

THE FIFTH WEEK OF THE EASTER SEASON

28 April – 3 May

- Sun. **The Fifth Sunday of Easter**
28 **OUR ONENESS IN CHRIST'S LOVE**
 A Reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine
- Mon. **Memorial of Saint Catherine of Sienna**
29 **THE BRIDGE TO GOD THAT IS JESUS**
 A message of God from The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena
- Tues. **Tuesday of the 5th Week in Easter Season**
30 **THE PEACE OF EASTER**
 From the General Audience Address of Pope Francis, 13 April 2022
- Wed. **Memorial of St. Joseph, the Worker**
1 **WORKING WITH GOD AND JESUS**
 A Reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini
- Thurs. **Memorial of St. Athanasius, Bp Doct**
2 **GOD INCARNATE IN OUR HUMANITY**
 From Discourses Against the Arians by St. Athanasius
- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. **Feast of Sts. Philip and James, Apostles**
3 **WHY WE SHOULD IMITATE CHRIST**
 A Reflection from The Teaching of the Apostles
- Sat. **Saturday of the 5th Week in Easter Season**
4 **CHRIST DIED AND ROSE FOR US:**
 THE ONLY MEDICINE AGAINST THE WORLDLY SPIRIT
 From the Homily of Pope Francis, Saturday, 16 May 2020

Sunday

OUR ONENESS IN CHRIST'S LOVE

A Reflection developed from a homily by St. Augustine

The Lord Jesus calls himself The Vine and goes on to tell the disciples that they are branches. We ordinarily make this point by saying that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and we are his members, and that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and the human race but Jesus' metaphor expresses a fuller reality.

A vine and its branches are one and the same living reality. Christ possesses a divine nature which we, of ourselves, can't share but are made able to share by being made one with Christ. He became human and The Vine so that human beings might share in divinity. Dwell in me, he says to us, and I will dwell in you. Notice that the benefit is ours and not his. The branches of a vine don't give life to the vine but vice versa. Branches that are attached to a vine stock draw from it their vital nourishment. This is something the vine stock gives to its branches. Christ's presence in his disciples and their presence in Christ are for their good. Listen again to the Incarnate Truth! *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Anyone who dwells in me and I in him yields fruit in abundance, but without me, you can do nothing!"* These words are to be pondered very seriously.

One might think Christ's branches can produce some fruit of themselves. Yet our Lord doesn't say, "You can do little without me" but, "You can do nothing without me". Even a little fruit is impossible without Christ. More, if a branch doesn't bear much fruit the vinedresser prunes it. If severed from the vine stock the branch can't stay alive, so vinedressers prune branches without cutting them from the vine. That way they will bear more fruit than otherwise. The basic truth is that apart from a vine a branch can't bear any fruit.

Christ couldn't be our vine if he weren't human; he couldn't offer us the grace he does if he weren't divine. That grace enables us to love as he does and with him. Without the vine, one dies. Jesus himself says, whoever doesn't dwell in me will be thrown away and will wither. Such branches are gathered and then thrown into a fire to burn up." On the other hand, *"if you dwell in me and my words dwell in you, you will ask for whatever you long for and it will be yours"*. Those refusing to dwell in Christ have shame; those dwelling in him have glory.

If you dwell in Christ you can't long for anything that conflicts with his love. The very fact that people dwell in our Savior means that they love nothing that is out of harmony with their salvation. Yet it happens that a person may desire one thing due to union with Christ and another due to still being in the world. We are ignorant of what is genuinely good or bad and want something that can't be good for us. Christ gives us what we long for only if it helps us love as he does. Don't be saddened if you don't receive what seems good but receive only what is really for your welfare. If we let Christ's love dwell fully in us then we will ask for only what God wishes to give us and is for our true good.

Monday

THE BRIDGE TO GOD THAT IS JESUS

A message of God from The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena

God is speaking: "By Adam's sinful disobedience the road was so broken up that no one could reach everlasting life. Since they had to share in the good for which I created them, they did not give me the return of glory they owed me, and so my truth was not fulfilled. What is this truth? That I had created them in my image and likeness so that they might have eternal tenderness and goodness. But because of their sin, they never reached this good, for sin closed heaven and the door of my mercy.

As soon as they rebelled against me, they became rebels against themselves. They became like filthy beasts. All created things rebelled against them, while had they been submissive all would have been as I had established in the beginning. With sin, there came troubles from themselves as well as from the devil and the world. You were all drowning because not one of you, for all your efforts at righteousness, could reach eternal life.

But I wanted to undo these great troubles of yours. So I gave you a bridge, my Son, so that you could cross over the river, the stormy sea of this darksome life, without being drowned.

I want you to look at the bridge that is my only-begotten Son, and notice its greatness. Look! It stretches from heaven to earth, joining the earth of your humanity with the greatness of the Godhead. This is what I mean when I say it stretches from heaven to earth. This was necessary if I wanted to remake the road that had been broken up, so that you might pass over the bitterness of the world and reach life.

Using earth alone, your humanity alone, I could never have made it great enough to cross the river and bring you to eternal life. The earth of human nature by itself, as I have told you, was incapable of atoning for sin and draining off the pus from Adam's sin, for that stinking pus had infected the whole human race. Your nature had to be joined with the height of humanity so it could endure the suffering that joined humanity to the divine nature. Then you could accept my Son's sacrifice on your behalf to release you from death and give you life.

So, the highest stooped down to the earth of your humanity, bridging the chasm between us and rebuilding the roadway. Why should he have made himself a roadway? So that you might in truth come to the same joy as the angels. But my son's having made himself a bridge for you cannot bring you to life unless you make your way along it."

God has called. Will you follow the call and walk with Jesus?

Tuesday

THE PEACE OF EASTER

From the General Audience Address of Pope Francis, 13 April 2022

As Christ was solemnly entering Jerusalem, the exultant crowd loudly blesses “the King who comes”, and acclaim “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Lk 19:38). Those people celebrate because they see Jesus’ entry as the arrival of a new king, who would bring peace and glory. That was the peace those people were waiting for: a glorious peace, the fruit of royal intervention, that of a powerful messiah who would liberate Jerusalem from the Roman occupation. Others probably dreamed of the re-establishment of a social peace and saw Jesus as the ideal king, who would feed the crowd with bread, as he had already done, and would work great miracles, thus bringing more justice into the world.

But this is how Christ brings peace into the world: through meekness and mildness, symbolized by that tethered colt, on which no one had ever sat. No one, because God’s way of doing things is different from that of the world. Indeed, just before Passover, Jesus explains to the disciples, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you” (Jn 14:27). They are two different approaches: the way the world gives us peace, and the way God gives us peace. They are different. The peace Jesus gives to us at Easter is not the peace that follows the strategies of the world, which believes it can obtain it through force, by conquest and with various forms of imposition. This peace, in reality, is only an interval between wars: we are well aware of this. The peace of the Lord follows the way of meekness and mildness: it is taking responsibility for others. Indeed, Christ took on himself our evil, sin and our death. He took all of this upon himself. In this way he freed us. He paid for us. His peace is not the fruit of some compromise, but rather is born of self-giving. This meek and courageous peace, though, is difficult to accept. In fact, the crowd who exalted Jesus is the same that a few days later would shout, “Crucify him!” and, fearful and disappointed, would not lift a finger for him.

Jesus’ peace does not overpower others; it is not an armed peace, never! The weapons of the Gospel are prayer, tenderness, forgiveness and freely-given love for one’s neighbor, love for every neighbor. This is how God’s peace is brought into the world. This is why the armed aggression of these days, like every war, is an outrage against God, a blasphemous betrayal of the Lord of Passover, a preference for the face of the false god of this world over his meek one. War is always a human act, to bring about the idolatry of power.

Before his final Passover, Jesus says to his disciples: “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (Jn 14:27). Yes, because while worldly power leaves only destruction and death in its wake — we have seen this in recent days — his peace builds up history, starting from the heart of every person who welcomes it. Easter is, therefore, the true feast of God and humanity, because the peace that Christ gained on the cross in giving himself is distributed to us. Therefore, the Risen Christ, on Easter Day, appears to the disciples, and how does he greet them? “Peace be with you!” (Jn 20:19-21). This is the greeting of Christ victorious, the Risen Christ.

Wednesday

WORKING WITH GOD AND JESUS

A Reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

The Book of Genesis speaks of God working and says he completed his work on the Sixth Day. God is one who works. And the object of God's labor is the earth and all its creatures, especially ourselves. We are the fruit of God's labor.

How does God work? God works freely and uses work to express his love for others. God is inventive and loves to produce beautiful and good things. After each phase of work in creation God pauses and reflects, "This is good!" Thus, after making us God reflects, "This is very good!" God produces works that are good and beautiful, and they bear fruit in new works of love. All the works give great satisfaction.

This tells us about ourselves as made in God's image and likeness and expressly charged to care for the earth and its creatures. What we learn is God's plan. God labors for us now and always. We are placed in a beautiful world and are asked to imitate God. We too are intended to work in love and in joy. But this plan has to confront the reality of sin in human life and history. As a result, our work is often unfree, even a form of slavery; it may be imposed by circumstances beyond our control and require that we do what we don't want to. It often isn't creative or self-expressive or joyful. We often feel no satisfaction in doing it. Moreover, we often don't see the fruits of our labor or how it helps bring more abundant life to others. We often can't pause to reflect, "This is good!" Has God's plan for free, spontaneous, personally expressive, creative and fruitful work been destroyed?

Even if we think we are "condemned" to work at this or that, even when we think it's not good, yet, God has a plan of redemption and it relates to human labor. The labors of Joseph, with the work of Jesus and Mary, show us the path to redemption. The task to which we too have been called is to help bring work closer to what God had in mind in creating us. Our responsibility is to work with God in such a way that, in our own person, work may become expressive of our humanity at its best and, as in Jesus, divinized. Energized by the love Jesus shows us, we can find ways to make work fully human and humanizing. This may seem like a dream, but it is only a long and difficult road.

It is especially difficult because at times we think we've reached an objective and then run up against barriers like monotony or repetitiveness. We then have to renew our efforts to work "better"—i.e., make our work more expressive of our freedom and lovingness and human dignity. We mean we have to find ways to put human values first, even ahead of profit. That means we have to rethink our ways of living and enjoying and using things.

We can't do this in sadness if we want to draw others into this task. Nor can we expect God to do it all by a miracle. It is our God-given task. We must do it with our faith, our courage, our hope and our love. Above all, it is a matter of making every task a work of love. In God, all things are possible if you begin today.

Thursday

GOD INCARNATE IN OUR HUMANITY

Developed from Discourses Against the Arians by St. Athanasius

God assumed a created, human body that he might renew it and might deify it in Himself. The purpose was to introduce us all into the Kingdom of Heaven after his own likeness. We would not have been recreated anew if we had been joined to a merely human creature or if the Son weren't true God. We wouldn't have been freed from sin and its curse had it not been human nature which the Son assumed and we could not have been made divine unless the Word who is God had put on humanity.

In ancient times God sent his word to holy individuals but when The Word came among us through Mary and in the fullness of times he took flesh and became a human being. In that flesh, he suffered and rose. On account of this, the properties of human flesh are his—so he hungered and thirsted and suffered and was tired. And because he was nevertheless divine he raised the dead, restored sight to the blind, and cured the woman with a hemorrhage. In him, all that is of human flesh became an instrument for ministering the works of God.

We are told in Scripture that he “carried”, “bore”, our infirmities and “bore” our sins himself. He took no hurt; for this reason, we are redeemed and shown the way to love our God. We were filled with the righteousness of the Word who did the works of God through his flesh to show us we too can do God's works. He did the works of the Father and he told us that we would do these works and works even greater.

When there was need to raise up Peter's mother-in-law from her sickbed he stretched out his hand humanly but stopped the illness by divine power. In the case of the man blind from birth the spittle he used was human as an instrument of divine power. In the case of Lazarus, He used a human voice to call him forth from the grave by divine power. These deeds show that he had a human body, not merely in appearance, but in truth. It was wholly fitting that in putting on human flesh God should put on all that is proper to it. The Word became flesh.

It is in a different way that we put on divinity by becoming one with Christ. But the results of divine power working through our flesh are not less or other than in Christ. Our task is to allow God's power to so permeate us as to make us instruments of works not less than those of Jesus.

Are you afraid? God took on all that was ours by his creation, in which gave us all we are. Don't be afraid of losing anything if you allow God to make your flesh and your entire self like that of Jesus Christ for his glory and for the salvation of all humankind. God became human without losing anything of his divinity. God makes us divine without taking away anything that is genuinely human. Why should we be afraid? God cannot lose anything of himself and God gives us everything that makes us ourselves. Glory be to God forever.

Friday

WHY WE SHOULD IMITATE CHRIST

A Reflection from The Teachings of the Apostles

Anyone who would learn a craft from a master must observe the skills and the knowledge the master uses in executing the work. A learner then copies the master in executing his own work and does it in a way designed to please the master. If the learner cuts corners this is a serious fault. Now we have Our Lord as master and teacher. Why don't we imitate his teachings and his way of life?

Our master left riches and glory and power to come in poverty to help us. Besides, he let go of Mary, his blessed mother, and of his relatives and life itself. He endured persecution even to the cross. He did all this for our sake. He did this to redeem both Jews and Gentiles. He freed us from worshipping idols and from all ungodliness and offered us a marvelous inheritance. If he did all this for those who believed in him and was not ashamed, why don't we imitate his sufferings using the courage and endurance he gives us?

Our Lord has no need of our sufferings. But they do testify to and confirm our love of our faith and our free gift of self to God. Why not let go of parents, of relatives, and of all that belongs to this world, and even of our lives, for him? Indeed, we must pray that we not be put to a test we cannot endure, yet if we are called to martyrdom we can confess our faith when we are interrogated and we can persevere when we suffer and rejoice in our afflictions.

Let us not sorrow when we are persecuted. In doing these things we not only deliver ourselves from hell but we teach those who are young in the faith, and even those who are catechumens, so that they may do likewise. It is a gift of life in God. If we fail in faith and deny Christ through human weakness we not only destroy ourselves but threaten the lives of others. When they see our denial, they may think that they have become disciples of a wrong faith. If they stumble we are held accountable for them as well as ourselves.

We must love one another even to the cross. Suppose we are arrested and brought before the authorities and then deny the hope that we placed in our Lord by the gift of faith. You might be let go, but what if the very next day you fall sick? What if you can't retain food and vomit it up with great pain? What if you vomit blood and bile and turn out to have an ulcer and need an operation? You may be operated on by the doctors and you may die as a result, in great pain and affliction.

Behold, you have lost earthly life and destroy your life with God as well. *"Everyone, says the Lord, who loves this life shall lose it, and anyone who loses life for my sake will find life everlasting"*. Let us imitate our Lord and never give up. Let us help one another love the Lord and love to do his will.

Saturday

CHRIST DIED AND ROSE FOR US: THE ONLY MEDICINE AGAINST THE WORLDLY SPIRIT

From the Homily of Pope Francis, Saturday, 16 May 2020

Especially while He was bidding farewell to the Apostles, Jesus, spoke of the world many times (see Jn 15:18-21). “If the world hates you, know that it hated me before you” (v. 18). He speaks clearly of the hatred that the world had with Jesus and will have with us. And in the prayer that He says at table with the disciples during the Last Supper, He asks the Father not to take His disciples out of the world, but to defend them from the spirit of the world (see 17:15).

What is this worldliness that is capable of hating, of destroying Jesus and His disciples, and more, of corrupting them and of corrupting the Church? What is this spirit of the world? It is good for us to think about it. It is a style of life, worldliness. But someone might think that worldliness is about partying, living life as a party...No, no.

Worldliness may be this, but fundamentally, not so. Worldliness is a culture. It is a culture of the transitory, a culture of appearances, of *maquillage* (*facial make-up*), a culture of “today yes, tomorrow no; tomorrow yes and today no”. It has superficial values. A culture that does not know fidelity, because it always changes according to circumstances, everything is negotiable. This is the worldly culture. And Jesus insists on defending us from this and He prays that the Father might defend us from this culture of worldliness. It is a “use it and throw it away” culture according to whatever suits you. It is a culture without faithfulness, it has no roots. But it is a way of life, even a way of life for many who say that they are Christians. They are Christians, but they are worldly.

When we say that the martyrs are killed in hatred of the faith, it is true for many, that hatred was over a theological problem, but this is not so for the majority. In the majority of cases, it is worldliness that hates the faith and kills them, just as they did with Jesus.

Nothing about worldliness is superficial! It has deep roots. It is like a chameleon, it changes, it comes and goes according to circumstances, but the substance is the same: a style of life that enters everywhere, including in the Church. Worldliness, the worldly hermeneutic, *maquillage*, everything can be made up to appear in a certain way.

When the Apostle Paul went to Athens and saw many monuments to the gods in the Areopagus, he addressed them: “You are very religious people, I see this... altar to the ‘unknown god’. I know Him and I have come to tell you who He is”. And he began to preach the Gospel. But when he arrived at the cross and resurrection they were scandalized and they went away (see Acts 17:22-33). There is one thing that worldliness does not tolerate: the scandal of the Cross. And the only medicine for worldliness is Christ who died and rose for us; scandal and foolishness (see 1 Cor 1:23).

The apostle John in his First Letter picks up the theme of the world because of this. He says: “This is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith” (1 Jn 5:4). The only thing is faith in Jesus Christ, who died and rose. This does not mean neglecting to enter into dialogue with all people, no, but with the conviction of faith, beginning with the scandal of the Cross, of the foolishness of Christ and of Christ’s victory. “This is our victory”, John says, “our faith.”

Let us ask the Holy Spirit ... for the grace of discerning what worldliness is, what the Gospel is, and that we not allow ourselves to be deceived, because the world hates us, the world hated Jesus and Jesus prayed so that the Father would defend us from the spirit of the world (see Jn 17:15).