

LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR
THE THIRTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
SOLEMNITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE
UNIVERSE

- Sun **OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE**
- Nov. 21 **GRATITUDE TO GOD IS OPENNESS**
A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Mon. **Memorial of St. Cecilia**
22 **THE WITNESS OF THE LIFE & DEATH OF CECILIA**
A reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII
- Tues. **Tuesday of the Thirty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**
23 **HOW SEEING SIGNS CAN LEAD US TO GOD**
A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman
- Wed. **Memorial of Sts. Andrew Dung-Lac & Companions**
24 **GIVING THANKS EVEN FOR SUFFERINGS**
A reflection developed from a Letter by St. Paul Le-Bao-Tinh, martyr
- Thurs. **THANKSGIVING DAY**
25 **REMEMBERING HOW GRATEFUL WE SHOULD BE**
A reflection developed from a sermon by Bl. Gueric of Igny
- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. **Friday of the Thirty-Fourth Week in Ordinary Time**
26 **The Quest for Peace**
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- Sat. **Memorial of Our Lady**
27 **SHARING MARY'S NEVER-ENDING THANKSGIVING**
A reflection developed from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom

Sunday

GRATITUDE TO GOD IS OPENNESS

A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard

When the Lord's angel came to Mary he announced that "*The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David*". What does it mean for the Lord to receive the throne of David? He didn't receive in the sense that the kings who came after David did. But the Lord was not to reign in the earthly Jerusalem but in a heavenly city that would take the place of the earthly one. Nor did he sit on an earthly throne for as God he was already seated upon the cherubim; that is, the Lord receives a real and eternal throne and not a merely symbolic and temporal one. We have to discern the realities that lie behind and beyond earthly symbols!

The like holds for the word: "*He shall reign over the House of Jacob forever and his kingdom shall have no end*". Christ won't reign over a kingdom that is earthly, and so temporary, but over an eternal kingdom. We are that eternal reality and the Lord will reign in our hearts and over us forever! To speak of the House of Jacob reminds us that the name 'Jacob' means 'supplanter' and that Christ will supplant the devil and all that is the devil's in our love and affection. He will struggle against the vices and evil desires in human hearts so that sin may no longer be said to reign in our bodies or minds but Jesus alone will reign there through grace. He does now and he will do so for all eternity.

Blessed are those in whom Jesus will reign forever. They shall reign with Him. Of his kingdom in us, there will be no end. Think how glorious that kingdom will be where all ordinary kings gather together to give the King of kings and Lord of lords united praise and honor. In contemplating His splendor the just will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father.

Lord Jesus, out of the love you have for your people, remember me! When Jesus delivers his kingdom into the hands of his Heavenly Father may he save me! Grant that I, and all of us, may see that joy, the joy of all the chosen ones! Grant that all of us may rejoice with the gladness of God's People. Then I too will be able to praise him together with all of you.

Now, Lord Jesus, come and remove all stumbling blocks from within that Kingdom that is my heart and soul. You ought to reign within it so let that happen! Greed may come along and try to claim a throne in me. Or arrogance may try to dominate. Pride would be my king. Comfort and pleasure want to reign in me. Ambition, detraction, envy, anger, and the like struggle within me to be supreme. Help me resist! I will win if I have your help! Jesus, my Lord, will keep me for himself if only I acknowledge his rights over me. He is God and he is my Lord and I declare that I will have no king but the Lord Jesus! Be my king!

Monday

THE WITNESS OF THE LIFE & DEATH OF CECILIA

A reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

The liturgy has much to say about Cecilia the virgin and martyr. She is an example of the singular beauty that Christ gives to those who love Him. She sheds upon so many the heavenly light and sweetness of faith in God. She was deeply conscious of the truths of her faith and of the duty to God which they taught her.

It has been said of St. Cecilia that wherever she went she bore witness to the Gospel. How blessed are all those who are able to do this following her example? Above all, how blessed are those who show us what a great honor it is for a follower of Christ to find the inner strength to sacrifice everything, even life itself, when faced with the choice of choosing justice and fraternity and mutual love and peace by obeying the teachings of our Redeemer. Jesus has given these ideals new and deeper meanings than ever before and shown us how to so live them that all the world will be redeemed and saved.

I can only wish that all might find within their hearts the divine gift of a desire to live frankly and generously in obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. Wasn't Jesus' new commandment a call to love others even as he has loved them, and loved us? It isn't a path to personal or inner narrowness but to honor and openness and service. It is a path that multiplies care and concern and action on behalf of all that is good.

Cecilia was wealthy. A young man wanted to marry her, but not for herself. He lusted after her money and property. When she decided to give all she had inherited to the poor he denounced her as a Christian. He hoped this would cause her to turn back from her purpose out of fear for her life. It only caused her to make the even greater gift of her life to God. She went ahead and gave away her wealth and property, but she gave her very life and self in giving it. This is the call that her feast proclaims. It is a call that God makes to all of us—whether we have any property or wealth or not.

What we give is not important unless the gift is yourself. You may give it in a lifetime of dedication to God and to the love of others. You may give it by refusing to turn away from what you hear as God's call to you. Whatever that call costs, refusing to turn back is your path to God and to God's Kingdom.

Tuesday

HOW SEEING SIGNS CAN LEAD US TO GOD

A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

As long as there have been Christians they have constantly looked for signs of the coming of Christ. They have found signs in the natural world as well as the world as created by human ingenuity. Some people make fun of this and claim only the uneducated and uncultured see signs everywhere, as though earth-quakes, storms, harvest failures and diseases were something extraordinary. In fact, the educated and the powerful often do this too, but they are thinking of wars, revolutions and the like.

Actually, people see events as signs because their hearts are awake with longing for Christ and they see everything out of the ordinary as a reminder that God is the Lord of nature and of history and of all events. Since Jesus' own disciples did this too, we shouldn't find it surprising. And, indeed, Jesus himself shared these attitudes. He says that there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars and that on earth there will be distress among nations and that people will get terrified by what is happening around them, and think this means that the natural powers of the world are failing and that means that what we know is passing away and will be replaced by the more immediate rule of God.

Clearly, there isn't anything ridiculous about such thinking and there certainly isn't any particular harm in it. When people live from faith, they imagine that what is happening within them, as they are transformed, is happening in the outer world too. Seeing signs in things and events only reflects a religious and faith-inspired way of understanding life.

Yet if, as we find in Scripture, the "world" is opposed to God and the "order of the world" as human beings create it, is opposed to the ordering of everything in terms of its relation to God. But how can things of that same "world" be signs of God's presence and transforming and redeeming power and love as well as dangers because they aren't God-oriented?

Granted all I have said, granted the vastness and mystery of the world and the ways it is borne in upon us, how could we not think that there is nothing here below that isn't connected to the Plan God has for saving and drawing all things into unity in Christ? For all we know each event has a connection with every other event.

Perhaps, then, God is teaching us and offering us insight and knowledge about his ways. If we are only willing to open our eyes maybe we can see the hand of God working for the good of all creation. The Scripture tells us that the very hairs of our heads are numbered by God. All things are ours and all things work together to realize our good and, in its own way, that holds true generally. Let's, then, look for the Lord's presence in everything that happens, no matter how trivial it may seem.

To the ears of faith even what sounds bad doesn't happen without the permission of God. We hear God's footsteps everywhere. Seeing signs of God's presence is a way of seeing signs of God's coming. More important, it is a way of causing us to keep watch for that coming which will bring all into the immediate presence of God. Keep watch and pray! We are commanded to do this.

Wednesday

GIVING THANKS EVEN FOR SUFFERINGS

A reflection developed from a Letter by St. Paul Le-Bao-Tinh, martyr

I am in chains for the name of Christ. I want to relate to you the trials that beset us daily in prison so that you too may be set on fire with love for God and we may all join our voice in God's praise. "God's mercy is forever!" Even though the prison is a true image of everlasting hell, God who once freed the three Hebrew children from the fiery furnace is with us always. Everywhere there are shackles, iron chains, manacles, and added to them hatred, vengeance seeking, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing and cursing, not to mention anguish and grief. God makes all such tribulations sweet. Indeed, God's mercy is forever!

Such torments and evils usually terrify people. By the grace of God, I am filled with joy and gladness. It is because I am not alone but with Christ. Our Master bears the entire weight of the Cross. I am given only a tiny share. The Lord isn't a mere onlooker in this struggle but the main contestant. That is why the crown of victory is on his head.

Each day emperors and mandarins blaspheme God's holy name. As I see things, I would prefer to be torn to bits on account of the burning love I have for you, Lord, if only you will hold me up and show your power in my weakness. Grant that I may do nothing to help your enemies hold up their heads in pride. Beloved friends in Christ, as you hear all this may you too give thanks in joy. It is from God that every good gift comes. His mercy endures forever.

O praise the Lord all you nations; acclaim God all you peoples. God has chosen what is weak in this world to confound the strong. God chose what is low and despised to confound the noble. Through our mouths, God confuses the philosophers who are disciples of the worldly-wise. God's mercy is forever! I am writing all this so that your faith and mine may be one. In the midst of this storm, I cast my anchor toward the throne of God, the anchor which is the lively hope in my heart.

Let us all so run as to attain the crown. Let us put on the breastplate of faith and take up the weapons of Christ. As my patron saint, Paul, has taught me, "It is better for you to enter life with one eye or crippled than with all your members to be cast away". Come to my aid with your prayers. May I have the strength to fight according to the Law of God and to fight the good fight. Let me do it right to the end, and so finish the race. We may not see each other again in this life but we will have the happiness of seeing each other over and over again in the world to come. We will stand by the throne of the Spotless Lamb and together join in singing God's praises and exulting forever in the joy of God's triumph.

Thursday

REMEMBERING HOW GRATEFUL WE SHOULD BE

A reflection developed from a sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny

Whenever we come to a time of special celebration it is good to consider and state as plainly as we can how much God has given us in Christ. Why did our forbears go out into what seemed a wilderness except that they might better serve God? We hear in Proverbs, “A poor thing, such a poor thing, people say, and then go off and brag about their bargain”. Won’t we be able to boast rightly about the unbelievable bargain we have obtained—an immeasurable and eternal weight of glory, and for no more payment than such minor afflictions as we actually bear? “The sufferings of this time aren’t worthy to be compared with the future glory to be revealed in us.”

I could easily be carried away by unrelenting wrath against ingratitude and faithlessness, if I were not reminded of the holy and blessed times in which we live the gift that is Jesus Christ. Yet the two realities come together. We live a time of grace and of wickedness. “Behold, now is the acceptable time!” When the world’s wickedness had almost reached its peak God sent us the Only Son. Now we are graced to live a mature and adult faith and through grace and truth, we live in a time of fullness. It is God’s grace that makes this the happiest of times for us. The Book of Sirach reminds us not to waste our opportunities: “*Don’t be defrauded of the good day!*”, he shouts out. This is a good day because it is a day of godly gifts. We have received the best gift of all and we only have to live the grace received.

My friends in Christ, haven’t we received the Spirit which is of God? Don’t we have the knowledge of what has been given us? Thanks be to you, Father of mercies, who has given us our daily bread, who has opened your hand with such generosity to fill every living thing with blessings!

How wretched, how brutish and unfeeling, even more, how harmful and grudging is the person who defrauds self and others of the godly gifts God has given. Such a person has no share in those gifts, no share in heavenly grace. So much has been set before us. We celebrate a day of refreshment and joy. Could we do it with a sad heart? Wisdom calls out to us, “*A person with a jaundiced eye never has a full meal but always sits hungry and pensive at the table*”. We must consider with devotion and with faith all the things that have been offered us.

If we don’t turn our face away from Christ we can feed most happily and wonderfully from merely looking upon Him. “*The Lord feeds me and I lack nothing; God has set me in a place of green pastures*”. Yes, we yearn for the fullness of time, and even so we are filled with such a plenitude of good things! What can we do but give thanks to the One who has given us all and will give us endlessly more? Let us give thanks, now and through the endless ages. This is the Day of Thanksgiving. Give thanks to God.

Friday

THE QUEST FOR PEACE

A reflection based on a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

One of the phrases that stand out as you read St. Benedict's Rule for Monks goes: "Let all be at peace!" Superficially read, it reminds every member of a monastic community that they must work together so that all are free of anxiety and have their basic human needs met. But St. Benedict wanted us to hear this quasi-command in a deeper, Biblical sense. In this sense, peace (shalom) means a way of life in which all relate to one another so that God's plan for human life will be realized. That includes thriving and even being happy but these are not a Christian's primary goals, and so not the primary goals of monks.

In this final week of the church year, we are directed to Christ as our king, as guide to life in its fullness. Recall St. Irenaeus' famous saying, "The glory of God is a living human person". That glory is most fully realized in a fully human person working to love others. It is attainable in Christ, our good shepherd.

When the Lord is our shepherd there is nothing that makes life richer and fuller which we have to go without.

Jesus guides us even more lovingly and carefully than a good shepherd cares for sheep and leads them to good pastures. Our king is a personal protector and provider and not simply "an authority". Jesus is particularly attentive to those who have strayed. He reminds us of the many straying and needy persons he has led to God and to a way that makes their lives full and humanly rich. Think of the price this shepherd was willing to pay, and has actually paid, to bring us to "peace". His death and resurrection bring life, as Scripture itself emphasizes.

How do you react to the Gospel picture of judgment? A shepherd separates the different kinds of animals—anciently sheep and goats. We are to visualize ourselves as a sheep or a goat. Unless one has cared for both the difference doesn't make much sense. The bottom line is that goats are very different in their social lives, if I may use that phrase, than are sheep. Goats don't worry about the same ways of relating to each other that sheep do. Which means they don't live by the same social rules, to use a human metaphor. So to talk about judgment as a separating of sheep from goats is to talk about separating those who know how to care for and love one another as Jesus does from those who don't.

The Kingdom of God is Peace! To live in God's peace is to live by caring for and loving one another in the way Jesus shows us. When we come to judgment we come to Jesus and we see how our way of living with one another matches that of Jesus, or doesn't match it. To enter the Kingdom of Heaven is to enter a never-ending way of life. If we don't want to live as Jesus does, which is how God calls human beings to live, then we don't want to enter that Kingdom. At judgment, we discover what we actually and really want. We prepare for this by doing all we can to live in God's peace with others. We show this by genuinely caring for them.

Saturday

SHARING MARY'S NEVER-ENDING THANKSGIVING

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom

The fact that a child was born of a Virgin is a great miracle. The evangelist, Luke, was amazed by everything that preceded and followed Jesus' birth and offered to all of us the Virgin Mary as a model and example to follow. After all, it was not simply the birth of our savior of which he spoke but his ministry and teaching of the Gospel and his passion and death and resurrection. What did all these mean to Mary? They were opportunities for continual thanksgiving. She didn't remain preoccupied with herself, much less with the trial and difficulties and suffering that she had to bear. She was wholly caught up in gratitude to God, as is shown in her Magnificat prayer.

Let's give thanks to God throughout our lives. That is what Mary calls us to do. How wrong it would be if we enjoyed God's blessings indeed and every day while making no return for such gifts. An offering of gratitude only increases the blessing we receive. God needs nothing from us, but we need everything from God. Our thanks only make us more worthy of the good things with which God showers us continually. The memory of these gifts and loving kindness deepens our love for God. That is what happened for Mary too.

What is the most awe-inspiring and life-giving thing we celebrate? It is called the Eucharist. It is the commemoration of all the many blessings as well as the culmination of the gifts of Divine Providence. It teaches us to give thanks always. Who was ever better aware of God's Providence than Mary? Who was more richly filled with the gifts of God's grace? Who had more reason to trust in God? Can we suffer anything that causes greater anguish than what Mary felt? But her every reaction was a continuation of the trust that she expressed in her surrender to God's word and will, and that brought about the Savior's conception. What have we to fear if she isn't to be afraid?

When the sacrifice of Christ is set before us, in words or in the sacrament of the Eucharist, we are called to give thanks for the entire world and its history. We give thanks for the old dispensation and for the new. We give thanks for all that was done before our times and all that will come later. We rejoice in all that God has done and made and, wonder of wonders, this sets us free from earth and turns us toward Heaven. "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of God's good will*".

We see the fullness of what this means, however, because we are being set free to love more fully our fellow servants. We rejoice as much in their blessings and good fortune as in our own. Let's join with Mary in giving thanks, everlasting thanks, for all these gifts, large or small, given to us and to everyone!