

Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

February 12 – 18, 2023

- Sun **Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
12 **WISDOM IN SIRACH AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**
From a reflection by Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.
- Mon **Weekday of 6th Week**
13 **THE SCHOOL OF DIVINE SERVICE**
From the writings of Dom Bernardo Olivera, OCSO
- Tue **Memorial of Sts. Cyril, Monk and Methodius, Bishop**
14 **THE STORY OF SAINTS CYRIL AND METHODIUS**
From a reflection on *My Catholic Life!*
- Wed **Weekday of 6th Week**
15 **THE WORD OF GOD AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**
From Pope Benedict's apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*
- Thu **Weekday of 6th Week**
16 **THE ONLY EXAM QUESTION WE NEED TO PASS IN LIFE**
From a reflection on *catholic.net*
- Fri **Weekday of 6th Week**
17 **ON THE TOWER OF BABEL AND TODAY'S CULTURE**
From a reflection by Deacon Greg Lambert on *Catholic Stand*
- Sat **Memorial of Our Lady**
18 **MARY, STAR OF THE SEA**
From the writings of St. Bernard

Sunday, February 12

WISDOM IN SIRACH AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

From a reflection of Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.

Sirach, also known as Ecclesiasticus, is full of wonderful images and wise sayings about most aspects of life. The whole book centers around the depth, presence and practicality of wisdom. This spirit, this awareness, this sensitivity, is a participation in the divine.

God knows all, created all, loves all and allows us human beings to participate in that wisdom, but allows us a freedom to exercise just how deeply or to what extent we will share it.

If you have time and interest, it would be very helpful to read and listen to both the chapter before this one from which today's verses are taken and this entire chapter. The whole Jewish "law" is complete with God's wisdom and God has shared it with humanity. Wisdom is living the "law," not merely keeping it out of fear.

The many aspects of the "law" of Moses were meant to guide and invite God's people to live in harmony, prosperity and fertility. Wisdom is God's way and we are choosers. We have been given the gift, or burden, of our freedom. Our wisdom is using our knowledge according to our faith in God's ways.

Wisdom is received by sensing, listening to, living through the experiencing of choices. It is experienced-based, but that includes the ponderings and wonderings and strugglings it takes to make choices and then the patience to live the consequences. It is all about listening and hearing.

Today's continuation of the Sermon on the Mount contains twenty long verses about what has been heard in the past and what is to be listened to now. Jesus is not spinning the Law and the traditions passed on through the prophets. He is applying a proper spirit to what had become too legalistic. In a sense, the dictates of the "law" were for the head to inform or guide the five senses. The spirit of Jesus is to form the heart as well as the mind.

The ways of Jesus invite us to let go of exactness and conformity for the sake of slavish fear of being punished or excluded. This whole sermon, at the beginning of Jesus' preaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, is not meant for exact execution, but for our interiorizing the heart and mind of Jesus. It is not about doing this or not doing that. It is about the "why" of our doing anything.

For instance, we are encouraged not to lust sexually in our relationships with each other, but why not! It is about reverence of the human body and the sacredness of love and life that is important. This sacredness of life extends to killing all forms of human life as well. Killing relationships with our brothers and sisters is a violation of the new way of living the Old Law as well.

This is a long Gospel today and the whole Sermon takes much pondering. We here in the United States love the exactness of laws so we know what's right and how we can get around or through or under or above what's written. God so loved the world that God sent a Relational Person to share the sacredness of our lives and the sacredness of God's relationship with us. The Wisdom of Jesus is not "how" he lived, but the "why." He came and continues coming, respectful of our freedom, to encourage us to reverence our lives, the time we have and the lives and times we have with others.

Monday, February 13

THE SCHOOL OF DIVINE SERVICE

From the writings of Dom Bernardo Olivera, OCSO

In imitation of St. Benedict, whose Rule and life they wanted to follow, the Cistercian abbots and authors of the 12th century think of the monastery as “a school of divine service.” This has a double meaning:

- As a place to receive and learn from instruction, where the monk puts into practice his principal task of searching for and finding the experience of God.
- As a place to be freed from everything that can block this search.

Thus the word *school* signifies an almost systematic introduction to spiritual science, a new art that is learned in the monastery. That is why all are required to submit themselves to it freely and sincerely. It is also the key idea of William of Saint-Thierry in his *Golden Epistle*, where he often stresses the fact that someone newly received into the monastery should receive a teaching on the exercises proper to monastic life. But it is evident that there he is not speaking only about communicating a teaching or transmitting ideas, but also about stimulating the monk to practice personally this new art. He wants to encourage him in his desire to live by love. The first work of Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Mirror of Charity*, can be thought of as a handbook of this art.

The Cistercian Fathers understood this school from different points of view, the most interesting and inclusive of which is for us the “school of charity.” This *schola caritatis* is built on the commandment of love of God and neighbor, ordering everything else to this end. The purpose of this school of divine service, which is also the purpose of Benedict’s Rule, is “to safeguard love” or as the abbot of Clairvaux says, “for the gaining or preservation of charity.” The school of the Rule, is for the Cistercian Fathers, a school of Christ where one learns to love one’s neighbor as the fruit and proof of one’s love of God.” This is why the Order’s Constitutions present the cenobitic life as “a stable community that is a school of brotherly love.”

For St. Bernard, the school is a common will with God and with humanity. When this will is not shared with people, it will be shared with God only with difficulty. Love of neighbor nourishes and purifies the love of God, which preceded it but is only beginning to grow. Love of God is, in its turn, the crown of love of neighbor.

Love of one’s neighbor, or social love, plays a decisive role in the growth of spiritual life on its journey towards mystical life. The steps of this progress have various names, but the doctrine is the same:

- Three degrees of truth: in oneself by self-judgment, in one’s neighbor by compassion towards him, in God by contemplation of God.
- Four degrees of love of God: of oneself by taking care of one’s real needs that include openness to the social love of one’s neighbor, love of God for one’s own good, love of God for his own sake, love of oneself in and for God.
- Three Sabbath days of rest: love of self, love of one’s neighbor, love of God.

The conclusion that is clear and that we all should retain is “Whoever claims to be in light but hates his brother is still in darkness ... No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.”

Tuesday, February 14

THE STORY OF SAINTS CYRIL & METHODIUS

From a reflection on *My Catholic Life!*

Imagine what life would be like if you were unable to read because the language you spoke was not even in written form. No alphabet, no books, only a spoken language. This is the context into which Saints Cyril and Methodius were sent to preach the Gospel.

Their story began in Thessalonica, Greece. Seven sons were born to a Greek-speaking imperial magistrate and his wife, among them Constantine and Michael. Their mother was most likely of Slavic descent, and the boys learned her unwritten language, along with Greek and Latin. When Constantine was about fourteen years old, he was sent to the great Greek city of Constantinople to study. After completing his education, Constantine decided to become a priest. Constantine's brother Michael, about twelve years older than Constantine, began his career in civil service in Macedonia but chose to abandon that position to become a monk, taking the name Methodius.

When Constantine was thirty, he decided to give up his teaching career and embrace a life of prayer in his brother's monastery. Within a few years, however, Emperor Michael III asked Constantine to go on a mission to evangelize the Jews and Turks of Khazars, modern-day Russia, Ukraine, and Crimea. Methodius accompanied him on this mission, and they learned both Hebrew and Turkish so as to speak to the people in their native tongues.

Within a couple of years, Prince Rastislav of Moravia asked Emperor Michael III to send missionaries to Great Moravia, today's Czech Republic. His people had rejected paganism and embraced Christianity, but they didn't have anyone who could explain the faith to them in their native Slavic language since the Germanic clergy adhered strictly to Latin. It was this mission that would be the beginning of a new era and a new method of evangelization within the Church.

In Great Moravia, Constantine and Methodius began to translate the Bible and liturgical books into the Slavic language. Since there was no written form of the language or even an alphabet, Cyril created one. He translated the various sounds into symbols, which enabled him and his brother to then write down the sacred texts. In addition to their translations, they began to teach the people and future Slavic clerics how to read their new written language. Eventually, the new alphabet developed into what is now known as the Cyrillic alphabet and is the basis of many Eastern European and Asian languages used by more than 250 million people today.

The Slavic people were overjoyed to hear the Gospel and pray the liturgy in their native language, but many of the Germanic clergy took issue with this approach. To solve this problem, the brothers traveled to Rome where they received the approval of Pope Adrian II, who ordained them bishops and sent them back to Great Moravia. Before leaving Rome, however, Constantine fell sick and before dying, he fully consecrated himself to God as a monk in one of the Greek monasteries, taking the monastic name Cyril. His brother Methodius then returned to Great Moravia to continue his work for the next fourteen years. He continued to endure harsh treatment from the Germanic clergy, even being imprisoned by them for a time, but he pressed on, extending his missionary work even beyond the borders of Great Moravia.

A millennium later the brothers received the universal honor they deserved when the Western Church added them to its liturgical calendar. A century later, Pope Saint John Paul II, a Slav himself, honored them with the title of co-patrons of Europe and Apostles to the Slavs.

Wednesday, February 15

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

From Pope Benedict's apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*

The word of God is expressed in human words thanks to the working of the Holy Spirit. The missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are inseparable and constitute a single economy of salvation. The same Spirit who acts in the incarnation of the Word in the womb of the Virgin Mary is the Spirit who guides Jesus throughout his mission and is promised to the disciples. The same Spirit who spoke through the prophets sustains and inspires the Church in her task of proclaiming the word of God and in the preaching of the Apostles; finally, it is this Spirit who inspires the authors of sacred Scripture.

Conscious of this pneumatological horizon, the Synod Fathers highlighted the importance of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of the Church and in the hearts of believers in relation to sacred Scripture: without the efficacious working of the "Spirit of Truth", the words of the Lord cannot be understood. As St. Irenaeus states: "Those who do not share in the Spirit do not draw from the bosom of their mother [the Church] the food of life; they receive nothing from the purest fountain that flows from the body of Christ". Just as the word of God comes to us in the body of Christ, in his Eucharistic body and in the body of the Scriptures, through the working of the Holy Spirit, so too it can only be truly received and understood through that same Spirit.

The great writers of the Christian tradition speak unanimously of the place of the Holy Spirit in the relationship which believers are to have with the Scriptures. St. John Chrysostom states that Scripture "needs the revelation of the Spirit, so that by discovering the true meaning of the things enclosed therein, we can reap abundant benefits". St. Jerome is likewise firmly convinced that "we cannot come to an understanding of Scripture without the assistance of the Holy Spirit who inspired it". St. Gregory the Great nicely emphasizes the work of the Spirit in the formation and interpretation of the Bible: "He himself created the words of the holy Testaments, he himself revealed their meaning". Richard of Saint Victor points out that we need "the eyes of doves", enlightened and taught by the Spirit, in order to understand the sacred text.

Here too I would like to emphasize the very significant witness to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Scripture which we find in the texts of the liturgy, where the word of God is proclaimed, heard and explained to the faithful. We find a witness to this in the ancient prayers which in the form of an epiclesis invoke the Spirit before the proclamation of the readings: "Send your Paraclete Spirit into our hearts and make us understand the Scriptures which he has inspired; and grant that I may interpret them worthily, so that the faithful assembled here may profit thereby". We also find prayers which, at the end of the homily, again ask God to send the gift of the Spirit upon the faithful: "God our Savior... we implore you for this people: send upon them the Holy Spirit; may the Lord Jesus come to visit them, speak to the minds of all, dispose their hearts to faith and lead our souls to you, God of mercies". This makes it clear that we cannot come to understand the meaning of the word unless we are open to the working of the Paraclete in the Church and in the hearts of believers.

Thursday, February 16

THE ONLY EXAM QUESTION WE NEED TO PASS IN LIFE

From a reflection on *catholic.net*

Our prayer must lead us to respond to Christ's question, "Who do you say that I am?" This is the only test, the only examination question we need to pass in life. We must reflect and respond to the question from this perspective: "Who has Christ been for you?" This question does not so much define Christ, but the one who answers it. What experiences have we had of him? What have we been learning about Christ personally, through experiences that we cannot have known by solemn definitions, by routine external piety, or by what others say? Christ's history and our personal history must intertwine to become a single chapter which we both share.

If I have little to say as far as my firsthand knowledge of Jesus, if my interior experiences have been eclipsed by a mundane and materialistic spirit, I must take Christ's question to the next level: "Who have I been for Christ?" Who I have been for Christ will be determined largely by who I have been for him in prayer. The "inner Christ" is known only by those to whom it is revealed. It will not happen by a merely flesh-and-blood approach, nor by just going with the flow of human events. Peter's interior life was fertile ground for the Father, his testimony was not luck, but was a divine intervention in his soul from which his faith drew its strength. "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). May I seek in a special way the grace of greater sensitivity to let my interior life of prayer define me and shape my character.

Poor Peter! In one moment he is revealing the thoughts of the Father, in the next, Satan's. Peter's living experience of Christ is the target of Satan's attempts to break his faith. Christ's suffering will be the pledge that the faith of the apostle will not fail: "I have prayed for you..." (Luke 22:32). Ultimately Christ's prayer would prevail: Peter is reborn on Pentecost, fearlessly accepting and launching the mission of the Church. A strong interior foundation in Christ ultimately leads to one last reality check of the spiritual life: Can Christ build on me because I am built on him? Christ's fidelity will uphold me if I stay in the battle, if I hold firm and don't let the reality of my falls keep me from advancing. Satan cannot break my faith if I keep fighting, and for this I always have to have new goals, to begin fresher, better, and more generously than before.

Adapting the words of St. Paul from Ephesians 3:16-20, I make his prayer my own: I pray the Lord, according to the glory, you may grant that I may may be strengthened in my inner being with power through your Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith, as I am being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that I may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that I may be filled with all the fullness of you. Now to you who by the power at work within me is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all I can ask or imagine, be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Friday, February 17

ON THE TOWER OF BABEL AND TODAY'S CULTURE

From a reflection by Deacon Greg Lambert on *Catholic Stand*

The modern-day equivalent of the Tower of Babel can be found in the path where “science” seeks to lead us in our present culture. The quotation marks are necessary punctuation. Science has become the equivalent of the Golden Calf in the ancient world. If science spoke as a unified entity instead of a population with diverse opinions and conclusions, it might indeed be a sure path to the heavens.

As it stands, phrases like “follow the science” or “the science tells us” are relatively useless when it comes to objective truth. In fact, any statement other than “I am the way, the truth and the life” falls woefully short. Even then, followers of Christ disagree as to how the Word of God is to be interpreted. It would be nice, in every debate, to have God at least somewhere on the panel.

Happenings and events once considered as “Acts of God” are now mostly considered as acts that are directly related to human activity. Nothing seems to be off-limits. The “god” of science is now in full control and can only be appeased if the proper sacrifices are made. Humans must “toe the line” and follow the directives of an insatiable tyrant that speaks in riddles only those who are enlightened understand. Theoretically, if the laggards would stop their dissent and get on board, a straight line to utopia could be drawn.

As appealing as the notion of everyone proceeding with a singular devotion to scientific truth is, it amounts to little more than the folly that the Tower of Babel proved to be. The thinking seems to be that if only those with opposing views would “see the light” and “get with the program”, true progress could be achieved. If by some miracle, the left and right joined forces in the church and in the world, it might elicit divine intervention. As it is, it looks like we are a long way off from a common language or understanding.

With the two-headed beast of situational ethics and secular humanism on the loose, there is little need for God to intervene in order to scatter and confuse. The gift of free will allows enough “rope” for us to hang ourselves. The arrogance that accompanies the “terrible twos” and adolescence has now found a place of honor in modern society. Dialogue and debate have been replaced with demagoguery and caustic rhetoric in public discourse, and show no signs of diminishing. We are subjected to “expert” opinions and prognostications. Facts and figures are mixed and manipulated to arrive at a predetermined conclusion.

A quote from Mark Twain applies here: “Some individuals use statistics as a drunk man uses lamp-posts — for support rather than for illumination.” Yet, many “false prophets” proclaim that they possess the wisdom and knowledge that comes from “following the science”.

As Christians, we are called to be living witnesses to faith in Christ, glorifying Him by the lives we lead. No arguing or debate is necessary; just fidelity to the relationship we have with God through the sacrifice of his son. Grace, Redemption, Salvation, and Eternal life await the faithful disciple that follows the only sure path to Heaven.

Saturday, February 18

MARY, STAR OF THE SEA

From the writings of St. Bernard

Let us now say a few words about this name, *Stella Maris*, which means 'star of the sea', and is so becoming to the Virgin Mother. Surely she is very fittingly likened to a star. The star sends forth its rays without harm to itself. In the same way the Virgin brought forth her son with no injury to herself. The ray no more diminishes the star's brightness than does the Son his mother's integrity. She indeed is that noble star risen out of Jacob whose beam enlightens the earthly globe. She it is whose brightness both twinkles in the highest heaven and pierces the pit of hell, and is shed upon the earth, warming our hearts far more than our bodies, fostering virtue and cauterizing vice. She, I tell you, is that splendid and wondrous star suspended as by necessity over this great wide sea, radiant with merit and brilliant in example.

O you, whoever you are, who feel that in the tidal wave of this world you are nearer to being tossed about among the squalls and gales than treading on dry land, if you do not want to founder in the tempest, do not avert your eyes from the brightness of this star. When the wind of temptation blows up within you, when you strike upon the rock of tribulation, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. Whether you are being tossed about by the waves of pride or ambition or slander or jealousy, call out to Mary. When rage or greed or fleshly desires are battering the skiff of your soul, gaze up at Mary. When the immensity of your sins weighs you down and you are bewildered by the loathsomeness of your conscience, when the terrifying thought of judgement appalls you and you begin to founder in the gulf of sadness and despair, think of Mary. In dangers, in hardships, in every doubt, think of Mary, call out to Mary.

Keep her in your mouth, keep her in your heart. Follow the example of her life and you will obtain the favour of her prayer. Following her you will never go astray. Asking her help, you will never despair. Keeping her in your thoughts, you will never wander away. With your hand in hers, you will never stumble. With her protecting you, you will not be afraid. With her leading you, you will never tire. Her kindness will see you through to the end.

Then you will know by your own experience how true it is that 'the Virgin's name was Mary'.