

# THE SIXTH WEEK OF THE EASTER SEASON

5 - 11 May

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A reflection from On the Song of Songs by St. Bernard
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From the Encyclical "Announcing the Gospel (Evangelii Nuntiandi)"  
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11 November 2009

Sunday

## PREPARING A PLACE FOR THE LORD

### A reflection from On the Song of Songs by St. Bernard

*“My Father and I will come, and in the holy place will make our home”*. This means that the Son of God will seek a holy place in your heart. One of the psalms speaks about God in just this way. Listen, *“You make your dwelling in the holy place, you who are Israel’s praise”*. God dwells in the “heavens”; but we know that these heavens are the hearts of his holy ones. Listen to St. Paul, who says this quite clearly: *“Christ lives in our hearts through faith”*.

We should not be surprised that the Lord Jesus makes a home in such heavens, and does it with joy, for unlike the heavens above he didn’t bring these into being by a simple word of command but descended into the arena that is our world and laid down his life to redeem us and our hearts. Listen to what he said after the battle was over: *“This is my resting place forever and ever; here I have chosen to dwell”*. Blessed indeed is the person to whom the Lord says, *“Come, my chosen one! I will set up my throne in you!”*

Why, then, are we sorrowful at times? Why are we troubled inwardly? Is it a matter of trying to find a fitting place for the Lord within ourselves? After all, which of us can provide Jesus with a really fitting place—He who is the Lord of Glory? Where is the place that is worthy of his majesty? I would count myself fortunate to be found worthy of worshipping at his footstool and being able to cling to his feet! Maybe I can at least cling to the feet of a saintly person whom the Lord has chosen to be his dwelling place!

Yet, the fact is that the Lord only needs to anoint me inwardly with the oil we call his mercy to enable me to cry out: *“I have run the way of your commandments because you have enlarged my heart”*! I may not be about to usher the Lord into a large place in my heart, one wonderfully furnished, and then invite him to refresh himself there together with his disciples. I only hope that I will be able to offer him a place to lay his head!

One has to grow and be enlarged inwardly to become capable of containing God within oneself. The dimensions of a soul, however, are proportioned to its love. This is what St. Paul reminds us of when he calls upon us to *“widen our hearts in love”*. The soul is, of course, spiritual and can’t be measured in a physical sense. But grace makes possible what nature cannot. We expand spiritually as we make progress toward the perfection of our humanity called *“the full stature of Christ”*, as St. Paul notes. That is why we can grow into a temple sacred to the Lord.

Love is the measure of our inward self, of our soul. Souls who love much are large and those that love little are small. The soul that has no love at all is nothing! St. Paul says: *“Without love I am nothing!”* By Christ’s grace, we attain even to the stature, to the wideness and fullness, of the love that sets apart Jesus Christ. Let Christ’s grace work this wonder in your heart! Then you will have truly prepared a place for the Lord to dwell.

Monday

## **EVANGELIZING IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT**

**From the Encyclical “Announcing the Gospel (Evangelii Nuntiandi)” by Pope Paul VI**

*“Jesus said to his disciples: When the Paraclete comes, the Spirit of truth, who comes from the Father and whom I myself will send .. the Spirit will bear witness on my behalf.”* (Jn. 15:26ff) Only after the descent of the Spirit did the apostles set out for the ends of the earth. The Spirit made eloquent apostles of people like St. Peter and St. Paul, and even the Twelve, inspiring them with the message they were to proclaim. Then the Spirit fell upon those who listened to the divine word.

The Church lives and grows by being filled with the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the source of its life and enables believers to understand Christ and his teaching. Right now the Spirit is at work in each and every person who witnesses to the Good News. We need to be open to the Spirit’s guidance. The Spirit alone can inspire word and deeds in those who witness, as well as open the hearts of those who hear and see them, to accept this message. Techniques of evangelization as well as preparation and study are undoubtedly of value. Without the Holy Spirit, no amount of preparation is of any use. The best reasoning is powerless to persuade the human heart unless the Spirit prompts.

The present day is a privileged moment of the Spirit. Everywhere believers wish to know more of the Spirit, to unfurl their sails to catch the Spirit’s breath and to entrust themselves to the Spirit’s guidance. People gather in prayer and freely surrender themselves to the Spirit’s action. It was by no mere chance that the first steps in witnessing to the Gospel were taken on the day of Pentecost, which means at the inspiration of the Spirit of God. So it is easy to see that the initiative in spreading the Good News belongs to the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who prompts witnesses and prepares the hearts of those who hear and see that witness so that the message is understood and accepted as a word of salvation.

The Holy Spirit can, in a very true sense, be called the goal of all evangelization. It is the Spirit who brings the New Creation into being and fashions the new humanity—the aim of all spreading of the Gospel. The Spirit fashions the unity in diversity which is realized in the Christian community. It is due to the Spirit that the Gospel can permeate the world. The Spirit gives signs to the times and explains their significance for the concrete circumstances of our human life.

It is our vocation to live the Spirit in all we do and say and in how we do and say everything that is our life in the community of Christ. We open ourselves to the Spirit by doing and serving as Jesus did. It is every day’s task and it realizes the love of Christ in us and for others.

*Tuesday*

## **SEEING ALL WITH THE HEART OF CHRIST**

### **A Reflection developed from a Sermon of St. Oger**

The Holy Spirit who is called Advocate and Comforter is the counselor of all believers and the defender and protector of all who hope in God. Without the Spirit, there is neither strength nor holiness. The Spirit becomes the champion, as it were, of all who are destined for eternal glory.

When we speak of the Spirit comforting the afflicted we mean especially those who grieve for their sins and must suffer in consequence of them. They are distressed not only because they have messed up their lives with evil deeds but because they have shunned the love of Christ, the King of Glory. They are heartbroken because through their wrongs they have tried to set at naught, even though without realizing it, what our Savior died to accomplish. They weep over their inability to see the face of Christ who is the source of salvation and the only real hope of life.

The Spirit comforts all such persons. In this present life, the Spirit gives them the consolation of hope as the Spirit will bring them to the blessed eternal joy that is the fulfillment of all hopes. The Spirit of Truth shuns all whose love does not reach beyond themselves. The Spirit's will is that Christ, and Christ alone as God, should be loved for his own sake. Our love for God must be total. God will have no rival but must be the sole object of our love. God has no rival in loving us, any more than he can be rivaled by anyone else's generosity. It is out of that generosity that he rewards with life all those who love Him alone.

Yet God desires to be loved in such a way that we love everything else together with God and love nothing apart from God. As the creator of all, God is the source of all created things. Every created thing that is good is good simply because God made it and made it good. In loving the good in created things, then, one loves their creator. We cannot love them truly if we love them for their own sake because by themselves they have no good to offer us. God gave them existence and goodness.

Anyone who loves gold or silver or material goods and possessions of any kind must love their creator. To love them apart from God is to be a stranger to God's goodness and generosity, and so to theirs. It is the giver of goodness that one must love in all created things—loving them in God. By loving God in this way we love everything else too, even while God is truly and really the sole object of our love.

No one is capable of seeing God, even in created things, if the eye of the soul is diseased. The inward vision has to be purified to perceive spiritual truth. This is what makes us worthy temples of the Holy Spirit. We must do all that we can to become so purified that we can see God in all things when we have eyes only for God's glorious beauty. That is how Jesus knows all things and knows God. Jesus knows by loving because his heart sees God everywhere. If we let this be done in us then we dwell with God even as Jesus dwells with the Heavenly Father. Let the Spirit purify your love so that you can be with God forever in the life that is unending joy and gladness.

Wednesday

## **MASTERS AND MYSTICS OF THE SCHOOL OF CHARITY** **From The Brothers of Atlas Testimony Never To Be Forgotten** **by Dom Bernardo Olivera**

Christian wisdom consists of a divine project for salvation. This project finds its source and its summit in the Paschal Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus Christ is the "Wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1,24). To exercise oneself in wisdom is to remember and to keep in our hearts the saving interventions of God in history, putting into practice the ensuing norms of conduct. Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, is invoked as the Throne of Wisdom for a two-fold reason: because she carried in her womb Wisdom made flesh and because she carried in her heart the wisdom of one who meditated, pondered and interpreted the saving words and gestures of Christ the Lord.

The Lord worked powerfully in the life of our Brothers. His work in them is also word. (Here), we let them speak, and they themselves told us their story revealing their meaning. God reveals his secrets to his friends the prophets; this continues today.

In their passion, our seven Brothers began to work in a wonderful way in our Order.. and in the Church. Now is the time to listen again to what the Spirit, working in them, is saying to the Church and to the world: He speaks and teaches in the Order, this school of schools of charity.

There is a first message for all men and women of goodwill. The hidden and silent passion of these Brothers was transformed into a Gospel call that resounds without ambiguity.

- Beg forgiveness from God for the aggressors. Only forgiveness can break the chains of hatred and violence. To forgive is an act of profound respect that allows us to discover in the offender, beyond all appearances, the image of God. To forgive is to realize and to proclaim that, despite our failings and our ignorance, God recognizes everyone as sons and daughters, tenderly loved. To forgive is to bear witness, in spite of everything, to our divine Filiation and universal brotherhood. The word pardon is the word that best concords with the heart of a martyr since he is a faithful witness to love.

I hope when the time comes, to be conscious enough to ask pardon from God and from my brothers in humanity, and at the same time to forgive my aggressor with all my heart...(Christian, spiritual testament)

- The martyr who offers his life while forgiving, accuses no one. A group of extremists does not represent a people: nothing would be more absurd than to accuse the Algerian people or the Muslim world for what happened. Neither must we accuse the physical authors of the drama. We must be confident that a word of pardon will dissipate all evil and ignorance, letting light shine within ourselves and finding spaces of liberty for the transformation of our existence. All human beings are worthy of being loved.

How could I rejoice if this people whom I love were indistinctly accused of my death? This is too high a price for the "grace of martyrdom" to have to owe it to an Algerian, whoever he may be, above all if he thinks to act out of fidelity to Islam as *he believes it to be*. (...), *And for you too, friend of the last hour, who did not know what you were doing. Yes, for you too I wish this THANK YOU and this A-DIEU. And that we may meet again, happy thieves in Paradise, if it pleases God the Father of us all. Amen! (Christian, Spiritual Testament.)*

*Thursday*

## **THE MANY DEPARTURES OF JESUS**

**A Reflection taken from a text by Fr. Hans Urs von Balthasar**

Jesus announced his departure more than once and in general wasn't understood. Thus he told a crowd, "Where I am going you cannot come." and their response was to ask if he intended to kill himself, and when he told his apostles they imagined glory would come to them immediately. All thought only of his earthly way of being present. Some naively declare their willingness to die rather than be separated from him, others assert they will remain with him no matter what happens, and yet others ask where he is going so they can follow.

In John's Gospel Jesus says, "Little children, I shall be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, but where I am going you can't come." This puzzles them. The distance between heaven and earth, as we imagine them, remains and we don't appreciate that Jesus' presence as we can experience it is merely a means or point of departure for starting the believing Church on an unimaginably long and seemingly lonely journey through time.

What is the destiny of the Church? "Happy are they who do not see and yet believe". (Jn 20:29) Our relationship with Jesus is always one of faith. Even when he was publicly present his essential identity was unrecognized. As the Baptist says, "There stands among you one whom you do not recognize", (Jn.1:26). This is as true for us and for the Baptist's contemporaries or the apostles. Even when we know he is present, we don't know how to recognize who he is essentially. A seemingly impossible presence is veiled in mystery and is like an absence when one's faith is insufficient. Even when he came walking to them on the water or walked with them after rising they couldn't recognize his reality. "I have been with you all this time, Philip, and you do not know me?" (Jn 14:9) Is this the time of salvation?

The expression "a little while" becomes a kind of key. The disciples asked, "What does he mean by this 'little while'?" There is an economy of grace bestowed from above, allowing the invisible to become visible briefly, and a counter-economy of sin that refuses to see what is shown and sees only absence. We stand in a time of developing faith that must refuse the economy of sin and cling to that of grace. We, for instance, are to become Jesus' presence. Can the world recognize Him in us? Even if we have doubts we must believe in his presence in ourselves and make it visible by our deeds.

*Friday*

## **ST. DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI** **from The Catholic Online**

The man who would become St. Damien of Molokai was born in rural Belgium on January 3, 1840. He was the youngest of seven children. Growing up on the farm he was being prepared to take over for the family, but he did not want to take on the responsibility. Instead, he wanted to follow his older brother and two sisters who took religious vows.

He was baptized Josef and attended school until the age of 13 when his help was needed on the family-run farm full-time. He aided his family until he was old enough to enter the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He took the name Damien, after a sixth-century martyr.

In 1864, Damien's brother, who was a member of the same order, was ordered to Hawaii. But his brother became ill, so Damien offered to go in his place.

The brothers worried that Damien was too uneducated to become a priest, although he was considered to be intelligent. Damien demonstrated his ability by quickly learning Latin from his brother. He was devoted in prayer, and prayed each day before an icon of St. Francis Xavier. His prayer was that he could become a missionary. Eventually, his religious brothers agreed and had him ordained. The ordination took place on the island of Hawaii. For 9 years he worked on the island as a priest, leading an undistinguished life.

In 1866, Hawaii established a leper colony on Kalaupapa Peninsula. It was still mistakenly believed that leprosy was highly contagious.

Upon arrival, he found the colony was poorly maintained. Anarchy reigned among the people living there. Many people required treatment but had nobody to care for them. Others were drinking and became chronic alcoholics. There was no law or order.

Damien understood that leadership was needed, so he provided it. He asked people to come together to build houses and schools and eventually the parish church, St. Philomena. The church still stands today.

The sick were cared for and the dead buried. Damien personally provided much of the care the people needed. The leper colony became his permanent home. Damien grew to love the people.

Only 5% of people can catch leprosy from others. Damien was one of them. He realized he had the disease when he placed his foot into boiling water and felt no pain. He continued his work, despite his illness, which slowly took over his body. He died on April 15, 1889. He was beatified by St. John Paul 2 in Brussels, Belgium in 1995 and canonized by Pope Benedict 16 in 2009.

*Saturday*

## **THE HOLY ABBOTS OF CLUNY**

**from the General Audience Address by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, 11 November 2009**

The Order of Cluny at the beginning of the 12th century had almost 1200 monasteries, a truly impressive figure. At the time of the growth of Cluny, Western monasticism was experiencing a severe decline especially because of the dependence of abbeys on the local nobles who controlled all that belonged to the territories under their jurisdiction. In this context, Cluny was at the heart and soul of a profound renewal of monastic life that led it back to its original inspiration.

At Cluny, the Rule of St Benedict was restored with several adaptations that had already been introduced by other reformers. The main objective was to guarantee the central role that the Liturgy must have in Christian life. The Cluniac monks devoted themselves with love and great care to the celebration of the Liturgical Hours, to the singing of the Psalms, to processions as devout as they were solemn, and above all to the celebration of the Holy Mass. They promoted sacred music, they wanted art and architecture to contribute to the beauty and solemnity of the rites; they enriched the liturgical calendar with special celebrations and they intensified the devotion to the Virgin Mary. For the monks of Cluny great attention was given to the Liturgy because they were convinced it was participation in the Liturgy of Heaven. And the monks felt responsible for interceding at the altar of God for the living and the dead, given that large numbers of the faithful were insistently asking them to be remembered in prayer. To preserve and foster this atmosphere of prayer, the Cluniac Rule emphasized the importance of silence, to which discipline the monks readily submitted, convinced that the purity of the virtues to which they aspired demanded deep and constant recollection. Numerous princes and Popes asked the Abbots of Cluny to extend their reform so that in a short time a dense network of monasteries developed that were linked to Cluny. Thus, a spiritual Europe gradually took shape in various regions of France and in Italy, Spain, Germany and Hungary.

Also, of significance were the benefits that monasteries inspired by the Cluniac Reform contributed to society. At a time when church institutions alone provided for the poor, charity was practiced with dedication. In all houses, the Almoner was bound to offer hospitality to needy wayfarers and pilgrims, traveling priests and religious and especially the poor, who frequently came asking for food and a roof over their heads for a few days.

The Abbots of Cluny were elected without interference from the civil authorities and thus truly worthy people succeeded one another at the helm in Cluny. I think of Abbot Odo, and other great figures such as Eymard, Majolus, Odilo and especially Hugh the Great, who served for long periods, thereby assuring stability and the spread of the reform. As well as Odo, Majolus, Odilo and Hugh are venerated as saints.