

DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY
THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER
THE OCTAVE DAY OF EASTER

7-13 April 2024

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- Mon. **SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD**
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 From the Message of Pope Francis for the 2020 World Day of Vocations, 3 May 2020

Sunday

THE MERCIFUL LOVE OF JESUS

A Reflection from a Commentary on John's Gospel by St. Cyril of Alexandria

Thomas' profession of faith came swiftly, only eight days after he had declared himself unwilling to believe in Christ's resurrection unless he felt the very nail marks in his hands. Jesus came to him with a mercy that removed every possible doubt. Our Lord Jesus Christ miraculously entered the room where his disciples were, even though the doors were closed. This is impossible for an ordinary earthly body so the fact reassured Thomas and the other disciples when he also let his side and the wounds in his flesh be touched and felt.

Thomas had said: *"Unless my hands touch the marks of the nails and I see them, and unless I put my hand into his side, I won't believe!"* Yet, to some extent, all were guilty of disbelief, even after they told Thomas that they had seen the Lord. St. Luke's account says, *"While they stood in amazement, torn between joy and disbelief, Christ said to them: 'Haven't you anything to eat?' and they gave him a piece of broiled fish and part of a honeycomb, which he took and ate before their eyes."* This proved it wasn't only in the mind of Blessed Thomas that disbelieving thoughts were still lurking.

It was their very astonishment that made them slow to believe. But when it became impossible to disbelieve what they could see with their own eyes, then Blessed Thomas made his profession of faith on behalf of all: *"My Lord and my God!"* Jesus added: *"Because you have seen me, Thomas, you have believed. But blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."* There is wonderful providence behind the Savior's words—for us. They show us once again how much Jesus cares for our salvation. He is good, and as Scripture says, he wants everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth! Nevertheless, the saying may surprise us.

Christ had to be patient with Thomas, as he always is. When Thomas said he wouldn't believe, as when the other disciples too thought they were seeing only a ghost, Jesus showed his patience. It was because of his longing to convince the entire world that he so willingly showed them the marks of the nails and the wound on his side. It was for the sake of all who need such signs as these to support their faith. He wants us to have no possible reason for doubt. So, he even took food though he had no need for it.

When anyone accepts what hasn't been seen and believes in someone else's word, the faith shown honors not only the one who teaches it but the One the teacher proclaims. Thus, faith in Jesus, who has been proclaimed without being shown, is worthy of great praise. Blessed everyone who believes the message of the Holy Apostles. As the Gospel says, they were eyewitnesses and so became ministers of the word. If you want eternal life, if you long for a dwelling place in heaven, then you must listen to these teachers and then go and help others find faith too.

Monday

WHAT ACCEPTING GOD'S CALL DEMANDS

A Reflection from Spiritual Exercises by Fr. Karl Rahner

The Annunciation begins a process John describes joyfully by saying “and the word became flesh”. Doing this is God’s victory over all that is godless. It is the triumph of grace over all opposition! It is an unexpected, incomprehensible revelation of the immense love of God. The magnificence of this news about salvation is anticipated when Gabriel says to Mary: “You have found grace before God and you will conceive and bear a Son. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord will give Him the throne of his father David and he will rule over the House of Jacob forever.”

But the incarnation has a scandalous character. From now on we find glory in humiliation, fullness in emptiness, riches in poverty, and life in death. That is part of what St. Paul implies when he reminds us that the Word came in the flesh of sin, under the Law, in the form of a slave, and under the power of death. His failure and death-agony already begin when he is received by Mary. His kenosis has begun and the cross is becoming his throne.

God wanted these things and wanted us to find them in Jesus. The desert he entered was our human existence and its poverty and weakness and sickness and imprisonment in darkness, and life lived on a dead-end street. And yet it is life lived with a freedom that is real and true, in spite of the majesty of Divine Otherness. We no longer have to seek God because God is right where we are. God is looking at us from every point on our compass, carrying our burdens, tasting how bitter life can seem, traveling our streets and meeting us in our own human brothers and sisters.

But perhaps we don’t want some of these things—like a saving victory that is concealed in weakness! Doesn’t that just confirm the distressing reality of our situation? Yes, we want the incarnation of God but in a way that enables us to escape what we don’t like, and especially our boredom. Yet being called to Christian life is being called to a life of scandal to ourselves—that, for instance, of achieving glory only through the emptying that is the cross.

From the moment of the Annunciation, Mary is drawn into such an inner tension. Her fate is that of her child—not only in glory but in labor, insults, and death. Oh yes, an angel greets her as perfectly graced so that her heart can be filled with joy and sing forth her Magnificat. But through this grace, she became Our Lady of Sorrows.

When Mary said “Yes!” she became suspect and a kind of outcast. After she gave birth, Jesus himself was at times a puzzle to her, and she had to accept being abandoned by Him for the sake of God’s call. She had accepted this when she said, “Behold I am the slave of the Lord! Let it happen as you have said!” Lent is the grace of being made able to utter these words personally, becoming one with Mary and with Jesus. They always turn toward God and do God’s will instead of their own.

Tuesday

TO BE BORN FROM THE SPIRIT

From the Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, 20 April 2020

This man Nicodemus is one of the leaders of the Jews, an authoritative man. He felt the need to go to Jesus and he went by night. He went by night because he had to be careful, as those who went to talk with Jesus were not looked upon well. He was a Pharisee, a just man. Not all of the Pharisees were bad, no, there were also good Pharisees. He was a just Pharisee. He felt restless. He was a man who had read the prophets and knew that what Jesus was doing had been announced by the prophets. He felt that restlessness, and so he went to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who comes from God". This is a confession up to a certain point. "For no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him". And then he stops. He stops before the "therefore", and Jesus responds mysteriously, in a way that Nicodemus does not expect. He responds with the symbol of being born: "Unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God". And he, Nicodemus, feels confused, he does not understand and takes Jesus' answer literally: "But how can someone who is already an adult be born again?" To be born from high, from the spirit. It is the leap forward that Nicodemus needs to make but he does not know how to make it. Because the spirit is unpredictable. The definition of the spirit that Jesus gives here is interesting: "The wind blows where it pleases you hear it sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit", that is, free. A person who allows himself to be carried from one place to another by the Holy Spirit: this is the freedom of the Spirit. And one who does this is a docile person, and here we speak about docility to the Spirit.

Being a Christian is not only obeying the Commandments: we need to do that, this is true; but if you stop there, you are not a good Christian. Being a good Christian means letting the Spirit enter within you and lead you, lead you where He wants. In our Christian life very often we stop, like Nicodemus, before that "therefore". We do not know what step to take, we do not know how to do it, and we do not have the trust in God to make this step and let the Spirit enter. Being born again means letting the Spirit enter into us, so that I am led by the Spirit, not by myself, free, with this freedom of the Spirit, and you never know where it will end.

May the Lord help us always to be open to the Spirit, as it will be He who leads us forward in our life of service to the Lord.

Wednesday

EASTER HOMILY

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (2012)

Easter is the feast of the new creation. Jesus is risen and dies no more. He has opened the door of death to a new life, one that no longer knows illness and death. He has taken humanity up into God himself. A new dimension has opened up for all humanity.

At Easter, on the morning of the first day of the week, God says once again "Let there be light". The night on the Mount of Olives, the solar eclipse of the passion and death of Jesus, the night of the grave had all passed. Now it is the first day once again, creation beginning anew. Jesus rises from the grave. Life is stronger than death. Good is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate. Truth is stronger than lies. The darkness of the previous days is driven away the moment Jesus rises from the grave and himself becomes God's pure light. But this applies not only to him, not only to the darkness of these days. With his resurrection, light itself is created anew. He draws all of us after him into the new light of the resurrection and conquers all darkness. He is God's new day, new for all of us.

Through the sacrament of baptism and the profession of faith, the Lord has built a bridge across to us and thus the new day reaches us too. At our baptism, Christ took us by the hand. From that day on we are held by him and have walked with him in the light. We have walked into real life.

At Easter, the time of the new creation, The Church presents the mystery of light using a unique and very humble symbol: the new Paschal candle. This is a light that lives from sacrifice. The candle shines in as much as it is burnt up. It gives light, in as much as it gives itself. Thus, the Church most beautifully presents the paschal mystery of Christ, who gives himself and so bestows the great light. We should always remember that the candle is a fire. Fire is the power that shapes the world, the force of transformation. And fire gives warmth. Here too the mystery of Christ is made visible. Christ, the light, the fire, the flame, burns up evil and reshapes both the world and ourselves. "The one who is close to me is close to the fire", as Jesus is reported by Origen to have said. And this fire is both heat and light: not a cold light, but one through which God's warmth and goodness reaches down to us.

Let our Easter prayer be that we will experience the joy of the light of Jesus, and let us ask that we become bearers of this light.

Thursday

SAINT STANISLAUS

From the Address of His Holiness Pope JOHN PAUL II, 9 June 1979

Stanislaus was born in the first half of the eleventh century in the town of Szczepanow. Because of his deep piety and his cultural preparation he was named a canon in the Cathedral of Bishop Lambert Zula. On the death of Bishop Lambert, Pope Alexander II, at the request of the clergy and the lay people as well as of King Boleslaus II himself, raised Stanislaus to the See of Krakow.

History tells how the relationship between Bishop Stanislaus and King Boleslaus II, serene at first, later deteriorated because of the injustices and cruelty visited by the King upon his subjects. The Bishop of Krakow, an authentic "good shepherd" (cf. John 10:10-14), defended his flock. The King replied with violence. Bishop Stanislaus was killed while celebrating Mass. On the venerated skull of the Martyr, now precious preserved in an artistic reliquary, one can still see the signs of the heavy mortal blows.

From that time on, Saint Stanislaus became the Patron of Poland. He became especially the benefactor and protector of poor people; he became, above all, an example to Bishops as to how to communicate and defend the sacred deposit of faith with undaunted strength and unbending spirit. For centuries he has been considered an illustrious witness to genuine freedom and to the fruitful synthesis which is brought about in a believer between loyalty to an earthly fatherland and fidelity to the Church which lives in the expectation of a definitive and future city (cf. Heb 13:14).

After nine centuries the personality and the message of Saint Stanislaus preserve an extraordinary relevance. This regards both his life as a pastor of a portion of God's People and the witness of blood given by his martyrdom.

But Saint Stanislaus is certainly and especially "the man" of his times: his pastoral ministry is fulfilled under the pontificate of Saint Gregory VII, in a period, that is, in which the Church claims her own freedom and her own original spiritual mission in the face of the powerful men of the world. In the eleventh century, Poland and the Church in Poland, at the beginning of the second century of their history, also found themselves in the sphere of complex and delicate problems, which at that time both Europe and Christianity itself had to live and face.

If the Polish Episcopate has decided to invite so many illustrious guests, it has done so in order to emphasize these historical bonds. And it is in the name of these bonds that I desire to thank you for your presence.

And hence, if on this extraordinary occasion, I desire to wish something for everybody, it is that this our common meditation on the events which took place nine hundred years ago may help us to see with even greater clarity the mission of Christianity and of the Church in their relationship to the modern world. Perhaps this has a particular importance for the Europe of today that finds herself at a point of new searching for her distinctive and suitable path.

The task of Christianity and of the Church cannot be anything other than a creative participation in these efforts. Only in this way, and in no other, can there be expressed and, actuated our solicitude for the preservation and defense of the Christian patrimony of Europe and of the individual European countries.

Friday

THE PERIL OF FAILING TO SHARE CHRIST'S LOVE

A Reflection developed from a Sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great

If our hearts don't hesitate to believe what our lips have professed then not only has Christ died and been raised to life for us, but in Christ we too have been crucified, in him we have died and been buried and in him we are being raised up to a new way of life. This last is our third day. St. Paul says, "if you have risen with Christ then seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God; set your hearts on heavenly things and not on the things of earth, for you are dead and our life is hidden with Christ in God."

As people of faith, we know for certain that we have the power to raise up our hearts to heavenly things and to devalue desires that are merely worldly. The Lord solemnly guarantees his presence to us in these words, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of this world". If Christ is with us there is nothing that we cannot do with him. The name "Jesus" means "Savior". He doesn't forsake us by ascending into heaven. From the right hand of the Father Christ strengthens us not only to endure trials as he did but to love others and serve others as he did.

There are many who believe it is very dangerous to fail to celebrate the festival of the resurrection. It is even more dangerous to fail to live the risen life Christ shares with us and gives us the strength to live with all our hearts. We must not act like fools who have given themselves over to selfish pleasure-seeking or run away from what seems difficult or hard. The earth is full of the Lord's mercy. Christ's victory is available to us everywhere. This gives substance to his promise, "Fear not I have overcome the world". It is always Easter for us as long as we abstain from the old leaven of vice and sin.

If you understand the mystery of God's boundless love and kindness, says St. Paul, and if you realize what the Son of God had done for our salvation, then have among you the same attitude as was Christ's. Even if you are rich you mustn't fear the abasement of loving the poor by giving what you have. If you are of noble birth don't be afraid of doing whatever genuine love requires in dealing with others. Don't consider anything beneath your dignity, for you follow one who took upon himself the condition of a slave for others' sakes. We too must walk in his footsteps. We must learn to devalue whatever would prevent us from loving a brother or sister in need.

Listen again to St. Paul: "Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. He was God and didn't regard this as something to be clung to; instead, he emptied himself and became like a slave, becoming identical with ourselves as a human being for all to see. In his human body, he humbled himself and became obedient even to a Name that is above every other name!" This is God's call to each of us. Go and do likewise

Saturday

WORDS OF VOCATION

From the Message of Pope Francis for the 2020 World Day of Vocations, 3 May 2020

The Gospel tells us that in the midst of this challenging journey, we are not alone. Like the first ray of dawn in the heart of the night, the Lord comes walking on the troubled waters to join the disciples; he invites Peter to come to him on the waves, saves him when he sees him sinking and, once in the boat, makes the winds die down.

The first word of vocation, then, is gratitude. Taking the right course is not something we do on our own, nor does it depend solely on the road we choose to travel. How we find fulfillment in life is more than a decision we make as isolated individuals; above all else, it is a response to a call from on high. The Lord points out our destination on the opposite shore and he grants us the courage to board the boat. In calling us, he becomes our helmsman; he accompanies and guides us; he prevents us from running aground on the shoals of indecision and even enables us to walk on surging waters.

When the disciples see Jesus walking towards them on the sea, they first think that he is a ghost and are filled with fear. Jesus immediately reassures them with words that should constantly accompany our lives and our vocational journey: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Jn 6:20). This, then, is the second word I wish to offer you: encouragement.

What frequently hinders our journey, our growth, our choosing the road the Lord is marking out for us, are certain "ghosts" that trouble our hearts. When we are called to leave safe shores and embrace a state of life – like marriage, ministerial priesthood, consecrated life – our first reaction is often from the "ghost of disbelief". Surely, this vocation is not for me! Can this really be the right path? Is the Lord really asking me to do this?

The Lord knows that a fundamental life choice calls for courage. He knows the questions, doubts and difficulties that toss the boat of our heart, and so he reassures us: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear!" We know in faith that he is present and comes to meet us, that he is ever at our side even amid stormy seas. This knowledge sets us free from that lethargy which I have called "sweet sorrow" (*Letter to Priests, 4 August 2019*), the interior discouragement that holds us back from experiencing the beauty of our vocation.

As we live out our specific vocation, those headwinds can wear us down. Here I think of all those who have important responsibilities in civil society, spouses whom I like to refer to – not without reason – as "courageous", and in a particular way those who have embraced the consecrated life or the priesthood. I am conscious of your hard work, the sense of isolation that can at times weigh upon your hearts, the risk of falling into a rut that can gradually make the ardent flame of our vocation die down, the burden of the uncertainty and insecurity of the times, and worry about the future. Take heart, do not be afraid! Jesus is at our side, and if we acknowledge him as the one Lord of our lives, he will stretch out his hand, take hold of us and save us.

Even amid the storm-tossed waters, then, our lives become open to praise. This is the last of our vocation words, and it is an invitation to cultivate the interior disposition of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Grateful that the Lord gazed upon her, faithful amid fear and turmoil, she courageously embraced her vocation and made of her life an eternal song of praise to the Lord.

May the Virgin Mary accompany us and intercede for us.