

Nineteenth Week in Ordinary Time

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Sunday, August 13

ST AUGUSTINE ON TODAY'S GOSPEL

From St Augustine – Sermon 76

The gospel tells us how Christ the Lord walked upon the waters of the sea, and how the apostle Peter did the same until fear made him falter and lose confidence. Then he began to sink and emerged from the water only after calling on the Lord with renewed faith.

Now we must regard the sea as a symbol of the present world, and the apostle Peter as a symbol of the one and only Church. For Peter, who ranked first among the apostles and was always the most ready to declare his love for Christ, often acted as spokesman for them all. For instance, when the Lord Jesus Christ asked who people thought he was and the other disciples had cited various opinions, it was Peter who responded to the Lord's further question, *But who do you say I am?* with the affirmation: *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* One replied for all because all were united.

When we consider Peter as a representative member of the Church we should distinguish between what was due to God's action in him and what was attributable to himself. Then we ourselves shall not falter; then we shall be founded upon rock and remain firm and unmoved in the face of the wind, rain, and floods, which are the trials and temptations of this present world. Look at Peter, who in this episode is an image of ourselves; at one moment he is all confidence, at the next all uncertainty and doubt; now he professes faith in the immortal One, now he fears for his life.

Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you upon the water. When the Lord said *Come* Peter climbed out of the boat and began to walk on the water. This is what he could do through the power of the Lord; what by himself? *Realizing how violently the wind was blowing, he lost his nerve, and as he began to sink he called out, "Lord, I am drowning, save me!"* When he counted on the Lord's help it enabled him to walk on the water, when human frailty made him falter he turned once more to the Lord, who immediately stretched out his hand to help him, raised him up as he was sinking, and rebuked him for his lack of faith.

Think, then, of this world as a sea, whipped up to tempestuous heights by violent winds. A person's own private tempest will be his or her unruly desires. If you love God you will have power to walk upon the waters, and all the world's swell and turmoil will remain beneath your feet. But if you love the world it will surely engulf you, for it always devours its lovers, never sustain them. If you feel your foot slipping beneath you, if you become a prey to doubt or realize that you are losing control, if, in a word, you begin to sink, say: *Lord, I am drowning, save me!* Only he who for your sake died in your fallen nature can save you from the death inherent in that fallen nature.

Monday, August 15

ST MAXIMILIAN KOLBE, MARTYR

From Pope St John Paul's homily at St Maximilian's 1982 canonization

The inspiration of Maximilian Kolbe's whole life was the Immaculata. To her he entrusted his love for Christ and his desire for martyrdom. In the mystery of the Immaculate Conception there revealed itself before the eyes of his soul that marvelous and supernatural world of God's grace offered to man.

Men saw what happened in the camp at Auschwitz. And even if to their eyes it must have seemed that a companion of their torment "dies," even if humanly speaking they could consider "his departure" as "a disaster," nevertheless in their minds this was not simply "death." Maximilian did not die but "gave his life...for his brother." In that death, terrible from the human point of view, there was the whole definitive greatness of the human act and of the human choice. He spontaneously offered himself up to death out of love.

And in this human death of his there was the clear witness borne to Christ: the witness borne in Christ to the dignity of man, to the sanctity of his life, and to the saving power of death in which the power of love is made manifest.

Precisely for this reason the death of Maximilian Kolbe became a sign of victory. This was victory won over all systematic contempt and hate for man and for what is divine in man – a victory like that won by our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary.

As ever when the Church proclaims the holiness of her sons and daughters, as also in the present case, she seeks to act with all due exactness and responsibility, searching into all the aspects of the life and death of the Servant of God.

Yet at the same time the Church must be careful, as she reads the sign of holiness given by God in his earthly Servant, not to allow its full eloquence and definitive meaning to go unnoticed. And so, in judging the cause of Blessed Maximilian Kolbe even after his Beatification, it was necessary to take into consideration many voices of the People of God – especially of our Brothers in the episcopate of both Poland and Germany – who asked that Maximilian Kolbe be proclaimed as a martyr saint.

Before the eloquence of the life and death of blessed Maximilian, it is impossible not to recognize what seems to constitute the main and essential element of the sign given by God to the Church and the world in his death.

Does not this death – faced spontaneously, for love of man – constitute a particular fulfillment of the words of Christ? Does not this death make Maximilian particularly like unto Christ – the Model of all Martyrs – who gives his own life on the Cross for his brethren? Does not this death possess a particular and penetrating eloquence for our age? Does not this death constitute a particularly authentic witness of the Church in the modern world?

And so, in virtue of my apostolic authority, I have decreed that Maximilian Maria Kolbe – who after his Beatification was venerated as a Confessor – shall henceforward be venerated also as a Martyr!

Tuesday, August 15

CISTERCIAN PREACHING ON THE ASSUMPTION

From St Aelred of Rievaulx – Sermon 20:5-8

My brothers, Mary, the blessed mother of God, knew her dearest Son in the flesh. Although she fastened all her desires and all her love there, where he was, after her dearest Son and Lord ascended into heaven, so long as she remained in this corruptible flesh, what she had seen of him in the flesh could not fade from her memory. For his deeds and his words were always coming to her mind and above all there lingered in her heart the features of his exquisite face. Today, however, she passed from this world and went up *to the heavenly kingdom*. There she began to contemplate his brightness, power, and divinity, and her joy and her longing were fulfilled. So with good reason could she say: *I have found him whom my soul loves*. She holds him and she does not let him go.

Previously she had found him whom her flesh loved, since the flesh still appreciated flesh, a human being [another] human nature. She held him but she let him go. She held him – but in the flesh – and therefore through death she lost him to some extent – but in the flesh. Today she found *him whom her soul loves* because, although it may be – as some believe – that she was taken up into heaven with her body, that body had, however, been made spiritual, so that all the love with which she loves her Lord, her Son, is not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. Today she has found *him who her soul loves*, she has found him in spirit, she loves him in spirit, she holds him in spirit and therefore she will never lose him.

Today she has found [him] because today the shadow of night has retreated and the Light of light has risen on her. During the night she sought him but she did not find him. Therefore she says: *On my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him but I did not find him*. As long as she lived in this light it was night. And yet, during this night she did not cease seeking him. And therefore when the night was over she found him. *On my bed*, she said, *I sought him whom my soul loves*. What is this bed? Who can say what this bed was like? If this bed were an ordinary, material bed, there would be no need to seek for long.

I think this is the same bed of which she says elsewhere: *Our bed is covered with flowers*. And what was this bed but her heart, where there were the flowers of all the virtues? Well [may it be called] a bed because of the wonderful rest and tranquility which she had <in her heart>. For there was none of the uproar of empty thoughts, there were there no physical passions or desires. Where these exist is not a bed, since no one can have rest and tranquility who has these uproars going on within the heart.

Many make themselves a bed, not in their heart but in their flesh, for in their heart they have no rest because of a bad conscience. They stretch out their lower nature – that is, *in the desires of the flesh* - and there take their rest as in a bed. To such as these the Apostle says: *Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead and Christ will shine upon you*. But the blessed Mary took her rest, not in the flesh, but in the mind and in a good conscience. There she rested – and did not rest. She rested from all the cares of the world, from all the uproar of vices, from all the turmoil of empty thoughts. And yet she did not rest, because she yearned and sighed and sought with moaning and tears him whom she loved. *In my bed night after night I sought him whom my soul loves*.

Wednesday, August 16

SOME ADVICE FOR CISTERCIAN NOVICES

From William of St Thierry in *The Golden Epistle*

At fixed hours, time should be given to certain definite reading. For haphazard reading, constantly varied and is if lighted upon by chance does not edify but makes the mind unstable; taken into the memory lightly, it goes out from it even more lightly. But you should concentrate on certain authors and let your mind grow accustomed to them.

The Scriptures need to be read and understood in the same spirit in which they were written. You will never enter into Paul's meaning until by constant application to reading him and by giving yourself to constant meditation you have imbibed his spirit. You will never understand David until by experience you have made the very sentiments of the psalms your own. And that applies to all Scripture. There is the same gulf between attentive study and mere reading as there is between friendship and acquaintance with a passing guest, between boon companionship and chance meeting.

Some part of your daily reading should also each day be committed to memory, taken in as it were into the stomach, to be more carefully digested and brought up again for frequent rumination; something in keeping with your vocation and helpful to concentration, something that will take hold of the mind and save it from distraction.

The reading should also stimulate the feelings and give rise to prayer, which should interrupt your reading: an interruption which should not hamper the reading as restore to it a mind ever more purified for understanding.

For reading serves the purpose of the intention with which it is done. If the reader truly seeks God in his reading, everything that he reads tends to promote that end, making the mind surrender in the course of the reading and bring all that is understood into Christ's service. But if the intention of the reader is directed elsewhere, it draws everything in its wake and nothing that it finds in Scripture is too holy or too religious not to be applied to its own perverseness or folly, through the pursuit of vainglory or a distortion on meaning or a wrong understanding. For all the Scriptures demand that the reader should approach them in the fear of the Lord. In that fear, first of all he should make his intention steadfast, and then from it should derive all his understanding and appreciation of what he reads and the proper ordering of it.

Thursday, August 17

POPE FRANCIS PREACHES ON TODAY'S GOSPEL

From Pope Francis' *Angelus* Message on September 13, 2020

In the parable in today's Gospel reading, that of the merciful King, we find this plea twice: *"Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything."* The first time it is pronounced by the servant who owes his master ten thousand talents, an enormous sum. Today it would be millions and millions of dollars. The second time it is repeated by another servant of the same master. He too is in debt, not towards his master, but towards the same servant who has that enormous debt. And his debt is very small, maybe like a week's wages.

The heart of the parable is the indulgence the master shows towards his servant with the bigger debt. The evangelist underlines that, "moved with compassion the master" — we should never forget this word of Jesus: "with compassion", Jesus always had compassion — *"moved with compassion the master let him go and forgave him the loan."* An enormous debt, therefore a huge remission! But that servant, immediately afterwards, shows himself to be pitiless towards his companion, who owed him a modest amount. He does not listen to him, he is extremely hostile against him and has him thrown in prison until his debt is paid back, that small debt. The master hears about this and, indignant, calls the wicked servant back and has him condemned: *"I forgave you a great deal and you are not capable of forgiving so little?"*

In the parable we find two different attitudes: God's — represented by the king who forgives a lot, because God always forgives — and that of the man. In the divine attitude justice is pervaded with mercy, whereas the human attitude is limited to justice. Jesus exhorts us to open ourselves with courage to the strength of forgiveness, because in life not everything can be resolved with justice. We know this. There is a need for that merciful love, which is also at the basis of the Lord's answer to Peter's question, which precedes the parable. Peter's question goes like this: *"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?"* And Jesus replies, *"I do not say to you, seven times but seventy times seven."* In the symbolic language of the Bible this means that we are called to forgive always.

How much suffering, how many wounds, how many wars could be avoided if forgiveness and mercy were the style of our life! Even in families, even in families. How many disunited families, who do not know how to forgive each other. How many brothers and sisters bear this resentment within. It is necessary to apply merciful love to all human relationships: between spouses, between parents and children, within our communities, in the Church and also in society and politics.

Today's parable helps us to grasp fully the meaning of that phrase we recite in the Lord's Prayer: *"And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."* These words contain a decisive truth. We cannot demand God's forgiveness for ourselves if we in turn do not grant forgiveness to our neighbor. It is a condition: think of your end, of God's forgiveness, and stop hating. Reject resentment, that bothersome fly that keeps coming back. If we do not strive to forgive and to love, we will not be forgiven and loved either.

Let us entrust ourselves to the maternal intercession of the Mother of God: May she help us to realize how much we are in debt to God, and to remember that always, so that our hearts may be open to mercy and goodness.

Friday, August 18

A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

From Marcel LeJeune of *Catholic Missionary Disciples*

The concept of having a personal relationship with Jesus sometimes sounds too “Protestant” to some Catholics. That simply isn’t true. We have been using the language long before our Protestant brothers and sisters were ever around and the universal Church has never lost touch with this language, even if some individuals or communities have. For example, here are some quotes from some of our most recent Popes and one from the Catechism and one from Vatican II:

“Let the risen Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk: you won’t be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don’t be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.” - Pope Francis

“Being a Christian means having a living relationship with the person of Jesus; it means putting on Christ, being conformed to him.” - Pope Francis

“It is necessary to awaken again in believers a full relationship with Christ, mankind’s only Savior.”
- Pope Saint John Paul II

“Christian faith is not only a matter of believing that certain things are true, but above all a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” - Pope Benedict XVI

“Only in this personal relationship with Christ, only in this encounter with the Risen One do we truly become Christians.” - Pope Benedict XVI

“This mystery (of faith), then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.”
– Catechism of the Catholic Church 2558

“This conversion must be taken as an initial one, yet sufficient to make a man realize that he has been snatched away from sin and led into the mystery of God’s love, who called him to enter into a personal relationship with Him in Christ. For, by the workings of divine grace, the new convert sets out on a spiritual journey, by means of which, already sharing through faith in the mystery of Christ’s Death and Resurrection, he passes from the old man to the new one, perfected in Christ.” - Decree on Missionary Activity, §13. Vatican II

A close, intimate, and personal relationship with Jesus doesn’t happen by accident. You must choose it and that choice must be intentional.

“Choose this day whom you will serve...as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.” - Joshua 24:15

“Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. We put no obstacle in any one’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry” - 2 Corinthians 6:2-3

Neither does it mean that it can be on your terms or without a community. So, let us build up a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus AND his Catholic Church!

Saturday, August 19

BLESSED GUERRIC OF IGNY

From a chapter talk of Abbot Robert Barnes of Holy Cross Abbey

On our Order's calendar, today is the memorial of Blessed Gueric of Igny, who is, perhaps, the most approachable of the Cistercian Fathers. Certainly, he was the most unobtrusive, doing what we all do in the monastic life. Blessed Gueric made no name for himself, being neither famous nor heroic. He was just faithful, a kindly, wise old man, who couldn't understand why the abbatial office was thrust upon him. He was very conscious of his limits, largely from old age, precluding his being an example of monastic observance to anyone. He was merely a replacement of the first Abbot of Igny who said, "I'm quitting", packed his bags and returned to his motherhouse, Clairvaux. His action was against St. Bernard's orders to him to stay put. Bernard had no choice but to find a substitute so he sent dependable old Gueric who obeyed Bernard's order.

Gueric published nothing. He had no pretensions. He knew that the monks were making copies of what he taught them in his Chapter conferences and sermons. He was also keenly aware of the General Chapter's strictures against publishing one's writings so, on his death bed, he ordered his monks to burn all his writings before his eyes. The monks burned a copy of his sermons before him, prudently obeying the letter of his command while wisely disobeying him. They had kept from him other copies of his teaching. They knew what a goldmine they had, teaching both common sense and deeply spiritual. Except for their disobedience we probably wouldn't have known Gueric's name; he'd just be another forgotten entry in a chronicle like hundreds of other Cistercian Abbots in the Twelfth Century alone.

Gueric is a monk we can claim as a model for ourselves, one with whom we can identify. Not a Bernard or an Aelred, both heroic souls, but a monk who obeyed what he was told to do and who did it faithfully and unselfconsciously; a good man and a wise Abbot, an encouragement to us all. Blessed Gueric, indeed!