

# **FOURTH WEEK IN EASTERTIDE**

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- Sun.    **The Fourth Sunday in Easter Season**  
May 8    **WHAT JESUS GIVES US**  
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- Mon.    **Monday of the 4<sup>th</sup> Week in Eastertide**  
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          A reflection by St. Cyril of Alexandria
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          A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Romano Guardini

Sunday

## WHAT JESUS GIVES US

A reflection by Abbot Anscar Vonier

*“Jesus said, “The sheep who belong to me listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life!”* At many places in Scripture, the metaphor of a shepherd and flock is used to help us understand vital truths. Its primary meaning has little to do with ruling or our response to someone placed over us. In the classical world, kings were sometimes compared with shepherds but that isn't how Christ uses the metaphor. What a shepherd does primarily is to see that sheep get the sort of food, the nourishment, that suits their needs. How does Christ nourish you? That's the question placed before us.

If we follow Our Lord as sheep follow their shepherd, we will have all we need to grow into eternal life. No one will be able to take us away from Christ unless we deliberately stop following him. Listen once more to today's Scripture: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them life everlasting and they will never perish because no one can take them away from me. Those the Father has given me overcome everything because the Father is greater than all others and no one can snatch anything out of the Father's hand! I and the Father are one.”* Those who follow Christ show themselves the best and most faithful and most enthusiastic followers anyone ever had. Why?

It is because Christ never disappoints those who follow him! Think of all the merely human leaders who have badly disappointed those who followed them. They have led people astray in all sorts of ways. That means they haven't led them to life, let alone to a new life. Christ always nourishes us with what leads to real and full life, and a life that never ends. The only condition is that we accept what Christ gives us and that we learn to seek nothing more or less than this.

At one point some Jewish leaders confronted Jesus and wanted to know why he wasn't feeding them what they wanted. *“It was winter, and the time of the Feast of the Dedication and Jesus was walking in Solomon's Portico in the Temple area. The Jewish leaders gathered around him and asked: How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you really are the Messiah, tell us so in plain words!”* They wanted a certain kind of Messiah and Jesus wasn't that kind of leader. That is why he hadn't told them he was the Messiah because he wasn't what they were seeking. Who do you seek? Do you want a leader who will try to nourish you with what the world around us thinks will satisfy us?

But if we want to know whether Jesus is truly the leader of the people who has been sent by God to lead them to his New Kingdom, his response is that he is. But then he tells us something that is a bit frightening. If we don't want what Jesus offers us then we aren't his sheep. We face a stark choice! Is Jesus himself your nourishment? Do you want God as made present to us in Jesus? Then listen to his voice and no other. If you don't find what you want in Jesus you have to admit you're looking for a different shepherd. At Easter time we are shown, again and again, what Jesus really offers. He teaches us to want God more than anyone else and to want to love others as Jesus has. That is what is to give us the strength to walk our path of life, day by day.

Monday

## OUR KINSHIP WITH JESUS

### A reflection by St. Cyril of Alexandria

The mark of Christ's sheep is their enthusiasm for listening to him and then following him obediently. The sin of those who are not Christ's is an unwillingness to listen and follow where He leads. Those who "hear" God, and so follow God, are known to God. More, to be known and to know God in the way Jesus knows God is to become God's kindred and child. When Jesus says, "*I know mine!*" he is talking about the spiritual-mystical kinship that makes us like him. He leads us to love God about all else and to love and help one another as Jesus does. By hoping only in God's grace, we become Jesus' kin.

The Son of God has become human, and in that sense, all who are human are like him. But those who are like him spiritually and mystically are like him in a deeper way and are even made divine like Him. Yet one has to persevere in this holiness—the dedication first to God and being God's kin. That is what makes us more than just human. "*My sheep follow me!*" That's what Christ says! One no longer looks for life from the Mosaic Law, or human law, or from the directions and values our world proclaims as the way to life. Rather, one is guided by the Law of Christ, which is the law of love. That is how we come to be called, and to be, children of God. We follow Christ to the Cross, and we follow him in the resurrection, and then we follow him in his ascension into heaven.

Christ promises to those who follow him a never-ending life in God's Kingdom. Christ also promises to free us from the many torments that result from seeking life by following someone other than Him. For those who look to other guides everything falls apart; i.e., those others lead us only to corruption and its misery. Christ is by nature life and no one can find true and fulfilled life from anyone but Christ. He doesn't receive life from another but is life in Himself. He doesn't just give a long life but a full life, one filled with peace and joy.

We look for this when we come to the Eucharist. It is by this seed —by the Eucharistic body and blood—that Christ implants in believers the life of God. "*The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life!*" If you look at the Eucharist without faith that seems a foolish declaration. Clearly, the Eucharist doesn't visibly change the body and spirit of those who receive it in a way that makes them visibly live a life of joy and peace. This sort of change does take place but it comes gradually, as we become more and more like Jesus in his love of the Father and of neighbor. That is something you believe because Christ has said it. Are you following him with your faith? Show by your love that you really are Christ's kin.

*Tuesday*

## **ST. DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI** **from Catholic Online**

The man who would become St. Damien of Molokai was born in rural Belgium on January 3, 1840. He was the youngest of seven children. Growing up on the farm he was being prepared to take over for the family, but he did not want to take on the responsibility. Instead, he wanted to follow his older brother and two sisters who took religious vows.

He was baptized Josef and attended school until the age of 13 when his help was needed on the family-run farm full-time. He aided his family until he was old enough to enter the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He took the name Damien, after a sixth century martyr.

In 1864, Damien's brother, who was a member of the same order, was ordered to Hawaii. But his brother became ill, so Damien offered to go in his place.

The brothers worried that Damien was too uneducated to become a priest, although he was considered to be intelligent. Damien demonstrated his ability by quickly learning Latin from his brother. He was devoted in prayer, and prayed each day before an icon of St. Francis Xavier. His prayer was that he could become a missionary. Eventually, his religious brothers agreed and had him ordained. The ordination took place on the island of Hawaii. For 9 years he worked on the island as a priest, leading an undistinguished life.

In 1866, Hawaii established a leper colony on Kalaupapa Peninsula. It was still mistakenly believed that leprosy was highly contagious.

Upon arrival, he found the colony was poorly maintained. Anarchy reigned among the people living there. Many people required treatment but had nobody to care for them. Others were drinking and became chronic alcoholics. There was no law or order.

Damien understood that leadership was needed, so he provided it. He asked people to come together to build houses and schools and eventually the parish church, St. Philomena. The church still stands today.

The sick were cared for and the dead buried. Damien personally provided much of the care the people needed. The leper colony became his permanent home. Damien grew to love the people.

Only 5% of people can catch leprosy from others. Damien was one of them. He realized he had the disease when he placed his foot into boiling water and felt no pain. He continued his work, despite his illness, which slowly took over his body. He died on April 15, 1889. He was beatified by St. John Paul 2 in Brussels, Belgium in 1995 and canonized by Pope Benedict 16 in 2009.

*Wednesday*

## **THE HOLY ABBOTS OF CLUNY**

### **from an audience by Pope Emeritus Benedict**

The Order of Cluny at the beginning of the 12th century had almost 1200 monasteries, a truly impressive figure. At the time of the growth of Cluny, Western monasticism was experiencing a severe decline especially because of the dependence of abbeys on the local nobles who controlled all that belonged to the territories under their jurisdiction. In this context, Cluny was at the heart and soul of a profound renewal of monastic life that led it back to its original inspiration.

At Cluny, the Rule of St Benedict was restored with several adaptations which had already been introduced by other reformers. The main objective was to guarantee the central role that the Liturgy must have in Christian life. The Cluniac monks devoted themselves with love and great care to the celebration of the Liturgical Hours, to the singing of the Psalms, to processions as devout as they were solemn, and above all to the celebration of the Holy Mass. They promoted sacred music, they wanted art and architecture to contribute to the beauty and solemnity of the rites; they enriched the liturgical calendar with special celebrations and they intensified the devotion to the Virgin Mary. For the monks of Cluny great attention was given to the Liturgy because they were convinced it was participation in the Liturgy of Heaven. And the monks felt responsible for interceding at the altar of God for the living and the dead, given that large numbers of the faithful were insistently asking them to be remembered in prayer. To preserve and foster this atmosphere of prayer, the Cluniac Rule emphasized the importance of silence, to which discipline the monks readily submitted, convinced that the purity of the virtues to which they aspired demanded deep and constant recollection. Numerous princes and Popes asked the Abbots of Cluny to extend their reform so that in a short time a dense network of monasteries developed that were linked to Cluny. Thus, a spiritual Europe gradually took shape in various regions of France and in Italy, Spain, Germany, and Hungary.

Also, of significance were the benefits that monasteries inspired by the Cluniac Reform contributed to society. At a time when church institutions alone provided for the poor, charity was practiced with dedication. In all houses the Almoner was bound to offer hospitality to needy wayfarers and pilgrims, traveling priests and religious and especially the poor, who frequently came asking for food and a roof over their heads for a few days.

The Abbots of Cluny were elected without interference from the civil authorities and thus truly worthy people succeeded one another at the helm in Cluny. I think of Abbot Odo, and other great figures such as Eymard, Majolus, Odilo and especially Hugh the Great, who served for long periods, thereby assuring stability and the spread of the reform. As well as Odo, Majolus, Odilo, and Hugh are venerated as saints.

Thursday

## **THE TWO FACES OF CHRISTIAN LIVING**

### **Developed from On the Holy Spirit by St. Basil the Great**

In baptism the Lord makes a covenant with us and it has two objectives. Baptism is an image, you see, of both death and life. The water symbolizes death, in that baptism is intended to destroy sin in us in such a way that prevents it from ever dominating us. The Spirit we receive both symbolizes and realizes life and enables us to live in a way that gives birth to holiness and so eternal life with God. The Spirit awakens our spirits to the life they were given in creation. That is why baptism is spoken of as a second birth and a being born-again.

The killing of sin in us begins when we are enlightened by receiving a knowledge of God which so captures our love as to leave no place in us for an attraction to any sin. Baptism is administered by a triple immersion that accompanies the invocation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and creates in us an image of trinitarian life as a life of divinizing love. Scripture tells us that baptism *“isn’t a cleansing of the body but a pledge made to God from a clear conscience”*. The pledge comes from our complete gift of self to God in love and the clear conscience is realized in our not acting from self-interest in doing this.

Our Lord tells us in the Gospels how to prepare ourselves for the life of God’s Kingdom. He tells us to do this by the way we live now. We are to live peaceably, in long-suffering, undefiled by pleasure-seeking, and detached from the goods of this world, especially from its so-called wealth. To freely choose to live in this way prepares us for the way of life that will be natural in the world to come.

In effect, by receiving the Holy Spirit we are restored to paradise, we are re-instated as children of God and begin to ascend to Heaven and its Kingdom.

We gain the right to call God “Our Father” and become sharers in the grace of Christ. We are offered every sort of blessing. Our enlightenment enables us to see that what doesn’t draw us toward God or help us live as Jesus lived is not a genuine blessing. We can then contemplate the real blessings, if only as in a mirror. Our faith tells us of many of the good things that will be given us one day, and it stimulates us to imagine what marvelous gifts life with God will include by starting from what is already promised and pledged. If the first fruits are so wonderful what will the full harvest be?

The key to all this is our response to Jesus and the gift of the Spirit. If we actually give ourselves fully to striving to live as God lives, then sin has lost its hold on us. We simply have to refuse to fall back into old ways of thinking and hoping. This is not difficult if we cling to the Spirit and its promises. We know in this way that there is nothing in the world that is as good as what God has in store for us. Keep your mind fixed on “things above” and you will never be drawn into things that imprison us in this world’s ways and hopes. Where our hopes are, our deepest and most deeply felt hopes, that is where our hearts are. If your hearts are with God there is no place within you where sin is welcome.

*Friday*

## **HOW MARY'S LIFE INSPIRES US**

### **A reflection from Journeying With the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini**

Not far from the Garden of Gethsemane, near the church of St. Anne, the mystery of the Madonna's birth is venerated. A few yards away, on the Temple Mount, we find a spot where the mystery of her presentation is commemorated. And beyond Jerusalem, in the hill country to the west, the mystery of her visitation to Elizabeth is recalled. Across the road from the Garden of Gethsemane, we venerate the mystery of Mary's death and Assumption into Heaven. Thus we contemplate all the mysteries, the sufferings, the glory and the Resurrection of Jesus.

The Book of Revelation (11:19, 12:1-6) provides us with a curious synthesis, not always easy to explain, of the mystery of the Church as a participation in the mysteries of Jesus. And so when we remember Mary we remember too, the mystery of the Church dying and rising with Christ. We celebrate the mystery of our life and our communities which are equally called to share in the mystery of Christ and Mary.

I invite everyone to ask for the grace that our Church be like Mary. May it be a Church that reflects Jesus, which is entirely related to Him, which has no meaning in itself except for its relationship to Him and which, therefore, manifests Him and lives Him.

And let us ask too for each of us the experience of this same mystery in our own lives. It is a mystery of combat and of struggle. In fact, the Book of Revelation speaks of a mysterious struggle. To be with Christ, to be in the Church, means combat. An easy existence is not promised or foretold.

To be with the Lord in his victory over death also means to be together with Mary in all the humble and joyous services which she renders to humanity. Think of Lourdes, of Fatima, of all the places in which the Madonna has appeared to assure us that she continues to be near the daily life of the Church. The place where we are now is, so to speak, the source of all the other Marian presences. Because Mary is alive in Christ she can show and manifest herself to human history.

Saturday

## WHAT MATTHIAS AS APOSTLE TEACHES US

A reflection developed from a text by Fr. Romano Guardini

What makes one an apostle? It isn't a matter of having special talents, even special spiritual capacities! It isn't a matter of being what is described as "a great religious personality". Personal giftedness, spiritual creativity, dynamic faith, and all such things are not the decisive marks of an apostle. People often think of St. Paul or St. John as exceptional individuals in various senses, but that didn't make them apostles. If it were what would we make of the fact that Judas was an apostle?

If you consider all these facts in the light of what we know about Matthias it becomes clear that being an apostle is simply a matter of being called. What counts is that Jesus Christ has called and, in some way, placed the seal that is his choice upon a person. "*You have not chosen me but I have chosen you, and I have appointed you to go and bear fruit*". An apostle is one who is sent by God!

What is an apostle's task? It is to bear witness to Christ. As St. Paul says, it won't be the apostle who speaks through deeds and words but Christ in the apostle. One has to be as much like Christ as possible—otherwise one becomes like Judas. One becomes like Christ by seeking only what Christ seeks. St. Paul makes a clear distinction between Christ's message and his own advice. The Lord's words constrain us to follow them, but an apostle's advice or even commands are only his own and don't *require* following them as we do Christ's.

To be nothing in oneself but everything in Christ, to be obliged to contain such tremendous contents in so small a vessel, to be a constant herald of a life that is not one's own is difficult. Something of the trials such a life involves dawns on us when we read about an apostle's work in the Acts of the Apostles.

Listen to Paul and apply the words to Matthias and to yourself. "*I think God has sent forth us apostles as though doomed to death and as a spectacle to the world, to angels and to humans. We are fools for Christ, we are weak, ...we are without honor, to this very hour we hunger and thirst and are naked and knocked about and have no fixed place to live. We work hard and with our own hands. If bad-mouthed we bless those who do it, if we are persecuted, we put up with it. When put down we ask for help gently. Indeed, we are the refuse of the world and its throw-aways, right up to the present.*"

Would you want to be an apostle? You would need to love God and Christ far above self to want, let alone fulfill, the requirements of such a call. But, then, you are not asked. You are appointed an apostle. You are chosen even though you did not choose on your own.

The only appropriate response to God's calls is to trust in God and God's grace. That alone can enable one to show the living Christ in one's own living. That is how Christ draws people to himself through you. That is what we are reminded of when we gather to celebrate the choice of Matthias as an apostle. He teaches us what Christ has called each of us to do in a way that matches the life God gives us.