

TWENTY-EIGHTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sunday

THE LORD'S CALL AND OUR REPLY

A reflection by John Henry Cardinal Newman

“Go and sell everything you own and follow me!” All through our life, Christ is calling us. The first time was in baptism but the calls continued. Whether we obeyed or not Christ graciously went on calling. If we fall away from our baptism, he calls us to repent. If we answer the call, we are called again and again, from grace to grace and from holiness to greater holiness, and as long as we live. Abraham was called from his home, Peter from his nets, from his tax office Matthew was called, Elisha from his farm, Nathanael from his retreat. We are all called from one thing to another without rest, mounting toward an eternal rest. Christ keeps calling so as to keep justifying and sanctifying us more and more.

How wonderful if we understood these facts. We are slow to master the truth that Christ is walking among us now and by hand or eye or voice bidding us to follow him. We don't understand that this call happens right now. Don't think it took place only in the Apostles' day. We are called now! Do we watch for our calls? Perhaps we don't have eyes to recognize the Lord, as the Beloved Apostle did when the other disciples didn't. Jesus stood on the shore and told them to cast their net and that one disciple said to Peter, “*It is the Lord!*”

My meaning is this. People who are living their faith from time to time will glimpse truths they didn't previously know and had had no need to consider. Now these truths, these facts, are brought home to them powerfully! They are truths that involved duties; they are precepts and call for the response of obedience. It is in such ways that Christ calls us now. Nothing happens that is miraculous or extraordinary in the way Christ deals with us. Christ works through our natural abilities and the circumstances of our lives. Yet what happens is in God's Providence. For us, it is the same thing as Christ's voice was to those he spoke to when on earth.

It doesn't matter whether Christ calls by a visible presence, by a voice, or by our consciences. The crucial thing is that we feel we are being commanded. We may obey or disobey; we may accept the command as Samuel did or St. Paul did. Or we may put it aside like the rich young man who had to care for his possessions first. We don't have to be afraid of spiritual pride when we follow Christ's call. The important thing is that we respond with earnestness. We need to be determined to do God's will. We simply have to say, “*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening*”. We simply have to ask, “*Lord, what do you want me to do?*”

O God, grant us more of this spirit you gave to young Samuel. Help us to look only to one thing—to feel that the one thing we need to do is please our God! So let's each and all beg God day by day to reveal himself to us more and more fully. May our senses come alive! May he give us sight and hearing and taste and touch to perceive the world to come emerging in our daily world. We need to say with sincerity, “*Guide me with your counsel and then receive me into your glory!*” Do you think like this? “*Whom do I have in heaven except you? There is no one on earth that I long for as I long for you! God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!*” Pray for the grace to think this day in and day out.

Monday

WHAT DOES “DOING ALL IN CHRIST” MEAN?

A reflection developed from homilies by St. Pope John XXIII

We are all living members of the Mystical Body of Christ. That means we are all members of God’s Church. St. Paul reminds us that “just as the body is one ... so all are members of the one Body, and though many are all are one in Christ”. I am pope and so I am called to plead with all of those who are Christ’s members to live the life of Christ. Christ says “I am the vine, you are the branches” and that means we can actually do everything “in Christ”.

If we do this then all our activities, even if they seem merely worldly, are redemptive. They are made a continuation of Christ’s work of redemption by the fact that they are done “in Christ”. You see why it can be so important to understand what it means to do things “in Christ”.

Consider the good and joyous activities we participate in. The triumphs of our poor human life seem, from one perspective, to be puny things, vain and fleeting satisfactions that are wonderful one day and the next day are gone and seem empty. But think of how many of them Jesus did. And yet we think of all he did as inspired by the Holy Spirit and as redemptive as well as pleasing in the Heavenly Father’s eyes.

Part of the explanation is that Jesus did all this in love. He loved good work. He loved Mary and Joseph and the life they lived together. He loved helping others by making things that would help them and bring them joy. He even loved parties and blessed them by making more good wine for a wedding than anyone there had ever seen before. And he loved all these things because all are gifts of the Heavenly Father and ways in which God shares his own goodness with us.

The angel told Mary that Jesus would save his people from their sins. That means, among other things, saving them from viewing and doing things selfishly. Jesus saves us from delighting in things only to the extent they meet what we think are our needs but delighting in them as to show God’s glory and love.

God has given us so many good things! We are given them to share. As God shares Divine Goodness with us so we share this with others in our deeds, and not only with other people but with all the creatures God has placed upon the earth. Adam & Eve decided to view things from the perspective of their desires instead of God’s plan of sharing. We are saved from that in the measure that we share as Jesus does and love as Jesus does and thank God as Jesus does.

Jesus has shown us the fullness a human life can have—not “for self” but for God and for others. In fact, living for God is living for others. There was a young woman of Nazareth who said a wholehearted “Yes” to God’s call to love and live as God would have us do. She is now in heaven and is now able to help uncounted billions of people to love God and so love themselves and their lives in a freeing and redeeming way. What God has done for her God can do for us. We only have to say “Yes, Lord”. If we live for God then indeed God is all “Yes”! Today is just one of the days on which God asks us for our “Yes!”

Tuesday

THE REAL HEART OF THE MATTER

A reflection inspired by a retreat conference of Fr. Ronald Knox

Why did the Lord want to come to earth as a Jew, and then spend so much time and effort criticizing the observance of the customs that most perceived as proper signs of being Jewish? It was, I think, because he saw one primary failing as characteristic of the “lost of the House of Israel” to whom he had been primarily sent. They were lost because the way they observed the prescriptions of the Law treated them as values in themselves. Usually, we interpret this as critiquing all religious practice done for the sake of appearances. Yet the actual failing is common to the whole human race. How much of your life is dominated by a feeling that you have to keep up appearances and need to do what people expect? Are we better than the Pharisees Jesus took to task or just like them?

Put yourself for a moment in Jesus’ place when the Pharisees criticize him for letting his disciples ignore some of Israel’s many purity regulations. Today we still hear concern about washing one’s hands before eating. How would you reply? In effect, Jesus reminds his critics that purity is important only as it keeps one’s heart fixed on God and entrusts all one’s mind and heart and life to God. Yes, but isn’t that what one does in observing purity regulations? God gave them to us through our ancestors and sages and we do them, whether or not we see a deeper meaning in them, simply to obey God in every way and time and place!

But, Jesus adds, you are forgetting things like justice; i.e., like treating others as you want people to treat you—respecting and caring for them and treating them fairly. Are you praying to cover up the fact you are robbing widows of the little they have to live on? You see, actually you often treat religious customs as though they were more important than justice. God has not only called you to love him with all your mind and heart and life but also to love your neighbors, and love them as God loves them. Unless your religious customs help you do this in deed and not just in thought you are not loving God but pretending to love God while you spend your time and energy on trying to build up yourself and make yourself more important socially. Do you want others to honor you or do you seek your honor from God? You seem to use a pretended honoring of God as a means to get honor from other people.

We are as God sees us. What’s wrong about seeking “human respect” is that it gets us into the habit of asking, “What will others think?” and forgetting to ask, “What will God think?” We are commanded to help one another. That means helping one another put God first and showing love for one another in ways that help them too put God first. As you observe customs of courtesy and mutual respect do you do this in ways that help all concerned recall God’s love for us and our need to love God by loving each other so that we all go steadily toward God and God’s Kingdom?

Wednesday

GOD'S LAST WORD

A reflection by Fr. Hans Urs von Balthasar

Christian love is not the world's last word about itself, it is God's final word about himself—and so about the world. In the cross above all we see something foreign to the world, something which cuts right across all worldly understanding of how things work.

The world wants to live and rise again without dying. But Christ's love wills to die in order that, through death, humankind and the world may rise again beyond death and in "God's form".

If the Cross is turned into a law which reason can grasp and administer, even as an elastic sort of law governing the rhythm of life, then it is once the case that the world works by a law — a law in the Pauline sense of the word. But then absolute love is displaced and set aside by knowledge of law. That means God's sovereign freedom is called to judgement before a court of human reason. What's more that love is found wanting and condemned. Reason doesn't like the way love governs things.

There is a genuine knowledge regarding faith, which is the 'gnosis' so constantly stressed in the Greek text of the Gospels. It is possible to reflect on ourselves and our world in the light of that knowledge of "the faith". One discovers the "watermark", so to speak, of God's love in individual natures and in Nature as a whole. But this mark, impressed upon Nature, first comes to light when the sign of absolute love appears. That is the Cross.

The reality that is the world can be interpreted rightly only in the light of the Cross. The shadowy and vague outlines of love and of the ways of loving that the world knows are clarified in this setting—and otherwise they threaten to lead nowhere. The values of this world are only set in a true light when they are seen in relation to God's sign of love. That is because the limits of love, the obstacles to it, are seen and seen to be overcome, only in the Cross—that is, in the mystery of divine self-sacrificing love. The "truth" of this mystery has to be safeguarded against the attempt to reduce all life to knowledge and knowledge of law.

There is a high and vital truth that we only become who we really are when addressed in the context of the Cross, singled out as a person addressed by the love shown in the Cross. We become fully ourselves in our response to this love. We and our lives are the language God uses to speak to us! How could we possibly not understand ourselves when described in this language? Bathed in the light of God, and of God's love, we step into our clarity about who we really are. The Cross enables us to know ourselves as God sees and knows us, and so as we really are. Our response to this love enables us to see that we are love and beauty, for God and for one another. This is the knowledge that sets us free and when lived sets the world right.

Thursday

TRUSTING WHOLLY IN GOD

A reflection from a homily by Ralph the Fervent

“Such is the confidence we have in God through Christ—not that we are capable of thinking anything on our own, as if it came from us, but our capacity comes from God.” St. Paul tells us three things about trust. He tells us whom we can trust, through whom we can learn trust, and what sort of thing trust is.

We can have confidence in God; it is God whom we can trust. Paul teaches by his own example. God alone is able to save us and God truly loves us. God is truthful and God’s truth can be trusted. Friends can’t even save themselves and so can’t save us. Listen to the psalmist: *“Put no trust in princes or in any human person; there is no security in them. Their breath will leave them and they will return to the earth.”* What’s more, our earthly friends tend not to love us for ourselves but for what they can receive from us. It is only God who loves us, not for any advantage that comes to him, but only that we may gain from him. Friends aren’t always truthful either. Scripture says, *“Every human is a liar”*. God, however, never lies. Clearly, we must put the whole of our trust in God alone and not in anything that passes away. Relations, friends and all passing realities let us down. God alone never abandons those who hope in him. *“Has anyone ever hoped in the Lord and been put to shame?”*

Through whom are we to come to this complete trust in God? It is through Jesus Christ! It is only through Christ that we have access to the Heavenly Father. It is Christ who reconciles and mediates between God and humanity. Christ is always interceding for us. He is human and yet, like the Heavenly Father, saves us through his divinity. We must, then, love Christ with all our heart. As St. Paul says, there is no other name either in heaven or on earth through which we are destined to be saved.

What sort of reality is the trust to which we are called? We are shown the first side of this trust when we are taught that we are not capable of imagining by ourselves what God would reveal to us. How, then, could we trust in ourselves or our own power to imagine what real trust is like? We can have total confidence only in God. In this trust we place no confidence in anything that comes from ourselves or other creatures. We can’t imagine or feel in a way that could give us complete assurance. We haven’t the sort of freedom of will that would enable us to surrender ourselves to what we can think or imagine by ourselves. *“A king is not saved by his own great power, nor can even a giant be saved by his own immense strength.”* The like is true in regard to every good thing.

We cannot love, let alone enjoy as a possession, anything—whether material or spiritual or heavenly—except what comes to us in God. Only in God are we capable of the trust that God wants to share with us—one that never fails. Our own labors or devotion can’t create such trust. We certainly can’t have total confidence in ourselves. Recall Christ’s words to the disciples: *“Without me you can do nothing”!* Are you able to abandon self in trusting God? You aren’t capable of doing it but you can feel it happening within you. That is God doing within you what you can’t do of yourself.

Friday

PLACING ONESELF IN GOD'S HANDS

A reflection from the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Jesus

“When I began to turn to God Father Alvarez was my confessor. He began to lead me to greater perfection. He told me that I ought to leave nothing undone but seek to become entirely pleasing to God. He treated me with great skill yet also very gently. My soul was not at all strong, but very sensitive, especially as regards letting go of a certain friendship, though they were not actually leading me to offend God. They involved a great deal of affection and it seemed to me that if I let them go I would be sinning through ingratitude. So I asked him why it was necessary for me to be ungrateful if I was not offending God. He told me to commend the matter to God for a few days and to recite the hymn, “Come, Creator Spirit”, and that I would then be enlightened as to what was the better thing to do.

“I spent the greater part of an entire day in prayer and then I begged the Lord to help me please him in everything. I began to pray the hymn. While I was doing that a kind of transport came upon me so suddenly I was almost carried away. I could make no mistake about this, it was so clear. It was the first time the Lord had granted me the favor of any kind of rapture. I heard these words: “I will have you talk with angels and not with human beings”.

“This simply amazed me. My soul was very much moved and the words seemed to me to be spoken in the depths of the spirit. For this reason, they made me afraid, even though, on the other hand, they brought me great comfort. This remained with me after the fear caused by the strangeness of the experience had dissipated. The words have come true! Never since then have I been able to maintain a firm friendship except with people whom I believe love God and try to serve him. Nor have I been able to draw comfort from others or cherished a personal affection for them. It hasn't been in my power to do that. It makes no difference whether they are relatives or friends. Unless I know that a person loves God or practices prayer it is a real cross to me to have to associate with that person. I believe this is the absolute truth.

“Since that day I have been courageous enough to give up everything for the sake of God. At that moment, for what happened took no longer than a moment, God was pleased to make me, as his servant, another person than before. There was no longer a need for my confessor to give me further commands. When he had seen I was so attached to certain friendships he didn't dare tell me to abandon them. He had to wait until the Lord took the matter into his own hands, as he did. I hadn't thought I could ever give them up, even though I had tried to. It disturbed me so much that I put the very idea out of my mind. But now the Lord had set me free and given me strength to carry out my resolution. When these persons saw how determined I had become they were edified. Blessed be God forever! What I had been unable to do was done within me by the One who is almighty!”

Saturday

MAKING A PARADISE FOR GOD TO DWELL IN **A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx**

“In the beginning, the Lord God planted a garden of delight”. It was intended for us all but we lost it by sin. But God had already planned how to save us. This is the plan in which a virgin conceives without ordinary intercourse. Our Blessed Lady was filled with grace so that within her there should be a garden of delight in which our Blessed Lord could come to dwell. She is the paradise that God the Heavenly Father prepared for the new Adam.

Paradise was a beautiful place, full of the most beautiful trees and every sort of physical beauty. A fountain rose up in it and watered the trees and flowers and all else. Already you can see how rightly the heart of the holy virgin was a paradise. In it the good land bore thirty-fold and sixty-fold and a hundred-fold. Thirty-fold fruitfulness belongs to conjugal chastity, sixty-fold to the chastity of widows and one hundred-fold to virginity. Now you perceive how fertile this paradise is. Mary in herself is a mother, a widow and a virgin. She is the mother of God. Since she was espoused to God the cross left her a widow. Through her example who can say how many have remained virgins wholly dedicated to the service of God?

Mary, then, is fruitful beyond all others and is, indeed, the fountain which springs up in God’s new paradise and bears fruit in all the virtues. Think of her piety and her humility. And the water there is the Spirit. By the Lord’s promise, it is like a fountain bubbling up within us to eternal life. And the Spirit not only made a paradise within the Virgin and Mother Mary but makes one within us. Christ wants to dwell within us too.

Therefore, all who make within their spirits a paradise designed by the Holy Spirit have received within a life-giving fountain, and from it rises four rivers, the virtues of prudence, courage, temperance and justice from which all the other virtues needed for a holy life flow. No one can be wise without prudence and without it, one can’t discern worldly from godly prudence. Without this who can know how to be temperant and so worthy to eat the supper of the Lord. Having overcome our own appetites, we are ready to be fierce and strong for the faith and for living it in charity. The first fruit of these virtues is justice, animated by a true love for all and especially for the poor.

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