

# THE FOURTH WEEK OF THE EASTER SEASON

21-27 April 2024

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- Mon.      **Memorial of Blessed Maria Gabriella Sagheddu**  
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- Thurs.    **Feast of St Mark, Evangelist**  
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Sunday

## CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD

### From a homily on the Gospels by Pope Saint Gregory the Great

*"I am the good shepherd. I know my own-* by which I mean, I love them - *and my own know me.* In plain words: those who love me are willing to follow me, for anyone who does not love the truth has not yet come to know it.

My dear brethren, you have heard the test we pastors have to undergo. Turn now to consider how these words of our Lord imply a test for yourselves also. Ask yourselves whether you belong to his flock, whether you know him, whether the light of his truth shines in your minds. I assure you that it is not by faith that you will come to know him, but by love; not by mere conviction, but by action. John the evangelist is my authority for this statement. He tells us that *anyone who claims to know God without keeping his commandments is a liar.*

Consequently, the Lord immediately adds: *As the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep.* Clearly, he means that laying down his life for his sheep gives evidence of his knowledge of the Father and the Father's knowledge of him. In other words, by the love with which he dies for his sheep, he shows how greatly he loves his Father. Again he says: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them; they follow me, and I give them eternal life.* Shortly before this, he had declared: *If anyone enters the sheepfold through me he shall be saved; he shall go freely in and out and shall find good pasture.* He will enter into a life of faith; from faith, he will go out to vision, from belief to contemplation, and will graze in the good pastures of everlasting life.

So our Lord's sheep will finally reach, their grazing ground where all who follow him in simplicity of heart will feed on the green pastures of eternity. These pastures are the spiritual joys of heaven. There the elect look upon the face of God with unclouded vision and feast at the banquet of life for ever more. Beloved brothers, let us set out for these pastures where we shall keep joyful festivals with so many of our fellow citizens. May the thought of their happiness urge us on! Let us stir up our hearts, rekindle our faith, and long eagerly for what heaven has in store for us. To love thus is to be already on our way.

No matter what obstacles we encounter, we must not allow them to turn us aside from the joy of that heavenly feast. Anyone who is determined to reach his destination is not deterred by the roughness of the road that leads to it. Nor must we allow the charm of success to seduce us, or we shall be like a foolish traveler who is so distracted by the pleasant meadows through which he is passing that he forgets where he is going."

*Monday*

## **BLESSED MARIA GABRIELLA SAGHEDDU (1914-1939)**

### **From the Website of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance**

Her life in the monastery appears to have been dominated by a few essential principles: - The first and most obvious of these was gratitude for the mercy that God had poured out on her, calling her to belong completely to him. She liked to compare herself to the prodigal son and could only say, "Thank you!" for the monastic vocation, her monastery, the superiors, the sisters, everything. "How good the Lord is!" was her constant exclamation and this gratitude will pervade everything, even the last moments of her illness and agony. - The second principle of her life is the desire to respond to God's grace with all her strength so that what the Lord had begun in her might be completed and God's will fulfilled in her, because here is where her true peace lay.

The memories that the sisters have of her are both simple and meaningful: her promptness in acknowledging her faults and asking pardon of others without justifying herself; her simple, sincere humility; her cheerful readiness to do any sort of work, even the most tiring, without making a fuss about it. After her monastic profession, there grew in her the experience of her littleness: "My life is of no value..., I can offer it in peace." Her abbess, Mother Maria Pia Gullini, had a precocious ecumenical awareness and a desire to work for Christian unity. She had communicated this desire to the community, so when she explained to the sisters the Church's request for prayer and offering for the great cause of Christian Unity, Sr. Maria Gabriella felt immediately involved and interiorly compelled to offer her young life. "I feel the Lord is calling me" - she confided to her abbess - "I feel urged, even when I don't want to think about it".

By the quick, straight road of her tenacious commitment to obedience, Gabriella attained the inner freedom to be conformed to Jesus, who "having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end". As a counterweight to the laceration of the Body of Christ, she realized the urgency of offering herself and carrying out that offering with faithful consistency until its final consummation. She was conscious of her own frailty, but her heart and her will had only one desire: "God's Will! God's Glory!" On the very day of her offering, tuberculosis appeared in her young body which until then had been extremely healthy. It swept her to her death after 15 months of suffering.

On the evening of 23 April 1939, Gabriella ended her long agony, totally abandoned to the will of God, while the bells were ringing full peal at the end of Vespers on Good Shepherd Sunday. The Gospel that day had proclaimed: "There will be one fold and one Shepherd."

Even before the consummation of her offering, her self-gift for the sake of Christian Unity had been communicated to the Anglican brethren and had been welcomed by them. It has also sparked a deep response in the hearts of believers of other Christian confessions. The most concrete gift of Sister Gabriella to her own community has been the influx of vocations, who arrived in great numbers during the following years.

Her body, found intact on the occasion of its recognition in 1957, now rests in a chapel adjoining the monastery of Vitorchiano, where the community of Grottaferrata has transferred. She was beatified by John Paul II on 25 January 1983 in the Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls. It was 44 years after her death, the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul and the last day of the week of prayer for Christian Unity.

*Tuesday*

## **ATTITUDES THAT PREVENT US FROM KNOWING CHRIST**

### **From the Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, Tuesday, 5 May 2020**

Jesus was in the temple. It was close to the Feast of the Dedication (cf. Jn 10:22-30). During that time the Jews, too, “gathered round him and said to him, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly’” (v. 24). They would make one lose patience, but quite meekly “Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe’” (v. 25). But you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep” (v. 26). And this, perhaps, raises a doubt: I believe and I belong to Jesus’s sheep; but if Jesus says to us: “You cannot believe because you do not belong”, is there a faith prior to the encounter with Jesus? What is this belonging to Jesus’s faith? What is it that stops me at the door which is Jesus?

There are attitudes prior to professing Jesus. For us too, who are in Jesus’s flock. They are like “prior aversions”, that do not allow us to go forward in knowledge of the Lord. The first of them is wealth. Many of us too, who have entered through the door of the Lord, stop and do not go forward because we are imprisoned in wealth... Wealth is an obstacle to moving forward. But must we fall into pauperism? No. But do not be slaves to wealth, do not live for wealth, because wealth is a lord, it is the lord of this world, and we cannot serve two lords (cf. Lk 16:13). And wealth stops us.

Another thing that prevents moving forward in knowledge of Jesus, is rigidity: rigidity of heart. Also rigidity in the interpretation of the Law. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, the doctors of the Law for this rigidity (cf. Mt 23:1-36). Which is not faithfulness: faithfulness is always a gift to God; rigidity is a security for myself... This distances us from the wisdom of Jesus, from the wisdom, beauty of Jesus: it takes away your freedom. And so many pastors cause this rigidity to grow in the souls of the faithful; and this rigidity does not help us enter through the door of Jesus (cf. Jn 10:7): observing the law as it is written or as I interpret it is more important than the freedom of moving forward following Jesus.

Another thing that does not allow us to move forward in the knowledge of Jesus is sloth. That weariness... Let us think of that man at the pool: 38 years there (cf. Jn 5:1-9). Sloth. It takes away our will to go forward, and everything is “yes, but... no, not now, no, but...”, which leads you to get cozy and makes you tepid. Sloth is another thing that prevents us from moving forward.

Another which is rather ugly is a clericalist attitude. Clericalism in put in Jesus’s place: He says: “No, this must be like this, like this, like this...” –“But, the Teacher” – “Leave the Teacher be: this is like this, and if you do not do like this, like this, like this, you cannot enter”. Clericalism takes away the freedom of believers. This is an ugly disease in the Church: the clericalist attitude.

Then, another thing that prevents us from going forward, from entering to know Jesus and profess Jesus, is the worldly spirit. When the observance of faith, the practice of faith ends up in worldliness. And everything is mundane. Let us consider the celebration of a few sacraments in some parishes: how much worldliness there is!

These are the things that prevent us from belonging to Jesus’s sheep. We are “sheep” [in pursuit] of all these things: wealth, sloth, rigidity, worldliness, clericalism, methods, ideologies, forms of life. Freedom is lacking. And you cannot follow Jesus without freedom. “But sometimes freedom goes beyond, and one slips”. Yes, it’s true. We can slip while moving. But it is worse to slip before moving, with these things that prevent us from beginning to move.

*Wednesday*

## **LOVE**

### **from Meditations on Priestly Life by Fr. Karl Rahner**

Theologically, it is all well and good that we talk of creatures returning to God. Quite true though this is, there is still something more to be said. The reason that we can really find God is that God has not just created the world- rather, God's own self- for all that God is the God of inaccessible light- has, in His eternal Word, eternally descended into the world. In other words, we find God because God, by Himself with His own reality descending has lost Himself as love in His creation, never again to leave it.

Always remember that it is probably – to put it carefully- only in and through the Incarnation of the Word that the immediacy of the beatific vision is possible. For, if that were not the case, how could the sheer immediacy of the vision, its lack of anything to mediate it, not the sort of immediacy that would just burn up the whole creature as it came to know? Of course, we know that God is past all grasp, infinite mystery- but to live and experience God in His past all greatness, as this immediacy: how can anything like this occur at all?

In the last analysis, a minimal condition for this to be possible is that God as such, without ceasing to be God, can make a gift of self to the world. The Incarnation of the eternal Word amounts to God being worldly, God stepping out of Godself as love- the fundamental truth of God's own self, of what God's self actually does, of what God's own self can do. But this means that immediate love for God, love so immediate that God in God'- that love is possible only because God has descended into the world. From there follows that our ascending love to God is always a participation in the descent of God into the world's own life and glory becomes the content of our lives as creatures.

If love is possible only with and within the self-emptying of divine love into the world, and if this is the real structure of our love for God, then all this is possible in the kingdom of Christ, in discipleship of Christ, who is precisely the Word who descends into the world. Thus, when we encounter the love of God as disciples, we come to know the love of God within the world and within the Church.

By participating in God's action of descent into the world and love for the world the Christian can learn to love. This love, according to St Ignatius of Loyola moves us in love into work and service, of the world and our brothers and sisters

*Thursday*

## **THE FAITH OF ST. MARK**

### **A Reflection taken from discourses by St. Pope John XXIII**

I want to remind you of two things. The first is St. Mark's faith; it didn't give up even when he was rejected by others. The second is his devotion to the Gospel message, traditionally said to represent the preaching of St. Peter. This stands for the treasure of truth which we have to guard in our hearts. It is our sacred inheritance, one which our parents in faith bequeathed to us. In this, they showed how greatly they honored it and that they refused to treat it as an embellishment of other enterprises. They taught us to accept it as our basic treasury of wisdom and Christian virtues.

Unlike the many ideologies that come and go during human history, no message has succeeded in giving peace to human hearts except that which calls all to faith in Jesus Christ. People long for the truth about what is good and brings more abundant life, and they have to avoid being lured astray by various utopias and easy answers. These are only deceit and illusion.

Christianity is not a complex system of oppressive rules, as unbelievers at times think. It is peace and joy and love, and a life that is continually being renewed. Faith works in us like the mysterious pulse of spring. We need to assert this as confidently as the apostles; we need to be as convinced of it as was St. Mark; we need to live it in a way that makes it convincing and attractive.

Only faith can give unfailing meaning and serenity to daily life. In it, we find the source of these things, the Risen Christ. He has set us all free from the slavery that is sin; he invites us to become new creatures with him. This is a joyful mystery that has a meaning affecting every single Christian life in its innermost sanctuary of spiritual life. Its power can make us like the Risen Christ.

Throughout the whole of Eastertide, the Church proclaims the joyful truth: The Lord is risen indeed! Those who were sinners and came to Christ are risen too. Those who doubted or were diffident about their faith, or were overly timid or lukewarm, are all risen. So too those who have been sorely tried and who suffer or are poor and oppressed have new hope.

Those who are rising live joy in love. Love is not only a great spring of joy but joy draws its zest from love. God loves us and gives everything for us. We are called to follow him. If we love as Jesus loves we will love others as Jesus does, and we will bear witness to life in Christ as joy. It is joy, for the world. When all are filled with joy who will have time for hatred and violence and injustice? Come to the Lord and find life. This is St. Mark's message to us now and always. Do not forget the evangelizing power of faith-filled joy.

Friday

## **OBEDIENCE AT ITS MOST DIFFICULT**

### **A Reflection developed from a Sermon by St. Ambrose**

What command could the Lord give that is more difficult than “Don’t be disturbed!”? He immediately tells us what is required, “Believe in me”! To believe in deed is to march straight ahead without fear. If we do what will happen? We will meet our Redeemer, Jesus. If we want to be with Jesus we only have to keep going on the path we have set out to follow. Jesus tells us it is his path! It leads to the Father, and so to the assembly of all the holy ones. They are our forebears and they have already completed this very journey. What God’s grace can do for them God’s grace can do in us.

Let’s recall those who taught us our faith—that faith which comes to our aid and keeps safe what has already been entrusted to us. Even though we may have no good works to show when we keep marching with Jesus our very perseverance makes us a light to all those who see us. What’s more, the Lord Jesus has said he is preparing a dwelling place for us where he is, with the Heavenly Father. *“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places”* and he promises that *“I will come and take you to be with me, so where I am you will always be”*.

Some think this only applies to Jesus’ first disciples. Do they imagine he was preparing only eleven dwelling places? Hasn’t he said that people will come from every corner of the world to sit at table with Him in the Kingdom of Heaven? That is what Christ wants but for Him to want is to accomplish! He has carefully shown the way to his Table. He is the way because whoever walks as he did, whoever lives as he lived on earth, comes to sit at his table and share his dwelling place.

Christ prays to the Heavenly Father for this! The promise came first and then the request. Conscious of his authority and knowing the gift is at his disposal he makes the promise. Then he asked the Heavenly Father to grant what he had promised. This is confidence in prayer prayed “in his name”—standing before the Father in his person.

Yes, Lord Jesus, we will follow you. But we know we can only do this at your command. So teach us to keep your beginning command: Don’t be upset! No one can ascend to the Heavenly Kingdom without you, Lord. You are our way and blessed are those who know the truth that is this way, that is your life, and your love, and your strength. Give us confidence. That is itself a great reward. Be the way not only that we walk but that receives us, the truth that not only shows us the way but strengthens us, not only the reality that is eternal life but the life by which we live and praise and love you eternally. Don’t be disturbed!

*Saturday*

## **FINDING LIFE BY GIVING ALL TO JESUS**

### **Notes on the Spiritual Life by St. Rafael Arnaiz Baron**

“With Jesus at my side, nothing seems difficult to me, and I see more that the road to sanctity is simple. Better still, it seems to me that it consists in continuing to get rid of things instead of collecting them, in slowly boiling down to simplicity instead of becoming complicated with new things. In the measure that we detach ourselves from so much disordered love for creatures and for ourselves, it seems to me that we are getting closer and closer to the only love, the sole desire, the one longing of this life. That is true sanctity, which is God.

“To savor the Cross, to live sick and unknown and abandoned by all—only you and the Cross, Lord. How sweet the bitterness, the loneliness, the grief, the pain, wolfed down and swallowed in silence, without help. How sweet the tears shed next to your Cross. Ah! If I knew how to tell the world where true happiness is! But this the world doesn’t understand, nor can it... because to understand the Cross one must love it. To love it one must suffer; and not only suffer but love the suffering in the Lord. O Lord, how few follow you to Calvary.

“When I left my home, by my own deliberate intent, I left behind a series of treatments that my illness required and I came to embrace a state in which it is impossible to care for so touchy a sickness. I knew perfectly well what awaited me. Nevertheless, sometimes, poor Rafael, without your being aware of it, you were suffering, seeing yourself deprived of many necessary things, stripped free of the liberty of giving into the weakness of your illness and so giving it the remedies that out were there in the world you did not lack.

“It is difficult to explain why one loves suffering! But I believe that it can be explained because it is not suffering in itself but rather as it is in Christ, and whoever loves Christ loves his Cross.

“If at times God is not in the soul it is because we do not want him there. We have such an accumulation of things to do, of distractions, of interests, vain desires, conceit, we have too much world within us, that God distances himself. But all we have to do is want him. Every day I am happier in my complete abandonment into his hands. I see his will even in the most insignificant and tiny things that happen. In everything I find a lesson that serves to make me understand better God’s mercy toward me. I love his designs with my whole being, and that is enough.

“My prayer is not good. I neither pray nor meditate nor do my lectio well. At work, I hardly work. When I eat and sleep, I do nothing else—just eat and sleep like a little animal. What one does is nothing in itself and is worth nothing. What is of worth is the way in which it is done. When will I understand that virtue is not in eating an onion but in eating an onion for God? Sanctity is not in external things but in the interior intention of any act whatsoever.”

Rafael wrote this final reflection just two weeks before he died in a diabetic coma.