

THIRTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

The SOLEMNITY OF SS PETER & PAUL

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Sunday

GOD LOVES & BLESSES OUR ORDINARY LIFE

A reflection by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

In a passage from the opening chapters of the Book of Wisdom we are told that God doesn't rejoice in the destruction of the living. The Gospels make this even clearer by showing us the tender and determined way Jesus went about restoring life and health, even under seemingly impossible circumstances. Think of this in relation to Sunday's Gospel reading.

We find Jesus claiming needy and sick people as his own. He went to the sick daughter of a synagogue official, and in the process healed a woman who had been sick for many years. The woman had a long-continuing hemorrhage and had come and touched him without saying anything. But Jesus was aware that power had gone out from him and so looked for her until she identified herself. This required that he ignore or overcome several customs and taboos in a way we could easily miss. You see, what she did, and what he did to the little girl, made him ceremonially "unclean". That meant he wasn't supposed to enter a synagogue or the Temple or to pray liturgically or publicly. It wasn't his purpose to fly in the face of tradition or Mosaic Law, he simply acted lovingly and spontaneously to help two women, and he was willing to defend what he did.

When the hemorrhaging woman touched him, she made him "unclean". When he touched the body of the dead girl he made himself "unclean". Twice over he became "unclean" in less than half an hour. That was why the woman was afraid when Jesus looked around to identify her. She had made a holy man "unclean" and was afraid of what would happen when Jesus drew public attention to it. But notice that Jesus didn't criticize her or "correct" her. He praised her faith! That, he said, was what cured her rather than merely touching his clothes.

Struggling against illness and working to get better are good actions. The Lord was happy to be involved in them. He is still pleased to be involved in our like efforts. We need to believe in the power of miracles.

Notice that as soon as Jesus raised the little girl to life he told her parents to give her something to eat. He thought of her human needs. Notice too, that once he had raised the girl, he wanted people to settle down and go on helping each other in their regular family life. Jesus was blessing our ordinary human existence in making it possible for two individuals to experience the normal joys of life. Recall what the Book of Wisdom told us: God loves life, ordinary life, and wants the creatures of his world to be healthy and wholesome.

To enjoy life we have to share, and Jesus shows us ways of doing that. A selfish person isn't a happy one. Such a person lacks a quality that is part of "wholeness" and of belonging to the human family as well as a particular family. This is essential to being one of God's People. Don't miss your opportunities to do this.

Monday

BELIEVING IN THE REALITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

A reflection derived from Against Heresies by St. Irenaeus

We are Christ's members and we are nourished by God's creation. It is God's gift to us. The one who causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall has given us these things. God has also declared that the chalice we share, which comes from creation, contains Christ's blood and that this makes it the nourishment of our body. God affirms that the bread, which comes from his creation, is Christ's body, and that it is the nourishment of our bodies. When the chalice we mix and the bread we bake receive the word of God these created realities become the body and blood of Christ by which we live and grow.

So how could it be said that flesh which belongs to the Lord's own body and was nourished by his personal body and blood is incapable of receiving God's gift of eternal life? St. Paul speak of this in his Letter to the Ephesians. He says we are members of Christ's Body and that this means we share in Christ's flesh and bones. Nor is Paul speaking of some spiritual and incorporeal kind of Christ. After all, spirits don't have flesh and bones. Paul is speaking of a real human body composed of flesh, sinews, and bones and that is nourished by the chalice of Christ's blood and receives growth from the bread which is Christ's body.

A slip of a vine, planted in good ground, bears fruit at the proper time and after it has grown. A grain of wheat which has fallen into the ground, and seems to decay, nevertheless is raised up again and multiplied. This is accomplished by the Spirit of God. The Spirit sustains all things. The wisdom of God places these realities at our service. When they receive God's word they become our Eucharist. It is the body and blood of Christ. In the same way, our bodies, which have been nourished by the Eucharist, will be buried in the earth and will decay but will then rise again at the appointed time.

If one claims that our flesh is not saved, then such a one claims that the Lord has not redeemed us with his blood and that the Eucharistic chalice doesn't make us sharers in Christ's own body. There can be no blood without veins, flesh, and the rest of a human being. The Word of God actually became a human. Then with his own blood he redeemed us. As St. Paul says, "*In him, through his blood, we have been redeemed, and our sins have been forgiven*". The Word of God will raise us, and our human bodies, and share with us the glory of God the Heavenly Father. Then God will clothe our mortal nature in immortality. God will freely endow our corruptible nature with incorruptibility. God's power is shown most perfectly in weakness. Believe and be freed from anxiety and fear; enter into joy!

Tuesday

THE EXODUS TO WHICH THE LORD'S CALLS US

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

After asking Peter for the third time, "Do you love me?", Jesus said to him, "*Feed my sheep*" and then added: "*I tell you most solemnly that when you were young you put on your belt and went where you liked: but when you grow old you will let someone else put on your belt and take you where you don't want to go.*" We are told that these words were an announcement of Peter's martyrdom.

That isn't all they are. Jesus was announcing Peter's final exodus even as he called him to one more among his many exoduses. When he threw himself at Jesus' feet and said "*I am a sinful man!*" he heard the call "*Come, follow me!*" It had happened again, perhaps an hour before, when Peter jumped out of the boat to swim to Jesus. It had happened when he had confessed Jesus the Christ and Son of God, and when Jesus asked the disciples if they would leave him and Peter responded "*To whom shall we go?*" Each incident was a break with Peter's past, some riskier and others more comfortable. Each came with an invitation to go beyond self.

That happens to each of us and happens repeatedly, as it did for Peter and for Paul. The final leap of faith that Peter and Paul, and all of us, have to make will be that of dying for and in the Lord. Surrounded by events, conditionings, and situations forcing themselves on us and out of our control we have follow the Lord. We feel a kind of resistance and our spiritual efforts won't be enough, most likely, to enable us to encounter our final exodus serenely. We will face something that is very like Jesus' agony in the Garden and will have to pray, "*Your will be done, not mine!*"

Think about this in relation to Paul's experience, as you have in relation to Peter's. "*Because of Christ*", Paul confesses, "*I have come to consider all my 'advantages' as disadvantages.*" But God has helped him to face this fact by believing that nothing can outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Jesus Christ. We, like Paul, will be asked to accept the loss of everything and put all our hope in Christ.

When Paul encountered Christ on the road to Damascus, he had to accept a wholly new vision of the meaning of his life, and everything else. It was a kind of revelation or enlightenment. When Jesus asked him, "*Why are you persecuting me?*", Paul suddenly understood that he had mixed up truth and error. Seeing who Jesus really is required that everything change for Paul, and especially his understanding of himself. How do we feel about having to accept something like that? More, this experience brings a realization that I am being sent!

This happens to each of us as we are gifted with news and knowledge not due to any effort on our part. And because of this each of us has been made a sign of mercy and grace! The rest of our life has to become a response to this grace, and one we share with others. This is what we celebrate when we join in the Eucharist with Peter and Paul, joined with them in graces that we don't chose but show us the path God would have us walk. It is a gift marvelous beyond words, but also scary. Look what responding made of Peter and of Paul! Will you let God make of you

Wednesday

ARE WE AWAKE TO GOD'S PRESENCE WITHIN US?

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

The Gospels have been given us so we will not let our faith lie dormant, so to speak. The Risen Lord Jesus never has to sleep, but even while he was with us and did sleep his bond with the Heavenly Father was always "awake". Recall the Gospel story of a time when Jesus was with his disciples in a boat and a storm came up. The disciples panicked and woke him up to save them. Where, he asked them, is your faith? When your faith is dormant, it is as if Jesus were asleep in your hearts—for he always lives within you giving you the gift of faith.

Think of that Gospel story as one about your own life. You are confronted by many challenges and troubles and only by turning to Jesus can you overcome them. Each of us, we believe, is a temple of God. Our hearts are like boats that are caught in a storm. The storm can't harm us as long as we cling to Jesus. Remember he is the source of every good we need and is always with us.

If you have to listen to abuse you are in a kind of storm. When you react by getting angry you seem to be on the point of drowning in it. Your heart is in danger. You hear yourself insulted or belittled and you want to retaliate. But if you indulge in revenge and counter-insults you are shipwrecked. That can only happen if you treat Jesus within you as though he were asleep and, in effect, forget his presence. Remember him and join him to keep watch within yourself.

Pay attention to what he says in dangerous circumstances. What did you want? You thought you wanted to get back at a person who hurt you? Have you forgotten how Jesus prayed when being crucified? "*Father, forgive them because they don't know what they are doing!*" Jesus had no room for revenge-seeking in his heart. So call him to mind. You do this when you remember his words and recall his commands. Then you will think: What am I doing, seeking revenge? What business have I to hurt this person or threaten or give in to rage? Do I really want to do what Christ never did?

Jesus says to you: "*Give and it shall be given you; forgive and you will be forgiven.*" His words can restore peace to your heart. In effect, Jesus uses these recollections to rebuke the storm so all is calm again. This should be our way of reacting in any temptation. When you feel temptation's disturbance then you must turn to Jesus and awaken your heart to his presence. Don't even the winds and the sea obey him? Can't we imitate the winds and the sea in obeying the words of our Christ?

See what you can do when you are inwardly disturbed. Perhaps you can be a mouth through which Jesus speaks to others who are similarly disturbed. Never let despair reign within your mind or heart. With Jesus we can pass through every sort of turmoil and reach our heavenly home and its peace. Leave the blustering and carrying on behind you and rest in Jesus' loving presence and his guiding and calming words. We have a sure refuge, an ever-present help in times of distress. Turn to Him.

Thursday

THE EXISTENTIAL CHRIST

from **In My Own Words** by St. Mother Teresa

It is very possible that you will find human beings, surely very near you, needing affection and love. Do not deny them these. Show them, above all, that you sincerely recognize that they are human beings, that they are important to you. Who is that someone? That person is Jesus himself: Jesus who is hidden under the guise of suffering.

Jesus continues to live his passion. He continues to fall, poor and hungry, just like he fell on the way to Calvary. Are we not at his side to offer to help him? Do we walk next to him to give him a piece of bread, our piece of bread, real bread, to help him get over his weakness?

When we are caring for the sick and the needy, we are touching the body of the suffering Christ. That touch helps us overcome the repugnance and the natural reaction that is in all of us. This is the eye of faith and of love, to see Christ in the sick and the poor and to serve him, sharing their suffering, sharing everything. By standing beside the suffering of the world, we share in the cross and death of Jesus and we arrive at life, the Resurrection.

If our sisters do not see the face of Jesus in the poor, our work is impossible. We want them to know that there are people who really love them, and even more that God loves them so much.

All my time belongs to others, because in dedicating myself with all my heart to the suffering, it is Jesus whom we serve in his disfigured face, for he himself has said "As often as you did it to one of the least of my sisters and brothers, you did it to me. "

Our criterion for helping is not one's belief, but one's need. All are the body of Christ, all are Christ under the appearance of those in need of care and of love. They have a right to receive it.

All that we do then we do for Jesus, with Jesus and offered to Jesus. We are all called then: serve Jesus in our neighbor, serve him in the poor, care for him in the sick, comfort him in our brothers and sisters who suffer.

Friday

OBEDIENCE, HOLINESS AND LOVE

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Gospel endeavors to describe how believers are conformed to Jesus. In the first place, it involves obedience to Jesus' commands. The New Covenant, ratified by the blood of Christ, entails a new law. John, for instance, doesn't mention the institution of the Eucharist as the mystery of the New Covenant, probably because it was already so well-known, but recalls the command of mutual love modelled by Christ's washing of his disciples' feet.

Jesus gives us the example of laying down his life for his friends and that of serving others in the lowliest and most ordinary ways by washing others' dirty feet. Obedience to these commands brings about an interior conformity, an inward likeness to Jesus—in our attitudes and values—and so we are united to Jesus the way a branch is united with the vine it grows on. We are to inhabit Jesus' spiritual world. We are to make Jesus' motivations our motivations. These are the profound origins of Jesus' love.

You can perhaps see that we have to take literally some things that we tend to look on as only symbolic. We have believed we live in Jesus, literally, and that we live in the Father, literally, and that this happens by the power of the Spirit, literally. Thus, as disciples we become dwelling places, temples, for God—Father, Son and Spirit. The result is being holy, as Jesus is holy. That's the goal.

That holiness flowers in our love for one another, and for everyone. God's holiness is God's innermost reality. Jesus commands us, "*Be holy as your Heavenly Father is holy!*" Do we take that literally? Better, can we dare to take that literally? If we do, dwelling in the Father and Son and Spirit becomes a missionary compulsion and we have to share what God has given us. We do it in any way our circumstances allow.

Holiness causes us to seek communion. The communion of believers with one another springs from this shared divine and Trinitarian holiness. It is expressed in a communitary life that seeks acted out unity. Unity becomes a vivid testimony of the love that unites Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That love draws the world to faith and to putting all hope in God. We see what God invites us to hope for and we want it. But we don't want it just for ourselves but for the entire human world. We are sharing the mission Jesus received from the Heavenly Father because we are one with and in Jesus. This is the fruit of obedience flowering in holiness and engendering love.

Saturday

THE APOSTOLATE OF SHARING HOPE AND LOVE

**A reflection adapted from Centuries on Charity by
St. Maximus the Confessor**

The apostle we know as “saint” Thomas once tried to shut himself away from Christ and Christ’s love by refusing to believe he had risen. How did Christ react to this refusal? How do we act when we encounter such refusals? We are commanded to do all we can to love everyone. If you aren’t yet able to do that, then can you manage not to hate anyone? What makes us able to do such things, and for people who knowing refuse what we would share with them? Think of St. Thomas.

I think that a precondition for loving as Christ loves is detachment from the things of the world. To love everyone, and with all your strength, you have to hope only in God. Who else can you hope in? The other apostles weren’t able to share their joy in the resurrection of Christ with Thomas, a brother apostle. He was afraid to hope fully and only in Christ. But Christ never shut Thomas out of his love. We are reminded today that we are called to do likewise. Christ did it by showing Thomas he could hope for what he had thought he couldn’t hope for.

Christ’s friends are not universally loved, and, unfortunately, they don’t always love universally. Those who least love Christ and his friends are those who love the world. That means putting one’s hope in what the world has to give. You can’t love all because others are in competition with you for the world’s goods in which you hope. Christ’s friends cease to put their hope in the world and its goods and put all their hope in Christ’s love. He puts this hope in them and so is able to share his love with them. He loves perfectly, and right to the end! We have to learn to persevere in this sort of hope so we can love as Christ does.

Christ loved Thomas right to the uttermost end. His goal was simply to open Thomas to that love. He had to lead him to trust in him, and in God’s loving mercy shown through him, and he had to do it in a way Thomas couldn’t deny. He knew the way to do it and he loved Thomas so as to reorient his hopes.

A faithful friend can be many things. A friend can be a protector, a sympathetic advisor, a practical helper, and, most of all, can be one who loves you unselfishly and is deeply committed to you and your well-being. Christ found a way to show this to Thomas and so open him to faith and the loving that flows from faith. We are called to do the same for one another when anyone gets trapped by shutting the door to hope and love.

Many people have said many things about love. But we can only find the whole truth in Christ. People can only see this truth through us and our Christ-like love. Only those who cling to Christ have true love itself as their teacher. We see what that means in the story of Christ’s coming to the unbelieving Thomas. Here we see the meaning of St. Paul’s saying: “*If I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries, and have all knowledge, but don’t have love, I am nothing*”. Whoever has love has God because God is love. Love never shuts the door on anyone but always reaches out to help and to heal and to share hope and even joy.