

THE TWENTY-SIXTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sunday

IMITATING OUR GOD'S UNIVERSAL LOVE

A reflection from a homily by St. John Chrysostom

Have you ever asked why the rich person consigned to hell saw Lazarus in Abraham's arms? Why wasn't Lazarus in some other righteous person's arms? The reason is that Abraham was characterized by his hospitableness! The sight of Abraham was meant as a correction for that rich person because his inhospitableness brought him to hell. Recall the story of how Abraham actually ran after a stranger passing by and almost dragged him to his tent so he could show him hospitality.

By contrast, the rich man ignored a poor and sick person lying right at his door. He had within his grasp a great treasure, the very opportunity to win salvation! He ignored it day after day. He could have helped but he didn't. Abraham was certainly not like that; he was just the opposite sort of person. Abraham actually sat in the doorway to his dwelling so he could catch passers-by. He acted like he was fishing for people. When you fish in the sea you often find things other than fish in your nets. Sometimes you find pearls or even gold coins. Abraham cast a net to catch people and, so we are told, he caught angels instead. He didn't realize what had happened but that wasn't necessary. It was what he did that counted.

St. Paul marveled at this tale and gave us some necessary advice: "*Remember to welcome strangers into your homes, for some by doing so have entertained angels without knowing it*". If Abraham had welcomed those he made his guests because they were special people he wouldn't have done anything special. He is praised because he didn't know who the passers-by were and took them to be ordinary travelers. But look at the goodwill with which he welcomed and saw to their needs and comfort.

This is true for you and me! If you are eager to welcome famous or distinguished people you don't do anything out of the ordinary. The high rank of a person can even "compel" even inhospitable persons to show courtesy and special respect. We do something great and worthy of admiration when we give a courteous welcome even to society's outcasts and to those of very humble social standing. That is why Christ praises those who do this. Listen to his words: "*Whatever you did for one of these poor people you did for me*". Then he reminded us of an important truth: "*It isn't your Heavenly Father's will that one of these "little ones" should perish!*"

Throughout the Gospel, Christ speaks a great deal about "little people" and those of no social importance or standing. That's how Abraham conducted himself too. He didn't ask who travelers were or where they came from. He didn't act like us! He simply welcomed people. If you want to show kindness to a stranger don't ask about their past or how they have lived. Jesus only came to lighten people's burden of poverty and help meet their needs. This is also what he commanded us to do: "*Imitate your Heavenly Father who causes the sun to rise for the good and the bad and sends rain for people who are unjust as well as unjust.*" You have opportunities to do good for people today. Don't ignore them.

Monday

BECOMING CHILDLIKE IN CHRIST

A reflection by Archbishop Theophylact of Ochrida

“As he was teaching his disciples the Lord said to them: The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of unbelievers and they will put him to death, but after his death, on the third day, he will rise again.” Notice that the Lord always alternates prophecies of his passion with the performance of miracles. It is so that he should not be thought to have suffered through lack of power. So after imparting the very painful news that he would be killed he added the joyful news that he would rise again.

He did this to teach us that joy always follows sorrow and that we should not be uselessly distressed by painful events but rather have hope that better times will come. “He came to Capernaum, and after entering the house he questioned the disciples: What were you arguing about on the road?” The disciples still saw things from a very human point of view. They had been quarreling with one another about which one of them was the greatest and most esteemed by Christ. The Lord did not even want to do away with their desire for preeminent honor but wanted them to aspire to the right things. He doesn’t want us to try and seize first places; his purpose is that we win the highest honors with great humility.

The Lord stood a child among the disciples because he wants us all to become childlike. A child doesn’t desire honors; a child hardly knows what they are. The Lord said, if you become like this child you will receive a great reward, and if, besides, you do this for my sake you will receive the Kingdom of Heaven. The reason is that you will be receiving me in the child and by receiving me you receive the One who sent me. If you long for great things, see what humility, what guilelessness, what simplicity accomplish. A character shaped by these virtues draws the Son and the Father to dwell in us. With them comes, of course, the Holy Spirit. It is by their presence in us that great things are accomplished through us. If we seek great things seek grace, for in grace one finds God and humility.

Tuesday

PUTTING CHARITY FIRST

An instruction by St. Vincent de Paul

The poor often seem rough and unrefined. But who are we to judge from external appearances or in terms of mental gifts or whatever? If you consider them to be persons in need and see them in the light of faith you will realize that you are dealing with the Son of God. He chose to be poor, and in his passion, we are told that he almost lost the appearance of a human being. He was thought a fool by Gentile and by Jews. His mission, however, was like ours, to preach to the poor. He says, The Heavenly Father sent me to preach the good news to the poor. Should we have the same spirit Christ did? Shouldn't we imitate Christ? We must take care of the poor, console them, help them, and support their cause.

Christ willed to be born poor and chose for himself disciples who were poor. He made himself the servant of the poor and even shared their poverty. He went so far as to say that he would consider every deed which either helps or harms the poor as for or against himself. You see how God loves the poor. God also loves those who love the poor. When you hold another dear you also have a like affection for anyone who loves or serves the one you love.

We hope that God will love us for the sake of the poor whom we love. So when we are with the poor and needy we try to understand them and where they come from, as we say. We sympathize with them and do it so completely that we echo St. Paul's words, "I have become all things for all". We must let ourselves be stirred by our neighbor's worries and distress. We must beg God to pour into our hearts feelings of pity and compassion and to do this again and again.

It is our duty to prefer the service of those in need to everything else. We must offer help as quickly as possible. If someone requires medicine, or whatever other help, during prayer time then we do not become upset or feel guilty if we interrupt our prayer to serve them. God is not neglected but served if you leave such things to serve him in one in need. One work of love for God is interrupted so another can be carried out. When you leave prayer to serve one in need you are doing this for Christ. He himself tells us so.

Charity is more important than any rule. All rules must lead to and support charity. We must do whatever charity commands. So we must serve the needy with great devotion. This holds especially for beggars and outcasts. These people have been sent to us and we are to treat them as if they were our masters and patrons. Then we truly serve Christ and God. Never ignore another's need. If you do you ignore Christ.

Wednesday

TO FOLLOW JESUS

An Angelus Message by Pope Francis

In today's Gospel passage (cf. Lk 9:51-62), Saint Luke begins the narrative of Jesus' last journey towards Jerusalem, which ends at Chapter 19. It is a long journey, not only geographically and spatially, but also spiritually and theologically, towards the fulfillment of the Messiah's mission. Jesus' decision is radical and total, and those who follow him are called to measure up to it. Today the Evangelist presents us with three characters — three cases of vocation, we could say — that shed light on what is required of those who wish to follow Jesus to the end, completely.

The first character promises him: "I will follow you wherever you go" (v. 57). Generous! But Jesus replies that the Son of man, unlike foxes that have holes, and birds that have nests, "has nowhere to lay his head" (v. 58). The absolute poverty of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus left his paternal home and gave up all security in order to proclaim the Kingdom of God to the lost sheep of his people. In this way, Jesus pointed out to us, his disciples, that our mission in the world cannot be static, but is *itinerant*. The Christian is itinerant. The Church by her very nature is in motion; she does not stay sedentary and calm within her enclosure. She is open to the broadest horizons, sent forth — the Church is sent forth — to bring the Gospel through the streets and to reach the human and existential peripheries. This is the first character.

The second character Jesus meets receives the call directly from him, but replies: "Lord, let me first go and bury my father" (v. 59). It is a legitimate request based on the commandment to honor your father and mother (cf. Ex 20:12). Nevertheless, Jesus responds: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Lk 9:60). With these deliberately provocative words, he intends to emphasize the primacy of following and of proclaiming the Kingdom of God, even over and above the most important realities, such as the family. The urgency of communicating the Gospel, which breaks the chains of death and ushers in eternal life, does not permit delays but requires promptness and complete willingness. Thus, the Church is itinerant, and here the Church is decisive, acts quickly, on the spot, without waiting.

The third character also wants to follow Jesus but on one condition: he will do so after bidding farewell to his relatives. And this is the response he receives from the Teacher: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (v. 62). Following Jesus excludes regrets and backward glances but requires the virtue of *decision*.

In order to follow Jesus, the Church is itinerant, acts promptly, quickly and decisively. The value of these conditions set by Jesus — *itinerancy, promptness and decision* — does not lie in a series of saying 'no' to the good and important things in life. Rather, the emphasis is placed on the main objective: to become a disciple of Christ! A free and conscious choice, made out of love, to reciprocate the invaluable grace of God, and not made as a way to promote oneself. This is sad! Woe to those who think about following Jesus for their own advantage, that is, to further their career, to feel important or to acquire a position of prestige. Jesus wants us to be passionate about him and about the Gospel. A heartfelt passion that translates into concrete gestures of proximity, of closeness to the brothers and sisters most in need of welcome and care. Precisely as he himself lived.

May the Virgin Mary, icon of the pilgrim Church, help us to joyfully follow the Lord Jesus and, with renewed love, to proclaim the Good News of Salvation to brothers and sisters.

Thursday

GLIMPING THE RICHNESS OF GOD'S WORLD

A reflection taken from a homily by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Angels, we believe, are inhabitants of a world invisible. The fact that they exist tells us how many wonders we cannot see though they have been created for our good and joy. Indeed, we are told much more about angels than about the faithful departed. Our departed rest from their labors but the angels are active among us all the time. The Letter to the Hebrews calls them "*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are to be heirs of salvation*" (1:14) No Christian is so lowly as to lack an angel companion and helper. Those who live by faith and love are especially open to their comforting presence.

If we may judge from what is written in the Scriptures, should one of us catch a glimpse of an angel, we would fall to the ground in fear and trembling. Yet they are our fellow servants and fellow workers and companions. That they form part of an unseen realm is conveyed to us in the vision that the Patriarch Jacob saw when he was fleeing from the brother he had defrauded. "*He came upon a certain place and spent the night there. When the sun had set, he took a rock and put it under his head as a pillow, and lay down and went to sleep.*" He didn't see anything special about the place, other than that it was a holy place of sacrifice for the people of the area and he would be safe there. It was not an especially comfortable place to sleep but there was no building. Night had come and he had to sleep where he could.

Yet how different was the truth than what ordinary eyes could see! More was there but it was revealed to him only in a dream. In that dream, he saw a world that is not usually seen but is real for all that. "*He dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth where he lay and its top reached heaven. And, behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on that ladder.*" (Gen. 28:12) Now he saw another world and saw how deeply involved our daily world is with this unseen one.

Persons often speak as if they doubted the existence of the world Jacob saw. Many treat it as something that will become real to them only after death. No! It exists now, even if we do not see it. It is among us and around us. Jacob was shown this in his dream. Angels were all about him, though he hadn't realized it. What Jacob saw in his dream Elijah and his servant saw by God's grace. The shepherds at the time of Christ's nativity not only saw it but also heard the voices of blessed spirits praising God. It is what angels do always throughout our nights and days.

When this is shown us, either by faith or by some graced sight, we see that wonderful creatures are always going about on God's errands and doing whatever is God's good pleasure. The name 'angel' means "messenger". Like these blessed ones we too have been called to be God's messengers, ministers of God's word and blessing. Faith tells us that. It tells us too that we should imitate the angels as best we can, as God gives us the opportunities. Today is one of those opportunities.

Friday

BRINGING PEOPLE TO GOD'S WORD

A reflection taken from Franciscan Media

St. Jerome spent twenty years translating the Gospels and much of the Hebrew Scriptures into Latin. He began this work at the request of the Pope of Rome but continued it on his own. We are often told that he was irritable and not at all charitable but this reflects the attacks upon him by those who rejected his translation in favor of what they were familiar with. For instance, St. Augustine tells a story about the bishop of Tripoli who read Jerome's translation of the Book of Jonah in church; his people responded by rioting in the streets because it was too different from what they had been used to.

Jerome was merciless, and even abusive, to scholarly opponents but was a kind and gentle friend and one who gave much to the needy. He founded a school for poor children in Bethlehem when he lived there and gave shelter to refugees who had fled Rome after the Vandals sacked it. He spent a good deal of time giving spiritual direction to monks and nuns who settled in Bethlehem.

Jerome translated only the New Testament Gospels and that part of the Old Testament which was written in Hebrew. He also used a "sense for sense" rather than a "word for word" method of translating. Biblical language in the Latin of his day wasn't open to accepting newly coined words for ideas still unfamiliar to Latin speakers and Jerome both borrowed words from Greek and invented new ones. Thus he avoided what today is called "literalism" in Biblical translation. The "Old Latin" which St. Jerome's translation was to replace had been translated from a pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament and he rejected this and worked directly from Hebrew texts. He also realized that a translator will convey his own interpretation of Scripture whether he wants to or not. Jerome is probably most famous for his commentaries on Scripture and by reading them one can learn about the perspective which guided his translating work. He preferred what came to be called the "allegorical method" of interpreting Scripture. This means one gives less attention to what is merely seen as historical fact and more attention to the application of Scripture to the task of living the Christian life. This is called a "spiritual" interpretation.

Jerome worked very hard to keep himself in harmony with the teachings of the Church's magisterium. This caused him to treat those who were not faithful to what was considered orthodox in his day as stupid. In fact, he seems to have very much enjoyed a good argument and it was customary in his time to argue "*ad hominem*" by speaking abusively of opponents. He tells us that he had a weakness for good rhetoric and style and had a hard time with Hebrew texts that weren't written with Latin or Greek rules of good style in mind. Our characteristics come from our upbringing or education and that end up getting in the way of Christian charity. We can find it as difficult as Jerome did to put these aside when they get in the way of communicating God's love. That love is at the heart of all Scripture and so when we want to help others understand God's Word we have to step away from what seems natural or good to us and try to speak and act in ways that can attract others to God and an understanding of God's word. This is a struggle that everyone faces to a greater or lesser extent. Our personal struggle, then, is to daily put aside what we like and speak and act in ways that others can experience as loving and caring.

Saturday

THE INSEPARABILITY OF PRAYER & LOVE

A reflection taken from letters of St. Therese of Lisieux

The efficiency of prayer is a most extraordinary thing. Prayer has access to God's presence at all times. It can get whatever it asks! It is certainly a mistake to imagine that your prayer won't be answered unless it is well-phrased and comes from a book. We don't need splendid formulas of words that have been specially composed to deal with an emergency. If that were true I would find myself in a really terrible situation. You see, I recite the Divine Office with a great sense of unworthiness. But then I can't face the strain of hunting about in books for splendid prayers that would seem worthy. If I do that my head spins. There are such a lot of prayers to choose from.

Even if I could select the right prayers from all these books I would end up reciting them about like a child who hasn't yet learned to read. So I tell God what I want quite simply and without any special turns of phrase. Somehow, God always manages to understand me. For me, prayer means launching out of my heart toward God. It means lifting up one's eyes quite simply to heaven. It is a cry of grateful love, whether from the crest of a wave of joy or from the trough of a feeling of despair. It is a vast supernatural force that opens my heart and binds me close to Jesus.

The soul that is enfolded by Divine love can't remain inactive. It may simply sit at Jesus' feet, like Mary in Bethany, and listen to his words. His words are so filled with fire! They are so filled with comfort. This doesn't seem to contribute to doing anything. Yet it contributes so much in reality. Martha is hurrying distractedly to and fro and wants her sister to do the same. But what Mary does actually contributes more than what Martha does. No, our Lord doesn't have any fault to find with Martha's exertions. His own mother, the Mother of God though she was, put up with humble work of just the kind Martha did. Didn't she get meals ready for the Holy Family? Martha was a devoted hostess. Yet she couldn't keep calm; that was the trouble.

All the saints have seen the importance of Mary's attitude. This is perhaps true in a particular way for the ones who have done the most to fill the world with the light of the Gospel teaching. Surely those great friends of God, people like St. Paul and St. Augustine and St. John of the Cross and St. Thomas and St. Francis and St. Dominic, all went to prayer to find the secret of wisdom. It was Divine Wisdom that left even the greatest minds lost in admiration.

Give me a lever and a fulcrum, said a man of science, and I will move the world. Archimedes wasn't talking to God, so he could actually do what he said. In any case, he was thinking of the material world. But the saints really have enjoyed the privilege that he could have asked for. The fulcrum God would have told him to use would be God's self, nothing less, and the lever would be prayer. Yet it must be the kind of prayer that sets the heart all on fire with love. That's how the saints move the world in our own day. That's how they'll do it right to the end of time. That's something God can do with us!