

TWENTIETH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

**Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary
Solemnity of Our Holy Father St. Bernard**

- Sun.
Aug. 14 **The Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
THE PROMISE AND THE PRICE OF REDEMPTION**
A reflection by Joachim Jeremias
- Mon.
15 **SOLEMNITY OF THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY
THE GIFTS GOD SHARES WITH A HUMAN CREATURE**
A reflection from a homily by Nicolas Cabasilas
- Tues.
16 **Tuesday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time
GIVING THE GIFT THAT IS YOURSELF**
Reflections taken from the writings of St. Clare
- Wed.
17 **Wednesday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time
COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW 20:1-16**
By Fr. Karl Rahner
- Thurs.
18 **Thursday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time
THE GREATEST OF GIFTS**
A reflection from a homily by Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria
- Fri.
19 **MONASTIC DESERT DAY
Memorial of Bl. Gueric of Igny
ADVICE TO THOSE WAITING FOR CHRIST**
A reflection from a homily by Bl. Gueric of Igny
- Sat.
20 **Solemnity of Our Holy Father St. Bernard
SEEKING GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART**
A reflection taken from St. Bernard's sermons on the Canticle

Sunday

THE PROMISE & THE PRICE OF REDEMPTION

A reflection by Joachim Jeremias

“Jesus said to his disciples: I have come to bring fire to the earth and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over!” Any attempt to sketch what Jesus promises his followers has to start from his conviction that his mission is the prelude to the coming of a time of distress. We call this the eschatological time to remind ourselves that it is the prelude to the fulfillment of God’s promise of salvation and bliss. But no one should imagine that Jesus came to bring only peace. No, Jesus brought a sword to the earth; he brought fire and a baptism of suffering that is not just personal but cosmic.

Jesus was convinced that the sufferings of his disciples were linked indissolubly with his own sufferings. He foresaw that his disciples would be involved in a collective suffering to be introduced by his own passion. He was certain that the Kingdom of God comes through suffering and only through suffering.

Jesus was convinced that his suffering would fundamentally alter the situation of his followers. The rejection of Jesus would also involve his disciples. Jesus’ passion marks the turning point and prelude to the time of the sword. To agree to follow Jesus means to venture on a life that is as hard as the last walk of a person condemned to death. Discipleship involves the readiness to tread the lonely road and to bear people’s hatred. For a disciple, the special sting of suffering will be the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Micah, “one’s enemies are those of one’s own house”.

A division will go right through the midst of families and the closest relatives—fathers and brothers, mothers and daughters, even one’s own children. They will denounce each other and deliver each other up to death. Yes, Jesus envisages martyrdom as the fate of his disciples. The law that the Kingdom of God comes through suffering applies also to the disciples of Jesus. But suffering brings with it the promise that the surrender of life is simultaneously the acceptance of life. God will deliver those who endure to the end and persevere faithfully in the hours of trial. God will deliver those who pray to be freed from the Evil One. For the work of sieving Jesus’ disciples is that of Satan. That is how the wheat is separated from the chaff.

As great as Satan’s power may be, God’s power is greater. God’s victory is certain! When the tempting of God’s People reaches its climax God will bring about a great turning point. The “little flock” is promised that circumstances will be reversed. The flock may be small in number, but even if it is the persecution that threatens it only makes it clear that they are indeed God’s flock. We shall be clearly the saints of the Most High! The Kingdom is promised to us. It is the greatest of all kingdoms and the only one that lasts forever! Don’t be afraid of the price you have to pay. Look toward God’s promise.

Monday

THE GIFTS GOD SHARES WITH A HUMAN CREATURE

A reflection from a homily by Nicolas Cabasilas

It was fitting that the Holy Virgin should share in every aspect of her Son's providential care for all of us. Just as she had given her flesh and blood to Jesus and had received in return a share of his graces, so likewise she shared in his pains and sufferings. When his side was pierced by the lance as he hung on the cross, a sword pierced his mother's heart, just as saintly Simeon had foretold. After our Savior's death, she was the first to conform herself to the Son who resembled her; she shared in his resurrection before anyone else.

When her son broke the tyranny of death by rising from the grave, the Virgin saw and heard his greeting. When the time came for him to depart for heaven, she escorted him on the way as far as she could. When, finally, he had gone she took his place among the apostles, uniting herself with the other companions of the Lord by means of her good works. In all this she benefited the entire human race, teaching us by her example and obedience to God's will.

It was also right for the Virgin's most holy soul to be separated from her hallowed body, but it was so released only to be united with the soul of her Son. The second light was united with the first and primary one. For a short time, her body remained upon the earth and then it too departed. It had to go everywhere the Savior had gone and shed its light on both the living and the dead. It had to sanctify nature in every respect. Then, at last, it could take its appointed place.

Thus, the grave received her body for a short time but heaven soon took it from the grave as a new earth, a spiritual body, a treasure of our human life more revered than the angels and holier than the archangels. His proper throne was restored to the King, paradise to the tree of life, the sun's orb to the light, the tree to its fruit, and the mother to her son. In every respect, she was in accord with her Child.

O blessed one, what words can adequately praise your virtue, let alone the graces you received from Our Savior for the benefit of our entire race! It is impossible to give you fitting praise! It would be so even if one could speak in all the tongues of human beings and angels.

It seems to me that part of the eternal happiness in store for the righteous will be really to know and proclaim your graces in a fitting way. These graces no eye has seen nor ear heard of. To adapt St. John's words: The world could not contain them. The only place where your marvelous gifts can fittingly be displayed is the new heaven and the new earth, where the sun of Righteousness lives. No darkness is there and there is no evening. The Savior himself will proclaim the worth God has graced us with and the angels will applaud.

Tuesday

GIVING THE GIFT THAT IS YOURSELF

Reflections taken from the writings of St. Clare

All you who are my sisters and brothers in Christ I exhort and admonish you to strive to follow the way of simplicity, of humility, and of poverty. Live a worthy and holy life, as we have learned to from Blessed Francis. These virtues are not acquired by what we do but through the mercy and grace of the Father of Mercies. The result will be a life of fragrance and of good omen for all who are near. With the love of Christ, we must love one another, showing inward love by outward deeds. Each of us is to be an example that inspires others to grow continually in the love of God.

I also beg that anyone entrusted with the guidance of others to this by deeds and virtues and mutual charity and holiness of life. It is best that all follow their superiors because they are inspired by example and out of love. Such a person should be a good parent to the rest. She should provide to each what that person needs and be approachable. This holds for all but especially for one placed over others. All must have someone to go to and speak of their needs, with confidence that one will be listened to and that whatever is possible will be done. Let all keep it in mind, moreover, that they have renounced their own wills for the sake of giving themselves to God.

Obedience to God given through obedience to another should proceed from spontaneous love and according to what all have promised. Thus, the superior as well as the entire community, will see charity, humility and unity reigning among all; each will bear the burdens of individual duties more lightly because of this. A holy life can change what is painful and bitter into something sweet. Straight is the way that leads to life but how narrow the gate at its end. How wonderful when one knows how to persevere in this walk.

One cannot live like a Lord in this world and then pass right into heaven to rule with Christ there. A camel can pass through a needle's eye more easily than the rich can reach the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, you have cast aside everything so that our adversary may not grasp you by your garments; you will have nothing but yourself as given to Christ. So one can squeeze through the narrow gate and enter the Kingdom of Heaven as though one were naked. How blessed that poverty which leaves us with nothing but ourselves, and our Lord Christ. This life of having nothing but Christ, is our gift to others. We want them too to see the path which leads to our Lord.

Wednesday

COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW 20:1-16

By Fr. Karl Rahner

“Jesus said to his disciples: The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard.” It seems to me that this gospel gets stranger and more incomprehensible each time it is heard. That everyone receives the same reward simply doesn't hold true for eternity. Nor can we conclude that God doesn't give to each of us according to our works, for it is written in scripture that God does. What is this story really telling us?

The landowner explicitly asks the grumblers whether he hasn't the right to be generous. So what he gives the latecomers isn't a wage they have earned or a matter of justice; it is an expression of his free generosity. This brings us to the point of the entire story. It is about the incalculable mercy, the grace that cannot be reckoned up in terms of wages and justice, and the generosity and mercy which ultimately prevails between God and human persons.

Where does this mercy enter our life? Where is it that God shows us his freedom in disposing of us and that he does not negotiate? We can't find the answer to these questions in this parable. We can't make an unjustified application of the story's details to the divine reality. In the last analysis, everything one can earn by way of wages depends on the free disposition of God—who gives to us and ordains our beginning and our ending according to divine pleasure, as we say. From this, there follows something which can never lose its importance for us.

What we cannot negotiate and must leave to God's freedom is ultimately our self. Our own selves, just as we are with our life and our temperament and our destiny and our surroundings and our time and our heredity and our family—with everything that we may be and cannot change. Whenever we grumble and complain about others with whom God has dealt differently we are really refusing to accept our very own selves! We don't want to accept ourselves as we are from the hand of God.

The parable teaches us to say: We are those who receive the daily wage, we are that wage. We receive ourselves with our destiny, our freedom and whatever we choose to do with that freedom—but ultimately what we receive is our self. This we must accept, not just without grumbling, without inward protest, but with goodwill. Why? Because it is given us by the God who asks: Do you begrudge my generosity? Our life's great work is to accept our self as the mysterious and gradually revealed gift of the eternal generosity of God. Everything we are and have, even the painful and mysterious, is God's generous gift. We must accept it with the knowledge that when we do so God gives himself with the gift—gives us everything we could receive. We have not always done this. And yet God is willing to give us everything if we will only accept it—our selves, and God's self, and life without end.

Thursday

THE GREATEST OF GIFTS

A reflection from a homily by Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria

What could be greater happiness for those who love God and long for true life than to enjoy God forever and rest in his love? People often boast of their physical well-being when they have only indulged themselves with all sorts of food and drink, yet these bring pleasures that are only fleeting and often selfish. How much more wonderful the delight of those who care for themselves spiritually by drinking of the water of refreshment that is the Holy Gospel! They are clothed spiritually as though arrayed in cloth of gold richly embroidered!

Our spiritual journey has brought us to the most exalted and life-giving of mysteries. The Lord has set before us gifts that no words can describe. We need only meet together for a sacred meal to rejoice in inexpressible delights. As sharers in a heavenly calling we have willingly put on the wedding garment of undefiled faith and Christ, as a host, waits upon us as we feast of his love and goodness. Christ who loves us refreshes us!

As wonderful as such words are, yet deeds are even better. The fatted calf has actually been sacrificed. The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, has been slain for us. The Heavenly Father rejoices that his Son is offered as a willing victim. Could we have a clearer proof of this love? We need only pay attention to Scripture.

“Wisdom has built a house, set up seven pillars, slaughtered victims, prepared fine wine and spread a banquet table”. That is what Scripture actually says. But all these words, and the images they evoke, are only symbols. But the unfailing delights of Christ’s banquet are now realized. The bountiful giver is with us, the divine gifts are set before us, the sacred meal is ready and the life-giving wine poured out. The King of Glory summons you. The Son of God receives you! God the Incarnate Word invites you! It is Christ, the permanent fullness of the wisdom of the Heavenly Father has built a house that is a temple not made by human hands and distributes his own body as bread and gives his own blood as wine,.

Christ urges us: Come! Eat my bread! Come! Drink the wine I have prepared! I have prepared myself to be your food and drink. Do you long for me? I am life itself become your flesh. I am the Word and Image of the Father, sharing my body and blood to save you. Taste and see that I, your Lord, am truly good! You have experienced this. Do this now in memory of me and my love for you.

Friday

ADVICE TO THOSE WAITING FOR CHRIST

A reflection taken from a homily of Bl. Gueric of Igny

In the Holy Ones of old, the Church of Christ waited for his coming. In the same way, we wait for Christ's Second Coming. The first hope was that Christ would pay the price of redemption. The second hope is for the reward of the labors of those who follow Christ and live and love as he lived and loved. That means our eyes are raised above earthly concerns and fixed with joyful longing on those of heaven. Some are impatient and try to snatch the prizes this world offers. Blessed are those whose whole hope rests in the Lord's name and take no notice of false and empty foolishness. Isn't it better to be humble with the meek than share ill-gotten gains with the proud? The Lord is our share, and so we will wait for him!

If you are wise, give an eye to yourself and see how you are using your time. If you are a sinner don't waste the opportunity to repent. If you are holy then make progress in holiness. Remember the evil servant surprised by his Lord's coming! Evil servants say, "A rule here and a rule there, only a little of this and only a little of that, wait for this and wait for that" and they mock us. The one who grants faith tests it and crowns what he tests. The Lord commands us through Hosea: "You will be waiting for me for many days but you are not to take any other spouse".

This is the proper way of waiting for the Lord and keeping your pledge of love. Even though we miss and long for the consolation of his presence we must not look around for other consolations but keep ourselves in suspense looking toward his return. We are in suspense, as it were, between heaven and earth, unable as yet to grasp the heavenly things but seeking not to contaminate ourselves with the earthly.

The reason why we choose this suspense, this suspended death, is to make ourselves persevere in our suspension from the cross—until we merit to die on it.

O Lord Jesus, when you were about to exercise that power of laying down your life and accepting the sort of death by which you would lay it down, everything still remained in your own choice. You chose to hang from the cross so that being raised up over the earth you might draw us to yourself and then hang us too above all earthly concerns. You gave us an example so that we might also persevere until death on the cross and ascend from there to heaven all the more easily—stepping as it were from the topmost rung of the ladder of humility. Grateful thanks be to you, Lord Jesus! Where the cross is we are. Where the cross is we wait for you. We wait for "Eli", for our God, to come and take us to himself.

I believe that I shall see the Lord's favor even in the land of the living. Do you believe that too? Then strengthen your heart and bear with the Lord. Woe to those who lose patience. He promises that he will be coming quickly. "Look", he says, "I am coming quickly and bringing with me rewards to bestow on everyone in proportion to each one's labors. The time truly is short, though it may seem long to those who are in turmoil—whether from labor or love. Both are necessary. How long can anyone's labors last upon this earth? Be certain that the Lord will come, this Lord who is our own Lord, our dread and yet our desire, our rest and our reward, the sweetness and embrace we long for. He is the blessedness of all. He has chosen you. Never forget that; love as you are loved.

Saturday

SEEKING GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

A reflection taken from St. Bernard's sermons on the Canticle

It is a great good to seek God. Among all the blessings one can receive there is none greater than this. This is the first of God's gifts. This is also the final step in one's spiritual progress. There is no virtue that leads to it and it gives place to no virtue. What could be added to it to make it better? And since it is the consummation of all virtues how could it be pushed aside by any virtue? One who isn't seeking God has no virtue and there is no limit to this seeking. "Seek His Face evermore!" That is what the psalmist says to us.

I don't think that one who has found God will ever cease seeking God. We seek God not by walking but by longing; we don't move our feet but our heart! When one has been so fortunate as to find God that sacred desire doesn't cease. Rather, when one finds God one's longing is increased. Is the consummation of joy the extinction of one's longing for joy? Rather, it is like pouring oil on a fire. Desire is a kind of flame. Indeed, our desire will be fulfilled but the fulfillment isn't the extinction of the desire. That's why it isn't the extinction of our seeking God.

Why do I say these things? It is because every one of us who is seeking God needs to know that God anticipated this seeking and sought us before we began to seek at all. I remind you of this so that, even after you receive all sorts of gifts of the Lord, you won't treat them as if they were God's gifts. We must give glory to God for them.

"By night, on my bed, I reached out for him whom I love". We seek the Word because we had already been sought by the Word. If we were abandoned to ourselves we would be a kind of spirit that goes this way and never finds its way back to the one it seeks. The psalmist says: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, Lord". Do you desire to return, to draw closer yet to the Lord? If that depended on your own will or strength you wouldn't beg for help. Why would you ask another for what you already had yourself? It is obvious that we desire what we can't bring about by ourselves.

We long to draw closer and we long to be sought by the one we seek. Yet in this very longing, we find a consolation. What is the source of our longing and what is the source of our willingness, eagerness, to be found? It comes from the fact that we have already been sought and visited by the Word. That visitation wasn't without fruit. It has caused us to have that willingness and longing. Without that no greater closeness would be possible. It is simply that it isn't enough to be sought once. If you are in love you want to be sought never-endingly.

But your will to draw closer would be powerless if you were not given the power to do just this. St. Paul said: "To will is in my power but to perform what I will is not". Whence comes this power? It comes as a gift from the one who seeks us. When we are seeking we know that we are being given the power to draw nearer and nearer. This is the grace the psalmist sought when he prayed: "Seek your servant!" That is our prayer too. God is answering that prayer even as we make it.