

Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

Eighteenth Week in Ordinary Time

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Sunday, August 6

ST AUGUSTINE'S COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S GOSPEL

From St Augustine – Sermon 78

The Lord Jesus shone like the sun; his garments became as white as snow; and Moses and Elijah were conversing with him. Peter saw this and, taking a human point of view as human beings will, said: *Lord, it is good for us to be here*. He had grown weary of the crowd, he had found solitude on the mountain; there he had Christ as the good of his soul. Why then should he go back down to toil and pain, when here he had a holy love of God and therefore a holy way of life? He wanted this happiness for himself so he continued: *If you are willing, let us set up three tents here: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah*. The Lord gave no reply to this suggestion, yet Peter was answered. For as he was speaking a bright cloud came and overshadowed them. Peter was asking for three tents: the heavenly answer showed us that what the human mind sought to divide is in fact one. The word of God is Christ, the word of God is the law, the word of God is in the prophets. Why then, Peter, do you seek to divide? You ought rather to combine. You ask for three: understand that the three are one.

As the cloud overshadowed them and became as it were a single tent for them, a voice was heard from the cloud saying: *This is my beloved Son*. Moses was there and Elijah was there, but the voice did not say: These are my beloved sons. For it is one thing to be the only Son, another to be adopted children. He of whom the law and the prophets had boasted was being singled out. *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; listen to him*. You heard him in the prophets, you heard him in the law; indeed, where have you not heard him? On hearing these words they fell to the ground.

We are already being shown here that the kingdom of God is to be found in the Church. The Lord is here, the law and the prophets are here; but the Lord is here as Lord, while the law is present in the person of Moses and the prophecy in the person of Elijah, both of whom are here as servants, as subordinates. They are here as vessels, he as the fountain. Moses and the prophets spoke and wrote; but they were being filled from him when they poured out their message.

The Lord put out his hand and raised up the prostrate men. Then *they saw no one but only Jesus*. The prostration of the disciples signified that we die; for to humans it is said: *You are of the earth, and to the earth you shall return*. Then, when the Lord raised them up he signified the resurrection. After the resurrection will you have any need of the law? Any need of prophecy? Therefore Elijah is no longer to be seen, Moses is no longer to be seen. What is left to you? *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*. The Word is left to you so that God may be all in all.

Go down, Peter. You longed to take your rest on the mountain, but now the Lord tells you: Go down to work in the world, to serve in the world, to be condemned and crucified in the world. Life came down to be slain; Bread came down to suffer hunger, the Way came down to endure weariness on his journey; the Fountain came down to experience thirst. Do you refuse to work and to suffer? Do not seek your own interests. Practice charity; preach the truth. Then you will attain immortality and find rest.

Monday, August 7

THE MIRACLE OF THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES

From Pope Francis – General Audience on August 17, 2016

Today we wish to reflect upon the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. At the beginning of the narrative given by Matthew, Jesus has just received word of the death of John the Baptist, and he crosses the lake by boat in search of a “lonely place apart.” The people understand, however, and precede him on foot and thus, “as he went ashore he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick.” That’s how Jesus is: always compassionate, always thinking of others. The determination of the people — who fear being left alone, as if abandoned — is striking. John the Baptist, the charismatic prophet, is dead; [the crowd] trusts in Jesus, about whom John had said: “he who is coming after me is mightier than I.” Thus the crowd follows him everywhere, to listen to him and to bring him the sick. And seeing this, Jesus is moved. Jesus is not cold; he does not have a cold heart. Jesus is capable of being moved. On the one hand, he feels a bond with this crowd and does not want them to leave; on the other, he needs a moment of solitude, of prayer, with the Father. Often he spends the night praying to his Father.

Thus, that day too, the Master attends to the people. His compassion is not a vague sentiment; instead he shows all the strength of his will to be close to us and to save us. Jesus loves us so much and wants to be close to us.

As evening falls, Jesus is concerned about feeding all those tired and hungry people, and looks after those who follow him. He wants his disciples to be involved in this. Indeed he says to them: “you give them something to eat.” He shows them that the few loaves and fish that they have, by the power of faith and of prayer, can be shared with all of those people. Jesus works a miracle, but it is the miracle of faith, of prayer, created by compassion and love. Thus, Jesus “broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.” The Lord meets the needs of mankind, but wants to render each one of us a concrete participant in his compassion.

Now let us pause on this, Jesus’ gesture of blessing: “taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves.” As you see, they are the same signs that Jesus performed at the Last Supper; and they are also the same gestures that each priest performs when he celebrates the Holy Eucharist. The Christian community is born and reborn continually from this Eucharistic communion. Living communion with Christ is therefore anything but being passive and detached from daily life; on the contrary, it includes us more and more in the relationship with the men and women of our time, in order to offer them the concrete sign of mercy and of the attention of Christ. While we are nourished by Christ, the Eucharist which we celebrate transforms us too, step by step, into the Body of Christ and spiritual food for our brothers and sisters. Jesus wants to reach everyone, in order to bring God’s love to all. For this reason he makes every believer a servant of mercy. Jesus sees the crowd, feels compassion for them and multiplies the loaves; thus he does the same with the Eucharist. We believers who receive this Eucharistic bread are spurred by Jesus to take this service to others, with his same compassion. This is the way.

The narrative of the multiplication of the loaves and fish ends with the verification that everyone is satisfied and with the collection of the leftover pieces.

When Jesus, with his compassion and his love, gives us a grace, forgives us our sins, embraces us, loves us; he does nothing halfway but completely. As it happens here: all are satisfied. Jesus fills our heart and our life with his love, with his forgiveness, with his compassion. Thus, Jesus allows his disciples to carry out his command. In this way they know the path to follow: to feed the people and keep them united; that is, to be at the service of life and of communion.

Tuesday, August 8

ST DOMINIC: A MAN OF PRAYER

From Pope Benedict's General Audience on August 8, 2012

St Dominic was a man of prayer. In love with God, he had no other aspiration than the salvation of souls, especially those who had fallen into the net of the heresies of his time; a follower of Christ, he radically embodied the three evangelical counsels by combining the witness of a life of poverty with the proclamation of the Word. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance he made headway on the path of Christian perfection.

Blessed Jordan of Saxony, St Dominic's successor as head of the Order of Preachers, wrote: "During the day, no one was friendlier than he... conversely, at night no one watched in prayer more diligently than he. He dedicated the day to his neighbor, but gave the night to God." In St Dominic we can see an example of harmonious integration between contemplation of the divine mysteries and apostolic work. According to people close to him, "he always spoke with God and of God".

There are nine ways to pray, according to St Dominic, and each one — always before Jesus Crucified — expresses a deeply penetrating physical and spiritual approach that fosters recollection and zeal. The first seven ways follow an ascending order, like the steps on a path, toward intimate communion with God, with the Trinity: St Dominic prayed standing bowed to express humility, lying prostrate on the ground to ask forgiveness for his sins, kneeling in penance to share in the Lord's suffering, his arms wide open, gazing at the Crucifix to contemplate Supreme Love, looking heavenwards, feeling drawn to God's world.

Thus there are three positions: standing, kneeling, lying prostrate on the ground; but with the gaze ever directed to our Crucified Lord. However the last two positions, on which I would like to reflect briefly, correspond to two of the Saint's customary devotional practices. First, personal meditation, in which prayer acquires an even more intimate, fervent and soothing dimension. After reciting the Liturgy of the Hours and after celebrating Mass, St Dominic prolonged his conversation with God without setting any time limit. Sitting quietly, he would pause in recollection in an inner attitude of listening, while reading a book or gazing at the Crucifix. He experienced these moments of closeness to God so intensely that his reactions of joy or of tears were outwardly visible. Witnesses recounted that at times he entered a kind of ecstasy with his face transfigured, but that immediately afterwards he would humbly resume his daily work, recharged by the power that comes from on High.

Then came his prayers while travelling from one convent to another. He would recite Lauds, Midday Prayer and Vespers with his companions, and, passing through the valleys and across the hills he would contemplate the beauty of creation. A hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God for his many gifts would well up from his heart, and above all for the greatest wonder: the redemptive work of Christ.

Dear friends, St Dominic reminds us that prayer, personal contact with God is at the root of the witness to faith which every Christian must bear at home, at work, in social commitments and even in moments of relaxation; only this real relationship with God gives us the strength to live through every event with intensity, especially the moments of greatest anguish. This Saint also reminds us of the importance of physical positions in our prayer. Kneeling, standing before the Lord, fixing our gaze on the Crucifix, silent recollection — these are not of secondary importance but help us to put our whole selves inwardly in touch with God. I would like to recall once again the need, for our spiritual life, to find time everyday for quiet prayer; we must make this time for ourselves, especially during the holidays, to have a little time to talk with God. It will also be a way to help those who are close to us enter into the radiant light of God's presence which brings the peace and love we all need.

Wednesday, August 9

ST TERESA BENEDICTA OF THE CROSS

From the *Catholic News Agency*

On August 9 the Catholic Church remembers St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, also known as St. Edith Stein. St. Teresa converted from Judaism to Catholicism in the course of her work as a philosopher, and later entered the Carmelite Order. She died in the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz in 1942.

Edith Stein was born on October 12, 1891. Edith's father died when she was just two years old, and she gave up the practice of her Jewish faith as an adolescent.

As a young woman with profound intellectual gifts, Edith gravitated toward the study of philosophy and became a pupil of the renowned professor Edmund Husserl in 1913. Through her studies, the non-religious Edith met several Christians whose intellectual and spiritual lives she admired.

After earning her degree with the highest honors from Gottingen University in 1915, she served as a nurse in an Austrian field hospital during World War I. She returned to academic work in 1916, earning her doctorate after writing a highly-regarded thesis on the phenomenon of empathy. She remained interested in the idea of religious commitment, but had not yet made such a commitment herself.

In 1921, while visiting friends, Edith spent an entire night reading the autobiography of the 16th century Carmelite nun St. Teresa of Avila. "When I had finished the book," she later recalled, "I said to myself: This is the truth." She was baptized into the Catholic Church on the first day of January 1922.

Edith intended to join the Carmelites immediately after her conversion, but would ultimately have to wait another 11 years before taking this step. Instead, she taught at a Dominican school, and gave numerous public lectures on women's issues. She spent 1931 writing a study of St. Thomas Aquinas, and took a university teaching position in 1932.

In 1933, the rise of Nazism, combined with Edith's Jewish ethnicity, put an end to her teaching career. After a painful parting with her mother, who did not understand her Christian conversion, she entered a Carmelite convent in 1934, taking the name "Teresa Benedicta of the Cross" as a symbol of her acceptance of suffering.

She saw it as her vocation "to intercede with God for everyone," but she prayed especially for the Jews of Germany whose tragic fate was becoming clear.

"I ask the Lord to accept my life and my death," she wrote in 1939, "so that the Lord will be accepted by his people and that his kingdom may come in glory, for the salvation of Germany and the peace of the world."

After completing her final work, a study of St. John of the Cross entitled "The Science of the Cross," Teresa Benedicta was arrested along with her sister Rosa (who had also become a Catholic), and the members of her religious community, on August 7, 1942. The arrests came in retaliation against a protest letter by the Dutch Bishops, decrying the Nazi treatment of Jews.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross died in the concentration camp at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942. Pope John Paul II canonized her in 1998, and proclaimed her a co-patroness of Europe the next year.

Thursday, August 10

ST AUGUSTINE PREACHES ON THE FEAST OF ST LAWRENCE

From St Augustine – Sermon 304

The Roman Church commends this day to us as the blessed Lawrence's day of triumph, on which he trod down the world as it roared and raged against him; spurned it as it coaxed and wheedled him; and in each case, conquered the devil as he persecuted him.

For in that Church, you see, as you have regularly been told, he performed the office of deacon; it was there that he administered the sacred chalice of Christ's blood; there that he shed his own blood for the name of Christ.

The blessed apostle John clearly explained the mystery of the Lord's supper when he said *Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so we too ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*. St Lawrence understood this, my brethren, and he did it; and he undoubtedly prepared things similar to what he received at that table. He loved Christ in his life, he imitated him in his death.

And we too, brethren, if we truly love him, let us imitate him. After all, we shall not be able to give a better proof of love than by imitating his example; for *Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we might follow in his footsteps*.

In this sentence the apostle Peter appears to have seen that Christ suffered only for those who follow in his footsteps, and that Christ's passion profits none but those who follow in his footsteps. The holy martyrs followed him, to the shedding of their blood, to the similarity of their sufferings. The martyrs followed, but they were not the only ones. It is not the case, I mean to say, that after they crossed, the bridge was cut; or that after they had drunk, the fountain dried up.

The garden of the Lord, brethren, includes – yes, it truly includes – includes not only the roses of martyrs but also the lilies of virgins, and the ivy of married people, and the violets of widows. There is absolutely no kind of human beings, my dearly beloved, who need to despair of their vocation; Christ suffered for all. It was very truly written about him: who wishes all men to be saved, and to come to the acknowledgement of the truth.

So let us understand how Christians ought to follow Christ, short of the shedding of blood, short of the danger of suffering death. The Apostle says, speaking of the *Lord Christ, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal to God*.

What incomparable greatness! But he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men, and found in condition as a man. What unequaled humility!

Christ humbled himself: you have something, Christian, to latch on to. *Christ became obedient*. Why do you behave proudly? After running the course of these humiliations and laying death low, Christ ascended into heaven: let us follow him there. Let us listen to the Apostle telling us, *If you have risen with Christ, savor the things that are above is, seated at God's right hand*.

Friday, August 11

ST CLARE OF ASSISI

From My Catholic Life

Clare Offreduccio, born to a noble family in the Italian town of Assisi, was the eldest of three daughters. Raised in a palace in Assisi and a castle on the nearby slope of Mount Subasio, the girls were nurtured in their faith by their devout Catholic parents.

When Clare was twelve, her parents intended to arrange a marriage for her with a wealthy nobleman. However, Clare expressed her desire to wait until she turned eighteen, to which her parents agreed.

As a teenager, Clare grew to admire a twenty-four-year-old man named Francis, who had recently undergone an intense conversion. After renouncing his family inheritance and receiving papal approval, Francis and a small group of followers adopted a radical lifestyle, marked by poverty, prayer, penance, and itinerant preaching.

Around 1211 or 1212, when Clare was nearing her eighteenth birthday, she attended a Lenten mission at the church of San Giorgio in Assisi, preached by Brother Francis. The mission resonated deeply with Clare, and she felt God calling her to join Francis and his brothers by forming a women's branch of their new order. Aware that her family would not approve of her decision, Clare spoke to Brother Francis in secret.

That night, Clare arrived at the chapel, dressed as a bride ready to wed her spouse. Clare surrendered her noble attire for a coarse habit, allowed Brother Francis to cut her long hair, and covered her head with a veil. Francis then arranged for her to stay at a nearby Benedictine convent.

Upon discovering Clare's decision, her family tried to convince her to return home. Clare refused. When they attempted to force her, she resisted, clung to the altar, and showed them her cut hair. Realizing they no longer held authority over her, her family reluctantly backed down.

For her safety and peace of mind, Clare was moved to another monastery a few days later, and then to another. To her surprise, her sister Caterina joined her a few weeks later and was accepted into the newly-formed order and was given the religious name Agnes.

In time, even their other sister and mother joined Clare and Agnes at the small house that Brother Francis had built for them next to the church of San Damiano. Under the rule for their new life given by Brother Francis, they became known as the Poor Ladies of San Damiano. Only after Clare's death did they become known as the Poor Clares.

The Poor Ladies of San Damiano led a life of extreme poverty, manual labor, and almost complete silence under the rule of Brother Francis, which they strictly followed for the first few years. Unlike the friars, the Poor Ladies remained cloistered, instead of traveling and preaching. This newly formed order, like the Franciscan friars, was groundbreaking in its vocation, particularly its strict rule of poverty.

Mother Clare spent most of her life battling bishops, cardinals, and even popes who wished her order to align more with mainstream Benedictine nuns. After many years of battling, Mother Clare wrote a rule for her sisters and received approval of that rule from Pope Innocent IV, mere days before her death in 1256 at the age of fifty-nine. Despite her hidden life, Saint Clare's holiness was widely known, so much so that the pope came to Assisi to celebrate her funeral. She was canonized just two years later.

Saturday, August 12

MARY, A SIGN OF SURE HOPE

From the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* of Pope John Paul II

The Letter to the Ephesians, speaking of the "glory of grace" that "God, the Father...has bestowed on us in his beloved Son," adds: "In him we have redemption through his blood." According to the belief formulated in solemn documents of the Church, this "glory of grace" is manifested in the Mother of God through the fact that she has been "redeemed in a more sublime manner." By virtue of the richness of the grace of the beloved Son, by reason of the redemptive merits of him who willed to become her Son, Mary was preserved from the inheritance of original sin. In this way, from the first moment of her conception- which is to say of her existence-she belonged to Christ, sharing in the salvific and sanctifying grace and in that love which has its beginning in the "Beloved," the Son of the Eternal Father, who through the Incarnation became her own Son. Consequently, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the order of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, Mary receives life from him to whom she herself, in the order of earthly generation, gave life as a mother. The liturgy does not hesitate to call her "mother of her Creator" and to hail her with the words which Dante Alighieri places on the lips of St. Bernard: "daughter of your Son." And since Mary receives this "new life" with a fullness corresponding to the Son's love for the Mother, and thus corresponding to the dignity of the divine motherhood, the angel at the Annunciation calls her "full of grace."

In the salvific design of the Most Holy Trinity, the mystery of the Incarnation constitutes the superabundant fulfillment of the promise made by God to man after original sin, after that first sin whose effects oppress the whole earthly history of man. And so, there comes into the world a Son, "the seed of the woman" who will crush the evil of sin in its very origins: "he will crush the head of the serpent." As we see from the words of the Protogospel, the victory of the woman's Son will not take place without a hard struggle, a struggle that is to extend through the whole of human history. The "enmity," foretold at the beginning, is confirmed in the Apocalypse (the book of the final events of the Church and the world), in which there recurs the sign of the "woman," this time "clothed with the sun."

Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word, is placed at the very center of that enmity, that struggle which accompanies the history of humanity on earth and the history of salvation itself. In this central place, she who belongs to the "weak and poor of the Lord" bears in herself, like no other member of the human race, that "glory of grace" which the Father "has bestowed on us in his beloved Son," and this grace determines the extraordinary greatness and beauty of her whole being. Mary thus remains before God, and also before the whole of humanity, as the unchangeable and inviolable sign of God's election, spoken of in Paul's letter: "in Christ...he chose us...before the foundation of the world,...he destined us...to be his sons." This election is more powerful than any experience of evil and sin, than all that "enmity" which marks the history of man. In this history Mary remains a sign of sure hope.