

THE FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Jan. 31 **WHAT HAS CHRIST BROUGHT YOU?**
A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman
- Mon.** **Monday of the Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**
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from the *Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Tues.** **The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord**
2 **THE PEACE GOD GIVES US IN CHRIST**
A reflection by Timothy of Jerusalem
- Wed.** **Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**
3 **A PRAYERFUL LIFE**
from *A gift for God* by St Mother Teresa of Calcutta
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4 **FINDING OUR ROOTS**
from *Love into Silence* by Fr John Main OSB
- Fri.** **Memorial of St. Agatha**
5 **THE GIFT OF ONE'S SELF**
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6 **THE HARVEST OF A WITNESS TO CHARITY**
A reflection from a text by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Sunday

WHAT HAS CHRIST BROUGHT YOU?

A reflection by John Henry Cardinal Newman

At the time appointed, Christ came forth from the Heavenly Father and showed himself to all our world. First, he showed forth God as creator and second as teacher, and revealer, and mediator. Neither cloud nor image, emblem or word, was interposed between the Son and the Eternal Father. Listen to his own words: "*No one knows the Son but the Father, neither does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.*" Again, Jesus says, "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*". And he tells us this is due to the fact that he and the Father are one, and that he is always in the bosom of the Father, and so can disclose him.

As a result of such words, the Apostle John draws a contrast between Moses and Christ, one that give us comfort. "*The Law*", he says, "*was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*". In Jesus, God is fully and truly seen, so that Jesus is the Way in an absolute sense, just as he is the truth and the life. All our duties are summed up for us in the message Jesus brings.

Those who *look* towards Jesus for teaching, and worship and obey him will, by degrees, see "*the light of the knowledge and the glory of God in his face*", and they will be "*changed into the same image from glory to glory*". So, it happens that every sort of person, of whatever background, may know fully the ways and works of God—at least as fully as a human can. We know far better and more truly than the wisest of this world.

Faith has a store of wonderful secrets which no one can communicate to another, and which are most pleasant and delightful to know. "*Call on me*", says God by the prophet, "*and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things of which you have had no knowledge.*" This is no mere idle boast; it is a fact that all who seek God will find to be true, though perhaps they can't clearly express the meaning. These truths are first about ourselves. Many want to know about God, or about their duties or about the world or heaven or hell. People want new ways of viewing things, discoveries about things that can't be expressed in words, marvelous prospects and through half-understood, deep convictions inspiring joy and peace. Yes, these are a part of the revelation which Christ, as Son of God, brings to those who obey him, just as Moses had much to gain from the Great God, some scattered rays of the truth, and that for his personal comfort and not for all Israel.

Christ has brought from the Heavenly Father wonders for all a full and perfect way of life. First, he brings us knowledge of ourselves, and often as unwelcome as the other truths mentioned may be welcome. But this is grace as well as truth, a most surprising and renewing miracle of mercy. Do we perhaps need a to remember this when we are shown some dark corner of our being that we would rather not know about? Don't be afraid. Through all this sort of knowledge we find our Lord and joy!

Monday

DISCIPLESHIP AND THE CROSS

from the Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The call to follow Jesus is closely connected with Jesus' prediction of his passion. Jesus Christ must suffer and be rejected. This "must" is inherent in the promise of God—the Scripture must be fulfilled. This is the distinction between suffering and rejection. Had he only suffered, Jesus might still have been applauded as the Messiah. All the sympathy and admiration of the world might have been focused on his passion. It could have been viewed as a tragedy with its own intrinsic value, dignity and honor. However, suffering and rejection sum up the whole cross of Jesus.

In the passion Jesus is a rejected Messiah. His rejection robs the passion of its halo of glory. It is a passion without honor. Peter, the Rock of the Church, is the one who tries to prevent Christ being Christ. That shows how the very notion of a suffering Messiah was a scandal to the Church, even in its earliest days. That is not the kind of Lord it wants, and as the Church of Christ it does not like to have the law of suffering imposed on it even by its Lord. Peter's protest displays his own unwillingness to suffer, and that Satan has gained entry into the Church, and is trying to tear it away from the cross of its Lord.

Jesus must therefore make it clear beyond all doubt that the "must" of suffering applies to his disciples no less than to himself. Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of his suffering and rejection, so the disciple is only a disciple only in so far as he or she shares in the Lord's suffering, rejection and crucifixion. Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross.

Surprisingly enough, when Jesus begins to unfold this inescapable truth to his disciples, he once more sets the free to choose or reject him. For it is not a matter of course, not even among the disciples. No one will be forced, nobody will even be expected to come. Everything is left to the individual to decide: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let them take up the cross every day and follow me ". Every time the disciples are half-way on the road to discipleship, they come to another crossroad. Once more they are left free to choose for themselves, nothing is expected, nothing forced. So crucial is the demand of the present hour that the disciples must be left free to make their own choice before they are told the law of discipleship.

Tuesday

THE PEACE GOD GIVES US IN CHRIST

A reflection by Timothy of Jerusalem

“The just live forever and their reward is in the Lord; their hope in the Most High.” In every saint we are shown some part of God’s love and grace as a gift to share. Today we see two such holy ones, Simeon and the Virgin Mary. Let’s begin with Simeon.

He had already received from God the knowledge that he would not die and depart this present life until he had seen the Christ. But he received much more. He took Jesus into his arms; he enfolded life eternal in love and joy. Simeon the righteous longed to see the Lord and by God’s special grace did see him, and recognized him for who he was, and opened his arms wide to receive Him.

Then he called out to God for release from the life he had lived so long that he might be with God in the fullness that only the Christ can bring. We have all heard the words: *“Now Lord, let your servant go in peace, as you promised; for I have seen your salvation.”* I have seen, so let me depart in the peace of knowing you have fulfilled your promise to Israel and to all our race. I have seen your glory, seen the angels dancing, the archangels praising you, and all creation leaping for joy. I have seen the way from earth to heaven and into your one Kingdom. Now let me depart and be in that Kingdom.

Simeon didn’t have to witness the insolence of those who rejected the Messiah, or the crown of thorns they gave him in place of the crown of love he deserved. He did not have to see slaves beating their Lord, a spear being thrust into his side, or the sun itself darkened and the moon failing and the elements of the world altered. Mary did have to see all these things, as have to see them too.

We also can pray with Simeon, *“Lord now let your servant go in peace”*. Simeon saw the salvation prepared for all peoples, our salvation and that of Mary, the Virgin Mother. But we can join her too in empathic suffering with Christ, her son and our brother, and in doing this we learn how to share feelings with others and so to reach out to them to share with them the comfort Christ alone gives.

This doesn’t take away our suffering but gives it a new and transforming meaning. Mary leads us along this way. That is one of her many gifts to us. What is true love if it doesn’t constantly reach out to others in whatever their needs may be? But in Christ we find peace even in suffering and find the grace to place ourselves and our lives in our God’s hands.

We know God reaches out to embrace and hold us even as Simeon was allowed to do for God incarnate. But don’t we embrace God incarnate when we receive another as Christ? Let us rejoice in knowing what a mighty work God can do through us by drawing us to see Christ in those we meet.

Wednesday

A PRAYERFUL LIFE

from **A gift for God** by St Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Love to pray. Feel often during the day the need for prayer, and take trouble to pray. Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God's gift of himself. Ask and seek, and your heart will grow big enough to receive him and to keep him as your own.

Does your mind and heart go to Jesus as soon as you get up in the morning? This is prayer, that you turn your mind and heart to God. In your times of difficulties, in sorrows, in sufferings, in temptations, and in all things, where do your mind and heart turn to first of all? How did you pray? Did you take the trouble to turn to Jesus and pray, or did you seek other consolations? Has your faith grown? If you do not pray your faith will leave you. Ask the Holy Spirit to pray in you. Learn to pray, love to pray, and pray often. Feel the need to pray and to want to pray.

If you have learned to pray, I am not afraid for you. If you know how to pray, then you will grow to love prayer- and if you love to pray then you will pray. Knowledge will lead to love and love will lead to service.

On the other hand, if you don't pray, your presence will have no power, your words will have no power. If you pray you will be able to overcome all the tricks of the devil. Don't believe all the thoughts he puts in your mind.

There is only one powerful prayer: there is only one voice that rises up from the face of the earth: it is the voice of Christ. The more we receive in our silent prayer, the more we will give in our community life.

It is not possible to engage in community life or any kind of service without being a soul of prayer. We must be aware of oneness with Christ, as he was aware of oneness with the Father. Our life in community and our service of others is effective only in so far as we permit him to work in us and through us with his power, with his desire, with his love.

The Mass is the spiritual food that sustains me, without which I could not get through a single day or hour in my life: in the Mass we have Jesus in the appearance of bread, in the community we have him in the appearance of our other sisters; in the slums we see him and touch him in the broken bodies, in the abandoned children.

Thursday

FINDING OUR ROOTS

from Love into Silence by Fr John Main OSB

We know that we share in the nature of God, that we are called even deeper into the joyous depths of his own self-communication, and this is no peripheral purpose of the Christian life. In fact, if it is Christian, and if it is alive, our life must place this at the center of all we do and aim to do. "Our whole business in this life" said St Augustine "is to restore to health the eye of the heart where God may be seen". This eye is our spirit. Our first task, in the realization of our own vocation and in the expansion of the kingdom among our contemporaries, is to find our own spirit, because this is our lifeline with the Spirit of God. In doing so, we come to realize that we participate in the divine progression and that we share the dynamic essence of God's still point: harmony, light, joy and love.

Every personal loving relationship has its source in the movement of lover to beloved, though it has its communication in a wholly simple communion. The actuality of our faith does not depend upon the strength of our desire for God but derives from the initiative God has taken. St John writes "The love I speak of is not our love for God, but the love He showed us in sending us his Son". Our natural lethargy and self-evasiveness, our reluctance to let ourselves be loved are, like locked doors, no impediments to the Holy Spirit. In the heart of the utterly evil person, were there such a person, the Holy Spirit would still be crying: "Abba, Father," without ceasing.

The spiritual man or woman is one who is "in love" – in love within themselves beyond dividedness, and loving all people beyond division. And most miraculously, we are in love with God beyond all alienation, in Jesus. If you live it at the level only of words Christianity is unbelievable. It is beyond what the human mind can think of or comprehend. It is only in the experience of prayer that the truth of Christian revelation engulfs us. That is the invitation of Christian prayer, to lose ourselves and to be absorbed in God.

Friday

THE GIFT OF ONE'S SELF

A reflection developed from a text by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The New Testament illustrates the inexhaustible richness of Jesus' words as they became the sources and guides of life for the first Christians. This witness was, and is, continued in the witness of the martyrs. In both cases what is witnessed is charity, lived out in the gift of self in service of others. The service is more often spiritual than simply material. A marvelous example is found in St. Agatha.

Agatha illustrates the sharing of goods we see in the Jerusalem community as presented in the Book of Acts. She was rich yet she became poor because she shared so much with those who were in need. She helped the Christian community of Catania in Sicily to change things for the poor in a way that prefigured the new society that faith in Christ can and will create. In Acts this sort of giving of self is bound together with prayer and with listening to the Lord's Word in joy. It becomes more than a gift of social change. It is equally a gift of a new hope born of faith in Christ's resurrection as shared by us through our union with Him. We give things but the giving is actually rooted in the gift of self.

In Agatha's case this was a consecration of her life and self through the preservation of her virginity as a way of saying that she was married to Jesus and wholly his. For Agatha this led to martyrdom and her steadfastness in the face of every sort of torment was her way of showing that nothing at all can destroy our hope in God, as given us in Jesus' death and resurrection. Notice that this is a free gift, perhaps even more deliberately free than the sharing of all the things she possessed.

Recall the story in Acts of Annas and Saphira, who sold property and pretended to give all to God and their community but actually kept half for themselves. They were making themselves hypocrites and this destroyed them. Agatha refused to pretend in any way. There is a multitude of stories about how she overcame every sort of test and torture. This makes her life a witness to the supreme value of genuineness in our self-giving to God. It makes the point that living hope, no matter what happens, can be a tremendous gift to our fellow Christians. Agatha never stopped hoping or putting all her trust, and so her very self, into God's hands. She witnessed to God's never-ending love for us.

Charity and the concrete ways of sharing and sharing oneself are bound together. Charity is broader than any particular act. It is the best obedience to the Lord. It is a celebration of the resurrection and of the hope we are given in the Lord's resurrection. Charity is joy at Jesus' eternal presence amid his own. But it does aim for concrete action. It searches for ways to do everything that is possible in showing the new life that is proper to believers, socially as well as personally. Every sharing is a free manifestation of the richness of charity, just as our charity is a gift that witnesses to God's never-ending love for us.

Saturday

THE HARVEST OF A WITNESS TO CHARITY

A reflection developed from a text by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Quite frequently St. Paul's letters speak of Christian charity using the language of worship, calling it an "offering" and a "sacrifice". In Romans he says, "Think of God's mercy and worship him in a way that is worthy of a thinking being by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice" (Rm. 12:1f). He says the same to the Ephesians. It means, first, that worship is one's entire life-work, one's every day gift of self to God. Second, it presents concrete acts of spiritual and material charity as worship. He calls this the best way to come to know the will of God!

The Japanese martyrs provide marvelous examples, especially Fr. Paul Miki. He and his companions, Jesuits and Franciscans and lay Christians, were marched through the countryside to demonstrate what comes of disobeying the emperor. Actually, it showed the hope of Christians for something far beyond any imperial gift or favor. Paul made this clear in a sermon given as he hung on the cross waiting for the executioner to pierce his heart with a lance. From his heart flowed charity more than blood, and it created a Christian community that lived for centuries without church organization or even clergy. These believers had faith and hope, and these kept them faithful to Christ during centuries of being outlawed and persecuted.

The Christian vision of the life of charity is embodied in the famous hymn found in First Corinthians. It distinguishes a Christian's inward love from that of deeds done in conventional service of another, and connects them with tongues, prophesy, and miracles. It denies that even giving oneself to be killed can be important unless motivated by Christian charity. That doesn't make such charity a mystery but links it with acceptance of God and others without conditions, with pardon, with patience and kindness and understanding not based on ordinary reasoning or social training. Most of all it links it with hope.

Hope provides an inner orientation that permits a person to choose the right direction. Love puts us in the presence of God even while it is the supreme discovery of who we are as human beings. It shows us our brothers and sisters in a new light. It is the fruit of our total abandonment into the loving arms of our God. The Spirit speaks to us about this love in the history, as we may call it, of Christian sainthood. Because the saints allowed themselves to be guided by the Spirit, they were made holy. They didn't seek to glorify self or any earthly reality, even the Church, but humbly entrusted their lives to God. The Spirit gave them strength and insight to appreciate the world's needs and do something about them. What they did was give themselves to love and to hoping in God. The martyrs, for example, are not our heroes because of the pains they bore for God. The Japanese martyrs were tied up on a cross and then a soldier thrust a lance into their hearts to kill them. It was a simple death without a great deal of suffering. We offer what we are, and God brings much fruit from it.