

# Twenty-Second Week in Ordinary Time

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Sunday, September 3

## **COMMENTARY ON TODAY'S GOSPEL FROM ST AUGUSTINE**

### **From St Augustine Sermon 96: 1-4**

*If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and come after me.*

Our Lord's command seems hard and heavy, that anyone who wants to follow him must renounce himself. But no command is hard and heavy when it comes from one who helps to carry it out. The other saying of his is true: *My yoke is easy and my burden light*. Whatever is hard in his commands is made easy by love.

We know what great things love can accomplish, even though it is often base and sensual. We know what hardships people have endured, what intolerable indignities they have borne to attain the object of their love. What we love indicates the sort of people we are, and therefore making a decision about this should be our one concern in choosing a way of life. Why be surprised if people who set their hearts on Christ and want to follow him renounce themselves out of love? If we lose ourselves through self-love we must surely find ourselves through self-renunciation.

Who would not wish to follow Christ to supreme happiness, perfect peace, and lasting security? We shall do well to follow him there, but we need to know the way. The Lord Jesus had not yet risen from the dead when he gave this invitation. His passion was still before him; he had still to endure the cross, to face outrages, reproaches, scourging; to be pierced by thorns, wounded, insulted, taunted, and put to death. The road seems rough, you draw back, you do not want to follow Christ. Follow him just the same. The road we made for ourselves is rough, but Christ has leveled it by passing over it himself.

Who does not desire to be exalted? Everyone enjoys a high position. But self-abasement is the step that leads to it. Why take strides that are too big for you – do you want to fall instead of going up? Begin with this step and you will find yourself climbing. The two disciples who said: *Lord, command that one of us shall sit at your right hand in your kingdom and the other at your left* had no wish to think about this step of self-abasement. They wanted to reach the top without noticing the reply: *Can you drink the cup that I am to drink?* You who aim at the highest exaltation, can you drink the cup of humiliation? He did not simply give the general command: *Let him renounce himself and follow me* but added: *Let him take up his cross and follow me*.

What does it mean to take up one's cross? It means bearing whatever is unpleasant – that is following me. Once you begin to follow me by conforming your life to my commandments, you will find many to contradict you, forbid you, or dissuade you, and some of these will be people calling themselves followers of Christ. Therefore, if you meet with threats, flattery, or opposition, let this be your cross; pick it up and carry it – do not collapse under it. These words of our Lord are like an exhortation to endure martyrdom. If you are persecuted you ought, surely, to make light of any suffering for the sake of Christ.

*Monday, September 4*

## **THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON HUMAN LABOR From Msgr. Charles Pope of the Archdiocese of Washington**

Thanks be to God for human labor; we help each other to survive!

As today is Labor Day in the United States, it seems good to cite some teachings about human labor from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC).

1. Human labor precedes Original Sin and hence is not an imposition due to sin but rather part of our original dignity.

God places Man in the garden. There he lives “to till it and keep it.” Work is not yet a burden, but rather the collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation (CCC #378).

2. Human work is a duty and prolongs the work of creation.

Human work proceeds directly from persons created in the image of God and called to prolong the work of creation by subduing the earth, both with and for one another. Hence work is a duty: “If anyone will not work, let him not eat.” Work honors the Creator’s gifts and the talents received from him (CCC #2427).

3. Work can be sanctifying and redemptive.

Work can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ (CCC #2427).

4. Work is an acceptable sacrifice to God.

The laity, dedicated as they are to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and prepared so that even richer fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit—indeed even the hardships of life if patiently borne—all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord (CCC # 901).

5. To work is to participate in the common good.

Participation in the common good is achieved first of all by taking charge of the areas for which one assumes personal responsibility: by the care taken for the education of his family, by conscientious work, and so forth, man participates in the good of others and of society (CCC # 1914).

Tuesday, September 5

## **GOD DOES SPEAK TO US**

### **From Catherine Doherty in *Story of My Soul***

God directs our lives. He directs them through the Ten Commandments, and especially, through his law of love: we are to love him with our whole heart, mind, and soul, and our neighbor as ourselves.

*By this love you have for one another, He said, everyone will know that you are my disciples.* He asks us to love our enemies and to lay down our lives for each other. If we do that, we are certainly being directed by God.

A visiting bishop once said, "I've heard that Catherine has had many difficulties, but there is one thing she stands for unquestionably. She is obedient to the magisterium of the Church."

That is absolutely true, I have been accused of every other sin in the book, but no one has ever accused me of disobeying the Church.

I cannot differentiate between prayer and obedience. How can I pray to God, who was obedient unto death, if I myself act contrary to obedience? Christ, my brother, came to do the will of my Father, and I must do likewise. I must do so through pain, rejection, and misunderstanding.

Today God is raising up many people who honestly and sincerely desire to pray. But how can God listen if a person prays to do his own will?

We tend to pray with great intensity for things we want, but do we think of praying for what God wants?

Usually, when our desire for something cools off, so does our prayer. It is important, therefore, that when we pray, we move with the current of God's will, and not against it. Thus is true even when we are praying for someone we love tremendously.

When my husband, Eddie, was in a car accident and I was on my way to be with him, I prayed fervently that he might be well. But in my mind, every second, I forced myself to add, "If it be thy will."

If God wanted to take Eddie home, for whatever reason, I had to be willing to accept it. I was ready to do God's will and to move in its stream.

The greatest act of a Christian is to do the will of God. How do I know his will? How do I know which ideas are mine and which belong to God? To know his will, I must learn how to listen to him. This can happen only through prayer and under the guidance of a spiritual director.

Try to think of listening as an essential part of prayer. You pray, and you hear the voice of God speaking to you gently, not out loud, but deep in your heart. If you listen carefully, you will begin to know his will for you. God wants us to do his will, and he gives himself to us continually, that we might follow in his footsteps.

You can relate to God as you would relate to a friend. You can talk to him in order to find out what he thinks. You want to do as he suggests. Listen to him then, that you may know. God speaks quietly, very quietly, but he does speak, and he will make known to you what he wants you to do.

You will do his will, and it will be beautiful. To do what God wants you to do is to be truly happy.

Sometimes his will may bring pain, but it will also bring you joy. Everything comes from God, and everything returns to him in our hearts. To give ourselves wholly to God, in prayer, and in action, is the life of a Christian, and in it we discover joy so immense that our ordinary, everyday life is completely transformed. We find ourselves living in a new reality.

Listen, that you might hear and understand what it is that God wants of you. Listen to him quietly and follow him. You will be filled with joy. You will also be filled with pain, but that makes no difference, for *your sorrow will turn to joy.*

Wednesday, September 6

## **MEMENTO MORI – “REMEMBER, YOU MUST DIE”** **From the Catholic News Agency**

According to legend, the phrase *memento mori* may have originated with the Roman Empire. Allegedly, when victorious Roman generals returned from battle, in the midst of their festivities, a slave or another low-ranking citizen would follow them around and whisper *memento mori*, or some other reminder that their earthly glory was temporary.

The phrase and the practice were then incorporated into medieval Christianity — death was especially poignant as the plague spread throughout Europe and Asia, killing millions of people within the span of just a few years.

One of the most common myths surrounding *memento mori* is that the phrase is used by monks, particularly the famously ascetic Trappist monks, as a form of greeting among brothers.

Father Timothy Scott, a Trappist priest, said that this myth originated with a now obsolete order of French monks called The Order of the Hermits of Saint Paul, who came to be known as the “Brothers of the Dead.”

According to *La Sombre Trappe*, by Father M. Anselme Dimier, the Order of the Hermits of Saint Paul “pushed its tastes for the macabre to the extreme,” wearing scapulars with skulls and crossbones, and kissing a skull at the foot of the cross before each meal.

The words *Memento Mori* were found on the seal of the order alongside a skull and crossbones, and skulls were prominently displayed in most parts of the monastery, including in each brother’s cell.

Trappists are a branch of Cistercian monks, a reformed branch of the Benedictines, who desired to live the Rule of St. Benedict more authentically.

But while Trappist brothers don’t use *memento mori* as a greeting, other reminders of death have been present in the Trappist order, particularly in older monasteries, Father Scott said.

In his book *A Time to Keep Silence*, Patrick Leigh Fermor recalls these symbols of death, particularly present in Trappist monasteries during the 18th and 19th century.

“Symbols of death and dissolution confronted the eye at every turn, and in the refectory the beckoning torso of a painted skeleton, equipped with an hourglass and a scythe, leant, with the terrifying archness of a forgotten guest, across the coping of a wall on which were inscribed the words: ‘Tonight perhaps?’”

Father Scott added that he has heard of several other monasteries with various *memento mori* traditions, such as the monastery of la Val Sainte in Switzerland, which kept a white-wood cross and a skull in the middle of the refectory, or dining hall. Another Trappist monastery in France had the words *Hodie mihi, cras tibi* (Today I die, tomorrow it will be you) written above the door leading to the cemetery.

As we remember that we must die, let us also remember to pray for those who have died.

Thursday, September 7

## ST AUGUSTINE COMMENTS ON TODAY'S GOSPEL From St Augustine of Hippo – Sermon 43

While he was on the mountain with Christ the Lord in company with the two other disciples James and John, the blessed apostle Peter heard a voice from heaven saying: *This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.* The apostle remembered this and made it known in his letter. *We heard a voice coming from heaven, he said, when we were with him on the holy mountain; and he added: so we have confirmation of what was prophesied. A voice came from heaven, and prophecy was confirmed.*

How great was Christ's courtesy! This Peter who spoke these words was once a fisherman, and in our day a public speaker deserves high praise if he is able to converse with a fisherman! Addressing the first Christian the apostle Paul says: *Brothers and sisters, remember what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise according to human standards; not many of you were influential or of noble birth. But God chose what the world regards as weak in order to disconcert the strong; God chose what the world regards as foolish in order to abash the wise; God chose what the world regards as common and contemptible, of no account whatever, in order to overthrow the existing order.*

If Christ had first chosen a man skilled in public speaking, such a man might well have said: "I have been chosen on account of my eloquence." If he had chosen a senator, the senator might have said, "I have been chosen because of my rank." If his first choice had been an emperor, the emperor might have said: "I have been chosen for the sake of the power I have at my disposal." Let these worthies keep quiet and defer to others; let them hold their peace for a while. I am not saying they should be passed over or despised; I am simply asking all those who can find any grounds for pride in what they are give way to others just a little.

Christ says: Give me this fisherman, this man without education or experience, this man to whom no senator would deign to speak, not even if he were buying fish. Yes, give me him; once I have taken possession of him, it will be obvious that it is I who am at work in him. Although I mean to include senators, orators, and emperors among my recruits, even when I have won over the senator I shall still be surer of the fisherman. The senator can always take pride in what he is; so can the orator and the emperor, but the fisherman can glory in nothing but Christ alone. Any of these other men may come and take lessons from me in the importance of humility for salvation, but let the fisherman come first. He is the best person to win over an emperor.

Remember this fisherman, then, this holy, just, good, Christ-filled fisherman. In his nets cast throughout the world he has the task of catching this nation as well as all the others. So remember that claim of his: *We have confirmation of what was prophesied.*

*Friday, September 8*

## **THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

**From Fr. Michael Van Sloun on *The Catholic Spirit* website**

September 8, the nativity or birth of Mary, is nine months after December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the daughter of St. Anne and St. Joachim. Mary belonged to the tribe of Judah and David's royal bloodline.

The story of Mary's birth is not recorded in the Bible anywhere, not in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew or Luke, nor anywhere else in the gospels or the New Testament. The legend is found in multiple non-canonical, non-scriptural, or apocryphal sources: the Gospel of James, also known as the Protoevangelium of James; the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew; and the writings of St. Jerome.

According to the legend, Joachim and Anne reached old age without a child, a devastating disappointment and embarrassment to each of them. Anne was barren, much like a number of other great heroines in the Bible who had miracle births: Sarah, Manoah's wife, Hannah, and Elizabeth. Both Joachim and Anne were devout Jews who prayed daily. On one occasion Anne was at home deep in prayer lamenting the fact that she was without child. Coincidentally, Joachim had gone to the desert to fast and pray for forty days and forty nights, and like his wife, was distraught because they had no children. An angel appeared to Joachim to announce that Anne would conceive. Joachim hastened home to share the good news with Anne, only to find her waiting for him at the city gate, eager to inform him that an angel had appeared to her with the same message. Shortly thereafter Anne conceived in her old age, for nothing is impossible for God, and nine months later gave birth to her daughter Mary, especially chosen by God to be the Mother of the Savior of the world.

The Mass prayers describe the magnificence of Mary's birth: the Entrance Antiphon states that from Mary "arose the sun of justice, Christ our God;" the Collect further explains that Mary's birth is "the dawning of salvation"; and the Prayer after Communion re-echoes that Mary's birth is "the hope and the daybreak of salvation." It is from Mary that Jesus took his flesh and human nature. The second antiphon from Morning Prayer says poetically: "When the most holy Virgin was born, the whole world was made radiant; blessed is the branch and blessed is the stem which bore such holy fruit." Mary's birth was the arrival of the Mother of God.

The birth of Mary is remembered at the Basilica of St. Anne in Jerusalem. It is located inside the Lion's Gate or St. Stephen's Gate, a short distance north of the Temple Mount, and next to the Pools of Bethesda. The place is traditionally regarded as the place where Saints Joachim and Anne had their home. Mary's birth is commemorated on the lower or basement level at her Birth Crypt. St. Anne's Basilica was built in 1140 AD during the Crusader Period over the site of two earlier churches, a small oratory built in the Third Century, and then a much larger church dedicated to Mary, built in 438 AD, which was destroyed by the Persians in 614.

*Saturday, September 9*

## **ST PETER CLAVER, WHO LIVED AS “A SLAVE TO THE SLAVES” From *Jesuits.org***

Born on June 26, 1580, in Catalonia, Spain, St. Peter Claver studied at the University of Barcelona and joined the Jesuits at age 20 in 1602. While studying philosophy at Majorca in 1605, Peter developed a friendship with Jesuit Brother Alphonsus Rodriguez. Brother Rodriguez, who spent his days doing menial work as a doorkeeper, encouraged Peter to become a missionary in the Spanish colonies in America.

In 1610, Peter voyaged from Spain to Cartagena, Colombia, where, after five years of further study, he was ordained a priest. Despite Pope Paul III's repeated condemnations of slavery during the previous century, European colonists continued capturing and enslaving Africans to work on plantations and in mines. The Society of Jesus itself enslaved persons in the Americas for centuries, including in Cartagena in St. Peter Claver's day. It is important not to overlook this deeply regretful chapter in Jesuit history as part of the context of St. Peter Claver's ministry. (A Jesuit Conference initiative called the Slavery, History, Memory, and Reconciliation project researches the Jesuits' history and legacy of slaveholding. It also connects with descendants of those people enslaved by the Jesuits to “address the persistent vestiges of Jesuit slaveholding that manifest in our schools, universities, and parishes.”)

Fr. Claver threw himself into his ministry, bringing aid to enslaved persons despite his own health problems and the language barrier between himself and the population he served. With the help of multi-lingual catechists, Fr. Claver boarded every slave ship that entered the harbor. He was able to work among the enslaved people, offering immediate relief with medicines, biscuits, brandy, tobacco and lemons. “We must speak to them with our hands,” he said, “before we try to speak to them with our lips.” Whenever he came upon a baby born during the voyage or a dying person, Fr. Claver would stop to baptize the baby immediately.

Throughout his work, Peter Claver survived on minimal amounts of food and sleep. His life of humility and penance led to miraculous occurrences — as when he healed the sick with the touch of his cloak or appeared surrounded by a supernatural light during his hospital visits.

In the last years of his life, St. Peter became sick with the plague and was too ill to leave his room. When he was anointed with the oil of the Sacrament of the Sick in 1654, Cartagenians crowded into his room to see him for the last time, treating it as a shrine.

He died on September 8, 1654, after having baptized and taught the faith to more than 300,000 enslaved persons during his four decades in Cartagena.

St. Peter Claver was beatified by Pius IX on July 16, 1850, and was canonized along with his friend St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, who had encouraged him to go to Colombia, on January 15, 1888, by Pope Leo XIII.