

TWENTY-FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun.** **The Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Aug.21 **DO YOU WANT TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD?**
A reflection from a letter by St. Anselm of Canterbury
- Mon.** **Monday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time**
22 **THE GIFT OF SINCERETY OF HEART**
A reflection taken from a sermon by Cardinal Newman
- Tues.** **Memorial of St. Rose of Lima**
23 **TRIALS AND TRANSFORMATION**
A reflection based on a Letter of St. Rose of Lima to a doctor
- Wed.** **Feast of St. Bartholomew**
24 **HOW WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT GUILF**
A reflection based on a text from Carroll Stuhlmueller
- 2**
- Thurs.** **Thursday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time**
25 **THE POWER OF LOVE GIVES US HOPE**
A reflection developed from St. Clement of Rome's Letter to the Corinthians
- Fri.** **Friday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time**
26 **ON THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS**
Angelus Message of Pope Francis
- Sat.** **Memorial of St. Monica**
27 **A WAY OF LIFE THAT DRAWS OTHERS TO GOD**
A reflection from the The Confessions of St. Augustine

Sunday

DO YOU WANT TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

A reflection from a letter by St. Anselm of Canterbury

“Work hard to enter by the narrow gate; I tell you that many will seek to enter and will not be able to, ... yet people will come from east and west and will sit at table in the Kingdom.” Our God cries out that the Kingdom of Heaven is for sale! Yes, the glorious bliss of this Kingdom which surpasses the power of mortal eyes to see or mortal ears to hear or mortal hearts to conceive, is for sale. And yet if anyone asks its price the answer is: There is no need for any earthly payment. To obtain the Kingdom from the One who wishes only to bestow it as a gift only one thing is needed, love. After all, no one can give God anything he doesn't already possess because everything belongs to Him. Still, he doesn't give such a precious gift without asking for anything. He won't give it to anyone who lacks love.

People don't give away what they hold dear to those who don't appreciate it, and so God won't bestow his precious gift on those who don't value it. The gift is love and if you receive it you love. Love is the one thing God asks in response to this gift. Indeed, God can't give it without receiving love. Give love, then, and receive the Kingdom. Love and it is yours.

Reigning in Heaven consists in exercising one single power, and doing it together with God and all the angels and saints. It is the power to love. And reigning means being united with God and the holy ones in loving. Love God more than your self and already you will have begun to have what you desire to possess fully. Be at one with God and already you are beginning to reign with God and all the holy ones. In Heaven, the desire of God and the desire of the saints are one. If you love as they do you are one with them. If you desire only God, then what you desire will be what the saints do.

Do you want to reign in Heaven? Love God, and all others, and love now as you will when you are in Heaven. Then you will be the sort of person you want to be and you will love God and everyone in the way loving is done in Heaven.

We can't have such perfect love unless we empty our hearts of every other love that is separate from it. Those who fill their hearts with the love of God and neighbor long for nothing but the will of God. And that shall be the will of other human beings so long as they love nothing but what God loves. This is why we devote ourselves to prayer, to spiritual conversations, and to reflections on God. This is a way of loving God. But it is a joy to love God—for all who want most of all to think and speak and hear of the One they love most. That is why we rejoice with the rejoicing, weep with the weeping, show compassion to those in distress, and give to the needy. This is loving others as one loves oneself. Hence we devalue riches, power, pleasure, honor and praise—for those who love these things frequently offend God and neighbor.

Think of the two commandments on which the entire law and prophets depend. Those who want to possess the fullness of love, which is the price of the Kingdom of Heaven, must, as a result, love even contempt, poverty, toil, and subjection to difficulty. This is what the saints do. This is what we must do, and want to do.

Monday

THE GIFT OF SINCERITY OF HEART

A reflection taken from a sermon by Cardinal Newman

Great is the difference between sincere and insincere Christians. All sin, even after receiving the grace of God. God's true servants sin and are sorry, while hypocrites sin and are not. The two sorts of people look like one another but the word of God discriminates between them by a straightforward test: Christ dwells in the consciences of the one and not of the other. Those who belong to the first group open their hearts to God and the others do not. The one views God as the Lord and owner of all that is and the other admits the Lord only for, as it were, a night or some brief period of time.

We are all filled with stains and corruption. We don't see them because they are as invisible as the air is when the sun is shining. But God sees all. God pervades us as sunbeams do the air. We cannot hide from God and our wisdom as our duty lies in embracing these truths, accepting them gladly, and acting upon them.

Our first need is to beg God to teach us the mystery of his ever-presence in us and in all things. By acknowledging it begins to be real to us and to have effects on us. We must confess it with faith so that we may possess it unto justification. Let us so own it as to set God before us in everything. The Psalmist declares: I have set God before me for God is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall. Let us in all circumstances look to God.

Even if we have sinned let us not dare to keep away from God in our thoughts or actions. With the prodigal son, let us rise and go to God. Or, if we are not conscious of anything, still let us not boast about ourselves or justify ourselves. Let us feel that the One who judges us is the Lord. In all circumstances, of joy or of sorrow, of hope or of fear, let us aim at having God in our innermost heart. Let us have no secret that is for us apart from God. Let us acknowledge God as enthroned within us at the very springs of all our thoughts and feelings. Let us submit ourselves to God's guidance and sovereign direction. Let us come to God that God may forgive us, cleanse us, change us, guide us, and save us.

All this is God's great gift of love to us. Let us accept it and let us do it with all our heart. That is the gift of sincerity.

Tuesday

TRIALS AND TRANSFORMATION

A reflection based on a Letter of St. Rose of Lima to a doctor

Our Lord and Savior has spoken with incomparable majesty to us. He says that all must know that grace follows upon trials. Without bearing the burden of trials no one reaches the heights to which grace raises us. The gifts of grace increase just as the struggles increase. We must not deceive ourselves in this matter. The only reliable stairway to paradise is the cross. Without it, there is no road that leads to Heaven.

While I was listening to this message a kind of power came over me and I seemed to have been set in the middle of a public street so that I might repeat the message to people of every age, sex and status. I wanted to cry out: "Hear, Oh people, Oh nations! I am warning you of the commandment of Christ by using the words that came from his own mouth: We cannot obtain grace unless we suffer afflictions. We must even heap trouble upon trouble to attain a deep participation in the divine nature, the glory of the sons of God and the perfect happiness of the soul."

That same power urged me to proclaim the beauty of divine grace. It was so strong that I could hardly breathe and I began to sweat and to pant. I felt as if my soul could no longer be confined to my body, but that I had burst apart some sort of chain and was free in a new way and even alone. I was moving very fast across the entire world and proclaiming this message.

If only we mortals would learn how wonderful, how great a thing it is, to have divine grace. It is so beautiful, so noble, so precious in every way! How great are the riches that this grace conceals within itself and how many are the delights and joys that it gives? If people only knew this and without doubt, they would dedicate themselves and all their care and concern to winning for themselves those pains and afflictions that come with seeking God. Everyone, throughout the whole world, would seek trouble, infirmities and even torments—and seek them rather than good fortune. It is worth it to attain the immeasurable treasure of God's grace.

This is the reward and the ultimate gain of patience! With it no one complains about a cross or about troubles or whatever may happen to one. No one would complain if they knew anything about the scales on which all crosses are weighted when they are distributed to us. God's gifts are so immeasurably greater than any trial! Let us seek God and seek to bear the cross with Jesus more than we seek anything else. What we are talking about are the means by which the Lord transforms us and makes us more and more like Jesus Christ.

Wednesday

HOW WE CAN LIVE WITHOUT GUILLE

A reflection based on a text from Carroll Stuhlmueller

The disciple St. Matthew calls Bartholomew seems to be the same person St. John calls Nathaniel. That is fortunate because St. John goes on to tell us that Jesus saw in him one who was without guile, who lived wholly in sincerity and truth. That is intended as an inspiration for us, both in accepting Jesus and striving to follow Jesus' example. Recall the words of St. Paul: "Don't act like fools but like thoughtful people; make the most of present opportunity". Our present opportunity is to live and believe without guile.

We have recently heard the words of the Book of Wisdom: "Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed; forsake foolishness that you may live." We have also heard that the food and wine we need is the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ and have reflected on the fact that many cannot make sense of this or believe it.

The first requirement of the Christian faith is an honest, integral, and authentic living out of our humanness. It is God's first gift to us and if we live it in an authentically Christian home or community we will find many examples of what is involved. We have seen others make mistakes, and turn away from them, or fail to listen to good advice and then repent. But doing just that is part of what it means to learn to live without guile. It means self-acceptance joined to the effort to let oneself be transformed by the grace of Christ. We become guileless in doing good and in admitting our need to turn away from all that isn't Christ. This is preparation for eating the flesh and blood of Jesus.

God rained down food for Israel in the desert, what they hadn't recognized before as food. They found by experience that it would nourish them on their difficult journey to the Land of Promise. They had to collect it every day and eat it every day, accepting it for what it was and not trying to make it whatever they might happen to want. Not in satisfying our wants do we find the life we seek, that life God gives us in seed as our humanness. We find life in what God directs us to do. We are respectful of one another and cultivate relations of mutual support with the other members of our community of faith. We do all this through faith in Jesus and through self-sacrificing love shown us in his example and his words. Taste and see that the Lord is good and that nothing is lacking for those who preserve in humbly following Jesus with childlike honesty and openness to divine grace.

To be without guile is a matter of receiving as well as of giving, from Jesus and to one another. Jesus told Nathaniel he had seen him "under his fig tree", which has always been understood to mean he saw him in prayer. Guilelessly, Nathaniel responded with a confession of faith: You are the Son of God, the King of Israel! Jesus responded with a promise Nathaniel would see great things yet. That promise is ours too, if our faith is guileless inwardly and in our deeds, as was Bartholomew's. In this faith, he got up from prayer and followed Jesus wherever he led.

Thursday

THE POWER OF LOVE GIVES US HOPE

A reflection developed from St. Clement of Rome's Letter to the Corinthians

Anyone truly possessed by the love of Christ is sure to keep God's commandments. The love of God creates a bond stronger than any other. Who can express this in fitting words or describe the beauty of divine love? What is more, the heights to which this love raises us are indescribable?

Love unites us to God. Love cancels innumerable sins. Love has no limits to its endurance or faithfulness. Love bears everything patiently. Love is neither servile nor arrogant. Love doesn't provoke divisions or factions. It always leads those who live by it to harmony and cooperation. By it, all God's chosen ones are sanctified and without it, no one can please God.

It was out of love that the Lord took us to himself. Because God loves us, because it is the will of our Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus Christ gave his life's blood for us and his flesh to save our flesh, his life to save our lives. See, beloved, what a great and wonderful thing love is, and especially God's love for us! How inexpressible is this love's perfection! What, then, have we to fear if we live in the love we have been given?

No one is worthy to possess such love. Yet God makes us worthy! So we must turn to God and beg God, by the divine mercy that love free from all partiality and beyond reproach may be found in us. Every generation has passed away from Adam's time until our own. Those who, by God's grace, were made perfect in love have a dwelling even now among the holy ones. When the Kingdom of Christ appears, all these will be revealed as one in God. Take courage, God says to us, and a day of gladness will come when I will raise you from your graves to glory. Beloved, it is by keeping God's commandments and living together in harmony and mutual helpfulness that we shall find happiness.

The love that we show one another will win us forgiveness of our sins. As Scripture says: *"Happy are those whose transgressions are pardoned, whose sins are forgiven. Happy those to whom the Lord imputes no fault, on whose lips there is no guile."* This is the blessing given to those whom God has chosen through Jesus Christ our Lord. All we can hope for is given us through the love we show to God as a response to the love God shows us. It transforms us day by day.

Friday

ON THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

Angelus Message of Pope Francis

The Gospel Reading (cf. *Mt* 25: 1-13) indicates to us the condition for entering into the Kingdom of Heaven, and it does so with the parable of the ten virgins: these are those maidens with the task of welcoming and accompanying the bridegroom to the wedding ceremony, and since in that time it was the custom to celebrate marriage at night, the maidens held lamps.

The parable says that five of these virgins were wise, and five were foolish: indeed, the wise ones brought with them oil for the lamps, whereas the foolish did not. The bridegroom arrived late and they all fell asleep. At midnight the bridegroom's arrival was announced, and at this point, the foolish virgins realized they did not have oil for the lamps and asked the wise ones for it. But the latter answered that they could not spare it, as they did not have enough for all. While the foolish were in search of oil, the bridegroom arrived; the wise virgins entered with him in the banquet hall and the door was closed. The five foolish ones arrived too late and knocked on the door, but the answer was, "I do not know you" (v. 12), and they remained outside.

What does Jesus want to teach us with this parable? He reminds us that we must be ready for the encounter with Him. Very often, in the Gospel, Jesus exhorts us to be vigilant, and He does so at the end of this account too. He says, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (v. 13). But with this parable He says that to be watchful does not mean simply not sleeping, but *being prepared*; indeed, all the virgins slept before the bridegroom arrived, but upon reawakening some are ready and others not. Here, therefore, is the meaning of being wise and prudent: it means not waiting for the last moment of our life to collaborate with the grace of God, but to do so already from now on. It would be good to think a little: one day will be the last one. If it were today, how prepared am I? But I must do this or that... Preparing oneself as if it were the last day, this does us good.

The lamp is the symbol of the faith that illuminates our life, while the oil is the symbol of the charity that nourishes, that makes fruitful and credible the light of faith. The condition for being ready for the encounter with the Lord is not only faith, but a Christian life rich in love and charity for our neighbor. If we let ourselves be guided by what seems easiest to us, by the pursuit of our own interests, our life becomes sterile, incapable of giving life to others, and we do not accumulate any spare oil for the light of our faith; and this – faith – will be extinguished at the moment of the coming of the Lord, or even before. If instead we are watchful and seek to do good, with gestures of love, of sharing, of service to our neighbor in difficulty, we can remain at peace as we await the coming of the bridegroom: the Lord will be able to come at any moment, and even the sleep of death does not make us afraid, as we have a reserve of oil, accumulated with the good works of every day. Faith inspires charity and charity safeguards faith.

May the Virgin Mary help us make our faith ever more operative through charity, so that our lamp may shine already here, on our earthly journey, and then in heaven, at the wedding feast in paradise.

Saturday

A WAY OF LIFE THAT DRAWS OTHERS TO GOD

A reflection taken from The Confessions of St. Augustine

Monica was brought up in a modest and sober fashion. It was you who made her obedient to her parents rather than they who made her obedient to you. When she reached the age of marriage she was given to a man whom she served as her master. She tried to win him to you, preaching by the beauty of the character you had given her to make her able to call forth love and respect and even the admiration of her husband.

She endured his infidelities and never had a single quarrel with him on this subject. She was waiting for you to show mercy to him so that he might believe in you and be made chaste. He was an extremely kind person by nature but had a very hot temper. My mother knew that an angry husband is not one who should be contradicted, either in deed or word. It was only when he had calmed down and become quiet that she looked for an opportunity to explain to him the reason for what she had done in angering him, even if he had flown into a rage for no reason. There were many wives among her friends with husbands much milder than hers but whose faces were disfigured by bruises. When they got together these women would often complain but my mother would advise them that the fault lay in their tongues. They had all listened to the reading of the marriage contract; they should regard it as a legal instrument making them servants, a fact they should remember. They knew what a violent husband she had to put up with and were amazed that it had never been said that Patrick beat her or that a family quarrel lasted as much as an entire day. They asked how she managed it, and she stated the rule I have described. Those who followed it had every reason to thank her. Those who didn't follow it didn't escape being bullied and put down.

At one time her mother-in-law was angry with her because of the malicious whispering of some servants. Monica showed such a respectful attitude that she won her over her mother-in-law by patience and forbearance. The mother-in-law ended up telling her son the names of the malicious servants and asking that they be beaten. Out of deference toward his mother, and concern for the good order and peace in his household and family, he did just that. His mother told the servants that they had received the reward of trying to please her by speaking ill of her daughter-in-law. None dared to do it again and all lived together pleasantly.

Toward the very end of his earthly life, my mother finally won her husband over to you, Lord. Now that he was a believer she no longer had to complain about the things she had had to put up with before his conversion. She had always been the servant of those who serves you in faith and all who knew her had good reason to praise and honor and love you the more because of the fruits born by her holy way of life. They could experience your presence in her heart through her deeds. She had been wife to only one man, she had cared for her parents well, she had governed her household well and piously, she was well spoken of for her good works, had brought up children well, and often labored over them as though bringing them again to birth when they wandered from you. Lord, by your gift she gave each of us the care a mother gives a son and the service that a daughter gives a father.