

Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time

July 16 – 22, 2023

- Sun
16** **Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S GOSPEL
From St Gregory the Great – *Forty Gospel Homilies*
- Mon
17** **Weekday of 15th Week**
EACH OF US IS A PROPHET
From Pope Francis – *Angelus Address, July 2, 2023*
- Tue
18** **Weekday of 15th Week**
ST BENEDICT
From Aelred of Rievaulx – *Sermon 7.5-11*
For the Feast of St Benedict
- Wed
19** **Weekday of 15th Week**
WANT TO BE HAPPY? BE GRATEFUL
From Br David Steindl-Rast – 2013 TED Talk
- Thu
20** **Weekday of 15th Week**
HOPE, OUR ANCHOR
From Fr Raphael Simon, OCSO in *Hammer and Fire*
- Fri
21** **Weekday of 15th Week**
SEEK WISDOM
From St Bernard – *Sermon 15.1-2*
- Sat
22** **Feast of St Mary Magdalene**
MARY MAGDALENE: THE APOSTLE OF THE APOSTLES
From the *Vatican News* website

Sunday, July 16

COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S GOSPEL BY ST GREGORY THE GREAT **From St Gregory the Great – *Forty Gospel Homilies***

Dearly beloved, the reading from the holy gospel about the sower requires no explanation, but only a word of warning. In the fact the explanation has been given by Truth himself, and it cannot be disputed by a frail human being. However, there is one point in our Lord's exposition which you ought to weigh well. It is this. If I told you that the seed represented the word, the field the world, the birds the demons, and the thorns riches, you would perhaps be in two minds as to whether to believe me. Therefore the Lord himself deigned to explain what he had said, so that you would know that a hidden meaning is to be sought also in those passages which he did not wish to interpret himself.

Would anyone have believed me if I had said that thorns stood for riches? After all, thorns are piercing and riches pleasurable. And yet riches are thorns because thoughts of them pierce the mind and torture it. When finally they lure a person into sin, it is as though they were drawing blood from the wound they have inflicted.

According to another evangelist, the Lord spoke in this parable not simply of riches but of deceptive riches, and with good reason. Riches are deceptive because they cannot stay with us for long; they are deceptive because they are incapable of relieving our spiritual poverty. The only true riches are those that make us rich in virtue. Therefore, if you want to be rich, beloved, love true riches. If you aspire to the heights of real honor, strive to reach the kingdom of heaven. If you value rank and renown, hasten to be enrolled in the heavenly court of the angels.

Store up in your minds the Lord's words which you receive through your ears, for the word of the Lord is the nourishment of the mind. When his word is heard but not stored away in the memory, it is like food which has been eaten and then rejected by an upset stomach. A person's life is despaired of if he cannot retain his food; so if you receive the food of holy exhortations, but fail to store in your memory those words of life which nurture righteousness, you have a good reason to fear the danger of everlasting death.

Be careful, then, that the word you have received through your ears remains in your heart. Be careful that the seed does not fall along the path for fear that the evil spirit may come and take it from your memory. Be careful that the seed is not received in stony ground, so that it produces a harvest of good works without the roots of perseverance. Many people are pleased with what they hear and resolve to undertake some good work, but as soon as difficulties begin to arise and hinder them they leave the work unfinished. The stony ground lacked the necessary moisture for the sprouting seed to yield the fruit of perseverance.

Good earth, on the other hand, brings forth fruit by patience. The reason for this is that nothing we do is good unless we also bear with equanimity the injuries done us by our neighbors. In fact, the more we progress, the more hardships we shall have to endure in this world, for when our love for this present world dies, its sufferings increase. This is why we see many people doing good works and at the same time struggling under a heavy burden of afflictions. They now shun earthly desires, and yet they are tormented by greater sufferings. But, as the Lord said, they bring forth fruit by patience, because, since they humbly endure misfortunes, they are welcomed when these are over into a place of rest in heaven.

Monday, July 17

EACH OF US IS A PROPHET

From Pope Francis – *Angelus Address on July 2, 2023*

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward". The word "prophet" appears three times. But what type of prophet? There are some who imagine a prophet to be some type of magician who foretells the future. But this is a superstitious idea and a Christian does not believe in superstitions, such as magic, tarot cards, horoscopes and other similar things. Others depict a prophet as a character from the past only, who existed before Christ to foretell his coming. And yet, Jesus himself speaks today of the need to welcome prophets. Therefore, they still exist. But who are they? What is a prophet?

Each one of us, brothers and sisters, is a prophet. In fact, with Baptism, all of us received the gift of the prophetic mission. A prophet is the one who, by virtue of Baptism, helps others read the present under the action of the Holy Spirit. This is very important: to read the present not like news, no... to read it as enlightened and under the action of the Holy Spirit, who helps to understand God's plans and correspond to them. In other words, the prophet is the one who points Jesus out to others, who bears witness to him, who helps live today and to build the future according to his designs. So we are all prophets, witnesses of Jesus, so "that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in daily social and family life". A prophet is a living sign who points God out to others. A prophet is a reflection of Christ's light on the path of the brothers and sisters. And so, we can ask ourselves: Do I, — each one of us — Do I, who am "a prophet by election" through Baptism, do I speak, and above all, do I live as a witness of Jesus? Do I bring a little bit of his light into the life of another person? Do I evaluate myself on this? I ask myself: What is my bearing witness like, what is my prophecy like?

In the Gospel, the Lord also asks to welcome the prophets. So it is important to welcome each other as such, as bearers of God's message, each one according to his state and vocation, and to do it right where we live — that is, in the family, in the parish, in the religious community, in other places in the Church and in society. The Spirit has distributed gifts of prophecy in the holy People of God. This is why it is good to listen to everyone. For example, when an important decision needs to be made — let us think about this — it is good to pray first of all, to call on the Spirit, but then to listen and dialogue trusting that each person, even the littlest, because they have something important to say, a prophetic gift to share. Thus, the truth is sought and the climate is spread of listening to God and our brothers and sisters where people do not feel welcome because they say what I like, but they feel accepted and valued as the gifts they are.

Let us reflect on how many conflicts could be avoided and resolved in this way, listening to others with the sincere desire to understand each other! So, finally, let us ask ourselves: Do I know how to welcome my brothers and sisters as prophetic gifts? Do I believe that I need them? Do I listen to them respectfully, with the desire to learn? Because each of us needs to learn from others. Each of us needs to learn from others.

May Mary, Queen of Prophets, help us see and welcome the good that the Spirit has sown in others.

Tuesday, July 18

ST BENEDICT

From Aelred of Rievaulx – Sermon 7.5-11 For the Feast of St Benedict

Since we know where Saint Benedict passed from and to, let us see now how he passed. For it would be of no profit to those wishing to follow him if they knew only where he passed from and to, unless they also know how he passed. Truly he went through Christ to Christ. Through faith in Jesus Christ, which worked in him through love, he passed to the vision and contemplation of Jesus Christ by which is satisfied the desire for all that is good. His way therefore was Christ who said of himself in the Gospel: *I am the way, the truth and the life*. Through Him he passed to Him because He who is the way is life itself.

The most direct way of our Father was the very best way of life. The way of life was his holiness. For, as Saint Gregory has said, *this present life is* nothing more than a kind of *pathway*. A person who lives well and praiseworthy in that he lives well and worthy of God passes to God and to life eternal. But someone who leads a degenerate life through his degenerate life heads for hell and everlasting death. This is the way of sinners. David speaks of it in the first psalm: *Happy the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked or loiter in the way of sinners*. Through this evil way one goes to the sinners' wretched death, of which the same Prophet in another place said: *The death of sinners is the worst*. Very rightly, indeed, he says the death of sinners is the worst because their way is evil. And as the Apostle says: *Evil persons go from bad to worse; erring themselves and leading others into error*. The death of sinners therefore is said to be the worst because as long as they live they become more and more evil until, having reached the depths, they deserve to be cut off and thrown into the fire.

But our Blessed Father Benedict did not follow this way. He did not lead a degenerate life but held fast to the way of which it is said: *The way of the just is straight. Although narrow, it leads to life*. The way is narrow at the beginning but afterwards, as blessed Benedict himself teaches us in his Rule, *one runs in the way of God's commandments in the unutterable sweetness of love*. For those who are beginning, the way is indeed narrow, as it was for David when he said: *Because of the words of your mouth I have followed harsh ways*. But did this prophet, because he found it narrow in the beginning, either abandon or decide that he should abandon it? God forbid! Rather, he held fast until he could make this very different statement: *I have run in the way of your commandments because you have enlarged my heart*.

Blessed Benedict also found the way narrow at the beginning of his conversion. But in the end he found it wide open. Wasn't the way narrow for him when, as we read in his Life, he threw himself naked into a thorn bush to avoid consent to lust? But when he found the way narrow what did he do? Did he ever depart from it? Instead, he kept to it and manfully stood his ground. First he did what later he taught, so he could teach us, his followers, what he himself had done. For as Pope Saint Gregory said of him: Just as he lived, so he taught. *He could not teach other than he lived*.

How he stood manfully in the way of God we can glean from his own words, since in his Rule he warns anyone *daunted by fear* not to flee the way of salvation. Experience had taught him that there is no beginning except by the narrow trail. But he was aware that however extraordinarily narrow it might be, it nevertheless led to *life* – as our Lord himself said: *Narrow is the way which leads to life and few they are who walk in it*. To what life this way leads, our Lord himself teaches in another place, saying: *This is eternal life, to know you, the true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*.

Wednesday, July 19

WANT TO BE HAPPY? BE GRATEFUL

From Br David Steindl-Rast – 2013 TED Talk

Now my topic is gratefulness. What is the connection between happiness and gratefulness? Many people would say, well, that's very easy. When you are happy, you are grateful. But think again. Is it really the happy people that are grateful? We all know quite a number of people who have everything that it would take to be happy, and they are not happy, because they want something else or they want more of the same. And we all know people who have lots of misfortune, misfortune that we ourselves would not want to have, and they are deeply happy. They radiate happiness. You are surprised. Why? Because they are grateful. So it is not happiness that makes us grateful. It's gratefulness that makes us happy. If you think it's happiness that makes you grateful, think again. It's gratefulness that makes you happy.

Now, we can ask, what do we really mean by gratefulness? And how does it work? I appeal to your own experience. We all know from experience how it goes. We experience something that's valuable to us. Something is given to us that's valuable to us. And it's really given. These two things have to come together. It has to be something valuable, and it's a real gift. You haven't bought it. You haven't earned it. You haven't traded it in. You haven't worked for it. It's just given to you. And when these two things come together, something that's really valuable to me and I realize it's freely given, then gratefulness spontaneously rises in my heart, happiness spontaneously rises in my heart. That's how gratefulness happens.

Now the key to all this is that we cannot only experience this once in a while. We cannot only have grateful experiences. We can be people who live gratefully. Grateful living, that is the thing. And how can we live gratefully? By experiencing, by becoming aware that every moment is a given moment, as we say. It's a gift. You haven't earned it. You haven't brought it about in any way. You have no way of assuring that there will be another moment given to you, and yet, that's the most valuable thing that can ever be given to us, this moment, with all the opportunity that it contains. If we didn't have this present moment, we wouldn't have any opportunity to do anything or experience anything, and this moment is a gift. It's a given moment, as we say.

Now, we say the gift within this gift is really the opportunity. What you are really grateful for is the opportunity, not the thing that is given to you, because if that thing were somewhere else and you didn't have the opportunity to enjoy it, to do something with it, you wouldn't be grateful for it. Opportunity is the gift within every gift, and we have this saying, "Opportunity knocks only once." Well, think again. Every moment is a new gift, over and over again, and if you miss the opportunity of this moment, another moment is given to us, and another moment. We can avail ourselves of this opportunity, or we can miss it, and if we avail ourselves of the opportunity, it is the key to happiness. Behold the master key to our happiness in our own hands. Moment by moment, we can be grateful for this gift.

Does that mean that we can be grateful for everything? Certainly not. But I didn't say we can be grateful for everything. I said we can be grateful in every given moment for the opportunity, and even when we are confronted with something that is terribly difficult, we can rise to this occasion and respond to the opportunity that is given to us.

A grateful world is a world of joyful people. Grateful people are joyful people, and joyful people — the more and more joyful people there are, the more and more we'll have a joyful world. People are becoming aware that a grateful world is a happy world, and we all have the opportunity to transform the world, to make it a happy place.

Thursday, July 20

HOPE, OUR ANCHOR

From Fr Raphael Simon, OCSO in *Hammer and Fire*

The value of the theological virtue of hope in preserving the balance of our mental powers is very great, for hope gives strength to the activities of the soul. It makes them joyous and prompt, while freeing the soul from uncertainties, tensions and fears, as well as from proneness to temptation and inconstancy. This stabilizing influence of the theological virtue of hope is expressed by the anchor, the symbol of hope; hope anchors the soul in the Father; it centers our heart in God and frees us from undue attachment to creatures.

It is hope that gives us strength to live in the spirit of the counsel of poverty, just as living in the spirit of the counsel of poverty strengthens our hope. When, on encountering adversities, losses, and misfortunes, we turn to the Father, we find our hope and joy mysteriously increased. The soul conformed to the will of the Father never loses creatures without gaining thereby an infinitely greater good, a greater possession of God, a stronger and more confirmed hope. Instead of the misfortunes of life rendering such a soul embittered, depressed, suspicious, fearful and withdrawn, they strengthen it in the possession of infinite happiness. This is the mystery of the Cross, the mystery of fruition through frustration, of conquest through contradiction, of life through death. It is in union with Jesus Crucified that we must endure loneliness, abandonment, suffering. He will teach us how to turn all that is bitter in life into sweetness.

When, in pursuing the spiritual life and conscious of no deliberate habitual attachment, we find that despite all our efforts we are going backward, that our faults are apparently multiplying, that advance is blocked, that our prayers are fruitless, then is the time to hope and to take courage. Such trials are permitted by the Father to strengthen us in faith, in hope and in love. They lead us to abandon all hope in ourselves, to despair of our own goodness and power, and hence they lead us to put all our hope in Him. When we seem to be losing all, to be hanging on to God by only a thread, then is the time to resign ourselves completely into His hands with peace, joy and assurance; for Jesus is closest to the tried, the tempted, the needy, and He will never be nearer than when He seems to have completely abandoned us. He united our dereliction to His own when from the Cross He cried in our name to His heavenly Father: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In our dereliction, then we can be united to Him in His, though we do not feel His presence or this union, it is very real.

"Hope is so pleasing to God that it obtains all that it hopes for," says St John of the Cross and St Thérèse of Lisieux. Our hope should have the perfection of utter trustfulness and security in the abandonment of ourselves to our heavenly Father, to His loving care. Utter trustfulness, complete abandonment – for this we should strive with all our energy. This degree of hope we can the more readily achieve the more completely we conform our will to His. While prudence accurately discerns the obstacles and difficulties with which we have to cope, our hearts should remain serene in the assurance that we are the children of a heavenly Father who is all-powerful.

Friday, July 21

SEEK WISDOM

From St Bernard – Sermon 15.1-2

What are we doing in this world, brothers? Or what do we make of this world? If we strive to be saved from this present wicked world, then why do we still worry ourselves about this world? If we wish to escape, then why do we take pains to drag our shackles with us? Let us suppose that the shackles were made of gold: even then it would be much better to be free of them than to be held back on account of them. Let us not esteem their value, but let us consider how they hinder us. In addition to the inherent privation of our human condition (which is generally considered harsh enough), we even start clinging to these shackles with the glue of cupidity, and we start to be entangled in the obligations of foolish worries.

Let us assume that it is perhaps less conclusive to explore what anyone in shackles may do, because human beings are put in shackles to make them suffer than to make them do anything; shackles are meant to prevent action, being instruments of passivity. Nevertheless, there is something that we must do in this world: we must at least do penance. Although this will seem to pertain more to suffering than to action, nevertheless we must do something here indeed; in this world, but not of this world.

For when we read that in the beginning Adam was put in a paradise of pleasure in order to work, what wise and sane person would suppose that Adam's children were put in the place of affliction to take a break from toil? Therefore, let us labor not for the food which perishes. Rather, let us perform the work of our salvation. Let us work in the Lord's vineyard so that we deserve to receive our daily wage. Let us work in Wisdom, who says, they who work by me shall not sin.

Truth says, The field is the world. Let us dig in it! A hidden treasure lies buried within. Let us dig it out. For wisdom itself is drawn out of secret places. We all seek her; we all long for her.

But one who seeks on his little bed seeks wisdom in vain. Neither is wisdom found in the land of those who live in delights. The bed is small, and yet you hope to find him there, him who never knew a bed at the inn?

If you seek, says Isaiah, then seek; be converted and come. Come where, you ask? Away from your little bed. Do you ask from what you are converted? Turn away from your own will, says Scripture. And if I do not find wisdom in my own will, where, you say, shall I find it? For my will vehemently desires wisdom. Nor shall it suffice to find wisdom unless I put it into my bosom, in good measure and pressed down, shaken together and running over. Rightly indeed, for Blessed is the person who finds wisdom and is rich in prudence.

Seek, therefore, Wisdom while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Do you wish to hear how near wisdom is? The word is near, even in your mouth and in your heart, if only you seek with an upright heart. Lift up your heart! Get up from your little bed so that you do not hear in vain him who urges us from on high to have a heart. For this shall you find wisdom with your heart. You shall pour prudence from your mouth. That is, wisdom shall overflow from abundance. See that it does not just escape or be expelled.

Saturday, July 22

MARY MAGDALENE: THE APOSTLE OF THE APOSTLES

From the *Vatican News* website

“Apostle of the Apostles” is the title given Mary Magdalene by St Thomas Aquinas. Her name comes from her home town of Magdala, a fishing village on the western shore of Lake Tiberias. St Luke the Evangelist tells us, in Chapter 8 of his Gospel, how Jesus went from town to town announcing the Good News of the Kingdom of God, and how the Twelve Apostles were with Him together with some women who had been healed of evil spirits or infirmities, and were serving them. Among these was a certain “Mary, called the Magdalene, from whom seven demons came out.”

As Biblical exegesis teaches, the expression “seven demons” could indicate a serious physical or moral malady that had struck the woman and from which Jesus had freed her. But, until now, tradition has claimed that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. This is only because in Chapter 7 of Luke’s Gospel we read of the conversion of an anonymous “known sinner in that city” who, when Jesus was a guest in the house of a notable Pharisee, bathed His feet with perfume and her tears and dried them with her hair.” Without any real textual connection, Mary of Magdala was identified with that unnamed prostitute. But, according to Cardinal Ravasi, there is a further misunderstanding: anointing with perfumed oil is a gesture that was also performed by Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, on a different occasion, as reported by the Evangelist, St John. And so, in some popular traditions, Mary Magdalene has come to be identified with this Mary of Bethany, after being confused with the prostitute of Galilee.

Mary Magdalene appears in the Gospels in the most dramatic moment of Jesus’ life, when she accompanies Him to Calvary and, along with other women, observes Him from afar. She is still there when Joseph of Arimathea places the body of Jesus in the sepulcher, which is closed with a stone. And on the morning of the first day of the week, she returns to the tomb, finds the stone rolled away, and runs to warn Peter and John. They in turn hurry to the empty tomb and discover that the body of the Lord is missing.

The two disciples return home but Mary Magdalene remains at the tomb in tears. Her initial disbelief gradually turns to faith when she sees two angels and asks them if they know where Jesus’ body has been taken. Then she sees Jesus Himself, but fails to recognize Him. She thinks He is the gardener, and when He asks why she is crying and who she is looking for, she replies: “Sir, if you have taken Him away, tell me where you have put Him and I will go and remove Him.” But Jesus says her name, “Mary” – and she recognizes Him at once: “Rabbuni!”, she says, which in Hebrew means “Master!”. Jesus then tells her: “Do not cling to me because I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go and find the brothers and to tell them I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” So Mary Magdalene goes to the disciples and tells them she has seen the Lord and that He said these things to her.

Mary Magdalene is the first among the women following Jesus to proclaim Him as having overcome death. She is the first to announce the joyful message of Easter. But she also proved she was among those who loved Him most when she stood at the foot of the Cross on Mount Calvary together with Mary, His Mother, and the disciple, St. John. She did not deny him or run away in fear as the other disciples did, but remained close to Him every moment, up to and including the tomb.

Pope Francis elevated the memory of Mary Magdalene to the status of Festivity on July 22nd, 2016 in order to stress the importance of this faithful disciple of Christ.