

THE THIRTY-FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. Solemnity of All Saints
Nov.1 **HASTEN TO OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS**
from a Sermon by St Bernard
- Mon. Commemoration of the Faithful Departed
2 **THE STRUGGLE TO ASCEND THE HEIGHTS**
A reflection from On the Heights by Francesco Petrararch
- Tues. Tuesday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time
3 **THE FRUITFUL MARGINS**
A Reflection by Fr Richard Rohr OFM
- Wed. Memorial of St. Charles Borromeo
4 **HOW DO YOU GIVE YOUR LIFE TO GOD?**
A reflection from Journeying with the Lord
by Carlo Maria Cardinal Martini
- Thurs. Thursday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time
5 **BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL**
from In Search of the Beyond by Fr Carlo Carretto
- Fri. Friday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time
6 **REDISCOVERING THE MEANING OF GOD'S CALL**
A reflection developed from a homily
by John Henry Cardinal Newman
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7 **ADVENTURES IN PRAYER**
from The Third Hour by Dorothy Day

Sunday

Hasten to our brothers and sisters from a Sermon by St Bernard

Of what profit to the saints are our prayers and the honors we pray them? Of what use is this feast day? Of what use to them are the honors paid on earth when our Father in heaven, fulfilling the truth of his Sons promises, has raised them to glory? Our songs of praise do not avail them nor do they need our honors, nor anything our services can offer. Surely, we are the ones to benefit, when we venerate their memory. I confess that at the thought of them I am consumed by a loving desire to be with them.

The first wish, then, which the memory of the saints inspires in us and urges us to achieve is that we should enjoy their hoped for company, striving to deserve to be fellow citizens with and members of the household of the spirits of the blessed; to take our place in the gatherings of the patriarchs and the ranks of the prophets; to be at home in the assembly of the apostles and in the numerous host of the martyrs; welcome in the college of confessors and the choirs of virgins: in a word, to be united in the communion of all the saints. The Church of the first Christians in its glory awaits us, and we turn aside; the saints lovingly call us and we make little of it; the host of the redeemed look for us and we are not interested.

Brothers and sisters, at long last let us shake off our torpor and rise with Christ to seek the things that are above, to set our minds on things above. Let us love those who love us, hasten to those who await us, and with our prayers come into the presence of those looking for us. Our hope then should be not only for fellowship with the saints but also to share in their joy, so that by our own efforts we may share too, the glory of those whose presence we long for.

Another wish that inspires us when we commemorate the saints is: that Christ, who is our life, may manifest himself to us as he did to them, and that we may be made manifest with him in glory. When Christ comes again his death will no longer be proclaimed, and we shall know that we also have died and that our life is hid in him. Our head will appear in glory, and with him his glorified members will shine. So, let us strive to attain this glory with a passionate desire and a praiseworthy ambition. The saints will pray for us, so that what we cannot attain by our own unaided efforts may be granted to us through their intercession.

Monday

THE STRUGGLE TO ASCEND THE HEIGHTS

A reflection by Petrarch

I have this very day climbed the highest mountain in this area. It is called “Windy” and the name isn’t undeserved. I was guided only by a desire to see what one could from such a high place. The thought had been with me for many years and the mountain was almost constantly before my eyes. At last the impulse seized me and I decided to put into action what had long lain in my heart. But who would be my companion? All the people I could think of seemed inadequate for the journey. At last I thought of my younger brother. He listened to me with great delight because I was thinking of him as a friend as well as a brother. So, on the appointed day we set out and by evening had arrived at the foot of the mountain. It seemed an almost impossible challenge. Our only real obstacle was the terrain itself.

We met an old shepherd who tried to dissuade us. He said he had once set out to make the climb but had gotten only pains and torn clothing for his efforts. While he was shouting all this our desires only grew with each warning. So, when he saw his efforts were of no avail, he went ahead of us a little way and pointed with his finger to a steep path between rocks. We could see we had brought things that would only get in the way during the climb so we left them in the care of the shepherd and started out.

As usually happens, we no sooner got going than we suddenly felt weary. We went ahead a little way and got to the top of a cliff. There we had to halt. But soon we started again and pushed on, though at a slower pace. My brother took a path straight up the mountain and was making for the top but, being less energetic, was looking for an easier way and had actually turned downwards. When called back by my brother and shown the right path, I responded that I hope the climb would be easier on the mountain’s other side and that I wouldn’t mind covering more distance if only the climb was less difficult. I was only excusing my laziness.

Meanwhile my brother had already gotten quite a way up the mountain. I hadn’t found an easier way but only worn myself out. Exhausted and disgusted with myself for walking around aimlessly I finally resolved to seek the heights. Eventually, tired and out of breath I joined my brother. He had been waiting for me and seemed quite refreshed as a result. For a time, we walked on side by side. But soon, forgetting what had happened, I started straying downward looking for the easier path.

Then, my thoughts passed suddenly from material things to those incorporeal. I spoke to myself like this: “What you have experienced today quite frequently happens to mountain climbers. And you can’t help knowing it is what happens to many who enter upon the way to blessedness. The life which we term blessed is found in a higher place and narrow is the way that leads to it. That’s what we are told. Many are the steep slopes that get in the way; we have to climb with mighty strides to go from virtue to virtue.” I don’t need to tell you that this little inner discourse was elevating to my mind, and my body too seemed to be spurred on to make the rest of the ascent.

Finally, we reached the top. I was deeply moved, especially as I looked down and saw where we had come from. The clouds were actually under my feet. It had been ten years since I left my studies. How many changes had taken place! Yet now I could see how I had changed for the better. With St. Augustine I could want only to love you, O my God!

Tuesday

The Fruitful Margins **a reflection by Fr Richard Rohr OFM**

On the margins of the Roman Empire, Ireland and Scotland helped hand down the Christian contemplative lineage. The Romans had conquered much of Europe by the time of the birth of Jesus; though they ruled Britain, the Romans never occupied Ireland or Scotland. This allowed the Celtic culture and Christian monks the freedom to thrive independently. They were not controlled by Roman practicality or Greek thinking.

When Christian missionaries arrived by the third century, the Celts blended their pagan or creation-based spirituality with Christian liturgy, practice, and structure. As a result, Celtic Christianity was still grounded in the natural world, and they had much easier access to a cosmic notion of Christ.

Perhaps we can think of Celtic Christians as an alternative community on the edge of the inside of organized Christianity. Lacking the structure and support of the organized church, radical forms of Christianity never thrive for very long. Without the Irish monks, much of Celtic practice and thought would not have been passed on to us at all.

Like the Desert Fathers and Mothers who influenced them, Celtic mystics focused on rather different things than the mainstream church. The Celts drew on their own cultural symbols and experience to emphasize other values than the symbols of a Roman Christianity. For example, Celtic Christianity encouraged the practice of confession to an "*anam cara*," a soul friend more than to an ordained priest.

They also saw God as a deep kind of listening and speaking presence, as in the Deer's Cry";

Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ in me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ in lying down, Christ in sitting,
Christ in the heart of every person, who may think of me,
Christ in the mouth of every one who may speak to me,
Christ in every eye, which may look at me,
Christ in every ear, which may hear me.
I arise today:
Vast might, invocation of the Trinity
Belief in a Threeness
Confession of Oneness. Amen

Wednesday

HOW DO YOU GIVE YOUR LIFE TO GOD?

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

What did St. Charles Borromeo do? He took risks. When he did that, he gave his life to God. For example, at one time a plague was devouring the people of his city. He threw himself at this scourge, not isolating himself from the plague- stricken like a hired hand but like a good shepherd he remained with his flock without fear of death.

This is a sample of a thousand other things that Charles Borromeo did as signs of his tireless gift of self to his people. Charles left no autobiography, no spiritual writings telling us his “secret”. He had no secret; his inner life and his prayer were visible to all in his gift of self.

As witness to the intensity of his prayer we have only a few pictures showing him in ecstasy or in tears while he venerated the crucifix. Apart from these, his swiftness in grasping the meaning of the Madonna’s tears he saw at the Shrine of Rho gives a confirmation of the faith he lived by.

St. Charles moved in an atmosphere of intense awareness not only of disasters like the plague but of all the wounds in the living flesh of his city and saw them as the same as the wound in the side of Christ. He was intensely aware of Christ’s suffering and Christ’s sorrows. God isn’t recognized as God, or loved, by people who are lazy as Christians and deaf to God’s Word.

If St. Charles lived his inner life in an inexhaustible capacity for praise and for sharing suffering, he was only living what the Psalmist says are the two basic aspects of human praying. It was probably his capacity for sharing suffering that primarily manifested itself exteriorly.

St. Charles was a person of prayer, of tears, and of penance. He understood this last not as something heroic but as a mysterious and even impassioned sharing in the sufferings of Christ himself. He saw this as a path by which Christ enters into the depths of the world’s sin and finds there the absurdity of refusing God. Christ lived this until his heart almost broke and his soul was torn open. Today we celebrate one of the great witnesses who have penetrated to the very depths of the mystery of divine sharing in human suffering. Christ drank the last drops of this bitter cup and so was capable of understanding very lucidly his age and ours. This was true also of Charles. He understood the deep meaning of the events and history of his times, as we are called to do in our times. He understood and he loved. This is our call as well

Thursday

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

from *In Search of the Beyond* by Fr Carlo Carretto

Blessed are the merciful; they shall obtain mercy.

Jesus himself had difficulty in explaining what this meant, and nowhere is it said that he has been particularly successful: our poor hearts are so sick.

He said some things to convince us, but at times it looks as if his efforts were as good as wasted.

I have come across religious Sisters who have been prepared to die as martyrs to preserve their faith but who were not prepared to expend one ounce of goodwill to establish good relationships with a nearby convent.

I have known parents who made extreme sacrifices to provide their children with food but who could not manage to make even the smallest effort to reach agreement between themselves and stop fighting with each other.

I have seen pastors and bishops who spend their lives to the point of exhaustion in the service of their diocese or parish but who do not care for their sheep and who spend their time propping up their own authority. It might well appear from this that the Gospel is no longer read, and that we have replaced it with a thousand and one other ways of interpreting our relationship with God and with our fellow men and women.

Each one of us has some object of adoration, some subject we set upon the altar; for one it is chastity, for another the privileges of a powerful position in the church, and for others it will be work or economy or a good name. Few, all too few, are prepared to adore the living will of Jesus, which was spelled out for us so carefully in the Father's name.

We need to return to the words of Jesus crying out to us to lean mercy. Could any words express more clearly what Jesus wants of us; speak to us of the way in which God wishes us to live out our religious commitment; or explain what is God's innermost purpose in establishing his church here on earth? I hardly think so. Be merciful. Be merciful.

Mercy is the fruit of the highest degree of love, because love creates equals. There are 3 basic premises:

- Those who do not love feel superior to everyone else
- Those who love feel equal to everyone else
- Those who love much gladly take the lower place

Jesus set his sights high by teaching us to have mercy and by living it to the full by caring for the sheep and by stooping down, out of love, to the lowest place. Have mercy. Have mercy.

Friday

REDISCOVERING THE MEANING OF GOD'S CALL

A reflection developed from a sermon

by John Henry Cardinal Newman

No prophet began his labors for God with a better encouragement than did Jeremiah. A king after God's own heart, Josiah, had come to the throne. He was young and so had time to accomplish great things for the Lord. Whether or not such thoughts encouraged Jeremiah's initial efforts, that cheerful hope was soon overcast and he had to labor in the dark. Josiah died an early death and his successors sought worldly answers to what they thought were merely worldly problems. Soon Jeremiah had to suffer persecution. Even when his prestige was restored by Jerusalem's fall, he was carried to Egypt by people who pretended reverence for him but in the end put him to a violent death.

All of us live in a world that promises well but can't fulfill its promises. But, then, we too began life thoughtlessly if joyously, seeking great things in various ways and having only vague notions of what good we could achieve. But we were seeking satisfaction merely in this world. It is our nature to hope in this way, but life's nature is to lead us to many disappointments. This is, in some way, the human lot. We begin life with health and, for the most part, end it with sickness. When life ends in this way, has it been a failure?

It is in this context that God himself offers us aid, especially by the Word and in the Church. Left to ourselves, we seek good from the world but cannot find it. In youth we look forward, naively and in old age we look back, often bitterly. It is well that we learn from these two facts. We need wisdom to face disappointing or evil days. Do you still seek great things? Then you must seek them where they are really to be found. You must seek them as God sets them before you.

God came into our world to enable us to do and attain great things. Are we willing to give up present enjoyment, give up this world for the invisible world? Then we must prepare for disappointment and even suffering. That befits us as sinners and is necessary for us as saints. It enables us to do a great thing.

We mustn't turn away from trials when God brings them upon us, nor must we play the coward when our faith is tested. "Watch, stand fast, be strong!" These are Scripture's words and God's words, as St. Paul tells us. But how are we to help one another find hope in such words? Yes, we know that such things are means of preparing us from God's Kingdom and for helping one another cling to God. Do you know also that this is the greatest thing anyone can do?

We must pray for grace to proclaim his word by our lives in a way that persuades those who see us to follow God as we do. We can't live this way from our own wisdom, which is always in a measure worldly. It has been so with all those who have gone before us. We must strive to live purely by God's word, praying to see its import more clearly than our predecessors. But are you ready to trust God to bring this about? We know God's way is no human way and that God only reveals himself to us through the way we bear our crosses. Let's help one another to trust God to reveal this ever more clearly, even through human beings. It opens us to the meaning of the divine call to us today.

Saturday

Adventures in Prayer from *The Third Hour* by Dorothy Day

Rabbi Abraham Heschel said at the Liturgical Conference in Milwaukee that what we needed, what the world needed was prayer.

And now I pick up Thomas Merton's last book, *Contemplative Prayer*. And I suddenly remember an important incident in my life. I was coming home from a meeting in Brooklyn, sitting in an uncomfortable bus seat facing a few poor people. One of them, a downcast, ragged man, suddenly epitomized for me the desolation, the hopelessness of the destitute, and I began to weep. I had been struck by a beam of love as the poet William Blake said "We are put on earth for a little space that we may learn to bear the beams of love".

Of course, it was my own condition I was weeping for- my own hardness of heart, my own sinfulness. I recognized this as a moment of truth, our tremendous, universal, inevitable and yet inexcusable incapacity to love was what I was experiencing. This moment inspired me to do what Merton was suggesting, to pray. And pray I did." Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh instead ". I was learning how to love this brother because in him, in his meanest guise, I am encountering Christ. I was learning to pray.

In that moment in the bus in Brooklyn I knew what St Augustine meant when he cried out "May I know myself so that I know thee ". Because I feel so strongly my nothingness, my powerlessness to do anything about this horrifying recognition of my own hardness of heart, it drove me to the recognition that in God alone was my strength. Without him I could do nothing. Yet I could do all things in him who strengthened me. So, my tears were a joy as well as a grief.

More and more I see that prayer is the answer, it is the clasp of the hand, the joy and keen delight in the consciousness of the Other. Indeed, it is like falling in love.

Surrounded by the slums as we are, I have long been impressed by the sight of the storefront churches where the poor come to worship and praise God and petition him for their needs. There was one tenement I lived in on Ludlow Street that I remember. My neighbors were good and happy housekeepers, gentle with their children, hard working. Very often mother and father worked in one of the loft factories in the neighborhood and left the grandmother to take care of the children. The women in the front apartment used to go out at night with bibles under their arms and go to one of these little churches. I thought "These people are called the poor. They are rich because they love their families and they pray". Yes, truly they lived the Gospel. They teach us how to pray.