

# THE FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

---

- Sun.**            **The Baptism of Jesus**  
**Jan.10**        **WHERE IS CHRIST LEADING YOU?**  
A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory Nazianzen
- Mon.**            **Monday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**  
**11**              **FINDING FAITH IN RUSSIA**  
from Encounter by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom
- Tues.**            **Memorial of St. Aelred of Rievaulx**  
**12**              **THE NATURE & PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP**  
From a Treatise by St. Aelred of Rievaulx
- Wed.**            **Memorial of the Dead**  
**13**              **THE GOAL OF DYING IN CHRIST**  
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Thurs.**           **Thursday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**  
**14**              **GOD'S FIRST LANGUAGE IS SILENCE**  
from Open Mind, Open Heart by Fr Thomas Keating OCSO
- Fri.**              **Memorial of Sts. Maur & Placid**  
**15**              **LIVING AS A CHILD OF OBEDIENCE**  
A reflection adapted from a homily by Sr. Phyllis Hunhoff OSB
- Sat.**              **Memorial of Our Lady**  
**16**              **THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS**  
from Happiness by Sr Joan Chittister OSB

*Sunday*

## **WHERE IS CHRIST LEADING YOU?**

**A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory Nazianzen**

Today Christ experiences baptismal enlightenment. Let's go and experience it with Him! Those who are enlightened see the way that really leads to God, into the Promised Land that is the Kingdom of Heaven. That way is the perfect fulfillment of God's holy will. Christ is baptized by entering the river on whose other bank is the Promised Land and he enters it by giving himself totally to the Heavenly Father's will. Let's go with Him down into the waters that wash away every other love than that of God. If we do this we may come up with Christ into the Kingdom!

As John was baptizing Jesus presented himself. He came to show the way to sanctification and to hallow all who walk in that way, even the very person who was to baptize him. Certainly, he was to leave behind the Old Adam, who did his own will and not the Heavenly Father's. He was preparing the way for us by hallowing the waters. He who is both flesh and spirit will baptize with the water of this world and with the Holy Spirit to save both.

John demurred: "I am one who should be baptized by you", and not the other way round. That's what a lantern says to the sun and a voice says to the Word and a friend says to the bridegroom. John is the greatest born of woman but the Son is the first born of all. John leaped in his mother's womb, sensing the presence of the unborn Child of Mary. The forerunner adored the one to come after him. We might say what John said, but about our own unworthiness. John was to undergo the baptism of martyrdom, however, and may we be worthy of such grace.

Jesus passes through the water into the promise and he bears the entire world with him. Adam had gotten himself barred from paradise and his posterity with him. Jesus opens the gates of paradise and not only for himself but for us who believe. A voice came from Heaven to bear witness to this and the Spirit assumed a bodily form in honor of that hallowed body in whom that same Spirit dwells. The Spirit appears as a dove to remind us that a more marvelous peace has now come to the world than an ordinary dove announced after the Great Flood.

Let us pay homage to Christ and to his baptism. This is the day to keep a Feast and celebrate. This is the day to dedicate ourselves to being wholly purified and to keeping ourselves pure. God delights in nothing so much as conversion with turning to his will. For our benefit every saving word is spoken and all the mysteries revealed. We are to be lights in the world and to receive power to give life to others. We first have to receive enlightenment ourselves. Then we have a clearer and fuller understanding of divine truth than ever before. It comes to us from the one Godhead who dwells in Jesus Christ. He is our Lord! Let us give him glory and love him for ever and ever.

*Monday*

## **FINDING FAITH IN RUSSIA**

**from Encounter by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom**

Growing up, as far as the Church was concerned, I was very against it, because of what I had seen among my friends, both Catholic and Protestant. God did not exist for me, and the Church was simply a negative phenomenon.

In the summers in camp, there was Vespers on Saturday and Liturgy on Sundays and we systematically did not get up to go. Rather we turned back the flaps of our tent so that those in charge could see that we were lying in bed and NOT going anywhere. So, the foundation in my life for religion was an extremely doubtful one.

Then in 1927 things changed for me. There was a priest at our Children's Camp who seemed very aged. He was probably about thirty years old, but, like most Orthodox priests, he had a large beard and long hair, sharp features, and one characteristic none of us could explain: and that was that he loved everybody. He did not love us in response to love or affection being shown to him; he did not love as a reward for being good or obedient or anything of that kind. It was simply that his heart overflowed with love. Everybody could share in it, and not just a fraction or a drop, and it was never withdrawn. His love was certain for all of us. I found something in him which I did not understand at the time.

I knew my mother loved me, that my father loved me, that my grandmother loved me, but that was the extent of the circle in my life as far as tender feelings went. But why a person who was a stranger to me could love me and could love others who were strangers to him, was an idea that was foreign to me. It was only many years later that I understood where all this sprang from. But at the time it was a question mark in my consciousness, a question which could not be answered at that time.

I never forgot that priest and the way he made me feel. I tried to bring that lesson with me when I rose in the ranks of the Orthodox Church. How did I treat others? How did I make them feel? Others who were watching me carefully to see if I resembled Christ to them.

*Tuesday*

## **THE NATURE & PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP**

**From a Treatise by St. Aelred of Rievaulx**

Genuine and spiritual friendship is sought on account of God and for its own sake. Our Lord and Savior has given us the formula of true friendship when he said: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Behold the mirror. Do you love yourself? Yes, and especially if you love God and so are a person worthy of being chosen as a friend. But do you think you should expect any reward from yourself for loving yourself? No, indeed not. By the very nature of the matter everyone is dear to oneself but what if you transfer that affection to another, loving that person gratuitously simply because your friend seems dear?

Unless you do this, you cannot savor true friendship as it is. The one whom you love has become another self. You have transformed your love of self into love of your friend. Friendship is not a form of tribute, as St. Ambrose says. It is a thing full of beauty and grace and a virtue, not a thing to be used as an article in buying and selling. It is “bought”, so to speak, with love and not money. It is acquired by a kind of competition in generosity rather than a haggling over prices. So, the intention of the one you have chosen as a friend must be subtly tested because that person may not wish to be joined to you in friendship or may think of friendship in a mercenary way and not as gratuitous.

The extraordinary and great happiness we await with God is a matter of God’s spreading and sharing self with creatures. He uplifts them while respecting the degrees and orders according to which he has distinguished each from the others. God does this among chosen, individual souls giving to each so much friendship and charity that each is able to love another as an other self. God makes it so that each rejoices in the good fortune of the other, and so in the happiness of the other, that the happiness of one is that of all and a kind of universal happiness is the possession of each. In this friendship there is no hiding of thoughts, no dissembling of affection.

A true and eternal friendship begins in the life and is perfected in the next. What here belongs only to a few good people there belongs to all because all are good. Here a testing is necessary since the wise and unwise are mixed together. There none is needed since an angelic and, in a sense, divine perfection makes all blessed. It is to this model that we compare friends now. We love them as we love ourselves. Our confidences are laid bare to one another. We strive to be firm and stable and constant in all respects. Do you think there is any human being who does not wish to be loved in this way? And loving thus leads us to God for it is in loving God that we become capable to a spiritual friendship.

*Wednesday*

## **THE GOAL OF DYING IN CHRIST**

**A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard**

“Here we have no abiding city, but we seek one which is to come.” (Heb.13:14) Once a pilgrim sets out it is necessary to turn neither to one side or the other but to go straight ahead. Happy the one who knows the way to the Heavenly Home and never turns aside from the path that leads to it. One must not engage in activities that have a merely worldly goal and nothing beyond that. But what does this mean in practice?

St. Paul says, “You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God”. (Col.3:3) A pilgrim can easily be held back, oppressed by the burdens that are at times inseparable from a journey. By contrast, a dead person won’t even feel the lack of a tomb! If the dead heard others blaming them for this or that, or who were praising them instead, such a person wouldn’t pay any attention. The dead pay no attention to such things, as pilgrims may. Does death, then, keep one unstained by wholly separating one from what is only worldly? If so, it is an altogether happy thing to be dead.

Christ must live in one who no longer lives in self, if such a person is to have life at all. St. Paul says, “I live, yet I don’t live, for Christ lives in me”. It is as if he were saying that he had died to everything but Christ. I don’t feel or notice or get concerned with anything but Christ, he is saying. If anything is truly of Christ then I am alive and ready for action in its regard. This is a great step along the pilgrim way to God’s Kingdom. Yet perhaps there is a greater step.

St. Paul says, “Let me not glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world”. (Gal. 6:14) Paul is not only dead to the world but crucified to the world. Everything the world loves, if it is not Christ’s, is a cross to him. I, on the other hand, pass by all such things as a pilgrim, and at times with suffering or hardship. I long for something better. We have many brethren who have completed their pilgrimage and their dying with Christ, and their being crucified with him. We must listen to the teaching given us in their now ended lives among us in this world. We must make our pilgrimage through it as we seek to let Christ alone live in us. They bid us seek ever to live in purity. Be careful at all times to maintain this purity, they say. You must not lose hope because at times you are negligent or even wander from the straight path which is our Christian life.

Remember, says St. Paul, that you aren’t any longer only strangers and aliens but are citizens of the Kingdom of God with all the saints. Do you want to be joined with those you remember, who have gone from this world and into God’s Kingdom? They show us the way, the many ways, of following the Lord and letting God’s life bear fruit within us. Surely, we must press onward in the spiritual battle that is our pilgrimage. They reach out loving hands in prayer to help us over the rough places on our road. That is God’s gift. Do not refuse it but walk bravely forward for the sake of the glory of our King and salvation.

*Thursday*

## **GOD'S FIRST LANGUAGE IS SILENCE**

**from Open Mind, Open Heart by Fr Thomas Keating OCSO**

There are all kinds of ways in which God speaks to us- through our thoughts or any one of our faculties. But always keep in mind that God's first language is silence. Prepare yourself for silence in your prayer, and if other things happen, then it is His problem, not yours. As soon as you begin to make it your problem, you tend to desire something that is other than God.

Pure faith will bring you closer to God than anything else. To be attached to an experience of God is not God; it is a thought. The time of centering prayer is the time to let go of all thoughts, even the very best of thoughts. If they are really good, they will come back later.

What is the great thing that Our Lady has done for us? At Christmas she brought the Word of God into the world, or rather let Him come into the world through her. It is not so much what we do, but what we are that allows Christ to live in the world. When the presence of God emerges from our inmost being into our faculties, whether we walk down the street or drink a cappuccino, divine life is pouring into the world. The effectiveness of every action depends on the source from which it springs. If it is coming out of the false self, it is severely limited. If it is coming out of a person who is immersed in God, it is extremely effective. The contemplative state, like the vocation of Our Lady, brings Christ into the world.

Interior silence is one of the most strengthening and affirming of human experiences. There is nothing more affirming, in fact, than the experience of God's presence. That revelation says as nothing else can, "You are a good person. I created you and I love you." Divine love brings us into the fullest sense of the world. It heals the negative feelings that we have about ourselves.

The more confidence we have in God, the more we can face the truth about ourselves. We have to face up to who we really are in the presence of someone we can trust. If you trust in God, you know that no matter what you have done or not done He is going on loving you. As a matter of fact, He always knew the darkside of your character and He is now letting you in on the secret like a friend confiding to a friend. Thus, insights of self-knowledge, instead of upsetting you, bring a sense of freedom. They lead you to the point where you can ask yourself, "Why think of myself at all? "Then, you have the freedom to think how wonderful God is and you care little what happens to you.

*Friday*

**ST ANTHONY'S CHARGE TO HIS COMPANIONS**  
**From The Life of Anthony by St. Athanasius**

When Anthony grew very old, he withdrew to the desert, and because of his great age two companions went with him to assist him. When he felt the time of his departure was near he addressed this exhortation to them.

“I am going the way of my fathers, as Scripture says. I see myself called by the Lord. And you should be on your guard and work not to bring to nothing the asceticism you have practiced for so long. Make it your endeavor to keep up your enthusiasm as though you were only now beginning. You know the demons and their designs. You know how fierce these demons are and yet how powerless. Do not be afraid of them.

“Let Christ be your life's breath. Place your confidence in Christ. Live as if dying daily, taking heed for yourselves and remembering the counsel you have heard from me. Let there be no communion whatever between you and the schismatics, and none at all with the heretical Arians. You know how I myself have kept away from them. They attack Christ by their heresy.

“Show your eagerness to give your allegiance, first to the Lord and then to his saints. Then, after your death, they will receive you into everlasting dwellings as familiar friends of God. Give your thoughts to these things; make them your purpose; if you have any care for me and think of me as a father, don't allow anyone to take my body in Egypt, lest they should turn it into relics and keep it in their houses. This was a reason for going to the mountain and coming here.

“You know how I have always put those who practice such deeds to shame. You know I have charged them to stop this practice. You yourself are to carry out the rites of my funeral and are to bury my body in the earth. Let what I have said to you be respected by telling no one of the place where I am buried.

“At the resurrection of the dead I shall receive back my body from the Savior and it will then be incorruptible. You may distribute my few garments to bishop Athanasius and bishop Serapion. Keep my hair shirt for yourselves. God bless you. Anthony is going and is with you no more.” More important, God is always with you.

*Saturday*

**THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS**  
from Happiness by Sr Joan Chittister OSB

In folktales of the East written thousands of years ago, there is a story which, in the annals of contemporary happiness research, is still as fresh as yesterday. Once upon a time, an angel appeared to a seeker hard at work in the field of life and said, "I have been instructed by the gods to inform you that you will have ten thousand more lives". The wanderer, who had been pursuing the dream of eternal life for years, slumped to the ground in despair. "Oh, no" the seeker cried. "Ten thousand more lives!" He wailed and rolled in the dust.

Then the angel moved to another seeker and repeated the same message. This seeker straightened up, arms flung towards the heavens, and began to dance and prance and shout with joy.

As I get older, I have come to realize that there is a bit of both seekers in each of us. I have loved life. Like the second seeker I have loved every moment of it, however deep the difficulty of a current crisis. I lusted after every breath of it. I always thought of it as getting better, getting fuller. I got older and loved it even more. What matters are not memorabilia in my drawers and cupboards, but rather what is happening on the inside. Whatever the struggles of it- the deaths, the life changes, the polio- I would take more of it if I could.

I have had what could be called a fair share of what the world would call unhappiness. I have faced the challenge, the struggle to be fully human in a man's world and fully adult in a religious culture whose history has belied its theology, whose practice has been to be more comfortable with male overlords than with thinking women.

I am convinced that we become happy by concentrating on the gifts of life rather than obsessing over its possible pitfalls. The more we express our gratitude to God for our blessings, the more God will bring to our mind other blessings. The more we are aware of what we have to be grateful for, the happier we will become.

Above all, refuse to allow externals to be the measure of the acme of our souls. The Kenyans teach "Those who have cattle, have care."

We become happy by refusing to be beguiled by accumulation or power or pure utilitarianism. For a happy life is a grateful, surprised life. We need to have a purpose in life and then pursue it with all the heart that is within us, and all the energy we have. We must keep our eye on the real thing. Once you know what that really is or who that really is, you will never stop pursuing it. Be grateful. Be happy.