

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

A WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY BEGINS

SUN. THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jan. 17 THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR HOPES

A reflection based on a commentary by Fr. Demetrius Dumm

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Begins

MON. Monday of the Second Week in Ordinary Time

18 ABIDE IN MY LOVE AND YOU SHALL BEAR MUCH FRUIT

Message for the week of prayer for Christian Unity 2021 from World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican City

TUES. Tuesday of the Second Week in Ordinary Time

19 THE HOLY SPIRIT AND ECUMENICAL HOPES

from [A New Pentecost](#) by Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens

WED. Memorial of Bl. Cyprian Michael Tansi

20 THE PASTORAL POWER OF CONTEMPLATIVE LIVING

A reflection based on a sermon by St. John Paul II

THURS. Memorial of St Agnes

21 THE TRANSFORMATION ST. AGNES

A reflection by the ancient poet, Prudentius

FRI. Day of Prayer for Legal Protection of the Unborn

22 THE VOCATION TO PROTECT LIFE

A reflection from "How to Build a Culture of Life"
on Christ Our Hope (official) website

SAT. Memorial of Our Lady

23 MARY, TEACHER OF TRUST AND OBEDIENCE

A reflection adapted from St. Irenaeus' "Against Heresies"

Sunday

THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR HOPE

A reflection adapted from a commentary by Fr. Demetrius Dumm

In John's version of the call of the first disciples, we read that Jesus had been pointed out to two of them by John; they then followed him, literally. "*When he turned and saw them following him, he asked: What are you looking for? They said, Rabbi, where are you staying?*" It would be a mistake to see this as simply an account of a friendly exchange between Jesus and the two disciples. The story implies that Jesus perceives in them a deep longing. He finds it in us too. It is characteristic of humans generally, if they allow themselves to get in touch with their actual condition. It is as if Jesus had said: "You two must be earthlings, for I see that you are searching for something!"

In response, the two call him "Rabbi", because they sense that if he knows their innermost yearning, he must also know where to find what they seek. He must be a teacher of this truth. So, they ask, "Where are you staying?" They are certainly not asking for his address. Their question means, "Where can we find you and learn from you about our true home?" Jesus says in reply, "Come and see!" Jesus doesn't give vague answers but offers an invitation to walk with him and learn what living in hope means.

What our journey, our life, means, in its pain and its joy, is the truth Jesus teaches. Most of all he teaches about its happy ending, our true homecoming. He teaches the ability to live in hope. That is what we learn from the Bible and its stories. It is a lesson not taught us anywhere else. Take worldly ideologies or philosophies and you can only find advice about making life as much a success as it can be here and now in our world. Such messages are about immediate fulfillment. Time is seen as one's enemy, most because we all are growing older and this relentlessly erodes opportunities for enjoyment and happiness; certainly, in our present situation this is so!

From the perspective we learn from the Bible, a promise dominates life and doesn't fade or become less as time passes. True fulfillment is reserved for "the end". The only real concern in our present life is to assure that we have chosen the right path to an end whose promise never fades. The thing is to stay on the path leading to our genuine homeland. This is not an easy path.

We have to put aside personal gratification for the good of others. It is the Jesus-path of loving care and self-sacrifice. The length of life is not a major concern because one step in the right direction is as good as a thousand. We are freed from excessive anxiety or angry frustration. Old age is not just meaningless and helpless waiting for death. It is the joyful expectation of looking forward eagerly to our arrival at our longed-for home. It may be that not all experience aging this way, but all can. That we fear we won't is only a proof that we need to be more and more converted from the infection of merely worldly hopes. Look to the bright hope of God's revelation as given to us in the Bible. In every tale this hope is glimpsed around the corner of daily incidents; it calls us to God and to share in God's life. It never ends. We meet Jesus today, and we recognize him as the source of all our hope.

Monday

ABIDE IN MY LOVE AND YOU SHALL BEAR MUCH FRUIT

Message for the week of prayer for Christian Unity 2021 from World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican City

The week of prayer for Christian Unity in 2021 has been prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. The theme chosen from John's Gospel, "Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit" expresses the monastic community's vocation to prayer, reconciliation and unity in the Christian family.

Today, the community has fifty sisters, all women from different generations, church traditions, countries and continents. In their diversity the sisters are a living parable of communion. As well as fidelity to a life of prayer the community always welcomes guests. Thus, the sisters share the grace of their monastic life with visitors and volunteers.

The first sisters experienced the pain of division between the Christian churches and from the beginning prayer and concrete work for Christian unity was at the heart of the life of the community.

The French words for monk and nun come from the Greek MONOS, which means one. Our hearts, bodies and minds, far from being one are often scattered. The monk desires to be one in and with Christ.

Abiding in Christ is an inner attitude that takes root in us over time. It demands space to grow. When we listen to Jesus his life flows through us. Jesus invites us to let his life grow in us. By his word we bear fruit. As persons, as a community, as an entire church, we cannot ever be closed in on ourselves, so that we can keep his commandment of loving one another as he has loved us.

Communion with Christ always demands communion with others. Moving closer to others, living together in communion with others, sometimes people very different from ourselves, can be challenging. Divisions among Christians, moving away from one another, are a scandal because in doing so we are moving away from God. Many Christians, moved to sorrow by this situation, pray fervently to God for the restoration of the unity for which Christ prayed. That is why we pray together each January during the annual Week of Prayer for Christian unity.

In our world there is much suffering and sadness. Thus, spirituality and solidarity are inseparably linked. Abiding in Christ, we pray for the strength and wisdom to act against structures of injustice and oppression, to fully recognize ourselves as brothers and sisters in humanity. WE must pray and act. Prayer and action. The summary of the rule of life that the monastic sisters of Grandchamp recite together each morning begins with the words "pray and work that God may reign". Prayer and everyday life are not two separate realities but meant to be united. Pray and act.

Tuesday

The Holy Spirit and Ecumenical Hopes

from **A New Pentecost** by **Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens**

The second Vatican Council recognized in the stirrings of ecumenism throughout the world a sign of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. There were some important texts adopted by the Council which expressed a sense of openness and receptivity in our relationship with other Christian churches. A new Secretariat was established under the leadership of Cardinal Willebrands of Holland and they took many new initiatives and made many contacts with our non-Catholic brothers and sisters.

There are so many examples of honest open dialogue notably in England and Belgium. The dialogue has not ended, rather it is only beginning. Many important issues are outstanding, notably the primacy of Peter and collegiality in the Church. We will go a long way with the principle: "We should not do separately what, in good conscience we can do together". And this will take us a long way.

Yet, despite undeniable activity and mutual goodwill, the ecumenical movement seems nevertheless to show signs of stagnation. Ecumenism can be compared to taking off in a jet. As we leave the ground, the engines make a tremendous roar. Then once the plane is airborne there is tremendous silence. Now it becomes hard to believe that we are moving at all. Sometimes we hit air pockets and are told to fasten our seat belts.

After unforgettable moments like the meetings between Pope Paul VI in Jerusalem, Constantinople and Rome came silence, lots of air pockets. No, ecumenism has not run out of fuel, the plane is in mid-flight. After all, the first millennium of the Church was, with some exceptions, the era of the undivided Church. The second from 1054 until now, has seen the Church torn asunder. We are permitted to be confident that with hope founded in God and in the progress of theology that the third millennium will see the restoration of full unity and full communion.

Nevertheless, this hope of ours encounters obstacle of many kinds which it would be foolish to minimize. Among the younger generation of both lay people and clerics, there is a disturbing lack of interest. They want to forget the past and build a brighter future. And of course, young people are not interested in doctrinal issues. For them the demands of justice are more urgent.

So, starting point is during the Unity Octave, being held 18 to 25 January each year. But it is no more than that. A starting point. Its timid and sporadic. We need to enter into God impatience

Wednesday

The Pastoral Power of Contemplative Living

A reflection based on a sermon by St. John Paul II

Father Cyprian Tansi was a contemplative as a diocesan priest. He found the power and inspiration to minister in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. In God he found freedom from self-concern and became available to all who had any kind of need. In a culture traditionally polygamous, he worked in a special way to help married people and to secure the dignity of women. Everything that opens people to the fullness of life given only in God was something he wanted to give himself. He lived the interdependence of contemplative prayer and active ministry.

In today's Gospel Jesus makes the point that all rules bend for the sake of charity. The rules exist to promote human well-being by drawing them into closer relations with God. If a rule doesn't actually help to draw people to God—due to particular circumstances—one must be ready to do charity in a way that steps outside the rule. One doesn't devalue rules but values them because of their purpose. Father Cyprian Tansi was a powerhouse of charity and every sort of work of charity and in a culture whose rules needed transformation by the Gospel message in many ways.

Father Tansi knew that there is something of the Prodigal Son in every human person. He knew all are tempted to separate themselves from God to seek things just for themselves. He knew that people are disappointed by the illusion which previously fascinated them and so find in the depths of their hearts a road that leads back to the Father's House. Father Tansi was always available to people to help them make this journey of reconciliation. He lived to spread the joy of communion with God. He inspired people to welcome the peace of Christ and to nourish the life of grace in them, especially with the Eucharist and God's word.

He sought to lead people to the sources from which all contemplatives draw their life. It was no wonder that his bishop sponsored his going to England to learn Cistercian monastic life in order to bring it to the people of Nigeria. If he died before he could realize this dream, nevertheless monastic life came to Nigeria. But it can grow there only in the measure that those who live it learn to nourish themselves with prayer as Father Cyprian did, and so free themselves from self-seeking and concern with personal comforts and conveniences.

All contemplatives must learn how to draw nourishment from the word of God. They must learn through a way of life shaped by personal prayer. This teaches the liberating love given in Jesus. We must let ourselves be set free from all that focuses attention on self rather than on serving those with whom we live. We all seek a deeper and richer and more human life. In Blessed Cyprian Tansi not only contemplatives but people of every way of life see that God is love and that life is the sharing of the love revealed to us in Jesus.

Thursday

THE TRANSFORMATION ST. AGNES

A reflection by the ancient poet, Prudentius

Agnes was a brave woman and a glorious martyr. A double crown of martyrdom was given her, that of keeping her virginity untouched and that of dying by her own will to give herself wholly to the Lord. They say that as a young girl she was already on fire with the love of Christ and so withstood commands to marry and to worship false gods. Many stratagems were used from fair promises to threats of torture but she stood firm and unconquerable and even made explicit her determination to die before she deserted her dedication to the Lord.

“If it seems easy for her to overcome the pains and bear the suffering of torture, and if she scorns even life as of little worth, still the purity of her dedicated virginity seems dear to her. So, I have decided to confine her to a public house of prostitution unless she lays her head on the altar and asks pardon of Minerva, the virgin, whom she persists in slighting. All the young men will hurry to seek this new slave for their entertainment.” That is what the judge said, but Agnes replied: “No, Christ isn’t so forgetful of his own as to let my chastity be lost. He stands by the chaste. You may stain your sword with my blood but you will not pollute my body by your lust.”

The judge gave orders that she be placed naked at a corner of the public square but while she was there, people avoided her in sadness and one youth who happened by and looked at her with lust was struck by something like a thunderbolt of fire so that he fell down blind and lay in convulsions in the dust. Agnes sang of God the Father and of Christ because when an unholy danger fell on her then her virginity won the day. She was chaste and pure even in a brothel. It is said that some asked her prayers on behalf of the young man who had been struck down and that he was healed in response to these prayers.

The judge saw all this and complained that he was becoming the loser in this contest. So, he gave the order: “Go and draw the sword, soldier, and give effect to the command of our Lord, the emperor. But when Agnes saw him standing there with his sword drawn, she rejoiced. “I rejoice that there comes a cruel and savage soldier to destroy me with the death of honor. This lover pleases me. I meet him with eager steps and shall welcome the entire length of his blade into my body. As Christ’s bride I will leap out of darkness and rise higher than the sky!”

She bowed her head and worshipped Christ so that her bent neck would be more ready to accept the blow of the executioner. His arm fulfilled her great hope. At one stroke he cut off her head and death forestalled all pain. She now watches over Rome’s citizens together with the strangers who honor her with a pure and faith-filled heart.

Friday

THE VOCATION TO PROTECT LIFE

From “How to Build a Culture of Life” from “Christ our Hope” website

To understand more fully how to defend and protect human life we must first consider who we are and at the deepest level. God creates us in his image and likeness, which means we are made to be in loving relationship with God. The essence of our identity and worth, the source of our dignity, is that we are loved by God. We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the gifts the Father’s love has given us and our real capacity to become the images of his Son.

We are called to divine intimacy, true communion with God, and we can grow in this closeness with him through daily prayer, reading the Scriptures and frequent participation in the sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist.

The knowledge and realization of how deeply we are loved by God elicits a response of love that simultaneously draws us closer to God and impels us to share his love with others.

Embracing a relationship with God means following in Christ’s footsteps, wherever he may call. Being a disciple of Jesus naturally includes sharing the Gospel with others and inviting them to a deeper relationship with God. As Christians, our identity and mission are two sides of the same coin. We are called to be missionary disciples.

When we live in union with God, open to his promptings, we’re more able to see the opportunities for witness and his guidance in responding to them. We may fear doing the wrong thing or saying the wrong word but we don’t need to be afraid. Jesus is with us until the end of the age.

As a society and as individuals, we often measure ourselves by false standards. But God’s love is the true source of our worth, identity and dignity. It really isn’t a question of who we are but of whose we are. God’s love will never change and nothing can reduce our God-given dignity.

When a woman becomes pregnant and her boyfriend threatens to leave if she continues the pregnancy, we need to lovingly walk with her. When family members or friends become seriously ill, we need to assure them that God offers them something marvelous and that they still have purpose.

This is how we answer our missionary call. This is how we build a culture of life, one that joyfully proclaims the truth of God’s love, purpose and plan for each person. Changing the culture is a process of conversion that begins in our own hearts and includes a willingness to be instructed and a desire to be close to Jesus—the deepest source of joy.

When we encounter Christ, experience his love and deepen our relationship with him, we become more aware of our own worth and that of others. Our lives are often changed by the witness of others, so too other’s lives may be changed by our witness and authentic friendship. Let us not be afraid. God is always with us.

Saturday

MARY, TEACHER OF TRUST & OBEDIENCE

A reflection adapted from St. Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*

In accordance with the design of the Heavenly Father, Mary the Virgin is found obedient; when God's word came to her, she replied, "Behold, the slave of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word". (Lk.1:38) Contrast Mary with Eve, who had disregarded God's word. Both were virgins though both were married—since in the Law betrothal makes a woman the wife of the one to whom she is betrothed. So, both were faced with a decision about doing what seemed contrary to God's word. Eve was moved to take it upon herself to decide that whatever she wanted was good, even though God had said it was bad. Mary was asked to allow God to make her pregnant, although the Law forbade her to let herself be made pregnant by any but Joseph.

Mary chose to obey what she personally was certain God willed her to do, even if that meant disobeying what she had been told by others was God's will. In doing this she brought life, while Eve, who obeyed herself rather than what she had been told was God's will, brought death. They did this not just for themselves but for the entire human race. Notice that neither consulted her husband before making her decision. Joseph decided that her disobedience to the prohibition of becoming pregnant by anyone but him dissolved the bond stating that human beings may not separate what God has joined. Recall that God joined both Eve and Adam and Mary and Joseph in marriage.

The difference was that Eve was deciding to disobey God while Mary was deciding to obey God while disobeying a human interpretation of God's law. Eve and Adam both knew her decision treated God as a deceiver and liar, while Joseph and Mary both knew that her decision treated God's promise of a savior as true and believed God does not deceive in what we are told to do. God had to speak to Joseph as God had spoken to Mary so Joseph would disregard Mary's pregnancy.

So, Mary, and Joseph as well, gave obedience to God and gave that priority over any other call to believe that what God had commanded was not right. Eve believed one other than God but Mary believed God over every other. What Eve did caused death, and what Mary did brought life, and to the entire human race. By her deed Mary became the cause of salvation, to herself and to our entire race. She teaches us always to believe God, and to trust God as we wrestle with the practical consequences of this obedience. Because she did trust God, Joseph was given the assurance he needed that what had happened in her was God's work directly.

Eve and Mary are presented in parallel because they illustrate situations we all face in dealing with inclinations to obey or disobey God, and to believe or refuse to believe that God always does only what is for our good. Mary's obedience teaches us to accept even what is wholly new and unheard of when we have good reason to believe it is God's will. Eve's fate teaches us never to disobey what we are sure is God's word just because that would seem to offer some sort of benefit to us. The consequences of distrust and disobedience can be an evil that no one can undo, while the consequence of trust and obedience can undo all such evils as well as bring unheard of good.