

THE THIRTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

19-25 November 2023

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Nov.19 **The Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
BOLD IN HOPE - CREATIVE WITH COURAGE
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IN THE 11th FESTIVAL OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH,
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Sunday

BOLD IN HOPE - CREATIVE WITH COURAGE

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE 11th FESTIVAL OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH, 25-28 November 2021

“Bold in hope - Creative with courage”. Boldness, hope, creativity and courage are not synonymous, but represent a connection of intentions, virtues, openness and views of reality that strengthen the human soul. But not only that...

You will remember the parable of the talents told in the Gospel of Matthew (25:14-30). “He who had received the five talents went at once and traded them; and he made five talents more”, we read in verse 16. This parable is the last parable before the text in which it is said that we shall be judged on charity (*Mt 25:31-46*). So, the one about the talents seems to be Jesus' programmatic discourse on the boldness that is necessary to be a Christian.

Against all do-goodism and fatalism, Jesus invites the crowds to use their talents with courage. It does not matter how many or what one's talents are. Jesus asks them to take risks and invest them in order to multiply them. When we remain closed in on ourselves with the sole objective of preserving what exists, we are losers in the eyes of the Gospel: in fact, even what is left will be taken away. Boldness, hope, creativity and courage are words that outline the spirituality of the Christian. “For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away” (*Mt 25:29*).

In the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* I recall that “the pandemic enabled us to recognize and appreciate once more all those around us who, in the midst of fear, responded by putting their lives on the line. We began to realize that our lives are interwoven with and sustained by ordinary people valiantly shaping the decisive events of our shared history: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, storekeepers and supermarket workers, cleaning personnel, caretakers, transport workers, men and women working to provide essential services and public safety, volunteers, priests and religious”, and so forth... These people understood “that no one is saved alone”, no one is saved alone (*FT 54*). Here are talents put to use... Here is the hope that sustains and guides creativity with boldness and courage. Therefore, I renew my invitation to walk in the hope that “is bold, can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and can open us up to grand ideals which make life more beautiful and worthwhile” (*FT 55; Greeting to young people at the Fr. Félix Varela Cultural Centre, Havana – Cuba, 20 September 2015*).

Hope, I have said on other occasions, is like “dropping anchor on the other shore”. It is this boldness that inspires new actions, guides skills, stimulates commitment, and gives life to life.

Those who hope know that they are part of a story built by others and received as a gift, just as in the parable of the talents. And they also know that they must make this gift bear fruit.

One more word to the various protagonists of social life gathered in Verona for the Festival: continue to commit yourselves by following the path that Fr. Adriano Vincenzi traced with you for knowledge and training in the social doctrine of the Church. As the slogan says: Wherever you are, build change! Wherever you are, build change, because we know that we do not come out of the crisis the same: we come out better or worse.

Monday

MERCY IS LIGHT

From the GENERAL AUDIENCE Message of Pope Francis, 15 June 2016

Luke the Evangelist says that a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging (Lk 18: 35). He is separated from the flock, sitting there while people pass by... And the road, which could be a place of encounter, for him is instead a place of solitude. Crowds pass by ... and he is alone.

It is sad to imagine a person who has been marginalized, especially against the backdrop of Jericho, a beautiful lush oasis in the desert. Moses proclaimed: "If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother; therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" (Dt 15:7, 11). The contrast between this recommendation of God's Law and the situation described in the Gospel is striking: while the blind man cried out, calling to Jesus, the people rebuked him to silence him, as if he had no right to speak. They had no compassion for him.

The evangelist says that someone in the crowd explained to the blind man the reason why all those people had gathered, saying: "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by!" (v. 37). Jesus' passing by is indicated with the same verb with which the Book of Exodus speaks of the passing of the Angel of Death, who saves the Israelites in the land of Egypt (cf. Exodus 12:23). When Jesus passes by there is always liberation, there is always salvation! Therefore, for the blind man, it was as if his Paschal Mystery was proclaimed. Without allowing himself to be intimidated, the blind man cries out repeatedly to Jesus, recognizing Him as the Son of David, the awaited Messiah. As opposed to the crowd, this blind man sees with the eyes of faith. On hearing him, "Jesus stopped, and commanded that he be brought to him" (v. 40). By doing so, Jesus takes the blind man and puts him at the center of the attention of His disciples and of the crowd. First: the people proclaimed good news to the blind man, but they wanted nothing to do with him; now Jesus obliges them all to be aware that the good news implies putting at the centre of one's path the person who was excluded from it. Second: in his turn, the blind man could not see, but his faith opened the way of salvation, and he finds himself amidst all those who had stopped on the road to see Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord's passing by is an encounter of mercy that unites everything around him to enable us to recognize one who is in need of help.

Jesus turns to the blind man and asks him: "What do you want me to do for you?" (v. 41). These words of Jesus are striking: the Son of God is now before the blind man as a humble servant. God makes himself a servant of the sinful man. The blind man asks that he might see again, and his desire is heard. He showed his faith by invoking Jesus and wanting by all means to meet Him, and this brought him the gift of salvation. Thanks to his faith, he can now see and, above all, he feels that he is loved by Jesus.

A second miracle happens: what happened to the blind man also enables the people to finally see. The same light illuminates them all, uniting them in a prayer of praise. So Jesus pours out his mercy upon all those he meets: He calls them, makes them come to him, gathers them, heals and enlightens them, creating a new people that celebrates the wonders of his merciful love. Let us also allow ourselves to be called, healed, and forgiven by Jesus, and let us follow Jesus, praising God.

Tuesday

PRESENTING WHAT WE HAVE

A Reflection developed from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

Every Christian heart is glad to be reminded by the liturgy of the sacred event commemorated today. We think of Sts. Joachim and Ann going up to the temple of God with their child, Mary. We think of her as the purest of all creatures—pure of heart in a way that opens eyes to see God. When we think of Mary, we think about God's choice of her to become the Mother of his Only Begotten Son, the Mother of God.

I can't remember these things, however, apart from what may be the very first memory I carry with me from my childhood. It is a memory of my mother's taking me to visit a small shrine dedicated to Mary, one built on land belonging to my native town. It is dedicated to Mary precisely as Mother of God and this title is associated especially with the Feast of Mary's Presentation. The small chapel is set among the trees at the end of a small country lane.

When I came there with my mother we couldn't get into the chapel because it was already so filled with people. But my mother wanted to share with me her love for Mary, symbolized by the statue in the chapel. She got me to the front of the building, where there were two small windows—the only windows in this chapel. They were barred and were located just above my mother's head. She lifted me up and said to me, "Look, look at our Lady! She is our special lady on this feast day! She was presented in God's Temple today."

What a wonderful way to remember my mother and her love for me. She lifted me up so I could see Blessed Mary, whom she taught me brings Christ to us all. Look at the one who most of all brings us Jesus, who brings us to the Heavenly Father, and to the love that saves and blesses us forever.

Today I am pope and I want to take you with me to that little shrine and lift you up so that you too can see Mary and know you are close to Jesus, to whom she looks with all her heart and soul. Can anyone do more for another than this? Isn't this a ministry that our Good and Loving God has called all of us to? If you can't see God's deep love for you, because you can't see God, then you can look to Jesus, who reveals God for you. But how will you draw close to Jesus in such a crowd as fills our world? Look first to Mary and ask her to bring you to Jesus.

Perhaps you only see Jesus as shown to us in images like those in cathedrals. Then you only see him resplendent and glorious and clothed with power. But that isn't the sort of person you would go to with your pains and puzzles, your needs and nonsense fears. Mary can show us the Jesus to whom we can bring everything. She can remind us of our own mothers and how they tried to share their faith with us even when we were too small to understand. Mary bears the light who is Christ and she wants to share that light with us and help us in turn share it with one another. There is no more wonderful thing to do, whoever you are and whatever titles you bear or don't bear. Turn to a divine love that is as gentle as a mother's love for her child, and as rich as the entire world of beauty our caring God's love has given us. God would have you play in it and share it with others, as perhaps your own mother did with you.

Wednesday

St. Cecilia and the Evangelism of Witness

A reflection by Fr. Ronald Knox

The legends of early Roman saints, among whom St. Cecilia is numbered, do not command a great deal of respect from critically minded historians. But whether the story of St. Cecilia as it is told in the acts of her martyrdom is true, wholly or even partially, there is simplicity about it and about Cecilia's character is presented in it, which conveys a profound truth.

She was, the story says, married to a pagan named Valerian but persuaded him to respect her vow of virginity by telling him her guardian angel would make him sorry for it if he did otherwise. Valerian wanted to see this guardian angel and Cecilia, with an innocent craftiness, said he could not do that unless he was first baptized. He was baptized and did see the angel at her side as she prayed. He proceeded to make a convert of his brother, Tiburtius, and the two brothers spent themselves in doing works of charity. They, and then Cecilia herself, were arrested and punished with death for professing the Christian religion.

The tenor of the story is perhaps a familiar one. We find it often in the homage paid to great saints for their public witness to Christ. In Cecilia we see one working quietly at home for the conversion of a husband and family. Not that she was in the position of a modern wife. She had, in imitation of the legends about the Virgin Mary, made a vow of perpetual virginity. The virgin martyrs were martyrs because they were virgins; i.e., because they insisted on keeping their vow even though their spouses or his parents wished them to have children. Then their attachment to Christian faith was discovered. It was persistence in maintaining this that led to their martyrdom.

It is hard for us to appreciate the unpopularity that came to Christianity because of the tradition of virginity. Because of this it seemed to many a dangerous and debased cult. Virginity is an ideal that pagans had no real right to misunderstand. In theory, they too honored it in the institution of the Vestal Virgins, who tended the fire representing the Roman state as providing for its people. If one is to be close to the divine one needs to be spotless. One must offer what costs one something. That was a pagan idea connected with sacrifice and virginity.

The world knows that Gospel faith places a high value on purity and purity of heart. Of course, the world is not impressed by this unless it is convinced that believers do what they profess to value. That is not only a lesson for young women, or for husbands and wives, but for all of us. Each of us, whether we like it or not, is an advertisement for faith and the practice of the Christian, and Catholic, religion. The world does not respect us for being non-Puritans or joining in any of its risky and risqué behaviors and conversations. It respects our faith if it sees that the virginity practiced in the cloister has its complement and fruit in the lives of other Catholics living in the world. St. Cecilia reminds us to take our Christian vocation seriously. This Roman maiden prays for us who worship on the day sacred to her memory, and prays that when Christ, our one Master, comes again in judgment we may be found pure of heart in the sight of our God.

Thursday

HOW GRATITUDE CONFIRMS US IN GRACE

A reflection inspired by a sermon of St. Bernard

Great is our God's mercy to us, very great! If only we would recall the disgraceful image of our former life, we could gauge more rightly the greatness of God's liberating mercy. If we could remember, not only that which we have avoided, but that to which we have called, as well as what we have received, we would be filled with endless gratitude. People live lawfully in marriage and work for the good of our families alone, but God calls us to do more and greater things, following the example of the Lord Jesus. So why do we so often complain as if God's mercy and love had fallen short? Are we like the nine lepers who never returned to thank the Lord for their healing? Why aren't we filled with thanks?

There are many who ask insistently for what they know they lack. But we know how few are those who know how to give thanks for all they receive. Would it be a kindness for God to refuse our prayers in order to spare us the sin of ingratitude? It is not necessarily beneficial to cleanse away the leprosy of worldliness when the ulcer of ingratitude eats away at our inner self.

Our God has given us so much! God has given us the entire world and all the good things that fill it. It would only be gratitude on our part to keep beautiful and serviceable all these gifts. Happy is the one who returns each gift, and especially each gift of grace, to the Lord who gives all good gifts. This is the gift of gratitude. Don't show yourselves ungrateful to God for all we have received.

Surely, it is only our ingratitude that gets in the way of our progress in conversion. And we know that God views what is given as though it had been lost if it is not returned in by prayers of thankfulness and gratitude. From that point of view, the more our God gives us without receiving our thanks the more things God has to write off as a loss.

In the beginning of our conversion, we were more grateful than we now are when for now we take all God's gifts for granted. When we confessed ourselves sad and wretched and admitted that apart from God we had nothing, God's generosity seemed to overflow. We even received the gift of being God's friends. When we cease to give thanks, aren't we bringing it about that one belonging to the Lord's own household is acting like one of the Lord's enemies?

I beg you all, be humble and humble yourselves more and more under the powerful hand of God most high. Strive to keep far away the most wicked vice of ingratitude. If we turn to God with a complete devotion, shown by giving thanks with all our hearts, then we gain the grace of our God, that grace which alone is able to save us. Not only by word or tongue, but in deed and truth we need to show ourselves grateful. But God expects from us much more than just lip service. We must perform genuine acts of thanksgiving, loving not just in words but in deeds. It is by living deeds of love that we become like God. Thanksgiving makes this happen; we become like God and like God's Only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Giving thanks confirms us in such great grace!

Friday

LET US THANK GOD EVEN FOR THE CROSS

A letter from one of a group of 117 Vietnamese Martyrs

St. Paul wrote from prison and chains to praise the name of Christ. How can we do less? We want only that you too be inflamed with love for God and join us in praise. God's mercy is forever! God is with us in tribulation and has even made tribulations sweet, for God's mercy is forever!

In the midst of torments which usually terrify people, we are filled with joy and gladness. We are not alone! Christ is with us! Our Master bears the entire weight of the Cross and leaves us only a tiny share. He isn't a mere onlooker but a contestant in the struggle, and a champion and victor. On his head be the crown!

Beloved brethren as you hear many horrible things give endless thanks in joy. From God every good comes. Bless the Lord with us! "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior, for he has looked on me with favor".

O praise the Lord, all you nations, acclaim God all your peoples! God chose what is weak in this world to confound the strong and the philosophers, disciples of the wise of this world and not of God. For God's mercy endures forever!

I write these things so that our faith and yours may be one. In the midst of the storm let us cast our anchors toward the throne of God. What is that anchor? It is living hope in the hearts of all who suffer and yet look to God and God's Christ in trust.

Beloved, for your part run so that you may attain the crown. Put on the breastplate of faith and take up the weapons of Christ for the right hand and the left. This is what St. Paul has taught us. Isn't it better to enter life with one eye or crippled, than with all members intact to be cast away? Come to me with your prayers. Grant us the strength to fight the spiritual fight according to the Gospel law, and so fight a "good fight". Let us finish our race with victory.

It may be that we shall not see one another again in this life. We will have the great happiness of seeing each other again in the world to come. Then, standing in triumph and at the throne of the spotless Lamb, we will together join in singing God's praises and exulting forever in joy.

Saturday

From the Angelus Message of Pope Francis, 10 November 2019

Today's Gospel reading (Lk 20:27-38) offers us a wonderful teaching of Jesus on the resurrection of the dead. Jesus is asked by some Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection and therefore provoke Him with an insidious question: in resurrection, whose wife would a woman be if she had seven successive husbands, who were all brothers, who all died one after the other? Jesus does not fall into the trap and replies that in the hereafter the risen "neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (vv. 35-36). This is how Jesus responds.

With this response, first and foremost, Jesus invites His interlocutors — and us too — to consider that this earthly dimension in which we now live is not the only dimension, but that there is another, no longer subject to death, which will fully manifest that we are children of God. It is of great comfort and hope to listen to this simple and clear word of Jesus about life beyond death; we need it very much, especially in our time, so rich in knowledge about the universe but so lacking in wisdom about eternal life.

Jesus' clear certainty about resurrection is based entirely on the fidelity of God, Who is the God of life. In fact, behind the question of the Sadducees is hidden a more profound question: not only whose wife will be the widow of the seven husbands, but to whom will her life belong. This is a doubt that touches mankind of every age and also us: after this earthly pilgrimage, what will become of our life? Will it belong to nothing, to death?

Jesus responds that life belongs to God, who loves us and cares very deeply about us, to the point of linking His name to ours: He is "the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him" (vv. 37-38). Life exists where there is [a] bond, communion, brotherhood; and it is a life stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity. On the contrary, there is no life where one has the presumption of belonging only to oneself and of living as an island: death prevails in these attitudes. It is selfishness. If I live for myself, I am sowing death in my heart.

May the Virgin Mary help us to live every day from the perspective of what we affirm in the final part of the Creed: "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come". Awaiting the hereafter.