

TWENTY-FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

- Sun. **Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
Sept. 17 **THE PENANCE OF FORGIVING**
A Reflection by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, CFR
- Mon. **Monday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time**
18 **TWO SERVANTS**
From a homily by Pope Francis
- Tues. **Tuesday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time**
19 **THE POWER TO GIVE LIFE TO THE DEAD**
A reflection based on a text by Fr. Ladislav Boros
- Wed. **Memorial of Sts. Andrew Kim, Paul Chong, & others**
20 **THE PASSION FOR EVANGELIZATION:
THE APOSTOLIC ZEAL OF THE BELIEVER**
Catechesis on Evangelization No 14 by Pope Francis, 24 May 2023
- Thurs. **Feast of Saint Matthew, Apostle**
21 **PREFERRING NOTHING TO GOD**
A reflection taken from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman
- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. **Friday of the 24th Week in Ordinary Time**
22 **WOMEN AT THE SERVICE OF THE GOSPEL**
From the General Audience Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 14 Feb 2007
- Sat. **Memorial of St. Pius of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)**
23 **THE SPIRITUAL PATH OF PADRE PIO**
An anonymous reflection

Sunday

THE PENANCE OF FORGIVING

A Reflection by Fr. Benedict Groeschel, CFR

Perhaps the greatest penance of all is forgiveness. It depends on what it is we have to forgive. We have already spoken of the grace to be able to forgive, and have said that forgiveness is a process. First, we must decide to forgive and review the reasons for forgiving, beginning with the undeniable fact that God has forgiven us.

In the Gospel, Christ teaches us the necessity of continuing forgiveness. *“Peter came up and said to Jesus: Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said, I do not say to you seven times but seventy times seven”* (Mt.18:21f). Peter’s use of the word “brother” refers to people we know well and who may often offend us. A great deal of personal unhappiness comes from constant friction with loved ones. We feel others have taken advantage of us or been ungrateful or hypercritical.

As you make this meditation, think of a couple of people who are permanent sources of pain or annoyance in your life. Don’t be surprised if they are also people you love—such as a fellow struggler on the way to Christ. Don’t be surprised if some things they do are wrong or inconsiderate or even cruel.

But ask yourself why. Every human action has a cause. The cause may be confusion or a complete distortion or a relapse into childish-ness. That’s life, we say! If Jesus was mistreated by his fellows, if he was betrayed by an apostle and killed by the very people he came to save, don’t be surprised if you get hurt by someone you love.

It’s wise to pray for guidance, to think over carefully what you are adding to the conflict of what you did to create it in the past, or even how you can help the other person change a defensive position toward you. In the worst of circumstances, the hurtful person may be twisted or very ill, or just unable to be peaceful and livable.

Think this over and you will say to yourself: “I just have to carry this cross, but I will try to carry it with a smile.” You will live longer, and when you get to the other side, you will be able to look into the eyes of Jesus and say, “I tried”. And perhaps he will say to you. “I know you did”.

Lord Jesus, give me your Holy Spirit and his gifts of wisdom, counsel and courage, that I may forgive with courage, understand with wisdom and heal with counsel, because you have forgiven me more than seventy times seven. Amen.

Monday

TWO SERVANTS

From a homily by Pope Francis

Today's Gospel ... speaks to us of service, showing us two servants, from whom we can draw precious teachings: the servant of the centurion, who is healed by Jesus, and the centurion himself, at the service of the emperor. The words that he sends to report to Jesus, so that he does not come as far as his house, are surprising and are often the opposite of our prayers: «*Lord, do not disturb yourself! I am not worthy that you enter under my roof* "(Lk 7,6); "*I did not consider myself worthy to come to you*" (v. 7); "*I too am in the condition of subordinate*" (v. 8). In front of these words Jesus is admired. He was struck by the great humility of the centurion, his meekness. And meekness is one of the virtues of (the centurion)... Faced with the problem that afflicted him, he could have been agitated and expected to be heard, by asserting his authority; he could have persuaded with insistence, even forced Jesus to go to his house. Instead, he becomes small, discreet, meek, does not raise his voice and does not want to disturb. He behaves, perhaps without knowing it, according to the style of God, who is "*meek and humble of heart*" (Mt 11:29). In fact, God, who is love, out of love even pushes himself to serve us: with us, he is patient, benevolent, always ready and well disposed, he suffers for our mistakes and seeks the way to help us and make us better. These are also the meek and humble traits of Christian service, that is imitating God by serving others: welcoming them with patient love, understanding them without tiring us, making them feel welcomed, at home, in the ecclesial community, where it is not great who commands, but who serves (cf. Lk 22:26). And never scold, never. Thus, in meekness, your vocation as ministers of charity will mature.

After the centurion, in today's readings, there is a (second) servant, the one who is healed by Jesus. severe illness. In some way, we too can recognize ourselves in that servant. Each of us is very dear to God, loved and chosen by him, and is called to serve, but first of all, he needs to be healed internally. To be able to serve, we need heart health: a heart healed by God, which feels forgiven and is neither closed nor hard. It will do us good to pray with confidence every day for this, to ask to be healed by Jesus, to be like him, who "no longer calls us servants, but friends" (cf. 15:15). (You) can ask for this grace every day in prayer, in a prayer where you can present the hardships, the unexpected, the weariness, and the hopes: a true prayer, which brings life to the Lord and the Lord in life. And when you serve (others) ... you will find the presence of Jesus, who gives himself to you, so that you give yourselves to others.

Thus, available in life, meek of heart and in constant dialogue with Jesus, you will not be afraid to be servants of Christ, to meet and caress the flesh of the Lord in the poor of today.

Tuesday

THE POWER TO GIVE LIFE TO THE DEAD

A reflection based on a text by Fr. Ladislav Boros

Jesus sought out those who found themselves in dead-end situation and could see no way to new hope. That was exemplified in the Gospel story in which he gave new life to a widow who had just lost her only son. Many live under a crushing burden of toil and affliction, and even oppression. They often come to think of themselves as of no significance—destined to disappear one day and leave no trace behind them. People like that need to learn to sing Mary's Magnificat and so to rejoice in God, who is their savior and never ceases to look upon them and reach out to them.

Jesus reached out to those who felt their life a failure and had no one to turn to but God—if they realized his love for them. He reached out, especially to those whose sin made them expect nothing from God. Further, this was not a matter of passing emotion. It was the central theme of Jesus' teaching about God and salvation. The heart of God is always filled with mercy. God doesn't rejoice simply over the righteous but at the repentant sinner, the lost sheep waiting to be found without knowing it, the unloving son who finally sees the need to return to the Heavenly Father to begin a new life. Didn't Jesus tell us that God waits only for such people to make a move and then runs to them and gives them everything they can ask for that will lead them back into God's way of life? The Lord is patient with the fig tree that never bears fruit cares for it and waits for it to come into fruit.

Jesus demanded of this follows that they "be merciful, even as your Heavenly Father is merciful". Mercy is an essential condition of entering into the Kingdom. After all, only the merciful can expect mercy. Jesus repeated the sublime teaching of the prophet Hosea: God says, I desire mercy and not sacrifice. The mercy has to be tender and gentle and should bring those who live in misery close to God. On my way through the world, says Jesus, I make the wretched I encounter my neighbors; I have mercy on them, just as a Samaritan had mercy on a Jew who had been robbed, beaten and left half-dead by the roadside. We will be judged solely by the mercy we have shown. Perhaps unknowingly I show mercy to Jesus when I show it to a brother or sister who is suffering.

In the Gospel, Jesus encountered a widow utterly bereft by the death of her only son and support. He immediately felt compassion. "Don't cry!" he told her. Then he touched the bier and told the young man to get up. He did! Fear came over all who saw this. Yet it was from start to finish a matter of mercy and of feelings we have all had and can easily understand. Jesus saw suffering, felt deep compassion, reassured the sufferer and acted immediately and effectively. He gave the son back to the mother, alive. If we were able to do such things we would act in exactly the same way. God gives us the power to be compassionate and tells us that we can bring new life where there was only death if we live this compassion, as Jesus did.

The key is to trust in Jesus! That is what he calls us to. It is the key to ministering to others in His Name, in His Person.

Wednesday

THE PASSION FOR EVANGELIZATION: THE APOSTOLIC ZEAL OF THE BELIEVER **Catechesis on Evangelization No 14 by Pope Francis, 24 May 2023**

We find a great example of passion for evangelization in the Korean Church. Let us look at Saint Andrew Kim Tae-gon, a martyr and Korea's first priest. Initially, evangelization of Korea was done mainly by the laity! It was the baptized laity who transmitted the faith. The priests came later. And Saint Andrew was one of the first priests. His life was and remains an eloquent testimony of zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel.

About 200 years ago, the Korean land was the scene of a very severe persecution, believing in Jesus Christ meant being ready to bear witness unto death. From the example of Saint Andrew Kim, we can draw out two concrete aspects of his life. The first is the way in which he had to meet with the faithful. Given the highly risky context, the saint was forced to approach Christians discreetly, and always in the presence of other people. To confirm the other's Christian identity, there was a previously agreed upon sign of recognition- a sign on his outfit or in his hand. Then, he would surreptitiously ask "Are you a disciple of Jesus?" With other people around, the saint had to speak in a low voice, and in a few words. Thus, for Andrew Kim, the expression that summed up the whole Christian identity was "disciple of Christ". Indeed, being a disciple of the Lord means following him. The Christian preaches and bears witness to Jesus. Every Christian community receives this identity from the Holy Spirit, and so does the whole Church, since the day of Pentecost (cf. Vatican Council II, Decree *Ad Gentes*, 2). And it is from this Spirit that we receive the passion for evangelization, this great apostolic zeal. And even if the context is not favorable, the passion does not change. It even becomes more valuable. Saint Andrew Kim and other Korean believers demonstrated that witnessing to the Gospel in times of persecution can bear much fruit for the faith.

The second is the way to welcome foreign missionaries. When he was still a seminarian, Saint Andrew would secretly welcome missionaries from abroad. One time Saint Andrew walked in the snow, without eating, for so long that he fell to the ground exhausted, risking unconsciousness and freezing. Then suddenly he heard a voice, "Get up and keep walking"! At that, Andrew reawakened, and caught a glimpse of something like the shadow of someone who was guiding him. This makes us understand a very important aspect of apostolic zeal; namely, the courage to get back up when one falls. But do saints fall? Yes! Indeed, from the earliest times. Think of Saint Peter who committed a great sin, but he found strength in God's mercy and got up again. And in Saint Andrew, we see this strength. He had fallen physically but he had the strength to go on.

No matter how difficult the situation may be, and seem to leave no room for the Gospel message, we must not forsake pursuing what is essential in our Christian life: namely, evangelization. "But how can I evangelize"? Well, look at these great ones, and think about our own small context: evangelizing the family, evangelizing friends, talking about Jesus with a heart full of joy, full of strength. And this is given by the Holy Spirit. Let us ask him for that grace of apostolic courage, the grace to evangelize, to always carry the message of Jesus forward.

Thursday

PREFERRING NOTHING TO GOD

A reflection taken from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

According to the rule of the Gospel, the lack of wealth is, as such, a more blessed state than its possession. This is illustrated in the call of Matthew to discipleship. There is an obvious danger posed by worldly possessions. One may end up treating them as a substitute in our hearts for that One to whom supreme devotion and love are due. Possessions are present and seen but God is unseen. They are ready and at hand for us to use in accomplishing what we want. Whether or not God will our prayers for the fulfilling of those same wants is uncertain, or perhaps even certain in the negative. This is the case when we use wealth to satisfy the corrupt inclinations of our nature or heart. Worldly wealth promises and is actually able to do deeds as gods might, but they are gods that require no service. How easy to choose to serve such a master instead of the Lord who leads us to a cross.

Worse yet, wealth can fill us with notions of our own power and security and self-sufficiency which are wholly false. This is their constant and primary mischief. People who would live in God are not always able to eliminate from themselves all sinful desires, all the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, all gluttony and drunkenness and the like. They may continue to love mere entertainment and frivolous pleasures and putting on a show. One can't easily rid oneself of a feeling of self-importance and superiority. As a result, they get attached to this world and lose sight of the duty of bearing the Cross. One can become spiritually dull and near-sighted and lose the inner delicacy that alerts one to opportunities to love as Christ loves and to serve.

Does it seem somehow unnatural to risk everything for the sake of imitating Christ? Does this seem extravagant and give one a morbid preoccupation with death? Isn't it better to act graciously and give good things to others with a liberal hand? What happens to the contemplation of death and the thought of going to God and facing God's judgment? Doesn't a dedicated Christian contemplate all these things willingly and with a kind of joyous anticipation? But people attached to this world are all too often content to remain as they are. Even if some do serve God in intention, and even in fact, they do it without the noble enthusiasm and elevation of heart and soul that marks the Christian who has given self into God's hands.

What if you didn't think there was anything after this life? Perhaps you "*would eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a happy heart, seeing that your clothes always indicate joy and gladness and that you are anointed with sweet smelling perfumes and oils, living joyfully with one's spouse and loving one another all the days of your life—a life which is vanity even as you enjoy the good things won by your labor*". This is not even an indirect criticism of the good things God gives us. But it is a warning that these things are not the "One Spouse" who wants to be the One to whom all our love and devotion are directed. There is much more to come after death. To close one's eyes to these things is to misunderstand the

Gospel. Every day, turn always toward God and toward the marvels to which God calls those who love him above all else.

Friday

WOMEN AT THE SERVICE OF THE GOSPEL

From the General Audience Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 14 February 2007

Today, we dedicate our attention to the many female figures who played an effective and precious role in spreading the Gospel.

In conformity with what Jesus himself said of the woman who anointed his head shortly before the Passion: "Truly, I say to you, wherever this Gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mt 26: 13; Mk 14: 9), their testimony cannot be forgotten.

The Lord wants these Gospel witnesses who have made a contribution so that faith in him would grow, to be known, and their memory kept alive in the Church. We can historically distinguish the role of the first women in early Christianity, during Jesus' earthly life and in the events of the first Christian generation.

Jesus, as we know, certainly chose from among his disciples 12 men as Fathers of the new Israel and appointed them "to be with him, and to be sent out to preach" (Mk 3: 14-15).

This fact is obvious; but, in addition to the Twelve, pillars of the Church and fathers of the new People of God, many women were also chosen to number among the disciples. I can only mention very briefly those who followed Jesus himself, beginning with the Prophetess Anna (cf. Lk 2: 36-38), to the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4: 1-39), the Syro-Phoenician woman (cf. Mk 7: 24-30), the woman with the hemorrhage (cf. Mt 9: 20-22) and the sinful woman whose sins were forgiven (cf. Lk 7: 36-50).

In the first place, we think spontaneously of the Virgin Mary, who with her faith and maternal labors collaborated in a unique way in our Redemption to the point that Elizabeth proclaimed her "Blessed... among women" (Lk 1: 42), adding: "Blessed is she who believed..." (Lk 1: 45).

Having become a disciple of her Son, Mary manifested total trust in him at Cana (cf. Jn 2: 5), and followed him to the foot of the Cross where she received from him a maternal mission for all his disciples of all times, represented by John (cf. Jn 19: 25-27).

Then there are various women with roles of responsibility who gravitated in their different capacities around the figure of Jesus. The women who followed Jesus to assist him with their own means, some of whose names Luke has passed down to us, are an eloquent example: Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Susanna and "many others" (cf. Lk 8: 2-3).

The Gospels then tell us that the women, unlike the Twelve, did not abandon Jesus in the hour of his Passion (cf. Mt 27: 56, 61; Mk 15: 40). Among them, Mary Magdalene stands out in particular. Not only was she present at the Passion, but she was also the first witness and herald of the Risen One (cf. Jn 20: 1, 11-18).

It was precisely to Mary Magdalene that St Thomas Aquinas reserved the special title, "Apostle of the Apostles" (*apostolorum apostola*), dedicating to her this beautiful comment: "Just as a woman had announced the words of death to the first man, so also a woman was the first to announce to the Apostles the words of life" (*Super Iohannem*, ed. Cai, 2519).

Nor was the female presence in the sphere of the primitive Church in any way secondary. It is rather to St. Paul that we are indebted for a more ample documentation on the dignity and ecclesial role of women. He begins with the fundamental principle according to which for the baptized: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither

slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3: 28), that is, all are united in the same basic dignity, although each with specific functions (cf. I Cor 12: 27: 30).

The Apostle accepts as normal the fact that a woman can "prophesy" in the Christian community (I Cor 11: 5), that is, speak openly under the influence of the Spirit, as long as it is for the edification of the community and done in a dignified manner.

In short, without the generous contribution of many women, the history of Christianity would have developed very differently.

This is why, as my venerable and dear Predecessor John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*: "The Church gives thanks for each and every woman.... The Church gives thanks for all the manifestations of the feminine 'genius' which have appeared in the course of history, in the midst of all peoples and nations; she gives thanks for all the charisms which the Holy Spirit distributes to women in the history of the People of God, for all the victories which she owes to their faith, hope and charity: she gives thanks for all the fruits of feminine holiness" (n. 31).

As we can see, the praise refers to women in the course of the Church's history and was expressed on behalf of the entire Ecclesial Community. Let us also join in this appreciation, thanking the Lord because he leads his Church, generation after generation, availing himself equally of men and women who are able to make their faith and Baptism fruitful for the good of the entire Ecclesial Body and for the greater glory of God.

Saturday

THE SPIRITUAL PATH OF PADRE PIO

An anonymous reflection

Padre Pio was given the grace of leading many people to God and to closeness with God. He did it without leaving his monastery or doing anything that other members of his community weren't assigned to do. Why was his impact so great? The simplest explanation is that it was due to his having been given the stigmata. That made him a realization of the grace of unity with God and Christ. To come to Padre Pio was to come close to Jesus and his forgiving, redeeming mercy and love.

Padre Pio himself didn't seek this. He said in writing to his confessor: "I never stop asking Jesus to lead me by the ordinary path followed by everyone else". Yes, he believed in God's omniscience and infinite love, yet he found it extremely difficult to accept the way God gave him to walk. His call and his way of service through the wounds of Christ weren't comfortable. That didn't stop him from abandoning himself to God's will.

He felt very much what every fervent and dedicated Christian feels. Listen to what he said: "I want to love Jesus as I should; I desire this love; I know I love him but, dear God, how inferior my love is to my desire to love!" We want to love God with all our mind and heart and strength but we seem to fall so far short. He turned to God in prayer and that itself expressed his love in the best way he knew.

His "special" way caused him great fear and trembling. What was he to make of it all, and especially of words that he seemed to hear spoken in his heart? "You know, he says, I would not wish to be a victim of the devil in any way whatsoever." How was he to know that he was not creating what he heard in his own mind and imagining it came from God or from Jesus? He could not know for sure; he had to abandon himself to God's love.

People sometimes think that being so close to Christ as they imagined him to be would free them from struggles, especially inner ones. The opposite was the case; his closeness brought more struggles. It was for him a way of carrying a cross with Christ. He too lived in a dark night of faith and living in that way seemed to him very difficult, as it does for us all.

The tradition of spiritual wisdom in the Church tells us that the closer one is to God the more intensely one experiences how very little one is and how very poor are one's own best efforts. "In order that God may more readily hear my poor prayers, Padre Pio said, I make every effort, with the assistance of Divine Grace, to be a good religious priest". Yet he thought little of his efforts. The experience of God's grace doesn't make one feel good about oneself but feel one is almost nothing in comparison with God; one's efforts are next to useless when they are contrasted with the power of grace. The sense of God's grace to him was Padre Pio's path to humility. It can be ours as well. He was nothing; grace was everything. We need only cast ourselves upon God's grace & love, as Padre Pio did.