

# Thirteenth Week in Ordinary Time

## July 2 – 8, 2023

- Sun**  
**2** Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
**COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S GOSPEL**  
From St Hilary of Poitiers' *Commentary on St Matthew's Gospel*
- Mon**  
**3** Feast of St Thomas, Apostle  
**A REFLECTION ON ST THOMAS THE APOSTLE**  
From Fr Andrew Hamilton, SJ of the Australian Jesuit Communications Office
- Tue**  
**4** Conventual Mass for Independence Day  
**FOUR AMERICANS POPE FRANCIS SINGLED OUT**  
From Pope Francis' address to Congress on Sept 24, 2015
- Wed**  
**5** Weekday of 13<sup>th</sup> Week  
**PUNISHMENT IN THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT**  
From Joan Chittister in *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*
- Thu**  
**6** Memorial of St Maria Goretti, Virgin, Martyr  
**ST MARIA GORETTI AND ALESSANDRO SERENELLI**  
From Jenna Murphy of Salt and Light Media
- Fri**  
**7** Weekday of 13<sup>th</sup> Week  
**CALLED TO BE GOOD APOSTLES**  
From Pope Francis' *Angelus* message on June 18, 2023
- Sat**  
**8** Memorial of Blessed Eugene III, Cistercian Pope  
**BLESSED EUGENE III, THE FIRST CISTERCIAN POPE**  
From the *anastpaul.com* website

Sunday, July 2

## **COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S GOSPEL**

### **From St Hilary of Poitiers' *Commentary on St Matthew's Gospel***

Christ commanded the apostles to leave everything in the world that they held most dear, adding: *Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* For those who belong to Christ have crucified their lowest nature with its sinful passions and desires. No one is worthy of him who refuses to take up his cross, that is to say, to share the Lord's passion, death, burial, and resurrection, and to follow him by living out the mystery of faith in the newly received grace of the spirit.

*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* This means that thanks to the power of the word and the renunciation of past sins, temporal gains are death to the soul, and temporal losses salvation. Apostles must therefore take death into their new life and nail their sins to the Lord's cross. They must confront their persecutors with contempt for things present, holding fast to their freedom by a glorious confession of faith, and shunning any gain that would harm their souls. They should know that no power over their souls has been given to anyone, and that by suffering loss in this short life they will achieve immortality.

*Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.* Christ gives us all a love for his teaching and a disposition to treat our teachers with courtesy. Earlier he had shown the danger facing those who refused to receive the apostles by requiring these to shake the dust off their feet as a testimony against them; now he commends those who do receive the apostles, assuring them of a greater recompense than they might have expected for their hospitality, and he teaches that since he still acts as mediator, when we receive him God enters us through him because he comes from God. Thus whoever receives the apostles receives Christ, and whoever receives Christ receives God the Father, since what is received in the apostles is nothing else than what is received in Christ; nor is there anything in Christ but what is in God. Through this disposition of graces to receive the apostles is to receive God, because Christ is in them and God is in Christ.

*Monday, July 3*

## **A REFLECTION ON ST THOMAS THE APOSTLE**

**From Fr Andrew Hamilton, SJ of the Australian Jesuit Communications Office**

Thomas is often referred to as Doubting Thomas. The epithet refers to one of the stories in John's Gospel, the only New Testament where he has a speaking role. In the other Gospels, he is simply named as one of the twelve apostles, with the suggestion that he is a twin.

In John's Gospel, Thomas first appears shortly before Jesus' fatal final journey to Jerusalem. When Jesus announces that he is going to Jerusalem, Thomas responds sardonically, 'Let us go and die with him.' After the Last Supper, he also expresses his bafflement when Jesus speaks of going away from his followers for a little time and then returning.

The exchange for which he is remembered takes place after Jesus has risen from the dead and has appeared to the disciples. Thomas is absent at the time and refuses to believe that Jesus has risen unless he can touch his wounds. When Jesus next appears to the disciples, Thomas is with them. Jesus invites him to see and touch his wounds to prove that he has risen. Thomas worships him, and Jesus praises those who have not seen but have believed. The final mention of Thomas in the Gospel of John includes him by name with other Apostles who agreed to go fishing with Peter and so found Jesus waiting for them on the beach.

The stories of Thomas fascinated many communities in the Early Church. One group used a Gospel of Thomas to explain its beliefs. The Acts of Thomas describes a mission that took him to India where he was martyred. He continues to be held in great respect by the Thomas Christians in Southern India.

In John's Gospel, the stories of people always contain layers of meaning in which we seek the meaning of our own story. Thomas' epithet 'Doubting Thomas' may lead us to think of him as a modern sceptic who won't believe anything that is not scientifically proven. He is a plain blunt man who won't put up with wishful thinking and reports from credulous people. In this reading, Jesus praises those who don't need scientific proof. When Jesus offers him proof, he is totally converted. Jesus then praises those who believe without needing scientific proof. The doubt associated with Thomas is an intellectual doubt.

We can certainly read Thomas' story in that way, but perhaps it cuts even deeper. Other stories in John's Gospel present Thomas as conflicted in his decision to follow Jesus. When Jesus says he will go to Jerusalem, Thomas makes it clear he thinks it is a crazy idea and that he is not taken in by Jesus. But he still goes along. He leaves himself room to say afterwards, 'I told you so'. Similarly, when Jesus speaks mysteriously about his disappearance through death and his return as risen, he doesn't want to surrender to the mystery but demands to have things spelled out. Thomas does not want to be a credulous member of a group but to be his own person. He finds it hard to trust.

That reluctance to trust naturally leads him to go it alone after Jesus' death and to react with frustrated fury when others tell him they have seen the risen Jesus. When Jesus appears to him and invites him to touch his wounds, Thomas is also invited to touch his own words and to respond wholeheartedly to the mystery of Jesus who is found within the community.

John's last mention of Thomas as one of the disciples who agreed to go fishing is significant. He no longer points out the reasons why the fish won't bite but is united in the trust of Jesus with the community of disciples.

*Tuesday, July 4*

## **FOUR AMERICANS POPE FRANCIS SINGLED OUT**

**From excerpts of Pope Francis' address to the US Congress on Sept 24, 2015**

I would like to mention four Americans: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton.

This year marks the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, the guardian of liberty, who labored tirelessly that "this nation, under God, (might) have a new birth of freedom". Building a future of freedom requires love of the common good and cooperation in a spirit of subsidiarity and solidarity.

Here I think of the political history of the United States, where democracy is deeply rooted in the mind of the American people. All political activity must serve and promote the good of the human person and be based on respect for his or her dignity. If politics must truly be at the service of the human person, it follows that it cannot be a slave to the economy and finance. Politics is, instead, an expression of our compelling need to live as one, in order to build as one the greatest common good: that of a community which sacrifices particular interests in order to share, in justice and peace, its goods, its interests, its social life. I do not underestimate the difficulty that this involves, but I encourage you in this effort.

Here too I think of the march which Martin Luther King led from Selma to Montgomery fifty years ago as part of the campaign to fulfill his "dream" of full civil and political rights for African Americans. That dream continues to inspire us all. I am happy that America continues to be, for many, a land of "dreams." Dreams which lead to action, to participation, to commitment. Dreams which awaken what is deepest and truest in the life of a people.

In these times when social concerns are so important, I cannot fail to mention the Servant of God Dorothy Day, who founded the Catholic Worker Movement. Her social activism, her passion for justice and for the cause of the oppressed, were inspired by the Gospel, her faith, and the example of the saints.

How much progress has been made in this area in so many parts of the world! How much has been done in these first years of the third millennium to raise people out of extreme poverty! I know that you share my conviction that much more still needs to be done, and that in times of crisis and economic hardship a spirit of global solidarity must not be lost.

A century ago, at the beginning of the Great War, which Pope Benedict XV termed a "pointless slaughter", another notable American was born: the Cistercian monk Thomas Merton. He remains a source of spiritual inspiration and a guide for many people. In his autobiography he wrote: "I came into the world. Free by nature, in the image of God, I was nevertheless the prisoner of my own violence and my own selfishness, in the image of the world into which I was born. That world was the picture of Hell, full of men like myself, loving God, and yet hating him; born to love him, living instead in fear of hopeless self-contradictory hungers". Merton was above all a man of prayer, a thinker who challenged the certitudes of his time and opened new horizons for souls and for the Church. He was also a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions.

From this perspective of dialogue, I would like to recognize the efforts made in recent months to help overcome historic differences linked to painful episodes of the past. It is my duty to build bridges and to help all men and women, in any way possible, to do the same.

Three sons and a daughter of this land, four individuals and four dreams: Lincoln, liberty; Martin Luther King, liberty in plurality and non-exclusion; Dorothy Day, social justice and the rights of persons; and Thomas Merton, the capacity for dialogue and openness to God.

Four representatives of the American people.

Wednesday, July 5

## **PUNISHMENT IN THE RULE OF ST BENEDICT**

**From Joan Chittister in *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages***

One of the sages said: "I never met anyone in whom I failed to recognize something superior to myself: if the person was older, I said this one has done more good than I; if younger, I said this person has sinned less; if richer, I said this one has been more charitable; if poorer I said this one has suffered more; if wiser I honored their wisdom; and if not wiser, I judged their faults more lightly." Community is the place where we come to honor the world.

In one of the gentlest monastic rules ever written, Benedict devotes eight straight chapters to punishment and its techniques, none of them very acceptable or very applicable today. His concept of punishment, if not his form of punishment, however, may well bear considerable reflection in our own time.

In the first place, Benedict does not punish severely for everything. He does not punish for incompetence or lack of spiritual intensity or ignorance or weaknesses of the flesh. No, Benedict punishes harshly only for the grumbling that undermines authority in a community and the rebellion that paralyzes it. Benedict punishes severely only for the destruction of the sense of community itself.

It is community that enables us both to live the Christian life and to learn from it. Human growth is gradual, Benedict knows – the grumblers and defiant are to be warned about their behavior twice privately – but grow we must. Otherwise those who do not honor the community, those in fact who sin against the development of community in the worst possible way, by consistent complaining, constant resistance, or outright rebellion, must be corrected for it.

In the second place, Benedict does not set out simply to reason with us about the disordered parts of our lives. Benedict intends to stop an action before it takes root in us. Physical punishment was common in a culture of the unlettered. Many monastic rules, in fact – the Penitential of St. Columbanus, the Rule of St. Fructuosus, the Rule of the Master – specify as many as a hundred lashes for offenses against the rules. At the same time, Benedict prefers another method more related to the nature of the sins. If we refuse to learn from the community and to cooperate with it, he implies, we have no right to its support and should be suspended from participation in it. Once we have separated ourselves from the community by withdrawing our hearts, then the community must withdraw from us in order to soften them.

There may be another point to be made, as well. Mild as it may have been according to the standards of the day, Benedict did mandate punishments and he did require atonement. The rule would certainly expect the same attitudes from us even now. Things broken must be mended; things running away with us must be curbed; things awry in us must be set straight. What we may have to face in a culture in which self-control is too often seen as self-destructive is that none of that happens by accident. It requires discipline – conscious, honest, continuing discipline, not in the ways that discipline may have been prescribed in the sixth century, surely, but in some way that is honest and real.

*Thursday, July 6*

## **ST MARIA GORETTI AND ALESSANDRO SERENELLI**

**From Jenna Murphy of Salt and Light Media**

We know that Maria Goretti was a poor, pious farm girl. We know that only days before her 11th birthday, on July 6th 1902, Maria was attacked and murdered by 18-year old Alessandro Serenelli. St. Maria, we also know, died because she refused to give in to the boy when he tried to rape her.

The fact that St. Maria Goretti is an incorrupt saint is not surprising then given the perennial nature of her story and the potency of her humble message. No matter how rare virtue may become, St. Maria's example will always yield light and purity when we are confronted with the gray areas, especially in the realm of chastity.

We often forget, though, that this story merely draws attention to an already saintly young girl. St. Maria's mother would frequently tell her children: "You must never commit sin, at any cost." St. Maria's life was focused on the sacraments and on falling more in love with Christ. Her love for God was learned from the saintly example of her mother who encouraged the young girl to partake in the sacrament of reconciliation at 6 years old (earlier than was the custom at the time).

Maria's firm resolve to never commit a sin is what led her to give her life instead of submit to a sin against chastity. In the absence of her firm resolve, the story's ending would be much less beautiful. St. Maria's story reminds us of the power of a firm resolve, true, but her resolve did not come about from a simple one-time decision. She lived out her decision everyday and constantly renewed her love for Jesus in small sacrifices. At a World Youth Day audience in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI told the young people that if we do not learn to say "little 'no's" we will never be able to say the "big no". Clearly, Maria was no stranger to small 'no's.

While in prison atoning for his crime, Alessandro had a vivid dream, so vivid, he said, that he "could not distinguish it from reality." In his dream, his prison cell turned into a lush garden and Maria came to him bathed in light. She gave him 14 lilies (symbolic of the 14 stab wounds he dealt her years before). After he took the lilies in his hands, they turned into "flaming lights". At this point in the dream, Maria told him that someday his soul would join hers in heaven.

This was all too much for Alessandro. Until this point he had been unrepentant of his crime, but immediately his heart began to soften and he allowed himself to weep after so many years. After 27 years in prison, Alessandro was released. A changed man, he was discharged three years early because he was considered to be a "model prisoner". After his release, he sought out Maria's mother that he might beg for her forgiveness. You can imagine his surprise when she placed her hands on his head, caressed his face and gently said, "Alessandro, Marietta (Maria) forgave you, Christ has forgiven you, and why should I not also forgive. I forgive you, of course, my son! Why have I not seen you sooner? Your evil days are past, and to me, you are a long-suffering son." From that day on, Alessandro was welcomed into the Goretti family as "Uncle Alessandro".

Alessandro died at the ripe old age of 89 after years of prayer and atonement for the crime of his youth. Calling St. Maria his "protectress," Alessandro was known to call upon the young saint frequently for her intercession.

*Friday, July 7*

## **CALLED TO BE GOOD APOSTLES**

**From Pope Francis' *Angelus* message on June 18, 2023**

Today, in the Gospel, Jesus calls by name – he calls by name – and sends out the twelve Apostles. By sending them, he asks them to proclaim just one thing: “Preach as you go, saying ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” It is the same proclamation with which Jesus began his preaching: the kingdom of God, that is, his lordship of love, has come near, it comes in our midst. And this is not just one piece of news among others, no, but the fundamental reality of life: the vicinity of God, the vicinity of Jesus.

Indeed, if the God of heaven is close, we are not alone on earth, and even in difficulty we do not lose faith. Here is the first thing to say to people: God is not far away, but he is a Father. God is not distant, he is a Father, he knows you and he loves you; he wants to take you by the hand, even when you travel on steep and rugged paths, even when you fall and struggle to get up again and get back on track. He, the Lord, is there with you. Indeed, often in the moments when you are at your weakest, you can feel his presence all the more strongly. He knows the path, he is with you, he is your Father! He is my Father! He is our Father!

Let us remain with this image, because proclaiming God as close to us is inviting you to think like a child, who walks held by his father's hand: everything seems different. The world, large and mysterious, becomes familiar and secure, because the child knows he is protected. He is not afraid, and learns how to open up: he meets other people, finds new friends, learns with joy things that he did not know, and then returns home and tells everyone what he has seen, while within him there grows the desire to become grown up and to do the things he has seen his daddy do. This is why Jesus starts out from here, this is why God's vicinity is the first proclamation: by staying close to God, we conquer fear, we open ourselves to love, we grow in goodness and we feel the need and the joy to proclaim.

If we want to be good apostles, we must be like children: we must sit “on God's lap” and, from there, look at the world with trust and love, in order to bear witness that God is the Father, that he alone transforms our hearts and gives us that joy and that peace that we ourselves cannot attain.

To proclaim that God is near – but how can we do this? In the Gospel, Jesus recounts and recommends not saying many words, but performing many deeds of love and hope in the name of the Lord. Not saying many words, performing deeds! “Heal the sick”, says the Lord, “raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without pay, give without pay.” Here is the heart of proclamation: witness freely given, service. I will tell you something: I am always puzzled, very puzzled, by the “talkers” with their endless talk and no action.

At this point, let us ask a few questions: we, who believe in God who is close, I wonder: do we confide in him? Do we know how to look forward trustfully, like a child who knows he is held in his father's arms? Do we know how to sit in the Father's lap with prayer, by listening to the Word, partaking of the Sacraments? And finally, close to him, do we know how to instill courage in others, to make ourselves close to those who suffer and are alone, to those who are distant and even those who are hostile? This is the substance of faith. This is what counts.

And let us now pray to Mary; may she help us feel we are loved and transmit closeness and trust

Saturday, July 8

## **BLESSED EUGENE III, THE FIRST CISTERCIAN POPE**

From the *anastpaul.com* website

Bernardo Pignatelli was born in the vicinity of Pisa around 1080. Little is known about his origins and family except that he was son of a certain Godius. From the 16th century he is commonly identified as member of the family of Paganelli di Montemagno, which belonged to the Pisan aristocracy.

Between May 1134 and February 1137 he was ordained to the Priesthood by Pope Innocent II, who resided at that time in Pisa. Under the influence of Bernard of Clairvaux he entered the Cistercian Order in the Monastery of Clairvaux in 1138. A year later he returned to Italy as leader of the Cistercian community in Scandriglia.

After he became a Cistercian he took the name of "Bernard" in honor of his friend, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Father Bernard was appointed Abbot of Tre Fontaine in Rome. Following the death of Pope Lucius II (+1145) the cardinals elected Abbot Bernard to be Pope, who was not present at the conclave due to not being a cardinal. It is reported that all were surprised. But he always remained a Cistercian monk at heart.

Bernardo's election was assisted by being a friend and pupil of Bernard of Clairvaux, the most influential ecclesiastic of the Church and a strong assertor of the pope's temporal authority. The choice did not have the approval of Bernard, however, who remonstrated against the election, writing to the entire Curia: "May God forgive you what you have done! ... What reason or counsel, when the Supreme Pontiff was dead, made you rush upon a mere rustic, lay hands on him in his refuge, wrest from his hands the axe, pick or hoe, and lift him to a throne?"

Bernard was equally forthright in his views directly to Eugene, writing: "Thus does the finger of God raise up the poor out of the dust and lift up the beggar from the dunghill that he may sit with princes and inherit the throne of glory."

Never a shy man and a passionate teacher, Saint Bernard wrote *De consideratione* to instruct Eugene in papal duties. Despite these criticisms, Eugene seems to have borne no resentment to Bernard and notwithstanding these criticisms, after the choice was made, Bernard took advantage of the qualities in Eugene III which he objected to, so as virtually to rule in his name.

On hearing of the fall of Edessa to the Turks, Pope Eugene in December 1145 addressed the bull *Quantum praedecessores* to Louis VII of France, calling on him to take part in another Crusade. At a great diet held at Speyer in 1146, King Conrad III of Germany and many of his nobles were also incited to dedicate themselves to the Crusade by the eloquence of St Bernard of Clairvaux, preached to an enormous crowd at Vézelay. The Second Crusade turned out to be "an ignominious fiasco" and the army abandoned their campaign after just five days of siege.

The Dominican, St Antoninus called Pope Eugene "a great Pope with great sufferings." He died on July 8, 1151. The people of Rome speedily recognised him as a pious figure who was meek and spiritual. His tomb acquired considerable fame due to the miracle which occurred there and his cause for sainthood commenced. Pope Pius IX beatified him on 28 December in 1872.