

THE TWENTY-FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. **The Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Sept.19 **STANDING FAST WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND**
 A reflection from a homily by Fr. Karl Rahner
- Mon. **Memorial of Sts. Andrew Kim & Paul Chong, Martyrs**
20 **THE CROWN THAT COMES WITH A CROSS**
 A reflection from a letter of one of the Korean martyrs
- Tues. **Feast of St. Matthew**
21 **THE SPIRIT COMES IN TONGUES OF FIRE**
 A reflection developed from a sermon by Guerric of Igny
- Wed. **Wednesday of the 25th Week of Ordinary Time**
22 **THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIFE**
 A reflection based on Fritz Schumacher's Small is Beautiful
- Thurs. **Memorial of St. Pius of Pietrelcina**
23 **THE HUMILITY THAT ACCEPTS SUFFERING**
 A reflection taken from a letter by St. Paulinus of Nola
- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. **Friday of the 25th Week of Ordinary Time**
24 **CHRIST IS IN ALL OF THEM**
 from Cosmic Dance by Sr Joyce Rupp
- Sat. **Memorial of our Lady**
25 **GOD'S IMMENSE LOVE FOR US**
 A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Sunday

STANDING FAST WHEN WE DON'T UNDERSTAND

A reflection from a homily by Fr. Karl Rahner

“Jesus and his disciples came down from the mountain and began to go through Galilee. He didn't want anyone to know about this because he was teaching his disciples that the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and put to death and that three days later he will rise” (Mk.9:30ff). The Twelve Apostles, the foundation stones of the Church, Peter and the other eleven, those Jesus had chosen and called, didn't understand him. Yet they were to be the beginning of the new People of God!

They can't grasp the fact Jesus must suffer. They aren't even willing to try to make sense of what he has said, even the part about rising after three days. Yet they remain with Jesus! They do that even when they see they don't understand him. They remain steadfast, faithful and are patient. Jesus, for them, is a kind of advance payment of confidence. They give him time to grow in their hearts! More, God bears with them. Their hearts are darkened; they don't understand. They are stuck and scarcely even want to leave their ignorance behind.

The thing is that they are undergirded by God's mercy and faithfulness and providence and love. Uncomprehended mystery stands between them and the Lord but doesn't separate them. Neither abandons the other and both cling to each other. Why is this? It is because God loves and is faithful and because the humans involved realize that even if they don't understand what seems a mystery, God and God's grace are found only where Jesus, that mystery, is.

There is a lesson for us in all this. Compare all you grasp and understand—all that is clear and straightforward—with the obscure and baffling things, the hidden and not comprehended ones, all that is mysterious and unspeakable. When we do this, we understand that what we do see is like a tiny candle shining in endless darkness.

How could anything else be possible, granted that we are on a pilgrimage? We are making our way through things that seem only parables rather than realities. We are on the way toward the everlasting light. And we are told it is an unapproachable light! It is God. What we seek only God can give. Wouldn't it be foolish to expect that everything will be intelligible? Wouldn't it be foolish to accept only so much as we can understand?

God is for us incomprehensible, so God must lay hold of us. Only when God does, can we let ourselves be made open to God. God is infinite and we must be open to that. But only if we are open wholly is there any hope for us. More than hope, however, we have the promise that we will find everything. Remembering this we cling to God, even in darkness. We must be faithful and patient and loving toward God, just as our God is toward us.

Monday

THE CROWN THAT COMES WITH A CROSS

A reflection from a letter of one of the Korean martyrs

My dearest friends, think often on the fact that God rules over all things in heaven and on earth and does this from the beginning to the end of time. So all things exist by God's choice, including ourselves. Why were we chosen, then, to be God's images and likenesses? First consider how a farmer cultivates a field. This involves plowing, fertilizing and planting and then much labor to nurture the growth of the seeds that have been planted. If, when harvest time comes, the crop is abundant the farmer rejoices and exults. God created us to grow and flourish and multiply life on the earth. He has chosen to share his labors as a farmer and to work with him that the crop of those who love and serve him may be abundant.

Yet this world is filled with perils and hardship, at least at times. If we didn't recognize God as our Creator and realize God has chosen to create us as co-workers in cultivating life what benefit would be brought into being by our births and our lives? But we know the truth and we know we have come into the world by God's love and grace. It is by that same love and grace that we received baptism, were accepted into the Church, and are Christians. But it will do us no good if we are Christians only in name and not in our deeds. It would be as though we had not come into the world or the Church or been given so many graces! To receive the call and grace of God and to turn away from God and labors God shares with us would be like not existing.

The Lord is like a farmer and we are like a field he is cultivating and fertilizing and seeding with genuinely good seed. God waters this field with the very blood of Jesus in order that we might grow to maturity and bear much fruit. Even if a crop is sparse God doesn't give up. An ordinary farmer might turn his back on an unfruitful field with disgust at all the wasted labor. God never does this.

When harvest time arrives we will find that his grace has enabled us to grow into maturity, even if we didn't notice it. We will find that we are God's adopted children and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

My dearest friends, when the Lord Jesus was in this world he bore many sorrows as well as a passion and death, and so founded the Church. He continues to give it new growth through the sufferings of those who are faithful to Him and his Gospel. Hold fast, then, to the will of God and fight the good fight with all your heart under Jesus' leadership. Do not fail in your love of one another. Support one another and stand fast until the Lord delivers us. We will soon reach Heaven! I embrace you in prayer and in love. Never lose hope in God and in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Tuesday

THE SPIRIT COMES IN TONGUES OF FIRE

A reflection developed from a sermon by Guerric of Igny

When the time had come, the Spirit came upon the apostles in tongues of fire. The Spirit's goodness is an anointing by which all were "taught by God". Blessed are such persons. God teaches them the spotless law which is charity. It sets hearts on fire and, as with your apostles, it can send us to spread that fire of love through the entire world of our lives.

Even in the apostles' utterances there is fire and to read Matthew's Gospel can set us afire with the same fire that God caused to burn in his heart and mind. I feel that I scarcely have the tongue of a dog with which I could lick my own sores and those of others, as the dogs did for Lazarus lying at Dives' door. My soul, famished and suffering hunger, will accept even what is bitter, so can I satisfy it by licking the wounds sin has left in others? The sores of sin are ugly and disgusting to look at and yet one who hungers for others' salvation doesn't turn away from them. I pray for a tongue with which to praise God as well as tend to the sores and diseases of sinners. My words may be what I offer to others. Haven't we all been given the gift of helping others in this way?

We long even more for the groanings of the Spirit within us. They teach us to pray for that which is not yet but which we can grasp in hope. Can we do a greater thing for one another than enkindle such hope and longing? I don't know of any other spiritual gift that is more helpful. It leads to the moaning that is so helpful to prayer from the heart. What could be more useful to those who are themselves bound by weakness and wretchedness as we are? The Lord shows us ourselves so we will long for him and be healed. The Lord gives us the apostles to show us what we are to busy ourselves in doing for the healing of others and helping his Kingdom come.

We have to help one another surrender the longing for the physical presence of our Lord and begin to long most deeply for his spiritual presence. As ourselves in want and yet enriching many, we must drink in, so to speak, the bridegroom's absence. If we have known Christ according to the flesh we know him in that way no longer. But it is our very sorrow and longing for the Lord that bring us to Him. The apostles had lost their Lord and were huddled together in prayer when all was made new for them by the Spirit. Now they knew what to long for and found it a joy. Devout and religious longing and mourning occupy the first place and it is outstanding in its spiritual usefulness.

This is the highest wisdom of the saints, the safeguard of the just, the sobriety of the moderate, the first virtue for beginners, the spur of the proficient, the crown of the perfect and the salvation of those who are perishing. It is to this longing that the Apostles and their words lead us. As they proclaimed Christ who was to come, and so engendered hope we must do likewise, imitating them. It is this we celebrate as we remember the Apostle Matthew, read his words, and drink in his longing for our God.

Wednesday

THE BEAUTY OF GOD'S DESIGN FOR OUR LIFE

A reflection based on Fritz Schumacher's Small is Beautiful

In our excitement over our scientific knowledge and technological skills people have developed we build a system of production and consumption that ravages nature and mutilates human beings. If only we have more wealth and more power we could put everything right! But can we use these achievements to acquire justice, mutual harmony, beauty or even health? If we can't, won't it be possible to circumvent these non-material needs? If we let ourselves think like this we make wealth and technological prowess our prime values and all other goals receive only lip service.

This way of looking at things is called Materialism and it is a philosophy which is now being challenged by events. There has never been a time without sages and prophets to challenge this sort of thinking and self-reliance. They are always pleading for a new set of priorities. Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these other things will be given you as well. That doesn't mean seek God's Kingdom so that you will get the things you already want, yet it does mean you will receive good things even now and not just in some unimaginable life beyond death.

The interesting and terrifying fact is that today we not only hear this message from sages and prophets but it is forced upon our attention by the course of events. We can't avoid the lesson of terrorism, genocide, pollution, the exhaustion of natural resources, the breakdown of ecosystems, and the menace of climate change. We live in a time of convergence when the words about the Kingdom of God are not simply words but describe what is happening.

Unless we seek first the Kingdom of God these other things that we need will cease to be available to us. We shrink back from the truth about what is actually happening. We tell ourselves that the destructive forces operating in our world can be "brought under control" by mobilizing more wealth and resources. We tell ourselves that education and awareness campaigns will enable us to effectively fight pollution, preserve wildlife and nature, discover new and non-polluting forms of energy and arrive at better ways of living together in harmony.

Who could deny that education, research, resources and wealth can help us do many things. They are necessary for our civilization and its culture. But what we most need is a reorganization and reordering of the ends we pursue and the kinds of means we use to pursue them. This means we have to put material things in their proper and very secondary place. This means putting non-material and humanizing values and goals and means in first place.

Only in God do we find a life that is rich and satisfying and fully human and everlasting. We can begin by asking what is really beautiful. Is it a life of wealth that fails to bring real inward satisfaction? What is beautiful is the Kingdom of God. Materialism has many prophets. We are called to be prophets of God's Kingdom.

Thursday

THE HUMILITY THAT ACCEPTS SUFFERING

A reflection taken from a letter by St. Paulinus of Nola

From the beginning of the world Christ has been suffering in all his people. He is, you see, the beginning and the end, veiled in the Law and revealed in the Gospel, the Lord ever wonderful in his saints and he both suffers and triumphs in them. Today we remember St. Padre Pio, one who was truly humble and whose sharing in the suffering of Christ made his and Christ's humility shine forth and reveal themselves as saving love.

In Abel Christ was killed by a brother, in Noah mocked by a son, in Abraham a wanderer, in Isaac a sacrifice, in Jacob a servant, in Joseph a slave, in Moses a refugee, in the prophets one scorned and stoned and sawn in two, and in the apostles slapped and whipped and killed. It is the same Lord who endures our sufferings and sorrows today.

Jesus has identified himself with us and our race and has continually borne the mistreatment we inflict on each other. He knows how to suffer and to endure. Power is brought to perfection in Christ's weakness. The tragedy is that when we hate each other we hate him. Was anyone ever so humble as to accept so much without complaint or desire for revenge?

Thanks be to God that Christ has been vindicated and in him we see for the first time what suffering truly is and what humility accomplishes. As we read in Scripture, the Lord triumphs in us through living as a slave among us; he gains, for all who follow and serve and imitate him, a new kind of freedom the world never knew before. He clothed himself in the nature of a slave for our sakes, even when we make ourselves slaves.

Christ humbled himself even to the point of accepting a cross and all the suffering that went with it. Christ dwelt with us in lowliness. Christ won for us an endless exaltation. In this light, consider the position from which we have fallen. When we do we begin to realize that all has come about by God's design; i.e., by divine wisdom and love. We see ourselves and our world with new eyes and a renewed mind. Thus we are beginning to be restored to the life God wished to give us from the beginning.

In Adam we were ruined by pride. In Christ and Christ's saints we are restored by humility. The more we become like Christ the more humble we become. The more we suffer with Christ the more our humility gives birth to exaltation. In humility Christ washed away all the guilt of foolish pride by living the depths of humility. Having offended by ignorant arrogance, we are forgiven and restored by knowing and deliberate humility.

Rejoice! Stand firm with Christ! See, Christ has overcome the world! What overcame it was suffering humility. Do not be afraid of either. Follow Christ even in this way, if he invites you. It is a way that leads to all good and all joy and all fulfillment and peace. Look to the example of those who have gone before us. It is a great gift of God.

Friday

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

The beauty and variety of people consistently bring 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 traveling 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 Chessman was traveling 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 on the same planet, in a universe threaded with the wonder of enriching diversity.

Saturday

GOD'S IMMENSE LOVE FOR US

A reflection from *Journeying with the Lord* by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Virgin Mary presents us with the perfect case and example of the dignity of life received from the beginning as grace, and expressed throughout its existence as obedience. This dignity is the fruit of grace, which means the fruit of God's love. As the Gospel says, Mary is full of grace. This expression in Greek is actually in the passive mood, which expresses something received. Even more it is in the remote past. Therefore, we could interpret the phrase in this way: "O Mary, you have been loved for a long time!" This is the dignity of Mary—forever immensely loved.

With the help of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, which speaks of God's eternal plan, we can realize in our contemplation the dignity of every person—each person born, each person conceived, each of us. Just as the words applied to Mary, they apply to us. We are creatures forever loved, forever present in love and in God's plan. "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ."

"Before the world was made, God chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence, determining that we should become God's adopted children". Human dignity, seen in this mystery, is grace and gift and being loved.

But to be loved also means letting oneself be loved. It, therefore, concerns obedience: listening to God's Word. The sincere and loving acceptance of that Word—which has always spoken our name and which always loves us—is perfectly expressed by Mary's response to the angel: "Let what you have said be done to me". This is how our dignity is received and how it is expressed in obedience.

At the center of God's plan, we find a woman, and with her we find ourselves. This is the key to our understanding of our dignity and hers. Mary is the first in the chain of human believers. She is the beginning of the Church, the Mother of the Church. God himself was interested in her from before the beginning of all things. This is her human sacredness.

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