

## **THE SIXTH WEEK IN EASTERTIDE**

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Sunday

## PREPARING A PLACE FOR THE LORD

### A reflection from On the Song of Songs by St. Bernard

*“My Father and I will come, and in the holy place will make our home”.* This means that the Son of God will seek a holy place in your heart. One of the psalms speaks about God in just this way. Listen, *“You make your dwelling in the holy place, you who are Israel’s praise”.* God dwells in the “heavens”, but we know that these heavens are the hearts of his holy ones. Listen to St. Paul, who says this quite clearly: *“Christ lives in our hearts through faith”.*

We should not be surprised that the Lord Jesus makes a home in such heavens, and does it with joy, for, unlike the heavens above he didn’t bring these into being by a simple word of command but descended into the arena that is our world and laid down his life to redeem us and our hearts. Listen to what he said after the battle was over: *“This is my resting place forever and ever; here I have chosen to dwell”.* Blessed indeed is the person to whom the Lord says, *“Come, my chosen one! I will set up my throne in you!”*

Why, then, are we sorrowful at times? Why are we troubled inwardly? Is it a matter of trying to find a fitting place for the Lord within ourselves? After all, which of us can provide Jesus with a really fitting place—He who is the Lord of Glory? Where is the place that is worthy of his majesty? I would count myself fortunate to be found worthy of worshipping at his footstool and being able to cling to his feet! Maybe I can at least cling to the feet of a saintly person who the Lord has chosen to be his dwelling place!

Yet, the fact is that the Lord only needs to anoint me inwardly with the oil we call his mercy to enable me to cry out: *“I have run the way of your commandments because you have enlarged my heart”!* I may not be about to usher the Lord into a large place in my heart, one wonderfully furnished, and then invite him to refresh himself there together with his disciples. I only hope that I will be able to offer him a place to lay his head!

One has to grow and be enlarged inwardly to become capable of containing God within oneself. The dimensions of a soul, however, are proportioned to its love. This is what St. Paul reminds us of when he calls upon us to *“widen our hearts in love”.* The soul is, of course, spiritual and can’t be measured in a physical sense. But grace makes possible what nature cannot. We expand spiritually as we make progress toward the perfection of our humanity called *“the full stature of Christ”*, as St. Paul notes. That is why we can grow into a temple sacred to the Lord.

Love is the measure of our inward self, of our soul. Souls who love much are large and those that love little are small. The soul that has no love at all is nothing! St. Paul says it: *“Without love I am nothing!”* By Christ’s grace, we attain even to the stature, to the wideness and fullness, of the love that sets apart Jesus Christ. Let Christ’s grace work this wonder in your heart! Then you will have truly prepared a place for the Lord to dwell.

*Monday*

## **LEARNING FROM OUR EASTER CELEBRATION**

### **From a sermon of Pope St. Leo the Great**

Dearly beloved, these days between the Resurrection of the Lord and his Ascension are not to be passed in idleness. Great mysteries have been confirmed and great truths have been revealed. It was during these days that the fear of death was abolished and immortality was proclaimed, not only for the soul but also for the body. It was during these days that the Holy Spirit was poured into all the apostles through the breath of the Risen Lord. It was during these days that the Lord walked alongside two traveling disciples and, in order to clear away all doubt, challenged their slowness to believe as they trembled in fear even while their hearts were enlightened and felt the flame of faith blaze up within them. Those who had been lukewarm became fervent when the Lord opened the Scriptures to them. The faces of those sitting at table with Him lit up at the moment of the breaking of the bread when their eyes opened to see the glory of their nature made manifest in the Risen Christ.

When we celebrate Easter the resurrection of the Lord is the cause of our joy. So too his Ascension into heaven will give a new reason for that joy. We fittingly remember and venerate these days in which the humility of our nature is raised in Christ above all the angelic orders and the sublimity of all Heaven's powers as our Head shares the throne of God the Father. It is upon these divine works that we are firmly grounded and built up in truth. The grace of God becomes more marvelous when it keeps our faith from doubt, our hope from wavering and our charity from dying away—now that his physical presence is taken from our sight.

This, in effect, is the strength of great spirits and the characteristic light of eminently faithful persons. It consists in unshakably believing what the eyes of the body do not see while setting our desire where sight cannot reach. May all the People of God thus recognize that they are new creatures in Christ. May they be sure to understand who it is who has adopted them and from whom they have received this adoption. May that which has been renewed never return to its past instability, and may those who have put their hands to the plow never abandon the work begun.

So let us look carefully at what each has sown and not set our gaze on what has been left behind. May no one fall back into the vices out of which we all have been raised. But even if we should again give in to the weakness of the flesh, may we desire without delay to repent and be healed. This is the way of salvation; this is the way to imitate the Risen Christ. Even if it should be impossible to avoid falling or tripping on life's icy roads, may the steps of all of us travelers find solid ground. It is written, "Those whose steps are guided by the Lord, whose way God approves, may stumble but they will never fall—for the Lord holds their hand". (Ps37)

Take this to heart so as to sanctify your entire life. Spiritual exercises tend to transform practices into habits, preserve purity, and shatter by ready penance all guilt. Healing old wounds is a long and difficult process, so quickly apply the remedy of love for Christ to every wound. It is through Jesus Christ that we thus attain the resurrection and are called to glory.

*Tuesday*

## **SEEING ALL WITH THE HEART OF CHRIST**

**A reflection developed from a sermon of St. Oger**

The Holy Spirit who is called Advocate and Comforter is the counselor of all believers, and the defender and protector of all who hope in God. Without the Spirit, there is neither strength nor holiness. The Spirit becomes the champion, as it were, of all who are destined for eternal glory.

When we speak of the Spirit comforting the afflicted we mean especially those who grieve for their sins and must suffer in consequence of them. They are distressed not only because they have messed up their lives with evil deeds but because they have shunned the love of Christ, the King of Glory. They are heartbroken because through their wrongs they have tried to set at naught, even though without realizing it, what our Savior died to accomplish. They weep over their inability to see the face of Christ who is the source of salvation and the only real hope of life.

The Spirit comforts all such persons. In this present life, the Spirit gives them the consolation of hope as the Spirit will bring them to the blessed eternal joy that is the fulfillment of all hopes. The Spirit of Truth shuns all whose love does not reach beyond themselves. The Spirit's will is that Christ, and Christ alone as God, should be loved for his own sake. Our love for God must be total. God will have no rival but must be the sole object of our love. God has no rival in loving us, any more than he can be rivaled by anyone else's generosity. It is out of that generosity that he rewards with life all those who love Him alone.

Yet God desires to be loved in such a way that we love everything else together with God and love nothing apart from God. As the creator of all, God is the source of all created things. Every created thing that is good is good simply because God made it and made it good. In loving the good in created things, then, one loves their creator. We cannot love them truly if we love them for their own sake because by themselves they have no good to offer us. God gave them existence and goodness.

Anyone who loves gold or silver or material goods and possessions of any kind must love their creator. To love them apart from God is to be a stranger to God's goodness and generosity, and so to theirs. It is the giver of goodness that one must love in all created things—loving them in God. By loving God in this way we love everything else too, even while God is truly and really the sole object of our love.

No one is capable of seeing God, even in created things, if the eye of the soul is diseased. The inward vision has to be purified to perceive spiritual truth. This is what makes us worthy temples of the Holy Spirit. We must do all that we can to become so purified that we can see God in all things, when we have eyes only for God's glorious beauty. That is how Jesus knows all things, and knows God. Jesus knows by loving because his heart sees God everywhere. If we let this be done in us then we dwell with God even as Jesus dwells with the Heavenly Father. Let the Spirit purify your loving so that you can be with God forever in the life that is unending joy and gladness.

*Wednesday*

## **KNOWING GOD IN THE SPIRIT**

### **A reflection taken from a homily by St. Bede the Venerable**

The evangelists in the Gospels make clear that all grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. They add: "No one has ever seen God; the Only-Begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father has told us about God". No greater grace and no higher truth can be given to human beings. This is repeated in many ways. For instance, Jesus declares "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God". But notice how the emphasis varies: "Now this is eternal life, that they recognize you, the one, true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent". It seems, however, that seeing God belongs only to the next world since we are also told: "No one has ever seen God" and Moses was told, "no one sees my face and lives". And in the Letter to Timothy, it is said, "no human being has seen or can see" God.

What the patriarchs and prophets saw was a vision or an image and not God directly. The holy ones saw God through a subordinate creature, for instance, through fire or an angel or a cloud or lightning. Those who are still within the weak vessel of human flesh can see God through circumscribed images of created things but are in no way capable of looking at his uncircumscribed radiance as it is in eternity.

Yet the evangelists speak about the longing to come to the vision of the unchangeable and eternal radiance and add, "The only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, has told us about God". The Lord seems to reinforce this by saying, "no one comes to the Father except through me" and "no one knows the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him". By the guidance of the Son, we are to know God. And the key to this is the Spirit, the gift of the Father to the Son and of the Father and Son to us.

By imbuing us with the sacraments of his incarnation and sanctifying us by the charismatic gifts of the Spirit, he makes us capable of coming to what we so long for. So, we hear how the faithful are to hasten to contemplation and by what actions they are to come to God. It isn't only that the Son will declare God, or manifest to human beings the glory of the Holy and indivisible Trinity after the resurrection. Notice what Jesus says, "One who loves me is loved by the Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him". Remember that he has said, "One who sees me sees the Father". This is because the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son and because to "see" God is to share God's life. God is love and to share God's life is to share God's love as shown us through the Son. You have received the Spirit who is God and is God's love. So, you have God and God's love living in you. The more completely, then, that we love as Jesus loves, the more completely, we know God. This is the way we begin to "see" God even now. The complete fullness of this knowledge comes only in God's Kingdom but even now we begin to know. Know by loving and know that loving is knowledge of God.

*Thursday*

## **LEADING OTHERS TO CHRIST**

### **A reflection taken from talks by St. Pope John XXIII**

The Gospel of St. Luke presents us with a picture of Mary hurrying to bring help to Elizabeth. But she not only brings human help, she also brings the salvation that is Christ. This is a sign and symbol of what we are all called to do.

There are many apostolates to which God calls us. There is an apostolate of learning, because faith comes from hearing and so we must always keep our ears open to God's voice, even as the ears of Elizabeth and her unborn son, John, were open to the words God spoke through Mary. There is an apostolate of teaching, by which the words received in truly open ears and hearts are shared with others, even as was the case with Mary's. She didn't intend to teach when she uttered her Magnificat but she did. Then there is the apostolate of dying which is that of helping one another surrender oneself completely into God's loving hands. Mary learned this by sharing in the dying of Jesus, her son and her savior. These are all apostolates to which we too are called.

Mary is at the heart of the Christian revelation as she is at the heart of all Christian living, precisely because she went wherever God directed her to go. That is what brought her to Elizabeth; an archangel, a most special messenger of God, told her of Elizabeth's need for help in responding to the gift of God given to and through her.

God reveals to us the needs of others and it is up to us to respond. Why would God's providence reveal such needs except to call us to reach out as Mary did to Elizabeth? This is truly one of the loftiest aims of human life, and a most meritorious answer to the call to the Lord's service.

Motives for melancholy, however, are never in short supply. They have never been lacking in the history of the world! A wise Christian must do whatever is possible to free oneself and others from such sad thoughts. Mary provides a wonderful example and source of consolation and strength.

Jesus never preached a greater sermon than from the cross when he gave himself completely into the hands of his Father. Who was there to hear those words and absorb them completely? All the world knows the story of the Lord's last testament when he left his own mother to the world as a universal mother. She was to witness to all the total giving of all that is precious and wonderful to us into the hands of our God! She witnessed it and she made it her own gift of self. She is to help us all learn to make that gift.

God calls us to work to perfect our own spiritual lives and we have Mary to imitate. We must be constant in our search for what is best and in making our conduct ever a better and better instrument of God's grace for others. We must cherish in our hearts great confidence, perhaps like that which the child Jesus showed to his mother as she taught him to pray and to love God's Holy Word and will. We seek to embody and even to hasten the triumph of the charity of Christ.

How can this fail to encourage mutual love and concern? We are to learn to feel impelled by all that unites people and prepares for the Lord's coming to redeem and unite the entire world. Mary can only lead us to Christ and Christ leads all to God. We are sent to help this happen.

*Friday*

## **WORSHIPING AS A CHRISTIAN**

**From In Defense of the Christians, by St. Justin Martyr**

We hold a common assembly on Sunday because it is the first day of the week. It is the day on which God put darkness and chaos to flight and created the world. It is also the day our Savior, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead. He was crucified on Friday and on Sunday appeared alive to his apostles and disciples. He taught them the things that we are passing on for your consideration.

None may share the Eucharist with us unless they believe that what we teach is true, unless they are washed in the regenerating waters of baptism, and unless they live in accordance with the principles given us by Christ. We don't consume the bread and wine of the Eucharist as ordinary food and drink, for we have been taught that as Jesus Christ our Savior became human by the Word of God so this food that our flesh and blood assimilate makes us become the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus.

The apostles in their recollections, called gospels, handed down to us what Jesus commanded them to do. They tell us that he took bread, gave thanks, and said: Do this in memory of me; this is my body. In the same way, he took the cup, gave thanks, and said: This is my blood. Ever since that time, we have constantly reminded one another of these matters. The rich among us help the poor and we are always united. For all that we receive, we praise the Creator of the universe through his Son, Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit.

In our Sunday assembly the recollections of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, are read as long as time permits. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us, urging everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard about in the readings. Then we all rise together and pray.

At the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give their assent by saying, "Amen"! The Eucharistic bread and wine are distributed, and everyone present communicates. The deacons take it to those who are absent.

The wealthy, if they wish, may make a contribution. They themselves decide the amount. The collection is placed in the custody of the president, who uses it to help the orphans and widows and all who for any reason are in distress. This may be because they are sick, in prison, or away from home. In a word, he takes care of all who are in need through the sharing of those who have enough.

*Saturday*

## **THE JOURNEY OF THE MIND TO GOD** **From St. Bonaventure**

Christ is both the way and the door. Christ is the staircase and the one who carries us up it. He is like the throne of mercy over the Ark of the Covenant, a mystery hidden through the ages. One should turn one's full attention to this throne of mercy; one should gaze at Him hanging on the cross, one should be filled with faith, hope and charity, devoted and full of wonder and joy, marked by gratefulness and open to praise and jubilation. Such a person will make with Christ a "pasch"; i.e., a passing-over. By means of the branches of the cross, one will pass over the Red Sea, leaving Egypt and entering the desert. There one will taste the hidden manna and rest with Christ as in the tomb, as if one were dead to things outside. One will experience as much as is possible for those who are still living on earth what was promised to the thief who hung beside Christ: "Today you will be with me in paradise!"

For this passing over to be perfect we must suspend all the operations of the mind and transform our highest affections, directing them to God alone. This is a sacred mystical experience. It cannot be comprehended by anyone unless one surrenders self to it. Nor can one surrender oneself to it unless one longs for it. Nor can one long for it unless the Holy Spirit, whom Christ sent into the world, should come and inflame one's innermost soul. Thus the Apostle says that this mystical wisdom is revealed by the Holy Spirit.

If you ask how such things can occur, seek the answer in God's grace rather than in doctrine. Seek it in the longing of the will and not in the understanding. Seek it in the sighs of prayer, not in research. Seek the bridegroom, not the teacher. Seek God and not human resources. Seek darkness, not daylight! And look not to the light but rather to the raging fire that carries the soul to God with intense fervor and glowing love. The fire is God, and the furnace is in Jerusalem—fired by Christ in the ardor of his loving passion. Only that one understood who said: "My soul chose hanging and my bones death". Anyone who cherishes this kind of death can see God. It is certainly true that "No one can look upon me and live".

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