

THE FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

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Sunday

A NEW TEACHING! WITH AUTHORITY

From the ANGELUS Message of Pope Francis on Sunday, 28 January 2018

This Sunday's Gospel reading (cf. Mk 1:21-28) is part of a wider narrative called the "day in Capernaum". At the heart of today's reading is the event of the exorcism through which Jesus is presented as a *powerful prophet in word and deed*.

He enters the Synagogue of Capernaum on a Saturday and he begins teaching. The people are astonished by his *words* because they are not ordinary words. They do not sound like the ones they are accustomed to hearing. The Scribes teach but without any authority. And Jesus teaches with authority. Jesus instead teaches like one who has authority, thus revealing himself as God's Emissary and not a simple man who has to base his teaching solely on earlier traditions. Jesus has full authority. His doctrine is new and the Gospel says that the people commented: "a new teaching! With authority" (v. 27).

At the same time, Jesus reveals himself to be powerful also in *deeds*. In the Synagogue of Capernaum, there is a man who is possessed by an unclean spirit which manifests itself by shouting these words: "What have you to do with us Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (24). The devil tells the truth: Jesus came to destroy the devil, to ruin the demon, to defeat him. This unclean spirit knows the power of God and he also proclaims his holiness. Jesus rebukes him saying: "Be silent, and come out of him!" (v. 25). These few words from Jesus are enough to obtain victory over Satan, who comes out of that man "convulsing him and crying out in a loud voice", the Gospel says (v. 26).

This makes a strong impression on those present. Everyone is overcome by fear and asks themselves: "What is this? [...] he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him". (v. 27). The power of Jesus confirms the authority of his teaching. He does not just speak with words, but he takes action. In this way, he manifests God's plan with words and with the power of his deeds. In the Gospel in fact, we see that in his earthly mission, Jesus reveals the love of God both through preaching and through countless gestures of attention and aid to the sick, the needy, children and sinners.

Jesus is our Teacher, powerful in word and deed. Jesus imparts to us all the light that illuminates the sometimes dark paths of our lives. He also transmits to us the necessary strength to overcome difficulties, trials and temptations. Let us consider what a great grace it is for us to have known this God who is so powerful and so good! A teacher and a friend who shows us the path and takes care of us especially when we are in need.

May the Virgin Mary, the woman of listening, help us to create silence around us and within us, in order to hear, through the din of the messages of the world, the most authoritative word that there is: that of her Son Jesus who proclaims the meaning of our existence and delivers us from all slavery, even that of the Evil one.

Monday

WHEN FACED WITH DARKNESS

From the Morning Meditation of Pope Francis on February 3, 2014

The Pope shared his reflection on the first Reading from the Second Book of Samuel (15:13-14,30; 16:5-13). "We have heard the story of that very sad time for David when he was forced to flee because his son had betrayed him". Indeed, we read in the Scriptures that: "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom".

What does David do when faced with his son's betrayal? He had "three attitudes". Firstly, "David, takes the situation as it is. He knows that this war will be very hard, he knows that many people will die", because "the people are divided against each other". And realistically, he makes "the choice not to kill his people", saying, "No, I do not want Jerusalem to be destroyed!". He also opposed those who wanted to take away the Ark, ordering them to leave it in its place: "The Ark of God remains in the city!". All of this shows David's "first attitude", which was "to defend himself; he uses neither God nor his people" because he has a "great love" for both.

The second is a "penitential attitude", which David assumes while fleeing from Jerusalem. We read in the passage from the Book of Samuel, that he went to the mountain "weeping" and walked "barefoot and with his head covered. Think of what it means to climb the mountain barefoot". And the people who were with him did the same: "He had his head covered, and going up he cried".

It was "a penitential journey". Perhaps, at that time David thought about the many bad things "in his heart", and about the "many sins he had committed". And he probably said to himself: "I am not innocent! It is not fair that my son did this to me, but I am not a saint!". It is in this spirit that David "chooses penance, and cries". His "ascent up the mountain makes us think about Jesus' ascent. He too, barefoot and grieving, went up the mountain with his Cross".

David, therefore, portrays a "penitential attitude". And when "something happens in our lives, we always seek justice — it is an instinct that we have". Instead "David does not seek justice. He is realistic. He seeks to save the Ark of God, his people. And he does penance" climbing the mountain. For this reason "he is a great: a great sinner and a great saint". "How these two things go together", the Holy Father added, only "God knows. But this is the truth".

Along his journey, the king meets a man named Shimei, who "throws stones" at him. He was "an enemy" who cursed and "said bad things" to David. Abishai, "one of David's friends", proposes to capture and kill the man. But David stops him and "instead of choosing revenge in the face of many insults, chooses to rely on God". We read in the Bible passage: "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction and that the Lord will repay me with good for this cursing of me today". Here is the third attitude: David "relies on the Lord".

It is indeed "these three attitudes that David has in that time of darkness, in that time of trial, that can help all of us" when we find ourselves in difficult situations. The Pope emphasized again that we must "accept our penance", understand the reasons why we "need to do penance", and know how to "cry over our mistakes, our sins". Ultimately, we must not seek justice with our own hands but we must "rely on God".

In conclusion, Pope Francis invited all to call upon David and to ask him to teach us how to live "these attitudes in the difficult moments of life", that we may be people "who love God, love his people and do not use them, who know that they themselves are sinners and do penance, people who are sure of their God and rely on him".

Tuesday

WEeping FOR THE DEAD

From a Homily by St. Lawrence of Brindisi, OFM Cap

The patriarch Abraham wept bitterly at the death of his wife, Sarah. So did Isaac at the death of his mother. The people of Israel wept at the death of the high priest Aaron, and that of the great prophet Moses. David likewise mourned the death of Absalom: *"Oh Absalom my son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you!"* In similar words Christ addressed himself to Jerusalem: *"Oh Jerusalem, if only I might die instead of you; for I am ready to die for your salvation."* David loved his son Absalom with a most tender love, even though he was wicked, and sought to assassinate his father and usurp his kingdom. And so David wept over his death and wished he had died in his place. Christ too loved Jerusalem and that is why he wept over it, wept to think that, like Absalom, it would be destroyed.

Christ mourned over Jerusalem, and not only longed to die to save it but actually did die. But Christ's greatest sorrow was that although he was going up to Jerusalem to die for its salvation, his death would, through its own fault, lead not to its salvation but to its greater condemnation. *"When he came in sight of the city he wept over it"*. Christ grieved not so much because of the suffering and death he would endure upon the cross as because people would not realize what he had done for them. Hence his words, *"If only you knew, even today, the way that leads to peace"*. We are born children of wrath and enemies of God; but God gives us the whole span of our lives to make our peace with him, to receive his grace, and, in the end, to attain glory.

Alas, there is nothing to which we devote less attention. On the contrary, our enmity with God is increased every day by our sins. The reason this happens is because the end of God's grace, which is glory, and the end of sin, which is eternal death, are hidden from our sight. *"When Jesus came in sight of the city he wept over it because it did not recognize the time of God's visitation."* God, in his tender mercy, has visited us to give us light, *"to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins"*. God has visited us to save us from our sins *"so that freed from the hands of our enemies we might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness in his sight all the days of our life"*.

But if we want to do this, I beg you, brothers and sisters, let us keep our last day ever before us. Let us always remember that we shall die, and recognize the world's deceitfulness; then we shall live holy and upright lives. Then we shall be prepared to live in the company of God's holy ones for days without end.

Wednesday

THE JOYFUL PRIEST

From the Morning Meditation of Pope Francis on 31 January 2019

A priest who is true to his vocation can be recognized by the joy he feels and brings to people, Pope Francis said during his homily for Mass at Santa Marta on Thursday, 31 January, the Feast of Saint John Bosco. Indeed the Pope's reflection on the qualities that should distinguish priests drew inspiration from an event from the Saint's life: "On the day of his ordination, his mother said to him: 'You will be a priest, you will begin to suffer'", Pope Francis said. The purpose of this warning and "prophecy" from his humble mother was to let her son know that if he perceived no suffering, then that was a clear sign that "something was wrong". Why should a priest suffer?, the Pope asked. The reason can be found in Don Bosco's life choices. He "had the courage to view reality with the eyes of a man and with the eyes of God". Indeed, Francis noted, "in those Masonic days ... where the poor were truly poor", Don Bosco was moved to seek new avenues, human avenues that could help young people grow.

Moreover, the Pope continued, that Don Bosco "had the courage to look with the eyes of God", he looked "at reality with a father's love" and "at God with the eyes of a beggar who asks for something luminous", in this way moving forward. Priests "must have these two polarities: looking with the eyes of a man and with the eyes of God" which means, the Holy Father explained, spending "ample time before the Tabernacle". Don Bosco had these two qualities which helped him to "see the way" and this is why, rather than just imparting precepts, "he drew near" to the people, "with their same liveliness.... He walked with them, he listened with them, he saw with them, he cried with them".

But he warned there "is always the risk of looking too much at the human being and not at all at the divine, or too much at the divine and not at all at the human; however, if we do not take risks in life, we will never achieve anything".

Francis thanked God for having given us Don Bosco, who "knew what it meant to earn his daily bread, this man who understood what compassion was, what the real truth was".

Describing Don Bosco as a "teacher of joy", Pope Francis said that joyfulness in a priest shows he is doing well and looking at reality both with the eyes of a man and with the eyes of God. "Let us ask the Lord for the intercession of Don Bosco today, for the grace that our priests be joyful".

Thursday

WHAT WE LEAVE TO OTHERS

From the Morning Meditation of Pope Francis on February 6, 2014

To live our whole life within the Church, as sinners but not as corrupt traitors, and with an attitude of hope that allows us to leave a legacy, not of material wealth, but of a witness to holiness.

The Holy Father focused his homily on the mystery of death, referring to the First Reading (Kgs 2:1-4, 10-12) in which he said, "We hear the story of David's death".

David's whole life was "a path, a journey he had made at the service of his people". And "it ended just as it had begun". In our lives too we "begin, walk, go forward, and finish". Thinking of David's death "from the heart", the Pope offered three points of reflection. *First*, he pointed out that "David died in the bosom of the Church, in the bosom of his people. Death did not find him outside of his people" but "within". In this way, he lives "belonging to the people of God". It is true that David "had sinned: he called himself a sinner". But "he never left the People of God: he was a sinner, yes, but not a traitor". This, the Pope said, "is a grace". The grace to "remain in the People of God till the end" and "to die in the bosom of the Church, right in the midst of the People of God".

Highlighting this aspect, the Pope invited everyone "to ask for the grace of dying at home: dying at home, within the Church". He remarked that "this is a grace" that you "cannot buy" because "it is a gift from God". We "ought to ask: Lord, grant me the gift of dying at home, within the Church". Even if we are "all sinners" we must never be "traitors" nor "corrupt". The Church, the Pope explained, "is a mother and wants it to be so", even if "at many times dirty". For it is she who "cleanses us: she is our mother, and she knows how to do so". But it is up to us to "ask for this grace of dying at home".

Pope Francis then proposed his *second* thought about David's death. "In this story, you can see that David is quiet, peaceful, and serene". To the point where he "calls upon his son and says: I want to go the way of every man on earth". In other words, David acknowledges: "Now it is my turn!". We then read in Scripture that "David rested with his fathers". The king, the Pope explained, "accepted his death with hope, in peace". And "this is another grace: the grace to die with hope", with the "awareness that this is only a step" and that "we are awaited on the other side". Indeed, even after death, there will be "home, there will be family, I will not be alone!". It is a grace to be sought especially "in the last moments of life because we know that life is a struggle and that the evil spirit takes the spoils".

The *third* reflection Pope Francis shared was that of "the problem of legacy". "When David died, all of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren came to ask for their inheritance!". But the inheritance that David leaves behind is not wealth. We read in the Scriptures: "And his kingdom grew strengthened". David had "left a legacy of 40 years of government to his people and the people were strengthened".

The real "legacy is that of David" who on the verge of death told his son Solomon: "You are a strong and capable man. Obey the Law of the Lord, your God, proceeding in his ways and executing his laws".

David's words help us to understand that the real "legacy is the witness we leave to others as Christians". There are indeed some people who "leave great legacies: think of the saints who lived the Gospel with such force... leaving us a way of life, a way of living life as a legacy". In conclusion, the Pope summarized his three points and turned them into a prayer to St David, that he "grant us these three graces: to ask for the grace to die at home, within the Church; to ask for the grace to die with hope; and to ask for the grace to leave behind a beautiful legacy, a human legacy made from the witness of our Christian life".

Friday

TRUSTING IN GOD AND IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

A reflection from a homily by Origen of Alexandria

It is good for us to reflect on the way God fore-ordains all things for salvation. Think of the way God pre-arranged for Simeon to embrace God's Son. First, he was given a revelation by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he has seen the Lord's Anointed. Second, he didn't enter the temple by chance but was prompted by the Holy Spirit to go there at a particular time. We should remember the Scripture which tells us that "*all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God*". This means that if we too want to embrace Jesus, and even enfold him in our arms, we must strive with all our might to follow the guidance of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has today led us to God's Temple. At this moment we are standing in the Lord Jesus' temple, the Church. It is a temple built of living stones. When your life and conduct are truly worthy of the name of Jesus, you are standing in the Church and so in the Lord's Temple.

Have you come to this temple led by the Spirit? If so you will find the Lord Jesus. If you find him you will take him in your arms and you too will say: "*Now, Lord, you can let your servant go in peace, as you promised!*". Notice how peace is linked with dismissal from one's present responsibilities in the Church and with death. Simeon didn't say that he wished to leave this world but that he wished to go to the Lord in peace.

The promise of peace had been made to Abraham. He was told, "*You shall go to your ancestors in peace when you have reached a ripe old age*". Who, then, can hope to die in peace? It is the sure hope of those who have that peace of God that surpasses all our abilities to understand. This hope guards the hearts of those who experience it.

Who, then, leaves this world in peace? Those who understand that "*God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ*". Such a one isn't God's enemy or opposed to God. Such a person has complete peace and concord through the good works he has done in God. This is the sort of person who is allowed, like Abraham, to go in peace and to be in God with the holy patriarchs.

But talking about the patriarchs isn't sufficient. Only speaking of Jesus is adequate. He is the prince and lord of patriarchs and of all others. Listen to St. Paul: "*It is better to die and be with Christ!*" One who has Jesus dares to say, like Paul: "*It isn't any longer I who live, but it is Christ who is living in me!*"

Here we are standing in the Temple of God and holding the Son of God. We embrace him and so we pray to Almighty God, and to the Son of God who is in Jesus, that we be found worthy of being released from all earthly duties and so be found worthy of going to better things and places. We long to speak with Jesus and embrace him but we seek only to give him glory forever and ever.

All this is true because of God's loving providence. He has chosen us from before all ages to be his own and to know His Son.

Saturday

MARY AS THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

A reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

"I am the slave girl of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me." These words express a clear recognition of a special relationship with God. Mary calls herself a slave, the slave of another in whom she finds the meaning of her life, and this may seem a problem. Bondage isn't thought a humanizing relationship. Yet if we put the expression in its spiritual-biblical context something deep and wonderful emerges.

Mary's words reflect those of the prophet Isaiah. *"Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight"*. Mary understands herself in relation to these words of Isaiah. This understanding echoes in the words of the angel, *"You have won God's favor"*. She sees herself in a close relationship of favor and support. This isn't how an ordinary slave would see herself. Isaiah said that God's servant had been *"endowed with God's favor"* and Mary was told, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you"*. This is the promise to which Mary responds by identifying herself as the Lord's slave. In short, we need to understand what Mary says in terms of *what* Isaiah's "servant of the Lord" says.

She is a servant loved by God and pre-chosen by God to be filled with the Spirit. But in Isaiah, this is an awareness proper to God's Chosen People and not just to an individual. Mary represents a People and speaks in their name. When God calls Israel his servant he isn't degrading Israel but exalting it. That is why the angel says that Mary isn't to be afraid but to remember that the Lord is with her. Mary is expressing her unity with a People deeply loved by God, chosen by God, and sustained by God's power. God does that for her.

Mary's heart is the heart of her people, the expression of their dedication to God. That is what it means for her to be the "Virgin Israel" and the "Daughter of Zion". But beyond this, Mary has a sense of unity with all humankind. Think of the words, *"I have appointed you as a covenant for the people and a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to free captives from prison and those who live in darkness from their dungeon"*. Mary lives a triple awareness of her personal relationship of dedication to God, of being the expression of her People's response to God's love and call, and of responsibility toward all humanity.

If we think of Mary as the model for all believers we should remember that we live in all these relationships that she did. She has been given to us by her Son as our mother and that means we share all those relationships even as God gave them to her. We are called like Mary. Are we prepared to live in the sense of our relationships to God and to God's People and to all humankind as she does? That is our challenge