

THE THIRD WEEK OF EASTER

- Sun. **The Third Sunday of Easter**
May 1 **GROWING IN LOVE FOR JESUS**
A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Mon. **Memorial of St Athanasius, Bishop, Doctor**
2 **GOD'S LOVE WORKS THROUGH US**
A reflection from Three Discourse Against the Arians by St. Athanasius
- Tues. **Feast of Ss Philip & James, Apostles**
3 **CHRIST MODELS OUR PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY**
A reflection developed from the Teaching of the Apostles
- Wed. **Wednesday of the 3rd Week of Easter**
4 **LIVING COMMUNION WITH CHRIST**
A reflection taken from The Mystery of the Church by Fr. Ives Congar
- Thurs. **Thursday of the 3rd Week of Easter**
5 **THE SAVING ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN CHRIST**
A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine
- Fri. **Friday of the 3rd Week of Easter**
6 **GOD'S PLAN FOR THE WORLD'S SALVATION**
A reflection from Against Heresies by St. Irenaeus
- Sat. **Saturday of the 3rd Week of Easter**
7 **REVERENCING THE SACRAMENT OF JESUS' BODY & BLOOD**
A reflection developed from a sermon of St. John Chrysostom

Sunday

GROWING IN LOVE FOR JESUS

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Augustine

“Jesus stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish” (Jn.21). The Lord appeared to his disciples in Galilee after his resurrection. Today we hear the story of his questioning of Peter. Three times Peter had denied knowing Jesus, and now Jesus requires of him a three-fold declaration of love. Now that Christ had been raised to unending life, he comes to raise Peter to a new life as well. Notice, moreover, that each time Peter declares his love for Jesus he is told to feed Jesus’ flock; i.e., to care for those whom Christ is calling to be his own as he called Peter.

Is there any advantage for Christ as a result of Peter’s renewed love for him? Isn’t the same thing true in our case? If Christ loves you then you gain a great advantage, but what is the advantage for Christ? Pause and ask yourself how you actually love Christ. He told us how in speaking to Peter: *“Do you love me? Then feed my sheep”*. He repeats it three times. We can’t miss the importance Jesus gives to loving all he calls to be with him forever. Remember how Jesus describes judgment: Whatever you did, or failed to do, for the least of my brothers and sisters you did or didn’t do for me!

No wonder the Lord has only one question: Do you love me? Each time we say we do, he responds with the command to feed his sheep. As we love one another so we love Christ! In Christ, we encounter the Eternal God who became human. We knew him first as a true member of our race. As God in human form, he did many wonderful signs, and as a human being he suffered much from what other human beings did. Yet however, much suffering people inflicted on him, he responded with merciful love. We killed him and he returned from the dead still loving and caring for us. The Risen Christ lived with us for forty days and ascended into Heaven before the eyes of his disciples, leaving the command to proclaim the good news of God’s never-ending love to all.

We believe all these things, even though we never saw them. We believe that we are commanded to love Christ, our Lord, and to obey his command to go to all peoples on earth and proclaim the good news of resurrection and life everlasting. Why is it good news? Because it tells us the Kingdom of God is among us and the love for one another which marks off citizens of that Kingdom is beginning to spread. Listen: *“If you don’t love the brother or sister that you see, how can you love the God whom you can’t see?”* We show our love for our shepherd by loving his sheep. The sheep are members of Christ and of Christ’s body as really as the human body he took upon himself was and is really his own.

Recall the words of the Baptist: *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”* How could a lamb bear such a burden? He shows how strong he is by overcoming death. He has given us the Spirit, through whom that strength came to Him. You have received that Spirit. What reason can you have to be afraid of carrying out your Lord’s command? May nothing be dearer to us than Christ Our Lord! Let us love him with all our hearts! Then all will know they are loved both by God and by all of those who follow Christ. The world is filled with people who love us and seek to care for us.

Monday

GOD'S LOVE WORKS THROUGH US

A reflection taken from Three Discourses Against the Arians by St. Athanasius

When God came among us from Mary for the abolition of sin the Son of God took flesh and became a human being, and in that flesh, he suffered for us. He did this in order that we might all believe that the Godhead dwelt in flesh. Being God, He had a body and used this as an instrument for our sakes. On account of this, the properties of the flesh are said to be his. So he hungered, thirsted, suffered, was tired, and all the rest. On the other hand, the works proper to the Word himself, such as raising the dead, restoring sight to the blind, curing the woman with an issue of blood were done as works of the Godhead but through his body. The Godhead was in the flesh which was God's.

The prophet Isaiah said very appropriately that he "bore" our infirmities, and he himself "bore" our sins so that it might be clear that he was not external to the body. That would leave human beings still subject to death and we were redeemed from our infirmities and filled with righteousness. Thus, when the flesh suffered the Word wasn't external to it. That is why the passion is said to be just as much a human work as a divine work of the Father's love. In the body, the Lord did his works. That is why he said, *"If I don't do the works of the Father don't believe in me, but if I do them believe the works even if you don't believe in me. Know that the Father is in me and I am in Him."*

When there was a need to free Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, He stretched out a human hand and stopped the fever by divine power. In the case of Lazarus, he spoke in a human voice but as God raised Lazarus from the dead. These things were done because he had a body and not in appearance only but in truth. It was appropriate that in putting on human flesh, the Lord should put on the whole with the affections proper to human nature. The affections of the body were absolutely proper to it and the body was proper to Him so that the affections of the body were too, though without altering in any way the Godhead. To the one to whom the bodily affections were attributed—such as being condemned, being scourged, thirsting and the cross and death—so too were the triumph and the grace. All such affections are ascribed appropriately to the Lord.

As God worked through human flesh when he made it his own when the Son of God became incarnate, so does God, in a different but no less real way, work through us and our flesh. It is really God who sends the Spirit into our hearts and souls to make us his instruments for saving and loving mankind. This is what he does when he divinizes us. God unites what is human to himself that he might save humankind and deification might be certain. He saves human persons by uniting them to himself. Salvation is not something outside us that happens to us. We are saved by being made one with the real and true Godhead. It is this Godhead who came to us in the Son of God and put on our humanity to show us what it will mean for us to put on, by grace, his divinity. God really works through us for salvation as truly as through Christ. This has happened through Christ's incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection. The loving deeds that you do today are God's loving deeds done in and through you. Rejoice that this great wonder is done daily in and through you.

Tuesday

CHRIST MODELS OUR PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY

A reflection from the Teaching of the Apostles

Everyone who learns a craft has to watch a master. One sees how the skills of the craft are exercised. This kind of learning enables one to carry out the work of the craft successfully. One copies the master in one's work and does it in a way the master will approve. But if a person shirks some aspect of the task? Such a one is not a good craftsperson.

Our Lord is the Master of the craft of leading others to God. He has called us to continue the work which he begun. We have our Lord for master and teacher. We must imitate his teaching and way of life as fully as we are able. For instance, He left riches and favor and power and glory and accepted poverty and even parted with Mary, his blessed mother, and with his brethren, and finally with His very life itself. He endured persecution even unto the cross and death.

These things he endured for our sake, that he might redeem those from the bonds of the Old Law and from Gentile worship of idols as well as from all ungodliness. He did this so that we might share his inheritance.

If, then, he suffered so for our sake, to redeem us who believe in Him, and if He was not ashamed to do this, why don't we imitate Him in all these things, including his sufferings? He gives endurance. He does it that we may be delivered from the eternal death of fire.

He endured everything for our sake, but we do it also for our own sake. Or has Our Lord any need to prove that we will suffer for Him? Rather it is this alone that he wants; he would prove the love that comes from our faith and our free will. Let's part with our parents and our kinfolk and with all that is in this world, and even with our lives for his sake and for one another's sake.

We must, indeed, pray that we don't fall when we are tempted. If we should be called to martyrdom, we can by God's grace confess when interrogated and when we suffer we can endure it. If we are afflicted, we can rejoice, and if persecuted we needn't grieve. In doing these things, we deliver ourselves from hell, and, equally important, we teach those who are young in the faith and those who are still hearers to do the same.

This is the pastoral responsibility God gives to all who follow Christ. To follow Christ is to live for God and one another. The Lord lived and died for us. Can we do less for one another? If we fail in faith towards the Lord, we deny him through infirmity of body. Often, as our Lord said, "*the spirit is willing and ready but the body is weak*". If we fail, we not only destroy ourselves but kill the brethren who see our denial and fall because of it. They will think that they have been made disciples of a defective teaching. But if we lead them to stumble, we will have to render an account for them, as well as for ourselves. We will render it to the Lord on the day of Judgment. If you deny the hope that you have in Our Lord, you have destroyed your life in God. It is our responsibility to one another, as to God, not to do this.

Wednesday

LIVING COMMUNION WITH CHRIST

A reflection taken from The Mystery of the Church by Fr. Ives Congar

“Jesus said to the crowds, I am the living bread which has come down from heaven; anyone who eats this bread will live forever”. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the redemptive mystery of the cross and the sacrament of the unity of the Mystical Body. By its grace, this body is brought into being. In this sacrament, we receive Christ as our food. We thus unite ourselves in a special union similar to that of a living being and its food. Ordinarily, a living being assimilates its food and makes it part of its own substance. But here the roles are reversed. We feed on the eucharistic bread and wine but all the power of assimilation resides in Christ and in feeding us he unites us and incorporates us into his life.

In his Confessions, St. Augustine pointed out that Christ declares, *“Eat me and grow in stature; but it is not you who will change me into yourself, as you do bodily food, but it is I who will change you into me.”* (Book VII, 10) The union with Christ which results, an infinitely mysterious one, is like the union which takes place in a living thing. It is both an incorporation and an intensification of life. As we have seen, our Lord compares in a most explicit way the union he wishes to establish between us and himself, especially through the eucharist, to the unity existing between him and his Heavenly Father. But this is a unity of perfect life, a substantial unity of life.

The Eucharist is, then, the perfect sacrament of our incorporation with Christ. Theologians are unanimous in holding that its special effect is to bring about the unity of the Mystical Body. By a special increase of grace and of living faith, it incorporates us with Christ precisely inasmuch as it takes us into the supreme act of love by which Christ offered himself for us on the cross, so as to bring together into one all God's children, scattered far and wide.

We may not communicate in isolation from our brothers and sisters. We communicate in the true Body of Christ only by communicating at the same time in his Mystical Body. The “breaking of the Bread” brings with it, inseparably, the presence of Christ uniting us to that multitude which shares in Christ's redemption. The one bread makes us one body; though we are numerically many. Here we have the entire mystery of the Mystical Body. But it is not a mere fact but a call and command and promise. Living the unity of this Body is salvation.

Thursday

THE SAVING ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN CHRIST

A reflection from a sermon by St. Augustine

Faith assures us that we are all members of Christ's Body, the Church. So, you are a member of a community whose head is Christ. He died for us and rose again out of love. You have come to place your hope in this Risen Divine Master and have come to understand that your spiritual health depends upon the bond of love that makes all believers one body under the one head who is Christ. Reflect on the fact that our health depends on our bond with Christ in his body.

Anyone whose love has grown cold is an unhealthy member of Christ's body. But the One who has already raised our head from death certainly has the power to heal his members as well. The fearful possibility is that one might cut oneself off completely from Christ. Even sin doesn't separate one from Christ's body, provided that one remains attached to it. The vital thing, then, is not to lose one's hope in Christ and in his Body and its other members. A limb, no matter how sick, can always hope to recover health. If cut off completely it has no hope.

As St. Paul reminds us, the members of a body—and especially of the Body of Christ, all help one another make each one's special contribution to the welfare of all. One of these contributions is helping unhealthy members. This is God's will. Think of the following facts.

Christ is the head of the Church and the Church is Christ's body. The whole Christ is the head and body together. We have a head who intercedes for us in heaven. He is Risen, immortal, sinless and seated at God's right hand. Christ is at this very moment offering himself in atonement for our sins. He does that forever. His goal is that all rise from death, as he has, and let themselves be transformed, as he has. That will make us able to follow him to glory in Heaven. Where the head is there the members will be too. So, we must never give up hope! We shall be where our head is.

You all know how much Christ, our head, loves us. He labors with us here on earth so long as the Church's labors have not ended. He continues to be hungry and thirsty and without clothes and an outcast and sick and in prison. He has told us that wherever members of his body suffer he suffers too. He also helps them. He does this, especially through the other members of the body! If you have been given a special ability or possession, it has been given so you can help others. That holds true, especially for those who are unhealthy and have in some measure separated themselves from other members of the body. We are called to reach out to them and find ways to help them with spiritual as well as bodily health.

We all long to hear Christ say: "*Come, blessed of my Father, and receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you since the beginning of the world*". To whom does Christ say this? To those who reach out to help other members of the one body of which we are all members. That is the task of love. God is love. Let us never cease to care for one another in every way we can. Let us never separate ourselves from the loving which is the life-blood of Christ's Body.

Friday

GOD'S PLAN FOR THE WORLD'S SALVATION

A reflection from Against Heresies by St. Irenaeus

We are saved body and soul by Christ. He does this especially by feeding us with his blood given in the Eucharistic chalice and his body given in the Eucharistic bread we break. But there is no blood or body without the veins, the flesh and all the rest of what makes up a human being. The Word of God actually became human and redeemed us with his own human blood and body. Keep in mind what St. Paul tells us: *"In Him, through his blood, we have been redeemed and our sins have been forgiven"*.

We are Christ's members and we are nourished by all Creation as God's gift to us. It is God who causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall, just as he declared it is his blood that we receive from the chalice that is creation! Where would we get nourishment except from God's creation? Our chalice mixes the wine with the bread, and the word of God makes these elements the body and blood of Christ. God makes us live and grow through them. Indeed, through them, God gives us an eternal life.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul says that *"we are members of Christ's body"*, of his flesh and bones. He is not speaking only of a spiritual and incorporeal person, for spirits don't have flesh and bones, as we know Christ has. Paul is speaking of a real human body composed of flesh, sinews, and bones and nourished by a creation that is made Christ's own body and blood. All this receives nourishment from the bread and wine that are Christ's body and blood.

A small slip taken from a vine is planted in the ground and, in due time, it becomes itself a vine and bears fruit. A grain of wheat is planted in the ground and gradually decays so that it may spring up and be multiplied by the hidden action of God's Spirit. The Spirit of God sustains all things. Whatever is alive dies in some way, and, by God's power, then rises up again to produce new life. The Spirit of God multiplies all hidden things.

It is the wisdom of God that created all things that sustains them and places them at our service. Some receive God's word and become eucharist. God sends his Word into his creation to transform it and prepares it to be raised up as a new and ever-enduring creation. Our bodies will be buried in the earth but God will raise them up to serve him and praise him always. The word of God will raise all up to give God glory forever. God will clothe mortal nature with immortality and endow our corruptible selves with incorruptibility.

God doesn't save just a part of us but saves and preserves all that is part of us—body and spirit. We are to rejoice in all this and make it a part of that which leads all that comes from God back to God. God's power is shown most perfectly in weakness. Let us rejoice in what is strong and in what is weak. All is to give glory to God. His glory lasts forever.

Saturday

REVERENCING THE SACRAMENT OF JESUS' BODY & BLOOD

A reflection developed from a sermon of St. John Chrysostom

Sages from the East came and paid homage to Christ's body, even though it was a baby's body. Foreigners who did not worship the One True God left their homes by reason of an interpretation of the appearance of a new star in heaven and came to worship Jesus in great fear and trembling. We are "citizens of Heaven", Scripture tells us. We should imitate what the Sages did. They only saw Christ as a baby. They didn't see anything of what we see. Yet they approached Jesus with profound awe and reverence. You see him on an altar, offered by a chosen priest, and upon offerings of bread and wine you see by faith the Holy Spirit bountifully poured out upon Christ. You, unlike the sages, see more than Christ's body; you know Christ's power and through him you know God's entire plan of salvation. You have been carefully instructed and so you know of the marvels he performed.

Well, then, are we awakening in ourselves a feeling of awe and reverence even greater than the eastern sages showed? Coming to the sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood is not something to do casually or thoughtlessly. Yet failing to share in this sacramental meal is spiritual hunger and death. This is food that strengthens us. It emboldens us to speak freely to our God and of our God. It is hope, salvation, light and life for us. If we go to the next world strengthened by this sacrifice we enter its gates with perfect confidence, as though one were protected all over by armor of steel covered with gold. But why do I speak of the next world? It is because this sacrament transforms earth into Heaven for you.

Would you like to throw open the gates of Heaven, or even of the Heaven of the Heavens? If you did and then looked through them what would you see? You would see Heaven's most precious possession! But I can point to it right here on earth. I needn't point to angels or archangels or to the Heaven of the Heavens but only to their Lord—the Lord of all. Here on earth, we gaze on what is most precious of all. We not only gaze on it but we touch it, we even eat it, we take it in our hands and we carry it with us to our homes when we leave the church.

What is essential in our reverence toward Christ present with us and for us? It is essential that we cleanse ourselves inwardly, cleanse our souls and not just our bodies. It is essential that we ask Christ to send upon us the Spirit that it may cleanse us in ways we cannot cleanse ourselves. What we need to do is cast away all sin. What we need to do is let the love of Christ enter our hearts and use our entire selves in loving even as he has loved us. That is how one approaches the Body and Blood of Christ. It is given for our strengthening in saving faith and love. It is given for sharing of faith and showing love for our neighbor. It is given so we may become other Christs. Christ gave us his flesh and blood to eat in order to deepen our love for Him. There should be burning within us a fire of love and longing proportionate to the magnitude of the graces we receive here.