

THE TWENTY-NINTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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Sunday

THE WIDOW WHO PRAYS AND NEVER GROWS WEARY

Angelus Message of His Holiness Pope Francis

In today's Gospel Jesus tells a parable on the need to pray always, never wearying. The main character is a widow whose insistent pleading with a dishonest judge succeeds in obtaining justice from him. Jesus concludes: if the widow succeeded in convincing that judge, do you think that God will not listen to us if we pray to him with insistence? Jesus' words are very strong: "And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night?" (Lk 18:7).

"Crying day and night" to God! This image of prayer is striking, but let us ask ourselves: Why does God want this? Doesn't he already know what we need? What does it mean to "insist" on God?

This is a good question that makes us examine an important aspect of the faith: God invites us to pray insistently not because he is unaware of our needs or because he is not listening to us. On the contrary, he is always listening and he knows everything about us lovingly. On our daily journey, especially in times of difficulty, in the battle against the evil that is outside and within us, the Lord is not far away, he is by our side. We battle with him beside us, and our weapon is prayer which makes us feel his presence beside us, his mercy, and also his help. But the battle against evil is a long and hard one; it requires patience and endurance, like Moses who had to keep his arms outstretched for the people to prevail (cf Ex 17:8-13). This is how it is: there is a battle to be waged each day, but God is our ally, faith in him is our strength and prayer is the expression of this faith. Therefore Jesus assures us of the victory, but at the end, he asks: "when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk 18:8). If faith is snuffed out, prayer is snuffed out, and we walk in the dark. We become lost on the path of life.

Therefore, let us learn from the widow of the Gospel to pray always without growing weary. This widow was very good! She knew how to battle for her children! I think of the many women who fight for their families, who pray and never grow weary. Today let us all remember these women who by their attitude provide us with a true witness of faith and courage, and a model of prayer. Our thoughts go out to them!

Pray always, but not in order to convince the Lord by dint of words! He knows our needs better than we do! Indeed persevering prayer is the expression of faith in a God who calls us to fight with him every day and at every moment in order to conquer evil with good.

Monday

HELPING ONE ANOTHER LIVE FOR GOD

A reflection from Letters by St. Ignatius of Antioch

“It is proper that you Ephesians act in agreement with the mind of your bishop. This is what you are doing. Your college of priests is a credit to God for it harmonizes with the bishop as the strings of a harp do with one another. That is why the symphony of your concord and love sings the praise of Jesus Christ. But all the members of your church should also form such a choir. You should take the keynote from God. It is unity. This is how you become one with Jesus Christ in singing a song to the Heavenly Father. That is why he listens to you and recognizes in your good life the melodies taught by Jesus Christ, his Son. It is very much to your good to continue this flawless unity. By it you will always have a share in God. In your assemblies, there must be one prayer, one supplication, one mind, one hope in love, one flawless joy, and all this in Jesus Christ. Come together as one temple and altar to the one Jesus Christ—to him who came forth from the one Father and remained with Him and returned to the One Godhead.

“I am writing to state emphatically that I die willingly for God. Do not interfere! Allow me to be the food of wild beasts for they are the means of making my way to God. I am God’s wheat and I will be ground by the beasts’ teeth so I may be Christ’s pure bread. Coax the beasts to leave nothing behind so that I may be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and the world may not any longer see me.

“All the way from Syria to Rome I have been fighting wild beasts, on land and at sea, by day and by night, chained as I am to ten soldiers who act like beasts. Yet in the school of their abuse, I am more and more trained in discipleship, although that is not what justifies me.

“The whole universe is of no use to me, nor all the kingdoms of this earth, in comparison to the good of dying and coming to Jesus Christ. I seek the one who died for us all. I love the one who rose again for my sake. I am suffering birth pangs, so don’t get in the way of my being born to a new life. Don’t make a gift to the world of one who wants to be God’s.

“The prince of this world is resolved to abduct me, and to corrupt my Godward aspirations. Don’t help him. Side with me. That is siding with God. Even if I should, after my arrival, plead for you to intervene, don’t listen to me! Pay attention only to what I am writing to you.

My love has been crucified. I’m not on fire with love for any earthly thing. There is within me a living water that cries out, “Come to the Father”. I have no taste for any delight of this life. Bread of God is what I long for. For my drink, I want only Christ’s blood. This is incorruptible love!”

Tuesday

REMEMBERING ST. LUKE

A reflection from the History of Eusebius of Caesarea

We all know that Paul preached to the Gentiles and established many churches. He did this from Antioch all the way to Illyricum. We learn this from his Letters and from the testimony of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. We know too that Luke for a long time was a companion of Paul in his ministry, and that he was Paul's personal physician in many illnesses. He tells us also of the churches in Pontus, Galatia Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. Thus it is Luke who tells us about the lives of the churches and the struggles which occasioned Paul's Letters.

We know too that not everyone was judged worthy to work with Paul in his many labors and that Luke was one of those who were. He is even described as "beloved" and was with Paul even during his imprisonment in Rome. We know, for instance, that Paul had many fellow laborers over the years of his preaching, he calls them fellow soldiers. They are recalled because of what Luke tells us about them in writing the Acts; and so we know that he wasn't eager for praise himself, but for praising others.

Luke was born in Antioch and by profession was a physician. It was in this capacity that he got to know Paul, and even others from among the Apostles. A great deal of what we are told in the Acts of the Apostles comes from his personal observations and participation in the events recorded. He has dedicated his heart and soul to the Gospel. How hard he worked to proclaim and make it widely known! That can be judged from the fact that he wrote a Gospel as well as the Acts. He tells us that what he writes he learned from "those who were with Jesus from the beginning and became eye-witnesses of what they proclaimed as ministers of the Word".

From Luke's own words we know that he was very much concerned that what he said should be accurate. That is why he consulted eyewitnesses and persons who had been with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry. So he wrote on the basis of what others had told him but tried to assure himself, and us, that these persons knew what they were talking about.

At times, in his letters, Paul refers to what he calls "my Gospel". It is thought that he is referring to the Gospel according to Luke. That being the case, we know that Paul was eager to emphasize the Lord's mercy and acceptance of all sorts of people. This was most probably what Luke thought important as well.

Luke was personally acquainted with people like Timothy and Titus, whom Paul himself had called to the duties of a bishop. The greatest recommendation we can have of Luke was the fact that he received the inspiration of the Spirit so that he would write both a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. They form a significant part of the entire canon of the New Testament. His presentation of the Virgin Mary has formed the church's understanding of the vocation of all Christians, and his presentation of Jesus' ministry has shaped many parts of the Church's annual liturgical cycle of celebrations. His presentations of Jesus' birth and early life have been hugely influential for Christians' understanding of their call to ministry and to the living of a holy life. We can do no better than to imitate him in our own efforts to share the faith we have received through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Wednesday

HOW THE MARTYRS SUFFERED FOR CHRIST

A report to the Jesuit General

We were informed by some escaped captives of the deaths of Fathers Jean de Brebeuf and Gabriel Lallement. The next morning sent eight men to seek their bodies. At the place of torture, we found a spectacle of horror. It seems that as soon as they were taken captive they were stripped naked and some of their fingernails torn out. They were subjected to a hailstorm of blows with clubs over their entire bodies. In spite of this Father de Brebeuf addressed the Christians, many of who he had instructed, also being held captive. "My children, let's raise our eyes to heaven in the midst of our afflictions and remember that God is witness to our sufferings and will soon be our glorious reward. Let us die in this faith and let us hope from God's goodness the fulfillment of his promises. The torments will end with our lives but the glory which follows will never end." The Christians replied, "Our spirits will be in Heaven while our bodies are still suffering on earth. Pray to God for us that he may show us his mercy; we will call upon him until death!"

Some enemies of the faith were angered by these words. They cut off hands and pierced others with iron awls. They heated hatchets red hot and held them against the armpits and thighs of those being tortured. They made necklaces of red hot ax heads and hung them about the necks so that one was tortured in every posture one could take. They made belts of bark filled with pitch and resin and set them on fire, burning the entire upper body.

Father de Brebeuf suffered like a rock, insensible to fires and flames and not uttering a single cry. This astonished the tormentors. When he began to preach to them they became even angrier and gouged out a circle around his mouth, cut off his nose and tore off his lips. His blood spoke more loudly than his words had. They then baptized the Fathers with boiling water, not once but three times. They also mocked their teaching: "We treat you as a friend since we are the cause of your greatest happiness in Heaven. Thank us for our kind services, for the more you suffer the more your God will reward you!"

Before the two fathers died they had their hearts torn out by means of an opening above the breast. The torturers feasted on these organs and drank their blood while it was still warm. While the fathers were still conscious pieces of flesh were removed and placed on coals to roast. They were then eaten in the sight of the captives. They sliced open their bodies in various places and stuck red hot hatchets into the wounds. They had broiled their tongues by thrusting flaming fire bands into their mouths to prevent them from invoking God while dying.

I have learned all these details from persons worthy of being believed. They saw it all and reported it to me first-hand. They too had been captives but were reserved for death at a later death. Before that time came they had escaped.

Thursday

THE FIRE THAT JESUS BRINGS

From the Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis

The words of Jesus, in the very middle of the Gospel of Luke, pierce us like an arrow: “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (12:49).

Journeying with his disciples towards Jerusalem, the Lord announces this in typically prophetic style, using two images: fire and baptism (cf. 12:49-50). He is to bring fire into the world; the baptism he himself will receive. Let me take just the image of fire, the *powerful flame* of the Spirit of God, God himself, as “consuming fire” (*Deut 4:24; Heb 12:29*). A passionate love that purifies, regenerates and transfigures all things. This fire – but also this “baptism” – is fully revealed in the paschal mystery of Christ, when he, like a column of fire, opens up the path to life through the dark sea of sin and death.

There is however another fire, the *charcoal* fire that we find in John’s account of the third and final appearance of the risen Jesus to the disciples at the Sea of Galilee (cf. 21:9-14). It is a small fire that Jesus himself built close to the shore, as the disciples in their boats were hauling up their nets miraculously filled with fish. Simon Peter arrived first, jumping into the water, filled with joy (cf. v. 7). That charcoal fire is quiet and gentle, yet it lasts longer and is used for cooking. There on the shore of the sea, it creates a familiar setting where the disciples, amazed and moved, savor their closeness to their Lord.

With those words found in the Gospel of Luke, the Lord calls us once more to follow him along the path of his mission. A fiery mission – like that of Elijah –not only for *what* he came to accomplish but also for *how* he accomplished it. And (it is) as if Jesus is handing us a lighted torch and telling us: “Take this; as the Father has sent me so I now send you” (*Jn 20:21*). In this way, the Lord wants to bestow on us his own *apostolic courage*, his *zeal for the salvation* of every human being, without exception. He wants to share with us his *magnanimity*, his boundless and unconditional love, for his heart is afire with the mercy of the Father. This is what burns in Jesus’ heart: the mercy of the Father. And within this fire, too, there is the mysterious tension of his mission, poised between fidelity to his people, to the land of promises, to those whom the Father has given him, and, at the same time, an openness to all peoples, – that universal tension –, to the horizons of the world, to peripheries as yet unknown.

This is the same powerful fire that impelled the Apostle Paul in his tireless service to the Gospel, in his “race”, his missionary zeal constantly inspired by the Spirit and by the Word. It is the fire, too, of all those men and women missionaries who have come to know the exhausting yet sweet joy of evangelizing, and whose lives themselves became a gospel, for they were before all else witnesses.

This is the fire that Jesus came to “bring to the earth”, a fire that the Holy Spirit kindles in the hearts, hands and feet of all those who follow him. The fire of Jesus, the fire that Jesus brings.

Then there is that other fire, that of the charcoal. The Lord also wants to share this fire with us, so that like him, with *meekness*, *fidelity*, *closeness* and *tenderness* – this is God’s style: closeness, compassion and tenderness – we can lead many people to savor the presence of Jesus alive in our midst. A presence so evident, albeit in mystery, that there is no need even to ask: “Who are you?” For our hearts themselves tell us that it is he, it is the Lord. This fire burns in a particular way in the prayer of *adoration*, when we silently stand before the Eucharist and bask in the humble, discreet and hidden presence of the Lord. Like that charcoal fire, his presence becomes warmth and nourishment for our daily life.

Friday

LEARNING TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

A reflection taken from a homily of St. Augustine of Hippo

“This is the test by which we can be sure that we know God: Do we keep his commandments?” St. John adds to this, saying: “The person who claims to know God and disobeys his commandments is a liar, but in one who keeps God’s word divine love has reached perfection.” We infer from this that God’s actual commandment is to love.

Turn to the Gospel and you will find Jesus confirming this. “I give you a new commandment; love one another.” When we are perfect in love we know we abide in God. The perfection of love is to love one’s enemies. They can even be transformed into brothers and sisters. This love is not merely natural affection. We are to love, for instance, our enemies with the kind of love that longs to have them as brothers or sisters and to welcome them into our community. This is the love the Lord showed while hanging on the cross. “Father, forgive them”, he prayed. By this prayer, so filled with compassion, and by his own power, the Lord sought to save them from everlasting death. And I think that many did receive this forgiveness for their part in shedding his blood. When he says, “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” our Lord calls us to the perfection of loving our enemies so they become brothers and sisters.

“One who loves a brother or sister dwells in the light and has no occasion for stumbling”. People who stumble, or cause others to stumble, are people who are scandalized by Christ or the Church. If you hold fast to charity you will find no reason to stumble in either of these. How can anyone be “in” Christ and leave the Church? Those who stumble, then, are people who abandon Christ or the Church, his Body. Recall the scandal of the people to whom Christ announced the giving of his body and blood. Many responded by declaring it an intolerable teaching and withdrawing. Why did they stumble?

Ask first why there is no cause for stumbling in those who love their brothers and sisters. It is because such a person endures all things for the sake of unity. Our love for one another consists in our being one in charity. When the Lord gave us a new commandment he told us to love as he loved. We must bear with one another patiently. St. Paul says, “Bear with one another in love, sparing no effort to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-4). This is Christ’s own law! Look again to St. Paul, “Bear one another’s burdens and you will be fulfilling the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). There are very many occasions for bearing with one another, bearing with reactions to the burdens they carry. Their greatest may be an inability to carry burdens in love and in charity toward others. We can be one with them by bearing this burden with them in love and so leading them back to the charity which finds no burden too great to bear. In this way, we build up the Body of Christ and build up one another in love. No one delights in bearing a burden without love because then it is not born with delight or peace of heart.

You see what great gifts God wants to give through our love for one another

Saturday

IN MARY THE WORK OF GOD IS PERFECT

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

There is a person who has already accomplished all that humanity desires and hopes for, a person in whom the work of Christ is perfected. It is the Virgin Mother of our Lord. Each of us can look to her and say: Here is God's work made perfect, here is the face of true joy and true peace. And since Mary is the Mother of the Church, all those who conform themselves to her in the Church live, in the measure that they do r correspond to her, the splendor of God's gifts.

But what is meant when we say that we should imitate Mary's adherence to God, and express that in our lives? It means three things. It means listening to the Word, it means saying 'Yes' to God, and it means serving.

Listening to the Word comes first. Mary is a person who made space in her life so that the Word of God could enter. Mary let the Word resonate within her, from the first words of the angel until the last words of Jesus on the cross.

Mary created a zone of silence within and about her so that she could hear: "*She treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart*". She said "Yes" to God. From Mary's contemplative silence is born the second characteristic already mentioned, the capacity to say 'Yes'. She puts herself at the disposition of the divine call. "*He called those whom he intended and those he justified and with them, he shared his glory.*" This somewhat obscure saying of St. Paul means to tell us that we have nothing to fear when we say "Yes" to God in our own lives. God guides us always and is always faithful to his words of love and choice.

Then there is the matter of service. Jesus' mother demonstrated her adherence to God. She allowed God to manifest his reign in her through her humble service as his servant, and she did it from the incarnation to the cross. And then she did the same in the early Christian community.

The Church was born out of this openness and readiness to serve. The Church is continually sustained and advanced by the generous service of all those baptized into Christ. The service of bishops and priests is part of this but not all of it. Each person serves in what God sees as the right place for him or her. It is out of this spirit of service that civil society too is served and supported.

God calls each of us as God called, and still calls, Mary. We imitate her by doing the same three things that she did. Through this obedience, comes salvation to the whole world. It comes, notice, through our obedience, just as it did through Mary's.