

THE THIRTY-FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE

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 From an Angelus Message of His Holiness Pope Francis

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Sunday

WHEN THE SON OF MAN COMES IN HIS GLORY

From an Angelus Message of His Holiness Pope Francis

On this last Sunday of the liturgical year, we are celebrating the Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe. His is a kingship of guidance, of service and also a kingship which at the end of time will be fulfilled as judgment. Today, we have Christ before us as King, shepherd and judge, who reveals the criteria for belonging to the Kingdom of God. Here are the criteria.

The Gospel passage opens with a grandiose vision. Jesus, addressing his disciples, says: "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne" (Mt 25:31). It is a solemn introduction to the narrative of the Last Judgment. After having lived his earthly existence in humility and poverty, Jesus now shows himself in the divine glory that pertains to him, surrounded by hosts of angels. All of humanity is summoned before him and he exercises his authority, separating one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

To those whom he has placed at his right, he says: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (vv. 34-36). The righteous are taken aback, because they do not recall ever having met Jesus, much less having helped him in that way, but he declares: "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (v. 40). These words never cease to move us, because they reveal the extent to which God's love goes: up to the point of taking flesh, but not when we are well, when we are healthy and happy, no; but when we are in need. And in this, hidden way, he allows himself to be encountered; he reaches out his hand to us as a mendicant. In this way, Jesus reveals the decisive criterion of his judgment, namely, concrete love for a neighbor in difficulty. And in this way the power of love, the kingship of God is revealed: in solidarity with those who suffer in order to engender everywhere compassion and works of mercy.

The Parable of the Judgment continues, presenting the King who shuns those who, during their lives, did not concern themselves with the needs of their brethren. Those in this case too are surprised and ask: "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?" (v. 44). Implying: "Had we seen you, surely we would have helped you!". But the King will respond: "as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me" (v. 45). At the end of our life, we will be judged on love, that is, on our concrete commitment to love and serve Jesus in our littlest and neediest brothers and sisters. That mendicant, that needy person who reaches out his hand is Jesus; that sick person whom I must visit is Jesus; that inmate is Jesus, that hungry person is Jesus. Let us consider this.

Jesus will come at the end of time to judge all nations, but he comes to us each day, in many ways, and asks us to welcome him. May the Virgin Mary help us to encounter him and receive him in his Word and in the Eucharist, and at the same time in brothers and sisters who suffer from hunger, disease, oppression, injustice. May our hearts *welcome him in the present* of our life, so that we may be *welcomed by him into the eternity* of his Kingdom of light and peace.

Monday

THE MEANING OF MARY'S PRESENTATION

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

The Feast of the Presentation of Mary originated as a celebration of her gift of her total self to God, and her call to lead us to make the same gift of ourselves. The feast originated in the tale told in an apocryphal gospel about the offering of Mary to be raised in God's Jerusalem Temple. This didn't happen historically and doesn't reflect genuine Jewish practice from the time of Jesus but the Church has seen in the tale an opportunity to call all God's people to the same sort of gift of self that Mary made, and that God used to make her the Mother of Jesus, and of us all.

Mary's vocation was a "religious" vocation. This is not to be taken in the technical sense the phrase now has. It means that with an eager and trustful heart Mary offered herself to God. No doubt she learned to make this gift from her parents. In effect, then, they led her to God and helped her offer herself to God. In this sense, Mary and her parents provide a model for all believing families, Christian and Jewish.

We don't all grow up, any more than Mary did, with a clear idea that we are called to help draw more and more people into God's Kingdom. But we now know that we are called to share our faith in God and in God's saving Kingdom with those given us as family members and, especially, as our children.

The voice of Christ continues to ring out over the entire world. Christ gently and firmly draws to God all who are open to becoming God's special people through prayer and self-gift in works of love and in fostering the fullness of life. What does it mean to respond to this call? It means losing oneself and in this very loss, find oneself again. God repays those who give everything for his sake and for the sake of the salvation to which he calls all mankind a 100-fold recompense for giving themselves 100% to his love and service.

Think of how many ways of consecrating oneself 100% to God are offered to people throughout the world. The ancient monastic and contemplative orders and styles of life are only the beginning of these many ways. Each of us must answer the call of God in a unique way. Each life is unique and each has a unique witness to God's leading to the full flowering of our humanity and our many human talents. This is what Mary did and consider how vast God has made her opportunities and capabilities for sharing her love for God! What God did for Mary God would do for each of us, each in a special way.

Be courageous! Don't be afraid! God's love conquers all obstacles. We need only begin now, or continue now, to make our self-gift to divine love and watch it flower into a life of love and service, joy and peace.

Tuesday

THE WITNESS OF THE LIFE & DEATH OF CECILIA

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

The liturgy has much to say about Cecilia the virgin and martyr. She is an example of the singular beauty that Christ gives to those who love Him. She sheds upon so many the heavenly light and sweetness of faith in God. She was deeply conscious of the truths of her faith and of the duty to God that they taught her.

It has been said of St. Cecilia that wherever she went she bore witness to the Gospel. How blessed are all those who are able to do this following her example. Above all, how blessed are those who show us what a great honor it is for a follower of Christ to find the inner strength to sacrifice everything, even life itself when faced with the choice of choosing justice and fraternity and mutual love and peace by obeying the teachings of our Redeemer. Jesus has given these ideals new and deeper meanings than ever before and shown us how to so live them that all the world will be redeemed and saved.

I can only wish that all might find within their hearts the divine gift of a desire to live frankly and generously in obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. Wasn't Jesus' new commandment a call to love others even as he has loved them, and loved us? It isn't a path to personal or inner narrowness but to honor and openness and service. It is a path that multiplies care and concern and action on behalf of all that is good.

Cecilia was wealthy. A young man wanted to marry her, but not for herself. He lusted after her money and property. When she decided to give all she had inherited to the poor he denounced her as a Christian. He hoped this would cause her to turn back from her purpose out of fear for her life. It only caused her to make an even greater gift of her life to God. She went ahead and gave away her wealth and property but in giving it she gave her very life and self. This is the call that her feast proclaims. It is a call that God makes to all of us—whether we have any property or wealth or not.

What we give is not important unless the gift is yourself. You may give it in a lifetime of dedication to God and to love of others. You may give it by refusing to turn away from what you hear as God's call to you. Whatever that call costs, refusing to turn back is your path to God and to God's Kingdom.

Wednesday

PERSECUTED BY THE PRINCE OF THE WORLD From a Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis

Christians are persecuted today more than at the start of Christianity. The originating cause of every persecution is the hate of the prince of the world for those who have been saved and redeemed by Jesus through his death and resurrection. The only weapon by which we can defend ourselves is the Word of God, humility and meekness. Pope Francis pointed to the path we must take to disentangle ourselves from the snares of the world. These snares are works of the devil who is the prince and spirit of the world.

“So many Christian communities are persecuted around the globe. More so now than in the early times.... Why? Because the spirit of the world hates”. Persecution usually comes after a long road. “Think,” urged Pope Francis, “how the prince of the world tried to trick Jesus in the desert”, tempting especially his vanity. “Jesus never answered this prince with his own words but with the word of God”. The Pope said the message for man today is: “you cannot dialogue with the prince of the world”. Dialogue is “necessary between us”, he explained, “necessary for peace” and we must always maintain it. But “with that prince, there is no dialogue; you can only answer him with the Word of God who defends us”. The prince of the world, Francis warned, “hates us. And what he did with Jesus, he will do with us”. With a little word here, a trifle there, “he will lead us down a path of injustice”. It begins with the little things, “softening us” to the point that “we fall into the trap. Jesus tell us ‘I send you like lambs in the midst of wolves’. Be prudent, but simple.”

Jesus is meek and humble of heart. Let us reflect over the weapons that we have to defend ourselves: “let us remain like lambs forever because then we will always have a shepherd to defend us”.

Thursday

GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE

A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard

We know many persons who ask insistently for what they know they lack, but we know exceedingly few who give proper thanks for all they have been given. It is right to pray insistently, but if we are ungrateful the effect of the prayer is, so to speak, negated. It may actually be kindness to refuse ungrateful sinners what they ask lest they be judged more harshly for lack of gratitude.

How many monks do we see, and weep over, because they suppose that all is well for them so long as they persevere in monastic life. A worm of ingratitude is eating away their inner self but is careful not to let itself be seen lest they correct themselves out of shame. It isn't always beneficial to be cleansed of the leprosy that is a worldly life, as when an ulcer of ingratitude is destroying one. Only one out of nine lepers the Lord healed returned to give thanks. The grateful Samaritan knew that he possessed nothing that he had not received. By the act of thanksgiving he gave all he had received to God. Happy are those who return each gift of grace to the One who is the fullness of all grace!

It is ingratitude that gets in the way of progress in the life of grace. A gift is, in a sense, lost when it is received ungratefully. The one who considers self-undeserving responds even to small kindnesses with large gratitude. Such a one neither doubts nor ignores the free gift bestowed.

In our own beginnings, we came to count ourselves as strangers to God's kingdom. We acknowledged this and so found the humility and reverence that made us devout enough to be accepted by God as his own. How easy it is, and how soon we forget how much we have received. Whatever we have is a gift. It is wrong to take it for granted. This is especially so where our very friendship with God is in question. The Lord's enemies, Scripture tells us, belong to the Lord's own household. If we receive too lightly all we are given we can only expect to be judged more gravely.

I ask you all to humble yourselves more and more under the mighty but loving hand of God most high. Let us strive to keep far away from the most wicked vice of ingratitude. If we turn with all our devotion to giving thanks we gain the grace of our God and this alone is able to save us. Not only "by word or tongue, but by deed and truth" we need to show ourselves most grateful. God asks of us not only lip service by genuine acts of thanksgiving. What is most grateful than following our Lord in the deeds of love by which he drew us to God and to salvation. We gather around the altar as at the Lord's Last Supper and listen to his loving words and begin to see the loving deeds by which he loved us even to the very end that is the love by which a friend gives life itself from others. Our lives are gratitude when they are the very love with which Jesus loves the Heavenly Father and gives himself for us.

Friday

PREPARING FOR THE LAST THINGS

A reflection from Christ & Us by Fr. Jean Danielou

The coming of Christ has as its purpose a set of divine works. Those to come won't be less mighty than those already completed but they will be more glorious. These take place in the sequence of God's mighty works throughout salvation history.

The first of these works is Judgment. It is the work by which righteousness, which is God's faithfulness to himself, is brought about fully. This righteousness is entirely positive. It is the fulfillment of the promises made by God. Judgment is that fulfillment and its manifestation. In other words, it brings to completion the order of present things. Now true values are hidden but false values are everywhere put forth. Judgment exposes the nothingness of all that which is not founded upon God. It necessarily condemns that which is not founded on God. It reveals, on the other hand, that what is truly founded upon God has been established forever. Thus judgment is the manifestation of truth. It manifests the fact that the truth is Christ. It bears witness that those who have believed in Christ have lived in the truth. That is why it will "prove the world wrong about sin and about the rightness of heart; for I am going back to my Father".

The second divine work is the Gathering. "The Son of Man will send out his angels with a loud blast of the trumpet, to gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other". This gathering, as presented in the Hebrew Scriptures, was one of the essential promises made by God through the prophets to a scattered people. Christ has already gathered together in Himself not only the scattered children of Israel but all the groups into which mankind has divided itself. These are made one in a single Church. The ancient liturgy provides a description of the day of the Final Gathering of those who are united in Christ but seem separate: "Gather, O Lord, your Church, from the towns and cities and markets, from the four corners of the universe". This is to be the fulfillment of the priestly prayer "that they should all be one, as we are one". Unity is a divine work. It is the distinguishing mark of Trinitarian life. The unity of the Church is its visible epiphany.

The final work is the resurrection. This is the repercussion in bodies and the entire cosmos of that which was already accomplished in the Person of Christ. Resurrection isn't merely the bringing back to life of bodies for the purpose of judgment. The general resurrection is of the just and the unjust; it is the divine act that bestows incorruptibility upon the bodies of the saints and delivers them from the slavery of spiritual death. The action of God reaches out to the utmost bounds of creation. God the Redeemer is also God the Creator. He intends to lose nothing of the creation in so far as it is his. Thus the cosmic meaning of the "parousia" is revealed in its entirety. Beyond humanity, God reaches out to the whole cosmos and raises up a new heaven and a new earth. We are part of that new creation forever.

Saturday

WHAT CHRISTIANS EXPECT & OFFER

A reflection from the Gospel of Liberation by Jurgen Moltmann

Every day we look at the news. Every day we read the Bible. We want to participate in the history of God's coming into the world. We want to be involved in the fate of our world too. How can we bring together the community of those who hope in God and the community of those who share so many of the sorrows of our earth?

Two things concern us daily. The first is the future of God's coming. The second is the future of our earth, of the place where we live and work and have children and strive to teach them to live with others in a human and humanizing way. We recognize that a famine has come, a famine of hope. We want to meet this famine by sharing our own Christian hope and we want others to know that this doesn't free us from the need to share and suffer with those who have no hope.

Whoever perseveres in hope remains in love. Because we hope in Christ we refuse to let ourselves be embittered by all disappointments. We persevere in the love of Christ for the degraded and wronged. We bring friendliness into a world of cold indifference. We are fools for love because we always give an advance of trust.

And then there is this: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come". Perseverance until the end means going on ahead with the message of freedom and of the Kingdom as penetrating to all places and circumstances with the conviction that the final end is the Kingdom of Christ. The only persons who will remain until the end are those who, on God's account don't stay standing in place but go on ahead. They go to meet the coming of God into the world.

Christians don't have a point of view to defend but must travel in a direction that exists right now. Their battle line is the real suffering of the world that exists right now. We are to ignite the world with Gospel hope. It is a hope in an open and outgoing life that awakens faith. We must spread friendliness and love through our solidarity with all the suffering.

Isn't this the "end" the world needs? This is the "last" thing! It doesn't require wars, catastrophes, famines or any of the other evils. We experience such things because the "end" hasn't been reached. The Gospel of the Kingdom is proclaimed to all in order to bring them hope! This hope is certain and definitive. We now wait for the "end" to come.

Christian hope is that love will overcome sorrow. In the Kingdom peace and joy will laugh together. And Christ is coming as the judge who comforts all the deeply afflicted and gives the suffering freedom. Not as the world imagines but in a new way. Dare to hope and to share your hope.