

THE THIRTY-FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

5-11 November 2023

- Sun. **Sunday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time**
Nov.5 **HE WHO IS GREATEST AMONG YOU SHALL BE YOUR SERVANT**
From the Angelus Message of Pope BENEDICT XVI, 30 October 2011
- Mon. **Monday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time**
6 **THE THREE GIFTS FROM GOD**
From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis, 6 November 2017
- Tues. **Monthly Memorial of the Departed**
7 **HOW OUR BELOVED DEAD HELP US**
A Reflection by St. Augustine
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8 **PRAISE THE NAME OF THE LORD!**
From the GENERAL AUDIENCE Message of Pope BENEDICT XVI, 18 May 2005
- Thurs. **Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica**
9 **CELEBRATING CHURCH**
A Reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard
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10 **HOW WE MUST CELEBRATE GOD'S GRACE & GIFTS**
A reflection taken from a homily by St. Pope Leo the Great
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Pope BENEDICT XVI, 11 November 2007

Sunday

HE WHO IS GREATEST AMONG YOU SHALL BE YOUR SERVANT

From the Angelus Message of Pope BENEDICT XVI, 30 October 2011

In this Sunday's Liturgy, the Apostle Paul invites us to draw near to the Gospel "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (1 *Thes* 2:13). Thus we can accept with faith the warning that Jesus offers to our conscience, in order to conform our way of living to it. In today's passage, he rebukes the scribes and the Pharisees, who were the teachers of the community, because their own conduct was openly in conflict with the teaching they rigorously taught others. Jesus underlines that they "preach, but do not practice" (*Mt* 23:3); rather "they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger" (*Mt* 23:4). Good teaching must be received but it risks being contradicted by inconsistent behavior. Thus Jesus says: "Practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do" (*Mt* 23:3). Jesus' attitude is exactly the opposite: he is the first to practice the commandment of love, which he teaches to everyone, and he can say the burden is light and easy because he helps us carry it (cf. *Mt* 11:29-30).

Thinking of teachers who oppress the freedom of others in the name of authority, St Bonaventure points out who the authentic teacher is, affirming that, "No one can teach or practice, or reach knowable truths unless the Son of God is present" (*Sermo I de Tempore, Dom. XXII post Pentecosten, Opera omnia, IX, Quaracchi, 1901, 442*). "Jesus sits on the cathedra of Moses... as the greater Moses, who broadens the Covenant to include all nations" (cf. *Jesus of Nazareth, Doubleday, New York, 2007, p. 66*). He is our true and only Teacher! We are, therefore, called to follow the Son of God, the Word Incarnate, who expresses the truth of his teaching through his faithfulness to the will of the Father, through the gift of himself. Bl. Antonio Rosmini writes: "The first teacher trains all the other teachers, as he also trains the same disciples themselves, because they exist only in virtue of that first tacit, but very powerful Magisterium" (*Idea della Sapienza, 82, in: Introduzione alla filosofia, vol. II, Rome, 1934, 143*). Jesus also firmly condemns vanity and observes that "deeds to be seen by men" (*Mt* 23:5), places them at the mercy of human approval, undermining the values that found the authenticity of the person.

Dear friends, the Lord Jesus presented himself to the world as a servant, completely stripping himself and lowering himself to give on the Cross the most eloquent lesson of humility and love. His example gives rise to a proposal of life: "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant" (*Mt* 23:11). We invoke the intercession of Mary Most Holy and we ask especially for those in Christian communities, who are called to the ministry of teaching, that they may always witness by their works to the truths that they communicate by their words.

Monday

THE THREE GIFTS FROM GOD

From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis, 6 November 2017

Pope Francis identified three “irrevocable gifts” from God, namely, those of “election, promise and covenant”. He explained that such gifts are freely given in mercy because of our disobedient nature, and we, the faithful, must allow ourselves to receive God’s mercy.

Reflecting on St Paul’s letter to the Romans (11:29-36), the Pope began by noting that in this passage, “Paul is finishing his reflection on God’s election of the Israelites and His election of the Gentiles”. This reveals a “theological reasoning that Paul must make” in order to persuade the people that they are both God’s elect. This means that “when God gives a gift, this gift is irrevocable: He does not give it today and take it away tomorrow” and, likewise, “when God calls, that call endures for life”.

In the history of salvation”, God gave three gifts to his people: “the gift of election, the gift of promise, and the gift of covenant”. Indeed, “the People of God are an elect people”. “It is the Lord who elects Abram – the first elect – and leads him forth with a promise, and makes a covenant with him and his successors”. And, “it is the Lord who continues to emphasize and reinforce that election”. In fact, in the narrative about Abram, “in Genesis, how many times does the Lord say: ‘yes, I have elected you’; and how many times does he emphasize and reiterate the promise: ‘I will give you a son, but not this one, another’ – ‘At 90 years?’ – ‘At 90 years!’”.

Here Pope Francis remarked on the nature of “the promise”, on the fact that “the Lord continually celebrates the covenant sealed by Him at the beginning”, and “this is the history of salvation”. “But the Lord never turns back”. Therefore, “these gifts are irrevocable, for the People of God, for the Church and for each one of us”.

“Each one of us has been elected”. “Each one of us is elect; each one of us bears a promise that the Lord has made: ‘Walk in my presence, be irreproachable and I will do this for you’”. Thus, “each one of us makes a covenant with the Lord”, and one can choose whether or not to do so. The choice is ours, “and that’s a fact”.

In this prospective, Francis proposed a question for self-reflection: “How do I perceive the election: do I feel I am Christian by chance? How do I live the promise, a promise of salvation on my journey? And how am I faithful to the covenant: am I faithful, as He is?”. Because “He is faithful” and for this reason “the gifts and the call are irrevocable; He cannot disavow himself; He is faithfulness itself”.

Therefore, the Pontiff recommended, in light of God’s unwavering faithfulness, we should each ask ourselves: “Do I feel elected by God? Do I feel God’s caress in my heart? Do I feel that God loves me and takes care of me? And when I distance myself, does He come to look for me?”

“I think that it would do us good, each of us to think today about our election, about the promises that the Lord has made to us, and about how we live out the covenant with the Lord.” But also, about how we receive mercy from the Lord, “in the face of our sins, of our disobedience”. And finally, the Holy Father said, consider “whether we are capable, like Paul, of praising the Lord for what He has given to us, to each one of us; to give praise and to perform that act of adoration”.

Concluding the homily, Pope Francis invited the faithful “to never forget” that “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable; He is the faithful one”.

Tuesday

HOW OUR BELOVED DEAD HELP US

A Reflection by St. Augustine

The Apostle Paul calls upon us not to immerse ourselves in sorrow for those who “have fallen asleep”. We ought not to think of them apart from the hope we share with them. It is the hope of resurrection and eternal life. Scripture speaks of the dead as being asleep because it teaches us to expect them to wake up. A psalm asks, “Shall one who sleeps not get up again?”

A certain sadness over those who have died is natural. We have lost their daily company for a time and are sad. Our human nature shuns death as though it were aware that apart from sin we would not have to fear death as sin’s penalty. Even animals who are created to live only for a certain period of time seek to avoid death and love their lives. It is natural that human beings, who were created so that life might last forever—if the right choices were made—seek to avoid death. Although we know that those who die are not gone forever but are merely going before us into a new life, and that we are shortly to follow them, we shrink from death when it strikes the one we love. Grief at the loss of their companionship is very real.

Thus St. Paul doesn’t exhort us not to be sorrowful, but to avoid sorrowing like those who have no hope. We grieve over the necessity of being without them for a while but with the hope of seeing them again. The necessity causes us anguish but the hope consoles us. Our weakness is brought out by our grief and our faith is made stronger by our hope. Our human condition leads us to sorrow but God’s promise is our salvation. In this way, we are built up in hope by the death of those we love.

All the pomp of a funeral and of costly grave markers and funeral dinners are not for the dead but for ourselves. They are meant as solace for the living. They are of no advantage to those who have died but we need them to turn our loss to advantage, as a help in our progress in following Christ. There is no doubt that the dead benefit from prayers and from the Sacrifice of Salvation as well as from alms. God will deal with them with greater mercy than their sin deserves. But the Church universal prays not simply for them but for us. We remember them in offering the Sacrifice at a particular place and time but this profits us even more than them. We remember to offer it for them and so we deepen our faith in the salvation given us through the sacrifice of Christ. Who can doubt that works of mercy offered in the memory of the departed profit them? But they profit us who do them even more. Our prayer profits us who pray even more than those for whom we pray.

We take consolation in the loss of our beloved ones from the sympathy of others. We thus build up the community of mutual love which is Christ’s Church. Mourners come together and support one another. The customary rites become occasions for charity and concern for one another. All these may be seen as gifts given to us through the death of those who have been called to God.

Wednesday

PRAISE THE NAME OF THE LORD!

From the GENERAL AUDIENCE Message of Pope BENEDICT XVI, 18 May 2005

1. In its simplicity and beauty, Psalm 113 [112], is a true introduction to a small group of Psalms that go from 113[112] to 118[117], commonly known as the "Egyptian Hallel". It is the Alleluia, or song of praise, that exalts the liberation from Pharaoh's slavery and the joy of Israel to serve the Lord freely in the Promised Land (cf. Ps 114 [113]).

The Jewish tradition intentionally connected this series of Psalms to the Paschal liturgy. The celebration of that event, according to its historical-social and, more especially, spiritual dimensions, was perceived as a sign of liberation from the multifaceted forms of evil.

2. The first strophe (cf. Ps 113 [112]: 1-3) praises "the name of the Lord" who, as is known, indicates in Biblical language the person of God himself, his presence, living and working in human history.

Three times, with impassioned insistence, the "name of the Lord" resounds at the center of the prayer of adoration. All being and all time - "from the rising of the sun to its setting", as the Psalmist says (v. 3) - are involved in a single action of grace.

3. Precisely by means of this ascending movement, the Psalm leads us to the divine mystery. Indeed, the second part (cf. vv. 4-6) celebrates the Lord's transcendence, described with vertical images that go beyond the mere human horizon. It is proclaimed: the Lord is "sublime", "enthroned on high", and no one is equal; also, to look at the heavens he must "stoop", since "above the heavens is his glory" (v. 4).

The divine gaze watches over all realities, over all beings, earthly and heavenly. However, his eyes are not arrogant and distant, like that of a cold emperor. The Lord, the Psalmist says, "stoops... to look" (v. 6).

4. In this way, we pass to the last part of the Psalm (cf. vv. 7-9), which moves the attention from the heights of the heavens to our earthly horizon. The Lord attentively stoops down towards our littleness and poverty, which drives us to withdraw in fear. He looks directly, with his loving gaze and his real concern, upon the world's lowly and poor: "From the dust he lifts up the lowly, from his misery he raises the poor" (v. 7).

God bends down, therefore, to console the needy and those who suffer; this word finds its ultimate wealth, its ultimate meaning in the moment in which God bends over to the point of bending down, of becoming one of us, one of the world's poor. He bestows the greatest honor on the poor, that of sitting "in the company of princes, yes, with the princes of his people" (v. 8). To the abandoned and childless woman, humiliated by ancient society as if she were a worthless, dead branch, God gives the honor and the immense joy of many children (cf. v. 9). And so, the Psalmist praises a God who is very different from us in his grandeur, but at the same time very close to his suffering creatures.

It is easy to draw from these final verses of Psalm 113[112] the prefiguration of the words of Mary in the *Magnificat*, the Canticle of God's chosen one, who "looked with favor on his lowly servant". More radically than our Psalm, Mary proclaims that God "casts down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly" (cf. Lk 1: 48, 52; Ps 113 [112]: 6-8).

Thursday

CELEBRATING CHURCH

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard

Today we celebrate Church. We celebrate a glorious feast. But what is it that we celebrate when we do this? We say that we are celebrating God's Temple. We say we are celebrating the City of the Eternal God. We say that we are celebrating the Bride of Christ. But if we think carefully that means we celebrate ourselves. I say this with both awe and reverence. We are Christ's Bride, God's Temple, and the City of the Eternal God. But we are all these things in the heart of our God. We are all this in God's grace and by God's election.

We aren't celebrating anything we have made ourselves or anything we deserve to be. We must beware of appropriating for ourselves anything that belongs to God. We can't take any glory that is God's as though it were our own. If we exalt ourselves God will only humble us and bring us down to the level on which we belong—we have to be lowly to be what we celebrate today!

The proper celebration of the Church, and of ourselves as Church, is a humble acknowledgment of our weakness and sickness and of all that arouses God's compassion. We are celebrating what we are to grow into; you see, in our helplessness, God will feed us as a mother feeds an infant. Because of who God is we will have all we need in abundance; in God's house, nothing is ever lacking.

Bear it in mind, however, that God's House is described as a house of prayer. Holiness befits such a house. It is a house filled with tears of repentance and with the purity of self-restraint. "Be holy, says the Lord, because I am holy." St. Paul says this very nicely: "Don't you realize that your bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you?" Yet even this isn't enough. According to St. Paul, peace is also necessary. "Strive to be at peace with everyone, and so achieve the holiness without which no one can see God!" It is peace that makes us children of one family, brothers and sisters to one another. Dwelling in unity builds the true Kingdom of peace, the new Jerusalem.

There is a mystery in what we celebrate. How can the greatest king become our bridegroom? How can a city become a bride? All this is possible only for divine love. It is stronger than death and can do everything. Lack of love brought us down but divine love can raise us up again. If the abundance of everything children need shows that we are in our Father's house, if holiness shows us to be God's Temple, if the sharing of a common life shows us to be the city of the Great King, if divine love shows us to be the bride of the immortal bride-groom, then we can say without hesitation that today's feast is our feast.

Don't be surprised that we are celebrating on earth. The celebration takes place in heaven too! There is joy in heaven and among God's angels when a single sinner repents, so today's joy must be many times as great since so many sinners are repenting as they celebrate it. Our repentance is our joy! Share this joy with one another as you do with God and with God's angels. That is how we can celebrate filled with thankful repentance. The more whole-heartedly we celebrate, the more we make the repentance our joy. What better way to glorify our God and Savior!

Friday

HOW WE MUST CELEBRATE GOD'S GRACE & GIFTS

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Pope Leo the Great

The sublimity of God's grace lies in this, that daily in our hearts all our longings are transferred from what is earthbound to what is heavenly. And yet it remains true that our present life is part of God's providence and bounty and is lived only with our Creator's help and care. It is one and the same Lord who gives us present blessings and who promises eternal life. There is a bond and a unity between what we do here and what we are invited to do forever with God. The mere fact that we are promised such a fulfillment of life carries us along. Hope gives speed and fervor to what we do, both for God and for one another. Clearly, we must honor and praise God for all the good things we are given through the fruitfulness with which he has endowed our earth.

Whatever benefits flow from the harvests are for the use and benefit of all. Everything flows to us from God's goodness. In his delicate way, God helps the hesitant and the bold, God encourages the farmers and enables them to sustain us all. He does the like for everyone in whatever occupation they contribute to building up their community. The wind and rain, the cold and heat, day and night, all these serve our needs. If the Lord doesn't give growth by divine planting and watering human effort and forethought wouldn't be able to care for each and all. That is why it is so right and just that we help one another, and do it using the things our Heavenly Father mercifully bestows on us.

There are many who have no share in fields, vines, olive groves, and much else. It is worth remembering the poverty of these people so that out of the plenty God gives those who have such goods the poor too may bless God. All are intended to rejoice at having been given a share of what God has given for the good of all. These things are the common good that God has designed for rich and poor, for pilgrims and for the sick so that all may have what they need and be satisfied.

God's justice arranges for those who labor under various disabilities to find what they need through the love and generosity of others. God blesses them through their patient and trusting hope, and blesses those who help them through their very kindness and mercy. God blesses all by their contribution to the common well-being, and for the way each helps build up a community of mutual love and concern.

The most effective way of praying for forgiveness is sharing. Almsgiving, fasting, and prayer must be united. What we ask of God in these ways is certainly heard, especially if we ask only that all be blessed and come to the eternal joy and life God calls us and tries to help this happen. As it is written: The merciful do good to themselves. Nothing does greater good than the good of sharing with neighbors in need. That transfers what was only earthly into heaven and makes it an eternal wealth. The merciful, as the Lord teaches, have mercy shown them by God. God is the highest of all rewards and God's gift of self is for those who give themselves as God does.

Saturday

THE PAPAL ANGELUS MESSAGE

Pope BENEDICT XVI, 11 November 2007

Today, 11 November, the Church remembers St Martin, Bishop of Tours, one of the most celebrated and venerated Saints of Europe. Born of pagan parents in Pannonia, in what is today Hungary, he was directed by his father to a military career around the year 316. Still an adolescent, Martin came into contact with Christianity, and, overcoming many difficulties, he enrolled as a catechumen in order to prepare for Baptism. He would receive the Sacrament in his 20s, but he would still stay for a long time in the army, where he would give testimony of his new lifestyle: respectful and inclusive of all, he treated his attendant as a brother and avoided vulgar entertainment. Leaving military service, he went to Poitiers in France near the holy Bishop Hilary. He was ordained a deacon and priest by him, chose the monastic life, and with some disciples established the oldest monastery known in Europe at Ligugé. About 10 years later, the Christians of Tours, who were without a Pastor, acclaimed him their Bishop. From that time, Martin dedicated himself with ardent zeal to the evangelization of the countryside and the formation of the clergy. While many miracles are attributed to him, St Martin is known most of all for an act of fraternal charity. While still a young soldier, he met a poor man on the street numb and trembling from the cold. He then took his own cloak and, cutting it in two with his sword, gave half to that man. Jesus appeared to him that night in a dream smiling, dressed in the same cloak.

Dear brothers and sisters, St Martin's charitable gesture flows from the same logic that drove Jesus to multiply the loaves for the hungry crowd, but most of all to leave himself to humanity as food in the Eucharist, the supreme Sign of God's love, *Sacramentum caritatis*. It is the logic of sharing that he used to authentically explain the love of neighbor. May St Martin help us to understand that only by means of a common commitment to sharing is it possible to respond to the great challenge of our times: to build a world of peace and justice where each person can live with dignity. This can be achieved if a world model of authentic solidarity prevails which assures all inhabitants of the planet food, water, necessary medical treatment, and also work and energy resources as well as cultural benefits, and scientific and technological knowledge.

Let us turn now to the Virgin Mary so that all Christians may be like St Martin, generous witnesses of the Gospel of love and tireless builders of jointly responsible sharing.