

# **THE FIFTH WEEK IN LENT**

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- Sun.      **THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT**  
April 3    **The Angelus Message of Pope Francis**  
              **on the Fifth Sunday of Lent in 2017**
- Mon.      **Monday of the Fifth Week of Lent**  
4            **A MEDITATION: I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**  
              **By Thomas a Kempis**
- Tues.     **Tuesday of the Fifth Week of Lent**  
5            **SERPENTS THAT BITE US & THE MEDICINE OF FAITH**  
              **A reflection from a Gospel Commentary by the Venerable Bede**
- Wed.      **Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent**  
6            **FOLLOWING JESUS INTO THE WILDERNESS**  
              **A reflection from a sermon by Bishop Alonso de Orozco**
- Thurs.    **Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent**  
7            **PERSEVERING IN THE WAY OF FAITH**  
              **A reflection taken from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom**
- Fri.        **Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent**  
8            **THE LOVE WHICH IS ALWAYS LOYAL**  
              **A reflection excerpted from a text by Laurin Wenig**
- Sat.        **Saturday of the Fifth Week of Lent**  
9            **JESUS CHRIST FULFILLS PROMISES**  
              **A reflection derived from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom**

**Sunday**

## **The Angelus Message of Pope Francis on the Fifth Sunday of Lent in 2017**

The episode of the adulterous woman have two contrasting attitudes: that of the scribes and the Pharisees on the one hand, and that of Jesus on the other. The former want to condemn the woman because they feel they are the guardians of the Law and of its faithful implementation. Jesus, on the other hand, wants to save her because he personifies God's mercy which redeems by forgiving and renews by reconciling.

While Jesus is teaching in the Temple, the scribes and the Pharisees bring him a woman who has been caught in adultery. They place her in the middle and ask Jesus if they should stone her as the Law of Moses prescribes. The Evangelist explains that they asked the question in order "to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him". One might think that this was their purpose: behold the iniquity of these people - a 'no' to the stoning would have been a pretext to accuse Jesus of disobeying the Law; a 'yes' instead, to report him to the Roman Authority which had reserved such sentences to itself and did not permit lynching by the people. And Jesus must respond.

Jesus' interrogators are confined to narrow legalism and want to oblige the Son of God to conform to their perspective of judgment and condemnation. However, he did not come into the world to judge and condemn, but rather to save and offer people a new life. And how does Jesus react to this test? First, he remains silent for some time and then he bends down to write on the ground with his finger, almost as if to remind them that the only Legislator and Judge is God who had inscribed the Law on stone. And then he says: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her". In this way, Jesus appeals to the conscience of those men: they felt they were the 'champions of justice', but he reminds them of their own condition as sinners, due to which they cannot claim the right to life or death over one of their fellow human beings. Then, one after the other, beginning with the eldest, those who were more fully aware of their own failings, they all went away, and desisted from stoning the woman. This episode also invites us to be aware that we are sinners, and to let fall from our hands the stones of denigration, of condemnation, of gossip, which at times we would like to cast at others. When we speak ill of others, we are throwing stones, we are like these people.

In the end only Jesus and the woman are left there in the middle: "misery with mercy", as Saint Augustine says. Jesus is the only one without fault, the only one who could throw a stone at her, but he does not do so, because God "does not want the death of the wicked but that the wicked convert and live" (cf. Ez 33:11). And Jesus sends the woman on her way with these wonderful words: "Go and do not sin again". And thus Jesus opens a new path to her, created by mercy, a path that requires her commitment not to sin again. It is an invitation that applies to each one of us. When Jesus forgives us, he always opens a new path go forward. In this Lenten Season, we are called to recognize ourselves as sinners and to ask God for forgiveness. And, while forgiveness reconciles us and gives us peace, it lets us start again, renewed. Every true conversion is oriented toward a new future, a new life, a beautiful life, a life free from sin, a generous life. Let us not be afraid to ask Jesus for forgiveness because he opens the door to this new life. May the Virgin Mary help us to bear witness to all of the merciful love of God, who through Jesus, forgives us and renders our lives new, by always offering us new possibilities.

*Monday*

## **A MEDITATION: I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

**By Thomas a Kempis**

The one who follows me, says Christ, our Savior, does not walk in darkness but has the light of life. These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by them we are told to follow his teachings and his manner of living if we wish to be truly enlightened and delivered from all blindness of heart.

Let all the effort of our heart be from now on to have our meditation wholly fixed on the life of Christ, for his holy teachings are of more power and strength than the words of all the angels and saints. One who through grace has the inner eye of his soul opened to the genuine grasp of the Gospels of Christ will find in them hidden manna.

It often happens that those who hear the Gospels find little sweet-ness in them. The reason is that they do not have the spirit of Christ. So if we desire to have a true understanding of the Gospels we must exert ourselves to conform our life as nearly as we can to that of Jesus. What avail is it to anyone to reason about the high, secret mysteries of the Trinity if one lacks humility and so displeases the Holy Trinity? Truly, it avails nothing. Deeply inquisitive reasoning does not make anyone holy or righteous, but a good life makes one beloved by God. I would rather feel compunction of heart for my sins than merely know the definition of compunction. If you know all the books of the Bible merely by rote and all the sayings of the philosophers by heart, what will it profit you without grace and charity?

All that is in the world is emptiness apart from love and service of God. This is the most noble and the most excellent wisdom that can be in any creature: By valuing the world little and drawing daily nearer and nearer to the Kingdom of Heaven! It is, then, a great vanity to labor inordinately for worldly riches that will shortly perish or to covet honor or any inordinate pleasure or fleshly delight. How great a vanity it is to desire a long life and to care little for a good life. Keep the common proverb in your mind: The eye is never satisfied or pleased with seeing any worldly thing, nor the ear with hearing. Work, therefore, to withdraw the love of your soul from all things that are visible and to turn it to the things that are invisible. Turn to the things of God.

*Tuesday*

## **SERPENTS THAT BITE US AND THE MEDICINE OF FAITH**

**A reflection from a Gospel Commentary by the Venerable Bede**

With the wonderful skill he has in imparting heavenly teaching, Our Lord shows us the Law's spiritual meaning. He recalls an ancient history and explains its symbolic reference to his own passion and to our salvation. The Book of Numbers relates that the Israelites grumbled against the Lord and Moses and fiery serpents came among them. When the people cried out Moses prayed for them and the Lord commanded him to make a bronze serpent and set it up as a sign. Those bitten had only to look at it and live.

Now the bites of fiery serpents are for us temptations to sin and to sin in a way that brings spiritual death. The people who grumbled against the Lord felt the burning that is foolish and futile desire. They were made sick in this way so that by a physical pain they might realize how much inward damage they suffered due to their grumbling at not having what they wanted. Those bitten by such serpents are healed by our Redeemer. The kingdom of death and sin is conquered only by faith in him. It replaces the foolish and futile longing with what will truly satisfy and give life fullness.

The sins that drag both soul and body to destruction are well described as serpents. Consider that a serpent persuaded our first parents, who were immortal, to commit the sin through which they became subject to death. Our Lord who came in the likeness of sinful flesh is rightly portrayed as the bronze serpent because there is in him nothing that leads one away from genuine life and immortality. He is in a sense the same as we are but there is in him nothing poisonous or hurtful or causing a burning longing for mere passing things. The redeemer of human kind clothed himself not in sinful flesh but in a flesh "like" the sinful. Thus by suffering death on the cross he delivered those who believe in him from all sin and even from death itself. He teaches us to desire what is above and not what is merely here below.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. As those who looked at the bronze serpent were for a time healed of physical sickness and death so those who gaze upon the mystery of the Lord's passion, who believe, confess and sincerely imitate him are saved completely and for ever from the death of both soul and body. Accordingly, the text continues: So that all who believe in him may not perish but have eternal life. These words make it clear that whoever believes in Christ not only escapes the pain of punishment but also receives a life that is eternal.

See the difference between symbol and truth. The symbol prolongs this temporal life but truth gives a life that will be endless. Yet it requires the truths our minds grasp be given fitting practical expression by confessing the true faith and living devout, disciplined lives. Those who grumble reject their cross and so reject true faith. Those living by the discipline of faith find nothing to grumble about because they see that it is by faith that all is made to work for their good and the good of their brethren.

*Wednesday*

## **FOLLOWING JESUS INTO THE WILDERNESS**

**A reflection from a sermon by Bishop Alonso de Orozco**

Beloved, I beg you, let us accompany Christ in seeking out the wilderness of repentance as quickly as we can. Let us be ashamed to go on spending our time seeking pleasure and diversion, especially in things like gluttony, when our Savior is engaged in prayer and in fasting. Recall the soldier, Uriah, when King David asked him why he hadn't gone down to his home while in Jerusalem: "The ark of God dwells in tents and my Lord Joab is in camp fighting against the enemy", so should I indulge in ordinary pleasures? What about us? Shall we apply ourselves to prayer and fasting or to ordinary pleasure seeking?

We know that Christ Jesus, who is the ark of God, and in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of the Heavenly Father, is in battle with the devil in a kind of wilderness. Shall we take our rest and seek ordinary delights? We need to bravely resist the temptation to do this. We must say: "Not on bread alone does a person live, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God". We surely have to rely on the One who gives food to all who call upon him, and doesn't even forget sparrows and crows when they call out for what they need.

We can perform all our actions for the glory of God. We can do everything in praise of our Creator. We must not tempt God, the Most Good. Scripture tells us, "You shall not tempt the Lord, your God". We must remember the word, "Whoever loves danger will perish in it". If we keep these truths in mind we will be able to escape not only ordinary dangers but the vainglory of thinking ourselves secure in God's love, no matter what we do.

A wicked king of Babylon erected a golden statue and called all to worship it. That is an image of the devil, the master of all who would follow their own will and convenience rather than seek the Lord and fear him. We would adore a monster if we became this sort of person. We have to imitate the courage of the three young men who refused to worship the devil or his many images. As Jesus said to the devil: "The Lord your God shall you adore, and only God shall you serve".

Those three brave young men chose to enter a fiery furnace rather than worship such an image. Do you believe that if you follow them an angel of the Lord will come to you and make that furnace into a place where a moist and gentle breeze of God's goodness blows? The fire won't be able to harm you. Instead you will claim the victory over the enemy and sing with one heart and voice unwearied praise and thanksgiving to Christ our true Lord. He can rescue us from all danger. By his gift of grace, he has cast down the enemy and his pride. He will raise us up to heavenly glory. So let us bravely follow him into our own wilderness and then watch him overcome in us all evil attractions and grow in love of our God and of one another.

*Thursday*

## **PERSEVERING IN THE WAY OF FAITH IN GOD**

**A reflection taken from a homily by St. John Chrysostom**

We have to persevere patiently in the course that faith has set us on and not let ourselves grow faint or discouraged. St Paul urges us: "Let's run the race that lies before us". Who will give us the example we need? Paul continues, "Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection". Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus means that we observe his example and follow it. In arts and athletics, the skill of an instructor is impressed on the minds of students as they watch, but then they must practice what they have seen. This is what we have to do if we want to run the race of life well. It is the only way to keep on a straight course towards our goal.

What is implied in these instructions? Surely, they tell us that Christ has given us faith and that we owe its impulses within us to his inspirations. He tells us, as he told his first disciples, "You didn't choose me; it was I who chose you." If Christ has given our faith its first impetus, we can be sure he will direct us to its goal. "He endured the cross and thought nothing of its shame for the sake of the joy that lay ahead." The Gospel records Jesus' own statement that the prince of this world was on his way but would find that he had no power over Jesus. Jesus, however, had the power to lay down his life for the Heavenly Father. If we are to follow Christ, we must bravely endure all the trials we encounter, and for love's sake as he himself did.

Scripture says that Christ endured the cross thinking not of its pain or shame but of what lay beyond. Christ chose an ignominious death, and he chose it in full freedom. He was not subject to sin and so he did not act because he feared death. His example shows us how to face disgrace bodily and with peace of heart. Let me remind you of the goal that Christ achieved. "He has taken his seat at the right hand of God."

You see the prize that is to be won. St. Paul puts it as follows: "God has exalted him and given him the name that is above all others, so that at the name of Jesus every knee may bow". He is speaking in a human way about something that can't be expressed in human language. But even if there were no such reward to be won, wouldn't Christ's example be enough to persuade us to endure all trials willingly? We are, in fact, told that rewards do lie ahead of us, and that they are no ordinary honors but realities of such greatness that we don't even know how to describe them.

Whenever, then, we have to suffer some disgrace or pain we have only to think of Christ and remember how many insults and rejections filled his life. He was continually hearing statements that he was mad or possessed by the prince of devils or a deceiver or magician. And these insults came from the very people among whom he went about doing good. He performed miracles for them. He revealed the works of God to them. He has done as much for us. Be of good heart. Marvelous things lie in store.

*Friday*

## **THE LOVE WHICH IS ALWAYS LOYAL**

**A reflection excerpted from a text by Laurin Wenig**

“Many good deeds have I shown you from my Father. For which of them do you stone me?” Jesus offers us the cup of my blood of the new and everlasting covenant. ‘Covenant’ is a word we hear at every Eucharist. It points to the solemn commitment we make to God and God to us. It means God will take care of us. It means we will ever be loyal and faithful to God. It means we will live by the laws exemplified in the command: Love one another.

There is another word that hovers between the lines of every sentence that talks about our covenant with God. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word is ‘hesed’ and it means covenant-loyalty lived as love. This is the kind of love that God shows Israel and shows us, and that we are to show to one another. This is the love Jesus kept talking about during his ministry.

This kind of love consists of actions done for others—what we often call “good works”. These are the kinds of activities that God does for us in covenant-love. Long ago God sent Jeremiah to remind people of their obligation to God and to one another to be faithful and loyal to the covenant. It was not an easy mission. People didn’t want to be reminded of covenant obligations. They made his life miserable. God sent Jesus to accomplish those same goals. The Gospels continually describe Jesus healing the sick, telling the truth, bringing light to the blind and confused, bringing forgiveness to the sinner, bringing life out of death.

Everyone who saw this should have seen God at work. Because some didn’t, Jesus had to ask, “For which of these good deeds do you stone me?” They planned to arrest Jesus in order to kill him. Their ancestors had tried to do the same thing to Jeremiah. Truth has powerful enemies.

Throughout the Gospel of John, we see how those whose hearts are open to the word of Jesus come to believe in Him. It takes time to figure out the difference between the influence of the “world” and the way of Jesus. The truth will win out.

That is what Lent is about, growing in faith, wanting more of Jesus and his life-giving love. That way we can continue to do the good works, the covenant works of loyalty to God in Jesus, that mark one off as belonging to God. How often do we hear the word ‘covenant’ without thinking about its meaning? It is not enough to support one another in pure faith, that is too intellectual. We need to bind ourselves to one another in good works.

May our good works increase in number and become ever more sacrificial as we move closer to the final sign of the covenant—the Cross and Good Friday. It is only a week away. Amen.

*Saturday*

## **JESUS CHRIST FULFILLS PROMISES**

**A reflection from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom**

We need endurance to do God's will. That means we need endurance to obtain what God has promised us. Are we on the very threshold of victory? Are we through with the contests, the imprisonments, afflictions, confiscations and all the rest? In that case, we are standing here waiting for our reward. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us, "In a little while he who is to come will be here; he will not delay". The Scriptures are used to comfort people and answer their questions about when the Lord will come again. "The righteous shall live by faith; no one who shrinks back in fear is pleasing." This is not only an exhortation but a warning. Another quote comes: "We are not among those who shrink back and are lost; we have the faith that leads to life."

These words, directed to those for whom the Letter to the Hebrews was written, can just as well be used for us. We can get downcast and tempted to lose heart. People find it hard to endure the sight of the wicked flourishing when they aren't having success. Perhaps some of us long for vengeance and want punishment to be inflicted on sinners while they are rewarded for the pains they have born.

Well, I too can assure the listless and negligent that there will be a time for punishment. The Lord certainly will come. The resurrection's consequences are not endlessly far off but in some sense "close at hand". How do I know this? I do not claim to have the knowledge from the prophets. Christ himself foretold things and if these predictions had proven false then we wouldn't need to believe what he foretold about the Last Days coming soon. But all the foretellings have come true. Why should we hesitate in regard to the Last Days?

Christ foretold the fall of Jerusalem. He declared that the city would suffer a defeat unlike any that had happened before. This prediction has been fulfilled. He foretold a time of great distress, which indeed has come. He described how the Gospel would spread abroad like a mustard plant growing from a tiny seed. In the world, he warned us, we would have affliction but should take heart. He said he had overcome the world, meaning that no one would gain mastery over us, and all this has come true, as we can see. He declared that the "gates of hell" would not prevail against the Church, in spite of persecution, and that no one would extinguish the light of the Gospel.

Thus, experience bears witness to the fulfillment of these prophetic words. So why are we distressed that the words about the Last Day have not yet been fulfilled? What is it that we want? Do we want our pleasures to take precedence over God's plans to bring many more into his Kingdom? When God tells us that we will be rewarded we have no good reason to doubt. I can't tell you when it will happen exactly. What we must do is open ourselves wholly to God's will, no matter what it entails. Scripture tells us that, as God sees things, there is no delay.