

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

Sun. The Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Oct. 9 **IT IS FAITH THAT CLEANSSES US**

A reflection by Bishop Bruno of Segni

Mon. Monday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time

10 **THE LESSON OF JONAH'S MISERY**

Inspired by a text of R.J. Rushdoony

Tues. Memorial of St. Pope John XXIII

11 **THE MISSION OF A POPE & OF THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE**

A reflection taken from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

Wed. Remembrance of the Departed

12 **HOW TO REMEMBER THE DEPARTED**

A reflection from a sermon by St. John Chrysostom

Thurs Thursday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time

13 **AN INVITATION TO CONVERSION**

A Homily by Dom Bernardo Olivera, OSCO

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri. Friday of the 28th Week in Ordinary Time

14 **WHERE HEAVEN BEGINS**

14 From the Morning Meditation at *Domus Sanctae Marthae* by Pope Francis

Sat. Memorial of St. Teresa of Avila

15 **PLACING ONESELF IN GOD'S HANDS**

A reflection from the Autobiography of St. Teresa

Sunday

IT IS FAITH THAT CLEANSSES US

A reflection by Bishop Bruno of Segni

“On the way to Jerusalem Jesus passed along the border between Samaria and Galilee, and when he was entering one of the villages, ten lepers came to meet him.” What do these ten lepers remind us of? Don't they remind us that we are all sinners and need cleansing? When Jesus, Our Lord, came, not everyone was a bodily leper but all were lepers in their souls; a soul that is leprous is in a much worse state than a leprous body!

What happened when the Lord came to us? Listen to Scripture: *“Standing a considerable distance off from Jesus, they cried out to him: Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”* Why did they stand apart? Because no one in their condition was permitted to come close to others. When we continue in sin we are standing far from Jesus and need to be cured of what makes us leprous, so we too must cry out to Jesus: Lord, Master, have pity on us! That cry needs to come from our heart. The cry of the heart is louder than any other. It pierces the heavens and comes to the very throne of God!

So listen further to the Scripture: *“When Jesus saw the lepers he told them: Go and show yourselves to the priests!”* God has only to look at us to be filled with compassion. The Lord pitied the lepers as soon as he saw them. He sent them to the priests, but not to get cleansed for he had pronounced them clean already. *“And as they went they were cleansed”*.

Let all of us who are sinners listen to these words and try to understand them. It is easy for the Lord to forgive sins. Sinners are often forgiven even before they come to a priest. In fact, their repentance and healing occur simultaneously. At the very moment of conversion, they pass from death to life. However, we need to understand what conversion means. We need to heed the Lord's words. Listen to them: *“Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts rather than your clothes!”*

Real conversion is an inward reality. To be really converted one must be so in one's heart! As Scripture says: *“A humbled, contrite heart God will not spurn!”*

Now listen to what happened as they obeyed the Lord's words. *“One of them, went he saw that he was cured, when back again, praising God at the top of his voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. Now this man was a Samaritan.”*

This man stands for all who renounce the devil and take Christ as their model. We have been cleansed in the waters of baptism. We have been healed by the sacrament of penance. We have promised to renounce the devil and take Christ as our model. We have promised to follow Christ. We have praised him and adored him and given thanks to him. We must never again abandon his service.

Listen once again to the Scripture: *“Jesus said to the man: Get up and go your way; your faith has saved you.”* See how great the power of faith is! Without faith, as St. Paul says, *“it is impossible to please God”*. *“Abraham believed God and because of this God regarded him as righteous”*. Faith saves! Faith justifies! Faith heals both body and soul!

Monday

THE LESSON OF JONAH'S MISERY

Inspired by a text of R.J. Rushdoony

I like Jonah, the prophet. He reminds me of many people I know—including myself! Jonah was commanded by God to go and preach to the people of Nineveh, to the Assyrians who had done such horrible things to his people. Jonah seems to hate these people. He wanted God's judgment to strike Nineveh and not God's mercy. So he tried to run away from God's command, and God's judgment on Nineveh. Twice he ended up in misery. The first misery was the experience of three days in the belly of a great fish. The second was that of being burnt by the heat of the sun and a south wind while waiting with the foolish hope that God would not have mercy on Nineveh just because its people had believed.

An unwilling preacher in an evil city proclaims its destruction. Yet by God's grace, the people are converted. That displeased Jonah exceedingly. But he wasn't ready to give up his hope that the city would be destroyed in forty days or thereabout. So he sat on a hillock outside the city in a little lean-to and endured the heat and misery he felt. When a vine grew up overnight and shaded the place where he sat and watched his misery was relieved. And then the vine was attacked by a worm and died—just as the day got really hot and the hot wind blew really hard.

What is making you suffer so, Jonah? That was about what God asked his prophet. Why do you want me to destroy all these people? Think of the fact that there are about 120,000 children in Nineveh and they are too young to know the difference between their right hand and their left, let alone the difference between right and wrong.

Jonah's sufferings came from his warped perspective. Getting even with the Ninevites was more important than God's love for his creatures. Even his personal comfort was more important to him than God's mercy. He didn't want to be an instrument of mercy and salvation for those damn Ninevites! His refusal to accept God's love molded him inwardly in a way that caused his miseries, his two great sufferings. To be free from them he only had to obey God inwardly and gladly rather than outwardly and with reluctance. There are many in such a situation.

But perhaps Jonah was able to let go of the hatred he has nourished for so long. That too is one of the causes of our sufferings. As a result, we may find ourselves unable to let go of what God tells us to cast away as well as unable to accept as good what God tells us is good. Perhaps Jonah faced both of these predicaments. Ask yourself: How much of the suffering I experience has roots like these? Then we too need to repent and ask the Lord to give us the same sort of grace that turned the Ninevites from their "evil ways" to "God's ways". That is something to pray for each day.

Tuesday

THE MISSION OF A POPE & OF THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE

A reflection from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

The message of the popes has always been about unity in love. We have a message from Linus, the very first pope after Peter, to Christians in the East just as we have the letters of Pope Clement to the Corinthian church. These messages are filled with heavenly teaching seeking to draw those who receive them together in mutual support and love. They provide a kind of spiritual direction together with their sound teaching about spiritual realities. The goal is to provide good counsel adapted to the circumstances of a particular time and place.

Think of the apostolic Letters of St. Peter. Like all the Letters in Scripture, they provide spiritual food for all the believers of the world. They are called “Catholic epistles” because of this intent. If you will reflect on them carefully you will see that they deserve great attention and the closest study. I recommend that they be learned by heart—the better to help us live the message of Christ, our Lord. That, indeed, is my invitation and exhortation to all who read this message of mine. Take these epistles as though they were encyclicals written by the very first pope.

Don’t despise these letters because they are wholly practical. The teaching they contain is really food for spiritual nourishment. They are all the more sublime in that they aren’t theology for theology’s sake but practical. This is something that can give us all real spiritual delight. It will come to many as a surprise but as you get to know them better you will cherish them more and more.

St. Paul wrote to the Roman church amazing truths about lofty themes of universal interest. St. Peter wrote instead from Rome to encourage all believers regarding subjects important to the daily and practical life of every local church. This applies to the churches of our times and of every time and place. For example, St. Peter’s First Letter speaks of the dignity of a Christian and the call to sanctity. This leads him to speak of the duties of a Christian, duties made resplendent through grace. They are incumbent on all the members of the Chosen Race, the Royal Priesthood, the Holy Nation, the Ransomed People.

The basic duty is one of obedience—to God and to love for one another. These are duties carried out in the joy of a family’s life and of its members’ charity. Then comes a series of counsels concerning how we are to wait and look forward to the end of all things and the inauguration of the fullness of God’s Kingdom. All this is seen from the perspective of both the elderly and the young. It is for each of us to view the challenges and opportunities that each day brings us from this same perspective. We too look forward to the Kingdom and we work for its coming in whatever ways God’s love and Providence have made it possible for us to do that. Do you rejoice in these daily opportunities? They are opportunities to love and share. One of the special gifts we can share is found in the letters of the popes of the past as much as of the present. We must show what they mean practically for the daily life of a Christian believer.

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, which 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

AN INVITATION TO CONVERSION

A Homily by Dom Bernardo Olivera, OSCO

The Gospel is good news but our Teacher, Jesus, wakes us up from our daily sleep by saying to us, Woe to you, Cistercian Order of the so-called Strict Observance! Woe to you if you do not listen and accept this invitation to conversion (cf. Lk 10: 12-16).

Luke tells us how the Master asserted his will to go up to Jerusalem despite the mortal danger, and he tells us how different persons tried unsuccessfully to follow him in his journey. Then he named 72 disciples whom he sent to announce the Kingdom of God; this episode of sending these disciples finishes with the “Woe, woe, woe” I have quoted. Nothing can be as disgraceful as not accepting and embracing the Kingdom of God. To convert is to enter into his Kingdom.

The Beatitudes are a gift from God. They are not obligatory: we are free to accept them or not. They are words of grace but also of warning. We can reject salvation and destroy ourselves. The ‘woes’ are cries of grief, an urgent invitation to conversion. Their crudeness is due in part to the very nature of Gospel life and monastic life: radical, absolute truth. They are an urgent invitation to be faithful to the Lord and to the vocation we have received.

But what is this Kingdom of God? It is the central message of Jesus’ preaching and life program; it is the greatest threat to the established order of things and our egoistic mentality; it is something utopian-which means partially achievable if we have faith and work with God; it is the utopia of a history worthy of human beings created in the image of God; it is the utopia of divine filiation by adoption and of universal brotherhood by redemption.

The Kingdom of God is a dynamic reality, namely God himself ruling, exercising his sovereignty as a loving Father of children. After the great fact of the Master’s resurrection, the teaching of the Apostles no longer concentrates on the Kingdom of God but on the God of the Kingdom, or, more precisely, on the Risen One who gathers within himself the children of God as to convert them into brothers and sisters of one another. From now on conversion to God’s Kingdom means conversion to Jesus Christ.

John Paul II said: *“To strive after sanctity is the program of every truly consecrated life, especially in the context of renewal in the third millennium. It is a program that should begin by leaving everything to follow Christ, putting him before everything else so as to share his Paschal Mystery fully.”* (VC 93). Brothers and sisters, monks and nuns, we are called to conversion, to change more and more into the living and life-giving Person of Jesus Christ.

We are invited to anchor our lives and sink deeper roots into his way of living for the Father, our contemplative sonship, and for the brothers or sisters in his school of fraternal life. Our way of life, our *conversatio morum*, is our radical, exaggerated, blessed way of conforming ourselves to the Lord by making him active and present in the Church and the world. Without this anchoring and rooting of our lives in Christ, we cannot really accept being called Christians or his followers according to the Gospel. Our contemplative dimension and our School of Charity find unity in the only Teacher in this school, the only true contemplative: Jesus the Christ, the only Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Friday

WHERE HEAVEN BEGINS

From the Morning Meditation at *Domus Sanctae Marthae* by Pope Francis

A Christian cannot allow himself “to be lukewarm”: he has a specific identity that was given by the seal of the Holy Spirit. During Mass at Santa Marta on Friday, Pope Francis turned his reflection to the beginning of the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians and on Christians “chosen by the Lord before the creation of the world”. Among those present in the chapel was Shoah survivor Enzo Camerino, who had previously met the Pontiff on 16 October 2013, on the 70th anniversary of the raid on the ghetto of Rome.

The Lord, the Pontiff said, recalling the words of St Paul, “not only chose us” but also “gave us an identity”. And, Francis explained, we did not inherit merely a name, “but an identity, a way of life, which is not only a list of customs, it’s more: it’s an actual identity”. And how have we been “marked” so deeply? The Apostle writes: you have been “sealed with the Holy Spirit”. Our identity, the Bishop of Rome stated, “is this very seal, this power of the Holy Spirit, which we have all received in Baptism”.

And since the Holy Spirit had been promised to us by Jesus, “He sealed our heart” and, what’s more, He “walks with us”. He not only gives us an identity, but it is also the “guarantee of our inheritance. Heaven begins there”. A Christian thus acts in earthly life but is already living from the perspective of eternity”. Pope Francis further emphasized: “With this seal, we have Heaven in our grasp”.

Everyday life is sprinkled with temptations, first of all, with that of “not realizing this beauty that we’ve received”. When this happens, the Spirit, to use an expression of Paul’s, “grieves”: this happens, the Holy Father underlined, not when we want “to erase the identity, but to render it opaque”. This is the case of the “lukewarm Christian”, the one who “goes to Mass on Sunday, yes, but the identity isn’t seen in his life”; the one who, despite being a Christian, “lives like a pagan”. Then there is another risk, the other sin “which Jesus speaks to the disciples about” when he tells them: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy”. It happens, the Pope recalled, that some “pretend to be Christians”, those who lack “transparency” in their actions, who profess one thing in words but act differently in fact. “And this”, he added, “is what the doctors of the law did”; it is the leaven of “hypocrisy” which risks growing inside us.

Rendering our identity opaque and betraying it in our actions are “two sins against this seal” which “is a beautiful gift of God, the Spirit” and is the “guarantee of what awaits us”, of what “we have been promised”. This is why we are able to say that “we have Heaven in our grasp”.

What, then, the Pontiff asked, is “the true conduct of a Christian?”. We learn it from Paul himself: “The fruit of the Spirit, which comes from our identity, is love, joy, peace, magnanimity, goodwill, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control”. And this, Pope Francis concluded, is “our road toward Heaven”

Saturday

PLACING ONESELF IN GOD'S HANDS

A reflection from the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Jesus

“When I began to turn to God Father Alvarez was my confessor. He began to lead me to greater perfection. He told me that I ought to leave nothing undone but seek to become entirely pleasing to God. He treated me with great skill yet also very gently. My soul was not at all strong, but very sensitive, especially as regards letting go of certain friendships, though they were not actually leading me to offend God. They involved a great deal of affection and it seemed to me that if I let them go I would be sinning through ingratitude. So I asked him why it was necessary for me to be ungrateful if I was not offending God. He told me to commend the matter to God for a few days and to recite the hymn, “Come, Creator Spirit”, and that I would then be enlightened as to what was the better thing to do.

“I spent the greater part of an entire day in prayer and then I begged the Lord to help me please him in everything. I began to pray the hymn. While I was doing that a kind of transport came upon me so suddenly I was almost carried away. I could make no mistake about this, it was so clear. It was the first time the Lord had granted me the favor of any kind of rapture. I heard these words: “I will have you talk with angels and not with human beings”.

“This simply amazed me. My soul was very much moved and the words seemed to me to be spoken in the depths of the spirit. For this reason, they made me afraid, even though, on the other hand, they brought me great comfort. This remained with me after the fear caused by the strangeness of the experience had dissipated. The words have come true! Never since then have I been able to maintain a firm friendship except with people whom I believe love God and try to serve him. Nor have I been able to draw comfort from others or cherished a personal affection for them. It hasn't been in my power to do that. It makes no difference whether they are relatives or friends. Unless I know that a person loves God or practices prayer it is a real cross to me to have to associate with that person. I believe this is the absolute truth.

“Since that day I have been courageous enough to give up everything for the sake of God. In that moment, for what happened took no longer than a moment, God was pleased to make me, as his servant, another person than before. There was no longer a need for my confessor to give me further commands. When he had seen I was so attached to certain friendships he didn't dare tell me to abandon them. He had to wait until the Lord took the matter into his own hands, as he did. I hadn't thought I could ever give them up, even though I had tried to. It disturbed me so much that I put the very idea out of my mind. But now the Lord had set me free and given me the strength to carry out my resolution. When these persons saw how determined I had become they were edified. Blessed be God forever! What I had been unable to do was done within me by the One who is almighty!”