

The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Tenth Week in Ordinary Time

June 11 – 17, 2023

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Sunday, June 11

PATRISTIC THOUGHTS ON CORPUS CHRISTI

From St. Augustine (Sermon 272)

You see on God's altar bread and a cup. That is what the evidence of your eyes tells you, but your faith requires you to believe that the bread is the body of Christ, the cup the blood of Christ. In these few words we can say perhaps all that faith demands.

Faith, however, seeks understanding; so you may now say to me: "You have told us what we have to believe, but explain it so that we can understand it, because it is quite possible for someone to think along these lines: We know from whom Our Lord Jesus Christ took his flesh – it was from the Virgin Mary. As a baby, he was suckled, he was fed, he developed, he came to young man's estate. He was slain on the cross, he was taken down from it, he was buried, he rose again on the third day. On the day of his own choosing, he ascended to heaven, taking his body with him; and it is from heaven that he will come to judge the living and the dead. But now that he is there, seated at the right hand of the Father how can bread be his body? And the cup, or rather what is in the cup, how can that be his blood?"

These things, my friends, are called sacraments because our eyes see in them one thing, our understanding another. Our eyes see the material form our understanding, its spiritual effect. If, then, you want to know what the body of Christ is, you must listen to what the Apostle tells the faithful: *Now you are the body of Christ, and individually you are members of it.*

If that is so, it is the sacrament of yourselves that is placed on the Lord's altar and it is the sacrament of yourselves that you receive. You reply "Amen" to what you are, and thereby agree that such you are. You hear the words "The body of Christ" and you reply "Amen." Be, then, a member of Christ's body, so that your "Amen" may accord with the truth.

Yes, but why all this in bread? Here let us not advance any ideas of our own, but listen to what the Apostle says over and over again when speaking of this sacrament: *Because there is one loaf, we, though we are many, form one body.* Let your mind assimilate that and be glad, for there you will find unity, truth, piety, and love. He says, one loaf. And who is this one loaf? *We, though we are many, form one body.* Now bear in mind that bread is not made of a single grain, but of many. Be, then, what you see, and receive what you are.

So much for what the Apostle says about the bread. As for the cup, what we have to believe is quite clear, although the Apostle does not mention it expressly. Just as the unity of the faithful which holy Scripture describes in these words: *They were of one mind and heart* in God, should be like the kneading together of many grains into one visible loaf, so with the wine. Think how wine is made. Many grapes hang in a cluster, but their juice flows together into an indivisible liquid.

It was thus that Christ our Lord signified us, and his will that we should belong to him, when he hallowed the sacrament of our peace and unity on his altar. Anyone, however, who receives this sacrament of unity and does not keep the bond of peace, does not receive it to his profit, but as a testimony against himself.

Monday, June 12

BLESSED IS THE MONK: ISAAC OF STELLA ON THE BEATITUDES From Patrick Terrell Gray's in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* V 36.3

While the beatitudes shape Isaac's *Sermon for All Saints*, they are properly understood in the context of Jesus Christ. Sermon 1 begins: "Jesus, seeing the crowds, went up into a mountain"; the exposition that follows is a gloss on what the implications are for the beatitudinal life if Jesus needed to withdraw from the crowds. Isaac says that "perhaps [Jesus] alone could be in a crowd and yet be undisturbed by it and so could see it. Yet he 'when he saw' it, dismissed it, and 'withdrew' 'into a mountain', where it could not follow him." Isaac assumes, then, that before the beatitude can even begin within Jesus himself, he must separate "from the crowds."

Christ separates himself not only from the literal crowds, but also from the interior ones. Here Isaac is interested in the tropological interpretation of Scripture, because in the tropological interpretation the literal can be translated into the life of the hearer or reader. Isaac explains that Jesus has climbed three mountains, one when only the disciples followed, one when only a few of the disciples followed, and one that Jesus climbed by himself in order to pray to God. Isaac asks, "What do these mountains signify? He climbs the first in order to teach, the second to reveal his glory, the third to pray to his Father." It is on this last mountain that Jesus "prays to the Father for us." Thus the beginnings of beatitude required Jesus to separate himself from the crowds and even from his own disciples. But Jesus withdrew in order to be with God the Father, not by himself.

The solitary life is what the monk is to desire, as well, according to Isaac, who encourages the monks to imitate Christ's behavior toward the crowd. He states, "If only we could sometimes do the same [as Christ]; see the crowds, dismiss them, and then 'place ascending steps in our hearts!' But here Isaac shifts immediately to the allegorical, so that the connection between the physical reality and the spiritual reality becomes inseparable. In other words, Christ's actions are to be the monk's actions, both exterior (the doings of the body) and interior (the doings of the soul). That being the case, Isaac exhorts his fellow monks to imitate Jesus, saying, "So, brother, 'escape far away' do not run back to the crowd but 'stay in solitude,' 'follow' Jesus, climb the mountain, tell the crowd 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'" Thus the exterior life of the monk is to be a solitary one with regard to society outside the monastery.

The interior life of the monk is also to be solitary, with discipline the means of avoiding the interior crowds. And again Jesus provides the means. Isaac states the intimate connection between Christ and the monk: "[Jesus] has descended into you, so that you, after him and through him, may ascend above yourself, even up to him who is within you." The monk, then, is given the ability to climb the three interior mountains because Christ himself is doing in the monk. At the last mountain, a space is found to pray in secret to the Father as Jesus did, then the level of separation between being like Jesus and being him begins to break down. The monk is not to be identified as Jesus, however, but as one in union with Christ.

Although the interior life of the monk is a private matter, there is a slight irony in Isaac's exhortation to his brothers to separate from the physical crowds when they have already done so. Just by being in the monastery, they have started on the path to beatitude. But some, he says, never do start, perhaps referring to those who do not take lifetime vows: "How sad it is, brothers, that many nowadays resolve to leave the crowds yet settle down where they are certain to be found by them again." Monasticism, then, in all of its external and internal rigors, becomes the means by which the beatitudinal life of Christ becomes possible for the monk.

Tuesday, June 13

ST ANTHONY OF PADUA

From Jeanne Kun on *The Word Among Us* website

The man who became known to the world as St. Anthony of Padua actually began his life in a different city than Padua and with a different name than Anthony. He was born Fernando Bulhom in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1195. When he was fifteen, he chose instead to join the Augustinian monks at San Vincente, just outside the city.

In 1220, the bodies of five Franciscans martyred for preaching to Muslims in Morocco were brought to be honored at Santa Cruz. The story of these men moved Fernando profoundly, and he began to burn with a desire to lay down his life for Christ. He realized, however that he was unlikely to fulfill this dream as an Augustinian monk. When some Franciscans came to the monastery begging a short time later, he opened his heart to them and said, "I will gladly take the habit of your order if you will promise that as soon as I do you will send me to the land of the Saracens." After receiving the reluctant permission of his prior, Fernando exchanged his white Augustinian habit for the gray robe of a Franciscan brother and took the name Anthony in honor of St Anthony of the Desert.

Twenty-six years old, Anthony sailed to Morocco with ambitions to convert Muslims to Christianity. However, a prolonged fever forced him to surrender his dream. He realized that God was asking a different kind of sacrifice from him, but he couldn't tell yet what that sacrifice might be. On the return trip to Portugal, a storm drove Anthony's ship to Sicily, where he met friars who nursed him back to health. Together with these brother Franciscans, Anthony set out for the now-famous Pentecost "Chapter of Mats" in Assisi where three thousand friars gathered with their founder, Francis. At the close of the meeting, Anthony was assigned to the hermitage of San Paolo near Arezzo, where he served his brothers by celebrating Mass for them, washing dishes, and sweeping the floor.

None of the friars at San Paolo suspected their new companion's brilliant intellect and knowledge of Scripture until 1222, when they all attended an ordination ceremony in Forli. When several other Franciscans and Dominicans declined an on-the-spot request to preach a homily, Anthony was called upon to "speak whatever the Holy Spirit put in his mouth." Anthony did just that, and his listeners were amazed at his eloquence and passion. Thus ended Anthony's contemplative life as the Franciscan provincial commissioned him to preach publicly.

Anthony presented the truth of Christianity in positive ways and defended the faith by the example of his life rather than by taking direct issue with heretics and trying to prove them wrong. Nonetheless, Anthony was also well able to refute false teachers with his thorough knowledge of the Bible and the church Fathers. Because of his success, he became known as the "Hammer of the Heretics."

Concerned for the poor, Anthony preached against charging exorbitant interest rates on loans and persuaded the city to pass a law against the common practice of imprisoning debtors who could not pay their creditors. But his main object was to bring people back to peace with God. He took no satisfaction in a crowd of listeners if the confessional remained empty afterwards. Anthony felt that would be like "hunting all day and returning with an empty game-bag." So, after his morning Mass and sermon, he frequently heard confessions the rest of the day, often aided by local parish priests.

After preaching through Lent and the spring of 1231, Anthony's health and strength gave out. He was only thirty-six years old. He retreated with two companions to a forest where he enjoyed solitude and prayer in a cell built for him in the branches of a huge walnut tree. When he saw that he was declining, Anthony asked to be taken back to his beloved Padua, but only reached the outskirts of the city, where he died on June 13, 1231. As death approached, he joyously told his companions, "I see my Lord!

Wednesday, June 14

A RABBI'S THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

From *The Insecurity of Freedom* by Abraham Joshua Heschel

The presence of God is the absence of despair. In the stillness of sensing His presence misery turns into joy, despair turns to prayer. I repeat, prayer is more than a cry out of anguish. It is rather a moment of sensing His mercy. Let me make clear what I mean. A moment of supplication is an expression of what we need at the moment. A person may go on pondering deeply in intense emotion about his needs, about the need of the moment. That is not yet prayer. Adding "in the name of God" to it will not make it prayer. It is the cry of anguish which becomes a realization of God's mercy that constitutes prayer. It is the moment of a person in anguish forgetting his anguish and thinking of God and His mercy. That is prayer. Not self-reflection, but the direction of the entire person upon God. It is a difficult but not impossible situation. It may last a moment but is the essence of a lifetime.

The true motivation of prayer is not, as it has been said, the sense of being at home in the universe, but rather the sense of not being at home in the universe. Is there a sensitive heart that could stand indifferent and feel at home in the sight of so much evil and suffering, in the face of countless failures to live up to the will of God? On the contrary, the experience of not being at home in the world is a motivation for prayer. That experience gains intensity in the amazing awareness that God himself is not at home in the universe. He is not at home in a universe where His will is defied and where His kingship is denied. God is in exile; the world is corrupt. The universe is not at home. To pray means to bring God back into the world, to establish His kingship for a second at least. To pray means to expand His presence. In the most important moment of the Jewish liturgy, we cry out of the depth of our disconcerted souls a prayer for redemption. "Lord, our God, put Thy awe upon all whom Thou hast made, Thy dread upon whom Thou hast created, so that all Thy works may revere Thee, and all that Thou hast created may prostrate themselves before Thee, and all form one union to do Thy will wholeheartedly." To worship, therefore, means to make God immanent, to make Him present. His being immanent in the world depends on us. When we say, "Blessed be He," we extend His glory, we bestow His spirit upon this world. In other words, what underlies all this is not a mystic experience of our being close to Him but the certainty of His being close to us and of the necessity of His becoming closer to us.

Let me warn against the equating of prayer with emotion. Emotion is an important component of prayer, but the primary presupposition is conviction. If such conviction is lacking, if the presence of God is a myth, then prayer to God is a delusion. If God is unable to listen to us, then we are insane in talking to Him. All this presupposes conviction. The source of prayer then is an insight rather than an emotion. It is the insight into the mystery of reality; it is, first of all, the sense of the ineffable that enables us to pray. As long as we refuse to take notice of what is beyond our sight, beyond our reason, as long as we are blind to the mystery of being, the way to prayer is closed to us. If the rising of the sun is but a daily routine of nature there is no reason for us to praise the Lord for the sun and for the life we live. The way to prayer leads to acts of wonder and radical amazement. The illusion of total intelligibility, the indifference to the mystery that is everywhere, the foolishness of ultimate self-reliance, are serious obstacles on the way. It is the moment of our being faced with the mystery of living and dying, of knowing and not knowing, of loving and the inability to love that we pray, that we address ourselves to Him who is beyond the mystery.

Thursday, June 15

POPE JOHN PAUL II & FORGIVENESS

From an ABC News Report in April 2005

At the heart of all Christian doctrine is the concept of forgiveness, and Pope John Paul II made that concept one of the most impressive aspects of his legacy, both in the way he sought forgiveness and in the way he practiced it himself.

"The call as a Christian, it's like Jesus from the cross saying 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,'" said the Rev. Thomas Reese. "If we're supposed to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we have to do that and forgive our enemies, to forgive people who hate us and try and harm us."

Vatican scholars say one of the hallmarks of Pope John Paul II's pontificate was his work toward both giving and seeking forgiveness.

Five years ago, on the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Christ, John Paul did something no pope had ever done before, admitting the church's mistakes throughout history.

"One of the most important things he did in his pontificate was to hold this service of forgiveness," said the Rev. Richard McBrien. "In this case, it was the church asking forgiveness, acknowledging its sins against various peoples and groups and then asking their forgiveness."

The pope was apologizing for Catholic sins that ranged back through the decades and the centuries.

"He apologized to the Jewish community, to the Muslim community, to the scientific community for Galileo," Reese said. "He felt this was an important part of what we should be about. And he called on people and even nations to be forgiving in their relations with one another."

He knew his history, and he believed that the Crusades were an abomination in which many Catholics in Europe used the excuse of religion to invade the Middle East and to brutally slaughter Muslims and Jews.

But it was not just wrongdoing from centuries back in church history that he acknowledged. John Paul also felt the need to seek forgiveness for things he'd seen firsthand.

"He had witnessed the horrors that Catholics had committed in anti-Semitism, not only in Poland but throughout Europe in World War II," said ABC News Vatican correspondent Bill Blakemore. "He had gone to Rome so he had seen Pius XII. That was the first pope he saw in the flesh."

"Whatever the criticisms were of Pius XII, about him not having spoken out enough and soon enough, John Paul made sure that he was not going to be guilty of that," Blakemore said. "He was also very forward thinking, trying to do what he can to lay the groundwork of peace in a quickly shrinking global village in which the religions would have to figure out how to live in peace together."

On behalf of the world's 1 billion Roman Catholics, John Paul II had often asked for forgiveness. In an extraordinary personal example, he proved he was also able to give it.

In May 1981, in St. Peter's Square, Mehmet Ali Agca, an escaped convict from Turkey, shot the pope twice in the abdomen. Two years later, the pope visited Ali Agca in prison, and forgave him.

Forgiving your enemies is one of the central teachings of Jesus. The pope embodied and personified something that is utterly central to what Christianity is supposed to be.

Friday, June 16

DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

From Christopher Ruddy in *America* magazine March 2003

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus has suffered cardiac arrest in recent decades. It has been dismissed as superstitious in its apparent guarantee of salvation to those who practice it, as masochistic in its emphasis on making reparation for Jesus' own suffering. Its popular iconography is, to put it generously, saccharine, kitschy, effeminate, somehow ethereal and grotesque at once. This decline of devotion is all the more striking because of its pre-eminence in the first half of the 20th century, when so many Catholic families had a picture of Jesus and his Sacred Heart displayed in their homes, and when Thursday night holy hours and first Fridays proliferated in parishes.

Like many forms of heart disease, such atrophy could have been prevented through a healthy diet: in this case, Scripture and tradition. The heart is a powerful metaphor in the Bible, what Karl Rahner, S.J., has called a primordial word. It signifies the wellspring of life, the totality of one's being. The prophet Ezekiel, for instance, records God's promise to change Israel's heart of stone into a heart of flesh, while John's Gospel gives the heart its most profound scriptural expression: Jesus' heart is the source of living water, of rest for the Beloved Disciple, of the church and its sacraments, of doubting Thomas's faith.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart began to flourish in the Middle Ages through a renewed attentiveness to Jesus' humanity and his Passion. Its golden age, though, was the 17th century, when the French School of Francis de Sales, John Eudes, Jane de Chantal and Margaret Mary Alacoque offered a tender, compassionate spirituality that helped to renew the church and counter Jansenism's severity and sectarianism. From 1673 to 1675 at the Visitation convent of Paray-le-Monial, Margaret Mary received a series of four revelations from Christ about his heart. It was here that devotion reached its enduring form: personal consecration to the Sacred Heart, the observance of an hour of prayer on Thursday night between 11 o'clock and midnight as a way of sharing in Christ's suffering in Gethsemane, and the reception of Communion on the first Friday of the month as reparation for the indignities inflicted upon the sacrament by those indifferent and ungrateful. This latter revelation would evolve into a belief that salvation was assured to those who received Communion on the first Fridays of nine consecutive months.

The Sacred Heart was later enlisted in combat against the French Revolution, Communism and threats to family life. Pope Pius IX made it a feast of the universal church in 1856, and Leo XIII consecrated the entire world to the Sacred Heart in 1899. The devotion reached its magisterial peak in Pius XII's 1956 encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* (You Shall Draw Waters), which placed God's passionate love for humanity at its center.

I did not grow up with any devotion to the Sacred Heart, and it is only in the last few years, as I have struggled with vocation and the demands of family life, that the practice has spoken to my own heart. In praying to the Sacred Heart, I have come to know God's still deeper mercy. I am strengthened by a heart pierced but unvanquished. I am welcomed by a heart that knows only tenderness and so makes me tender. I look on that pulsing, fleshy heart: courageous and vulnerable, compact and capacious, never one without the other.

Saturday, June 17

DEVOTION TO THE HEART OF MARY

From Timothy Harris of the St Benedict Center

In Catholic piety, as in Catholic belief, Jesus and Mary are never apart. Though our veneration of the Mother never infringes on the supreme worship that we reserve for the Son, yet, in due subordination, it invariably accompanies it. In the Church's calendar of feasts we find the mysteries of Mary's life commemorated side by side with the mysteries of Jesus; her name has its special solemnity just as His; her titles and offices are held in corresponding honor. Hence it was to be expected that when public devotion to the Heart of Jesus appeared in the Church devotion to the Heart of Mary should soon follow. Private devotion to the Heart of Mary had at all times existed among the faithful, and some dioceses and religious congregations had the privilege of celebrating a Mass and office in its honor.

Devotion to the Heart of Mary has, with proper reservations, the same characteristics as devotion to the Heart of Jesus. Our attention and veneration are first directed to the physical heart itself. This we honor because it is the noblest organ in the body of the Mother of God, the holiest body, her Divine Son's excepted, ever created. But we honour that heart more particularly because of all that it suggests, all of which it is the expressive symbol and living reminder—Mary's holiness, her virtues and perfections, her joys and sorrows, her virginal love for God, her maternal love for her Divine Son, and her compassionate love for men. The actual heart of flesh has an essential part in our veneration; but it is not so prominent to the mind as in the devotion to the Heart of Jesus. We think rather of the thing symbolized—of Mary's love, virtues and sentiments.

Saint John Eudes the apostle of this devotion explains it: "When we honor the Holy Heart of the Mother of God, we honor the Heart that, of all hearts, after the Heart of her Son, is the most worthy of our admiration, the most perfect, the most beloved of God, the most adorned with every kind of virtue, the most full of grace and love; the Heart that has the most tenderness for poor sinners, that is the meekest, the most compassionate, the most merciful, the most charitable, the most beneficent, the most amiable; in a word, the object that after the Heart of Jesus has the greatest charm for Heaven and earth. It is, therefore, for the best reasons that we should make this Holy Heart the object of our tenderest devotion, and pay it all the honor and respect that its own excellence and the favour that we have received from it, demand."

At first, then, the Heart of Mary was honored for all the virtues, sentiments and dispositions that it symbolizes; but in time the Blessed Virgin's holiness and purity became the special object of devotion. The first feasts in honor of her Heart were the feasts of the "Holy Heart of Mary" and the "Most Pure Heart of Mary." Now the title which the Church officially uses is the "Immaculate Heart." It is the innocence and sinlessness of Mary, her purity of soul and body, that we are specially invited to contemplate and revere. The Immaculate Heart of Mary is the garden enclosed where sin and Satan never entered in, the pure fountain sealed with the seal of the Holy Spirit, the Paradise or pleasure place of God abounding in delights. The Church teaches that she was conceived free from original sin and that the beauty of her soul was never tarnished by the stain of actual sin; sin, even the most venial, had no part in her. Never for a moment was her will at variance with God's designs; never in thought or word or act was there found in her anything that was in the least way displeasing to God, nay, that was not most pleasing to Him. Out of all the fallen race of men she alone was worthy of her Creator's praise: "Thou art all fair, my beloved, and there is no spot in thee."