in a human body. Now He comes to rest in our bodies and so give light to all creation throughout all the ages of the world. In mercy and compassion God stirs up in believers the longing to imitate Mary as far as the grace given them allows. Christ our God clothes himself in not just a single human body. Mary is a human tent which receives the King of Glory. That is also, in another way, our vocation. Her physical tent has been taken away and re-erected in Heaven. She doesn't cease to pray and praise and seek to bring a blessing to all those God has made her children in His Providence. Our task is to seek out and find the ways in which we can praise him and pray for others and make the light of God's love shine upon the world. We are a lamp for love to shine forth. Meditation and prayer let that light shine forth.

Friday

THE MISSIONARY POWER OF CHARITY

A reflection by St. Maximilian Kolbe

To stimulate our activity for the good of souls God permits various crosses. This goodness of God is an immense reality, containing numberless sources of grace; we must take advantage of them. Among others, we may mention the irritation others provoke. With what a blessed hope we can repeat the words of the Our Father: *“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”*. In this way our complete pardon of others’ offenses against us obtains for us the right to be pardoned for all the faults we commit against God. What a pity it would be for us to have nothing to pardon others for! Think how necessary offenses are in purifying our souls and so how welcome that purification is! How powerfully these acts contribute to bringing us closer to God.

What is more, the reciprocal love we are graced with doesn’t mean that nobody will ever cause us displeasure or distress. It means that we will try not to distress others and try to accustom ourselves to forgiving immediately and fully everything that offends us. True fraternal charity consists in this mutual bearing with one another.

St Teresa wrote this: *“I gradually understood how imperfect was my love for my sisters. Jesus did not love them that way. Now I understand that genuine love consists in bearing with the defects and faults of our neighbors, in not being surprised at their imperfections, but in being edified by every least act of virtue. Above all I understood that love must not remain locked up in our hearts, because no one lights a lamp to place it under a bushel basket; rather one places it on a lampstand so that it may shed its light to all who enter the house.”*

Dear Mother Mary, it seems to me that this lamp in the Gospel represents love, which should illuminate and make joyful not only those who are dearest to us but all those who are in the house.

Besides, St. Therese continues: *“My dear Jesus, I know that you don’t command anything impossible. You know my weakness and imperfection better than I do. You know I shall never succeed in loving my sisters as you love them, unless you love them in me and through me. And since you wish to give me this grace you have taught me your new commandment.”*

The message is that the deeper this love becomes in us, the more effective our activities as missionaries will be. It is a love one can live always and in every sort of circumstance, whether pleasant or painful. Trust in God and God will act in and through you and so will bring closer the full coming of the Kingdom.

Saturday

MARY'S ASSUMPTION: GOD'S PROMISE TO US FULFILLED **A reflection from The Seat of Wisdom by Fr. Louis Bouyer**

How should we approach Mary's Assumption? It is a living fulfillment of Christ's promise to all his disciples: He has gone to the Heavenly Father to prepare a place for us, because it is his will that where he is there we too shall be. With Him the glory that the Heavenly Father gave him will be ours too, and all that follows from it. So, it goes, almost without saying, that Mary's Assumption into Heaven is a fulfillment of the promise made to all of us. Take Jesus literally.

Mary conceived and gave birth to her Son by a divine promise fulfilled in her. By opening herself to this grace she, in effect, opened all of us to grace. She was the first saved as God intends to save all of us. She was saved perfectly, freed from the consequences of our first parents' sin she was freed to be fully open to grace and to show us the marvelous effects of this saving and forgiving grace. We see in her what we are to grow to be under the power and driving force of God's grace. This is what we become by answering God's call. It is the grace of entering the nuptial chamber and becoming one with Christ and God.

Mary's assumption is the pledge of the glory Christ gives to all who are his spouse. He has already shared that glory with his mother. He now asks us to share it too. As St. John says: "*It has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, because we will see him as he is*". For Mary this has already been fulfilled; her faith has passed into sight. In her we are given the pledge of our God's seriousness in promising this to all who believe. We shall see God as God is, with Mary, like her already fully like Christ.

St. Paul tells us: "*We shall be taken up together to meet Christ and so we shall always be with the Lord*". Have you ever tried to imagine what that state of "glory", as we call it, will be like? We know that it is already realized for Mary and for endless other saints in her train. We also know that Christ's ascension didn't mean that he had left us to our own devices in our present condition. He has gone only to prepare a place for us with him. Where he is we are soon to be. Yet his going didn't, and doesn't, separate us from Christ! Now apply this to Mary. She has been taken to Heaven and is with Christ but as Christ is with us still so is Mary. She can't be absent from wherever he is because he has promised we will be with Him always. The same is true for us.

If we want to imagine what it is like to be with Christ, we have to begin from the fact that it means we won't be absent from any of those who are still on earth—after all Christ is with them and we will always be with Him. Mary's blessedness has been made perfect and it doesn't separate her from us any more than does Christ's. The same will be true for us. But Christ always stands interceding for us before the Heavenly Father. So does Mary, and so shall we. Everyone, in the bliss of an eternal Eucharist, shall be one of innumerable many bearers of blessing. With her we will ever be united with her Son and our Savior, interceding and bringing blessings upon all. That is God's will for us, fulfilled already in her. Don't be afraid! Christ is with us always