

# THE SIXTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

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**Ash Wednesday**

- .....
- Sun.      **The Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
Feb. 11   **THE ANGELUS MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS**  
            **Sunday, 15 February 2015**
- Mon.      **Memorial of Bl. Humbeline**  
12         **HUMILITY AS THE LAMPSTAND FOR GOD'S LIGHT**  
            **A reflection developed from various sources**
- Tues.     **SHROVE TUESDAY (in the 6<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time)**  
13         **RESIST TEMPTATION**  
            **From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis on Tuesday, 18 February 2014**

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## THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON OF LENT

- Wed.      **Ash Wednesday**  
14         **RETURN TO ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART**  
            **From the Homily by Pope John Paul II on Ash Wednesday, 17 February 1999**
- Thurs.    **Thursday after Ash Wednesday**  
15         **STOP AND CHOOSE**  
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- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
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16         **THE SPIRIT OF HYPOCRISY**  
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*Sunday*

## **THE ANGELUS MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS**

**Sunday, 15 February 2015**

In these Sundays, Mark the Evangelist speaks to us about Jesus' actions against every type of evil, for the benefit of those suffering in body and spirit: the possessed, the sick, sinners.... Jesus presents Himself as the One who fights and conquers evil wherever He encounters it. In today's Gospel (cf. Mk 1:40-45) this struggle of His confronts an emblematic case because the sick man is a leper. Leprosy is a contagious and pitiless disease, which disfigures the person, and it was a symbol of impurity: a leper had to stay outside of inhabited centers and make his presence known to passersby. He was marginalized by the civil and religious community. He was like a deadman walking.

The episode of the healing of the leper takes place in three brief phases: the sick man's supplication, Jesus' response, and the result of the miraculous healing. The leper beseeches Jesus, "kneeling", and says to Him: "If you will, you can make me clean" (v. 40). Jesus responds to this humble and trusting prayer because his soul is moved to deep pity: *compassion*. "Compassion" is a most profound word: compassion means "to suffer-with-another". Jesus' heart manifests God's paternal compassion for that man, moving close to him and *touching him*. And this detail is very important. Jesus "stretched out his hand and *touched him*.... And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean" (vv. 41-42). God's mercy overcomes every barrier and Jesus' hand touches the leper. He does not stand at a safe distance and does not act by delegating, but places Himself in direct contact with our contagion and in precisely this way our ills become the motive for contact: He, Jesus, takes from us our diseased humanity and we take from Him his sound and healing humanity. This happens each time we receive a Sacrament with faith: the Lord Jesus "touches" us and grants us his grace. In this case, we think especially of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which heals us from the leprosy of sin.

Once again the Gospel shows us what God does in the face of our ills: God does not come to "give a lesson" on pain; neither does He come to eliminate suffering and death from the world; but rather, He comes to take upon Himself the burden of our human condition and carries it to the end, to free us in a radical and definitive way. This is how Christ fights the world's maladies and suffering: by taking them upon Himself and conquering them with the power of God's mercy.

The Gospel of the healing of the leper tells us today that, if we want to be true disciples of Jesus, we are called to become, united to Him, instruments of his merciful love, overcoming every kind of marginalization. In order to be "imitators of Christ" (cf. 1 Cor 11:1) in the face of a poor or sick person, we must not be afraid to look him in the eye and to draw near with tenderness and compassion, and to touch him and embrace him. I have often asked this of people who help others, to do so by looking them in the eye, not to be afraid to touch them; that this gesture of help may also be a gesture of communication: we too need to be welcomed by them. A gesture of tenderness, a gesture of compassion... Let us ask you: when you help others, do you look them in the eye? Do you embrace them without being afraid to touch them? Do you embrace them with tenderness? Think about this: how do you help? From a distance or with tenderness, with closeness? If evil is contagious, so is goodness. Therefore, there needs to be ever more abundant goodness in us. Let us be infected by goodness and let us spread goodness!

*Monday*

## **HUMILITY AS THE LAMPSTAND FOR GOD'S LIGHT**

### **A reflection developed from various sources**

Blessed Humbeline was the youngest sister of St. Bernard. She married and had children but was unsatisfied with her life as a way of serving God and so decided to seek counsel from her brother. St. Bernard misjudged the reason for her coming to him and refused to see her until she humbly sent him a message explaining that she had come to ask his advice about her way of best serving God. His advice was that she should obtain her husband's permission to become a nun and so spend the remainder of her life seeking God above all else.

Humbeline had to work for some years before she was able to obtain her husband's permission to leave married life and enter a monastery. She went to Jully, whose abbess was the sister of her husband. She remained there for the rest of her lifetime, though she was later elected abbess, or prioress—the sources don't make it clear how the community at Troyes saw the matter. The sister-in-law went away to found a new monastery and Humbeline was elected in her place.

She devoted her life to the loving service of her sisters and seems to have been a good and faithful superior. Her monastery lived the Rule of Benedict but was not joined to the new order of Citeaux. As far as we know, St. Bernard and others had nothing but praise for the life of the nuns living under the guidance of Humbeline. She had made the humility with which she responded to her brother's harsh judgment the rule of her life and ministry to her sisters.

We are told that St. Bernard was present at his sister's death and that she told him she was tremendously grateful for his advice that she leave married life and take up instead the monastic life. She had found it a choice filled with joy and inner peace. This, no doubt, is a word for us even more than for St. Bernard. One who lives the monastic life fully, without looking back at what has been left behind, finds it a source of joy and mutual help that leads one to a spiritual fulfillment not found in any other way. That is what Humbeline experienced and what she recommended to many others.

St. Benedict presents humility as a key virtue for those who choose to walk the monastic way toward God. Humbeline gives us an example of a person who wasn't filled with self-concern or self-importance. She was willing to rely on others whom she could see were dedicated first of all to loving God and all the others who choose to seek Him as well.

She knew that Bernard had made this choice and so was fully prepared to hear and follow his advice, as long as that advice was consonant with fulfilling the obligations to God and others she had already undertaken. That her husband eventually gave his permission for her to enter the monastic life meant that she had his support and his willingness to give up all the types of support he had received from her throughout their years as husband and wife. She hoped what she did would also lead him to place God even more practically at the center of his life. All of this exemplifies what humility looks like practically. Removing oneself from the center of one's life makes room for God to fill that place. That is what can bring us all to God and to God's light. It makes us ready to live the life of the Kingdom of Heaven. Like Humbeline, we become lamp stands from which the light of Christ shines.

*Tuesday*

## **RESIST TEMPTATION**

**From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis on Tuesday, 18 February 2014**

Temptation presents itself to us in subtle ways, infecting the whole environment that surrounds us and always causes us to look for justifications. In the end, it causes us to fall into sin, and encloses us in a cage from which it is difficult to escape. To resist temptation it is necessary to listen to the Word of God, because “he is waiting for us”, and he always gives us confidence and opens new horizons before us.

The Pope took the opportunity to reflect on the liturgy of the day, particularly on the Letter of St James (1:12-18) in which the apostle, “after having spoken to us yesterday of patience... speaks to us today of resistance; the resistance to temptation. Each person is tempted by his own passions, which attract and seduce him. Then the passions conceive and create sin, and once that sin is committed, it brings forth death”.

But where does temptation come from? How does it act within us? The Pope again referred to the passage from the Letter of St James. “The Apostle tells us that sin does not come from God but from our passions, from our inner weaknesses, from the wounds that original sin has left within us. That is where temptation comes from”.

Initially, temptation “begins in a soothing way”, but “then it grows. Jesus himself spoke about this when he told the parable of the seeds and the weeds (Mt 13: 24-30). The seeds grew, but the weeds planted by the enemy also grew. This is how temptation grows, it grows and grows. If one does not stop it, then it occupies everything”, and that is when infection occurs. Temptation grows, “and it hates solitude”; it will try to spread to another to have company. This is how it accumulates people, spreading to others”. The third feature is justification; “we justify ourselves in order to feel fine with ourselves”.

Temptation has always justified itself, “since the first original sin” when Adam blames Eve for convincing him to eat the forbidden fruit. Through this growth, infection and justification, it “locks us in a place where you cannot easily escape”. “This is what happened to the Apostles who were in the boat: they had forgotten to bring bread” and began to blame each other and discuss who had made the mistake of forgetting it. “Jesus looked at them, and I think that he smiled as he watched them. And he said to them: do you remember the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod? Take heed, beware!”. Yet they “did not understand anything, because they were so caught up in blame that they did not have room for anything else, they did not have light to understand the Word of God”.

The same happens “when we fall into temptation. We do not hear the Word of God and we do not understand. Jesus had to remind them of the multiplication of the loaves, to help them get out of the mindset that they were in”. This happens because temptation closes every horizon “and in this way leads us to sin”. When we are being tempted, “only the Word of God, the Word of Jesus, can save us. Listening to His Word opens horizons”, because “he is always ready to help us escape from temptations. Jesus is great because not only does he help us to get out of temptation, but he also gives us more faith”. Therefore, Jesus not only expects to help us escape temptation but he also trusts us. This is a great strength”, because “he always opens up new horizons” while, through temptation, the devil “closes and develops environments which cause you to fight” and “seek justification for accusing others”.

“Let us not be ensnared by temptation,” the Holy Father said. You can only escape temptation through “listening to the Word of Jesus”. He concluded his homily with the words: “Let us ask the Lord to always say to us, in times of temptation, as he did with the disciples, with patience: Stop. Do not worry. Lift up your eyes, and look to the horizon. Do not close yourself in, move forward. His Word will save us from falling into sin in moments of temptation”.

Wednesday

## RETURN TO ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART

From the Homily by Pope John Paul II on Ash Wednesday, 17 February 1999

Return to the Lord, your God! (Joel 2:12, 13).

Today we announce Lent with the words of the prophet Joel, and we begin it with the whole Church. We announce Lent with the rite that is even more eloquent than the words of the prophet. Today the Church blesses the ashes, obtained from the branches blessed on Palm Sunday last year, to sprinkle them on each of us. So let us bow our heads and in the sign of the ashes recognize the whole truth of the words addressed by God to the first man: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19).

Yes! We can remember this reality, particularly during the time of Lent, to which the liturgy of the Church brings us today. It is a stern time. In this period, divine truths must speak to our hearts with particular forcefulness. We must meet our human experience, our conscience. The first truth, proclaimed today, reminds man of his transience, and recalls death, which is for each of us the end of earthly life. Today the Church lays great stress on this truth, confirmed by the history of every man. Remember that "to dust you shall return". Remember that your life on earth has a limit!

But the message of Ash Wednesday does not end here. The whole of today's liturgy warns: Remember that limit, and at the same time: do not stop at that limit! Death is not only a "natural" necessity. Death is a mystery. Here we enter the particular time in which the whole Church, more than ever, wishes to meditate on death as the mystery of man in Christ. Christ the Son of God accepted death as a natural necessity, as an inevitable part of man's fate on earth. Jesus Christ accepted death as the consequence of sin. Right from the beginning death was united with sin: the death of the body ("to dust you shall return") and the death of the human spirit owing to disobedience to God, to the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ accepted death as a sign of obedience to God, in order to restore to the human spirit the full gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ accepted death to overcome sin. Jesus Christ accepted death to overcome death in the very essence of its perennial mystery.

Therefore the message of Ash Wednesday is expressed in the words of St. Paul: "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God. For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:20-21). Collaborate with him!

The significance of Ash Wednesday is not limited to remind us of death and sin; it is also a loud call to overcome sin, to be converted. Both of these express collaboration with Christ. During Lent we have before our eyes the whole divine "economy" of grace and salvation". In this time of Lent let us remember "not to accept the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor 6:1).

Jesus Christ himself is the most sublime grace of Lent. It is he himself who appears before us in the admirable simplicity of the Gospel, of its words and its works. He speaks to us with the might of his Gethsemane, of the judgment before Pilate, of the scourging, of the crowning with thorns, of the *via crucis*, of his crucifixion: with everything that can shake man's heart.

In this period of Lent, the whole Church wishes to be specially united with Christ, in order that his preaching and his service may be even more fruitful. "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2).

Filled with the depth of today's liturgy, I, John Paul II, Bishop of Rome, with all my Brothers and Sisters in the one faith of your Church, with all my Brothers and Sisters of the immense human family, say to you, Christ: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit" (Ps 51).

"Then the Lord became jealous for his land, and had pity on his people" (Joel 2:18). Amen.

*Thursday*

## **STOP AND CHOOSE**

**From the Homily by Pope Francis on Thursday, 19 February 2015**

In the hustle and bustle of life, it is important to have the courage to stop and choose. The season of Lent serves this very purpose.

Interpreting the Readings for the day after Ash Wednesday (Deut 30: 15-20; Ps 1; Lk 9:22-25), the Pontiff explained that “at the beginning of the Lenten journey, the Church makes us reflect on the words of Moses and of Jesus: “You have to choose”. It is thus a reflection on the need we all have, to make choices in life. And Moses “is clear: ‘See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil’: choose”. Indeed “the Lord gave us freedom, the freedom to love, to walk on his streets”. We are free and we can choose. However, “it’s not easy to choose”. It’s more comfortable “to live by letting ourselves be carried by the inertia of life, of situations, of habits”. This is why “today the Church tells us: ‘You are responsible; you have to choose’”.

This is how Moses shows us the path of the Lord: ‘If your heart turns back and if you do not listen and you let yourself be drawn to prostrate yourself before other gods and serve them, you will perish’. Choose between God and the other gods, those who do not have the power to give us anything, only little things that pass”.

ePope Francis said he was aware that “we always have this habit of going where the people go, somewhat like everyone”. But, “today the Church is telling us: ‘stop and choose’. It’s good advice. And today, it will do us good to stop during the day and think: what is my lifestyle like? Which road am I taking?”.

“Begin Lent with small questions that will help one to consider: ‘What is my life like?’”. The first thing to ask ourselves, the Pope explained, is: “Who is God for me? Do I choose the Lord? How is my relationship with Jesus?”. And the second: “How is your relationship with your family: with your parents; with your siblings; with your wife; with your husband; with your children?”. In fact, these two series of questions are enough, “and we will surely find things that we need to correct”.

The Pontiff then asked, “why do we hurry so much in life, without knowing which path we are on”. He was explicit about this: “Because we want to win, we want to earn, we want to be successful”. But Jesus makes us think: “What advantage does a man have who wins the whole world, but loses or destroys himself?”. The Pope emphasized that “one can win everything, yet become a failure in the end. That life is a failure”. So are those who seem to have had success, those women and men for whom “they’ve made a monument” or “they’ve dedicated a portrait”, but didn’t “know how to make the right choice between life and death”.

The Pope indicated that we can find help in “that really beautiful advice of the Psalm: ‘Blessed are they who trust in the Lord’”. And “when the Lord gives us this advice — ‘Stop! Choose today, choose’ — He doesn’t leave us on our own; He is with us and wants to help us”. And we, for our part, need “only to trust, to have faith in Him”.

Repeating the words of the Psalm, “Blessed are they who trust in the Lord”, the Pope then urged that we be aware that God does not abandon us. “Today, at the moment in which we stop to think about these things and to make decisions, to choose something, we know that the Lord is with us, is beside us, to help us. He never lets us go alone. He is always with us. Even in the moment of choosing”. And he concluded with these instructions: “Let us have faith in this Lord, who is with us, and when He tells us: ‘choose between good and evil’ helps us to choose good”. And above all “let us ask Him for the grace to be courageous”, because “it takes a bit of courage” to “stop and ask myself: how do I stand before God, how are my relationships in the family, what do I need to change, what should I choose?”.

*Friday*

## **THE SPIRIT OF HYPOCRISY**

**From the Morning Meditation by Pope Francis on Friday, 7 March 2014**

In his homily at Holy Mass, Pope Francis reflected on the readings of the day taken from the Prophet Isaiah (58:1-9a) and from the Gospel of Matthew (9:14-15). Through these two readings, the Pope noted, on the first Friday after Ash Wednesday, the Church meditates on the true meaning of fasting. “The spirit of hypocrisy is lurking behind these readings. The spirit of formality in keeping the commandments, in this case, of fasting”. Therefore, “Jesus frequently returns to the issue of hypocrisy many times when he sees that doctors of the Law think themselves to be perfect: they fulfill the commandments as though it were a mere formality”.

The Pope observed that they suffered from a kind of memory loss. For “they forgot that they had been chosen together with the People of God, and not on their own. They forgot the history of their people, the history of salvation, of their election, of the Covenant, of the promise”.

In so doing, they continued, “they reduced their history to ethics. Religious life became for them a matter of ethics”. Thus, “theologians say that, in Jesus’ time, there were 300 commandments” to be observed, “more or less”. Yet “receiving the love of a father from the Lord, receiving from the Lord an identity as a People and then changing it into an ethical system” means “rejecting the original gift of love”. The hypocrites were “good people, they did what they were supposed to do, they were apparently good”. But “they were ethicists, ethicists without goodness, because they had lost the sense of belonging to a people”.

“The Lord grants salvation within a people, in belonging to a people. Thus we understand what the Prophet Isaiah says to us about fasting and penitence. The fact that stands in relation with the people, the people to which we belong: the people to which we have been called and in which we have been inserted”.

This is the true meaning of fasting: “to care about the life of your brother, not to be ashamed of the flesh of your brother, as Isaiah says”. In fact, “our perfection, our sanctity advances with our people, the people with whom we were chosen and inserted”. And “our greatest act of holiness is precisely in the flesh of our brother and the flesh of Jesus Christ”.

Thus, he emphasized, “Today’s act of holiness — for us who stand at the altar — is not a hypocritical fasting. It means not being ashamed of the flesh of Christ who comes here today: for this is the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ. It is going out to share our bread with the hungry, to care for the sick and the elderly, for those who can give us nothing in return: this is what it means not to be ashamed of the flesh”.

“The salvation of God occurs in a people, a people that advance, a people of brothers and sisters who are not ashamed of one another”. However, this “is the most difficult fast: the fast of goodness. This is where goodness leads us”.

*Saturday*

## **THE DIVINE PHYSICIAN “NEEDS” THE SICK**

**From the Catholic Daily Reflections for Saturday after Ash Wednesday**

What would a doctor do without patients? What if no one were sick? The poor doctor would be out of business. Therefore, in a sense, it's fair to say that a doctor *needs* the sick in order to fulfill his role.

The same could be said of Jesus. He is the Savior of the World. But what if there were no sinners? Then Jesus' death would have been in vain, and His mercy would not be necessary. Therefore, in a sense, we can conclude that Jesus, as the Savior of the World, *needs* sinners. He needs those who have turned away from Him, violated the Divine Law, violated their own dignity, violated the dignity of others and acted in a selfish and sinful way. Jesus needs sinners. Why? Because Jesus is the Savior, and a Savior needs to save.

A Savior needs those who need to be saved in order to save!

This is important to understand because when we do, we will suddenly realize that coming to Jesus, with the filth of our sin, brings great joy to His Heart. It brings joy, because He is able to fulfill the mission given Him by the Father, exercising His mercy as the one and only Savior.

Allow Jesus to fulfill His mission! Let Him offer mercy to you! You do this by admitting your need for mercy. You do this by coming to Him in a vulnerable and sinful state, unworthy of mercy and worthy only of eternal damnation. Coming to Jesus in this way allows Him to fulfill the mission given Him by the Father. It allows Him to manifest, in a concrete way, His Heart of abundant mercy. Jesus “needs” you to fulfill His mission. Give Him this gift and let Him be your merciful Savior.

Reflect, today, upon the mercy of God from a new perspective. Look at it from the perspective of Jesus as the Divine Physician who desires to fulfill His healing mission. Realize that He needs you in order to fulfill His mission. He needs you to admit your sin and be open to His healing. In so doing, you allow the gates of mercy to pour forth in abundance in our day and age.

*Dear Savior and Divine Physician, I thank You for coming to save and heal. I thank You for Your burning desire to manifest Your mercy in my life. Please humble me so that I may be open to Your healing touch and that, through this gift of salvation, I allow You to manifest Your Divine Mercy. Jesus, I trust in You.*