

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun.** **The Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Oct. 4 **PERFECT OUR IMPERFECT FAITH, LORD**
A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Mon.** **Monday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time**
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from Meditation and Earth by Deborah Guess (*Part 1*)
- Tues.** **Memorial of Saint Bruno**
6 **THE ASCENT TO GOD**
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- Wed.** **Memorial of our Lady of the Rosary**
7 **THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF PRAYING THE ROSARY**
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Sunday

PERFECT OUR IMPERFECT FAITH LORD

A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine

Reading the Holy Gospels seriously and carefully nourishes prayer and prayer builds up faith and that disposes a person to trust and hope in the Lord rather than in oneself. Could we imagine a more powerful incentive to pray than this. Think, for instance, of the parable about the unjust judge. He was unprincipled and had neither fear of God nor regard for others. But a poor widow pestered him so constantly that he decided to grant her justice just to rid himself of her. Neither kindness nor concern for the right motivated the man but only self-interest.

If constant prayer can accomplish so much in the case of an odious person who won't listen carefully to anyone, what can it accomplish with God, who constantly invites us to pray and who is supremely good? A comparison of opposites, the Lord hopes will persuade us to pray frequently, even at all times. Listen to his words: "We ought always to pray and never lose heart". But what actually happens? Listen to these dark words: "When the Son of Man comes, do you think he will find faith on earth"?

Where there is no faith there is no prayer. Who would pray to someone who isn't believed in? Who would pray for something if there is no one to answer the prayer? St. Paul recognized this: "How can people call on the One in whom they don't believe?" But if you do believe then you should trust your prayer will be answered superabundantly. St. Paul says it again: "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"! Salvation is a response that goes beyond anything we can imagine.

So, then, we need to believe in order to pray, and we must ask God that the faith which enables us to pray will never fail. Faith gives rise to prayer, and prayer obtains an increase of faith; it is strengthened by prayer. It was to guard against our faith's failing in times of trial and temptation that the Lord said: "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation".

Pause and ask yourself what it means to "enter into temptation". It means to turn your back on faith, we came to faith when we turned our face to God; that's what repentance is. In proportion to our turning away from God faith grows weaker and temptation is weakened as we turn our face toward God. When the Lord told his disciples to watch and pray, he also said: "This night Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat, Peter; but I have prayed for you so that your faith may not fail!" It wouldn't make sense for the protector to pray and the one needing the protection not pray!

We know from Scripture, however, that there are different sorts of faith. There is, for instance, such I think as "perfect faith". It is rarely found on earth. If faith as tiny as a mustard seed could move a mountain who would fail to move them with "perfect faith"? God's church buildings are full of people and no one could come to church if faith weren't existent. But if they had "perfect faith" who wouldn't be out moving mountains? The same is true of the apostles. They wouldn't have left everything to follow Jesus if they had no faith. Yet if they had "perfect faith" they wouldn't have asked him to increase their faith. That is what we need to pray for this very day. Use the faith you have to ask the Lord to perfect your faith. See if he doesn't begin by giving you the faith to believe that he will answer your prayer!

Monday

WE NEED TO CHANGE

from Meditation and Earth by Deborah Guess (*Part 1*)

Pope Francis prophetically calls on us to protect creation. He tells us that it is hard to identify any area of human life that is not impacted by, and that is beyond the ability to address, ecological questions. Thus, we urgently need to develop a spirituality of the environment, which has practical effects.

The Pope puts it bluntly “Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. A great spiritual challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal”.

The Pope is clear that this spirituality must be grounded in concrete action. Faith communities must be leaders and prophets in a task where the Pope’s patron, Francis of Assisi can be an inspiration. A few examples include

- Reduce or opt out of patterns of extreme consumption by simply buying less, by asking, “do I really need this?”
- Buy goods which involve the least amount of processing and packaging possible.
- Consider second-hand and recycled options for clothes and household items
- Consume food that has been locally and organically grown, and produce some of your own food if possible.
- Adopt the minimalist principle of de-cluttering and of owning fewer things
- Support renewable energy either by installing solar energy or using a power company that has good green credentials
- At home, switch from disposable plates, cutlery and cups to washable ones; from tissues to washable handkerchiefs; put on another jumper instead of turning up the heating.

Pope Francis asks us to care for the environment by acting in a way which significantly affects the world around us. He asks us to examine our lifestyles as individuals and as communities and so to reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity. When we reduce water consumption, separate refuse, cook only what we will consume, plant trees, turn off unnecessary lights, we are living out our faith in ways which are deeply practical, and necessary.

Tuesday

THE ASCENT TO GOD

A reflection on Psalm 83 by St. Bruno

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord. My soul longs to enter the courts of the Lord”. We long for the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God. The Psalmist tells us why. We ought to seek to enter the courts of the Lord because of a promise: “Blessed are those who dwell in your house”, in the heavenly Jerusalem. If we want to be blessed, we seek to be with God. Help us, O Lord, God of all the heavenly powers, my king and my God!

It is as if the Psalmist had said: Who would not want to enter your courts, since you are God, the creator, the Lord of Powers, King? Besides, all who dwell in your house are blessed! Court and house are the same thing, and when he says “blessed” he means that those who dwell there are possessed of as great a blessed-ness as it is possible to conceive. The reason is that they are blessed who praise God with loving devotion, world without end—for eternity. There could not be praise for eternity if they were not blessed for eternity.

No one can attain this blessedness on one’s own. Even if one has faith, hope and charity that is not possible. But that one is blessed—that is, comes to blessedness—whom God helps to climb the ladder to blessedness which God sets up in the heart. This means that one can be said to be likely to attain blessedness if one sets one’s heart on climbing by the many steps of virtue and good works and receives help from God’s grace. No one can climb alone by a personal strength—not to ascend to such heights. As the Lord has said, “No one has ascended into heaven except the Son of Man who is in Heaven.”

I said that God has set up a ladder in the heart because God is living now in our hearts in this vale of tears, this present life, which is so lowly and filled the tears of tribulation. Compared with that other life, called a mountain, and which is full of joy, this present life is as nothing. God’s grace helps one ascend each step.

Since the Lord has said, “Blessed are those whose strength is in God”, one might ask: Will God’s help be forthcoming? To which we reply, Help from God is there for the blessed. For the lawgiver—Christ who gave us the law—gives and will go on giving blessings in the form of innumerable gifts of grace. By them God blesses those who are God’s own. This means that God will raise them up to blessedness. As they make the ascent they will, by God’s blessings, mount from strength to strength.

In time to come, in the heavenly Zion, Christ himself, the God of gods, will be seen. Christ, who is God, will deify those who are God’s own. To put it another way, the God of gods, the divine Trinity, will be seen in a spiritual way among those who dwell in that Zion. Again, by the light of the intellect they will see among them the God whom here we cannot see. For God will be all in all.

What comes to fullness in Heaven begins even now as we ascend the ladder. Christ has ascended and he calls us to follow him. He takes us to the Father, who is all blessedness.

Wednesday

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF PRAYING THE ROSARY

A reflection taken from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

The real substance of a well-prayed and well-meditated rosary is three-dimensional.

Its first dimension is contemplation. We strive as we pray to contemplate as clearly and purely and directly as we can one of God's Mysteries. These are truths of faith which speak to us of Christ's redeeming mission and of the Divine Love which sent him on it. When we contemplate, we enter into a communion of thought and feeling and will with the teaching and life of Jesus. He is the Son of God and Son of Mary. That is the Mystery of the Incarnation. The Son of God lived on earth, in Jesus the Christ, redeeming, sanctifying, teaching, and living the same sort of life we do. He did this in a hidden life for some thirty years. Those years were all prayer and work, as ours can be. He suffered the Passion, he triumphed in the Resurrection, he Ascended into the Glory of Heaven. He sits at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. He ever assists us by sending us the Holy Spirit. He gives life to the Church he founded. These are all Mysteries for us to contemplate because as we do that in prayer we will be drawn more and more into participation in those mysteries, according to the Heavenly Father's will and grace.

The second dimension of rosary prayer is reflection. This is what makes it possible for the fullness of the light that shines from the Divine Mysteries to enter into our minds and hearts. When you reflect carefully you find in each of the mysteries you contemplate a teaching that is especially given to you. You hear a message for your sanctification that is adapted in a special way to the circumstances of your unique life. This is due to the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit which is always interceding for you from within the very depths of your individual soul. What comes from the Holy Spirit is grace, a special gift from God. We are told that even when we are not sure how to pray the Spirit is there "interceding for us with sighs too deep for words".

Each of the Divine Mysteries contains a word to strengthen you in your particular trials and joys. We need this help in order to confront our life in the way Jesus confronted his. We may find ourselves asking God whether a particular trial is really his will for us. If we hear God say that it is we can be sure that with that answer comes a grace to respond, just as it did to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Each time we reflect on a given mystery the Spirit will draw a new and richer lesson in grace and support from it.

That brings us to the third dimension of this prayer. It is what we call its intention. When we pray we pray for people, for institutions and for all sorts of good purposes. We pray for necessities and we pray for personal and social benefits and gifts. This is an integral part of our charity towards our neighbors. We allow God's grace to insert us in a great net that is drawing everyone out of this world and into God's kingdom. We are one of the knots that create this great web of Divine Love. The more deeply we enter into the prayer of the rosary, the more deeply we contemplate and the more richly we reflect, the broader becomes our love for all our brothers and sisters, and, indeed, for all that is the earth and that fills it. This means that the rosary prayer binds us more tightly and wonderfully into the Mystical Body of Christ and the Communion of Saints. It is by our intentions that we begin to share in all this. As our intentions are more and more suffused by charity they become like the very heart of Christ, itself perfectly one with the heart of the Heavenly Father. We celebrate all this today. Today our prayer helps us live the charity which makes us one with God and each other a little more deeply and fully.

Thursday

MEDITATION AND CHANGING HABITS

from Meditation and Earth by Deborah Guess (*Part 2*)

Meditators know a good deal about changing habits. The differences between a person just beginning meditation and an experienced meditator is quite simply that an experienced meditator has become accustomed to meditating. For that person, meditation has become a natural part of life.

But initially, changing a habit of any kind takes work. Wise teachers remind us that although meditation is simple, that does not necessarily mean it is easy. Yet, the discipline of daily practice, over weeks, months and years, turns meditation into a completely natural and habitual part of our life. Much the same is true of daily changes in habit that support a lighter ecological footprint. Altering the way we behave can bring about significant changes in ourselves and the world around us, but it does take a certain amount of concentration, effort and commitment.

The practice of meditation and the practice of living in a way that is more ecologically sustainable can impact and reinforce each other. A daily prayer practice builds a foundation of discipline and commitment which makes it easier to change other habits. A turning away from the overwhelming pressure to consume, as well as from the hectic and overly busy lives we live has a strong resonance with the simplicity that lies at the heart of the Gospel. Meditation, spiritual practice, is an important way in which we can begin to confront the major ecological crisis that we are now facing.

In our quiet time we come to the knowledge of the Christ who dwells within us and who loosens the grip of our ego self. A person who has a daily spiritual practice is well equipped to see through the veil of consumerism and avoid its lure, to connect more strongly with what really matters.

An ecologically sustainable way of living, grounded in daily meditation, can draw us closer to our true selves and to Christ. Pope Francis points to the strong connection between what goes on in the human heart and the present ecological crisis and calls us to ecological conversion.

Learning the art of stillness is crucial. Environmentally destructive behavior has its roots in a loss of stillness; a loss that is expressed in the restless desire for growth, production and consumption. The simplicity of the practice of meditation has something in common with the Christian and Jewish practice of setting aside a holy day of the week when people rest from work. Rest is an important part of ecologically sustainable living. Doing less provides time for holy wonder, joy and thanksgiving for creation that is an alternative to compulsive activity. Thus, our daily practice and the Sabbath rest allow us and the earth time for restoration.

Friday

HOW THE LORD TREATS SERVANTS

A reflection by Gunther Bornkamm

Jesus promises to those who do God's will a reward in the form of a Kingdom of Heaven. Innumerable sayings and parables contain this idea. They have to do with the status of human persons before God. God is Lord and we are God's "servants". In human terms, the relation of a servant, a slave, to a lord excludes the thought of a reward given for good service. A slave is the property of a human lord and master and belongs to this lord body and soul. There is no place for a reward or even a claim for one.

This perspective is summed up in one of Jesus' sayings: "We are unworthy slaves, we have only done what was our duty". A master is entitled to claim the entirety of a slave. Further, from the slave's perspective, the work assigned is not the slave's own any more than it lies with the slave to decide what service to render. The slave of a human being is required to be faithful in the face of the master's will, and without knowing what the master is trying to accomplish.

Our efforts to picture our relation to God is made even more complicated by the fact that the reward Jesus promises isn't a payment that is owed us but is the free gift of a distinction bestowed on trusted servants and indicating that an even greater trust is placed in them. Think of the parable of the servants who received talents when their master went on a journey. Jesus pictures the master saying to the servants who have gained much for him, "I will place you over much! Enter into your Master's joy!" A servant who has done well isn't paid and sent away but is invited into a kind of special fellowship with his very master.

A wise and faithful servant of God is one who is "faithful". The faithfulness is shown in the way the servant has done an assigned task. In the parable, the servant managed the resources given in such a way as to increase the master's estate and its value. We know that this actually involves being faithful in showing love to the least of Jesus' brothers and sisters.

Being "faithful" means being constantly ready for action and, like the wise virgins, with one's torch alight. This torch casts the light of love and one is rather to help those in need than send them away to take care of their own needs. All the human comparisons between how we should think of our relation to God and of how ordinary servants think of their relation to their masters fail.

Listen to the Lord: "I will gird myself and have them sit at table and serve them". That is the way the Lord treats and will treat us. We are more friends than servants, and yet friendship doesn't describe exactly our relationship with our Lord and God. Our waiting is not for nothingness, for the end of everything. Our waiting is not for the silence of death. We wait for our Lord, one who has chosen us to be with him and done that personally. He will serve us even more than we serve him. What will it be like? It won't be like anything we have experienced. We simply must trust.

Saturday

THE BOND THAT KEEPS GOD'S FAMILY TOGETHER

A reflection by Charles de Foucauld

What does our God ask of us who are one with him in a mystical marriage? Love your enemies, God says. Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who wish to harm you. If someone strikes you on your right cheek, offer the other cheek to be struck as well. If anyone wants to take your outer garment let him have your other clothes. Give to anyone who asks and if anyone takes something from you don't ask to have it back. Do to others all that you would have others do to you. Forgive and you will be forgiven by God. Don't be concerned about the speck of dust in another's eye but look at the blocks to your own ability to see clearly.

All these commands have to do with charity. There is nothing difficult to understand about any of them once you realize, finally, that all human persons are, taken together, members of a single family with God, the Creator and Guide, as a sort of father. God is our Heavenly Father but in such a way that God loves all and loves each incomparably more and more tenderly than any human parents can love each of their children.

Since our God loves each of us in just this way, and loves all and each without any exception, God wishes to see among us that same love and tenderness, and when it is needed, that same leniency and yielding gentleness that loving parents always long to see among their own children. God would have you give in to one another, helping one another without stint. Each of us should yield where our own rights are concerned and no one of us should insist on one's rights. Let one who is wrong or unfair have his or her way. The hope of correcting such a person lies in gentleness and keeping peace. We simply pray for the erring person that the mistake may be seen and corrected.

You can see from my recommendations about mutual love that I have only one purpose in mind. I want to keep peace with all my brothers and sisters in God's one human family. If we all observe these precepts the principle from which they flow will be engraved deeply on us and within us. All are, in truth and in fact, brothers and sisters in God. God is our parent and God wishes all of us to regard and to love one another, and treat one another in every way and at every moment, like persons we love most tenderly.

Be compassionate with one another. Think of Jesus' compassion for you. How did he suffer with all sufferings and pity all those who suffer! For you and me he suffered, and he asks us to suffer with those who mourn, with the sick, with the anxious, with the hungry, with the weak, with the ignorant. He not only did good to others while he was on earth but he opened his Sacred Heart to them, and does so for us even today. Compassion is part of the love that lives in every heart; it is part of all human love. In Christ we can find new strength for compassion and for every dimension of genuine love. That is what Jesus offers us every day, always. What else can bind us together and make us one in truth and not just in words or wishes?