

THIRTIETH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sunday

THE SIGHT WE NEED FROM THE LORD

A reflection from Exhortation to the Greeks by Clement of Alexandria

“The commandment of the Lord shines clearly, enlightening the eyes”. That is what Scripture tells us, and it also shows us that we receive this light *from* Christ. It is by this light that we differentiate what is divine from what is only human. This is a knowledge *“more delightful than gold and precious stones, more desirable than honey or than a honeycomb”*.

Despite the light of the stars, without the sun the world would be plunged in darkness. If we had not known Christ, the Word, we would have been no better off than the chickens that people raise in complete darkness so they will be more tender—i.e., we would have been reared only for death. We have to open ourselves to the light; we have to become disciples of the Lord. Christ promised to the Heavenly Father: *“I will make known your name to my brothers and sisters and praise you where they are assembled”*. So we sing God’s praises. Christ’s words save us and instruct us. Once I wandered and got lost searching for God but with Christ’s light we find the right path. With you O Lord Jesus I have light, I find God, I receive the Heavenly Father, I become a coheir with you because you weren’t ashamed of me but made me your brother.

We have to shake off forgetfulness of these truths. We have to shake off that ignorance and darkness that dims our sight. We need to contemplate the true God and raise a song of praise. “All hail, O Light!” Upon us, buried in darkness, imprisoned in the shadow of death, a heavenly light has shown. It surpasses the sun in brightness and is sweeter than anything in this earthly life can be. This light is eternal life for all who receive it. Night is afraid of light, and gives place to the day in something like terror. Unfailing light has now penetrated everywhere. The Day of the Lord is come! Sunset has been turned into dawn.

This is what it means to say that there is a new creation. The Sun of righteousness has come to visit us, just like the Heavenly Father, *“who makes the sun rise upon all, and bestows truth on every one”*. Christ has changed sunset into dawn and death into life and did it by his crucifixion. He has snatched the human race from perdition and exalted it to Heaven. He transplants what was merely mortal into the Kingdom of immortality. He is God’s gardener and points the way to prosperity. He prompts us all to good works and reminds us how to live according to truth. He bestows the truly great and divine heritage of the Heavenly Father, one that cannot be taken away from us. Christ deifies us by heavenly teaching, instills his laws into our minds, and writes them on our hearts.

What are the laws Christ prescribes? First, that all should know God. *“I will be merciful to those who know me and I will remember their sins no more.”* Let us accept these laws of life. Let us obey God’s promptings. Let us learn to know him so that God may be merciful to us. Although God stands in no need of it, praise God and pay God your debt of gratitude in willing obedience to his Law. Think of it as a kind of rent we owe God for our lodging here below. Watch Jesus and see how to love God. He also shows you how to love each of God’s children.

Monday

WHO AM I

A reflection from Fr Bede Griffiths OSB CAM

I look at the flowers which are growing up in the ashram garden outside my window-golden orange marigolds and crimson Christmas roses. They come out of the darkness of the earth, which is itself the shadow of the divine darkness, the abyss of being from which everything comes. They come out of this darkness into the light of the Word, radiant with its brightness, reflecting its glory. The impulse which quickens them in the earth and makes them thrust into the light is the movement of the Spirit, the divine life, immanent in the earth. And the same spirit which stirs in them stirs in me, awakening feelings of joy and delight in their beauty. They are in me and I am in them, and both of us are in the Word and the Spirit. This is a theophany. God the Father speaks his Word, and these flowers spring into being. He speaks again, and my consciousness delights in their beauty. He sends forth his Spirit and they are created. The same Spirit moves the flowers to spring and me to contemplate them: both in them and in me it is the one Lord who rejoices in his works.

Who am I? I am this person who sits here thinking and meditating. I am aware of my body,, which occupies the space of my cell, which looks out on the flowers in the garden and hears the birds singing, and at the same time I am aware of my mind, which reflects on my body and the world around me, which names these sights and sounds and expresses my thoughts on these words. But I am much more than this. I have a long history now of many years, in which my body and my mind have undergone innumerable changes.

How can I get to know myself? Not by thinking, for thinking reflects my conscious being but by meditating. Meditation goes beyond the conscious mind into the unconscious. In meditation I become aware of the ground of my being. I can experience my solidarity with the universe, with the remotest star in outer space. I can experience my solidarity with the earth, with every living thing, with these flowers and trees, with the birds and squirrels, and above all with every human being. Then I discover the Ground from which they all spring. I can know the Father, the Origin, the Source. In the Word all comes to be eternally, beyond time. The Word is the self-manifestation of the Father. I have existed eternally in this Word from the Father beyond time and space. Thus, I stand eternally before him.

Tuesday

WORD AND SILENCE

from Word into Silence by Dom John Main OSB

“It is better to be silent and real than to talk and be unreal,” wrote St Ignatius of Antioch in the first century, and our contemporary situation must bear this out. Authority, conviction, personal verification, which are the indispensable qualities of Christian witness, are not found in books, in discussions, or in talks, but rather in an encounter with ourselves in the silence of our own spirit.

If modern people have lost their experience of spirit, pneuma, or essence, in which their own irreducible and absolute being consists, it is because they have lost their experience of and their capacity for silence. There are few statements about spiritual reality that can claim a universal agreement. But this one has received the same formulation in almost all traditions, namely, that it is only in accepting silence that people can know their own spirit, and only in abandonment to an infinite dept of silence that they can be revealed to the source of their spirit in which multiplicity and division disappear. Modern people are often threatened by silence, what T S Eliot called “the growing terror of nothing to think about”, and everybody has to face this fear when they begin to meditate.

We must confront with some shame the chaotic din of a mind ravaged by so much exposure to trivia and distraction. Persevering through this by fidelity to our spiritual practice, we then encounter a darker level of consciousness, of repeated fears and anxieties. The radical simplicity of meditation can clear this too. But our first inclination is always to retreat from the dawn of self-knowledge, and as the author Walter Hilton very graphically put it, “This is not surprising for if a woman came home to her house and found nothing but a smoking fire and a grumpy husband, she would quickly run out again.”

Of course, in overcoming distractions and subconscious anxiety, we risk being bruised. But in entering into our own silence, we risk everything, for we risk our whole being: “Be still my soul”. This is a pilgrimage through our spheres of silence that we undertake in faith, putting our entire trust in what is only a dim appreciation of the authentic, the real, yet confident in doing so precisely because it is authentic.

When we meditate, do our spiritual practice, we lay down our life for the sake of Him we have not yet seen. Blessed are they who believe and act on their belief though they have not yet seen. In meditation we are plunged into a silence that explores our infinite poverty of mind and spirit, revealing our absolute dependence on Another. In the silence we find the life we laid down and the self we surrendered.

Wednesday

I AM WHAT I AM ONLY IN JESUS

A reflection developed from a homily by Fr. Stephen Yim of Singapore

Nothing is known of the apostles named Simon and Jude except that Jesus chose them to bear witness to him. Legend has it that he did this in Persian Mesopotamia, where the church has existed from their day to this, usually under persecution. We are familiar with St. Jude because he is the patron of those who are in desperate need; i.e., when people don't know where to turn they ask St. Jude to pray for them. Who wouldn't want to be remembered for more than two thousand years as one who was close to Jesus and had a special gift of praying for others?

It is an interesting fact that depictions of St. Jude always show him with a picture of Jesus on a medallion around his neck. He, and even more his fellow apostle Simon, picture Jesus by what they do. What do they do? They proclaim Jesus and they imitate his constant turning to the Heavenly Father in prayer. Is there anything that any of us need to do besides letting our God make us an image of Jesus and ourselves carry that image always in our heart?

We are probably headed for obscurity and oblivion. In a couple of centuries who will remember the details of what we did with our lives? But more and more people are coming to Jesus and to the Heavenly Father all the time. As St. John the Baptist said: He must increase and I must decrease. That should be our prayer constantly. That's what it means to choose to be instruments for the proclamation of the Good News.

Saints Simon and Jude are named in the First Roman canon of the Mass. All who pray using that canon remember them as chosen by Jesus and made close to Jesus by God's grace. That is what all Christians pray for. Whether we are remembered by name is of no special importance. We are always with God and God is always mindful of us. Jesus is God and if we are inseparable from Jesus we are inseparable from God. That is what we pray for constantly.

These two saints are remembered as martyrs. All we know is that just as the world hated Jesus, and crucified him, so the world hates those whom Jesus has chosen as his witnesses. They are models for all who suffer because of their faith in Jesus. Whenever we undergo hardships, even interiorly, because we are struggling to let our faith be our very life and the source of all our hopes, we are experiencing the hatred of the world as it has come to be even within us. We have announced that we want to "leave the world" and cling only to Christ. That is what Simon and Jude announced, and what they did wherever they proclaimed the Gospel in word and by their lives. We have experienced that hatred and the pain and suffering that comes with it. Do we rejoice in this? Do we experience our sufferings themselves as reminders that we have chosen Christ as the Way and the Truth and the Light? To remember that is certain a grace that brings us close to our Lord. It is the best assurance we can have that we are close to God and that we do God's will. That too is what we constantly pray for. Praise God that we have been given such a gift.

Thursday

Opening and surrendering to God's Presence within from Open Mind, Open Heart by Fr Thomas Keating OCSO

The Spirit speaks to our conscience through scripture and through the events of daily life. Reflecting on these two sources of personal encounter and the dismantling of the emotional programming of the past prepare the psyche to listen at more refined levels of attention. The Spirit then begins to address our conscience from that deep source within us which is our true Self. This is contemplation properly so-called.

The spiritual journey does not require going anywhere because God is already with us and in us. It is a question of allowing our ordinary thoughts to recede into the background and to float along the river of consciousness without our noticing them, while we direct our attention towards the river on which they are floating. We are like someone sitting on the bank of a river and watching the boats go by. If we stay on the bank, with our attention on the river rather than on the boats, the capacity to disregard thoughts as they go by will develop, and a deeper kind of attention will emerge.

The chief thing which separates us from God is the thought that we are separated from him.....We fail to believe that we are always with God and that He is part of every reality. The present moment, every object we see, our inmost nature, are all rooted in him. But we hesitate to believe this until personal experience gives us the confidence to believe in it. This involves the gradual development of intimacy with God. God constantly speaks to us through each other as well as within. The interior experience of the presence of God activates our capacity to perceive him in everything else, in people, in events, in nature.

In contemplative prayer the Spirit places us in a position where we are at rest and disinclined to fight. By his secret anointings the Spirit heals the wounds of our fragile nature at a level beyond our psychological perception, just as a person who is anesthetized has no idea about how the operation is going until after it is over. Interior silence is the perfect seedbed for divine love to take root. In the Gospel the Lord speaks about a mustard seed as a symbol of divine love. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but it has an enormous capacity for growth. Divine love has the power to grow us and transform us. The purpose of contemplative prayer is to facilitate the process of inner transformation.

Friday

HOW DO YOU IMAGINE THE STATE OF THE DEPARTED?

A reflection excerpted from a text by St. Catherine of Genoa

There is no complete joy save in paradise. There is no joy to be compared to that of a soul in purification except that of those in paradise. As the rust of sin is consumed one becomes more and more open to God's love. Just as a covered object left out in the sun can't for all that be penetrated deeply by the sun's light so it isn't just that surface defects, our sins, need to be removed. Having opened oneself to being made wholly one with God's will, one lets go of all sin. Only then can one open oneself fully to God. To the extent that God gives this gift one "sees into" God.

Joy in God, oneness with God, is the end of every human person. Seeking this is an instinct implanted in us at our creation. We want to respond fully to the love of God and what we say about God and what it is like to open oneself fully is nothing in comparison with the reality. When God finds one pure, as one was first created, then God tugs at us with a kind of glance. This draws and binds one to God with a love that is like pure fire. In that love God so transforms us that we know nothing but God. And God doesn't stop until we are brought to our perfection!

This is why one seeks to cast off all that gets in the way of being lifted up and brought close to God. Such obstacles are what causes suffering in one who is seeking only to be wholly God's. I don't think that those who have died and are with God but in a state of being purified dwell on their sufferings. They dwell rather on the resistances they find in themselves to abandoning self to God's will. Against a pure love bent on nothing but being one with God one runs into various obstacles. I imagine it as though a bolt of lightning darted from God's love to the person involved and it seems so intense and fiery as to seem to annihilate the one it strikes. Yet it makes one like wholly purified gold. The heat of love purifies one by burning away all that gets in its way.

The last stage of love is that which does its work with any human doing. Which of us is aware of the many flaws hidden in us? If we knew perhaps we would despair. But all these are burned away in us by God. God shows us our weaknesses and does this in a way that shows us how God works within us in ways we can't achieve of ourselves. If we are to come to our perfection many things must change but we can't make the changes. So God does. It is the pure and intense love of God that does this. The overwhelming love of God gives one a joy beyond words. Purification is a process of great joy that is also great suffering. They two don't exclude one another.

We have all experienced something like this in ourselves. We have seen that happening in those we love and with whom we sense ourselves united by prayer. Perhaps this gives us pain. Perhaps the pain is part of our purification, just as it is theirs. What response can be more fitting than one that brings a joy that is inseparable from suffering. Both feelings draw us mysteriously closer to our God and open our eyes to see God as God really is.

Saturday

DISCIPLESHIP

from Meditations on a Theme by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom

When we think of spiritual discipline, we usually think in terms of rules of life, rules of thinking, rules of prayer, which are aimed at drilling us into what we imagine to be the pattern of the real Christian life. But when we observe people who submit themselves to that kind of strict discipline, and when we ourselves attempt this, we usually see that the results are far less than we would expect. But this is more drill than discipline.

We must always remember that discipline is not the same thing as drill. Discipline is a word connected with the word “disciple”. Discipline is the condition of the disciple, the situation of the disciple with regard to both the master and what he is learning. And if we try to understand what discipleship means when it is put into action, when it results in discipline, we may easily find the following things. First of all, discipleship means a sincere desire to learn and a determination to learn at all costs. I know the words “at all costs” may mean a great deal more for one person than for another. It depends on the zeal and the conviction or the longing we have for learning. Quite often we wish to learn up to a point, provided the effort will not be too great, provided we have guarantees that the final results will be worth all the effort. We do not launch into the effort wholeheartedly enough and this is why we so often do not achieve what we could achieve. So, the first condition if we wish to become disciples fruitfully and learn a discipline that will give results, is integrity of purpose.

The second condition is that we must be ready to pay the cost of discipleship. There is always a cost, because from start to finish, it means a gradual overcoming of all that is self in order to grow into communion with what is greater than self and which will ultimately displace self. And there is always the moment in discipleship when fear comes upon the disciple, for he or she sees that death is looming, the death that the self must face. Later on, it will no longer be death; it will be a life greater than his own, but every disciple will have to die first before coming back to life. This requires determination, courage and faith.