

# **Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time**

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Sunday, July 9

## COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S GOSPEL

### From a homily attributed to St John Chrysostom

Our Master is always the same, gentle and benevolent. In his constant concern for our salvation, he says explicitly in the gospel just read to us: *Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.*

What great condescension on the part of the Creator! And yet the creature feels no shame! *Come, learn from me.* The Master came to console his fallen servants. This is how Christ treats us. He shows pity when a sinner deserves punishment. When the race that angers him deserves to be annihilated, he addresses the guilty ones in the kindly words: *Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.*

God is humble, and we are proud! The judge is gentle; the criminal arrogant! The potter speaks in lowered voice; the clay discourses in the tones of a king! *Come learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.* Our master carries a whip not to wound, but to heal us. Reflect upon his indescribable kindness. Who could fail to love a master who never strikes his servants? Who would not marvel at a judge who beseeches a condemned criminal? Surely the self-abasement of these words must astound you.

I am the Creator and I love my work. I am the sculptor and I care for what I have made. If I thought of my dignity, I should not rescue fallen humankind. If I failed to treat its incurable sickness with fitting remedies, it would never recover its strength. If I did not console it, it would die. If I did nothing but threaten it, it would perish. This is why I apply the salve of kindness to it where it lies. Compassionately I bend down very low in order to raise it up. No one standing erect can lift a fallen man without putting a hand down to him.

*Come, learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.* I do not make a show of words; I have left you the proof of my deeds. You can see that I am gentle and humble in heart from what I have become. Consider my nature, reflect upon my dignity, and marvel at the condescension I have shown you. Think of where I came from, and of where I am as I speak to you. Heaven is my throne, yet I talk to you standing on the earth! I am glorified on high, but because I am long-suffering I am not angry with you, *for I am gentle and humble in heart.*

*Monday, July 10*

## **ST JEROME ON MATTHEW 9:18-26**

### **From a homily by St Jerome**

This is the eighth miracle wrought by Jesus, when a certain ruler, desiring not to be kept out of the true circumcision, besought Him to recall his daughter to life. The ceremony of circumcision, which usually took place on the eighth day after the birth, seems to be indicated by this miracle. Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, certainly deserved the preference; but a woman, diseased with an issue of blood, thrust herself in, and her own cure occupies the eighth place, so that the resurrection of the ruler's daughter is postponed, and made the ninth in the enumeration. Indeed, it seems that by this case our Savior wished to call our attention to the vocation of the Gentiles; for we read in the Psalms: Ambassadors shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God. A great mystery, spoken of by the Apostle, saying: Blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles should come in. And so all Israel should be saved, as it is written: There shall come out of Sion He that shall deliver, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

And behold a woman who was troubled with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment. Now, compare these two miracles in this Gospel: the first, a woman troubled with her disease for twelve years; the second, the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus who, according to St. Luke, was twelve years old; and you will come to the conclusion that the woman, a type of the Gentiles, had been diseased for the same time that the Jewish nation, typified by the ruler's daughter, had been living in faith. It is only by comparing good with evil, that is idolatry that we see the hideousness of the latter. Note also that this woman with the issue of blood came to our Lord, not in a house nor in a city, for such as she were by the law banished out of cities but in the way, as He walked. Thus our Lord healed one even whilst He was on the road to heal another. Whence the Apostles said: To you it behooved us first to speak the word of God; but because you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: I have set thee to be the light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be for salvation unto the utmost parts of the earth.

According to the Law, whosoever touched a woman with an issue of blood was declared unclean. Here, however, we see a woman touch Jesus to be cured of that issue by which she seemed to be unclean. Be of good heart, daughter, said Jesus; thy faith hath made thee whole. Our Savior calls her daughter, and justly, on account of her faith, by which she was cured. Note, again, our Lord did not say to the woman that her faith would make her whole that is, clean but thy faith hath made thee whole. It was to give her to understand that, as soon as she believed, she was cured. And when Jesus was come into the house of the ruler, and saw the minstrels and the multitude making a rout, He said. The deceased daughter of Jairus was the type of the Jewish nation, even now, after so many years, in a state of death. The Rabbis, entrusted with the instruction of that nation, may be compared to the minstrels playing a mournful and useless tune. The Jewish leaders, as we know, were only a noisy society of infidels, not of believers; and when Jesus said, Give place, for the girl is not dead, but sleepeth, He wished to teach us that every being, under the dominion of the living God, is alive. And when the multitude was put forth, He went in. Indeed, these people, laughing to scorn the One Who had power to give life, were not worthy to assist at the miraculous resurrection of this maiden.

Finally, consider the last point of likeness between the Jewish nation and the ruler's daughter who, being dead, received life. He took her by the hand. And the maid arose. And the fame thereof went abroad into all the country. The unbelieving synagogue, typified by this daughter, is dead; for her sinful hands are covered with the prophet's blood shed by them and their fathers. To rise from that death her stained hands must be washed in the same innocent Blood of Jesus Christ, the Author of all life.

Tuesday, July 11

## REFLECTIONS ON ST BENEDICT AND HIS RULE

### From the Message of Pope John Paul II on the Feast of St Benedict in 1999

At the heart of St Benedict's monastic experience is a simple, typically Christian principle, which the monk adopts in all its radicalness: to unify one's life around the primacy of God. The search for Gospel simplicity requires continual examination, that is, the effort "to do the truth", by constantly returning to the initial gift of the divine call which is at the root of one's own religious experience.

The example of St Benedict and the Rule invite a witness of tenacious fidelity to the Word of God, meditated on and received through *lectio divina*. This involves maintaining silence and an attitude of humble adoration before God, for the divine word reveals its depths to those who, through silence and mortification, are attentive to the Spirit's mysterious action.

While the requirement of regular silence establishes times when human words must be stilled, it points to a style marked by great moderation in verbal communication. If it is perceived and lived in its profound sense, it slowly teaches the interiorization by which the monk opens himself to a genuine knowledge of God and man. In a particular way, the great silence in monasteries has a unique symbolic power of recalling what really counts: absolute availability and the total, loving gift of self to the Father.

It is the school of *lectio divina* which the Church expects from monasteries: she does not seek masters of biblical exegesis, who can also be found elsewhere, but rather witnesses to a humble and tenacious fidelity to the Word in the inconspicuous setting of everyday life. Thus the *vita bonorum* becomes a *viva lectio* which can be understood even by those who, disillusioned by the inflation of human words, seek what is essential and authentic in their relationship with God and are ready to understand the message given by a life in which a relish for beauty and order is combined with moderation.

Familiarity with the Word, which the Benedictine Rule guarantees by reserving much time for it in the daily schedule, will not fail to instill serene trust, to cast aside false security and to root in the soul a vivid sense of the total lordship of God. The monk is thus protected from convenient or utilitarian interpretations of Scripture and brought to an ever deeper awareness of human weakness, in which God's power shines brightly.

Along with listening to God's Word there is the commitment to prayer. The Benedictine monastery is above all a place of prayer, in the sense that everything in it is organized to make the monks attentive and responsive to the voice of the Spirit. This is why the complete celebration of the Divine Office, whose center is the Eucharist and which structures the monastic day, is the Work of God."

Prayer, which marks the hours of the day in the liturgy and becomes the personal and silent meditation of the brothers, is the most important expression and source of the unity of the monastic community, which is based on the unity of faith. Every monk is required to look with attention and faith at himself and at the community: in this each one will support his brothers and be supported by them.

May every Benedictine community present itself with a well-defined identity, like a "city on a hill", distinct from the surrounding world, but open and welcoming to the poor, to pilgrims and to all who are searching for a life of greater fidelity to the Gospel!

Wednesday, July 12

## **FRATERNAL CHARITY**

### **From Francis Acharya in *Cistercian Spirituality An Ashram Perspective***

To discover and love Christ in all our brothers is not to love them in an anonymous and impersonal fashion – for the goodness, the good desires, the supernatural attractiveness that we perceive in them are, at the same time, the work of the Holy Spirit and the profoundest and truest expression of their own personality. That is why one who is humble is full of understanding, and has a kind of gift of revealing to others the best they have in themselves. His sensibility, the human delicacy of his affection, is not dried up, but only purified from all self-seeking.

This humble love should become the soul of all the manifestations of fraternal charity. Thanks to it, acts of mutual consideration will no longer be simple human politeness, but respect and admiration for the presence of God in our brothers. The use of words will no longer be an occasion of speaking ill, but a quiet manifestation of love and of affability toward all.

Fraternal correction – remarks made to the chapter or individually – will not be negative criticism, but an attempt at helping our brethren so that the good that is in them may triumph over what is left of the old man.

In the relationships of the common life, the monk will be ready to yield to the wishes of his brothers rather than to his own, and will be disposed to acknowledge his mistakes, to accept quietly a wound inflicted on self-love, to forgive as God has forgiven him.

The service of the brothers that we have to perform in the community is the fruit of this humble love, and not the expression of a natural liveliness which disguises itself as devotedness and the doing of one's duty of state, but which is in danger of being no more than subtle self-seeking. If our love is humble, this service itself will become an authentic practice of contemplation.

What causes dissipation and prevents us from recollecting ourselves in God is less the multiplicity of our occupations than the absence of interior unity. If our heart is truly oriented toward God, our work will be done without feverishness, without agitation or preoccupation. We shall also be able to establish a hierarchy among our occupations, and sometimes to give up or finish quickly some work which perhaps appealed most to our heart or seemed to us most urgent, but which, in the light of God, appeared to us as really secondary.

We shall be able to create a certain balanced rhythm of the spiritual life and find those indispensable moments of silent prayer. What interferes with prayer is more often not the lack of time but a lack of order in our occupations. The cause is an interior state of tension and agitation which does not help the real efficiency of our work in any way, but which shows that we are seeking ourselves.

Sometimes we suffer from the fact that the necessary exercise of fraternal charity, under this form of service, does not leave us more time for prayer and *lectio divina*. But if our heart is unified in God, we are also one with our brothers, and all the good that is accomplished in the community is ours; we pray with him who prays, and it is in his name that we work, for we are all one single body of Christ.

Thursday, July 13

## **OBEDIENCE**

**From Charles Dumont in *Pathway of Peace*  
*Cistercian Wisdom According to Saint Bernard***

Obedience is the form love takes in the life of a monk. It is nothing other than the obedience of the Incarnate Word communicated to the monk by his grace. In Elisha's raising of a dead child, Saint Bernard saw Christ spiritually raising each one of us from the dead each day. The prophet's hands on the child's hands signify that Jesus places his hands on mine to give me his life as an example and as the form it should take: the 'form' of obedience. Obedience is the form, which according to the ancient sense of the word means the fundamental intention in our life which gives value to all our desires and all our actions. More essentially, it is the practical expression of a will which goes straight to what is good.

Saint Bernard describes four steps of good will. As is the case with other series of gradations frequent in his writings as well as in those of other contemporary authors, we must be careful not to reduce these steps to static or chronologically successive states. Quoting Job, he points out that a human being can never remain in the same state, because he or she will either regress or progress. Ideally, one ought to go forward, and for anyone who has set out on the way, 'ascensions' – as Psalm 83 tells us – are in the heart, that is to say, in the will. In the first stage, the soul accepts God's law with its mind. The will is *upright*, but it exists in weak flesh; it fails to do the good it desires and commits the evil it detests. In the second stage, the soul is *vigorous*. It withdraws from evil and has the strength to accomplish the good it wants to do, but not without some ponderousness. In the third stage, the soul is completely *consecrated* to God. It runs along the way of the commandments with a free heart and takes pleasure in doing good. Finally, in the fourth stage, where the angels abide, it accomplishes good the way they do: with the kind of *ease* which makes them always will it.

The fourth stage of the will's progress is very much like the fourth step of the love of God: the soul can desire it, of course, but because it is a stable perfection, the soul cannot attain it as long as it is in the body, and the body weighs it down. The highest step of love, like that of obedience, is therefore this peace which can come only from perfect accord between my will and God's. As long as we live in our body – which signals our limitations – the holiness of this peace remains our aim, our patiently and deliberately pursued aim in spite of all our weaknesses and deviations.

When, in his sermons for Easter, Saint Bernard speaks so insistently about renunciation of self-will, and therefore about obedience, our very astonishment ought to make us understand that for him it is there, in the moral conscience, that the pascal mystery leads. Die to self to live for God. Saint Bernard's whole teaching on asceticism rests solely on this free but arduous act of will, the unconditional acceptance of the ethical reality of the spiritual life. In the face of suffering, which is inherent in all existence and requires the constant effort of interior consent on the part of the will, Saint Bernard distinguished three successive stages of love for Christ: it is like a long apprenticeship. A person begins by submitting patiently to the cross without rebelling, then accepts it willingly in hope, so as finally to embrace it lovingly in charity.

*Friday, July 14*

## **ST KATERI TEKAKWITHA – THE LILY OF THE MOHAWKS**

**From the St Kateri Tekakwitha National Shrine website**

Kateri Tekakwitha was born in 1656 to a Mohawk chief and a Christian Algonquin woman who had been captured in a raid and assimilated into the Mohawk people. She was born in Ossernenon, on the south side of the Mohawk River near present-day Auriesville, New York.

When she was four years old, a smallpox outbreak ravaged her village. Her parents and brother died, and Kateri herself was left with a scarred face and permanently darkened vision. Her Mohawk given name, Tekakwitha, means “she who bumps into things,” likely in reference to her poor eyesight. Tekakwitha was adopted by her paternal aunt, whose husband was a prominent figure in the Turtle Clan of the Mohawk nation.

In 1666 a French-led raiding party destroyed the Mohawk settlements on the south side of the river; Tekakwitha’s family and other survivors moved to the north side of the river and built the fortified village of Caughnawaga. Tekakwitha lived in Caughnawaga beginning in 1666. She became skilled at arts such as beadwork and basket weaving and mostly undertook small handiwork for the community due to her physical disability. In accordance with Iroquois custom, she was engaged to a young boy at about the age of thirteen; however, she wished to remain unmarried. “I can have no spouse but Jesus,” she later told her confessor. “I have the strongest aversion to marriage.”

As the result of a peace treaty with the French, the Mohawk allowed Jesuit missionaries into their settlements. When Tekakwitha was about eighteen, she began instructions in the Catholic faith. Fr. Jacques de Lamberville, the Jesuit priest with whom she studied catechism, wrote in his journal in the years after her death about Tekakwitha. This text described her before she was baptized as a mild-mannered and well-behaved girl. Lamberville also stated that Kateri did everything she could to stay holy in a secular society, which often caused minor conflicts with her longhouse residents.

On Easter Sunday 1676, she was baptized in Saint Peter’s Chapel with water from the spring that stands on Shrine grounds to this day. Kateri is the Mohawk form of her baptismal name, Catherine, which she chose in honor of Saint Catherine of Siena.

Late in 1677 Kateri relocated to the Mission of Saint Francis Xavier, a Catholic Native settlement near what is now Montreal. On Christmas Day 1677 she made her first communion, and on the Feast of the Annunciation in 1679 she made a vow of perpetual virginity; however, her vow was not formally recognized by a bishop. Kateri’s retention of Iroquois ascetic practices, which in many cases exceeded the severity of European Catholic penances of the same time period, also caused controversy. Priests in the community discouraged her in these acts due to their negative impact on her already poor health. She is quoted as saying, “I will willingly abandon this miserable body to hunger and suffering, provided that my soul may have its ordinary nourishment.” In this period, she also developed a strong friendship with another young woman called Marie Thérèse Tegaianguenta. The two women broached the idea of forming a Native religious order, but the Jesuit missionaries rejected the suggestion.

Kateri’s health failed, and she died on April 17, 1680, at the age of 23 or 24. Tradition holds that her last words were “Jesus, Mary, I love you.” Within four years, pilgrimages to the site of her tomb had begun and healing miracles were attributed to her. She is associated with outsiders, exiles, orphans, and people ridiculed for their beliefs. She is also patroness of Indigenous people, patroness of ecology and ecologists, and Protectress of Canada. She was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 21, 2012.

*Saturday, July 15*

## **THE LIFE OF ST BONAVENTURE**

### **From the Franciscan Book of Saints**

Saint Bonaventure was born at Bagnorea in the Papal States in 1221, and was given the name John in baptism. As a child of four years he became seriously ill and was given up by the physicians. Then his mother hastened to St Francis, who was preaching in the vicinity just then, and begged him to come and heal her child. The saint acceded to her request; he prayed over the child, and immediately he was cured. St Francis is said then to have uttered the prophetic words: "O buona ventura - O blessed things to come!" For that reason the child was called Bonaventure.

Endowed with most remarkable gifts of nature and grace and reared in the fear of God, Saint Bonaventure entered the Order of St Francis as a young man. Completing his year of probation with honor, he continued his studies under the great Alexander of Hales. The latter did not know what he should admire most, the talent or the virtues of the young religious. He used to say it appeared that Adam had not sinned in this young man.

During his student years, Saint Bonaventure devoted many an hour to the contemplation of Christ's suffering and he was a zealous client of our Blessed Lady. It is reported that once when Bonaventure abstained from Holy Communion for several days from a sense of humility, an angel placed the consecrated Host on his tongue. After his ordination to the priesthood he devoted himself with extraordinary zeal to the salvation of souls.

Due to his extensive and profound knowledge, Saint Bonaventure was appointed professor of theology at the University of Paris at the early age of 27. Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, of the Order of St Dominic, at that time shed the greatest luster on that institution. Garson, the great chancellor, remarked that the University of Paris had perhaps never had a greater teacher than Bonaventure.

Saint Thomas Aquinas once visited Saint Bonaventure while he was engaged in writing the life of St Francis. He found Saint Bonaventure raised in ecstasy above the earth. Reverently he withdrew, saying to his companion: "Let us leave a saint to write about a saint."

In 1257, when Blessed John of Parma resigned the office of minister general, Saint Bonaventure was unanimously chosen, at the recommendation of Blessed John, to fill this position. He governed the order for 18 years and has generally been considered the second founder of the order.

In spite of all the duties of this important position, the saint still found time to preach and to write books of great learning and holy unction. He had steadfastly declined all ecclesiastical distinctions. In 1273, however, Pope Gregory X obliged him to accept the bishopric of Albano and the dignity of the Cardinalate. The pope himself consecrated him bishop and then entrusted him with the direction of the Council of Lyons.

Worn out by the heavy strain, he fell ill after the third session. The end came very rapidly; the pope himself administered extreme unction. With his eyes directed toward the crucifix, Bonaventure died during the night between the 14th and 15th of July, 1274. Seldom if ever was there a grander funeral. The pope and all the members of the Council attended.