

## THE SEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME - C

---

- Sun.** The Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time  
**Feb.20 LOVE YOUR ENEMIES**  
From the Homily of Pope Francis
- Mon.** Memorial of St. Peter Damian  
**21 HOW A MONASTIC WAY IS THE WAY TO LIFE**  
A reflection from Letter 18 by St. Peter Damian
- Tues.** FEAST OF ST. PETER'S CHAIR  
**22 FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF PETER**  
A reflection from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII
- Wed.** Memorial of St. Polycarp  
**23 A SUPREME WITNESS TO TRUST IN CHRIST**  
A reflection from The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp
- Thurs.** Thursday of the 7<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time  
**24 THE SCANDAL OF INCONSISTENCY**  
A reflection from a Homily of Pope Francis
- Fri.** **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**  
Friday of the 7<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time  
**25 GOD IS NOT AN EQUATION**  
A reflection from a Homily of Pope Francis
- Sat.** Memorial of Our Lady  
**26 THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF GOD'S WORD**  
A reflection from a text by St. Simeon the New Theologian

Sunday

## **LOVE YOUR ENEMIES**

### **From the Homily of Pope Francis**

If we want to be disciples of Christ, if we want to call ourselves Christians, this is the only way; there is no other. Having been loved by God, we are called to love in return; having been forgiven, we are called to forgive; having been touched by love, we are called to love without waiting for others to love first; having been saved graciously, we are called to seek no benefit from the good we do. You may well say: "But Jesus goes too far! He even says: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44). Surely he speaks like this to gain people's attention, but he cannot really mean it". But he really does. Here Jesus is not speaking in paradoxes or using nice turns of phrase. He is direct and clear. He quotes the ancient law and solemnly tells us: "But I say to you: love your enemies". His words are deliberate and precise.

*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.* This is the Christian innovation, the Christian difference. Pray and love: this is what we must do; and not only with regard to those who love us, not only with regard to our friends or our own people. The love of Jesus knows no boundaries or barriers. The Lord demands of us the courage to have a love that does not count the cost. Because the measure of Jesus is love without measure. How many times have we neglected that demand? Yet his commandment of love is the very heart of the Gospel. Where the command of universal love is concerned, let us not accept excuses or preach prudent caution. The Lord was not cautious; he did not yield to compromises. He asks of us the *extremism of charity*. This is the only legitimate kind of Christian extremism: the extremism of love.

The worship of God is contrary to the culture of hatred. And the culture of hatred is fought by combatting the *cult of complaint*. How many times do we complain about the things that we lack, about the things that go wrong! Jesus knows about all the things that don't work. He knows that there is always going to be someone who dislikes us. Or someone who makes our life miserable. All he asks us to do is pray and love. This is the revolution of Jesus, the greatest revolution in history: from hating our enemy to loving our enemy; from the cult of complaint to the culture of gift. If we belong to Jesus, this is the road we are called to take! There is no other.

Dear brothers and sisters, today Jesus, with his limitless love, raises the bar of our humanity. In the end, we can ask ourselves: "Will we be able to make it?" If the goal were impossible, the Lord would not have asked us to strive for it. By our own effort, it is difficult to achieve; it is a grace and it needs to be implored. Ask God for the strength to love. Say to him: "Lord, help me to love, teach me to forgive. I cannot do it alone, I need you". But we also have to ask for the grace to be able to see others not as hindrances and complications, but as brothers and sisters to be loved. How often do we pray for help and favors for ourselves, yet how seldom do we pray to learn how to love! We need to pray more frequently for the grace to live the essence of the Gospel, to be truly Christian. For "in the evening of life, we will be judged on love" (Saint John of the Cross, *Sayings of Light and Love*, 57).

Today let us choose love. Let us not yield to the thinking of this world. Let us accept the challenge of Jesus, the challenge of charity. Then we will be true Christians and our world will be more human.

*Monday*

## **HOW A MONASTIC WAY IS THE WAY TO LIFE**

### **A reflection from Letter 18 by St. Peter Damian**

Who can properly describe the greatness of God's work? Both in a stand of grain and in a cluster of grapes God seems to be hiding, even while God reveals himself. Notice the leaf on a tree trembling in the wind, and perhaps about to fall. Now in fall, the ground is strewn with fallen leaves, yet a leaf that hasn't fallen bears witness to the beauty of all trees when they were in leaf. Likewise, when we remember this why should we marvel when we so often see the monastic order of life decaying? Almighty God, cares for the leaves of his tree and holds some firm while letting others fall. God strengthens those he chooses in the monastic way, and others in another way. Let us rejoice in God's grace and choice.

I give boundless thanks to my Creator who wished me to have the office of an unworthy servant in a small but good Carthusian community. I only need to keep up with the pace of my brethren. I want, then, to relate briefly a few things about our life so it may be handed down in writing. Those who come after us will be the heirs of this way of life and it should not be lost, even if they fail to imitate it.

Ordinarily we fast four days a week. We consider those to be fasting who take bread with salt and water. It is customary for the brethren on all Sundays to have two warm meals, but on others only one. Concerning the recitation of psalms, it is customary that when two brethren live together in one cell, they recite two complete psalters daily, one for the living and the other for the dead. There are three lessons, one for each fifty psalms. We observe continual silence in the cells, just as in the chapel. All year round neither shoes nor stockings are worn in the cells. In regard to other monastic practices, whatever is done in monasteries of strict and regular observance we also do.

One practice exceeds all the rest in importance—love among the brethren. Unanimity of will, forged by the fire of mutual charity, so that each sees self as born to serve all and not to serve self. If one appears ill, all will at once inquire about his condition so that the sick person won't hesitate to give up his usual rigor, and so he will be promptly furnished all the necessities and so all may take joy in offering themselves as willing nurses. Likewise, if someone dies all fast for seven days for that person and takes the discipline seven times, each with a thousand blows, and then performs seven hundred prostrations, chants thirty psalters, and offer Mass for the deceased.

Strive, then, to persevere in the good work you have begun by your way of life. Do not deviate from the rule of life you have established, or which has been given you as a member of a community. This is how we enter the narrow gate that leads to life. This we should seek to do each day that God gives us. God has given us today and we should rejoice and be glad in it because he has shown us how to live it in his service and for his glory. Help one another do this. That is how we love one another in God and in imitation of Christ.

*Tuesday*

## **FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF PETER**

### **A reflection from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII**

The Apostolic Chair of St. Peter is a wonderful symbol of that unity of the great human family which God wishes to give us. The Church draws many Peoples into unity, or at least into its beginnings. From Jerusalem and Antioch and Rome, the light of Christ is seen to beat most fully upon this “Chair” of Peter. Light is reflected from the words addressed by Jesus to Peter in one of the most beautiful and touching passages in the New Testament. “On this rock I will build my Church... I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Mt.16:18ff).

What is the meaning of the keys entrusted personally to Simon son of John, to “Peter”? Aren’t they a sign that the universal leadership of the earthly Church had been given into his hands? From Jerusalem to Antioch, and then to the heart of the Roman Empire, the way lay open to the Apostle through Christ’s command. Christ is to be preached throughout the world under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the Lord has entrusted the task of maintaining the unity of all in Christ to Peter. To him, the Lord entrusted his sheep and lambs, his flock: “Feed my lambs, feed my sheep!” (Jn.21: 15f).

Peter was to be the leader and shepherd of all, even of other shepherds. He was to lead the flock to Christ in the name of Christ himself. This primacy was to be claimed by all Peter’s successors and acknowledged by the united care of souls on the part of his brother bishops all over the world. From this Chair bishops all over the world are forever consecrated. It must remain One, Holy, Apostolic, and Catholic!

From Christ to Peter and from Peter to every shepherd of the Christian flock, the power of the keys, bestowed from Heaven upon the person of the Roman Pontiff, is handed on. It comes through the bishops and the entire Christian community for the unification and sanctification of humankind as redeemed by Christ’s blood. Think now of Christ’s chosen and reflect on his loving care for all.

St. Matthew tells us that one evening, after a tiring day, Jesus went alone to a hilltop to pray. The boat, with the disciples in it, was on the lake and was blown about by the winds. At nightfall Jesus came upon the waves and called to the disciples: “Take heart! It is I! Don’t be afraid!” Peter responded: “Lord, if it is you command me to come to you on the water.” Jesus’ reply was, “Come!” Peter got out of the boat and tried to get nearer to the divine Master. But the violence of the wind alarmed him and he felt he was sinking. He cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus reached out and caught hold of him. “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

When Jesus speaks to us his words are enough to save us and to give us victory over fear. This is a message for all of us. This is how the Church is led and how those who lead and help others are given strength for their task. We must all come to Jesus. Who but Peter, with all his doubts, can show us how to trust our Lord? That’s what those who follow Peter are charged to do. That is how one feeds the lambs and the sheep—the entire flock of God! Follow your leader. Cry out to Jesus! Let him reach out and save you!

Wednesday

## **A SUPREME WITNESS TO TRUST IN CHRIST**

### **From The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp**

Brothers and sisters, we send you a written account of the martyr, Polycarp, whose witness to the faith sealed, as it were, the persecution and put an end to it. As he entered the arena a voice was heard, "Be strong, Polycarp, and act fearlessly!" No one saw the speaker but the believers present heard the voice. When Polycarp was finally led to the tribunal there was a terrific uproar; people had just heard that he had been arrested. The proconsul asked if he were Polycarp and, when he admitted the fact, tried to persuade him to deny the faith. Polycarp looked sternly at the crowd and looking up to heaven replied: "I have been serving Christ for 86 years and he has done me no wrong; how would I dare to blaspheme the king who has saved me!" The proconsul repeated, "Swear by the Fortune of Caesar!" Polycarp replied, "If you imagine I will swear by the Fortune of Caesar, let me frankly tell you: I am a Christian! If you wish to learn the teaching of Christianity fix a day and let me explain." The proconsul answered: "Talk to the crowd." "You", Polycarp answered, "I consider to be entitled to an explanation for we have been taught to honor, in so far as it doesn't harm anyone, magistrates and authorities appointed by God; but as to the crowd I don't think it would be proper to appeal to them."

"Well", said the proconsul "I have wild beasts and shall have you thrown to them if you don't change your mind." "Call for them", he replied, "to us a change from better to worse is impossible; but it is a noble change to go from what is evil to what is good". Again, the proconsul answered, "If you make little of the beasts, I shall have you consumed by fire unless you change your mind". "The fire that you threaten, Polycarp said, is one that burns for a short time and then goes out; you evidently don't know the fire of the judgment to come and the eternal punishment which awaits the wicked. But why delay? Go ahead and do what you want." As he spoke, he seemed filled with courage and joy, and his face was suffused with beauty. The proconsul was astonished. He sent a herald to announce three times: "Polycarp has confessed to being a Christian!"

The crowd screamed: "This is the teacher of Asia, the destroyer of our gods!" They called upon the minister of public worship to let loose a lion but he told them he couldn't. So they demanded that Polycarp be burned. The crowd helped gather wood and when the pyre was ready Polycarp laid aside his clothes and shoes. When they wanted to nail him to a stake he responded: "Leave me as I am. He who enables me to endure the fire will enable me to remain on the pyre without budging." They just tied him to the stake.

"Lord God, Father of your Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, ... I bless you because you have bestowed on me this day and hour that I may share with your martyrs and rise to eternal life. May I be a rich and pleasing sacrifice in your sight". When he had said the Amen, they lit the fire and a huge flame shot up, but it formed something like a chamber surrounding the martyr's body and he was in its center not burnt but seeming to bake like bread, and we even caught an odor *like incense*. *Since the fire would not burn him, they had him stabbed with a sword and so much blood gushed out that the fire was put out.*

*Thursday*

## **THE SCANDAL OF INCONSISTENCY**

### **A reflection from a Homily by Pope Francis**

The Apostle James speaks expressly about inconsistency in the passage from his Letter proclaimed at today's liturgy. There he takes issue with "inconsistent persons who boast of being Christian, yet take advantage of their employees", the Pope said. James writes: "Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (v. 4).

Turning to the day's Gospel passage from St Mark (9:41-50), Pope Francis said that the Lord speaks strongly against scandal. He says: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin [whoever "scandalizes" them], it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea". The "inconsistent Christian does great harm" and the Lord uses a very powerful image. "The life of a Christian is found on the way of consistency"; and yet we also need to keep before us "the temptation not to be consistent, and to cause great scandal. And scandal kills!".

The consequences are there for all to see. Everyone has heard it said: "I believe in God but not in the Church, because you Christians say one thing and do another!". These are words "we have all heard: I believe in God but not in you!". And this occurs precisely because of "inconsistency", the Pope explained.

He then affirmed that today's two readings help us "to pray for Christian consistency, in order that we may act, feel and think as Christians". He added that "we need to pray in order to live a consistent Christian life, for Christian consistency is a gift of God". It is a gift we should strive to ask for, saying: "Lord, may I be consistent! Lord, may I never give scandal! May I be a person who thinks like a Christian, who feels like a Christian, who acts like a Christian!". And "this is a prayer for all of us today, for we need to be consistent!".

Pope Francis then proposed a very practical example: "If you happen to be with an atheist who tells you that he does not believe in God, you can read him the whole library, where it says that God exists, and where it is proven that God exists, and he will not believe". However, he continued, "if in the presence of this same atheist you witness to a consistent, Christian life, something will begin to work in his heart". And "it will be your witness that brings him the restlessness on which the Holy Spirit works".

The Pope then reminded those present that "all of us, the whole Church" should ask the Lord for "the grace to be consistent". Acknowledging ourselves as sinners, weak and inconsistent, but always ready to ask for the Lord's forgiveness. All of us, in fact, "are able to ask for forgiveness, and God never tires of forgiving". It is important, then, "to have the humility to ask for forgiveness" when we have not been consistent.

In the end, he said, it is a matter of "proceeding forward in life with Christian consistency" by testifying that we believe in Jesus Christ and by acknowledging that we are sinners. But with "the courage to ask for forgiveness when we make mistakes" and "with great fear of giving scandal". Pope Francis concluded by praying that "the Lord may give all of us this grace".

*Friday*

## **GOD IS NOT AN EQUATION**

### **A reflection from a Homily by Pope Francis**

“Jesus is so merciful”, Pope Francis insisted, “he is so great that never, never, never does he close the door to sinners”. You can see this when he asks them: “What did Moses command you? What did Moses command you?”. The answer is that “Moses permitted the writing of an act of repudiation”. And “it’s true, it’s true”. But Jesus responds in this way: “It was because of your hardness of heart that he wrote this rule for you”.

Here, the Pontiff said, “is the fullness of truth, the truth that is powerful and blunt, but there is also human weakness and hardness of heart”. And “Moses, the legislator, did this, but things remain clear: the truth is one thing, while the hardness of heart is another that is the sinful condition of us all”. Therefore, “Jesus leaves the door open here to God’s forgiveness, but at home to the disciples, he repeats the truth: ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery’”. Jesus “states it in a clear and blunt manner: ‘And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery’”.

The Gospel passage speaks to us of “the truths that Jesus gives us, which are full truths, given by God, the Father, which are always this way”. It also shows us “the way”, that is, “the way in which Jesus acts before sinners: with forgiveness, leaving the door open”. And “in this reference to Moses, he leaves a little something for the forgiveness of people who failed to carry out this compromise”. Moreover, even “today, in this world in which we live, with this culture of the provisional, this reality of sin is so strong”.

Jesus, “recalling Moses, tells us that there is hardness of heart, there is sin”. But “you can do something: forgiveness, understanding, accompaniment, integration, the discernment of these cases”; with the understanding that “truth can never be sold, never”. Jesus “is able to speak this truth, which is so great, and at the same time he is forgiving towards sinners, towards the weak”. However, “this small group of enlightened theologians, who fall into their case studies, are both incapable of great horizons and of loving and understanding human weakness”.

“We must walk with these two things that Jesus teaches us: truth and understanding” Pope Francis said. And “this cannot be resolved like a mathematical equation”, but “with flesh itself: that is to say, as a Christian I help that person, I help those marriages that are facing difficulty, that are wounded, on their path to approaching God”. The fact remains that “that is the truth, but this is another truth: we are all sinners, on the road”. And “there is always this work to do: how to help, how to accompany, but also how to teach those who want to get married what the truth is about marriage”.

In conclusion, Pope Francis expressed his hope “that Jesus may teach us to have in our hearts a great adherence to truth and also a great understanding and support for all of our brothers who are in difficulty”. And “this is a gift: it is what the Holy Spirit teaches, not those enlightened doctors who, in order to teach us, need to reduce the fullness of God to a case study and equation”.

*Saturday*

## **THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF GOD'S WORD**

### **A reflection from a text by St. Simeon the New Theologian**

We all believe in the Son of God who is the son of Mary, the ever-virgin and mother of God. As believers, we faithfully welcome the Gospel into our hearts as she did. We confess our belief in words, and we repent our past sins with all our heart. The word which we receive when we believe appears within us as a seed. It does this just as truly as the Word of the Father entered the virgin's womb when she consented to God's request.

Are you amazed when you hear the truth about this awe-inspiring mystery? What we hear is true and its truth is guaranteed by God's inspired word in Scripture confirmed in Jesus Christ. We receive this seed, which is Jesus Christ, in a way that is not bodily—as it was for the virgin—but one that is both spiritual and substantial in us and in her. We hold in our hearts the very one whom the chaste Virgin also received. As St. Paul says: "It is God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, who has shown in our hearts to reveal the knowledge of his Son". He has become wholly substantial in us and wholly real.

Is this really what God meant to say? Recall the text which says, "We contain this treasure in earthenware pots" and in the context, it is the Spirit which is meant. But elsewhere the Lord is also called Spirit: "The Lord is the Spirit". And we also hear that if the words 'the Son of God' are used we are to think of the Spirit and that we should join the Heavenly Father to the Spirit in thought because it is also said concerning the Heavenly Father "God is Spirit".

We have been constantly taught that the Holy Trinity is inseparable and of one and the same substance. We are taught that where the Son is the Father is also, and where the Father is the Spirit is too. And where the Holy Spirit is the whole of the divinity in three persons is—the One God and Father with Son and Spirit and all of the same substance.

It follows that if we wholeheartedly believe and repent ardently, we receive the Word of God in our hearts, as has been said. This is like the Virgin, if of course we bring with us souls that are chaste and pure. Just as the fire of the divinity did not consume the Virgin, since she was supremely pure, so neither does it consume us, if we bring with us chaste and pure hearts. On the contrary, it becomes in us a dew from heaven, a spring of water, as a stream of immortal life.

Are you afraid that you cannot bring such a heart? But that is God's gift to you, as it was to the Virgin. If you have received God's gift by believing and repenting, why should you fear that your heart will not be pleasing to God? God has come to dwell in you by faith and faith has brought forth repentance and these two have brought about an inward transformation that is making you ever more and more chaste and pure.

Why should you hesitate to believe that God is doing in you what God promised? Look within! Do you find faith there? Could you be so hesitant if you were not experiencing the gift of repentance as well? Trust in God's love and gifts. It is transforming you as it did the Virgin.