

SEVENTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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 An Audience Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Sunday

SEEING GOD BY FAITH

A reflection from a homily by St. Augustine

What we call the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ lead our minds through visible things to an experience of God. We know that God is not the sort of being who can be seen with eyes and yet we know that God creates and rules the entire universe. But the amazing artistry we discover in a tiny seed is actually found everywhere. We don't bother to reflect on this fact because it is always there. What we notice are events that aren't part of the ordinary course of nature. They are works that God has reserved for particular times and places to cause us amazement and dumbfound us so that we will open our minds to God's presence and care in all events and beauties.

Governing the entire universe is certainly a greater miracle than feeding a mere five thousand people with five loaves of bread. Yet no one marvels at that governance but everyone is amazed at the second. We marvel at what is extraordinary. Think of the fact that a few seeds bring forth an entire field of wheat. Just as God multiplies a few seeds to make this field of wheat, so Christ multiplies five loaves. Christ does what God does, but in a way that opens our eyes to what God is always doing. The eyes that are opened are those of faith. The five loaves Christ multiplied were like seeds and from them comes our faith. This is much greater than a wheat field, and much more extraordinary!

A miracle is recounted to us in a sensible way in order to stimulate our minds and to engage our efforts to understand whatever happens. It makes us marvel at the God we don't see by showing us works we can see. The process raises us to the level of faith. Purified by the experience of faith we long to behold God. We know we can't do this with our ordinary eyes but we couldn't recognize God's hand working in our ordinary world except by the gift of faith. From this gift comes an ability to see what eyes cannot see. Christ performed a miracle so that the multitude he feed could see what was happening. It called forth faith. It was recorded and is read to us to call for the same faith. Faith, moreover, does for us what ordinary eyes did for the multitude. But doesn't the Lord tell us: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe"?

The people whom Jesus had healed realized they had seen a sign. "*Surely, this must be a prophet*", they said. He was in fact the Lord of the prophets, the one who fulfills what *they* prophets had proclaimed, the one who sanctifies the prophets. He was also a prophet himself, and the one whom Moses had foretold: "*I will raise up for them a prophet like yourself*", God said to Moses. The Lord Jesus is that prophet. He is the Word of God, and without God's Word no prophet can prophesy. Yes, the Word of God is a prophet and is with the prophets. Think of the people to whom God gave the gift of hearing the prophets proclaim the divine word. Now think of the fact that God has given you the gift of hearing the word of the very Word of God, the prophet of prophets.

Faith should open our hearts to gratitude and thanksgiving just as it has opened our minds to believe. That very thanksgiving is a miracle of faith that God is working in you at this very moment. Do you see God in yourself? Believe and so see and so rejoice.

Monday

SETTING OUT TO MULTIPLY GOOD THINGS

A reflection from a sermon by Fr. Johannes Hoffmeister

In many ways the Lord gives food to all living things. But God does this by using creatures as ministers—e.g., sun and moon, rain and dew, human farmers and their labors. The same is true in the spiritual realm. Listen to St. Paul: “*I have planted, Apollos has watered, but it is God who gave the increase*”. The Lord Jesus received the heavenly bread of true teaching from the Heavenly Father, the apostles received it from him, and so on down to the present day and those who have fed us.

St. John the Evangelist tells us that Jesus gave thanks to the Heavenly Father before he broke the bread to feed the five thousand. Why did he do that? Christ could multiply bread without a word or a gesture. That’s what he did in creating the universe. In one way, Christ did this so that the crowd would know that he was not working or teaching in the name of some god other than the One True God. All that he did was done in fulfillment of the promises made by that One God to mankind through Moses and the prophets. But he had a second reason for giving thanks before multiplying the loaves. He was teaching that thanksgiving must be the beginning of our efforts to multiply good things we have. We should do this in order to do God’s work and make God’s purposes effective.

What is thanksgiving. It is an acknowledgement that all good things come to us from God. After giving thanks Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fish to such an extent that they fed five thousand men without counting the women and children. All of them were fed most generously. We know that because five baskets of left-overs were collected; more bread and fish were left than had been blessed to begin with.

Now think of how many human activities are directed to multiplying good things! Think of what it means if we begin our work by thanking God! Do you expect to multiply your goods or anything you possess or want to possess without thanking God first? It doesn’t matter how much we have to begin with or even how much we want to end up with. We must always thank God. And when we have received a multiplication from God’s hands, we must use these things with gratitude. We must begin with God and end with God and do all according to God’s will and word. That shows our gratitude.

Tuesday

THE APOSTOLATE IS CHRISTIAN LIVING

A reflection from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

To Christ Jesus be the glory! The fact that the saints lived according to this maxim is one of the reasons why we admire them. And in whom do we admire this way of life more than in St. Ignatius of Loyola? It is vital that we pay careful attention to the example that St. Ignatius offers us today.

Perhaps the first thing he teaches us is not to be afraid for the Church. We say the Church of Christ is holy. This is true because the Lord sustains and guides it and not because of human efforts. It is Christ who makes the Church a fountain of life.

In some parts of the world the church is opposed or persecuted. This is at times due to the conduct of her members and not just to non-believers or anti-clericals. We have to turn to Christ when the Church is in trouble. There have been many such storms but they have always been followed by calm weather. One of the ways this is brought about is through the saints' examples of genuine Christian living.

St. Ignatius knew that all perfection is a result of the exercise of a genuinely Christian way of living. He saw that poverty and obedience, for example, are ways of living as Christ lived and paths we can walk to perfection. He wasn't talking about destitution when he spoke of poverty. It wasn't lack of goods or wealth he had in mind but an indifference toward what is merely human and not godly. Ordinary good things are desirable only as they lead us to salvation. We don't love them but we love all the people God has created and use goods to express this love. The same thing is true of obedience; it has to be like Christ's obedience to the Heavenly Father for the sake of the salvation of all.

How does God work this salvation? He does it through us. We teach others by our way of living, by our works of charity, by our concern for the social welfare of all, by our efforts to build up our societies and nations so they embody a civilization of love. What we do should be seen to build up and ennoble human life and ways of living.

What not all see is that what makes all of this a reality is making our living together an instrument for sanctification. We are to seek to sanctify our families, our communities, our civic and social order, our country and the Church. To difficulties and crises, we must respond with the "calm of the Gospel". There will always be difficulties and opposition, both from the failures of Christians to live sanctification and from the hatred of those who misunderstand Christ's message of love.

Let opponents rage! Continue to bless the name of the Lord Jesus! Continue to imitate and bless the saints! To Jesus Christ be glory and honor and blessing! This is the message of St. Ignatius, and the message of the Gospel and of Jesus. Keep it in mind that when you sanctify your living and acting in the ways possible in your circumstances you are both an apologist and an apostle of Jesus Christ!

Wednesday

BETHANY SAINTS

Homily by Marg Mowczko

Mary and Mary, along with their brother lived in Bethany. The two sisters seem to have had different temperaments, and their characters are often polarized in the retelling of their story. These polarized characteristics are caricatures that obscure the real pictures of the women, their faith, and their situation. Of their brother Lazarus we know almost nothing.

From the short biblical accounts, it seems that Martha was the older of the two women and the more practical. Mary seems more emotional and more popular. Martha has been unfairly maligned because of one incident but we must remember that she made some astute statements of faith concerning Jesus' identity and also about eternal life. Like Peter she recognized that Jesus was the Christ and this is something that had to be revealed to her.

Martha, Mary and Lazarus were all devoted disciples of Jesus. Sitting at someone's feet was the usual posture of a disciple who was being taught, and this is where we find Mary. Perhaps Lazarus and some others were doing the same, while Martha was busy preparing the meal. She was doing a very fine thing, but Jesus says Mary had chosen the greater option.

Later, Mary would choose to do another fine thing when she lovingly anointed Jesus with an expensive perfume. Mary came in for criticism once again because of this extravagant act of ministry, but once again Jesus defends her.

Lazarus is in the background but he becomes a celebrity after Jesus raised him from death. Jesus, clearly was very attached to him.

The name Bethany means "Poor house" or "House of Misery". The village may have been named after the hospice for the sick and destitute. But Jesus did not experience poverty in Bethany; instead he experienced the warmth, love, and hospitality of dear friends.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus were people of great faith and devotion. The Church needs their examples of friendship, hospitality and loving service.

Thursday

THE JOURNEY TO CONTEMPLATION

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The desert is a place where, through trial and temptation, we are called to learn who God truly is. We belong to a pilgrim church, a church journeying through history, and through a particular culture and civilization, and so often confronted with difficulties. Surrounded as so many are by anonymous individuals, there can be something of the desert even within our society or community.

How does one live through such trials? One let's oneself be made aware of the presence of the Lord. The Lord's face has been shown us in Christ and in his trials in the desert. If we let ourselves see him now we open ourselves to his help as we struggle to face the trails of our version of the desert. We have to know that we actually live by every word that comes to us from the mouth of God, and of Jesus who shows us that God's face is the face of love.

Do you think of contemplating the face of God as a reward that is given only after one has finished the desert journey? If you think that way how do you explain the glow you see in the faces of many believers? Does this reveal to us the intense radiance of the Son as revealing his face to us? The Son reflects a Father, and in this case a Heavenly Father. We begin to see that face ourselves when we see it radiated in the faces of those Jesus has made true children of God, the One Heavenly Father. I believe it is almost impossible to live a Christian experience in today's society without being immersed, rooted, in deep contemplation. And this must be in a personal experience of contemplation. The desert we enter is our daily life as we seek to do what we find gives our life meaning. We must strive to find the moments, the pauses, that allow us to live in a listening dialogue with our God and with God alone.

When your countenance is radiant from contemplating the countenance of God people notice it. When we live a contemplative experience, we radiate God around us, even without wanting or trying to. This is one of the few and most important signs of the presence of God in today's world. The presence is revealed in those who have climbed the Mount of Contemplation in a desert.

The question to ask ourselves is what we need to do to open ourselves to this. I think it is the only way that the temptation of idolatry and even atheism can be conquered in our society. Perhaps we are among those who are overburdened with a thousand things to do, or perhaps we have overburdened ourselves in an effort to escape an emptiness within. We need to give place—to leave a place open—to the radiant presence of God and to the contemplation of God's face. Perhaps our inner emptiness was such a place and we have to cease running away in order to find God's face in ourselves and in others. Stop running and let yourself be alone with God in prayer. It is the door to contemplation.

Friday

THE CHARISM OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

Fr Jon Sobrino SJ

Regarding the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, I would like to say two things. The first is how happy I am with my vocation as a Jesuit. I admire and have affection for many Jesuits, let's call them "people who live simply", who without fuss or much ado dedicate years of their lives, thirty, forty fifty to the care of souls. Other Jesuits are better known: Karl Rahner, Pedro Arrupe, Ignatio Ellacuria.... They have been on the frontier, advancing history, suffering attacks from the powers of the world, and sometimes, even the Vatican. They are a grace from God.

I am happy too, that our founder St Ignatius of Loyola reflected on God and Jesus, while still a layman, and was able to unleash a tradition that has come down to us, above all in his Spiritual Exercises. For me as a Jesuit, but also as a believer and as a human being, the image of the Incarnation in the Exercises is important "Let us bring about the redemption of the human race". His words continue to be a judgement and a demand. The colloquy from the meditation on sin continues to be decisive "Before Christ crucified, asking myself, what have I done for Christ, what am I doing for Christ, what am I going to do for Christ?" Fr Ellacuria made this concrete in a way which has not been surpassed saying "Before the crucified people, asking myself, what have I done to crucify them, what am I doing to take them down from the cross, what ought I to do to raise them up?". To me to this day, the notion of the Two Standards seems brilliant: there are two ways of life, two roads that are in conflict, so that they both cannot be accepted. They are the paths of poverty and the paths of riches. That is why Ignatius warned us against an always -present danger; "Worldly honor and pride".

There is no need to repeat the importance of Jesus of Nazareth for St Ignatius. Like Francis of Assisi or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he is always encouraging us to develop an interior knowledge of Jesus in order to love and follow him. He also teaches us that God fills our lives and our hearts, and makes us blessed. I am constantly surprised by the fact that, if somebody distinguishes the spirituality of St Ignatius, it is precisely this "only God is God.

Saturday

ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

An Audience Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

St. Alphonsus reminds us that the relationship with God is essential in life and that only with a daily personal prayer and participation in the sacraments can the Divine presence that directs, illumines and makes safe and peaceful our path, even in the midst of difficulties and dangers, grow in us.

For St. Alphonsus “prayer is a means necessary to salvation and the graces we need to achieve it” This sentence synthesizes Alphonsian understanding of prayer. The saint wanted us to understand that in every situation of life we need to pray, especially in times of trial and difficulty.

Therefore, we must always knock on the door of the Lord with confidence and submit our petitions, in the certainty of receiving what we need.

The enduring popularity of St. Alphonsus is due to his simple, straightforward style and his teaching on the sacrament of reconciliation. In times of great rigor, the result of the influence of Jansenism, he recommended confessors to administer the sacrament expressing the joyful embrace of God the Father, who in his infinite mercy never ceases to welcome every repentant son and daughter.

The saint proposed that health and all the grace we need are what is truly required in life. He was interested in a healthy body but primarily his interest was in the health of the soul, which Jesus gifts us.

It is this liberating presence of Christ that makes us truly fully human, and thus our existence full of joy is achieved through prayer. To illustrate this need for prayer, St. Alphonsus would often give the example of St. Philip Neri, who from the first moment he awoke in the morning, would say to God “My God, beware of Philip; otherwise, he will betray you.”

It is only through prayer that we can accept the grace of Christ, which, by illuminating us in every situation, helps us discern the truth, and by fortifying us, renders our will capable of implementing what we know to be good.