

TWENTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sun. **The Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Sept. 5 **WHAT WORDS ARE WE TO SPEAK TO OTHERS?**
A reflection from a sermon by Fr. Lawrence of Brindisi

Mon. **Monday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time**
6 **GOD SHOWS US HOW TO REDEEM LABOR**
A reflection from Journeying with the Lord
by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Tues. **Tuesday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time**
7 **GOD HAS ADOPTED US AS CHILDREN**
A reflection from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

Wed. **Feast of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary**
8 **THE JOY OF HAVING A MOTHER**
From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Thurs. **Memorial of Saint Peter Claver**
9 **SLAVERY LIVES ON**
A talk by Pope Francis

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri **Friday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time**
10 **THE CALL TO BE SINGLE HEARTED**
A reflection from a text by Fr. Hubert van Zeller

Sat. **Remembrance of 9-11**
11 **THE DAY AFTER 9/11**
Audience in St Peters Square of St John Paul II

Sunday

WHAT WORDS ARE WE TO SPEAK TO OTHERS?

A reflection based on a sermon by Fr. Lawrence of Brindisi

Jesus, for unknown reasons, avoided Jewish Galilee and went into Gentile territory. Even there he was known and people brought the sick to him. Everyone was astounded by his power to heal. Mark's Gospel tells us "they were beside themselves". The only reaction they could think of is preserved in words that we too should speak whenever we think of all our Savior has done for us: "He has done everything well!" Genesis says that God completed the creation and "saw all that he had made and that it was very good". What could we expect? "A good tree bears good fruit; no good tree can bear bad fruit!" It is clear that we must unite ourselves wholeheartedly with the throng of Gentile in saying, "*He had done all things well; He has made the deaf hear and the dumb speak*". Of course, we also know that Jesus is divine as well as human. We more or less expect him to do things that only God can do. But that isn't an adequate response to Jesus or his works. He doesn't want only our praise but wants us to tell others about him in a way that will open not only their eyes but their hearts to his word and his love.

Doing a good deed is not quite the same thing as doing it well. Many do good deeds but don't do them well; they may help the poor but not (e.g.) in a respectful or loving way. Even a hypocrite may do good deeds, but for the wrong reasons. Yet everything that God does is not only good but done well. "*The Lord is just in all his ways and holy in all his deeds; with wisdom you have done them all, O Lord!*" These confessions of praise call to us to imitate Jesus.

God did all this for our sake and out of love for us. He has done it in order to show us how we are to help one another. In Jesus, God's self-giving is like that of good spouse giving themselves to one another. We are to be good spouses not only to God but for one another. Again, Jesus is our good shepherd, but a shepherd can't make the same gift of self to sheep as one spouse can to the other. The gift can't be as complete or made with the love and tenderness.

We aren't to care for one another as though we were caring for sheep, or even for very dear children. We are to treat one another as equals in dignity and worthy of equal respect and care. We are to love even as God has shown us in Jesus how to love another. The metaphor of spousal self-giving is intended to show us how much we have to be grateful for, and how deeply we are loved and treasured. Scripture says God does this so that we might "know him". God wants us to experience his love just as one spouse experiences the other's love, and even more fully.

We aren't called to "do for one another" in a distant or cold way but in the closest and warmest way imaginable. This is part of striving to do supremely well all the good things we do for one another. God wants to say to each of us, "*You have done all things well!*" Come, then, spouse of God, enter into the joy of your lover and Lord. It is from that joy that we must strive to speak to others. How else can they truly "know" the Lord Jesus? The better you can see Jesus in others, and love him as He is in them, the more you will do all your deeds of love well, even very well.

Monday

GOD'S LABOR SHOWS US HOW TO REDEEM LABOR

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

Sacred Scripture speaks of "God's work". The Book of Genesis tells us that "on the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing". The bible doesn't hesitate to describe God as one who works. It shows us that the objective of God's work is creation, the earth and life. We ourselves are works of life and we are to work for life as God did.

We can also ask: How does God work? God's labors are done freely. All that is done is a spontaneous self-expression of God. God's works are inventive and creative. They are good, beautiful, and filled with satisfaction. After each work God pauses and says, "This is good!" And we, for our part, are made in the image of God. So we are called to make our work an expression of freedom and our dignity and we are to create what is good and true.

What makes this difficult for us is that we have so many wrong ideas and habits and values. These can enslave us. But we have to value human welfare and human good before everything that enslaves and degrades human life. If we do this we will not have to make life's journey in sadness or think that bad things can never be changed. God has a plan of redemption that pertains to human labor and its fruits.

We have to begin from what we are told about Jesus' work, and about that of Joseph and Mary. All of us are following them in working for the realization in daily life of the world's redemption. This is the marvelous task before us. It is actually what all the worker's movements of recent times are ultimately about. All people of good will are invited to work together to make human work more like God—free, creative and uplifting and for the greater good of all.

This may seem like a dream but it is rather a long and difficult road we need to travel together. From time to time we think we have reached one of these goals; e.g., diminishing the drudgery of so much labor. But then we run up against the fact that we haven't gotten rid of repetitiveness or anonymity and have to renew our efforts to find ways to realize human dignity through labor and not in spite of it.

This is the more difficult because along the path we have to rethink our ways of living, our ways of consuming, and even our ways of wanting. This is a matter of putting human and humanizing values first. They have to be put ahead of present satisfaction, profit, consumption for its own sake and everything that tends to make work enslaving and degrading.

If we are to convince others to join us we can't try to make our journey in sadness. Neither can we fool ourselves into thinking that some miracle will come from who knows where to bring about what we are striving for without our having to do the work. This journey has been entrusted to us. We set out on it every day as we begin the work of that day. The redemption of human life depends on the redemption of work and that depends on our courage, our hope, and, most of all, our faith. We start again today, and every day.

Tuesday

GOD HAS ADOPTED US AS CHILDREN

A reflection from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

In great love our Heavenly Father has “*predestined us to be adopted as children; such was God’s will and pleasure*”. This is what St. Paul tells us. Why did God do this? Because God wants to be praised for what and who God really is. And why should God do this if not to lead us to love more and more in the way God loves? What is more, this is not a longing for praise or service or for the glory we might give God, but for our salvation. For this God made our world.

Imagine a person suffering from a disgusting and infectious disease. Imagine that person is also old, decrepit, hungry, poor and with every sort of problem. What is such a person were suddenly transformed into the healthy and most attractive young person, surpassingly lovely to look at and endowed with not only the bloom of youth but every sort of possession and free from every sort of problem, both within and without. Do you think something like this impossible? But isn’t that exactly what God has done for us spiritually?

There is no one among the angels or archangels or the powers of heaven that has any greater spiritual beauty! Our Lord and Savior has made you and me desirable beyond anything we could have imagined.

Now consider the hurtful things we used to say and do. Consider how filled with grace and beauty we now are. Consider the words we use now to express our gratitude for all we have been given. Could any declaration be more wonderful than that by which the newly baptized renounce the devil and swear allegiance to Christ? Could any speech be more gracious than the declaration of faith we make before baptism? But then how is it that so many have been unfaithful to baptism? This can only fill us with sorrow and lead us to pray with all our heart that those who have fallen away be renewed and restored.

It is in the Beloved of our Heavenly Father that we have redemption and restoration. The wonder is not only that God has given us his only Son, but that God gave this Beloved Son to be killed by his enemies! And out of this God has worked our redemption! See how much our God loves us! God has given what he values above everything else to gain our freedom and give us fullness of life.

That is what we mean when we say we have been reconciled through grace. God has given us so much and given it freely and without regret, and because we are so beloved! St. Paul has much to say about our adoption into God’s own family, about our sanctification and our purity of heart, but then he seems to pass from the heights to the depths and speaks also of suffering.

It isn’t that Paul thinks suffering is of no importance but the reverse. Nothing is more astonishing, or more important, than the fact that God’s blood has been shed for us. As wonderful as our adoption is, even more wonderful is God’s love that didn’t spare an Only Son in order to give us everything God has. We have been reconciled through the blood of our Lord. We have been reconciled simply because we are loved. Can you possibly know more completely how much you are loved personally, and treasured? Every day let our living be an expression of joy and gratitude for the truth our God has shown us.

Wednesday

THE JOY OF HAVING A MOTHER

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

No authentic text of Sacred Scripture tells us directly about Mary's birth. This very ancient feast is born of the Church's childlike love for its mother. It marks the beginning of the liturgical year in the Eastern Church and in parts of the west the beginning of the pastoral year. Thus, the entire Church lovingly celebrates this feast as children do their mother's birthday—even though they have no exact idea of the circumstances of her birth. One might say we are drawing attention to the fact that there is a mother and she is this mother through whom the divine design became real for us. The Church exults with joy at the thought that it has a mother and that it has this mother!

Mary is the one who made Jesus part of a people. From Abraham through David and through the long genealogy of Jesus' ancestors, she made him part of a people, of a tribe, and placed him in the context of a real place in Israel, Bethlehem. She placed him in a specific set of surroundings. She made God human and incarnated God in time.

The divine design, according to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, is expressed in five great stages—awareness, predestination, call, justification and glorification. They include everyone destined to share in God's design, which becomes a detailed and precise reality and assumes a local color and geography. That design becomes part of a culture and is worked out within precise historical limits. We might say that through Mary the divine design passes from the abstract to the concrete.

The Messiah and our salvation come from a great story—glorious as well as wretched, painful and humiliating. The genealogy shows this. It also comes through a simple and humble story. How does this help us grasp the meaning of the Birth of Mary? Ask: What are we celebrating?

The reply is Mary's personal and free gesture. We are celebrating her being-generated, her birth in the love of God, and that of her parents. All is done with the simplicity of those who have nothing and receive everything.

The birth of Mary is totally gratuitous. It is a pure and radical act of receiving. This infant, this little girl called Mary, doesn't accomplish anything in her birth. She is simply given the destiny of being the object of God's working. From this point on—yes—her actions will be personal, courageous, and definitive commitments. But her birth prefigures the approach Mary will consciously cultivate, and we must cultivate.

She is dependent on God's actions, on God's initiative and God's love. Her birth is the triumph of God's free initiative of tenderness, of compassion and of love. God bends down to us and in pure love calls us to a mysterious alliance. Our task is to be alert today to the challenges due to today's history and respond by depending wholly on God but doing all God gives us to do. We incarnate God's design in our time.

Thursday

SLAVERY LIVES ON

A talk by Pope Francis

My Jesuit confrere, Peter Claver, was a remarkable man. He left his homeland forever in 1610 to be a missionary in the colonies of the New World. By this time the slave trade had been established in the Americas for nearly 100 years and he dedicated his life to caring for those trapped in this terrible evil. During his 40 years of ministry he provided medical care to them as well as instructing and baptizing an estimated 300,000 of their number.

It would be wonderful to think that slavery was a thing of the past. Sadly, this is not so. During the Year of Mercy, I recall one of my Mercy Friday visits to a house here in Rome run by the Pope John XXIII Community for victims of human trafficking. I did not think I could find such humiliated, afflicted, and suffering women there. Truly women crucified.

I listened to the moving and very human stories of these women, some of them with their child in their arms. Afterwards I felt the need to ask forgiveness for the real torture they had to endure because of their clients, many of whom call themselves Christian.

A person can never be offered for sale. I am deeply touched by those who, in the spirit of Peter Claver, conduct the precious and courageous work of rescue and rehabilitation. This work is dangerous, because it runs the risk of possible retaliation by crime syndicates for whom these women represent an inexhaustible source of illegal and shameful profit.

If we are to combat the exploitation and humiliation of human lives effectively, we need to tell the stories behind the shocking numbers of people trafficked.

Corruption is a disease that does not stop on its own. We need to raise awareness individually and collectively about racism and slavery, and in the Church as well.

Any form of prostitution is a reduction into slavery, a criminal act, a disgusting vice that confuses love-making with venting one's instincts by torturing a defenseless woman.

It is pathological to think that a woman can be exploited like a commodity to be used and thrown away. Prostitution is a disease, a wrong way of thinking. To free these modern slaves is to continue the work of Peter Claver, and is a gesture of mercy, a duty for all people of good will. We cannot be indifferent before their cry of pain, nor can we turn away and wash our hands of the innocent blood that is shed on the roads of the world.

Friday

THE CALL TO BE SINGLE HEARTED

A reflection from a text by Fr. Hubert van Zeller

The prophets consistently called people to be single-hearted. That means they constantly preached the need to make love for God the center & organizing principle of the whole of one's life. Amos and Jeremiah and Isaiah have left us some powerful appeals to stop trying to use God to get what we personally want and to begin to let God tell us what will bring us to a genuinely good life. Listen to Amos: "*Woe to you who put your confidence in the temple at Samaria rather than Israel's God.*" The people he spoke to thought they could worship their idea of God, symbolized by a bull calf as itself a symbol of the divine source of fertility. They did this in the hope it would give them good crops, prosperity and healthy and numerous families. But they thought their offerings would get them these blessings without a need to treat others justly. They tried to use God for private purposes while doing all sort of injustice, especially toward the poor.

The prophet Amos went to the center of this false belief by telling the chief priest at Bethel exactly where it was leading. His reaction was wholly negative. He wrote to the king at Samaria: "*Amos has rebelled against you; the land can't tolerate his words.*" A call to worship only the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, not the Baals—of which the calf of Samaria was one, fell on deaf ears.

"Purity of heart", as Scripture calls it, is putting God alone and as God really is, at the center of one's life. If you don't do this it shows in your prayers and your worship. They all get centered on yourself and what you want rather than on God and what God wants. Here is a Scriptural summary of reactions to this call: "*Let us lie in wait for the just because they are never on our side and are always bad mouthing what we do and calling us names and telling people we are wicked and do evil things. It is a pain even to see such people. Their lives aren't like those of most folk and their ways of living are very different. Let's examine them by inflicting outrages on them and even tortures! Let's see how meek and patient they really are!*" Don't be surprised, says Jesus, when people persecute you as they did the prophets.

No one has found a wholly positive way to tell people they are acting foolishly and that the way they are living is leading them to ruin. However, there is a way of doing this without saying a word. One simply lives total devotion to the One True God, and pays no head to the calls of the created things people often treat as though they were gods. This is part of what it means to live purity of heart. That is what Jesus lived. He was persecuted like the prophets and you will be too. Are you willing to live as Jesus did, loving the things Jesus loved, and above all loving the Heavenly Father with all you mind and heart and all your deeds? That is what Jesus calls you to do. That is a call to purity of heart—to loving only one thing, the One God.

Saturday

THE DAY AFTER 9/11

Audience in St Peters Square of St John Paul II

Dear Brothers and sisters,
Praise be Jesus Christ!

I cannot hold this audience without expressing my profound sorrow at the terrorist attacks which yesterday brought death and destruction to America, causing thousands of victims and injuring countless people. To the President of the United States and to all American citizens I express heartfelt sympathy.

In the face of such unspeakable horror we cannot but be deeply disturbed. I add my voice to all the voices raised in these hours to express indignant condemnation, and I strongly reiterate that the ways of violence will never lead to genuine solutions to humanity's problems.

Yesterday was a dark day in the history of humanity, a terrible affront to human dignity. After receiving the news, I followed with intense concern the developing situation, with heartfelt prayers to the Lord. How is it possible to commit acts of such savage cruelty? The human heart has a depth from which schemes of unheard-of ferocity sometimes emerge, capable of destroying the normal daily life of a people. But faith comes to our aid when words seem to fail. Christ's word is the only one that can give a response to the questions which trouble our spirit. Even if the forces of darkness appear to prevail, those who believe in God know that evil and death do not have the final say. Christian hope is based on this truth; at this time our prayerful truth draws hope from it.

With deeply felt sympathy I address myself to the beloved people of the United States in this moment of distress and consternation, when the courage of so many men and women of good will is being sorely tested. In a special way I reach out to the families of the dead and the injured and assure them of my spiritual closeness. I entrust to the mercy of the Most High, the helpless victims of this tragedy, for whom I have offered Mass this morning. May God give courage to the survivors; may he sustain the rescue workers and the many volunteers who are presently making an enormous effort to cope with such an immense emergency.

I ask you dear brothers and sisters to join me in prayer for them. Let us beg the Lord that the spiral of hatred and violence will not prevail. May the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Mercy, fill the hearts of all with wise thoughts and peaceful intentions.