

Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

July 23 – 29, 2023

- Sun
23** **Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
THOUGHTS ON TODAY'S GOSPEL
From Origen – *Commentary on Matthew's Gospel*
- Mon
24** **Weekday of 16th Week**
CONCERNING THREE LOAVES
From St Bernard – *Monastic Sermon 59*
- Tue
25** **Feast of St James, Apostle**
ST JAMES THE APOSTLE
From *My Catholic Life* website
- Wed
26** **Memorial of Sts Joachim & Anne, Parents of the BVM**
STS JOACHIM AND ANNE, PARENTS OF THE BVM
From *My Catholic Life* website
- Thu
27** **Weekday of 16th Week**
CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT'S KISS
From St Bernard – *Monastic Sermon 89*
- Fri
28** **Weekday of 16th Week**
POINTS FOR PRAYER ON THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER
From the *Sacred Space* website of the Irish Jesuits
- Sat
29** **Memorial of Sts Martha, Mary, & Lazarus of Bethany**
MARTHA, MARY AND LAZARUS OF BETHANY
From Michelle Tan of *Catholic News of Singapore*

Sunday, July 23

THOUGHTS ON TODAY'S GOSPEL

From Origen – *Commentary on Matthew's Gospel*

To the seeker after fine pearls may be applied the words, *Seek and you will find*, and, *Everyone who seeks will find*. If you ask what is to be sought, and what will be found by everyone who seeks for it, I say with all confidence: pearls – especially that pearl which will be acquired by those who give their all, who sacrifice everything for it, the pearl Paul meant when he said: *I have accepted the loss of everything in order to gain Christ*. *Everything* means beautiful pearls; *to gain Christ* refers to the one pearl of great price.

Admittedly, a lamp is precious to people in darkness, and they need it until sunrise. Precious too was the radiance on the face of Moses – and I believe on the faces of the other prophets also. It was a sight of beauty leading us to the point of being able to see the glory of Christ, to whom the Father bore witness in the words: *This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased*. But *compared with this surpassing glory, what formerly was glorious now seems to have no glory at all*. We need at first a glory destined to be outshone by an all-surpassing glory, just as we need the partial knowledge which *will be superseded when that which is perfect has come*.

Thus everyone beginning to live a spiritual life and growing toward maturity needs tutors, guardians, and trustees until the fullness of time arrives for him, so that after all this, he who at first was *no different from a slave although he owned the whole estate*, may on his emancipation receive his patrimony from his tutors, guardians, and trustees.

This patrimony is the pearl of great price, and the coming of what is perfect to supersede what is imperfect, when, after acquiring the forms of knowledge, if we may call them so, which are inferior to knowledge of Christ, one becomes able to understand the supreme value of knowing Christ. The law and the prophets fully comprehended are the preparation for the full comprehension of the gospel and the complete understanding of the acts and words of Christ Jesus.

Monday, July 24

CONCERNING THREE LOAVES

From St Bernard – Monastic Sermon 59

Friend, lend me three loaves. Our friend is come to us from his journey, that is, any neighbor who has been converted should be refreshed with three loaves of bread. The first loaf is self-control, by which the body is restrained lest eventually it die away through deadly pleasures. The second loaf is humility, by which the soul is instructed lest she take pride in her own self-control. The third loaf is fervor of charity, by which the spirit is kindled so that each, that is, body and soul, is preserved steadfastly in chastity and humility.

A person of God is refreshed and strengthened by these three virtues, that is chastity, humility, and charity, like three loaves of bread, so that, according to the apostle, in the day of our Lord's coming, *his spirit and soul and body may be whole*. I call *spirit*, however, the strength that is grace, which, according to the same apostle, *helps our infirmity lest we fail, until we reap in due time the good that we have sown*.

What is more, the first loaf is called carnal or bodily, the second rational, the third spiritual. These daily loaves are lacking; they must be sought from God. Rightly, moreover, three are sought because three come to be refreshed: the soul like a husband, flesh like a wife, spirit like a servant of both.

And one should note that he does not say, "Give," but *lend me three loaves*, as though he is going to give them back. For, certainly, a priest ought to obtain grace from heaven for a repenting sinner, but he does not owe the fruit of that same grace to himself but ought to refer it back to God.

Tuesday, July 25

ST JAMES THE APOSTLE

From *My Catholic Life* website

Among the Twelve Apostles were two named James: James, the son of Zebedee and James, the son of Alphaeus. The former is traditionally called James the Greater, and the latter is traditionally called James the Lesser, perhaps because the former was taller than the latter, or more likely because of the greater importance James the Greater played in the Gospel narrative.

In John's Gospel, two of John the Baptist's disciples were with John when he saw Jesus walking by. The Baptist said of Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God." The two disciples then left the Baptist and followed Jesus. One of the disciples was Andrew, and the other is traditionally believed to be James the Greater. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark record James' calling a bit differently. "[Jesus] walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him." James and John most likely came from a family of means. Their father, Zebedee, most likely employed other fishermen alongside his sons. Their mother, Salome, is said to have been one of the women who supported Jesus and the disciples out of her own means. And John was entrusted with the care of Jesus' mother, implying that he had the means to do so.

James and his brother John are known for boldly asking Jesus that they sit at His left and right when He entered His Kingdom. In Matthew's Gospel, the request is made on behalf of the brothers by their mother, Salome, and in Mark's Gospel it is the brothers themselves who make the request.

In Luke 9, we read that Jesus "resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem" where He knew He would suffer death. On His journey toward Jerusalem, Jesus sent disciples ahead of Him to a Samaritan town to prepare for his arrival. However, the Samaritans would not welcome Jesus and His disciples. As a result, James and John ask Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" Jesus rebuked them for this thought and they traveled on. It was on account of this excessive zeal and perhaps the quick tempers and boldness of James and John that they are referred to as the "Sons of Thunder."

One later tradition states that James traveled to Spain to preach the Gospel before returning to Jerusalem to endure martyrdom. That same tradition states that after his martyrdom, his body was either miraculously transported to Spain, eventually arriving in Compostela where many believe he is buried, or that his body was taken to Spain by his followers. The exact site of his burial was lost for centuries. In the ninth century, a hermit named Pelagius observed a star or a cluster of stars that led him to Saint James' burial site in Compostela. After the discovery, King Alfonso II ordered the construction of a church over his grave; the site is now referred to as Santiago (Saint James) of Compostela (field of stars). Since that time, the site has been a major pilgrimage site. The Camino de Santiago (Way of Saint James) is a route traveled on foot from various starting points in France, Spain, and Portugal that all lead to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela where Saint James is believed to have been buried. The longest route begins on the French side of the Pyrenees and stretches almost 500 miles. Other routes are shorter than 100 miles.

One last mention of James is found in Acts 12. Herod Agrippa, who ruled Judea from 41–44, martyred James the Greater as a way of appeasing the Pharisaic Jews who were opposed to Jesus and His followers. According to an account by Eusebius, a fourth-century Bishop of Caesarea Maritima, James' zeal for the faith led to his arrest, but the one who turned James in as his accuser ended up converting to the faith. As a result, his accuser was also martyred with James.

Wednesday, July 26

STS JOACHIM AND ANNE, PARENTS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY **From *My Catholic Life* website**

On July 26 the Roman Catholic Church commemorates the parents of the Virgin Mary, Saints Joachim and Anne. The couple's faith and perseverance brought them through the sorrow of childlessness, to the joy of conceiving and raising the immaculate and sinless woman who would give birth to Christ.

The New Testament contains no specific information about the lives of the Virgin Mary's parents, but other documents outside of the Biblical canon do provide some details. Although these writings are not considered authoritative in the same manner as the Bible, they outline some of the Church's traditional beliefs about Joachim, Anne and their daughter.

The "Protoevangelium of James," which was probably put into its final written form in the early second century, describes Mary's father Joachim as a wealthy member of one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Joachim was deeply grieved, along with his wife Anne, by their childlessness. "He called to mind Abraham," the early Christian writing says, "that in the last day God gave him a son Isaac." Joachim and Anne began to devote themselves to rigorous prayer and fasting, in isolation from one another and from society. They regarded their inability to conceive a child as a surpassing misfortune, and a sign of shame among the tribes of Israel.

As it turned out, however, the couple were to be blessed even more abundantly than Abraham and Sarah. An angel revealed this to Anne when he appeared to her and prophesied that all generations would honor their future child: "The Lord has heard your prayer, and you shall conceive, and shall bring forth; and your seed shall be spoken of in all the world."

After Mary's birth, according to the Protoevangelium of James, Anne "made a sanctuary" in the infant girl's room, and "allowed nothing common or unclean" on account of the special holiness of the child. The same writing records that when she was one year old, her father "made a great feast, and invited the priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and all the people of Israel."

"And Joachim brought the child to the priests," the account continues, "and they blessed her, saying: 'O God of our fathers, bless this child, and give her an everlasting name to be named in all generations' ... And he brought her to the chief priests; and they blessed her, saying: 'O God most high, look upon this child, and bless her with the utmost blessing, which shall be forever.'"

The Protoevangelium goes on to describe how Mary's parents, along with the temple priests, subsequently decided that she would be offered to God as a consecrated Virgin for the rest of her life, and enter a chaste marriage with the carpenter Joseph.

St. Joachim and St. Anne have been a part of the Church's liturgical calendar for many centuries. Devotion to their memory is particularly strong in the Eastern Catholic churches, where their intercession is invoked by the priest at the end of each Divine Liturgy. The Eastern churches, however, celebrate Sts Joachim and Anne on a different date, Sept. 9.

Thursday, July 27

CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT'S KISS **From St Bernard – Monastic Sermon 89**

Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. The mouth of the Father is understood to be the Son. *No one, however, knows the Son except the Father; and neither does any one know the Father, except the Son and to whomever the Son wills to reveal.* But truly, to whomever that revelation happens, revelation of either the Father or the Son, it does not happen except through the Holy Spirit. Hence it is that, when Peter said to the Lord, *You are Christ, the Son of the living God*, he answered, *Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah*, which is interpreted as “son of a dove,” *because flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven.* And the apostle, when he had put forth, *What eye has not seen, not ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of a human being what God has prepared for those who love him*, at once added, *But to us God has revealed through his Spirit.*

Therefore the bride seems to have grace of the Holy Spirit, through which she acknowledges the Son equal to the Father. Nor does she say, “Let him kiss me with his own mouth,” which is only for the Father to say, not for any creature at all – a creature of course can in no way be equal to the Father – but *with the kiss of his mouth*. Furthermore, the mutual kiss belongs to both the one who kisses and the one who is kissed. If therefore the Father and Son kiss among themselves, what is their kiss if not the Holy Spirit?

And so the bride burns to be kissed with this kiss, saying, *Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.* Even Paul testifies that she has received this kiss when he says, *Because you are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father.* Even the Savior himself promised this kiss when he exhorted his disciples to the urgency of prayer: *If you then, he says, being evil, know to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father give the good Spirit to those who ask him?* From the impression of this kiss, the rational soul receives from her bridegroom, from God's Word, knowledge and love of virtue, which presses upon her like two lips: the virtue of God and the wisdom of God. Accordingly, wisdom confers knowledge and virtue confers love.

Similarly, the soul herself also has two lips with which she kisses her bridegroom, that is, reason and will. It is for reason to gain wisdom, the will to gain virtue. If reason alone were to gain knowledge of wisdom and the will did not have love of virtue, then it would not be a full kiss. Or if the will alone obtained love and reason gained insufficient knowledge, then likewise it would be half full. Then truly the kiss is full and perfect when both wisdom enlightens and virtue moves the will.

Friday, July 28

POINTS FOR PRAYER ON THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

From the *Sacred Space* website of the Irish Jesuits

Jesus speaks of the word of God as something organic and growing. Let me think back to seeds that have grown in my heart: probably happenings rather than preachers' words. I saw a kindness, a courageous stance, an example of honesty that cost the honest man dearly. That was the seed. It stayed with me, and was active in my heart. In the same way I sometimes find, to my delight, that others have noticed something I did or said, and it became a seed in their heart, yielding good fruit over the years.

Jesus explains the story of the sower and the seed. He knows that we have different levels of hearing and responding to him. Maybe this story can throw some light on the desires in our heart to bear fruit; or on what may prevent me from hearing fully the word of God. There are thorns in all of us; with Jesus we can remove them so that we may bear more fruit.

I allow my imagination to dwell with the scene that Jesus presents, picturing the growth, identifying threats to it. I take care not to allow the weeds and barrenness to dominate but accept that God pictures a flourishing harvest and never gives up that hope for me.

I think of how I might remain on the alert for anything that threatens the word that is given to me: the life that Jesus offers can be leached away by skeptical attitudes, cynical comments, despairing attitudes or unkind words.

Saturday, July 29

MARTHA, MARY AND LAZARUS OF BETHANY

From Michelle Tan of *Catholic News of Singapore*

July 29 is the feast day of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus of Bethany, siblings who were counted as among Our Lord's friends.

What can we learn from this holy family of Bethany?

Martha and Mary are often held up as the two aspects of Christian life – service and contemplation. True discipleship entails not just listening and hearing the will of God, but also doing it: we imitate Martha when we feed, clothe and care for Jesus in the hungry, thirsty, naked and sick.

Yet, when Jesus visited Bethany and found Martha anxious about feeding and caring for Him adequately, He told her gently not to be so worried because, "There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Martha is revered as a saint of warm welcome and generous hospitality. Indeed, the guesthouse next door to St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican built by Pope St John Paul II for visiting priests and cardinals, and where Pope Francis now lives, is named the *Domus Sanctae Marthae* after her. But that is not the only thing the Church remembers Martha for. She listened and understood what Christ meant by choosing 'the better part', and she learnt well how her life in the present could impact eternity.

For Sacred Scripture tells us: "When Jesus arrived in Bethany after the death of Lazarus, she said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of Him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha replied, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the One coming into the world.'"

Martha's profession of faith is as powerful as that of Simon Peter's in Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus had asked His disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" and Simon Peter had answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus had then said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." Surely, Martha was just as blessed.

As for Lazarus, the Bible does not say very much about him except that, like his sisters, he always welcomed the Lord into his home and enjoyed table fellowship with Him. He was much loved by Jesus, so dearly that He wept when he died. He was also a willing instrument of God through whom the Lord manifested His glory by raising him to life again after death.

We can emulate Lazarus by simply allowing the Lord to love us, and opening wide the door of our hearts to invite Him in for fellowship with us, not just at the Eucharistic table of plenty but also where two or three of us are gathered in His name. Like Lazarus, we too can welcome Jesus into our lives and allow Him to work miracles through us and in us.

May the trinity of Martha, Mary and Lazarus teach us how to live in communion with each other and with the Lord, and may they intercede for us and our families that we may love and serve the Lord as faithfully as they did.