

THE THIRTY-SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sun. The Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Nov. 7 **THE GIFT OF LIFE**

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Mon. Monday of the 32nd Week in Ordinary Time

8 **HOW GOD SOWS THE MUSTARD SEED OF FAITH**

A Reflection developed from St. Augustine's Commentary on St. Luke

Tues. Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

9 **LEARNING TO GLORY IN OUR WEAKNESS**

A Reflection from Christ, the Sacrament of Encounter with God
by Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx

Wed. Memorial of St. Pope Leo the Great

10 **HOW WE MUST CELEBRATE GOD'S GRACE**

A Reflection taken from a Homily by St. Pope Leo the Great

Thurs. Memorial of St. Martin of Tours

11 **FEARLESSNESS IN PUTTING CHRIST FIRST**

A Reflection from The Life of St. Martin by Septimus Severus

Fri. Friday of the 32nd Week in Ordinary Time

12 **PREPARING FOR GOD'S CALL TO THE KINGDOM**

A Reflection taken from a Sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

Sat. Feast of All Saints of the Benedictine Family

13 **IN PRAISE OF THE MONASTIC VOCATION**

A reflection by William of St. Thierry

Sunday

THE GIFT OF LIFE

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

All life comes from God. We often carelessly fall into the error of thinking that this only means that God makes people alive. Yet, as the common saying “Get a life!” reminds us, having life is more than just “being alive”. All the readings this Sunday focus our attention on this fact.

God had led the prophet Elijah to declare that there would be a drought in Israel so long as so many Israelites worshiped Baal rather than the one and only true God. But the drought threatened Elijah’s life like that of other Israelites. Finally, God told him to seek refuge with a widow in the non-Israelite town of Zarephath, perhaps because he was also hiding from King Ahab and would be out of his jurisdiction. The widow was preparing to die, together with her son, due to the famine that came with a severe drought. Elijah’s faith gave the two of them a new lease on life, as we say; suddenly they had hope again to live through the hard times and find a better life. Yet one day the widow’s son fell ill and suddenly stopped breathing. Through Elijah God again gave him, and his mother, a new gift of life.

The gift of life means so many things! A woman without a husband or son had no legal protection and so that widow counted on her son to save her from being robbed and left with no really decent or secure life to look forward to. She would rather have died with her son in the first place than try to live without him. That is almost exactly the situation of the widow at Naim whom Jesus met as she accompanied her only son’s body to the grave. ‘Naim’ means ‘nice’ in Hebrew but the widow from ‘Niceville’ had nothing nice to look forward to. Is a life without hope a “real life”? Jesus gave her back the gift of hope, a gift even more important than mere physical life.

The God who saves by giving hope to those who have none is the God of Mercy. When Paul was trying with all his might to destroy the Church of Christ he had no real hope for a good life because he was fighting God. When God called him to Christ he gave him the entire life we have read about so frequently. When God called us didn’t God, in mercy, give us a new life completely worth living? Where were we headed before we were called to our new way of living-in-God? Is there any hope apart from God? So we have a real, worthwhile, even wonderful hope because of our call. It is a call to share, and to share God’s mercy. How? By helping others hear God’s call and live it day by day. We are servants of God’s mercy—as were Elijah and St. Paul, and as Jesus was and is in so many ways, now and forever.

Scripture tells us that the worst drought is the absence of God’s Word. Without God’s Word, we don’t know the path of genuine hope. In mercy, God never takes away his Word, in Jesus or in Scripture. Our responsibility is to listen carefully to these words and then to invest our energy and time in living according to what we hear. The life we live in response to this word is to be merciful and loving. This is what Jesus called us from spiritual death to do and to be. We are living and breathing works of mercy. We are called to share life by helping others see this.

Monday

HOW GOD SOWS THE MUSTARD SEED OF FAITH

A Reflection developed from St. Augustine's Commentary on St. Luke

“If you had faith like a mustard seed...”. Reading the Holy Gospel nourishes in us the habit of prayer and so builds up our faith, disposing us to trust in the Lord rather than in ourselves. Recall the parable of the unjust judge. Could there be a more powerful incentive to pray than this story about untrustworthiness? An unprincipled person without reverence for God or concern for others only does his duty after being worn down by the pestering of a powerless widow. God is not like that, so why does God tell us to pray and to ask?

As Scripture has it, “we ought always to pray and never lose heart”. Yet “when the Son of Man comes will he find trust in God upon this earth?” Where there is no prayer there is no trusting faith in God. When we pray it is because we trust that God will answer us. That's why St. Paul proclaims: “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!” He adds, “how can people call on one in whom they do not believe?” Do you believe God will answer your prayer?

We have to believe in order to pray and we must ask God in prayer to keep our faith from failing. Trusting faith gives rise to prayer and is strengthened by that very praying. It was when their trust in him was to be supremely tested that the Lord said to his disciples, “Watch and pray that you may not be put to the test”. We have to stay awake with the Lord if we don't want to be overcome by temptation. What temptation? To turn one's back on the trust that is faith.

Temptation is harder to resist in proportion to faith's weakening. Recall that before warning the disciples Jesus said, “This night Satan demanded to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you”—and especially for Peter that his faith not fail completely. Should our protector pray if we who need the protection think we have no need to pray?

In asking whether the Son of Man at his second coming will find trusting faith on earth, the Lord was speaking of complete faith. Look at God's church. It is full of people. Would they come if faith were non-existent? But who has the faith that moves mountains? So faith is not present in full measure. The apostles would never have left all they had to follow the Lord if their faith had not been great, yet they cry out to Jesus to add to it. Their faith was not complete and they could not make it complete by themselves. They, and we, have to call out to our Lord: Lord, add to our faith! But will your prayer be answered? Watch how you keep the Lord's commands to love and forgive one another, even when others ruin your plans and projects. If you can do this, you know God has answered your prayer.

Tuesday

LEARNING TO GLORY IN OUR WEAKNESS

**A reflection from Christ, the Sacrament of Encounter with God,
by Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx**

Today we celebrate the Cathedral of the Church of Rome, and in doing this we celebrate the entire Church in its unity. The whole Church is the visible shape of salvation. It is a sign filled with the reality which it signifies. Think of the fact that the Church's members can sin only to the extent that they withdraw themselves from its sanctifying influence. To the extent that any of us is "in sin" we have placed our self outside the Church. That is a terrible thought. To the extent that we are "in sin" there is in us a rupture between the Church as sign and the Church as reality—a rupture in us.

It is clear that this means the Church has not yet reached its final state. We can't hold that at the end of time the Church will cease to exist and make way for some purely spiritual community and communion of the saints in grace. In virtue of Christ's incarnation the bodily visibility of grace is not a provisional or temporary reality; it is the definitive reality! Only in Heaven will the Church reach its full maturity, and still be a visible society. The resurrection of all flesh establishes and perpetuates in glory the earthly history of the Church just as does our personal holiness perpetuate each of us as saints who have fought for and won in this life. All we have won will be visible in our risen bodies. All that is weak and sad and troublesome will have disappeared, from the Church and from us individually.

The Church, as the earthly sign of the triumph of Christ's grace, remains now in a state of weakness. It needs to purge itself of all that is sinful. This fact shows us two things: First, the glory of the Church is always a veiled glory, for around it there is still a broad margin of weakness and shortcomings. Second, and more especially, the power of God is fulfilled in and through the weakness and poverty of the Church. The Church is great and glorious, but not on account of any earthly strength or achievements. In the Church Christ's redeeming grace always triumphs in spite of human weakness.

It is in weakness that the divine power comes into its own and becomes visible precisely as divine. The Church is therefore not only the object of our faith but is also the test of our faith. It can become an obstacle and a danger to faith. Belief, after all, is not a conviction to which a person is forced by things like the glory of the Church or some other manifestation of achievement that we can experience. We always believe in the midst of darkness and confusion. If we look at things in this way, the weakness of the Church is, to use an Easter expression, a "happy fault". It makes us realize that our only boast is in the power of God. Just as Christ was a scandal to the Jews because he set himself up, in many minds, in opposition to the Law given by God, so too the Church must pass through its pilgrimage as poor and despised. The power of redeeming grace alone will bring victory. This must be our deepest faith. It is one of God's most marvelous gifts.

Wednesday

HOW WE MUST CELEBRATE GOD'S GRACE

A Reflection taken from a Homily by St. Pope Leo the Great

The sublimity of God's grace lies in this, that daily in our hearts all our longings are transferred from what is earthbound to what is heavenly. And yet it remains true that our present life is part of God's providence and bounty and is lived only with our Creator's help and care. It is one and the same Lord who gives us present blessings and who promises eternal life. There is a bond and unity between what we do here and what we are invited to do forever with God. The mere fact that we are promised such a fulfillment of life carries us along. Hope gives speed and fervor to what we do, both for God and for one another. Clearly, we must honor and praise God for all the good things we are given through the fruitfulness with which he has endowed our earth.

Whatever benefits flow from the harvests are for the use and benefit of all. Everything flows to us from God's goodness. In his delicate way God helps the hesitant and the bold, God encourages the farmers and enables them to sustain us all. He does the like for everyone in whatever occupation they contribute to building up their community. The wind and rain, the cold and heat, day and night, all these serve our needs. If the Lord doesn't give growth by divine planting and watering human effort and forethought wouldn't be able to care for each and all. That is why it is so right and just that we help one another, and do it using the things our Heavenly Father mercifully bestows on us.

There are many who have no share in fields, vines, olive groves, and much else. It is worth remembering the poverty of these people so that out of the plenty God gives those who have such goods the poor too may bless God. All are intended to rejoice at having been given a share of what God has given for the good of all. These things are the common good that God has designed for rich and poor, for pilgrims and for the sick so that all may have what they need and be satisfied.

God's justice arranges for those who labor under various disabilities to find what they need through the love and generosity of others. God blesses them through their patient and trusting hope, and blesses those who help them through their very kindness and mercy. God blesses all by their contribution to the common well-being, and for the way each helps build up a community of mutual love and concern.

The most effective way of praying for forgiveness is sharing. Almsgiving and fasting and prayer must be united. What we ask of God in these ways is certainly heard, and especially if we ask only that all be blessed and come to the eternal joy and life God calls us and try to help this happen. As it is written: The merciful do good to themselves. Nothing does greater good than the good of sharing with neighbors in need. That transfers what was only earthly into heaven and makes it an eternal wealth. The merciful, as the Lord teaches, have mercy shown them by God. God is the highest of all rewards and God's gift of self is for those who give themselves as God does.

Thursday

FEARLESSNESS IN PUTTING CHRIST FIRST

A reflection from The Life of St. Martin by Septimus Severus

The barbarians were making incursions into Gaul and the Caesar Julian concentrated his army at Worms. There he began to distribute a bonus to the soldiers. They were called up one by one in the usual way. When Martin's turn came he decided it would be a good time to apply for his discharge, for he didn't think it would be honest to take the bonus if he wasn't going to fight.

He said to Julian: *"I have been your soldier up to now. Let me now be God's soldier. Let someone who is going to fight have your bonus. I am Christ's soldier; I am not allowed to fight."* These words put Julian in a rage and he said that it was fear of the battle to be fought the next day that Martin wanted to quit the service, not from religious motives.

Martin was undaunted. In fact, he stood all the firmer because of this effort to frighten him. *"If it is put down to cowardice and not to faith, I will stand unarmed in the front of the battle line tomorrow and I will walk unharmed through the enemy's columns in the name of the Lord Jesus, protected by the sign of the Cross instead of by shield and helmet"*.

So he was ordered to be placed in custody so that he could prove his words and face the barbarians unarmed. The next day the enemy sent envoys to ask for peace, surrendering themselves and all they had. Who could doubt that this victory was due to Martin's blessing and granted so he would not be sent unarmed into a battle! Christ could not have granted any victory for the benefit of his own soldier greater than one in which the enemy was beaten bloodlessly and no one had to die.

On another occasion, many years later, bishops from various parts of the world had been assembled to meet the Emperor Maximus. Many were fawning on him, lowering the dignity of their priesthood. Martin alone retained his Apostolic authority.

Invitations had been sent to a great feast and to persons of the very highest rank. Martin himself occupied a stool next to the emperor and one of his priests was placed nearby, between two very important counts. Toward the middle of the meal a servant, as was customary, offered a cup to the emperor. He ordered it to be given instead to Martin first and waited, expecting that Bishop Martin would then hand it to him. But after drinking, Martin passed the cup to his priest, affirming that no one had a better right to drink after him and that it would be dishonest to give preference to any other than the Lord's priest, even to the emperor.

The emperor, and all who were present, were so struck by this action that the very gesture by which they had been humbled became for them a source of good feeling. The news went around the palace that Martin had done at the emperor's table what no other bishop had dared to do even when eating with the least of the emperor's magistrates. Martin never hesitated to put Christ and Christ's honor above every human rank and sign of prestige.

Friday

PREPARING FOR GOD'S CALL TO THE KINGDOM

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

Watch yourselves! This world is passing away for each of us. Remember how the Lord foretells in the gospels that it will be the same on the last day as it was on the day when Noah entered the ark. That is how it will be on our personal last day too. "People ate and drank, bought and sold and married right up to the day when Noah entered the ark: Then the flood came and they all perished."

The reason the ark took so long to build was to make unbelievers wake up. Noah worked on it for a hundred years, yet people weren't awake enough to say to themselves: The man of God must have a good reason for building this ark; it must mean that the human race will soon be destroyed! We see people of 100 years old and we don't pause to think: This person will soon be called to God, and so will I, even if I live to be 100.

So the ark is still being built and the hundred years represent the days in which we live. The whole period of time that is our life is prefigured by that number. If those, then, who paid no heed when Noah was building the ark deserved the death that came to them, what do people deserve who are careless about their own salvation? Christ is building his Church and is drawing us nearer and nearer to his Kingdom where that Church finds its true home. So the people of that day have become a fearful example for us, their descendants, because they did not believe and many still don't.

Christ, who is God become human, is building the Church as our ark. Every day incorruptible timber—i.e., believers who renounce this world—are being added to this ark's structure. So let us fast and pray for tomorrow we may die. Those who say "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we shall die" have no hope for rising again. But we who, thanks to the words of the prophets and the preaching of Christ and the apostles, believe in and prepare for death and the resurrection, we who hope for everlasting life, must not lose courage or let our minds be dulled by distractions and dissipations.

How many of our friends and family members have been called by God into the Heavenly Kingdom. Many of them answered this call filled with hope and trust in God's love. We pray for them so let us pray for ourselves. They show us what we need to do. Let us be dressed for action and keep our lamps alight as we await the Lord's call and even his coming. We wait with all sobriety and we wait, in fasting and prayer. We do it not so we may avoid death but so we may die without fear. We prepare to join that cloud of witnesses to the importance of trusting in God. They have gone before us and with Jesus prepare our place in God's Kingdom. Let us join them in prayer for one another and all whom God is to call soon to come to him and the Church assembled in Heaven.

Saturday

IN PRAISE OF THE MONASTIC VOCATION

A reflection by William of St. Thierry

Surely it is right to feast in the Lord. Surely it is right to rejoice. For the fairest part of the Christian religion, which seems to come into such close contact with heaven, has been restored to life after having died. It has been found after being lost. I am speaking of the monastic life we lead!

Our ears had heard tell of it but we did not believe. We read of it in books and we marveled at the ancient glory of the solitaries and monks. We wondered at the great grace which God manifested in those living this life. Then, suddenly, we found it—in a clearing in the woods, on God's mountain, but a fertile mountain instead of a place in the desert. Now it prospers and grows greatly in the richness of renewed grace; it is girt round with exultation.

It is in such a condition that now, through you, it can offer itself to all. In you it displays its wonders. Up till now its beauty was revealed only to simple people. But the One who realizes it among us is that same One who by means of a few simple men subjected the entire world to Himself—to the amazement of that world. *“Do not be afraid, then, you, my little flock”*, says the Lord. *“Show utter trust, because your Father has determined to give you the Kingdom”*. (Lk. 12:23)

It is not for you to concern yourself with feebly keeping the commandments or to give your attention only to what God lays down as of obligation. You must seek what he longs for, fulfill in yourselves what God most wills—the good and desirable and perfect! It is for all to serve God. It is for you to cling tightly to God! It is for all to believe in God, know God, love God and revere God. It is for you to taste God, to understand God, to be intimately acquainted with God, to enjoy God.

This is no slight matter and no easy goal. Yet the One who in love makes you such promises is almighty and good. God will be faithful in bringing to fulfillment these promises and will be untiring in giving you help. To those who in their great love for God pledge themselves to great things and, believing and trusting in grace, undertake what is beyond their own strength, God imparts not only the will and desire but follows them up with the grace and power to achieve what you desire and will. Let the calumniator calumniate. If a person faithfully does what it is humanly possible to do, God in mercy will give judgment on such a weak one as champion of that person's cause.

You did what you could! But let all exaltation be far from us. Consider others as being far above you in strength; admire their glory. As long as is allowed, they love to stay inside and devote their leisure to the contemplation of truth and charity. But when necessity summons and duty impels and they go without a moment's hesitation to give themselves to the practice of charity in truth. So in fear and trembling work out your own salvation. Do not worry about others but to the best of your ability influence what others may become. It is not only for the sake of those now alive but for that of those who will come afterward. It is from you, from your example, that all the future of this holy Order will derive its character in this part of God's world.