

Twelfth Week in Ordinary Time

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Sunday, June 25

COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S GOSPEL

From St Augustine's *Expositions of the Psalms*

Thanks be to that grain of wheat who freely chose to die and so be multiplied! Thanks be to God's only Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for whom the enduring of our human death was not a thing to be scorned if it would make us worthy of his life! Mark how alone he was before his passing: his is the voice of the psalmist who said, *I am all alone until I depart from this place* – a solitary grain that nevertheless contained an immense fruitfulness, a capacity to be multiplied beyond measure.

How many other grains of wheat imitating the Lord's passion do we find to gladden our hearts when we celebrate the anniversaries of the martyrs! Many members has that one grain, all united by bonds of peace and charity under their one head, our Savior himself, and, as you know from having heard it so often, all of them form one single body. Their many voices can often be heard praying in the psalms through the voice of a single speaker calling on God as if all were calling together, because all are one in him.

Let us listen to their cry. In it we can hear the words of the martyrs who found themselves hard pressed, beset by danger from violent storms of hatred in this world, a danger not so much to their bodies which, after all, they would have to part with sometime, but rather to their faith. If they were to give way, if they should succumb either to the harsh tortures of their persecutors or to love of this present life, they would forfeit the reward promised them by the God who had taken away all ground for fear. Not only had he said: *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul*; he had also left them his own example. The precept he had enjoined on them he personally carried out, without attempting to evade the hands of those who scourged him, the blows of those who struck him, or the spittle of those who spat on him. Neither the crown of thorns pressed into his head nor the cross to which the soldiers nailed him encountered any resistance from him. None of these torments did he try to avoid. Though he himself was under no obligation to suffer them, he endured them for those who were, making his own person a remedy for the sick. And so the martyrs suffered, but they would certainly have failed the test without the presence of him who said, *Know that I am with you always, until the end of time.*

Monday, June 26

JUDGING JUSTLY

From Jim Blackburn in *Catholic Answers* magazine

When Jesus said, “Judge not that you not be judged.” he was not telling his disciples they could not ever judge the behavior of others. Rather, he was cautioning them to live righteous lives themselves so their judgment of others’ behavior would not be rash judgment, and their efforts in admonishing their neighbors would be effective.

By itself, “Judge not, that you be not judged” could be construed to mean that one may escape even God’s judgment simply by not judging the behavior of others. But everyone is judged by God, so this cannot be a proper understanding. Jesus goes on to reformulate his statement in a positive way: “With the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.” Jesus indeed expects his disciples to judge, but he warns that they will be judged in a like manner.

This is reminiscent of the line in the Lord’s Prayer: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Much more than a simple warning that God will treat us as we treat others, this is an appeal to each of us to be as much as we can like God in the way we treat others.

In the next two lines, Jesus cautions against hypocrisy: “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye?” Judging hypocritically is not effective. A petty thief admonished by a bank robber only scoffs at his admonisher.

Jesus then explains how to judge rightly: “First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” There can be no doubt that those final words – “take the speck out of your brother’s eye”—are, indeed, permission to judge so long as it is done rightly.

Other Bible passages that seem on the surface to indicate a condemnation of judging others’ behavior may be treated similarly in their full context. The idea of rightly judging the behavior of others can be found throughout the New Testament.

In John 7:24, Jesus told the Jews, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” In Matthew 18: 15-17, he instructed his disciples what to do if someone sins against them: “Go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

Paul, too, exhorted right judgment of other Christians: “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Drive out the wicked person from among you.”

It is not possible to follow Jesus’ instructions without being “judgmental” of another’s behavior. Clearly, contrary to what many would prefer to believe, the Bible exhorts us to rightly judge the behavior of others. Having said that, there is a big difference between judging another’s behavior and judging the eternal state of his soul. The latter judgment belongs only to God.

Tuesday, June 27

POPE FRANCIS EXPLAINS “THE NARROW DOOR”

From a report on Pope Francis' *Angelus* address in August 2022

Speaking to pilgrims gathered in Saint Peter's Square for the Angelus, Pope Francis recalled the day's Gospel reading when someone asks Jesus if only a few people will be saved and He responds, “Strive to enter through the narrow door.” This image of a narrow door could scare us, implying that only a few elect or perfect can be saved, the Pope suggested; but, he said, Jesus confirms that people from everywhere will “recline at table in the kingdom of God,” thereby affirming that while the door is narrow, it is open to everyone.

The Pope explained that in Jesus' time, the image of the narrow door most likely referred to a reality to which His contemporaries could relate: At night, the gates of a city would be closed except for the smallest door, which was then the only way to enter and return home. Jesus in the Gospel says: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.” The Pope said in this way Jesus tells us that to “enter into God’s life, into salvation, we need to pass through Him, to welcome Him and His Word. ” “Just as to enter into the city, someone had to “measure” the same as the only remaining open narrow door, so too the Christian door is a life whose “measure is Christ,” founded and modeled on Him. This means that the rule of measure is Jesus and His Gospel – not what we think, but what He says to us.

Going through the narrow door means to belong to Christ and follow Him, the Pope explained, and to live one’s life in love, service, and giving oneself as Jesus did, who passed through the narrow door of the Cross. Entering into God's way for our life calls on us to overcome selfishness, pride and arrogance, and laziness “in order to pass through the risk of love, which even involves the cross.”

The Pope offered a number of concrete examples of what passing through the narrow door implies, those concrete, daily acts of love people strive to offer: parents who dedicate themselves to their children, often at great sacrifice; those who serve the elderly, the poorest or most vulnerable; those who keep on working committedly despite the obstacles; those who suffer because of their faith but who continue to pray and love; those who respond to evil with good, finding the strength to forgive and the courage to begin again.

“These are only a few examples of people who do not choose the wide door of their own convenience, but the narrow door of Jesus, of a life spent in loving. The Lord says today that the Father will recognize them much more than those who believe they are already saved but who are actually “workers of evil.”

We should reflect on our own lives, the Pope suggested, and ask if we think only of ourselves and our own interests, or if we truly strive to enter the narrow door of the Gospel that makes us able to welcome the true life that comes from God. He prayed that Our Lady, who followed Jesus all the way to the Cross, may help us to measure our life with Him so as to enter into the fullness of eternal life.

Wednesday, June 28

ST IRENAEUS OF LYONS

From the *Catholic News Agency*

Celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church on June 28, Saint Irenaeus of Lyons was a second-century bishop and writer in present-day France.

He is best known for defending Christian orthodoxy, especially the reality of Christ's human incarnation, against the set of heresies known as Gnosticism. Pope Benedict XVI spoke admiringly of St. Irenaeus in a 2007 general audience, recalling how this early Church Father "refuted the Gnostic dualism and pessimism which debased corporeal realities. He decisively claimed the original holiness of matter, of the body, of the flesh no less than of the spirit."

"But his work went far beyond the confutation of heresy: in fact, one can say that he emerges as the first great Church theologian who created systematic theology; he himself speaks of the system of theology, that is, of the internal coherence of all faith."

While some of St. Irenaeus' most important writings have survived, the details of his life are not as well-preserved. He was born in the Eastern half of the Roman Empire, likely in the Aegean coastal city of Smyrna, probably around the year 140. As a young man he heard the preaching of the early bishop (and eventual martyr) Saint Polycarp, who had been personally instructed by the Apostle John.

Irenaeus eventually became a priest, and served in the Church of Lyons (in the region of Gaul) during a difficult period in the late 170s. During this time of state persecution and doctrinal controversy, Irenaeus was sent to Rome to provide Pope St. Eleutherius with a letter about the heretical movement known as Montanism. After returning to Lyons, Irenaeus became the city's second bishop, following the martyrdom of his predecessor Saint Pothinus.

In the course of his work as a pastor and evangelist, the second Bishop of Lyons came up against various heretical doctrines and movements, many of which sounded a common note in their insistence that the material world was evil and not part of God's original plan. The proponents of these ideas often claimed to be more deeply "enlightened" or "spiritual" than ordinary Christians, on account of their supposed secret knowledge (or "gnosis").

Irenaeus recognized this movement, in all its forms, as a direct attack on the Catholic faith. The Gnostics' disdain for the physical world was irreconcilable with the Biblical doctrine of creation, which stated that God had made all things according to his good purpose. Gnostics, by contrast, saw the material world as the work of an evil power, crediting God only with the creation of a higher and purely spiritual realm.

In keeping with its false view of creation, Gnosticism also distorted the concept of redemption. The Church knew Christ as the savior of the world: redeeming believers' bodies and souls, and investing creation with a sacramental holiness. Gnostics, meanwhile, saw Jesus merely as saving souls from the physical world in which they were trapped. Gnostic "redemption" was not liberation from sin, but a supposed promise of release from the material world.

Irenaeus refuted the Gnostic errors in his lengthy book "Against Heresies," which is still studied today. A shorter work, the "Proof of the Apostolic Preaching," contains Irenaeus' presentation of the Gospel message, with a focus on Jesus Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

St. Irenaeus died around 202 – possibly through martyrdom, though this is not definitively known.

Thursday, June 29

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL: THE TWO PILLARS OF THE CHURCH **From Pope Benedict's homily on this feast day in 2012**

In front of Saint Peter's Basilica, as is well known, there are two imposing statues of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, easily recognizable by their respective attributes: the keys in the hand of Peter and the sword held by Paul. Likewise, at the main entrance to the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, there are depictions of scenes from the life and the martyrdom of these two pillars of the Church. Christian tradition has always considered Saint Peter and Saint Paul to be inseparable: indeed, together, they represent the whole Gospel of Christ. In Rome, their bond as brothers in the faith came to acquire a particular significance. Indeed, the Christian community of this City considered them a kind of counterbalance to the mythical Romulus and Remus, the two brothers held to be the founders of Rome. A further parallel comes to mind, still on the theme of brothers: whereas the first biblical pair of brothers demonstrate the effects of sin, as Cain kills Abel, yet Peter and Paul, much as they differ from one another in human terms and notwithstanding the conflicts that arose in their relationship, illustrate a new way of being brothers, lived according to the Gospel, an authentic way made possible by the grace of Christ's Gospel working within them. Only by following Jesus does one arrive at this new brotherhood: this is the first and fundamental message that today's solemnity presents to each one of us, the importance of which is mirrored in the pursuit of full communion, so earnestly desired by the ecumenical Patriarch and the Bishop of Rome, as indeed by all Christians.

In the passage from Saint Matthew's Gospel that we have just heard, Peter makes his own confession of faith in Jesus, acknowledging him as Messiah and Son of God. He does so in the name of the other Apostles too. In reply, the Lord reveals to him the mission that he intends to assign to him, that of being the "rock", the visible foundation on which the entire spiritual edifice of the Church is built. But in what sense is Peter the rock? How is he to exercise this prerogative, which naturally he did not receive for his own sake? The account given by the evangelist Matthew tells us first of all that the acknowledgment of Jesus' identity made by Simon in the name of the Twelve did not come "through flesh and blood," that is, through his human capacities, but through a particular revelation from God the Father. By contrast, immediately afterwards, as Jesus foretells his passion, death and resurrection, Simon Peter reacts on the basis of "flesh and blood": he "began to rebuke him, saying, this shall never happen to you." And Jesus in turn replied: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me." The disciple who, through God's gift, was able to become a solid rock, here shows himself for what he is in his human weakness: a stone along the path, a stone on which men can stumble – in Greek, *skandalon*. Here we see the tension that exists between the gift that comes from the Lord and human capacities; and in this scene between Jesus and Simon Peter we see anticipated in some sense the drama of the history of the papacy itself, characterized by the joint presence of these two elements: on the one hand, because of the light and the strength that come from on high, the papacy constitutes the foundation of the Church during its pilgrimage through history; on the other hand, across the centuries, human weakness is also evident, which can only be transformed through openness to God's action.

Dear brothers and sisters, as I mentioned at the beginning, the iconographic tradition represents Saint Paul with a sword, and we know that this was the instrument with which he was killed. Yet as we read the writings of the Apostle of the Gentiles, we discover that the image of the sword refers to his entire mission of evangelization. For example, when he felt death approaching, he wrote to Timothy: "I have fought the good fight." This was certainly not the battle of a military commander but that of a herald of the Word of God, faithful to Christ and to his Church, to which he gave himself completely. And that is why the Lord gave him the crown of glory and placed him, together with Peter, as a pillar in the spiritual edifice of the Church.

Friday, June 30

JESUS HEALING A LEPER **From Mike Nappa on *beliefnet***

The simple fact is that Jesus broke the law when he healed the man with leprosy identified in Matthew 8:2-4.

Jewish law in the time of Jesus regarded leprosy as a grave offense. Upon diagnosis by the priest, the leper's clothes were burned. The leper's home was razed. He or she was immediately homeless, forced to live outside the community, outside the city limits. Moreover, the leper was required by law to dress like a mourner and to yell "Unclean! Unclean!" whenever any non-leper came near to him or her. Worst of all, the leper was considered reprobate, a lost cause and totally abandoned by God.

In short, no Israelite was to have anything at all to do with any leper—and this was by God's command. In spite of that, Jesus broke this law in several ways.

First, Jesus welcomed the leper into his presence—a serious no-no at the time. Second, Jesus allowed the leper to walk in and among the large crowd of people that surrounded him when he came down from the mountain after delivering his Sermon on the Mount. That endangered everyone there, both from the physical contagion of leprosy and from the infectious ceremonial uncleanness that it threatened to others. Finally, and worst of all, Jesus "reached out his hand and touched the man." According to Mosaic law, by touching the leper Jesus himself was instantly made ceremonially unclean too.

Yet, in breaking the law, Jesus fulfilled it completely, both the intent of the law (protecting the community from physical illness and spiritual infection) and its application (declaring the man to be "clean," or free from leprosy). In that single breathtaking gesture, he demonstrated also that he himself superseded the law and all possible forms of uncleanness, instantly banishing the incurable disease and fully restoring the former leper to right standing with God and humanity alike.

It was a stunning miracle, both illegal and obedient, confusing and joyful. It reminds us anew that Jesus is not tame—and we are all the better for it.

Saturday, July 1

THE BELIEVING CENTURION

From Nazareno Marconi in *L'Osservatore Romano*

The Gospel offers us some beautiful examples of believing soldiers; the most significant is undoubtedly the centurion of Capernaum. The story is significantly found in almost all the Gospels. We find it in Matthew (8:5-13), where we probably have the oldest tradition, deeply influenced by the fact that such faith was present in a pagan, while the chosen people so lacked it.

Who was our centurion? Historians let us imagine him as a courageous fighter who had won his stripes on the battlefield, a foreigner, a pagan. However this man of war was also a man of peace who had won the people's esteem. Although he was a foreigner, he had contributed significantly to building the local synagogue: the house of prayer and of religious and human formation for the community. Although he was a pagan, he had shown that he esteemed the People of God and their sincere faith.

Thus he was a man who was concerned and God-seeking, so that not even Jesus' presence and work had escaped him; indeed he had detailed and positive information about him.

He was certainly a good fellow, a strong and able man who could be tender and caring. When his slave, probably his orderly, falls seriously ill he leaves no stone unturned in his effort to help him.

Since he is a pagan, however, he feels unworthy even to present his petition personally to Jesus, and thus sends the elders of the Jews as intermediaries. He, an expert in military tactics and plans, has properly understood God's plan that salvation will come to the pagans through the Jews, and he knows how to be obedient even in this matter. His compassion, humility and obedience make him ready to receive Christ's message.

The elders of the Jews, leading members of the community, are convinced that God reserves these benefits only for his people, but they hope he will make an exception for the centurion because of what he has done for the people of God, and that he will also be gracious to a pagan. Their request however is very hesitant. The Greek word indicates that, before receiving Jesus' answer, which they feared would be negative, they immediately begin to try to recommend their friend by indicating all the good things he has done. "Of course", they seem to say to Jesus, "he does not believe in God, but he has done so many good things and his works can compensate for his lack of faith".

By now the centurion has understood better than all the others with whom he is dealing. He has been told that Jesus is coming to him. It is not by chance that he is an excellent soldier, and that always being informed beforehand of what is about to happen is essential to his work.

The information he had certainly received is confirmed by Jesus' action, and so he sends his friends with a message that is at once an act of humility, of faith and of revelation of Jesus' greatness.

His prayer is so beautiful that it has entered our liturgy to the point that we repeat it at every Holy Mass: "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed."