

THE TWENTY-FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

24-30 September 2023

Sun. **The Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Sept.24 **A LABORER IN THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD**
Angelus Message of Pope BENEDICT XVI on 21 September 2008

Mon **Monday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time**
25 **THE LIGHT IS NOT MEANT FOR THE FRIDGE**
From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis, 19 September 2016

Tues. **Memorial of Saints Cosmas and Damian**
26 **THE LIVING GENEROSITY OF STS. COSMAS AND DAMIAN**
From the Catholic Apostolate Center Website

Wed. **Memorial of St. Vincent de Paul**
27 **TEACHING THE ENTIRE GOSPEL MESSAGE**
A reflection developed from texts by St. Pope John XXIII

Thurs. **Thursday of the 25th Week in Ordinary Time**
28 **LIKE PEELING AN ONION**
From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis, 25 September 2014

Fri. **Feast of St. Michael & All the Angels**
29 **GLIMPSING THE RICHNESS OF GOD'S WORLD**
A reflection from a homily by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Sat. **Memorial of St. Jerome**
30 **BRINGING PEOPLE TO GOD'S WORD**
A reflection taken from Franciscan Media

Sunday

A LABORER IN THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD

Angelus Message of Pope BENEDICT XVI on 21 September 2008

You may remember that when I addressed the crowd in St Peter's Square on the day of my election, it came naturally to me to introduce myself as a laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. Well, in today's Gospel (cf. Mt 20: 1-16), Jesus recounted the very same parable of the owner of the vineyard who at different hours of the day hires laborers to work in it. And in the evening he gives them all the same wages, one denarius, provoking protests from those who began work early. That denarius clearly represents eternal life, a gift that God reserves for all. Indeed those who are considered the "last", if they accept, become the "first", whereas the "first" can risk becoming the "last". The first message of this parable is inherent in the very fact that the landowner does not tolerate, as it were, unemployment: he wants everyone to be employed in his vineyard. Actually, being called is already the first reward: to be able to work in the Lord's vineyard, to put oneself at his service, to collaborate in his work, is in itself a priceless recompense that repays every effort. Yet only those who love the Lord and his Kingdom understand this: those who instead work only for the pay will never realize the value of this inestimable treasure.

It is St Matthew who recounts this parable, an apostle and an evangelist, whose liturgical feast day we are celebrating on this very day. I like to emphasize that Matthew lived this experience in the first person (cf. Mt 9: 9). Indeed, before Jesus called him he worked as a tax collector and was therefore seen as a public sinner, excluded from "the Lord's vineyard". But everything changed when Jesus passed by his table, looked at him and said to him: "Follow me". Matthew rose and followed him. From a publican, he immediately became a disciple of Christ. From being "last" he found himself "first", thanks to God's logic, which - for our good fortune! - is different from the logic of the world. "My thoughts are not your thoughts", the Lord says, speaking through the mouth of Isaiah, "neither are your ways my ways" (Is 55: 8). St. Paul, for whom we are celebrating a special Jubilee Year, also experienced the joy of feeling called by the Lord to work in his vineyard. And what a lot of work he accomplished! Yet, as he himself confessed, it was God's grace which worked in him, that grace which from persecutor of the Church transformed him into an Apostle to the Gentiles, to the point of saying: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" However he immediately added: "If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell" (Phil 1: 21-22). Paul clearly understood that working for the Lord is already a reward on this earth.

The Virgin Mary, whom I had the joy of venerating in Lourdes a week ago, is the perfect branch of the Lord's vine. In her germinated the blessed fruit of divine love: Jesus, our Savior. May she help us to respond constantly and joyously to the Lord's call and to find our happiness in toiling for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Monday

THE LIGHT IS NOT MEANT FOR THE FRIDGE

From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis, 19 September 2016

If you do not want to be Christians in name only, you have to carry out your daily commitment to “preserve, and not hide” the light that was given to you at baptism. This is a commitment that takes place in “everyday” life.

Pope Francis began his reflection by focusing on ... the passage from the Gospel of Luke (8:16-18), which speaks precisely on the theme of the light, “of Jesus’ counsel not to cover the lamp”, and “to let the light shine and illuminate, that those who enter may see the light”. This advice is also reiterated in the Gospel acclamation of the evangelist Matthew (5:16): “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father”.

Firstly, it is important not to fall into misunderstanding, because typically, “in daily speech, we say: ‘But this is a luminous person; or this person is not luminous’”. Indeed, in the Gospel, “we do not speak about this human brightness. The light of the Lord is not sympathy only. It is something else”. In fact, “to cherish the light is to safeguard something that we have received as a gift and if we are luminous, we are luminous” in the sense “of having received the gift of light on the day of baptism”. It is precisely for this reason, he added, “that at the beginning, in the early centuries of the Church, and even still in some Eastern Churches, baptism is called ‘enlightenment’; and still to this day, “when we baptize a child, we give a candle, with light, as a sign: it is the light that is the gift of God”.

Now, this light that Jesus gives at baptism “is a true light”, a light “that comes from within, because it is the light of the Holy Spirit. It is not an artificial light, the light is not rigged. It is a mild, serene light, that does not go out”. For this reason, it cannot be “covered”. And “if you cover this light, you become lukewarm or simply Christian in name”.

Thus, one might ask, “Father, how can this light be hidden? How can one hide the light so that it does not enlighten, and why do men not see the light that comes from good works?” Pope Francis added that “everyone has the right to receive good, because we are all children of the Father who gives us good”. While on the contrary, “those who do not do good, when they are able to do so, are covering the light”, which “becomes dark”. In this respect, the Pope used a very concrete image: the light is not meant to be kept in the fridge, that is to say, it should not be preserved; “The good is today, and if you do not do it today, tomorrow it will not be there. Do not conceal the good for tomorrow”. And those who think with the logic of “go, pass by again, I will give it to you tomorrow”, are “heavily covering the light”.

Therefore, the Pope again urged that we listen to this advice concerning “everyday” life — “they are not unusual things” — and that we welcome the invitation to “be children of light, and not children of darkness”, and to “guard the light that was given to you as a gift on the day of Baptism”. In conclusion, the Pope invited “all of us who have received Baptism” to pray that the Holy Spirit “help us not to fall into these bad habits that cover the light, and that he help us to carry forward the light we received freely, that light of God that does so much good: the light of friendship, the light of meekness, the light of faith, the light of hope, the light of patience, the light of goodness”.

Tuesday

THE LIVING GENEROSITY OF STS. COSMAS AND DAMIAN **From the Catholic Apostolate Center Website**

Generosity is a virtue that can easily be motivated by pride—we do good things for others, secretly hoping to get accolades or some kind of reward for being so self-giving. But I think generosity is really about giving to others —material, spiritual, or emotional—because you know the other will benefit, even if there is no compensation for you in return, or if (like Cosmas and Damian) you refuse to take any.

Generosity is not only exemplified by a wealthy man donating money to charitable causes, nor only by going on mission trips to help those in poverty, nor is it demonstrated by showering poor children with gifts at Christmastide. We can cultivate the virtue of generosity in ourselves much closer to home and on a daily basis—just as St. Cosmas and St. Damian did. Generosity is lived out by a talented musician volunteering at his church to worship God in song, or by a mother who prepares and brings home-cooked meals to other families in her parish who have a new baby or have had a recent surgery. There is also spiritual and emotional generosity: being present and available to our siblings, children, parents, or friends as they struggle with transitions or discernment. When we engage in these acts of generosity, we serve Christ by serving others—even if it is not necessarily a sacrifice for us to do so. (Although I know for myself, the sacrifice that comes with being generous is striving to be selfless in my generosity and not to expect or desire reciprocation.) We are called to use anything that we have been given in order to glorify God.

And what about those—presumably poor—people that Sts. Cosmas and Damian healed and treated? Who knows what kinds of generosity they were able to offer to their benefactors as a result of their encounter with the twin saints? Maybe they were generous in their prayer lives and interceded for the physician brothers. Maybe they were inspired by the generosity and faith of the two saints and went on to assist others in their community. Even if we cannot always be materially generous to each other, giving of ourselves in any capacity can cause a ripple effect of generosity throughout our communities.

We can also learn to support and foster the generosity of others by thinking about how we respond when we are offered someone's generosity, whether we asked for it or whether it was volunteered to us. Personally, I am working on asking for help or accepting generosity with humility. I know that I am less likely to help someone if they repeatedly protest my efforts or insist that I am doing too much, and therefore I try not to protest or downplay the good work that someone does for me. I try to remind myself that by serving each other, we are ultimately serving Christ.

Wednesday

TEACHING THE ENTIRE GOSPEL MESSAGE

A reflection based on homilies by St. Pope John XXIII

It has been asserted that in this era of the triumph of science and technical skill, we are able to set up a civilization that leaves God out. But the truth is that scientific and technical progress themselves give rise to new human problems of worldwide dimensions that can only be resolved in the light of a sincere and active faith in God.

This situation calls for teaching the entire Gospel of Jesus Christ and not just in words but translated into concrete realities. This is a truth that St. Vincent de Paul saw clearly and dedicated his life to making incarnate in practical love for the poor and marginalized. Christian social teaching has as its objective justice and its motive power is love. We must draw attention to the need to educate all Christian believers, starting with children, about this fact and how it relates to effectively dealing with social problems.

Christian formation has to be integral. That means that it must extend to all the kinds of duties we have as responsible Christians and must help all such people feel bound to do something practical to carry out these duties. All have to feel an obligation to behave socially and economically according to the Gospel's teachings and precepts.

The passage from theory to practice often seems difficult. That is due to the selfishness which is so deeply rooted in today's culture. It is difficult for many to grasp clearly and precisely the objective requirements of justice that need to be realized in each individual case. Therefore, it isn't enough to bring people to consciousness of their duty to act in a Christian way in the social and economic fields of life; they must be helped to know how they can carry them out.

A free heart and a pure intention give birth to generous love, which is the core of every virtue and the strength behind every sacrifice. If you find you are eager to love God and love your neighbor then you know you have God dwelling within you. Follow charity. This is the most effective means to overcome the danger of distrust and indifference. This is a message that touches the hearts of all and will recall many to the Gospel of Christ.

The commandment to love in this way brings us face to face with the need not to steal, not to deprive people of their just wages, not to oppress the poor, not to cherish an immoderate appetite for wealth. This value forces us to confront the crucial problem for our entire world, both social and economic. There are many honest people, but the temptation to covet and even steal is everywhere. It must be overcome by charity, by love which seeks only the good of all.

St. Vincent de Paul made the primacy of charity more than obvious when he told his disciples that the service of the poor and needy came before even prayer. "*Offer the deed to God as your prayer*", is what he said. Charity enacted is the greatest prayer. It can bring us face-to-face with God. But that is what Heaven is. We begin now to live the life of heaven when we live a life of love like that of Jesus.

Thursday

LIKE PEELING AN ONION

From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis, 25 September 2014

Today, the Pope recalled, “so many Christians live for appearances”. And “their life seems like a soap bubble”, which is “pretty, it’s colorful, but it lasts for a second and then” it’s over. “Even when we see some funeral monuments”, he continued, “we think this is vanity, because the truth is a return to bare earth, as the Servant of God Paul VI said”. After all, “the bare earth is waiting for us, this is our final truth”. However, the Pope added, “In the meantime, do I boast or do I do something? Do I do good? Do I seek God? Do I pray?”. This is why one must aim for “things of substance”. Instead, “vanity is a liar, it’s fanciful, it deceives itself, it deceives the vain person: first, he pretends to be, but in the end, he believes to be what he says. He believes it, poor thing”.

And this is precisely what happened to Herod the Tetrarch, the Pope explained, referring to the passage in the day’s liturgy from the Gospel according to Luke (9:7-9): “When Jesus appeared, [Herod] was perplexed. In his imagination he thought: ‘But could this be John, whom I beheaded? Could it be another?’”. Herod’s reaction shows us that “vanity sows cruel unrest, it takes away peace”. Thus, vanity “is like those people who wear too much makeup and then are afraid to get rained on because all that makeup will wash off”. This is why “vanity does not give us peace: only the truth gives us peace”.

Therefore, Pope Francis advised, “Let us consider today Jesus’ counsel to build our life upon the rock. He is the rock. The only rock is Jesus!”. But “let us think about this proposal of the devil, of the demon, who also tempted Jesus with vanity in the desert”. The devil proposed, “Come with me, let’s go to the temple, let’s make a spectacle: throw yourself off and everyone will believe in you”. The devil truly served Jesus “vanity on a platter”.

For all these reasons, the Pope stated, vanity “is a very serious spiritual illness”. It is significant, he added, that “the Egyptian desert fathers said vanity is a temptation that we must fight against throughout all of life because it always returns to us to strip away the truth”. And “to explain this they used to say: it’s like an onion, you take it and begin to peel it. You shed a layer of vanity today, a bit of vanity tomorrow” and so it goes, “throughout all of life, peeling vanity to defeat it”. This way “in the end you are content: I shed vanity, I peeled the onion. But the odor stays on your hands”. Francis concluded the meditation by asking the Lord in prayer for “the grace to not be vain” but rather “to be true, with the truth of reality and of the Gospel”.

Friday

GLIMPING THE RICHNESS OF GOD'S WORLD

A reflection taken from a homily by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Angels, we believe, are inhabitants of a world invisible. The fact that they exist tells us how many wonders we cannot see though they have been created for our good and joy. Indeed, we are told much more about angels than about the faithful departed. Our departed rest from their labors but the angels are active among us all the time. The Letter to the Hebrews calls them "*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who are to be heirs of salvation*" (1:14) No Christian is so lowly as to lack an angel companion and helper. Those who live by faith and love are especially open to their comforting presence.

If we may judge from what is written in the Scriptures, should one of us catch a glimpse of an angel we would fall to the ground in fear and trembling. Yet they are our fellow servants and fellow-workers and companions. That they form part of an unseen realm is conveyed to us in the vision that the Patriarch Jacob saw when he was fleeing from the brother he had defrauded. "*He came upon a certain place and spent the night there. When the sun had set he took a rock and put it under his head as a pillow, and lay down and went to sleep.*" He didn't see anything special about the place, other than that it was a holy place of sacrifice for the peoples of the area and he would be safe there. It was not an especially comfortable place to sleep but there was no building. Night had come and he had to sleep where he could.

Yet how different was the truth than what ordinary eyes could see! More was there but it was revealed to him only in a dream. In that dream, he saw a world that is not usually seen but is real for all that. "*He dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth where he lay and its top reached heaven. And, behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on that ladder.*" (Gen. 28:12) Now he saw another world and saw how deeply involved our daily world is with this unseen one.

Persons often speak as if they doubted the existence of the world Jacob saw. Many treat it as something that will become real to them only after death. No! It exists now, even if we do not see it. It is among us and around us. Jacob was shown this in his dream. Angels were all about him, though he hadn't realized it. What Jacob saw in his dream Elijah and his servant saw by God's grace. The shepherds at the time of Christ's nativity not only saw it but also heard the voices of blessed spirits praising God. It is what angels do always throughout our nights and days.

When this is shown to us, either by faith or by some graced sight, we see that wonderful creatures are always going about on God's errands and doing whatever is God's good pleasure. The name 'angel' means "messenger". Like these blessed ones, we too have been called to be God's messengers, ministers of God's word and blessing. Faith tells us that. It tells us too that we should imitate the angels as best we can, as God gives us the opportunities. Today is one of those opportunities.

Saturday

BRINGING PEOPLE TO GOD'S WORD

A reflection taken from Franciscan Media

St. Jerome spent twenty years translating the Gospels and much of the Hebrew Scriptures into Latin. He began this work at the request of the Pope of Rome but continued it on his own. We are often told that he was irritable and not at all charitable but this reflects the attacks upon him by those who rejected his translation in favor of what they were familiar with. For instance, St. Augustine tells a story about the bishop of Tripoli who read Jerome's translation of the Book of Jonah in church; his people responded by rioting in the streets because it was too different from what they had been used to.

Jerome was merciless, and even abusive, to scholarly opponents but was a kind and gentle friend and one who gave much to the needy. He founded a school for poor children in Bethlehem when he lived there and gave shelter to refugees who had fled Rome after the Vandals sacked it. He spent a good deal of time in giving spiritual direction to monks and nuns who settled in Bethlehem.

Jerome translated only the New Testament Gospels and that part of the Old Testament which was written in Hebrew. He also used a "sense for sense" rather than a "word for word" method of translating. Biblical language in the Latin of his day wasn't open to accepting newly coined words for ideas still unfamiliar to Latin speakers and Jerome both borrowed words from Greek and invented new ones. Thus he avoided what today is called "literalism" in Biblical translation. The "Old Latin" which St. Jerome's translation was to replace had been translated from a pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament and he rejected this and worked directly from Hebrew texts. He also realized that a translator will convey his own interpretation of Scripture whether he wants to or not. Jerome is probably most famous for his commentaries on Scripture and by reading them one can learn about the perspective which guided his translating work. He preferred what came to be called the "allegorical method" of interpreting Scripture. This means one gives less attention to what is merely seen as historical fact and more attention to the application of Scripture to the task of living the Christian life. This is called a "spiritual" interpretation.

Jerome worked very hard to keep himself in harmony with the teachings of the Church's magisterium. This caused him to treat those who were not faithful to what was considered orthodox in his day as stupid. In fact, he seems to have very much enjoyed a good argument and it was customary in his time to argue "*ad hominem*" by speaking abusively of opponents. He tells us that he had a weakness for good rhetoric and style and had a hard time with Hebrew texts that weren't written with Latin or Greek rules of good style in mind. Our characteristics come from our upbringing or education and that ends up getting in the way of Christian charity. We can find it as difficult as Jerome did to put these aside when they get in the way of communicating God's love. That love is at the heart of all Scripture and so when we want to help others understand God's Word we have to step away from what seems natural or good to us and try to speak and act in ways that can attract others to God and an understanding of God's word. This is a struggle which everyone faces to a greater or lesser extent. Our personal struggle, then, is to daily put aside what we like and speak and act in ways that others can experience as loving and caring.