



Sunday

## THE HEALING OF OUR HOPE

### A reflection by Fr. Ansfried Hulsbosch

*“When he left the synagogue, Jesus together with James and John, went into the house of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and the first thing they did was tell him about her” (Mk.1:29f). Our health depends on our relation with God and yet our orientation to God depends on our contacts with others like ourselves. Recall what the Gospel says about this: “If anyone who has enough to live on sees another in need and yet closes his heart against that person, how can the love of God be in such a one? Children, we must not make love a matter of mere words or talk. We must have genuine love and show it in our deeds. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another God dwells in us and love is brought to perfection in us. Here is the proof that we dwell in God and God in us. God has given us the Holy Spirit.”*

Now there is always an element of suffering in Christians’ love for each other. This love is measured by the extent to which we give ourselves—our persons and our possessions. There is a struggle between such giving and our fallen nature. Dying to self is a full-time job, where our natural tendencies are concerned. This is suffering, and it comes from within. We can be a burden to others, as they can be burdens to us. Think of persecution for one’s faith and the way it tests us as well as our love for those who persecute us. Dying for Christ is the highest form of self-affirmation and makes the greatest demands on our freedom, but also on our ability to continue to love those who harm us.

Trials can also come in the form of illness and misfortune and this demands a martyrdom that is our witness to a hope for eternal life. Our daily existence demands a continual reaffirmation of this hope. When our hope is vivid external things, or even internal trials, can’t control us or harm us. They even become benefits. *“We know that in every way God works for good with those who love.”* If we are genuinely upheld by hope in Christ nothing can threaten us any longer. *“What can separate us from the love of Christ—affliction, or hardship, persecution, hunger, nakedness, or the danger of a violent death? For God’s sake we are being killed all the time and are treated like animals set aside for slaughter. Yet in all this we are more than mere conquerors, through Christ who loves us. I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or super-human powers, in the present world or that to come, in the forces of nature or in heights or depths—nothing in all creation, that can separate us from the love of God given us in Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

We can endure every sort of test and trial, and emerge victorious, because Jesus has already done so. He is our hope, and everything can be faced because he is with us. If you need your wounded hope healed, stretch out your hand like Peter’s mother-in-law and take the hand of Jesus. He will raise you up.

*Monday*

## **On Movement**

from Everyday Things by Fr. Karl Rahner SJ

Movement is one of the most everyday things in our daily round. We only think of it when we can't move any more, when we are shut in or paralyzed. Then we suddenly experience being able to move as a grace and a miracle. We are not plants, tied down to just one sitting determined for us; we search out our setting for ourselves, we change it, we make a choice-to move. And we change, we experience ourselves as beings who change ourselves, as searchers, as those who are still on the way. We recognize that we want to move towards a goal, and that we don't want to wander- into a mere vacuum. When we are moving forward towards something difficult and unavoidable, we still experience ourselves as free, even if we can only move towards accepting it as something imposed.

We talk about a way of life, and the first description of Christians in the Acts of the Apostles are those "belonging to the Way ". When Scripture tells us that we are not to be hearers of the Word only but also doers, it is thereby saying that we don't just live in the Spirit, but should move in the Spirit. We talk about the course of events, from the good outcome of an undertaking, about the approach to understanding, of how a deceitful person goes behind one's back, of something happening as an occurrence, of a change as a transition, of the end as a passing away. A king or queen ascends to the throne; our life is a pilgrimage; history moves forward; something we undertake we call accessible; a decision can appear as a step. Both in the sacred and secular spheres, great celebrations are marked by processions and parades.

These few, quite tiny indications are enough to show how we are constantly interpreting our whole life in terms of the utterly basic human experience of everyday movement. We move and this reminds us already that we have no abiding city, that we are on the way, that our real arrival is ahead of us. We are always seeking our goal, we are pilgrims, wanderers between two worlds, humankind in transition, moved and being moved. We discover as we plan our moves, that we don't always end up where we planned to.

The faith of a Christian reveals what the goal of this existence is and promises what is coming. God's own self comes in the descent and return of the Lord, who is our future to come.

We move; we cannot but be seeking. But the Real and the Ultimate is coming to us, and seeking us out- obviously only as we are moving, as we are moving forward. We will be carried along, and that is called grace, by the power of God's movement towards us.

*Tuesday*

## **THE GIFT OF HOPE THAT OUR DEAD GIVE US**

**A reflection developed from a text by St. Pope John Paul II**

The devotion to the memory of the dead, who have gone before us with the sign of faith, is particularly worthy of honor. It is above all a meditation on eternal truths, enabling us to perceive what it is that passes away and what it is that is destined to survive. Today we have come to pay our respects to the memory of the dead with a tribute of prayers to the Lord for their souls, and the hope that mercy has received them into the glory of heaven. But the memory of those who have gone before us, to whom we are linked by bonds of fidelity and gratitude, must also accompany us in every act of our daily life.

This, after all, is the memorial that they deserve. This redounds to their honor; this is the spirit of Christian prayer for the dead. It is inseparable from Christian hope and practice and life. We sing "Deliver me, O Lord" and this invites us to raise our eyes from the grave and to look elsewhere for those who were and are so dear and familiar to us. All who have benefited from the companionship and company of people consecrated to God recall the image of the persons they are and all the spiritual goodness they share, and have shared, with us.

We don't come simply to show respect or say a brief prayer once a month. We feel a deep spiritual communion, and attentive reexamination of the precious examples and lessons we received from those who are now with God. They continue to praise and bless God and to obtain God's blessings for us. It is a blessing that is intended for our spiritual progress. We know that the faithful exult in God's glory and sing for joy never-endingly. It is through such links as those with our dead that the Lord's light passes. Their examples are given us to imitate, and help us thus draw nearer to that Christian perfection which the Lord holds in store for all who turn to him from the depths of their hearts.

The smile of the babe at Bethlehem was the same smile that lights up the faces of all the children of men when they first appear on earth. We know that with it comes the last gasp, and perhaps sob, that we saw on the Cross. It gathers our lives, and all our sufferings, together to hallow them and wipe away all our sins. We know how Christ lived in this our earthly life, and we know how Mary stood beside him, and prays for us, both now and at the hour of our death. In this mystery we see foreshadowed the mystery of the life and salvation of all, and especially of our beloved dead.

With these thoughts our heart reaches out to all, in a kind of sign of heartfelt love and even reparation. It is the longing to reach past the ends of the earth into the heart of Heaven, to Jesus and to our Heavenly Father. That is where, through the blood of Christ, we find our dead. They wait for us and, by their lives and the memories they have left us, they strengthen our hope to enter into God's promise of eternal life with them. Today we celebrate holy hope and the strength it offers all people.

Wednesday

## LOVE ALWAYS HAS PRIORITY

### A reflection from the Dialogues of St. Pope Gregory the Great

St. Benedict had a twin sister, Scholastica, who was consecrated to God from early childhood, lived in a monastery a few miles from her brother's monastery at Monte Cassino. The two used to get together once a year at a house a short distance from Benedict's monastery. He brought two other monks with him and all of them spent the day singing God's praises and talking about the spiritual life. They ate together in the evening and continued sharing until quite late. On one occasion—indeed it was the last time they were to meet before Scholastica's death—she asked him to stay the entire night and talk about the joys of heaven. But he wouldn't hear of it, because in his Rule it was forbidden ordinarily to stay away from the monastery at night.

It was a clear night but when Benedict refused her request Scholastica folded her hand, put her head on the table top and prayed. St. Gregory tells us that, all of a sudden, there was a flash of lightening, a roll of thunder, and torrential rain! *“By shedding a flood of tears while she prayed, this holy woman had darkened the cloudless sky and brought on a heavy rain.”* The storm's coming, and the end of her prayer, coincided so perfectly that the thunder sounded as she raised her head from the table. Gregory adds: *“Realizing that he couldn't return to the monastery in this storm, Benedict complained bitterly: God forgive you, sister, what have you done?”* But he was complaining to the wrong party. *“When I asked you, you wouldn't listen, so I turned to my God and he heard my prayer! So, go ahead, leave and go back to your monastery!”*

Benedict was concerned about giving an example of obedience to the Rule to his monks. But God wills love, and especially love of God, and will that it shall always have first priority in the life of his faithful. So, Benedict had no real choice and did stay the night, talking with Scholastica about their love of God and God's love for them. St. Gregory says that both of them derived great profit from their sharing and the holy thoughts they exchanged about the interior life.

*“We shouldn't be surprised that Scholastica proved mightier than her brother. Do we not read in St. John that God is love? It is no more than right that the one who loved more should be mightier.”* Did God do this for Scholastica because he was preparing her for entry into the Kingdom? It was only three days later that, in prayer, Benedict saw Scholastica entering into heaven. They had been one in this life in many ways, and had even arranged to be buried in the same tomb. Yet it is more important that they were one in God's love, and will be forever.

Thursday

## **THE OBEDIENCE OF GIVING YOURSELF TO GOD**

**A reflection from Christ the Ideal of the Monk by Bl. Columba Marmion**

St. Benedict recalls to our minds the psalmist's words, "You have placed authority over our heads". These words may mean nothing to us unless we recall that we have chosen to walk the way of obedience. Moreover, St. Benedict would have us understand that obedience can be very difficult. In the Fourth Degree of Humility, he speaks of the hard and contrary things, even injuries, that may befall one in the course of obedience. He warns that obedience is a narrow way. But he adds, that it leads to life. If we obey with faith, we may be assured that each act, even if done under difficult circumstances but with trust, will prove to be for our good. We will be acquiring the virtue of obedience and God triumphs precisely in using our frailty and errors for the good of all who trust in God.

Our Holy Father Benedict's words should be before our eyes constantly. The more we see Christ in others, and especially in those set over us, the more fully we enter into the life of faith. Then those who ask us to do difficult and hard things can become for us causes of eternal salvation and Christian perfection.

One who yields up oneself in obedience toward God can be compared to a select arrow shot by the hand of a mighty archer. The one who possesses the supernatural suppleness of obedience is capable of great things. That is because you can count on God, and God can count on you, if you are willing to be such an arrow. Very often God has used people who were willing to trust for work which will bring special help to others and so special glory to God. God uses our obedience to perfect us in the humility that trusts because it never relies on itself.

We all believe in principle that no matter how lofty a goal may be, it is not out of God's reach. God "reaches up" through the entirely inadequate hands of ordinary believers who trust with their whole heart and so aren't afraid to reach out to those who need healing. The more one relies on God the more one is at the disposition of the very power of God. When a woman who had hemorrhaged for fifteen years touched the Lord's clothes, he felt power go out of him. That was God's power and it didn't need Jesus to will it for it to heal that woman. Faith was the switch that released it. Can't God do this through us?

We shouldn't be surprised at the prodigies performed by persons who forgot themselves, and so their inadequacies, stripped themselves of all awareness of their power, and obeyed the Lord's commands. Recall the incident when Maur ran to save the boy, Placid, who had fallen into a lake. In self-forgetfulness he walked on water! It is this sort of faith-filled self-forgetfulness that assures us of security in doing God's will. If Christ calls us, we can, like Peter, walk on water—only we mustn't doubt. But how can you avoid doubting? Take your eyes off yourself and fix them on our Master and obedience to his commands.

*Friday*

## **HUMILITY FINDS GOD'S WORKS EVERYWHERE**

**A reflection developed from a Life of St. Bernard by A. Luddy, O.Cist.**

When Humbeline, St. Bernard's sister, came to visit him some years after her marriage, she came as a great lady surrounded by servants. Bernard and Andrew, her brothers, thought she was showing off and so refused to meet with her. His message to her was harsh: "Why so much solicitude to embellish a body destined for worms and rotteness, while the soul that now animates it is burning in everlasting flames?"

When her brother, Andrew, told her this she burst into tears: "I deserve this because I am a sinner. Yet it is for such as I that Christ suffered on the Cross. Indeed, it is because of my sinfulness that I seek counsel and encouragement from holy men. If my brother, Bernard, who is the servant of God, despises my body, let him at least have pity on my soul. Let him come! Let him command! Whatever he thinks proper to require I am prepared to do."

Bernard and Andrew realized that they had made a hasty judgment. They hadn't reminded themselves that God works in all hearts. They went quickly to talk with their sister so as to strengthen her in her good intentions. Indeed, Bernard wanted her to enter monastic life. Yet he knew this was impossible without her husband's permission, and so what he counseled was that she should live as simply as possible, as though a recluse, and avoid all sorts of vane display. She could dedicate herself to helping the poor, as her mother had done. She promised to do just this, and indeed, to ask her husband for permission to become a monk.

It took her five years to persuade him to give this permission. In 1122 she entered the Benedictine monastery of July, where her sister Elizabeth was prioress. When Elizabeth went to found another monastery in 1130, Humbeline was appointed to succeed her. The monastery flourished under her leadership. She eventually made some twelve new foundations, all Benedictine though some later joined the Cistercian reform.

As a monk, Humbeline was known for her love of the cross. She was very dedicated to fasting and restricted her sleep time to what seemed necessary. She wore the poorest habits and served her sisters whole-heartedly and liked to do the humblest and most ordinary things. Her practices frightened her sisters and they asked her to treat herself a bit more gently. Her reply is recorded as: "For you, my dear sisters, whose lives have been consecrated to the service of God, this is an excellent bit of advice. But for me, who has lived so long among worldly vanities, no kind of penance can be excessive!"

When she became ill Bernard, together with Andrew and Nivard, came from Citeaux to be with her at her death. Her words to Bernard were: "How happy I am to have followed your counsel and consecrated myself to God. What a beautiful reward I can expect to receive for the love I had for you in this life. It is to that love that I owe the joy and glory that are awaiting me in our homeland." She died praying psalm 121: "I rejoice at the things that were said to me: We shall go into the House of the Lord".

*Saturday*

## **Mystical Devotion** from Mysticism by Dorothee Soelle

Mystical texts use creative language and expressly criticize the worship of lordship or the denial of our own strength. Thus, religion is the feeling of oneness with the whole, intimate connection, not subjugation; human beings do not honor God only because of his power and lordship, but submerge themselves in him, or as they always say, in his love. Meister Eckhart says, he is our ground, love, depth, sea. Such nature symbols are preferred where God demands no obedience but union, where a distant other does not demand sacrifice and renunciation, where harmony and oneness with the living become the theme of religion.

When we enter the mystical realm, the most important virtue in religion is no longer obedience but solidarity. Rather than expecting something to come from above, we learn to think cooperatively. This all belongs to what we can describe as mystical devotion.

But it must be stated that mysticism is about more than being free from a God who imprisons us. It also has to be positively stated: we have to talk about our freedom for a different God. Mystical language is an aid to express a deeper devotion than patriarch language is able to. In traditional theology and churchy talk, we talk about God's relationship to humankind in verbs that imply human passivity, such as: direct, control, send, use, judge, shape, destroy, offer and rule over humankind. Our need for a better, non- hierarchical language will still grow, and we may use verbs for God's activity that leave enough space for human response, such as: evoke, empower, liberate, support, build, awaken, listen, nourish, summon, suffer, experience, participate, rejoice, and stand within. Mystical language is full of God symbols and expression of God's action which are free of domination. Mystical language brings us beyond an I-It relationship to the warmth of the I-You.