

THE THIRTY-FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

.....

- Sun. The Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Oct 30 **OUR FREEDOM TO ANSWER GOD'S CALL**
 A reflection by Bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug
- Mon. Monday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time
31 **YOU WILL BE BLESSED**
 From an Angelus Message of His Holiness Pope Francis
- Tues. Solemnity of All the Saints
Nov 1 **LEARNING WHAT WE CAN BECOME**
 A reflection from the Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis
- Wed. Commemoration of the Faithful Departed
2 **THE STRUGGLE TO ASCEND THE HEIGHTS**
 A reflection from On the Heights by Francesco Petrarch
- Thurs. Memorial of St Martin de Porres
3 **LOVING LIKE CHRIST IN SIMPLE WAYS**
 A reflection by St. Pope John XXIII
- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. Memorial of St. Charles Borromeo
4 **HOW DO YOU GIVE YOUR LIFE TO GOD?**
 A reflection from Journeying with the Lord
 by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Sat. Memorial of Our Lady
5 **MARY & THE CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY**
 A reflection from Journeying with the Lord
 by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Sunday

OUR FREEDOM TO ANSWER CHRIST'S CALL

A reflection by Bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug

Our Lord called Zacchaeus to come to him from the sycamore tree he had climbed. Immediately, Zacchaeus hurried to come down. He welcomed Jesus as a disciple, even before he had been formally called! What a marvel! Our Lord hadn't spoken to him before, and he hadn't previously even seen the Lord with his physical eyes, and yet he believed in Him. He believed simply in the word of others.

He did this because faith had been preserved in him in its natural life and health. He showed this by believing in Our Lord as soon as he heard that the Lord was coming. The simplicity of his faith is seen in his promise to give half his goods to the poor, and even to restore fourfold anything he had gained by fraud. If Zacchaeus' spirit hadn't been filled with the simplicity that is proper to real faith he wouldn't have made this promise to Jesus!

In a moment Zacchaeus gave and promised to distribute what by labor he had amassed over many years. He may have accumulated it by cunning but simplicity and faith gave it away. Had he gained it by guile? Even if so he distributed it by simplicity and purity of soul. Faith made a public renunciation of what may have been gained by unrighteousness.

The only possession faith has is God. It refuses to own anything besides God. Faith doesn't see lasting value in anything other than God, who is faith's lasting possession. It is implanted in us so we may find God, and so we will be contented in possessing God alone. It enables us to recognize that everything apart from God can be harmful to us.

All who are called by the Lord should obey his summons at once! Only love of earthly things can weigh them down. Worldly ties are a weight upon the mind and the understanding. For those bound by them hearing the summons of God's call is difficult.

The apostles, the righteous people of the past, as well as the patriarchs were not bound by such ties. They were able to act like really alive people! They set out unburdened because no worldly possession held them bound. For others, these possessions are like heavy fetters.

Nothing can bind or be an obstacle to those who are aware only of God. If one senses God's presence one is open and ready for God's call. The voice of God is like a light that shows one the Way to God and God's love. Each time it makes itself heard it makes our soul more capable of receiving God's grace and gift, of receiving God.

We are told all of this to help us answer whatever call God causes to sound in our hearts today. Today, if you hear God's voice, harden not your heart!

Monday

YOU WILL BE BLESSED

From an Angelus Message of His Holiness Pope Francis

“You will be blessed”, Jesus says, “you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (v. 14).

This is what is described in the... parable, in which Jesus points out the attitude of selflessness that ought to characterize hospitality, and he says: “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you” (vv. 13-14). This means choosing gratuitousness rather than self-seeking and calculating to obtain a reward, seeking interest and trying to increase your wealth. Indeed, the poor, the simple, those who ‘don’t count’, can never reciprocate an invitation to a meal. In this way, Jesus shows his preference for the poor and the excluded, who are the privileged in the Kingdom of God, and he launches the fundamental message of the Gospel which is to serve others out of love for God. Today, Jesus gives voice to those who are voiceless, and to each one of us, he addresses an urgent appeal to open our hearts and to make our own the sufferings and anxieties of the poor, the hungry, the marginalized, the refugees, those who are defeated by life, those who are rejected by society and by the arrogance of the strong. And those who are discarded make up the vast majority of the population.

At this time, I think with gratitude of the soup kitchens where many volunteers offer their services, giving food to people who are alone, in need, unemployed or homeless. These soup kitchens and other works of mercy — such as visiting the sick and the imprisoned — are a training ground for charity that spreads the culture of gratuity, as those who work in these places are motivated by God’s love and enlightened by the wisdom of the Gospel. In this way serving others becomes a testimony of love, which makes the love of Christ visible and credible.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary, who was humble throughout her whole life, to lead us every day along the way of humility, and to render us capable of free gestures of welcome and solidarity with those who are marginalized, so as to become worthy of the divine reward.

Tuesday

LEARNING WHAT WE CAN BECOME

A reflection from the Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis

Behold the lively examples of the holy fathers and blessed saints. In them, flourished and shone brightly all the true perfection of life and of religion. If you contemplate them you will see how little, almost nothing, we do in comparison with them.

Oh, what is our life when compared to theirs? They served our Lord in hunger and thirst, in fear, in cold, in nakedness, in labor and in weariness, in vigils and fastings, in prayer and in holy meditation, in persecution and in spite of many criticisms.

Think of the many and very serious tribulations the apostles, the martyrs, the confessors, the virgins and other holy saints suffered. They were indeed willing to follow in the footsteps of Christ. They refused honors and bodily pleasures in this life that they might have them in everlasting life. How strict and how abject was the life that the holy fathers led in the wilderness. How difficult were their temptations! How strict and abject a life they led in the wilderness! How powerful their temptations were. How strict and how abject a life the holy Fathers led in the wilderness. How fiercely they were assailed by their spiritual enemies. How fervent was their prayer offered daily to God. What rigorous abstinence they kept! What marvelous zeal and fervor they had for spiritual profit, how strong a battle they waged against all sin, how pure and entire their purpose toward God in all their deeds.

In the day they labored and in the night they prayed, and though in the day they labored in a bodily way, they prayed in mind. So they always spent their time fruitfully. They felt every hour short for the service of God, and because of the great sweetness that they savor in heavenly contemplation, they often forgot bodily nourishment. All riches, all honor, dignity, kin and friends in the world they renounced for the love of God.

These were persons who had nothing in the world, and would scarcely accept anything that was useful for sustaining their bodies. They were poor in worldly goods but they were rich in grace and virtue; they were needy outwardly but inwardly in their souls they were replenished by grace and spiritual comfort. To the world, they were aliens and strangers but to God, they were dear and familiar friends. In the sight of the world and in their own sight they were vile and mean. In the sight of God and of the saints they were precious and singularly elect. In them, shown forth all perfection of virtue—true meekness, simple obedience, charity and patience, with other similar virtues and gracious gifts of God. And so they profited daily in spirit and obtained great grace from God.

These are left as examples to all of us, especially to religious persons. Their lives should stir us to devotion and to advance more and more in virtue and grace. They help us more than innumerable dissolute and idle persons can hinder us. Let us praise God for all these saints and companions in God's coming kingdom.

Wednesday

THE STRUGGLE TO ASCEND THE HEIGHTS

A reflection from On the Heights by Francesco Petrarca

I have this very day climbed the highest mountain in this area. It is called “Windy” and the name isn’t undeserved. I was guided only by a desire to see what one could, from such a high place. The thought had been with me for many years and the mountain was almost constantly before my eyes. At last, the impulse seized me and I decided to put into action what had long lain in my heart. But who would be my companion? All the people I could think of seemed inadequate for the journey. At last, I thought of my younger brother. He listened to me with great delight because I was thinking of him as a friend as well as a brother. So on the appointed day, we set out and by evening had arrived at the foot of the mountain. It seemed an almost impossible challenge. Our only real obstacle was the terrain itself.

We met an old shepherd who tried to dissuade us. He said he had once set out to make the climb but had gotten only pains and torn clothing for his efforts. While he was shouting all this our desires only grew with each warning. So when he saw his efforts were of no avail he went ahead of us a little way and pointed with his finger to a steep path between rocks. We could see we had brought things that would only get in the way during the climb so we left them in the care of the shepherd and started out.

As usually happens, we no sooner got going than we suddenly felt weary. We went ahead a little way and got to the top of a cliff. There we had to halt. But soon we started again and pushed on, though at a slower pace. My brother took a path straight up the mountain and was making for the top but, being less energetic, was looking for an easier way and had actually turned downwards. When called back by my brother and shown the right path, I responded that I hope the climb would be easier on the mountain’s other side and that I wouldn’t mind covering more distance if only the climb was less difficult. I was only excusing my laziness.

Meanwhile, my brother had already gotten quite a way up the mountain. I hadn’t found an easier way but only worn myself out. Exhausted and disgusted with myself for walking around aimlessly I finally resolved to seek the heights. Eventually, tired and out of breath, I joined my brother. He had been waiting for me and seemed quite refreshed as a result. For a time we walked on side by side. But soon, forgetting what had happened, I started straying downward looking for the easier path.

Then, my thoughts passed suddenly from material things to those incorporeal ones. I spoke to myself like this: “What you have experienced today quite frequently happens to mountain climbers. And you can’t help knowing it is what happens to many who enter upon the way to blessedness. The life which we term blessed is found in a higher place and narrow is the way that leads to it. That’s what we are told. Many are the steep slopes that get in the way; we have to climb with mighty strides to go from virtue to virtue.” I don’t need to tell you that this little inner discourse was elevating to my mind, and my body too seemed to be spurred on to make the rest of the ascent.

Finally, we reached the top. I was deeply moved, especially as I looked down and saw where we had come from. The clouds were actually under my feet. It had been ten years since I left my studies. How many changes had taken place! Yet now I could see how I had changed for the better. With St. Augustine, I could want only to love you, O my God!

Thursday

LOVING LIKE CHRIST IN SIMPLE WAYS

A reflection by St. Pope John XXIII

Martin de Porres was not given life's advantages but, because of his mixed racial background, he was denied opportunities open to those of "pure race" Yet this did not seem to him important in comparison with the great good that was shared with him, that of knowing Jesus Christ. The example of his life gives us abundant evidence that all can strive for holiness and receive the salvation that Jesus Christ offers. He shows us how to love God with all the heart, and soul and mind. He shows us how to love the neighbor as oneself. He was popularly known by his fellows as "Martin the charitable".

He knew that Jesus Christ suffered for all of us, and for him, and that Jesus had borne our sins in his own body on the cross; he responded with deep love of Jesus. He was known for remarkable ardor in meditating on the cross of Christ and the terrible pains Christ bore for our sakes. He was very often reduced to tears by the simple thought of them. This led him to an exceptional dedication to the Eucharist and to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. He rejoiced whenever he was able to receive holy communion—in a time when most were not allowed to receive it frequently.

Although he always strove to be obedient and to model himself on Jesus he continually gave more to the poor than was thought proper. He loved all, and especially the poor, as though they were his brothers and sisters and cared for them more than for himself. He was humble and always ready to think of others as better than himself. He did not blame anyone for his situation or its difficulties but considered that he deserved bad things because of his sins—even as he overlooked the sins of others.

He liked to sit with the sick and to spend time with jailed prisoners. He gave away food and medicine to the poor, and especially to those of mixed race who were ordinarily looked down upon or treated like slaves. His example and his words had a powerful influence and drew others to God and to the Church. If we all learned to do what Martin did by contemplating Jesus and the Cross our world would be a different, and better, place. Nothing seemed to him more important than striving to follow in Christ's footsteps, obey God's commandments, and walk the road to salvation with Christ. He did all this in very meager circumstances and by small acts of kindness and concern and generosity.

Martin simply loved those he met and sought to share with them his own love for Christ. If we too do this then we too will soon be in the company of saints in which he now rejoices forever. Nothing special is required and no special circumstances and resources are needed. Our only need is humble and joyful love.

Friday

HOW DO YOU GIVE YOUR LIFE TO GOD?

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

What did St. Charles Borromeo do? He took risks. When he did that he gave his life to God. For example, at one time a plague was devouring the people of his city. He threw himself at this scourge, not isolating himself from the plague-stricken like a hired hand but like a good shepherd, he remained with his flock without fear of death.

This is a sample of a thousand other things that Charles Borromeo did as signs of his tireless gift of self to his people. Charles left no autobiography, no spiritual writings telling us his "secret". He had no secret; his inner life and his prayer were visible to all in his gift of self.

As witness to the intensity of his prayer, we have only a few pictures showing him in ecstasy or in tears while he venerated the crucifix. Apart from these, his swiftness in grasping the meaning of the Madonna's tears he saw at the Shrine of Rho gives a confirmation of the faith he lived by.

St. Charles moved in an atmosphere of intense awareness not only of disasters like the plague but of all the wounds in the living flesh of his city and saw them as the same as the wound on the side of Christ. He was intensely aware of Christ's suffering and Christ's sorrows. God isn't recognized as God, or loved, by people who are lazy as Christians and deaf to God's Word.

If St. Charles lived his inner life in an inexhaustible capacity for praise and for sharing suffering, he was only living what the Psalmist says are the two basic aspects of human praying. It was probably his capacity for sharing suffering that primarily manifested itself exteriorly.

St. Charles was a person of prayer, of tears, and of penance. He understood this last not as something heroic but as a mysterious and even impassioned sharing in the sufferings of Christ himself. He saw this as a path by which Christ enters into the depths of the world's sin and finds there the absurdity of refusing God. Christ lived this until his heart almost broke and his soul was torn open.

Today we celebrate one of the great witnesses who have penetrated to the very depths of the mystery of divine sharing in human suffering. Christ drank the last drops of this bitter cup and so was capable of understanding very lucidly his age and ours. This was true also of Charles. He understood the deep meaning of the events and history of his times, as we are called to do in our times. He understood and he loved. This is our call as well.

Saturday

MARY & THE CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Second Vatican Council teaches as follows: “In celebrating the annual cycle of Christ’s mysteries, the holy Church honors with special love the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. She is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son. In her, the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption and joyfully contemplates it in a faultless model.” (SC 103)

This statement contains three key affirmations. The first teaches that all Marian feasts are a part of our celebration of Christ’s mysteries. This is actually the only cycle that the Church celebrates in its liturgy. Mary is strictly bound to Jesus’ redemptive action because she is the most wonderful fruit of his salvific work. We pray this every time we pray the “Hail, Mary”. She is joined to Jesus inseparably because she received everything from Him.

Second, the Church affirms that Mary opened herself and her heart to receive the fullness of God’s gift, Jesus Christ. In this way, she is the model for every Christian. This is our duty to God. We must let ourselves be loved by God! “The Almighty has done great things for me!” Mary recognizes that everything about her and in her is a gift from God. She knows herself as fully loved by God in Christ.

The Church praises God for the gift God has given in Mary. It uses the same words with which she praised the work of the Lord: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my savior”. We celebrate the lived identification between Mary and the Church and we as Church, know ourselves as understood by and represented by Our Lady.

The third affirmation is even more explicit than the others. The Church “joyfully contemplates” all that Mary is by God’s gift. She herself seeks and longs to be nothing but God’s. That is what she hoped to be and what God gave her. In other words, the Church, and each of us, looks beyond self and beyond the events that fill our days and we look to Mary as she is in God’s glory. Mary is the concrete image of all that the Church longs to be, of all that we ourselves long to be. She is what we hope to be.

Mary is totally dedicated to the Lord. Mary is totally attentive to the work of Christ. Mary is totally caught up in God’s great mysteries. Mary represents our hope in all these ways, but in her, it is already realized. Mary, glorified in body and soul, is with the Father in Heaven. In her our body is transfigured and so is our daily historicity. She shows us God’s goal for all humanity and for each of us. All are called to share in the fullness of the glory that God has given her. She shows us how we come to that glory in the seemingly simple deeds of each day—like today.