

THE FIFTH WEEK OF THE EASTER SEASON

- Sun. **The Fifth Sunday of Easter**
May 2 **OUR ONENESS IN CHRIST'S LOVE**
 A reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine
- Mon. **The Feast of Saints Philip and James, Apostles**
3 **WHY WE SHOULD IMITATE CHRIST**
 A reflection from The Teaching of the Apostles
- Tues. **Tuesday of the 5th Week in Easter Season**
4 **WORKING WITH GOD AND JESUS**
 From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Wed. **Wednesday of the 5th Week in Easter Season**
5 **GOD INCARNATE IN OUR HUMANITY**
 From Discourses Against the Arians by St. Athanasius
- Thurs. **Thursday of the 5th Week in Easter Season**
6 **CHRIST IS IN ALL OF THEM**
 from Cosmic Dance by Sr Joyce Rupp

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

- Fri. **Friday of the Fifth Week in the Easter Season**
7 **LIVING THE NEW LIFE CHRIST GIVES**
 A reflection from Life in Christ by Nicholas Cabasilas
- Sat. **The Memorial of Blessed Christian de Cherge**
8 **THE LAST TESTAMENT OF DOM CHRISTIAN DE CHERGE**

Sunday

OUR ONENESS IN CHRIST'S LOVE

A reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine

The Lord Jesus calls himself The Vine and goes on to tell the disciples that they are branches. We ordinarily make this point by saying that Jesus Christ is head of the Church and we are his members and that Jesus Christ is mediator between God and the human race but Jesus' metaphor expresses a fuller reality.

A vine and its branches are one and the same living reality. Christ possess a divine nature which we, of ourselves, can't share but are made able to share by being made one with Christ. He became human and The Vine so that human beings might share in divinity. Dwell in me, he says to us, and I will dwell in you. Notice that the benefit is ours and not his. The branches of a vine don't give life to the vine but vice versa. Branches that are attached to a vine stock draw from it their vital nourishment. This is something the vine stock gives to its branches. Christ's presence in his disciples and their presence in Christ are for their good. Listen again to the Incarnate Truth! *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Anyone who dwells in me and I in him yields fruit in abundance, but without me you can do nothing!"* These words are to be pondered very seriously.

One might think Christ's branches can produce some fruit of themselves. Yet our Lord doesn't say, "You can do little without me" but, "You can do nothing without me". Even a little fruit is impossible without Christ. More, if a branch doesn't bear much fruit the vinedresser prunes it. If severed from the vine stock the branch can't stay alive, so vinedressers prune branches without cutting them from the vine. That way they will bear more fruit than otherwise. The basic truth is that apart from a vine a branch can't bear any fruit.

Christ couldn't be our vine if he weren't human; he couldn't offer us the grace he does if he weren't divine. That grace enables us to love as he does and with him. Without the vine one dies. Jesus himself says, whoever doesn't dwell in me will be thrown away and will wither. Such branches are gathered and then thrown into a fire to burn up." On the other hand, *"if you dwell in me and my words dwell in you, you will ask for whatever you long for and it will be yours"*. Those refusing to dwell in Christ have shame; those dwelling in him have glory.

If you dwell in Christ you can't long for anything that conflicts with his love. The very fact that people dwell in our Savior means that they love nothing that is out of harmony with their salvation. Yet it happens that a person may desire one thing due to union with Christ and another due to still being in the world. We are ignorant of what is genuinely good or bad and want something that can't be good for us. Christ gives us what we long for only if it helps us love as he does. Don't be saddened if you don't receive what seems good but receive only what is really for your welfare. If we let Christ's love dwell fully in us then we will ask for only what God wishes to give us and is for our true good.

Monday

WHY WE SHOULD IMITATE CHRIST

A selection from The Teachings of the Apostles

Anyone who would learn a craft from a master must observe the skills and the knowledge the master uses in executing the work. A learner then copies the master in executing his own work and does it in a way designed to please the master. If the learner cuts corners this is a serious fault. Now we have Our Lord as master and teacher. Why don't we imitate his teachings and his way of life?

Our master left riches and glory and power to come in poverty to help us. Besides, he let go of Mary, his blessed mother, and of his relatives and life itself. He endured persecution even to the cross. He did all this for our sake. He did this to redeem both Jews and Gentiles. He freed us from worshipping idols and from all ungodliness and offered us a marvelous inheritance. If he did all this for those who believe in him and was not ashamed why don't we imitate his sufferings using the courage and endurance he gives us?

Our Lord has no need of our sufferings. But they do testify to and confirm our love of our faith and our free gift of self to God. Why not let go of parents, of relatives, and of all that belongs to this world, and even of our lives, for him? Indeed, we must pray that we not be put to a test we cannot endure, yet if we are called to martyrdom, we can confess our faith when we are interrogated and we can persevere when we suffer and rejoice in our afflictions.

Let us not sorrow when we are persecuted. In doing these things we not only deliver ourselves from hell but we teach those who are young in the faith, and even those who are catechumens, so that they may do likewise. It is a gift of life in God. If we fail in faith and deny Christ through human weakness, we not only destroy ourselves but threaten the lives of others. When they see our denial, they may think that they have become disciples of a wrong faith. If they stumble, we are held accountable for them as well as ourselves.

We must love one another even to the cross. Suppose we are arrested and brought before the authorities and then deny the hope that we placed in our Lord by the gift of faith. You might be let go, but what if the very next day you fall sick? What if you can't retain food and vomit it up with great pain? What if you vomit blood and bile and turn out to have an ulcer and need an operation? You may be operated on by the doctors and you may die as a result, in great pain and affliction.

Behold, you have lost earthly life and destroyed your life with God as well. *"Everyone, says the Lord, who loves this life shall lose it, and anyone who loses life for my sake will find life everlasting"*. Let us imitate our Lord and never give up. Let us help one another love the Lord and love to do his will.

Tuesday

WORKING WITH GOD AND JESUS

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Book of Genesis speaks of God working and says he completed his work on the Sixth Day. God is one who works. And the object of God's labor is the earth and all its creatures, especially ourselves. We are the fruit of God's labor.

How does God work? God works freely and uses work to express his love for others. God is inventive and loves to produce beautiful and good things. After each phase of work in creation God pauses and reflects, "This is good!" Thus, after making us God reflects, "This is very good!" God produces works that are good and beautiful, and they bear fruit in new works of love. All the works give great satisfaction.

This tells us about ourselves as made in God's image and likeness and expressly charged to care for the earth and its creatures. What we learn is God's plan. God labors for us now and always. We are placed in a beautiful world and are asked to imitate God. We too are intended to work in love and in joy. But this plan has to confront the reality of sin in human life and history. As a result, our work is often unfree, even a form of slavery; it may be imposed by circumstances beyond our control and require that we do what we don't want to. It often isn't creative or self-expressive or joyful. We often feel no satisfaction in doing it. Moreover, we often don't see the fruits of our labor or how it helps bring more abundant life to others. We often can't pause to reflect, "This is good!" Has God's plan for free, spontaneous, personally expressive, creative and fruitful work been destroyed?

Even if we think we are "condemned" to work at this or that, even when we think it's not good, yet God has a plan of redemption and it relates to human labor. The labors of Joseph, with the work of Jesus and Mary, show us the path to redemption. The task to which we too have been called is to help bring work closer to what God had in mind in creating us. Our responsibility is to work with God in such a way that, in our own person, work may become expressive of our humanity at its best and, as in Jesus, divinized. Energized by the love Jesus shows us, we can find ways to make work fully human and humanizing. This may seem like a dream, but it is only a long and difficult road.

It is especially difficult because at times we think we've reached an objective and then run up against barriers like monotony or repetitiveness. We then have to renew our efforts to work "better"—i.e., make our work more expressive of our freedom and lovingness and human dignity. We mean we have to find ways to put human values first, even ahead of profit. That means we have to rethink our ways of living and enjoying and using things.

We can't do this in sadness if we want to draw others into this task. Nor can we expect God to do it all by a miracle. It is our God-given task. We must do it by our faith, our courage, our hope and our love. Above all, it is a matter of making every task a work of love. In God all things are possible if you begin today.

Wednesday

SEEING EVERYTHING THROUGH NEW EYES

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Gregory of Nyssa

The Kingdom of Life has begun, the tyranny of death is ended. A new birth has taken place, a new life has come, a new order of existence has appeared, our very nature has been transformed! This birth is not brought about by human generation, by the will of human beings or by the desires of the flesh, but by God. You may wonder how all this can be true, but the explanation is straightforward.

Think of faith as a womb in which new life is conceived. Our birth from this womb is what happens through baptism. By baptism we come forth into the light of God's new day. We have a helper, the Church. Think of the church as your wet nurse, feeding you with teachings about what is genuinely good as through with milk. What's more she leads you to the Bread of Heaven as to solid food. In this way you are helped to grow and to come to maturity in Christ. This is seen in your practice of the virtues. More, maturity leads to espousal with wisdom.

What is the result? You are given a new hope. You realize that your true home is the Kingdom of Heaven. A rich inheritance awaits you and is to be experienced in the joys of that Kingdom. These have no end, for in that Kingdom there is no death. It is an everlasting life of joy as lived by those who so respond to God's gifts as to be fit for such a life. "*This is the day the Lord has made!*", a day far different from those we experience in this world.

The old days measured time's passage and the fading of what people try to find joy in. We are in a new creation, at least in its beginnings. God has made a new heaven and earth and we must live in this new creation. We do this by seeing all things in a new way. The way we live depends on the way we see ourselves and all that is around us. Can you see our faith as though it were the firmament which allows the earth we live on to emerge from the waters? Can you see the new earth on which you live as your own heart transformed by baptism into faith? This new heart drinks the water of grace and yields a rich harvest of loving deeds and joy in the Lord. You see that you don't depend on the old sun for life but on purity in living Christian virtues. You don't just breathe the old air but divine wisdom and knowledge given you in Christ. You don't depend for life simply on the old creation and its plants and animals but you get a new life from God and God's teachings. You are a sheep of God's flock keeping God's commandments.

Living the new life involves living by a new perspective. The old remains but we don't live by it because we have eyes to see. The "new day" isn't like past days. Jesus said: "*I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and your God.*" Jesus has brought our humanity and all it involves to the Heavenly Father and with it has presented us too. Our new eyes let us see this reality and use it as the touch stone by which to determine what has priority and importance for living the New Life. Let us use this gift always to love even as Jesus loves us.

Thursday

CHRIST IS IN ALL OF THEM from Cosmic Dance by Sr Joyce Rupp

The beauty and variety of people consistently brings joy and challenge to our lives, filled with diverse philosophies and values, filled with diverse philosophies and values. I have come to discover that it is mainly on the surface that we are different. We are merely as separate as we sometimes feel ourselves to be. Underneath our supposed differences we experience many. All I need to do is sit where people are gathered to know that there are people of all sizes, shapes, and skin color, filled with diverse philosophies and values. It is mainly on the surface that we are different. We are not nearly as separate as we sometimes feel ourselves to be. Underneath our supposed differences we experience many different emotions, longings, hopes and dreams. The cosmic dance goes on in each of us.

I was on the tram at Dallas airport one day and all of us were standing or sitting quietly, avoiding eye contact and conversations with one another. Then an elderly man who was holding his wife's hand spoke. He told us they were travelling to celebrate the birthday of a special granddaughter. One person wished them well, then another spoke about it being her 40th birthday. Many "Happy Birthdays" rang through the air. In a brief space of time, we had discovered our oneness.

Thomas Merton had a moment of glimpsing the true oneness of humanity. Merton was standing on a street corner in Louisville, Kentucky, when he suddenly saw the people surrounding him as a great body of life. He felt deeply and intimately connected with them in a vast oneness of spirit. They were his brothers and sisters. A similar thing happened when the writer, artist, and mystic Caryl Houselander was travelling on a crowded underground train in London. She looked around her and she saw the Christ in all of them. But she saw even more than that. She had a profound sense that she was one with every person who had ever lived and ever would live, that there was an immense bond between them because of their mutual existence in time and in eternity.

Christian theologians present this oneness as humankind's participation in the Body of Christ. Buddhists speak of it as the practice of compassion which views all things as one. Native Americans approach this same oneness in their understanding, as Merton did too, that each person is a brother, a sister.

The cosmic dance helps us to recognize the sacredness in the people of my world, to view them as part of an eternal movement of love. We are one vast web of intimate connections, all sailing in the same planet, in a universe threaded with the wonder of enriching diversity.

Friday

LIVING THE NEW LIFE CHRIST GIVES

From Life in Christ by Nicholas Cabasilas

The interior life of the new person created in the image of God develops in the womb that is this world. After being shaped and formed here, such a person comes to birth in the perfect and ageless world beyond. An unborn child is formed, according to the order of nature, in the darkness of the womb. It is being prepared for its future life in the light. It is the same with Christians. St. Paul implied this when he wrote: My little children, for you I experience the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. Yet the unborn child in the womb has no perception of the life to follow. No ray of sunlight ever penetrates to it. But for us it is otherwise. The life to come has been brought into this life and has mingled with it. With loving kindness, the Sun of Justice has shone even on us. The heavenly perfume has been poured out onto us to overcome the world's foul atmosphere. The Bread of Angels has been given to us.

This is why even in this life Christians are able to prepare themselves for another life and to live and act as though they already possessed it. As Paul wrote: It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me. There is living water in us, as St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote. The Word of Life himself declared: I am always with you, even to the end of the world. For when he had provided the seed of life he didn't immediately depart and leave us to tend that seed. No, he himself is truly present "giving us the will and the power to act" as he did to Blessed Paul. Without Him we can do nothing.

A soul's resting place is Christ. He alone is goodness and truth and all that is lovable. Nothing prevents those who rest in him from living with all the love he has placed in our souls and rejoicing to the full extent of their capacities. We can't fully rejoice or love the good things of this life because they are but poor images of what is genuinely good and lovely. But in Christ nothing prevents us from showing a love wonderful beyond description, and a joy no words can express.

These emotions, by God's design, are first directed to him and because he is infinite good our love and joy are proportionate to that infinity. A human person has a great and wonderful capacity for love and joy. This is experienced most fully in the presence of our Beloved. This is the joy the Savior calls perfect. When the Spirit comes to dwell in us, bringing his fruits, the first to appear are love and joy. Anyone who is aware of the presence within of the supreme Good can't fail to love and rejoice, and to share that love and joy. That is the life of Christ come to birth and growth in us, one and all. We have only to open ourselves to living these marvelous gifts day by day.

Saturday

THE LAST TESTAMENT OF DOM CHRISTIAN DE CHERGE

If it should happen today-and it could be today- that I become a victim of the terrorism which seems ready to engulf all the foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church and my family to remember that my life was given to God and this country.

I ask them to accept the fact that the One Master of all life was not a stranger to this brutal departure. I would ask them to pray for me: for how could I be found worthy of such an offering? I ask them to associate this death with so many other equally violent ones which are forgotten through indifference or anonymity.

I have lived long enough to know that I am an accomplice in the evil which seemed to prevail so terribly in the world, even in the evil which might blindly strike me down. I should like, when the time comes, to have a moment of spiritual clarity which allows me to beg forgiveness of God and of my fellow human beings, and at the same time forgive with all my heart the one who would strike me down. I could not desire such a death. It seems important for me to state that.

I do not see in fact, how I could rejoice if the people I love were indiscriminately accused of murder. It would be too high a price to pay for what will perhaps be called "The grace of martyrdom" to owe it to an Algerian, whoever he might be, especially if he says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes to be Islam. I am aware of the caricatures of Islam which a certain Islamism fosters. For me, Algeria and Islam are something different: it is a body and a soul.

I so often find that true strand of the Gospel which I learned at my mother's knee, my very first church, precisely in Algeria, and already inspired with respect for Muslim believers. Obviously, my death will appear to confirm those who hastily judged me naïve or idealistic, "Let him tell us now what he thinks of his ideals ". But these people should know that finally my most vivid curiosity will be set free.

That is what I shall be able to do, God willing: immerse my gaze in that of the Father to contemplate with him His children of Islam just as He sees them all, shining with the glory of Christ.

And now you, my last-minute friend, who will not have known what you were doing: Yes, I want to thank you and this goodbye to be a God bless for you too, because in God's face I see yours. May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of both of us.

AMEN! INCHALLAH!