

Fifth Week of Easter

May 7 – 13, 2023

- Sun** **Fifth Sunday of Easter**
07 **DEATH AS A BLESSING**
 From a treatise of St Ambrose
- Mon** **Mem of Bl Christian de Chergé, PrM et al, MM**
08 **THE TESTAMENT OF DOM CHRISTIAN DECHERGÉ, OCSO**
 From the *Cistercians of the Strict Observance* website
- Tue** **Tuesday of 5th Week of Easter**
09 **THE PEACE THAT JESUS GIVES**
 From Pope Francis' Regina Caeli address on May 21, 2022
- Wed** **Mem of St Damien de Veuster, Pr**
10 **A LEPER FOR CHRIST: ST DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI**
 From Brandon Vogt writing on the *Word on Fire* website
- Thu** **Mem of the Holy Abbots of Cluny**
11 **FOR THE HOLY ABBOTS OF CLUNY**
 From a homily of Fr Justin Sheehan of Genesee Abbey
- Fri** **Friday of 5th Week of Easter**
12 **CHARITABLE SERVICE LEADS TO HUMILITY**
 From Pope Benedict's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*
- Sat** **Mem of Our Lady of Fatima**
13 **RECENT POPES AND OUR LADY OF FATIMA**
 From the *America* magazine March 30, 2017 issue

Sunday, May 7

DEATH AS A BLESSING

From a treatise of St Ambrose

Let us march forward intrepidly to meet our Redeemer, Jesus, pursuing our onward course without swerving until we come to the assembly of the saints and are welcomed by the company of the just. It is to join our Christian forebears that we are journeying, to those who taught us our faith – that faith which comes to our aid and safeguards our heritage for us even when we have no good works to show. In the place we are making for Lord will be everyone's light; the true light which enlightens every human person will shine upon all. In the house where we are going the Lord Jesus has prepared many dwelling-places for his servants, so that where he is we also may be, for this was his desire. Hear his own words about them: *In my Father's house are many dwelling-places*, and about his desire: *I will come again*, he says, *and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be*.

“But he was speaking only to his disciples” you say, “and so it was to them alone that the many dwelling-places were promised.” Do you really suppose it was only for the eleven disciples they were prepared? And what of the saying about people coming from all the corners of the earth to sit at table in the kingdom of heaven? Do we doubt that the divine will will be accomplished? But for Christ, to will is to do! Accordingly, he has shown us both the way and the place: *You know where I am going*, he said, *and you know the way*. The place is where the Father is; the way is Christ, according to his own declaration: *I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me*. Let us set out on this way, let us hold fast to truth, let us follow life. It is the way that leads us, the truth that strengthens us, the life that is restored to us through him.

To make sure that we really understand his will, Christ prays later on: *Father, it is my desire that those whom you have given me may be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory*. How graciously he asks for what he had already promised! The promise came first and then the request, not the other way around. Conscious of his authority and knowing the gift was at his own disposal, he made the promise; then, as if to show his filial submission, he asked his Father to grant it. He promised first to make us aware of his power; he asked afterwards to show us his loving deference to his Father.

Yes, Lord Jesus, we do follow you, but we can only come at your bidding. No one can make the ascent without you, for you are our way, our truth, our life, our strength, our confidence, our reward. Be the way that receives us, the truth that strengthens us, the life that invigorates us.

Monday, May 8

THE TESTAMENT OF DOM CHRISTIAN DECHERGÉ, OCSO **From the *Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance* website**

If it should happen one day - and it could be today -
that I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to engulf
all the foreigners living in Algeria,
I would like my community, my Church and my family
to remember that my life was GIVEN to God and to this country.
I ask them to accept the fact that the One Master of all life
was not a stranger to this brutal departure.
I would ask them to pray for me:
for how could I be found worthy of such an offering?
I ask them to associate this death with so many other equally violent ones
which are forgotten through indifference or anonymity.
My life has no more value than any other.
Nor any less value.
In any case, it has not the innocence of childhood.
I have lived long enough to know that I am an accomplice in the evil
which seems to prevail so terribly in the world,
even in the evil which might blindly strike me down.
I should like, when the time comes, to have a moment of spiritual clarity
which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God
and of my fellow human beings,
and at the same time forgive with all my heart the one who would strike me down.
I could not desire such a death.
It seems to me important to state this.
I do not see, in fact, how I could rejoice
if the people I love were indiscriminately accused of my murder.
It would be too high a price to pay
for what will perhaps be called, the "grace of martyrdom"
to owe it to an Algerian, whoever he might be,
especially if he says he is acting in fidelity to what he believes to be Islam.
I am aware of the scorn which can be heaped on the Algerians indiscriminately.
I am also aware of the caricatures of Islam which a certain Islamism fosters.
It is too easy to soothe one's conscience
by identifying this religious way with the fundamentalist ideology of its extremists...
Obviously, my death will appear to confirm
those who hastily judged me naïve or idealistic:
"Let him tell us now what he thinks of his ideals!"
But these persons should know that finally my most avid curiosity will be set free.
This is what I shall be able to do, God willing:
immerse my gaze in that of the Father
to contemplate with him His children of Islam
just as He sees them, all shining with the glory of Christ,
the fruit of His Passion, filled with the Gift of the Spirit
whose secret joy will always be to establish communion
and restore the likeness, playing with the differences.
For this life lost, totally mine and totally theirs,
I thank God, who seems to have willed it entirely
for the sake of that JOY in everything and in spite of everything...

Tuesday, May 9

THE PEACE THAT JESUS GIVES

From Pope Francis' Regina Caeli address on May 21, 2022

What is this peace that the world does not know and the Lord gives us? This peace is the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit of Jesus. It is the presence of God in us, it is God's power of peace. It is He, the Holy Spirit, who disarms the heart and fills it with serenity. It is He, the Holy Spirit, who loosens rigidity and extinguishes the temptations to attack others. It is He, the Holy Spirit, who reminds us that there are brothers and sisters beside us, not obstacles or adversaries.

It is He, the Holy Spirit, who gives us the strength to forgive, to begin again, to set out anew because we cannot do this with our own strength. And it is with Him, with the Holy Spirit, that we become men and women of peace. This is the source of the peace Jesus gives us. For no one can leave others peace if they do not have it within themselves. No one can give peace unless that person is at peace.

Let us learn to say every day: 'Lord, give me your peace, give me your Holy Spirit.' This is a beautiful prayer. Jesus bids farewell with words expressing affection and serenity. But He does so in a moment that is anything but serene. The Lord knows the betrayal that is coming, and yet He does not rebuke, He does not use severe words, He does not give harsh speeches. Rather than demonstrate agitation, He remains kind until the end.

There is a proverb that says you die the way you have lived. In effect, the last hours of Jesus' life are like the essence of His entire life. He feels fear and pain, but does not give way to resentment or protesting. He does not allow himself to become bitter, He does not vent; He is not impatient. He is at peace, a peace that comes from His meek heart accustomed to trust. Jesus demonstrates that meekness is possible.

He incarnated it specifically in the most difficult moment, and He wants us to behave that way too, since we too are heirs of His peace. He wants us to be meek, open, available to listen, capable of defusing tensions and weaving harmony. This is witnessing to Jesus and is worth more than a thousand words and many sermons. It is a witness to peace.

Do we ease tensions, and defuse conflicts? Are we too at odds with someone, always ready to react, explode, or do we know how to respond nonviolently, do we know how to respond with peaceful actions? How do I react? Certainly, this meekness is not easy. How difficult it is, at every level, to defuse conflicts!

Jesus knows that we need help, that we need a gift. Peace, which is our obligation, is first of all a gift of God. No sin, no failure, no grudge should discourage us from insistently asking for this gift from the Holy Spirit who gives us peace. The more we feel our hearts are agitated, the more we sense we are nervous, impatient, angry inside, the more we need to ask the Lord for the Spirit of peace.

Please join me in praying, "Lord, give me your peace, give me your Holy Spirit." And let us also ask this for those who live next to us, for those we meet each day, and for the leaders of nations.

Wednesday, May 10

A LEPER FOR CHRIST: ST DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI

From Brandon Vogt writing on the *Word on Fire* website

When Fr. Damien de Veuster arrived in Hawaii in 1864, he found an island-community beset by infections. Yet none were as bad as Hansen's Disease, more commonly known as leprosy. First reported in Hawaii in 1840, leprosy devastated people in many ways. Few diseases isolated people from their communities as much as leprosy. Sufferers were seen as outcasts and cautioned to stay away from everyone else.

In 1866, to curb the spread of the disease, Hawaiian authorities decided to consign lepers to an isolated community on the island of Molokai. Puritan missionaries became convinced that leprosy stemmed from the people's licentiousness. But Damien knew that wasn't true. He believed the people on Molokai were basically good, not corrupt, and that sin did not cause the spread of the disease.

Damien asked the local bishop for permission to go to Molokai, and the bishop not only granted approval, but personally accompanied Damien to the island. He introduced Damien to the 816 community members as "one who will be a father to you and who loves you so much that he does not hesitate to become one of you, to live and die with you".

At first, the conditions around the lepers proved overwhelming. Damien often felt as if he had opened a door to hell. Victims wandered about, their bodies in ruin and their constant coughing the island's most familiar sound. Damien could hardly bear the stench. Eventually Damien overcame the distressing sights and smells. His superiors had given him strict advice: "Do not touch them. Do not allow them to touch you. Do not eat with them." But Damien made the decision to transcend his fear of contagion and enter into solidarity with the Molokai lepers. He committed to visit every leper on the island and to inquire of their needs.

One early realization was that to show the lepers the value of their lives, he had to first demonstrate the value of their deaths. So he built a fence around the local cemetery, which pigs and dogs regularly scavenged. He also constructed coffins and dug graves, committing that each leper, even if marginalized throughout his life, would receive a decent burial upon death. This had a remarkably uplifting effect on the community.

Damien also devoted his attention to the sick. He brought the sacraments to bedridden lepers. He washed their bodies and bandaged their wounds. He tidied their rooms and did all he could to make them as comfortable as possible.

What surprised the lepers most was that Damien touched them. Other missionaries and doctors shrank from the lepers. But Damien not only touched the lepers, he also embraced them, he put his thumb on their forehead to anoint them, and he placed the Eucharist on their tongues. Damien also taught the lepers to farm, raise animals, play musical instruments, and sing.

In December 1884 Damien contracted leprosy. He wrote home to his brother: "I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all to Jesus Christ." Even before contracting the disease, Damien spoke of himself and the people of Molokai as "we lepers." He identified closely with those he came to serve and offered a powerful, concrete expression of solidarity. And it was for that reason he became known not by his homeland, but by the island community he served—St. Damien of Molokai, patron of lepers.

Thursday, May 11

FOR THE HOLY ABBOTS OF CLUNY

From a homily of Fr Justin Sheehan of the Abbey of the Genesee

If you read only the early Cistercians about the monastery of Cluny, you could get a very distorted view of what the life there was like. In fact, today's feast is a reminder that all of the 10th-century abbots of Cluny are canonized saints, and the abbot at the time of St Bernard was Blessed Peter the Venerable, who is also commemorated today.

The main goal of the Cluniac reform was to guarantee the central role that the Liturgy must have in Christian life. The Cluniac monks devoted themselves with love and great care to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, to the singing of Psalms, to frequent processions, and above all, to the celebration of the Mass. They promoted sacred music, they wanted architecture and art to contribute to the beauty and solemnity of the rites; they enriched the liturgical calendar with special celebrations such as, for example, at the beginning of November, the Commemoration of All Souls; and they promoted devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Great importance was given to the Liturgy because the monks of Cluny were convinced that it was a participation in the liturgy of heaven, in the presence of the angels. And the monks felt responsible for interceding at the altar of God for the living and the dead, given that large numbers of the faithful were always asking them to be remembered in prayer.

To preserve and foster this atmosphere of prayer, the Cluniac Rule emphasized the importance of silence, a discipline which the monks willingly practiced, because the Benedictine life demands a deep and constant recollection. It's not surprising that before long the monastery of Cluny gained a reputation for holiness and that many other monastic communities decided to follow its discipline.

These holy Abbots are certainly a great example of monastic holiness. For Blessed Peter the Venerable, the ideal of the monk consists in clinging to Christ, in a cloistered life distinguished by monastic humility and hard work, as well as an atmosphere of silent contemplation and constant praise of God. The first and most important occupation of the monk, according to Blessed Peter the Venerable, is the solemn celebration of the Divine Office, which he calls "a heavenly action and the most useful of all". That was accompanied by reading, meditation, personal prayer and penance observed with discretion.

In this way the whole of life is pervaded by profound love of God and love of others, a love that is expressed in sincere openness to our neighbor, in forgiveness and in the quest for peace. To sum up, we might say that if this lifestyle, combined with daily work, was the monk's ideal for St Benedict, it also concerns all of us and can be to a large extent the lifestyle of the Christian who wants to become an authentic disciple of Christ, characterized precisely by clinging to him and by humility, diligence and the capacity for forgiveness and peace.

Friday, May 12

CHARITABLE SERVICE LEADS TO HUMILITY

From Pope Benedict's encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*

With regard to the personnel who carry out the Church's charitable activity on the practical level, the essential has already been said: they must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by the faith which works through love (cf. *Gal 5:6*). Consequently, more than anything, they must be persons moved by Christ's love, persons whose hearts Christ has conquered with his love, awakening within them a love of neighbour. The criterion inspiring their activity should be Saint Paul's statement in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*: "the love of Christ urges us on" (5:14). The consciousness that, in Christ, God has given himself for us, even unto death, must inspire us to live no longer for ourselves but for him, and, with him, for others. Whoever loves Christ loves the Church, and desires the Church to be increasingly the image and instrument of the love which flows from Christ. The personnel of every Catholic charitable organization want to work with the Church and therefore with the Bishop, so that the love of God can spread throughout the world. By their sharing in the Church's practice of love, they wish to be witnesses of God and of Christ, and they wish for this very reason freely to do good to all.

Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (cf. *1 Cor 13*), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing" (v. 3). This hymn must be the *Magna Carta* of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.

This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. Christ took the lowest place in the world—the Cross—and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own. This duty is a grace. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate the words of Christ: "We are useless servants" (*Lk 17:10*). We recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so. There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: "The love of Christ urges us on" (*2 Cor 5:14*).

Saturday, May 13

RECENT POPES AND OUR LADY OF FATIMA

From the *America* magazine March 30, 2017 issue

Recent popes have had a special affection for Our Lady of Fatima, but no pope's connection can match that of St. John Paul II. Portuguese Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins commented, "We cannot forget that he was saved by Our Lady of Fatima from the assassination attempt here in St. Peter's. This is fundamental and central. It is never forgotten. For St. John Paul, Our Lady of Fatima was everything," and his three visits to the Portuguese town were those of a grateful son to the mother who saved his life. As St. John Paul said, "It was a mother's hand that guided the bullet's path."

Cardinal Saraiva Martins oversaw the process leading to the beatification by St. John Paul of Jacinta and Francisco Marto, two of the three young shepherd children, who saw Mary at Fatima. The cardinal also shared a personal friendship with the third seer, Carmelite Sister Lucia dos Santos, who died in 2005.

Two years after Sister Lucia's death, the cardinal urged Pope Benedict XVI to waive the five-year waiting period before her sainthood cause could be opened. "The pope was very kind. He said, 'Yes, you know more about this than I do. We will do as you say,'" the cardinal recalled. Pope Benedict was a "great devotee" of Our Lady of Fatima, even before his election to the papacy.

The special papal bond with Our Lady of Fatima continues today with Pope Francis, who as archbishop of Buenos Aires, was a frequent visitor to a shrine in the Argentine city devoted to Our Lady of Fatima. Pope Francis visited Fatima in 1998 and again in 2017 to mark the 100th anniversary of the apparitions. In 1998, Pope Francis preached to the pilgrims in Fatima, "Entrust to her all that you are, all that you have, and in that way you will be able to become an instrument of the mercy and tenderness of God."

Devotion to Our Lady of Fatima is emblematic of the popes of the last century who have always recognized the relevance of Mary's message, particularly its emphasis on faith, conversion, hope and peace.

"Today we need faith, to be closer to God and our brothers and sisters—not hate each other—we need hope and we need peace," Cardinal Saraiva Martins said. "In short, the message of Fatima given (over) 100 years ago is of extreme relevance."