

## **TWENTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**

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- Sun     The Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Sept. 4 **A MEDITATION: DISCIPLESHIP & THE CROSS**  
          By Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Mon.     Labor Day  
5       **FOCUSING OUR LABOR ON GOD'S KINGDOM**  
          A reflection based on sermons of St. Pope John XXIII
- Tues.    Tuesday of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Week  
6       **THE APOSTOLIC TASK OF BUILDING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**  
          A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Jean Frisque
- Wed.     Remembrance of the Departed  
7       **HOW TO REMEMBER THE DEPARTED**  
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8       **ALL THINGS ARE MADE NEW**  
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9       **GOD'S CARE FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL**  
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          Homily by Pope Francis

*Sunday*

## **A MEDITATION: DISCIPLESHIP & THE CROSS**

**By Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Suffering and Rejection are the summary expression of Jesus' cross. Death on the cross means to suffer and to die as someone rejected and expelled. That it is Peter, the rock of the Church, who incurs guilt immediately after his own confession to Jesus Christ and after his appointment by Jesus, means that from its very inception the Church itself has taken offense at the suffering Christ. It does not want its Lord to force upon it the law of suffering. This makes it necessary for Jesus to relate clearly and unequivocally to his own disciples the "must" of suffering. "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself".

The law of Christ which must be fulfilled is the bearing of the cross. The burden of my brother or sister that I am to bear is not only that person's external fate, that person's character and personality, but is in a very real sense that person's sin. I cannot bear it except by forgiving it, in the power of the cross of Christ in which I, too, have a portion.

Those who are not prepared to take up the cross, those who are not prepared to give their life to suffering and rejection by others, lose community with Christ, and are not disciples. Discipleship is a commitment to the suffering Christ.

Whether we really have found God's peace in God's will is always shown by how we deal with the sufferings that come upon us. There are many Christians who do, indeed, kneel before the cross of Jesus Christ, and yet reject and struggle against every sort of tribulation in their own lives. They believe they love the cross of Christ, and yet they hate that cross in their own lives. And so in truth, they hate the cross of Jesus Christ as all, and in truth despise that cross and try by any means possible to escape it.

Those who acknowledge that they view suffering and tribulation in their own lives only as something hostile and evil can see from this very fact that they have not at all found peace with God. They have basically merely sought peace with the world, believing possibly that by means of the cross of Jesus Christ they might best come to terms with themselves and with all their questions, and thus find inner peace of soul. They have used the cross, but not loved it. They have sought peace for their own sake. But when tribulation comes, that peace quickly flees them. It was not peace with God, for they hated the tribulation God sends.

Thus those who merely hate tribulation, renunciation, distress, defamation, and imprisonment in their own lives, no matter how grandiosely they may otherwise speak about the cross, these people in reality hate the cross of Jesus and have not found peace with God. But those who love the cross of Jesus Christ, those who have genuinely found peace in it, now begin to love even the tribulations in their lives, and ultimately will be able to say with scripture, "We also boast in our sufferings."

*Monday*

## **FOCUSING OUR LABORS ON GOD'S KINGDOM**

**A reflection based on sermons by St. Pope John XXIII**

Today we celebrate Labor Day.

Recall the Lord's reminder that "a laborer deserves his food" (Matt.10:10) and note that Jesus is reminding us that all work is sacred; at least if it is the work of a person who directs every effort to the good of others precisely as "child of God". Without faith in God, it is impossible to achieve this or even achieve enduring success in a this-worldly way. Faith in God calls us also to faith in ourselves. We have wonderful powers; we need to use and develop ourselves in ways that will help us better support one another in earthly and spiritual ways.

God created us in the divine image and likeness and placed us on earth to cultivate and watch over it. Our dignity is reflected in the way we carry out all aspects of this vocation. We have to avoid the dead end of selfish individualism and that of isolating ourselves from the common effort to build up one another in human society. It means that to refuse these two efforts is more an expression of cowardice than of worldly wisdom. We can only become images and likenesses of our God in active solidarity and mutual assistance on all levels.

Jesus is God who has come into the world to save us. He didn't come to save us from the world, but from becoming a false self. Jesus spent most of the years of his life as an ordinary skilled worker, a manual laborer, and showed us how work ennobles us, and better as the work is done better. It is even more ennobling if we do it in a way that others can see points toward God and living better the love God has shown us in Jesus. Some do it as apostles, some as contemplatives, some writers or artists or artisans, and in various types of labor. But all this can be done in ways that direct minds and hearts to the higher community to which God calls us. Working like this makes labor an expression of mutual love and service, no matter what its product may be.

The Scriptures tell us a story about Joseph who was sold into slavery by his own brothers so they wouldn't have to compete with him for their father's attention and concern. The Scriptures also tell us a story of Joseph the husband of Mary, who saw everything he did as a way of carrying out God's call to him to love both God and others, starting with his own family. We are called to spend ourselves like both Josephs in showing care for others and promoting justice. We must make prayer the breath and sustenance of such living. Remember Benedict of Norcia and his motto: Pray and work. All activity, whether or not we call it "work", stretches our gaze toward the city of God. There all receive their just reward and find the fulfillment of their identity as children of God, created in the image of love. God is love. That is what we are too. Called and chosen to be love today.

*Tuesday*

## **THE APOSTOLIC TASK OF BUILDING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

### **A reflection inspired by a text of Fr. Jean Frisque**

We celebrate today the specifically Apostolic witness to Jesus' life, death and identity after the resurrection. Jesus instituted this witness, as is indicated by his choosing exactly twelve persons as "apostles"; they were to be his instruments in founding and binding together a new community of faith composed of people chosen from all the nations and races of the earth. He appeared to a variety of disciples after his resurrection but he appeared most frequently to the group we call the college of apostles. It was to them in particular that he said: As the Father sent me so I send you.

But the apostles' testimony wasn't limited to the assertion that Jesus who was crucified had risen from the dead. The apostles offered an eye-witness account of this fact but also communicated the faith which discloses the meaning of this fact, with the additional fact that Christ's passion and resurrection are the keys to understanding salvation history as God's plan for saving the entire world. More yet, they were to make this faith the binding glue that would hold the Church together through all the ages it might take for this plan to be completed. The Church endures by its fidelity to the proclamation of this truth and its refusal to accept any explanation of it that in any way watered it down or changed it. The apostolic witness to the resurrected Christ was inseparable from the life which animated the first Christian community and was necessarily a communal reality.

Fidelity to this salvation is absolutely essential to the mission of proclaiming and enacting the love without limits or boundaries, the universal charity, which is what transforms us into citizens of God's Kingdom. Individuals can be faithful only as members of the community of Christ. The apostles and their communal faith are the foundation stones of this community, as we see in the Book of Revelation's vision of the New Jerusalem. Within this community, God dwells and it is suffused by the light of God's love and truth whose lampstand is the Lamb, Christ.

So we are not told very much about either Philip or James, either in the New Testament or in tradition. It is not their individual contributions that are vital but their role in the community of Christian faith. It is upon this community that we, as individuals, depend for receiving the gift of faith and for living in a way that will allow this to transform us into other Christs, loving and caring even as Christ did and does still. We are all deeply and rightly concerned for our growth as members of Christ's Body. But we can't grow as members if there is no Body. And there would be no Body except for the common labor of faith by the Twelve Apostles which enabled it to become itself and to spread to the four corners of our world. As we celebrate the gift of apostleship and its ecclesial ministry we celebrate how much that gift means to us individually. The way we walk each day, in Christian and in monastic life, is a gift God gives us in Christ's Body. As we live it day by day we build up that Body in its witness to the salvation that the love of our God has given us in Christ incarnate.

*Wednesday*

## **HOW TO REMEMBER THE DEPARTED**

### **A reflection taken from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom**

Do you wish to honor the departed? The proper way to honor them is by giving alms, by performing good works, and by taking part in Divine Services. No good is done simply by arousing emotions, as people without faith do for their dead. We look heavenward! We reflect on spiritual truths and live them. Those without faith simply indulge in excessive expressions of grief. They want to honor the dead by showing how valuable they were when alive. They think to praise the dead in this way.

If we engage in the same sort of practices what will those without faith think when they hear us speak of the resurrection? If we merely express distress over the “loss” of loved ones are we trying to give them a better reputation or expressing how much we depended on their help in some worldly occupation? How can we convincingly proclaim Christ’s resurrection, and that of all the dead, if we don’t show our faith by the way we remember those who have left us to be with God?

You believe the entire message of Christ. We ourselves contemplate death with a feeling of security, don’t we? Grieving can even cause a person’s death, but not a Christian’s. Our emotions, then, mustn’t get in the way of living our faith. We have to be careful that what we do in remembering our departed doesn’t actually offend God!

Even grief and loss can be experienced in a way that draws us closer to God. Let’s reflect on the fact that those who are gone from us have been taken by God. All the departed were mortal to begin with, so death should be no surprise. If people indulge in too exaggerated signs of grief either they thought that something above nature should have saved their loved ones from death or they are sorrowing for themselves because they no longer have the presence and help of people they depended on. You don’t want to do either of these things.

Yes, all of us want to be immortal. God has taken those who have died to be immortal with him everlastingly. That is, of itself, a cause for joy. Immortality comes only from God. We can’t stay alive if we don’t eat. We can’t have immortality if we don’t go to God. You expect to be with God, and then you will once again be with those who have gone before you to God by death. It is part of God’s Providence.

The truth of the teaching on resurrection is defined as an essential part of our faith. We celebrate our belief in that teaching when we remember our departed. Only those who have no faith tear themselves apart in mourning and indulge in excessive expressions of grief. We Christians both accept the lot assigned to all mortal creatures and rejoice that God calls us to what is beyond our natural destiny.

If we want to grieve what we need to do is grieve for our sins. That is the best kind of sorrow. It is sorrow over what separates from God. God has freed our departed from their sins, that too, is a defined part of our Christian faith. What is the proper response to this faith? It is to live fully what we believe, both about our present life and about the life God has in store for all those called to share the divine life forever.

*Thursday*

## **ALL THINGS ARE MADE NEW**

### **From the sermons of St Anthony of Crete**

The law comes to an end with Christ, who leads us away from the letter of the law so as to bring us to the spirit. It is fulfilled in this, that the lawgiver himself has brought it entirely to completion, transforming the letter into the law of love. He has now made the law subject to love, and joined love to law in concord; not fusing the particular qualities of each, but in a marvelous way making light and free whatever is burdensome and servile and repressed: we are no longer to be enslaved by the elemental spirits of the world, as the apostle says, or held in the yoke of slavery to the letter of the law.

This is the summary of the benefits of Christ for us. This is the unveiling of the mystery, this is the nature made new, God and humankind, and the deification of the human nature assumed by God. But so radiant, so glorious a visitation of God to us needed some prelude of joy to introduce us to the present gift of salvation. Today's feast is such: the prelude is the birth of the Mother of God, and the concluding act is the union that is destined between the Word and human nature. A virgin is now born and suckled and molded, and is made ready to be the mother of God, the king of all forever.

Justifiably then is the mystery of this day to be celebrated, since a double gain will be ours if we do so: we shall be led towards the truth, and we shall be led away from a life of slavery to the letter of the law. How will this be? Clearly, in as much as the shadow yields to the presence of the light, and grace introduces freedom in place of the letter. The present feast stands on the border between these: it joins us to the truth instead of figures, and it brings in the new in place of the old.

As we celebrate the birth of Mary, let the whole creation sing praise and dance and unite to celebrate the glories of this day. Today let there be one common feast of those in heaven and those on earth. Let everything that is, in the world and above the world, join together in rejoicing. For today a shrine is built for the Creator of the universe. The creature is newly made ready as a divine dwelling for the Creator.

*Friday*

## **GOD'S CARE FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL**

### **A reflection taken from a sermon by Cardinal Newman**

When Hagar fled from Sarah and was lost and alone in the wilderness she was visited by an angel. Together with a reproof for her impatience, she was given a promise to encourage her. In the mixture of humbling and cheering words Hagar recognized the presence of her Maker and Lord, and realized that God always comes to those who seek him which shows both holiness and mercy. She had not expected this and so in her mind, the Lord became the "God who sees me".

Before the coming of Christ, there was little recognition of the fact that the Maker sees and is concerned for each individual human being. But now the gift of knowing God's care for us individually is given to everyone, though only we who are his people may be fully aware of it.

St. Peter Claver was one of the few who recognize the full implications of this fact. He knew that God cared for each and everyone of the many slaves that survived the Atlantic crossing and were sold in South America to Spanish masters. He knew that because God cares for each we in whom God lives are sent to care for each and every person in need of special care. The God who sees each does the seeing through my eyes and yours.

God beholds you individually, whoever you are. God calls you by your name. God sees you and understands you, just as God made you. God knows what is in you, all your own peculiar feelings and thoughts, your dispositions and likings, your strength and your weakness. The fact that you may feel you lack the abilities or resources to help others doesn't matter, and in any case, it is false. Peter Claver lacked almost every sort of resource to help the newly landed slaves, many of whom were ill or suffering from exposure. Even his fellows in religion wouldn't help him and thought him crazy for doing what he did. In many instances, all he had to give was love and concern and an effort to provide a blanket or some food or fruit.

You are one of those from whom Christ offered up his last prayer. You are one of those for whom Christ gave his life, sealing his love with his blood. You may have nothing to give but a good word or a prayer but you can give it with genuine concern. God sees whether we reach out to others in their need, in whatever kind of need they have. God sees what you have and if it is no more than Christ had would you dare to claim that it wasn't enough? Though he had so little, Peter Claver brought love and concern to tens of thousands. Does that count for nothing? God knows what you can do, and God waits for you to do it. Who knows how God may come to the aid of others when what you can do really isn't enough? Trust in the power of God, and in God living in you.

*Saturday*

## **HOUSE BUILT ON ROCK FOUNDATIONS**

**Homily by Pope Francis**

In the Gospel, Jesus compares the wise person who built his house on rock with the fool who built his house on sand. Those who listen to the words of the Lord are wise, while those who refuse to do so live like fools and base everything on appearances.

What is the foundation of our hopes, of our security, and of our lives. We need God's grace to discern where the sand is and where the rock is to sink our foundations.

The Rock. That's what the Lord is. Those who entrust themselves to the Lord will always remain safe because their foundations are on the rock. That's what Jesus says in the Gospel. He speaks about a wise man who built his house on rock, that is, on trust in the Lord and on serious things. And this trust is a noble thing because the foundation of this building of our lives is sure; it is strong.

The wise man built on the rock, while the fool chose the shifting sands and is swept away by winds and rain. Even in our own lives, it can happen when my foundations are not strong. The storm comes – and we all have storms in our lives, all of us, from the Pope to the last, everyone – and we are unable to stand firm. Many say: 'No, I'll change my life.' They think making life changes is like putting on makeup. Changing my life requires changing the foundations of my life, that is, finding the rock that is Christ. 'I would like to renovate this building because it's extremely ugly, so I would like to make it a little more beautiful and strengthen the foundation.' But if all I do is put on makeup, then things won't go far; it will fall. Christian life falls when based on appearances.

Jesus is the only sure foundation, while appearances are of no assistance, and this is also seen in the confessional. Only those who recognize they are sinners, weak, and eager for salvation show that their life is built on rock, as they believe and trust in Jesus as the source of salvation.

We cannot build our lives on passing things, on appearances, and on acting like everything is fine. Let us go to the rock, where our salvation is. And there we will all be happy. All.

Let each of us ... think about what foundation we give to our lives, whether solid rock or sand and ask the Lord for the grace to be able to discern.