

## **THE FOURTH WEEK OF THE EASTER SEASON**

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- Sun.      **The Fourth Sunday of Easter**  
April 25   **OUR CALL TO BE GOOD SHEPHERDS**  
            A reflection from The Names of Christ by Fr. Luis de Leon
- Mon.      **Monday of the 4<sup>th</sup> Week in Easter Season**  
26         **THE REDISCOVERY OF EASTER**  
            from The Sacrament of Easter by Roger Greenacre
- Tues.     **Memorial of St. Rafael Arnaiz Baron**  
27         **FINDING LIFE BY GIVING ALL TO JESUS**  
            Notes from the writings of St. Rafael Arnaiz Baron
- Wed.      **Wednesday of the 4<sup>th</sup> Week in Easter Season**  
28         **LOVE**  
            from Meditations on Priestly Life by Fr. Karl Rahner
- Thurs.    **Memorial of Saint Catherine of Sienna**  
29         **THE BRIDGE TO GOD THAT IS JESUS**  
            A message of God from The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena
- Fri.        **Friday of the 4<sup>th</sup> Week in Easter Season**  
30         **SHARING OUR TASTE FOR GOD**  
            A reflection by St. Aelred of Rievaulx
- Sat.       **Saturday of the 4<sup>th</sup> Week in Easter Season**  
May 1     **ALL WAYS OF WALKING WITH JESUS ARE LOVE**  
            A reflection developed from a homily by Bl. Gueric of Igny

Sunday

## **OUR CALL TO BE GOOD SHEPHERDS**

A reflection taken from The Names of Christ by Fr. Luis de Leon

“Jesus said, *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep!*” Jesus is not only a shepherd but a shepherd such as had never existed before. To call himself the “good” shepherd indicates that he is the best shepherd of all. There are four reasons for this.

In the first place Christ was born to be our shepherd; i.e., the shepherd for the entire human race. Most shepherds are entrusted with sheep but the Son of God descended from Heaven to seek out all those who were lost and make them into a flock. He was born as a human being precisely for this reason and he hinted as much by arranging that his birth be proclaimed first to ordinary shepherds.

In the second place, what we owe to Christ is not just a matter of receiving guidance and nourishment. Yes, he protects us and leads us and shows us the way to real life, but, in fact, we were savage animals when he came. He has transformed us into sheep! He has given us a spirit of simplicity and humility and even sweetness and so transformed us inwardly and made us sheep, his sheep.

In the third place, he died for the good of his flock in a way that no other shepherds have or could. He agreed to become a wolf’s victim in order to save us from that wolf, and he shows us that those who are killed by wolves or other enemies are not dead forever. He restores even the dead to a new life.

This is shown by the fourth mark that shows he is the only perfect shepherd. Besides doing all the good things other pastors do, he made himself our nourishment. In feeding us this shepherd gives himself to us. Christ came among us and, so to speak, became so close to us as to be permeated by all that is ours—except sin. He took our life and then took us into his own life so that we would be transformed into him. We don’t just feed on Christ; we remove our-selves—let him remove us, from our old selves and take upon ourselves the qualities of Christ. We slowly become one with our Shepherd.

In reality, after his human birth, he feeds us from his spirit and his flesh. As Scripture says, “*We wait upon you that you many give us our nourishment at the right time*”. He continues to rain nourishment upon us even after ascending to the Heavenly Father. In a thousand secret and marvelous ways Christ gives himself to us and makes that gift our food of transformation. As on earth he feeds us, so in heaven he will still be our shepherd. There he will leads us as a shepherd leads sheep to pasture and we, as his sheep, will live for endless centuries, for eternity, rejoicing in the gift of his own life.

Christ is our shepherd and our pasture. What he has already given us only foreshadows what is to come. With these gifts we can lead others to their good and true shepherd. What we have received we are to share with others who have not yet received it, and we are to so build one another up that all turn more and more wholly to Christ and so to our Heavenly Father.

*Monday*

## **THE REDISCOVERY OF EASTER**

from The Sacrament of Easter by Roger Greenacre

Easter has failed to touch the hearts and imagination of people in the West, even Christians, in the same way as Christmas. The popularity of Christmas is easily understandable: it can make some kind of appeal even to people whose Christian faith is minimal or non-existent, and it has collected to itself a wealth of folklore and tradition. But in the West, it is also true that for Christians of every tradition the Passion has made more of an impact than the Resurrection. Certainly, the passion can make more of an impact on human sensibilities, because suffering and death are basic human experiences, whereas resurrection from the dead is manifestly not.

The dangerous divorce of Cross and Resurrection is not only a matter affecting the liturgical and devotional life of the Church; it has also had a baneful influence on the Church's theology. Not long ago, theologians used to study the Redemption without mentioning the Resurrection at all. Christ's work of redemption was seen as the Incarnation, his life and death on the cross. When the Resurrection was mentioned, it was to show Christ's personal triumph over his enemies, and a kind of glorious counterblast to the pains he suffered.

The rediscovery of Easter has been the fruit of a number of convergent movements in the Church. It has been due to the renewal of biblical theology and the concern to understand the basic preaching of the apostolic church. Credit also is due to the Liturgical Movement.

Also, influential has been the Ecumenical Movement. The Orthodox Churches have not suffered from the divorce introduced between the Cross and Resurrection in the West. It has been a revelation to Christians in the West when they had the opportunity to attend the great Orthodox midnight services. To them as to the early Christians the conviction of Christ's resurrection has been the sustaining and invigorating power in their life and witness. "Christ is risen. He has risen indeed! Perhaps it needs a radical revolution in our outlook and mentality before we become convinced of this, but such a revolution must be brought to pass. Whereas Western theology and liturgy, since Vatican 2 has caught up, the average Christian has still a long way to go in finding the central place of Easter in life and spirituality.

*Tuesday*

## **FINDING LIFE BY GIVING ALL TO JESUS**

### **Notes on the Spiritual Life by St. Rafael Arnaiz Baron**

“With Jesus at my side nothing seems difficult to me, and I see more that the road to sanctity is simple. Better still, it seems to me that it consists in continuing to get rid of things instead of collecting them, in slowly boiling down to simplicity instead of becoming complicated with new things. In the measure that we detach ourselves from so much disordered love for creatures and for ourselves, it seems to me that we are getting closer and closer to the only love, the sole desire, the one longing of this life. That is true sanctity, which is God.

“To savor the Cross, to live sick and unknown and abandoned by all—only you and the Cross, Lord. How sweet the bitterness, the loneliness, the grief, the pain, wolfed down and swallowed in silence, without help. How sweet the tears shed next to your Cross. Ah! If I knew how to tell the world where true happiness is! But this the world doesn’t understand, nor can it...because to understand the Cross one must love it. To love it one must suffer; and not only suffer but love the suffering in the Lord. O Lord, how few follow you to Calvary.

“When I left my home, by my own deliberate intent, I left behind a series of treatments that my illness required and I came to embrace a state in which it is impossible to care for so touchy a sickness. I knew perfectly well what awaited me. Nevertheless, sometimes, poor Rafael, without your being aware of it, you were suffering, seeing yourself deprived of many necessary things, stripped free of the liberty of giving into the weakness of your illness and so giving it the remedies that out there in the world you did not lack.

“It is difficult to explain why one loves suffering! But I believe that it can be explained because it is not suffering in itself but rather as it is in Christ, and whoever loves Christ loves his Cross.

“If at times God is not in the soul it is because we do not want him there. We have such an accumulation of things to do, of distractions, of interests, vain desires, conceit, we have too much world within us, that God distances himself. But all we have to do is want him. Every day I am happier in my complete abandonment into his hands. I see his will even in the most insignificant and tiny thing that happens. In everything I find a lesson that serves to make me understand better God’s mercy toward me. I love his designs with my whole being, and that is enough.

“My prayer is not good. I neither pray nor meditate nor do my lectio well. At work I hardly work. When I eat and sleep, I do nothing else—just eat and sleep like a little animal. What one does is nothing in itself and is worth nothing. What is of worth is the way in which it is done. When will I understand that virtue is not in eating an onion but in eating an onion for God? Sanctity is not in external things but in the interior intention of any act whatsoever.”

Rafael wrote this final reflection just two weeks before he died in a diabetic coma.

Wednesday

## **LOVE**

from Meditations on Priestly Life by Fr. Karl Rahner

Theologically it is all well and good that we talk of creatures returning to God. Quite true though this is, there is still something more to be said. The reason that we can really find God is that God has not just created the world- rather, God's own self-for all that God is the God of inaccessible light- has, in His eternal Word, eternally descended into the world. In other words, we find God because God, by Himself with His own reality descending has lost Himself as love in His creation, never again to leave it.

Always remember that it is probably – to put it carefully- only in and through the Incarnation of the Word that the immediacy of the beatific vision is possible. For, if that were not the case, how could the sheer immediacy of the vision, its lack of anything to mediate it, not the sort of immediacy that would just burn up the whole creature as it came to know. Of course, we know that God is past all grasp, infinite mystery- but to live and experience God in His past all greatness, as this immediacy: how can anything like this occur at all?

In the last analysis, a minimal condition for this to be possible is that God as such, without ceasing to be God, can make a gift of self to the world. The Incarnation of the eternal Word amounts to God being worldly, God stepping out of Godself as love- the fundamental truth of God's own self, of what God's self actually does, of what God's own self can do. But this means that immediate love for God, love so immediate that God in God'- that love is possible only because God has descended into the world. From there follows that our ascending love to God is always a participation in the descent of God into the world's own life and glory becomes the content of our lives as creatures.

If love is possible only with and within the self-emptying of divine love into the world, and if this is the real structure of our love for God, then all this is possible the kingdom of Christ, in discipleship of Christ, who is precisely the Word who descends into the world. Thus, when we encounter the love of God as disciples, we come to know the love of God within the world and within the Church.

By participating in God's action of descent into the world and love for the world the Christian can learn to love. This love, according to St Ignatius of Loyola moves us in love into work and service, of the world and our brothers and sisters

Thursday

## **THE BRIDGE TO GOD THAT IS JESUS**

### **A message of God from the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena**

God is speaking: "By Adam's sinful disobedience the road was so broken up that no one could reach everlasting life. Since they had no share in the good for which I created them, they did not give me the return of glory they owed me, and so my truth was not fulfilled. What is this truth? That I had created them in my image and likeness so that they might have eternal tenderness and goodness. But because of their sin they never reached this good, for sin closed heaven and the door of my mercy.

As soon as they rebelled against me, they became rebels against themselves. They became like filthy beasts. All created things rebelled against them, while had they been submissive all would have been as I had established in the beginning. With sin there came troubles from themselves as well as from the devil and the world. You were all drowning because not one of you, for all your efforts at righteousness, could reach eternal life.

But I wanted to undo these great troubles of yours. So I gave you a bridge, my Son, so that you could cross over the river, the stormy sea of this darksome life, without being drowned.

I want you to look at the bridge that is my only-begotten Son, and notice its greatness. Look! It stretches from heaven to earth, joining the earth of your humanity with the greatness of the Godhead. This is what I mean when I say it stretches from heaven to earth. This was necessary if I wanted to remake the road that had been broken up, so that you might pass over the bitterness of the world and reach life.

Using earth alone, your humanity alone, I could never have made it great enough to cross the river and bring you to eternal life. The earth of human nature by itself, as I have told you, was incapable of atoning for sin and draining off the pus from Adam's sin, for that stinking pus had infected the whole human race. Your nature had to be joined with the height of humanity so it could endure the suffering that joined humanity to the divine nature. Then you could accept my Son's sacrifice on your behalf to release you from death and give you life.

So, the highest stooped down to the earth of your humanity, bridging the chasm between us and rebuilding the roadway. Why should he have made himself a roadway? So that you might in truth come to the same joy as the angels. But my son's having made himself a bridge for you cannot bring you to life unless you make your way along it."

God has called. Will you follow the call and walk with Jesus?

*Friday*

## **SHARING OUR TASTE FOR GOD**

**A reflection by St. Aelred of Rievaulx**

Like new-born infants crave spiritual milk that you may grow up to salvation, if indeed you have tasted how sweet the Lord is! Why are we encouraged to want this if we have already tasted how sweet the Lord is? You have seen and reflected on Jesus Christ on his cross and have seen his arms outstretched as if to embrace you. You have seen this with the eyes of your heart and so seen it more clearly than many did when they saw it with their eyes. So, you have tasted how sweet, humble, meek, merciful, gentle and caring the Lord is. And you have tasted this at the table of his Body and Blood. He willed that it should always be before our eyes, and that it should not only be our ransom but our food.

What are we to do now that we have tasted so much? We are to go with the holy women to the tomb. We are to go with the aromatic oils of devotion and love. We are to seek our Lord with faith and devotion and charity. These are the ointments we have to bring it we expect to find the Risen Christ.

How wonderful it is that Christ willed that women first learn of his resurrection and announce it to the other disciples. It falls to women to provide milk to little ones. They, and we, experience such milk in Christ's great compassion. And we who see and taste this must keep craving it! Crave it and taste it. Taste the faith which works through love. Draw this love from your remembrance of Christ's resurrection. Let's become like new-born infants. Infants have innocence and simplicity. Once we have put off the old person, left behind all that we were which was not of God, once we have allowed ourselves to be crucified with Christ, and so found ourselves rising to a new life with Christ, we are ready to share all that we have received. This is what Christ commanded the women to do. He commanded all the disciples to do it, as he commands us.

What is it that we do when we gather for prayer? Isn't our prayer in common a way of sharing Christ Risen? What is it that we do when we encourage one another to rise up and come to prayer? Isn't our mutual encouragement a way of sharing Christ Risen? What do we do when we help each other do the work that gives us bread to eat? Isn't our work and its product a sharing given us by God so that we might in turn share with others?

Let all that we do be a way of sharing God's gifts to us. This is what God called Adam and Eve to do in the beginning of our race. Now the New Adam and his Church help us to join in the sharing of the Bread that comes down from Heaven. That bread is Christ become one with us so that our lives may be offered to God as the life of Christ. You have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. Share what you have tasted as you share your delight

*Saturday*

## **THE MANY WAYS OF WALKING WITH JESUS**

**A reflection developed from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny**

A group of women went to the tomb of Jesus but didn't find him there. They met him as they went home. Two disciples were going to their home at Emmaus and met Jesus as they walked along but didn't recognize him. How can I meet Jesus and also recognize him? Think first of how many different walks in life there are and remember that all of them can bring us into Jesus' company.

There are people who devote themselves to obtaining justice for all, and there are those who devote themselves to contemplation. Jesus deigns to meet and manifest himself to those concerned with justice just as he does to those who contemplate. Many of you remember that you experienced such a meeting with Jesus. Maybe you sought him at an altar but he unexpectedly came to you while you were working. You tried to draw near and hold onto his feet but you couldn't, not until you ceased to be sparing of your own feet and obeyed God's command to work in a particular way. Ordinarily work demands a lot of coming and going and some think this gets in the way of Jesus walking with us. Yet Jesus didn't spare his feet from working and walking any more than from the nails. He did all this on our account. And with Jesus every walk is work of love. Isn't every walk in life, when one is genuinely seeking Christ, a work of love?

I ask all of you who have had such experiences: Wasn't your heart burning in you on account of Jesus when he spoke to you on as you were doing this or that and so helped you see the practical and spiritual meaning the Scriptures had for you? Let those who have experienced this remember. Let those who haven't believe what they hear and pray to be given this grace of experience.

We are still celebrating Easter. Let the spirit of each one of us rise and come to life, whether by watchfulness in prayer or by constancy in work. This is how we are to experience a share in Christ's resurrection. The first sign of life's return after illness is energy and diligence in action. Its perfect realization is contemplation. So, there is, so to speak, a growth in our resurrection, as though it took place by stages. For instance, we work and then we contemplate.

Remember the story of the child Elijah raised to life. First his flesh grew warm and then he yawned and finally he opened his eyes. First, our hearts find new warmth and a new hope that can carry us beyond previous torpors. Second, we meditate on what is happening to and within us and we experience a kind of flame in our hearts. Third, we experience a hunger, one for God's justice say, and want it to be realized in a love that seeks to supply everyone with what the need to walk and find Christ. When we open our hearts under the influence of God's Spirit, we long to do God's commandments in love. The first sign of life is the good works done by love. The second sign is the longing for prayer and God's closer presence. The third is contemplation. Love alone can recognize the Lord and so it alone leads to contemplation.