

THE THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

THE FOUNDERS OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER

- Sun.
Jan. 21 **The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**
FROM THE HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
Sunday, 24 January 2021
- Mon.
22 **Day of Prayer for Giving Thanks to God for the Gift of Human Life**
THE GOSPEL OF LIFE IS FOR THE WHOLE OF HUMAN SOCIETY
From the Encyclical EVANGELIUM VITAE of Pope John Paul II, 1995
- Tues.
23 **Tuesday of the 3rd Week in Ordinary Time**
THE PRAYER OF PRAISE
From the Morning Meditation of Pope Francis on Tuesday, 28 January 2014
- Wed.
24 **Memorial of St Francis de Sales**
OUR SEARCH FOR THE KISS OF FAITH
A Reflection from Treatise on the Love of God by St. Francis de Sales
- Thurs.
25 **Feast Conversion of St Paul**
WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD ISN'T
A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard
- Fri.
26 **The Feast of Sts. Robert, Alberic and Stephen**
THE JOY & CROSS OF FOLLOWING ST. BENEDICT
A reflection from the Great Exordium of Conrad of Eberbach
- Sat.
27 **Memorial of Our Lady**
MARY AND OUR LIFE OF FAITH
A reflection taken from "The California Network" website

Sunday

FROM THE HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS **Sunday, 24 January 2021**

On this Sunday of the Word, let us listen to Jesus as he proclaims the Kingdom of God. Let us consider *what* he says and *to whom* he says it.

What does he say? Jesus begins his preaching with these words: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk 1:15). God is near, that is the first message. His kingdom has come down to earth. God is not, as we are often tempted to think, distant, up in heaven, detached from the human condition. No, he is in our midst. The time of his distance ended when, in Jesus, he became man. Ever since then, God has been very close to us; he will never retire from our human condition or tire of it. This closeness is the very first message of the Gospel; today’s reading tells us that Jesus “was saying” (v. 15) those words: he *kept repeating them*. “God is near” was the leitmotif of his preaching, the heart of his message. If this was the opening theme and the refrain of all Jesus’ preaching, it must necessarily be the one constant of the Christian life and message. Before all else, we must believe and proclaim that God has drawn near to us, that we have been forgiven and shown mercy. Prior to every word of ours *about* God, there is his word to us, his Word who continues to tell us: “Do not be afraid, I am with you. I am at your side and I will always be there”.

Let us now consider *to whom* Jesus speaks. His first words are to Galilean fishermen, simple folk who lived by harsh manual labor, by day and night. They were no experts in Scripture or people of great knowledge and culture. They lived in a region made up of various peoples, ethnic groups and cults: one that could not have been further from the religious purity of Jerusalem, the heart of the country. Yet that is where Jesus began, not from the center but from the periphery, and he did so to tell us too that no one is far from God’s heart. Everyone can receive his word and encounter him in person. The Gospel offers a nice detail in this regard, when it tells us that Jesus’ preaching came “after” that of John (Mk 1:14). That word *after* is decisive: it points to a difference. John received people in the desert, where only those able to leave their homes could go. Jesus, on the other hand, speaks of God in the heart of society, to everyone, wherever they find themselves. He does not speak at fixed times or places, but “walking along the shore”, to fishermen who were “casting their nets” (v. 16). He speaks to people in the most ordinary times and places. Here we see the *universal power* of the word of God to reach everyone and every area of life.

Yet the word of God also has *particular power*, that is, it can touch each person directly. The disciples would never forget the words they heard that day on the shore of the lake, by their boats, in the company of their family members and fellow workers: words that marked their lives forever. Jesus said to them: “Follow me, I will make you become fishers of men” (v. 17). He did not appeal to them using lofty words and ideas, but spoke to their lives. He told fishermen that they were to be fishers of men. If he had told them: “Follow me, I will make you Apostles, you will be sent into the world to preach the Gospel in the power of the Spirit; you will be killed, but you will become saints”, we could be sure that Peter and Andrew would have answered: “Thanks, but we’ll stick to our nets and our boats!” But Jesus spoke to them in terms of their own livelihood: “You are fishermen, and you will become fishers of men”. Struck by those words, they come to realize that lowering their nets for fish was too little, whereas putting out into the deep in response to the word of Jesus was the secret of true joy. The Lord does the same with us: he looks for us where we are, he loves us as we are, and he patiently walks by our side. As he did with those fishermen, he waits for us on the shore of our life. With his word, he wants to change us, to invite us to live fuller lives and to put out into the deep together with him.

Monday

THE GOSPEL OF LIFE IS FOR THE WHOLE OF HUMAN SOCIETY **From the Encyclical EVANGELIUM VITAE of Pope John Paul II, 1995**

"We are writing you this that our joy may be complete" (1 Jn 1:4). The revelation of the Gospel of life is given to us as a good to be shared with all people: so that all men and women may have fellowship with us and with the Trinity (cf. 1 Jn 1:3). Our own joy would not be complete if we failed to share this Gospel with others but kept it only for ourselves.

The Gospel of life is not for believers alone: it is for everyone. The issue of life and its defense and promotion is not a concern of Christians alone. Although faith provides special light and strength, this question arises in every human conscience which seeks the truth and which cares about the future of humanity. Life certainly has a sacred and religious value, but in no way is that value a concern only of believers. The value at stake is one which every human being can grasp by the light of reason; thus it necessarily concerns everyone.

Consequently, all that we do as the "people of life and for life" should be interpreted correctly and welcomed with favor. When the Church declares that unconditional respect for the right to life of every innocent person - from conception to natural death - is one of the pillars on which every civil society stands, she "wants simply to promote a human State. A State which recognizes the defense of the fundamental rights of the human person, especially of the weakest, as its primary duty".

The Gospel of life is for the whole of human society. To be actively pro-life is to contribute to the renewal of society through the promotion of the common good. It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop. A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of society, such as democracy and peace.

There can be no true democracy without a recognition of every person's dignity and without respect for his or her rights.

Nor can there be true peace unless life is defended and promoted. As Paul VI pointed out: "Every crime against life is an attack on peace, especially if it strikes at the moral conduct of people... But where human rights are truly professed and publicly recognized and defended, peace becomes the joyful and operative climate of life in society".

The "people of life" rejoices in being able to share its commitment with so many others. Thus may the "people for life" constantly grow in number and may a new culture of love and solidarity develop for the true good of the whole of human society.

Tuesday

THE PRAYER OF PRAISE

From the Morning Meditation of Pope Francis on Tuesday, 28 January 2014

Pope Francis continued his reflection on the second Book of Samuel which tells of David's dancing before the Ark of the Lord on its entry into Jerusalem. "King David offered sacrifice in honor of God;" he prayed. Then his prayer became exultant ... it became the prayer of praise and of joy, and he began to dance. The Bible says: 'David danced before the Lord with all his might'", and he rejoiced greatly as he offered praise to the Lord. "That," Pope Francis said, "was truly the prayer of praise".

Pope Francis remarked: "I thought immediately of Sarah after she gave birth to Isaac: 'God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me'. This elderly woman at the age of 90 laughed and danced for joy". David was young, but he also "danced, he danced before the Lord. This is an example of the prayer of praise".

The prayer of praise is quite different than the prayer we normally raise to God, when "we ask something of the Lord" or even "thank the Lord". "We often leave aside the prayer of praise". It doesn't come so easily to us. Some might think that this kind of prayer is only "for those who belong to the renewal in the spirit movement, not for all Christians. The prayer of praise is a Christian prayer for all of us. Each day during Mass, when we sing: 'Holy, Holy...', this is the prayer of praise. We praise God for his greatness. And it does not matter if we are good singers.

Praising God is "totally gratuitous". "We do not ask, we do not thank. We praise: you are great. 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...'. We say this with all our heart. It is also an act of justice, for he is great, he is our God. Let us think about a good question we can ask ourselves today: How is my prayer of praise? Do I know how to praise the Lord? Or when I pray the *Gloria* or the *Sanctus*, do I only pray with my lips and not with all my heart? What does David's dancing say to me? And Sarah who dances for joy? As David enters into the city, he begins something else as well: celebration. The joy of praise leads us to the joy of celebration". This celebration then extends to the whole family. "Each person was given a cake of bread and departed to his own house to celebrate" (cf. v. 19). But when David reentered his household, he had to face the reproach and scorn of Michal, the daughter of King Saul: "'Aren't you ashamed of what you have done? How could you have done this, you the king, dancing in front of everyone? Are you not ashamed?' I wonder how many times in our hearts we hold in contempt good people who praise the Lord?" so spontaneously, as it comes to them.

In the Bible, we read that "'Michal had no child to the day of her death'. What does the word of God mean here? That joy, that the prayer of praise makes us fruitful. Sarah was dancing for joy at 90 years old in the great moment of her fruitfulness! Fruitfulness gives praise to the Lord". The one who praises the Lord, who prays by praising the Lord and rejoices "as they sing the *Sanctus* at Mass" is fruitful. On the other hand, those who "close themselves into the formality of a cold, measured prayer perhaps end up like Michal, in the sterility of formality".

"Let us think of and imagine David who dances with all his might before the Lord. Let us think about how beautiful it is to offer the prayer of praise. Perhaps it will do us good to repeat the words of the psalm we just prayed, number 23: 'Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors! That the King of glory may come in, the Lord strong and mighty, he is the king of glory! Lift up your heads O gates! Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the king of glory!'" This ought to be our prayer of praise. When we raise this prayer to the Lord we ought "to say to our heart: 'Lift up your hearts, for you stand before the king of glory'".

Wednesday

OUR SEARCH FOR THE KISS OF FAITH

A Reflection from Treatise on the Love of God by St. Francis de Sales

Under the rays of the noonday sun, we are no sooner aware of its brightness than we feel its heat. So it is with the light of faith; no sooner has it shed the splendor of its truth on our mind than straightaway the will feels the glowing warmth of charity. With infallible certitude, faith gives us knowledge of God's existence, shows us that God is infinite goodness, that God is capable of sharing his life with us ... indeed, not merely that he can do this but that he wants to. With this in view, he has provided, with indescribable tenderness, all that we need to attain the bliss of eternal glory.

We have a natural tendency toward the supreme good. As a result, the human heart knows an innermost eagerness, a constant restlessness, which it has no way of quieting. It has no way of hiding its lack of perfect satisfaction and utter contentment. Once faith has pictured to the mind the beauty of the goal of its natural tendency, God alone knows how we thrill through and through with joy and happiness. As though caught off balance by the sight of such superlative beauty, we cry out with love: "How fair you are, my true love, how fair!"

Abraham's servant Eliezar went in search of a wife for his master's son. He was not certain of finding anyone as fair and gracious as he hoped. But when he did discover her by the well, when he saw her beauty, her charm, and most of all when she had been given to him to take to his master, he fell to worshiping and praising God with joyful gratitude that knew no bounds.

The human heart is drawn to God by a natural tendency, even though a person has no clear knowledge of who God is. When we discover God at the well of faith, when we see how good God is, how beautiful, how kind, how gracious toward everyone, how ready to give himself as the supreme good and to all want him—heaven knows the gratification we feel, the inspirations we have for uniting ourselves to him forever with a goodness so supremely loveable!

I have found him at last, cries the person moved in this way. I have found the one I have been looking for, and now I am satisfied. But just as Jacob wept for joy after he had seen the fair Rachel, after he had greeted her with a kiss, even so, the human heart melts with love when it has found God, when it has received from him the first kiss of faith. It has had the first sight and taste of the infinite treasures that are supreme beauty!

Thursday

WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD ISN'T **A reflection from a sermon by St. Bernard**

The apostle Paul is usually brief in words and rich in meaning. The Kingdom of God is not, he says, food and drink but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Listen to these words: *"Food for the belly and the belly for food, but God will destroy both"*. Why, then, do so many love vanity and despise truth?

If the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, then what is it? It is justice and peace and joy in the Spirit. Is this what you strive and struggle for? Indeed, there isn't anyone who doesn't want to be glad. The first goal is to do justice to be eventually embraced by joy. But what all want, even the angels, is that peace which surpasses all understanding.

O Heavenly Jerusalem, praise and redouble your praises because your gates have been closed with the safest bars and unshakable bolts. No enemy enters, and no friend exits. You contain no temptations, no squadron of evil thoughts upsets you. All gaze upon the essence of divinity, not deceived by any imagination of the corporeal. Behold, in the end, joy, and joy without end.

God spoke and all creatures were made. After that, his Majesty being inflamed with a most fervent love for you, redeemed you. Nailed to a cross, doomed to death, regarded as a laughingstock, your God was made your brother. He also added something more special in that he has dragged us from the broad way that leads to death and has placed us in the congregation of the just. But here and now we must make peace. We aren't immune to scandals, so if you remember your brother or sister has anything against you, be humble enough to beg pardon. Learn of me, says the Lord, for I am meek and humble of heart.

The beginning of the joy we long for comes like a little drip splashed from the river that flows through God's city. When will we be plunged into that spring of divinity with its everlasting joys? When shall we come and appear before the face of God? So look at all that is with the eye of your heart. Let us faithfully pursue the happiness of justice and peace and joy in the Spirit. Why have we come here? We have come to serve the King who is blessed forever. That is what St. Paul did. Let us imitate him in fervor and labors and we shall be like him in joy.

Friday

THE JOY & CROSS OF FOLLOWING ST. BENEDICT

A reflection from the Great Exordium of Conrad of Eberbach

“Hugh, archbishop of Lyon and legate of the Apostolic See, to Robert, abbot of Molesme and to those brothers who desire with him to serve God according to the Rule of St. Benedict. ... You want to observe more strictly and perfectly the Rule of St. Benedict, which you have professed and which is kept somewhat tepidly and imperfectly in that monastery. Because many obstacles prevent you from doing this at the aforesaid place, we give you leave to go to another.”

Relying on this authorization, Abbot Robert and his brothers returned to Molesme and chose as associates brothers who rejected the enticements of a lax life, those who burned with eager minds to keep the Holy Rule purely and simply. There were 21 who set out in the desire of keeping to the straight and narrow way of the more perfect living of the Rule of the Holy Father Benedict.

Lord Odo, Duke of Burgundy, was delighted by the fervor and devotion of the brothers and at his own cost completely furnished the wooden monastery they built and supported them abundantly with lands and livestock. But not long after, the monks of Molesme complained to the Pope and legate that Robert’s absence was damaging their community. As a result, Abbot Robert was asked to return. Deprived of their spiritual father, the newly founded church of Citeaux quickly put forward as abbot a much-respected monk named Alberic. He was a learned man, assiduous in divine and human affairs, a lover of the Rule and of the brothers. He had been prior at Molesme, and shared in the founding of Citeaux. He endured much blame from false brethren, as well as blows and imprisonment. When, after considerable resistance, he agreed to accept the pastoral charge he sent two monks to the Apostolic See and obtained the protection of the Pope as a guarantee of the abbey’s peace and liberty. In the second year after the foundation of the monastery, they brought back the written privilege.

Following this, the abbot and his brothers began to arrange their new way of life in the manner prescribed in the Rule. They observed the Rule’s traditions about the manner and order of divine services, rejected supplementary psalms, prayers and litanies, because they were being performed tepidly and negligently. The Blessed Benedict declared a monk should make himself a stranger to all worldly affairs, and so the new community eliminated all that contributed only to comfort and spurned all tithes that would lead to conflict with secular clergy. They decided to receive lay brothers to help them support themselves through manual labor. The choir monks would remain within the cloister. In the tenth year of his abbacy, the blessed Alberic deserved eternal life.

By the grace of the Holy Spirit the monks elected as abbot a man named Stephen, a person of outstanding holiness and virtue, a lover of the wilderness and very zealous for holy poverty. Since the Order was newly established and its statutes still needed work, he called the brothers together and consulted them. They forbade secular authorities from holding court at the monastery and forbade any non-necessary accouterments in the liturgy. The ideal of poverty guided these decisions. Abbot Stephen and his brothers advanced day by day in virtue and witnessed to the wise bargain they had made in choosing this way of life.

Saturday

MARY AND OUR LIFE OF FAITH

A reflection taken from "The California Network" website

The name of Mary always makes us think of Jesus. Mary is the mother of Jesus and thus the Mother of God. But when we think of Mary and Jesus we also think of prayer. Next to Jesus' "Our Father" the "Hail Mary" is no doubt the world's best-known prayer.

When we think of Mary we also think of the famous shrines at Lourdes, or at La Salette or at Fatima. Because of these shrines, Mary has a message for us and for the entire world. That message is: Turn to God and pray. This is a message about the journey we are all making and which is never finished until we die. If we do pray, and if we give an example of prayer, we will influence others to turn to God and to be transformed by God's grace and find a new life.

It is a marvelous gift to know that God is using you to bring those whose faith is weak and those who have no faith at all out of the kind of desert they live in and toward a place of life and life's fullness. You are leading them towards friendship with the Son of God. Jesus is the one who gives us life and life in all its abundance.

To many, it appears that the influence of Christianity in the lives of many men and women is growing more and more faint. To many, it appears that more and more people haven't any room for God in their lives. But when God disappears from life, those concerned don't become greater but they begin to lose their dignity, their divine dignity. A face that has not encountered God loses its splendor. Such people end up thinking they are the mere products of a blind evolutionary process. But that makes them things that can be used and even abused. This is precisely what our epoch of history has experienced so vividly, and horribly.

With Mary and by listening to her message we can begin to understand these truths. We must not drift away from God, or let others do that. We must make God present. Mary teaches us to begin with prayer. That is how God becomes great in our lives. We too are called to be divine and that process continues in us every hour of every day. But if that is so then we should let the fact show in the ways we behave, the ways we care, the ways we forgive, and the ways we love.

Mary only wants to help us deepen our friendship with Jesus. The deeper it is the more power resides within us to show others how wonderful life can be when it is lived with God and with God's Son, Jesus Christ. That is what we celebrate today as we remember Mary, both Jesus' mother and ours. Let us be glad and rejoice in the gift God gives us by giving us Mary and her message.