

# THE SIXTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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- Sun.*      **The Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
July 17    **GOD'S SELF-REVELATION**  
A reflection from Abandonment to Divine Providence by Fr. J-P Causade
- Mon.*      **Monday of the 16<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**  
18         **THE GOD OF SURPRISES**  
On the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis  
in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae
- Tues.*     **Tuesday of the 16<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**  
19         **ATTUNING OUR HEARTS TO THE MELODY OF CHRIST'S LOVE**  
A reflection from No Man is an Island by Fr. Thomas Merton
- Wed.*      **Wednesday of the 16<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**  
20         **WHY THE LORD WARNS US**  
A reflection from a homily by St. Gregory the Great
- Thurs.*    **Thursday of the 16<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**  
21         **OUR RESPONSIBILITIES**  
A reflection taken from a book on Jesus' parables by Leopold Fonck
- Fri.*      **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**  
22         **Feast of St. Mary Magdalene**  
**NEVER FORGET GOD'S FORGIVENESS**  
A reflection from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman
- Sat.*      **Memorial of Our Lady**  
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A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Sunday

## **GOD'S SELF-REVELATION**

### **A reflection from Abandonment to Divine Providence by Fr. J-P Causade**

All creatures that exist are in the hand of God. We perceive creatures only by means of the senses but faith sees something more. Faith grasps that all things live in Jesus Christ and that God's working in them lasts to the end of time, embracing even each tiny atom in its least motion. The actions of creatures are a kind of veil covering deep mysteries of Divine working.

Jesus took his disciples by surprise after his resurrection due to the various guises he used to make himself known as well as because he disappeared in the very act of making himself known. Jesus still takes us by surprise, ever working and living and testing our weak faith. There is no single moment in which God doesn't reveal himself under the guise of some pain to be born or some consolation to be enjoyed or some duty to be done. This takes place within us and around us and through us as he conceals and reveals his divine action.

We need to be attentive and watchful so that God's continual self-revelation will show us how he acts in everything that happens to us. We are to rejoice in it. At each moment we should exclaim: It is the Lord! We are to accept every new circumstance as a gift from God. Creatures are simply feeble tools in the hands of an able worker so that we can discover through them the fact that nothing is ever wanting to us because the constant providence of God bestows on us without ceasing everything we require.

Will you pursue this beloved one who, caring for us, passes from one end of the heavens to the other as with giant strides? If we are content, nothing hides God from us. God moves in the smallest blades of grass just as in a mighty cedar. The grains of sand are under God's feet just as are the hugest of mountains. Wherever we turn there we find the foot prints of God, and if you follow them perseveringly you will come to God. The present moment is God's ambassador and the heart must listen and say, "*let it be done according to your will*". We never need to stop but can sail ahead using every wind that blows, knowing that all will bring us to the shore of eternity. Everything is a help and instrument for our sanctification.

That is what happened to Mary of Bethany when Jesus came to her home. She sought only to hallow the name of God and to adore and love God's holy will at every moment. Like Job we need to bless God, even in utter desolation. God is present with us now. We must not permit ourselves to ignore this but use the opportunity to praise God and bless the Providence that has brought us to this place and moment. God gives us as many joys as trials and perhaps this is one of them. Let us simply bless God's holy name now, as in whatever befalls us and whenever it comes.

*Monday*

## **THE GOD OF SURPRISES**

### **On the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae**

Pope Francis rested mainly on the passage of the Gospel in which Jesus harshly criticizes the crowd gathered to hear him, as “an evil generation” because “it seeks a sign”. According to the Bishop of Rome “it is evident that Jesus is speaking to the doctors of the law”, who, “many times in the Gospel”, ask him for “a sign”. Indeed, they “do not see many of Jesus’ signs”.

The Pontiff exhorted that we ask ourselves the reason that the doctors of the law did not understand the signs of the times and invoked an extraordinary sign. He proposed several answers: the first was “because they were closed. They were closed within their system, they had organized the law very well”. It was “a masterpiece. All of the Jews knew what one could and could not do, where one could go. It was all organized”. But Jesus caught them unprepared, by doing “curious things”, such as “going with the sinners”, and “eating with the publicans”. The doctors of the law did not like this, and found it “dangerous”, putting at risk “the doctrine which they, had been making for centuries”.

In this regard Pope Francis acknowledged that it was a law “made for love, in order to be faithful to God”, but it had become a closed regulatory system. They “had simply forgotten history. They had forgotten that God is the God of the law”, but He is also “the God of surprises. And God, many times, also had surprises in store for his people”: think of the Red Sea and of “how he saved them” from slavery in Egypt, the Pope recalled.

However, still they “did not understand that God is always new; He never says that something He had said was a mistake, never; but He always surprises. They did not understand, they closed themselves within that system created with much goodwill; and asked” Jesus for “a sign”, failing to understand, “the many signs that Jesus made” and maintaining a completely “closed” attitude.

The second response to his initial question is attributable to the fact that they “had forgotten that they were a people on a journey. When one is on a journey one always finds new things, things one does not know. And in the law, they had to accept these things in a heart faithful to the Lord”. But, also in this case, “a journey is not absolute in itself, it is a journey toward an end point: toward the definitive manifestation of the Lord”. After all, all of “life is a journey toward the fullness of Jesus Christ, when the second coming occurs”. It is a journey toward Jesus, who will come again in glory.

Pope Francis emphasized, repeating the words from the Gospel, this generation “seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah”: that is, “the sign of the Resurrection, of glory, of that eschatology we are journeying toward”. However, many of his contemporaries “were closed within themselves, not open to the God of surprises”; they were people who “did not know the path or even this eschatology, to the point that the priest asks Jesus: ‘Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God’, and Jesus says, yes, and ‘you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’. Then the high priest tore his robes. ‘He has uttered blasphemy! Blasphemy!’ For them, the sign that Jesus gave was blasphemy.

For this, the Pope explained, Jesus defined them as an “evil generation”, “they did not understand that the law they protected and loved was a pedagogy toward Jesus Christ”. Indeed, “if the law does not lead to Jesus Christ, does not bring us close to Jesus Christ, it is dead”. This is why Jesus scolds the members of that generation “for being closed, for being incapable of recognizing the signs of the times, for not being open to the God of surprises, for not being on a journey toward the Lord’s triumphant finale”, to the point “that when he explains it, they think it is blasphemy”.

The Pope then moved on to reflect on this theme, asking “Am I attached to my things, to my ideas, closed? Or am I open to the God of surprises?”. And also: “Am I a stationary person or a person on a journey?”. And finally, “do I believe in Jesus Christ and in what he has done?”, that “he died, rose again... do I believe that the journey goes forth toward maturity, toward the manifestation of the glory of the Lord? Am I capable of understanding the signs of the times and of being faithful to the voice of the Lord that is manifest in them?”

*Tuesday*

## **ATTUNING OUR HEARTS TO THE MELODY OF CHRIST'S LOVE**

**A reflection from No Man is an Island by Fr. Thomas Merton**

A saint isn't a person who likes suffering and declare this preference before God. Saints may hate suffering as much as anybody. Nor does a saint accept suffering in order to get a great reward. A saint is one who so loves Christ as to accept whatever happens as a way of proving a love that needs no reward but itself. We don't see Christ in the ordinary way; we live by faith. We don't do this as though it were an achievement but because the charity of Christ living in our hearts demands that we accept all that happens as an opportunity to love with Christ.

A saint is a person so attuned to the spirit and heart of Christ as to feel compelled to respond to what seem the demands of love by a love which matches that of Christ. This is a personal need so exacting that it becomes the whole of one's destiny. The more one responds to the secret action of Christ's love in one's own heart, the more one comes to know this love's inexorable demands.

The love of a Christian must always be a thing whole and simple and complete and incommunicable. The saints sometimes seem to desire even suffering in a universal and abstract way, but actually the only suffering anyone can validly desire is suffering that comes as a special trial that we see as demanded of us in Divine Providence's design for our lives.

Some are picked out to bear witness to Christ's love in lives overwhelmed by suffering. These have proclaimed that suffering was their vocation. That shouldn't lead us to believe that in order to be a saint one has to go in for suffering in the same way a college athlete goes out for a sport. No two people have exactly the same trials or experience them in exactly the same ways. And no one is ever called to suffer merely for the sake of suffering.

What is more personal than the feelings each of us experiences? It is futile even to try to convey the reality of what we feel. Suffering is a fine example of this. We can't convey such inner realities to others and the compassionate or empathetic response of another is never adequate. Suffering is one of those incommunicable realities.

As a result, things like suffering have to make sense to us in a vague universal way. It is necessary we experience such realities, and as a result of our own personal destiny. When I see, for example, my trials as not merely the collision of my life with a blind machine called fate but as a sacramental gift of Christ's love, given to me by God the Heavenly Father along with my identity and my very name, then I consecrate these things and myself to God.

I realize that my sufferings are not simply my own. They are tendrils from the vine that is the passion of Christ stretching into my own life. They will bear rich clusters of grapes. It will perhaps make my soul dizzy with the wine of Christ's love but it is part of God's work of pouring that wine—a wine as strong as fire—upon the whole world. Christ's redemption continues through you and me.

*Wednesday*

## **WHY THE LORD WARNS US**

### **A reflection from a homily by St. Gregory the Great**

We have heard the parable of the sower many times. It doesn't seem to require an explanation, granted the the Truth Himself has explained it. But what we may too easily miss is the fact that it is a warning. The Lord, for instance, told us that the seed represents the word of God, the field the world, the birds represent demons, and the thorns riches. How many of you would have believed me if I had been the one to represent wealth as a thorn? After all, thorns pierce a person and cause pain but wealth seems only to cause pleasure.

How can wealth be like a thorn? It can because the thought of wealth can pierce the mind and torture us with the desire to have more or to find better ways to use it to make life more pleasant. In many cases, such thoughts and desires lead people into sin. As St. Paul says, the search for wealth, or its use, can be a form of idolatry—putting wealth in a place in our lives that God should occupy. If we let this happen then either the thought or the reality of wealth has pierced us like a thorn and drawn blood.

I have commented on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, but one of the Gospels clarifies the Lord's meaning by speaking of "deceptive" riches; they function like thorns because deceptive. Wealth can be deceptive because it can't be held onto, or because it can blind us to our spiritual poverty and doesn't show us how to relieve it. It doesn't tell us that if we aspire to the heights of "true honor" we should strive to become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, or if we want "true fame" we should seek membership in Heaven's Court.

These applications of the parable are only a few of the ways we may find spiritual nourishment in the Lord's words. And we must warn one another that it is not enough just to remember the words, just as it isn't enough to fill the stomach with food if it can't be digested. Doctors despair of the life of a patient who is unable to keep food down. We have received food in the form of a warning and it is not enough to store it in memory; we have to apply it to our own way of living. If you can't grow in righteousness and love of neighbor you are in danger of everlasting death. Be careful the words you have received don't fail to grow within you, and bear the fruit of holy and good deeds. Patience brings forth good fruit even in tribulation. Indeed, the more we grow in God the more hardships we have to endure to keep growing. They come so we will grow more. What shall we do? Trust in God's grace and work with God to learn to grow so as to bear much good fruit.

*Thursday*

## **OUR RESPONSIBILITIES**

**A reflection taken from a book on Jesus' parables by Leopold Fonck**

By his many parables Our Lord teaches us manifold lessons. He most often teaches us that God works in people's life in quiet, almost unnoticed ways, but in doing this simultaneously teaches us about responsibilities God gives us, both individually and as a community.

Consider the parable of the mustard seed, initially a seed so small one can hardly see it. Yet it becomes something great and important. Yes, the fact that God begins small explains why many don't accept what comes to them as God's gift. So the parable teaches us to look for God in everything and not put many obstacles in the way of a seed's growth because we don't think it can come to anything great.

It helps us if we interpret the parables about growth in terms of the growth of the unbelief that is so common in our world. It was also common enough in ancient Israel. What are its causes? Take the instance of the parable of the sower as an answer to this question.

By his explanations of the parable the Lord simultaneously explains why there is unbelief and shows us what God expects us to do in response to unbelief. Because we have not always believed, or believed whole heartedly, we should be able to sympathetically enter into the situation of those who openly declare their unbelief, and perhaps help God make them receptive to his gifts and calls.

So the words of our Divine Master contain for each of us an exhortation to self-examination as well as a call to evangelization. Take, for example, the hardness of the soil upon which God's seed falls. Why are people's hearts so often hard? Why are our own hearts sometimes hard and impervious to what God says to us? Because we can work so hard to make their lives good, by means of our own plans, that no other ways of living can win acceptance and put down roots in their hearts. Or one may have such deeply ingrained ways of thinking that anything which goes contrary to them isn't allowed to take root or can't be understood in a way that makes its goodness apparent. Often times people don't want to consider anything that isn't part of their present understanding of how life works; they won't even take God's words seriously because it doesn't fit how they are living.

Such causes of unbelief afflict all to a greater or lesser extent. We have a responsibility to help and seek help in such situations. We are responsible for how our human "soil" responds to God's seeds. We need one another's help to do this. It is a basic form of mutual love of neighbor.

Friday

## NEVER FORGET GOD'S FORGIVENESS

A reflection taken from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Scripture presents Jesus to us speaking words of consolation: "*Many sins are forgiven her, for she has loved much*". Scripture singles out three person in speaking of penance and love. One is Mary Magdalene. Many believe her to have been the person who bathed the Lord's feet with her tears and dried them with her hair and anointed them with precious ointment. She came into a room as though to a party but did a marvelous deed of repentance. It was a formal dinner honoring Jesus and yet she came in, young and beautiful, as if to honor that festival, as was the custom for women in that time, by pouring ointments and perfume on the forehead and the hair of special guests.

The proud Pharisee who was giving the dinner let her come in, so long as she didn't touch him, for he thought her a sinner destined for perdition. She herself was nothing to him. He might, as Scripture elsewhere says, cross sea and land to make a proselyte but he wasn't interested in looking into that proselyte's heart to pity the sin there and to try to heal it. That didn't even enter his thoughts.

But what a wondrous thing! A poor child of guilt draws near to crown Jesus with her ointment. Was it a sudden inspiration or a mature resolve? Was it an act of the moment or the result of a long inner conflict? She looked and discerned the one without stain or sin, the brightness of eternal light and the spotless mirror of God's majesty, and recognized the Lord of Life, her judge. She looked again and saw a sweetness and serenity. She looked timidly but eagerly and caught his eye and in his smile she saw loving-kindness and tenderness and compassion and mercy.

She looked at herself. How vile and hideous she seemed. Yet she was attractive, but with a withered beauty—though her admirers didn't notice the fact. She felt only the seven evil spirits that dwelt within her. And she felt trapped, and would have stayed trapped and wrapped in confusion and despair, had she not seen his loving face looking at her as a shepherd looks for a lost sheep. And that lost sheep surrendered herself to Him.

He didn't say a word but his eyes drew her. She ignored the scorn of the proud and the whispered jokes of the profligate and drew near wanting only to be received and saved and not sure what would happen. She knows him as the fountain of holiness and truth, and of mercy. To whom should she go except to the One with the words of eternal life? He didn't shrink from her lips or her kissing of his feet. As she wet them with her tears, love for Him grew stronger within her and lit a flame that would never die, from that moment forever.

What happened when he declared her forgiven and tenderly praised her love? "*Many sins are forgiven her, for she has loved much! One to whom less is forgiven responds with less love.*" Then he crowned these words with peace: "*Your sins are forgiven! Your faith has made you well. Go in peace!*" He means these words for us as well. We need only turn to him with our love and watch it grow in the light from his love for us.

*Saturday*

## **GOD MAKES THE IMPERFECT PERFECT**

**A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant**

One of the great disappointments of my life has been the painful realization that every religious group or organization I belong to is riddled with imperfection and even failure. Every group is made up of limited human beings, and I'm not the only person who has felt disillusionment at this. There are poor liturgies, uninspiring sermons, sexism, racism, disregard for the needy, abuse of power and authority and even sexual abuse. Yes, there are many who stand against such evils and strive to eliminate them. There is no excuse for such imperfect, evil, sin and even wickedness. Yet these things are found in every part of God's Church.

Jesus was well aware of this. The field sown by God's grace contains both wheat and weeds that look-like-wheat (darnel), as well as weeds that don't look like anything but weeds. But who is going to do the eliminating? Are there perfect people who can spot the imperfect and throw them out? Besides, who really determines who is bad and who is good? That is Jesus' task and he refuses to do it the way we want him to. What if Peter had been weeded out, or Paul or Augustine of Hippo or Charles de Foucauld or any of the people God has graced with repentance? Until the end of time the Church will always be a gathering of sinners, as Pope Francis not too long ago reminded us.

In the meantime, how are we supposed to live in this mixed church of so many types of sinners? The Gospel tells us to be understanding and compassionate and kind. The parable of the Sower is coupled with (e.g.) the parable of the Mustard Seed. This tiny seed grows into something so great that all sorts of birds can nest in it! Are all the birds alike? Do all sing sweetly? Do some make messes? Those who want to live in Jesus' Church have to be ready to accept all kinds of people who come seeking shelter and help from him. What he intends is that the community of the Church be life-giving for all. And he intends to create this with all the sorts of imperfect people like you and me.

It is through give and take with selfish, inconsiderate sinners like ourselves that we learn to be understanding, patient, tolerant and forgiving. But we have to let the grace of God work in us and in our living. We have to let Jesus refine and strengthen and purify us. After all, it is God's Church that is destined for the life of God's Kingdom. There "all will shine like the sun". If we want to be of that number we will have to let grace make us like Jesus.