

THE EIGHTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. The Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 31 **JESUS PREPARES US FOR FAITH'S STRUGGLE**
A reflection from The Lord of Fr. Romano Guardini
- Mon. Memorial of St. Alphonsus Liguori
Aug. 1 **WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST?**
A reflection from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII & Catholic Online
- Tues. Tuesday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time
2 **REMEMBER WHO YOUR STRENGTH IS**
A reflection by Fr. Romano Guardini
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3 **COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW: 15:21ff**
By Thomas of Villanova
- Thurs. Memorial of St. John Mary Vianney
4 **THE BEAUTY & POWER OF PRAYER**
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- Fri. **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
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5 **REALLY RISING TO A NEW LIFE**
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- Sat. **FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD**
6 **GOD'S PRESENCE REVEALING ITSELF THROUGH US**
A reflection from a text by Max Thuriann

Sunday

JESUS PREPARES US FOR FAITH'S STRUGGLE

A reflection from The Lord by Fr. Romano Guardini

When Jesus tells us the story of the wealthy landowner who is a fool in God's eyes he confronts us with the distinction between what is essential and non-essential. Life is more essential than food because when I'm dead I don't eat. Are eternal possessions more essential than temporal ones? What, then, should a person do? Should one concentrate on the things of Heaven and let earthly things go as they may? But faith enables one to carry something of earthly existence over into immortality!

The more deeply people realize that Christ is the essential the less concerned they will be about everything else. That arms us for the struggle we must face. Don't be afraid! We may think ourselves forsaken but we aren't. We will be in the hands of Divine Providence. To the extent that a person recognizes God as Heavenly Father one places all trust in God and makes God's Kingdom the primary concern of one's heart. To precisely the extent that one does this a new order of being unfolds with and about one. In this order, it is the case that all things work together for those who love God, and they work together for good.

But those who love God in this way are those who hold fast to God's Son. This is a tremendous truth. Christ is the condition for the realization of the providential order established by God. In telling us the story of the wealthy landowner Jesus is trying to anchor the hearts and minds of disciples in reality! Jesus wants us to know what counts in God's eyes and what doesn't. Jesus wants us to know what God sees as acceptable and what God sees as "fallen". The disciples are to complete the revaluation of existence that Jesus has begun.

If we as disciples will do this then we will be prepared for anything. If, for instance, the property they have grown up considering the foundation of wealth—and this varies from culture to culture and is understood in many ways—should be taken away from them because they love Christ, then for them, there is no basic loss. Of course, this holds only for disciples whose faith is alive and active. Otherwise, the words of Jesus are just words. Faith makes a huge difference.

This is one way that Jesus roots those who follow him in what is indestructible. Very gently, Jesus is immunizing us to all "unreality". Faith enables us to distinguish between what is "real" enough to last forever and what is not. Those who seem today to be authorities and determine for those who follow them what is "really important" are endowing what is actually unreal with a fake reality. This is how "worldly wisdom" gets established. That is the fake wisdom of a prevailing social and economic order. That is how many decide what sort of property mustn't be lost and what is or isn't a threat to oneself or one's life. If we follow Jesus in faith we become invulnerable to worldly wisdom and its values. Jesus is the Truth and that makes Jesus the Way who leads all who follow him to real Life.

Monday

WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST? A reflection from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII & Catholic Online

One day, Alphonsus Liguori, a young lawyer, went to visit a local hospital for people considered incurable. He had an experience in which he heard God telling him to consecrate his life to God. He came to see that as a call to become a priest and work as a secular missionary. He was constantly opposed by members of his family but gave missions in Naples and then in rural areas. He knew he couldn't do all that was needed and tried to found a religious community, eventually founded the Redemptorists, though he had to start over twice because those who came deserted him. He was ordered under obedience to become bishop of the Diocese St. Agatha of the Goths, where he found 30,000 Catholics who didn't know their faith and 400 priests whom he judged indifferent to the tasks God had called them to. His life work, apart from the writings that made him a Doctor of the Church, was to lead the people and priests of that diocese to Jesus.

Speaking to each of you from my heart (said Pope John) I want to remind you that the Son of God, in the sacrament of his love, has sanctified you with the touch of his own pure body and has stilled the desires for all that is not his will. He has consoled you in your sorrows, soothed your angry hearts, and strengthened your wavering resolution to follow God. How long does each of us have to live? We don't know. But whether the road be long or short the Eucharistic food will always be unfailing food. It will keep you in good company on your way to the Lord's Kingdom. There are many who for a long time don't respond to the Lord's invitation to partake of this bread. What should we say? Take courage! The Lord's love will always draw you because he loves you. But we must present ourselves as the Lord's instruments and be willing to be made fit instruments.

Alphonsus found ways to instruct people who were being ignored. He created special programs for families. He reorganized the diocese's seminaries. He helped religious houses live more fully their own rules and charisms. He taught theology and he wrote. He created an approach to Christian morality that avoided what was called Laxism (moral permissivism) and Rigorism (symbolized by Jansenism or Puritanism) and it was adopted by the Catholic Church. He did all this while living a very ascetic life and suffering an increasingly severe form of rheumatism. He began unable to raise his head to drink and had to use a straw to drink and was very bent. An attack in 1768 left him paralyzed. Yet he was refused permission to resign his office as bishop for another seven years, and so had to do what he could in spite of his physical condition.

Dissension in the religious community he had founded reached such a pitch that he was tricked into signing away all authority regarding it. Learning this he became depressed but was able to rely on his faith during the eight years that passed between his rejection as superior and his resignation as bishop and his death. He remained a charismatic figure to all who sought him out. His people considered him a saint and this was confirmed by official beatification a little more than 20 years later. There was nothing he was not prepared to suffer for Christ and for the salvation of the poor and needy.

Tuesday

REMEMBER WHO YOUR STRENGTH IS

A reflection by Fr. Romano Guardini

“Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other shore while he sent away the crowds.” (Mt. 14:22) Jesus later came to the disciples by walking on the waters. They didn’t recognize him and were frightened. Even when he spoke to them they weren’t sure, so Peter asked for a kind of proof. To us, this seems mad because if it isn’t Jesus the “proof” could be fatal. But what we need to think about is how Jesus calls to us to follow him, even when that seems crazy or mortally dangerous. Are you ready to leave your security behind and step into pure trust in Jesus?

Jesus calls: Come! Peter fixes his eyes on Jesus and steps overboard. The water bears his weight. He believes. To believe means to share not what Christ believes but what he is. Thus Peter participates in Jesus’ act. But all divine action is living action, it rises and falls. Peter becomes aware that the water supporting him is rising and falling. As long as Peter’s gaze holds that of the Master and his faith remains one with the divine will, the water carries him. Then the tight tension of his trust slackens, the consciousness of his human limitations surges in on him and he recalls the power of the elements. He hears the roar of the wind and feels the waves rock beneath his feet.

Peter had come to a moment of crisis. Instead of leaning more completely on the support of Jesus and on faith in Jesus Peter began to look at his danger and his weakness, and he began to sink. The only thing he could do was scream out: *“Lord! Save me!”* He turned to Jesus and Jesus reached out and took his hand. All of a sudden the water was solid under his feet.

This passage contains a most important revelation about faith. What the believing soul experiences is not a truth or a value but a reality—the reality. Which? The reality of God in the living Christ

In the midst of everything that one may think or experience, in the midst of all that is known as the “world”, there rises a point that does not belong to the world, a place into which one may step, a room one may enter, a power on which one may lean, a love to which one may give oneself when strength and wisdom run out. This is reality, a reality different from the reality of the world, more real than the world. Faith is the act of seizing this reality of the Divine Power, of building one’s life on it, of becoming part of it.

Wednesday

COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW: 15:21FF

By Thomas of Villanova

“Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Then out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting: Sir, Son of David, take pity on me! My daughter is tormented by a devil.” The Canaanite woman did not have the law, she did not know the prophets, she was unacquainted with the mysteries, and yet, good God!, how many virtues and signs suddenly shine forth from her! What faith, what trust, what patience, what humility, what perseverance! She had not seen Christ’s miracles, she had not witnessed the dead rising, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, the lame leaping, but at the hearing of some light rumor, faith-filled her godly heart and she believed with a firm devotion of soul that her absent, demon-possessed daughter could be healed by his word alone.

Her trust in obtaining his favor was so strong that she neither became silent when scorned nor gave up when despised. She had cried out with incredible patience, and the Lord ignored her. He continued on and did not answer her. He pushed aside the interceding apostles. He reviled her as she was praying and lying prostrate before Him. No one was ever exasperated, no one ever scorned, no one ever provoked by so many rebukes.

What can I say of her humility? When she was called a dog, she also added her own abuse and called herself a puppy. Her perseverance was beyond human ability, for as often as she was provoked and despised, she never ceased from crying out until she obtained her request. O the wonderful greenness of this bough! O this remarkable woman, firmer in faith than one of the faithful, more filled with virtues than someone initiated in the mysteries.

What shall you say, O faithful soul, when you grow cold and numb, you who are imbued with the sacraments of life from the beginning, who are surrounded by so many teachings on holy scripture, so many oracles of the prophets and apostles, taking part in holy rites every day and with continuous praises of God, frequent sermons on the divine law and constant exhortations from preachers? Learn fervency from this idolater, learn faith, and learn virtue.

The Lord knew what lay hidden within her. He kept silent that she might become known; he disdained her that she might shine; he delayed that he might exalt her, that he might leave behind for the Church this woman as an example for imitations, that he might provide all future generations with this exemplar of all virtues. He suddenly confirmed her, not with an external word, but with an internal ray; thus rightly the Church presents her now to the penitent, that they might see in her what they should do, that they might observe in her what they should imitate.

O sinner, do for your own soul what she did for her daughter. For your soul suffers with a similar sickness, it is weighed down by an equal infirmity, it is vexed by an evil demon in the same way. So run after healing, seek a cure, cry out, beg, and keep at it. Do what she did and you will be free, just as her daughter was freed.

Thursday

THE BEAUTY & POWER OF PRAYER

Excerpt from a catechetical lesson by St. John Vianney

Human beings have the glorious duty of praying and loving. Reflect on the saying: A Christian's treasure is not on earth but in heaven. If so our thoughts ought to be directed to where our treasure is. This is why our glorious duty is to pray and love; if you pray and love you find your treasure and happiness.

Prayer is nothing other than union with God. If you have a heart that is pure and united with God then you have a kind of serenity and sweetness that makes you ecstatic; light surrounds you with marvelous brightness. In this intimate union, God and the soul are fused together like two bits of wax that no one can ever separate. This union of God and a tiny creature is a lovely thing that brings happiness beyond understanding.

Our hearts are small, but prayer stretches them and makes them capable of loving God. Through prayer we receive a foretaste of heaven; something of paradise comes down to us. Prayer never leaves us without sweetness; it is honey flowing into the soul and making all things sweet.

When we pray properly sorrows disappear like snow before the sun. It also makes time pass very quickly, and with such great delight, that one does not notice its length. Once when I was a delivery boy in Brest and most of my companions were ill I had to go a long way; I prayed to the Good God and the time did not seem long.

Some immerse themselves in prayer like fish in water; they give themselves totally to God and there is no division in their hearts. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Colette used to talk with our Lord as people talk to one another. How unlike that we are! Do you come to church with no idea of what you hope for from God? You would not visit an ordinary person without knowing what you hoped for. Or do you pray as though you wanted to say: "I will only say a couple of things and then I won't have to bother about you?" I think we would receive everything we hope for if we only asked for it with living faith and a pure heart. Never be surprised at how generous and loving God is.

Friday

REALLY RISING TO A NEW LIFE

A reflection by Thomas Keating, OCSO

“If anyone wants to become my follower, let that person deny self and take up the cross daily and follow me. Those who want to save their lives will lose them and those who lose their lives for my sake will save them. What does it profit one to gain the whole world but lose or forfeit one’s self?”

Jesus says: “If you want to come after me, deny yourself and take up the cross and follow me.” What is this “self”? It is our thoughts, feelings, self-image, world-view, and knowledge of the “way the world works” that we made to show us the way to happiness. So Jesus adds: “Whoever wants to save his/her self will lose it, and whoever loses it for my sake will find it.” Such a one will find eternal life, Christ life, Risen life, welling up from within.

Faith is not just the acceptance of abstract propositions about God. It is the total surrender of self to God. In baptism, our false self is put to death and Christ’s victory is given to us. That is what is intended. The dynamic process set off by baptism is meant to increase continually during the course of our chronological life and lead to the experience of the Risen Life of Christ within our new self.

In the Christian view, death is an integral part of living. Dying to the false self is a movement from a lower form of life to a higher one, from a lower state of consciousness and a weaker faith to a stronger, more penetrating, and unifying consciousness and faith.

Participation in the life of Christ means coming to know and love the person who is Jesus. The humanity of Christ is our starting point, the door into his divinity. Jesus said, “I am the door of the sheepfold; if anyone enters by me, that one will go in and out and find pasture”. We enter through the knowledge and love of Christ’s humanity into the sheepfold of his divinity.

A new person comes to birth in the deep interior rest offered to us as we seek to imitate Christ. This manifests Christ in and to the place and time and circumstances and people that make up our daily life. We replace the false self by thinking thoughts, feeling feelings, accept a self-image modeled on Christ’s. We have to throw out the trash first. Holy Spirit of God, though your gift of knowledge, may all our self-centered programs for happiness be laid to rest in the sure conviction that true happiness can be found in you alone.

Saturday

GOD'S PRESENCE REVEALING ITSELF THROUGH US **A reflection from a text by Max Thuriann**

Peter, James and John were present at the Transfiguration of Christ and saw his glory. Moses and Elijah also appeared “in glory” with Him. Jesus was seen as the revealed glory of God and as dwelling among God’s People. This was the same glory that filled the tent of meeting where the Ark of the Covenant was. Listen to the description in the Second Letter of Peter: “When he received honor and glory from God, the Father, and when the voice spoke from the majestic cloud, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased”, we heard a voice from Heaven, for we were with Him on the Holy Mountain”. Here Peter compares the Transfiguration with the revelation at Sinai. Luke, on the other hand, puts it in the context of God’s appearing above the tent of meeting. For both God dwells in Christ, the Beloved Son, and appears above him in a cloud.

In the Gospel, we hear Peter asking to put up tents for the three glorious ones so they could always meet God there. But the glory of God is always present on earth in Jesus transfigured, and even in Moses and Elijah glorified by Scripture. The cloud then comes as a sign of God’s presence above the three. When one comes under this cloud—and not the expression “come under” which is also used in the Exodus account of Sinai and of the tent of meeting—one feels terror. Glory is experienced in this fear, reminding us that God came to Mary in the annunciation and tying this awe to that of the transfiguration event.

Notice how the same theme marks the accounts of Sinai, of the Annunciation, and of the Transfiguration. In all a cloud symbolizes God’s presence and the awe we feel when we sense that presence. God comes, and fills and indwells and transfigures places or persons. As God came to Sinai and to the tent of meeting, so God comes to Mary and to Jesus, and now to Jesus’ disciples. Just as the mountain and the tent of meeting revealed God and God’s power to transform, so do Mary and Jesus. But does it surprise you that it reveals the same fact about us as disciples? In this last instance, God shows that there is no need for a special dwelling or tent or place. God’s glory was in a sense hidden by the tent of meeting and the Temple, but there is no need for this. Christ reveals that glory and it radiated from him to us. What was hidden in the Tent and Temple is revealed in Christ And in us. St. John writes: “The Word became flesh and “tabernacled” or “tented” among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only Son of the Father full of grace and truth”.

Today’s Biblical texts deliberately echo those speaking of God’s self-revelation in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Now we are told that the flesh which is the Son of God incarnate in Jesus as in his tent and temple, is continued in the Body of Christ. We are that Body. God is truly in the midst of his People through us. God intends to reveal his glory through us as God did through Christ. How? It is revealed through our loving others with the same love (the Spirit) by which Christ loved. The eyes of our faith have to pierce a veil, our own flesh. It is accomplished through our love for God and for one another. Faith guides this seeing. Our faith, and others’ faith, enable us to see who and what we truly are. It has guided us to discern God present in Jesus as an individual. Now, due to Jesus’ prayer for us, it guides us to see Christ in ourselves, and it guides others to see Christ in us.