

EIGHTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. **THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**
- Aug. 1 **TRUSTING IN THE LIVING BREAD**
A reflection by Bishop Theophylact
- Mon. **Monday in the 18th Week of Ordinary Time**
2 **HOW DO WE SET OUT TO MULTIPLY GOOD THINGS?**
A reflection from a sermon by Fr. Johannes Hoffmeister
- Tues. **Tuesday in the 18th Week of Ordinary Time**
3 **WHAT DO WE WANT BESIDES GOD?**
A reflection from a letter by St. John of the Cross
- Wed. **The Memorial of St. John Mary Vianney**
4 **WHAT LEADS PEOPLE TO CONVERSION?**
A reflection taken from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII
- Thurs. **Thursday in the 18th Week of Ordinary Time**
5 **THE JOURNEY TO CONTEMPLATION**
A reflection from Journeying with the Lord
by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Fri. **THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION**
6 **PASSING FROM GLORY TO GLORY**
A reflection from a homily by St. John Damascene
- Sat. **The Memorial of Our Lady**
7 **CHRIST'S LOVE SHOWN IN GIFTS OF LIFE**
A reflection from The Reed of God by Caryll Houselander

Sunday

TRUSTING IN THE LIVING BREAD

A reflection by Bishop Theophylact

Scripture tells us; *“Our ancestors ate manna in the desert; God gave them bread from heaven to eat”*. When the Lord Jesus performed a miracle by multiplying bread, did those who ate think only of earthly hunger or did they see what he did as a sign that God is always ready to satisfy our spiritual hunger? Jesus makes the contrast clear by telling those who came to him, *“it wasn’t Moses who give you bread”*; only God could give manna. What’s more Moses couldn’t give the true bread but could only represent this gift symbolically by the manna. The true giver was God and the true bread was, and is, Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us that he is the true bread come down from heaven, and it is “true” bread because it gives “true” life; i.e., a life that lasts forever.

The bread that is the Son of the living Heavenly Father is life by its very nature. Thus, it gives life to all who eat it with true faith. Just as earthly bread sustains the frail substance of the flesh and prevents it from decaying, so Christ gives the soul life through the power of the Spirit. He also preserves even the body for immortality. Through Christ’s resurrection from the dead and through bodily immortality, everything pertaining to life is given freely to the human race.

We read in the Gospel: *“Jesus said to the people: “I am the bread of life and whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst”*. He didn’t say he gave a bread for bodily nourishment and nothing more; he said that he gave “the bread of life”. When everything had been reduced to a condition describable only as “spiritual death”, then the Lord gave life through himself. He is bread because, as we believe, the leaven in the dough that is our humanity was baked through and through by the fire of his divinity.

Christ gives us the bread not of ordinary life but of a very different kind of life. Death can never cut short this kind of life. Whoever believe in the true bread that is Christ will never hunger and never be famished. What sort of hunger is he speaking of? It is a hunger for hearing God’s word. Christ is the Word of God and one who eats him can’t lack God’s Word. Nor can such a person be parched by spiritual thirst. One is given to drink of the Spirit through the waters of baptism. One is thereby consecrated by the Spirit.

Compare your condition, then, to that of an unbaptized person. Such a one lacks the refreshment given by the sacred waters. Such a one suffers great spiritual aridity. But we who are baptized and have been possessed by the Spirit can be sure of being given continually all that is needed for spiritual consolation. You have only to ask. God has promised you all things by choosing you and then gifting you with his Christ and his Spirit. What would God withhold from you? You have only to ask in prayer for what you truly need.

Never allow the gift of prayer to fade within you. Pray daily. Pray continually. Pray with Jesus. You will have all you need. But you have to trust that what God has given you meets the needs you truly have. Trust God to know what you need and gives that to you in love.

Monday

SETTING OUT TO MULTIPLY GOOD THINGS

A reflection from a sermon by Fr. Johannes Hoffmeister

In many ways the Lord gives food to all living things. But God does this by using creatures as ministers—e.g., sun and moon, rain and dew, human farmers and their labors. The same is true in the spiritual realm. Listen to St. Paul: "*I have planted, Apollos has watered, but it is God who gave the increase*". The Lord Jesus received the heavenly bread of true teaching from the Heavenly Father, the apostles received it from him, and so on down to the present day and those who have fed us.

... The Evangelist tells us that Jesus gave thanks to the Heavenly Father before he broke the bread to feed the five thousand. Why did he do that? Christ could multiply bread without a word or a gesture. That's what he did in creating the universe. In one way, Christ did this so that the crowd would know that he was not working or teaching in the name of some god other than the One True God. All that he did was done in fulfillment of the promises made by that One God to mankind through Moses and the prophets. But he had a second reason for giving thanks before multiplying the loaves. He was teaching that thanksgiving must be the beginning of our efforts to multiply good things we have. We should do this in order to do God's work and make God's purposes effective.

What is thanksgiving. It is an acknowledgement that all good things come to us from God. After giving thanks Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fish to such an extent that they fed five thousand men without counting the women and children. All of them were fed most generously. We know that because five baskets of left-overs were collected; more bread and fish were left than had been blessed to begin with.

Now think of how many human activities are directed to multiplying good things! Think of what it means if we begin our work by thanking God! Do you expect to multiply your goods or anything you possess or want to possess without thanking God first? It doesn't matter how much we have to begin with or even how much we want to end up with. We must always thank God. And when we have received a multiplication from God's hands we must use these things with gratitude. We must begin with God and end with God and do all according to God's will and word. That shows our gratitude.

Tuesday

WHAT DO WE WANT BESIDES GOD?

A reflection from a letter by St. John of the Cross

Everyone of us passes at some time through a state of “darkness” and a feeling of “emptiness” when Jesus, and even God, seem absent. This is actually a part of what may be called spiritual poverty. You think everyone and everything is gone from you. But that also means that you have nothing to worry about and nothing at all that you have to concern yourself to do or be. You realize that all the usual concerns are only things we suppose, groundlessly, to be important.

One who seeks nothing but God doesn't walk in darkness. No matter how unfortunate or impoverished one seems you own will doesn't have to get involved in trying to change what you can't change. If you don't live on presumptions or in your own desires but only desire for God, there is nothing to cause you to stumble.

When something like this happens you know you are making real progress. Don't get upset but rejoice! Who are you that you should worry about yourself on account of what you can't change? You would do well to stop. If you do, then you have never been in a better spiritual state than the one you are experiencing. You have never been so humble, so submissive, taking so little account of yourself and all the things that fill the world. You have recognized your own evil deeds and recognized God as wholly good, and if you wish you can now serve God in purity and disinterestedness.

What is it you want? What life, or what way of going about life, are you picturing yourself as pursuing? What do you think it means to serve God without doing evil, keeping God's commandments? Are you walking God's way the best you can? If you do this what need can you have of ideas or delights or sweetness from other sources? In those ordinary things there is no lack of pitfalls and dangers for the soul. We are so prone to letting ourselves be deceived and enraptured by our own notions and desires or enamored with our own abilities. How often do they lead us astray? So it is a great favor from God when one finds these blacked out and weakened so as to seem non-important.

You are in a state in which you can't wander off with things other than God. Since you can't go astray, what is left for you to do? You can only go forward along the straight road, the one laid down by the Law of God and of God's Church. You can only live in faith. It is obscure but it is true and it brings a very certain hope. Better it will bring you a flawless charity. One hopes for the good things that are there with God and lives here as a pilgrim like poor people, exiles, orphans and strays live. You are no longer hoping for things here.

That is why I say, rejoice and trust in God. Look at the signs God has given you of how well you can follow Christ, and how you must follow Him. If you do otherwise it couldn't be surprising to find that God would show you displeasure because you have been so foolish. You were led to a way that fit you perfectly—if you really wanted God alone. You were led to such a secure place but you wanted what you had left behind. Long for nothing but this “way of progress” I have described and you've experienced, and be at peace within yourself. All is well.

Wednesday

WHAT LEADS PEOPLE TO CONVERSION?

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

When we think or speak about St. John Vianney we immediately picture an extraordinarily saintly priest who for the love of God and the conversion of sinners, went without food and sleep, lived according to a harsh self-imposed discipline of life, and most of all practiced self-denial to a heroic degree. He was hard on himself but most gentle with others.

It is true that not all are asked to follow this way of life. Nevertheless, Divine Providence has seen to it that the Church is never short of persons, moved by the Holy Spirit, who have no hesitation about walking this road. It is people like this that, more than any others, work miracles of conversion. Conversions were the result of St. John Vianney's example of self-denial combined with gentleness to everyone.

One of the lessons we learn from St. John is that of the prime importance of the ascetic life. Notice the poverty of the Cure of Ars. He imitated St. Francis and was a faithful member of the Third Order of Franciscans. He had enough to give to others but was poor for himself. He lived in such total detachment from the good things of this world that his heart had perfect freedom to give generously to all those in material as well as spiritual need. They came in great numbers.

"My secret", he liked to say, "is very simple: Give all and hold nothing back." His disinterestedness made him deeply caring toward the poor, especially those of his own parish. He showed great tenderness in dealing with them. He treated them with "delicate tact and consideration, indeed he treated them with real respect". He liked to remind people that one must never treat the poor with disrespect because if we did we would be treating God with disrespect.

When beggars knocked at his door they were received with kindness. "I am as poor as you today; I am one of you"! That was what he often said. To the end of his life he loved to repeat: "I am very happy; I have given everything away and the Good God may call me whenever he wishes."

Does John Vianney give us an impossible example for us to imitate? We can't share his circumstances of life but we can share his love for God and for others. We can treat others with a respect and concern like his. How much we fast and what sorts of self-denial are not so important as the love and compassion he showed all he met. This played no small part in drawing people of every sort to him and to seek God through his ministry and prayers. If we show that we love God above and beyond all else then people know that God is with you. To whom would you go if you wanted to find the new life that God offers except to a person with whom God obviously dwells and who shows the face of God in the way he treats everyone? Let God's loving and merciful face shine out on your face.

Thursday

THE JOURNEY TO CONTEMPLATION

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The desert is a place where, through trial and temptation, we are called to learn who God truly is. We belong to a pilgrim church, a church journeying through history, and through a particular culture and civilization, and so often confronted with difficulties. Surrounded as so many are by anonymous individuals, there can be something of the desert even within our society or community.

How does one live through such trials? One let's oneself be made aware of the presence of the Lord. The Lord's face has been shown us in Christ and in his trials in the desert. If we let ourselves see him now we open ourselves to his help as we struggle to face the trails of our version of the desert. We have to know that we actually live by every word that comes to us from the mouth of God, and of Jesus who shows us that God's face is the face of love.

Do you think of contemplating the face of God as a reward that is given only after one has finished the desert journey? If you think that way how do you explain the glow you see in the faces of many believers? Does this reveal to us the intense radiance of the Son as revealing his face to us? The Son reflects a Father, and in this case a Heavenly Father. We begin to see that face ourselves when we see it radiated in the faces of those Jesus has made true children of God, the One Heavenly Father. I believe it is almost impossible to live a Christian experience in today's society without being immersed, rooted, in deep contemplation. And this must be in a personal experience of contemplation. The desert we enter is our daily life as we seek to do what we find gives our life meaning. We must strive to find the moments, the pauses, that allow us to live in a listening dialogue with our God and with God alone.

When your countenance is radiant from contemplating the countenance of God people notice it. When we live a contemplative experience, we radiate God around us, even without wanting or trying to. This is one of the few and most important signs of the presence of God in today's world. The presence is revealed in those who have climbed the Mount of Contemplation in a desert.

The question to ask ourselves is what we need to do to open ourselves to this. I think it is the only way that the temptation of idolatry and even atheism can be conquered in our society. Perhaps we are among those who are overburdened with a thousand things to do, or perhaps we have overburdened ourselves in an effort to escape an emptiness within. We need to give place—to leave a place open—to the radiant presence of God and to the contemplation of God's face. Perhaps our inner emptiness was such a place and we have to cease running away in order to find God's face in ourselves and in others. Stop running and let yourself be alone with God in prayer. It is the door to contemplation.

Friday

PASSING FROM GLORY TO GLORY

A reflection that from a homily by St. John Damascene

When Jesus took three disciples up the holy mountain he was transfigured. They were amazed but not terrified. But then “a bright cloud overshadowed them” and they fell on their faces in terror; within that cloud they sensed the presence of God in a way they never had before.

When Moses saw God on Mt. Horeb God was revealed in a kind of darkness. In the same way, when one accepted the Law one had to live in a kind of darkness because one couldn't see clearly the face of God in the dark. Israel could see only a passing glory in the face of Moses, because even in darkness God transforms those who come and worship and this shows.

We who have been called by Christ behold the glory of the Lord in a way that can't be hidden, at least from us, by a veil, as was the glory reflected from Moses' face. St. Paul tells us that we are being transformed by God's presence from one degree of glory to another. The cloud that overshadowed the disciples wasn't one of darkness but of light. The mystery hidden from the ages is revealed to them with a new glory. God has revealed the Divine Face in a human face. On the holy mountain a few disciples beheld the glory that lives in us as we are made one with Jesus. As we see this we realize a new glory.

A mystery hidden for ages, the fact that God comes in human faces, is now revealed. Moses and Elijah so testify. They proclaim the hope now fulfilled in such an unexpected way in Jesus. A voice from the cloud said: “*This is my beloved Son*”. God really is seen in human form. Christ lives in the midst of us every day. Just as the Son proceeds timelessly and eternally from the Heavenly Father, a Father who didn't begin to exist because of the Son, but generates the Son to be with the Father from all eternity, now the Son comes continually to us in human faces. It is a new revelation of glory to see the Son in ourselves and so to see the glory that is really in us.

It was by the Father's good pleasure that the only Son, the Word, should become incarnate. It was by the Father's good pleasure that the salvation of the world should be achieved through the only begotten Son become human. It was the Father's good pleasure that brought about the union of the whole universe through the only begotten Son. Humanity is a microcosm linking all things visible and invisible together by sharing in the nature of both sorts of things in Christ. It is this that Scripture means in saying that through Christ “*God is all in all*”. In Christ we see ourselves and our call as steward of all creation.

This is my beloved Son, says the Heavenly Father. This one bears the stamp of my own nature. Through the Son I created angels and all bodily things. Through the Son all things are made firm; the Son upholds the universe. The Son does this by his word and by the life-giving and guiding Spirit. We see all this in ourselves and so we see yet more clearly God's glory and how we share in it. The Heavenly Father says: “*Listen to Him!*” Whoever receives the Son receives the Father who sent him and by whose authority He speaks. He makes us words of life for all. Reveal this glory in your words and deeds.

Saturday

CHRIST'S LOVE SHOWN IN GIFTS OF LIFE

A reflection from The Reed of God by Caryl Houselander

"I have come that all may have life and have it more abundantly". (Jn 10) Have you ever considered how this is realized in the case of Christ's mother? *Even* before Christ was born his presence gave life and his mother found joy in it. With what piercing shafts of joy the story of Christ unfolded in his mother's life! First in the conception of her child, and then in the fact that her child brought joy to another mother and child, making that child leap for joy in his own mother's womb. A quickening of life can be felt as a leap of joy.

If we practice the contemplation taught and shown to us by Our Lady, we will find that our experience is like hers. If Christ is growing in us, if we are at peace, if we are recollected then we know that however insignificant our own life may seem to be, Christ is forming himself in us and that is never insignificant.

If we go with eager wills, in haste, to wherever our circumstances compel us, because we believe that is what He wants—that He wants to be in that place, we will find that we are driven more and more by the impulse of his love.

And there are the answers we get from others as the Christ life in us awakens impulses of love in them. They are awakened to into a leap of joy at the life they find is growing within them as well.

It isn't necessary, at this stage in our contemplation, to speak to others about the mystery growing in us. It is only necessary to give ourselves over to that life in all that we are. We pray without ceasing, almost without noticing it. It isn't a continual effort to concentrate our minds but a growing awareness of Christ taking form within our lives and transforming who we are and what we are becoming.

We must trust Christ in this because the time hasn't yet come to see his face. We must possess Christ in secret and in darkness, as the earth possesses a seed. We mustn't try to force Christ's growth in us, but let ourselves be filled with deep gratitude for the light burning secretly in our darkness. We must fold our concentrated love upon Christ like the earth as we nourish the seed within.

We need to be swift to obey the impulses of Christ-love as we carry Him to wherever he longs to go. Those who recognize his presence will be stirred by a new life within them. They will know Christ's presence, not by anything special about us, but in the way the bud knows the presence of the light, by an unfolding in themselves. They are putting on the new beauty God is giving them as bearers of Christ.

It seems to me that this may be Christ's favorite way of being recognized. He prefers to be known, not by his own human features but by a quickening of his life in the hearts which respond to his coming within them.

After the Resurrection he wasn't known by the familiar features people had once known. He was now known by the love in the hearts of others, as in the heart of Magdalene. He was known by the fire in the feet of the travelers to Emmaus as they hurried return to Jerusalem to tell about him. He was known by the wound in his side and heart, as touched by Thomas. He is known in the deeds of love he does in and with us. That's how we imitate Our Lady in showing him to all the world.