

THE ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

16-22 June 2024

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Sunday

IMAGINING THE UNIMAGINABLE

A Reflection from a Sermon by St. Peter Chrysologus

This Sunday we are told that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. What can that possibly mean? Are we hoping for something tiny? Can something like that motivate a virgin's long years of self-restraint, can it be the prize for the blood of a martyr? Can this be that mystery no eye has seen or ear heard and which no human heart has imagined? Here we see a challenge to our faith—we don't know how to think of what is promised to those who love God with all their heart.

Let's face this challenge by recalling the Scripture passage which tells us that God's weakness is stronger than human strength, and that God's foolishness is wiser than all human wisdom. If we believe this, it shouldn't surprise us that the smallest of all seeds is somehow greater than the entire earth. This means that the Kingdom of God is sown in us, in our minds and hearts, as something needing to grow, and grow in a way that will lift us with it as high as God's Kingdom. It will enlarge our faculties of mind and heart and produce great knowledge and vast love that will make us burn with longing love and grasp the breadth of God's truth.

We start by remembering that Christ himself is the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ has been sown within us like a mustard seed. He was first sown in the Virgin's womb but he grew up into the Tree of the Cross with branches that now spread over the entire world. When a mustard seed is crushed then its pungency is experienced and it not only flavors and seasons everything with which it is mixed but preserves it. So it was with Christ. So it is to be with us in whom the crushed Christ has been sown. This mustard seed must be crushed in us if we are to experience the power of God's Kingdom, and if we are to spread it throughout the worlds that are our lives.

Christ became all things to restore all of us to God's image and the full sharing in God's life of loving. The man Jesus received the kingdom of God as a mustard seed and sowed it in the garden that is the Church, his Body. It extends over the entire world—tilled by the plow that is the Gospel, protected by the stakes that are sound doctrine and discipline, cleared of every noxious weed by the labors of those sent as evangelists, and lovely with the perennial flowers that are holy lives. This is the paradise of God and we are its gardeners.

A mustard seed is a symbol of hope. God promised a kingdom to the patriarchs. This hope took root and sprang up through the ministry of the prophets. Through the apostles and all who preach the Gospel by word or example, it grew great like a plant large enough to house a whole flock of birds; the Church became a tree filling the entire earth. We too must "take the wings of a dove" to fly to this tree and find rest in its branches. There we may dwell securely no matter what tribulations come. From this

resting place, we show forth foreshadowings of all that is to come into the world here and hereafter. Rest and labor become one reality and bring us both suffering and joy. What imagination can't encompass, a heart at rest in God can embrace in hope. That hope is yours. Rejoice in it.

Monday

HOW GOD TEACHES US THE TRUTH **Inspired by a Sermon of St. Augustine of Hippo**

Blessed Joseph Mary Cassant died at the age of 25 after a life filled with sickness, suffering and weakness. He was never able to do an ordinary day's work and may never have passed a day without experiencing painful feelings about his weaknesses and inabilities. He was constantly put to the test by God. That is what he decided. That enabled him to find in his weakness a vocation within his monastic vocation. He abandoned himself into God's hands in trust.

This is what St. Augustine said about such situations. When God puts someone to the test it is not so God will learn something he had not known. It is to question the one being tested to bring into the light hidden qualities. The Psalmist prayed: "From hidden faults acquit me"! There are in all of us, things hidden from us—not only bad but good—and they do not come out, are not brought into the open, unless one is put to the test. We do not know ourselves as our creator knows us any more than the sick know themselves in the way their physicians know them. If God were to give up putting us to the test God would be giving up the work of teaching us the truth about who we are and who and what we are called to become.

God tests us to teach us the truth, just as the devil tests people to deceive them. There is a simple remedy for the temptations of the devil; one must overcome oneself interiorly and to do that is to overcome the devil even outwardly. When we learn to know ourselves, we are no longer careless and do not neglect some of the gifts God has given us. You may neglect the self you do not know, but not the self you do know.

We are told that Joseph Mary Cassant was tested every day by temptations to despair and depression. He was tempted to give up on himself, and so, on his life, because he felt depressed by all that he could not do. But in facing these temptations he discovered what he could do. He could love God by accepting himself as he was, and accept suffering as an invitation to draw close to God as Jesus had on the cross. He was capable of great love and great generosity in giving the gift of self to God and others. He was capable of showing others this opportunity. He did it by putting on real cheerfulness and charity.

What about us? Recall Abraham and Sarah, who could not have a child. When they placed their trust in God, they were given the longed-for child. What does this teach us? We should not value God's gifts more than God's giving himself to us; the gifts are secondary. God is to be loved without considering whether we will receive anything or not and the reward will be God himself.

This was the insight that Joseph Mary Cassant received. We know how he used it and how it enriched and saved him as well as others. That is why he was beatified. No

matter the burden and no matter the weakness, we are called to a vocation of loving. In his monastic community, Joseph Mary found people glad to work to supply his physical needs and only asked that he share with them his love of God. There is no greater gift one can give or receive. This is a truth God is teaching us too.

Tuesday

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND MORALS

From the Address of Pope Benedict XVI to Members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, 27 April 2006

Some have reached the point of theorizing on the absolute sovereignty of reason and freedom in the context of moral norms: they presume the expression of a law that man makes for himself by himself. The advocates of this "secular morality" say that man as a rational being not only *can* but *must* decide freely on the value of his behavior.

This erroneous conviction is based on the presumed conflict between human freedom and every form of law. In fact, the Creator, because we are creatures, has inscribed his "natural law", a reflection of his creative idea, in our hearts, in our very being, as a compass and inner guide for our life.

For this very reason, Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church tell us that the vocation and complete fulfillment of the human being are not attained by rejecting God's law, but by abiding by the new law that consists in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Together with the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, it is expressed in "faith working through love" (Gal 5: 6).

There is no contradiction between God's law and human freedom: God's law correctly interpreted neither attenuates nor, even less, eliminates man's freedom. On the contrary, it guarantees and fosters this freedom because, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, "freedom... attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude" (n. 1731).

The moral law established by God in creation and confirmed in the Old Testament revelation reaches fulfillment and greatness in Christ. Jesus Christ is the way of perfection, the living and personal synthesis of perfect freedom in total obedience to God's will. The original function of the Decalogue is not abolished by the encounter with Christ but is led to this fullness.

An ethic that in listening to revelation also seeks to be authentically rational, finds its perfection in the encounter with Christ, who gives us the new Covenant.

In revealing the Father and his way of acting, Jesus at the same time reveals the norms of upright human action. He affirms this connection in an explicit and exemplary way when, in concluding his teaching on loving one's enemies (cf. Mt 5: 43-47), he says: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5: 48).

This divine, divine-human, perfection becomes possible for us if we are closely united with Christ, our Savior.

The path marked out by Jesus with his teaching is not an externally imposed regulation. Jesus himself took this path and asks no more of us than to follow him. Moreover, he does not limit himself to asking: first of all, through Baptism, he allows us to participate in his own life, thereby enabling us to understand his teaching and put it into practice.

In the quest for a Christologically inspired ethic, it is therefore necessary always to bear in mind that Christ is the Incarnate Logos who enables us to share in his divine life and sustains us with his grace on the journey towards our true fulfillment.

What man really is, appears definitively in the Logos made man; faith in Christ gives us the fulfillment of anthropology. Consequently, the relationship with Christ defines the loftiest realization of man's moral action. This human action is directly based on obedience to God's law, on union with Christ and on the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer's soul. It is not an action dictated by merely exterior norms, but stems from the vital relationship that connects believers to Christ and to God.

Wednesday

TURNING TO GOD IN THE PRAYER OF LOVE

A Prayer of St. Anselm of Canterbury

Lord, my heart is before you! I try but I can do nothing by myself. Please do what I cannot. Admit me to the inner chamber of your love. You have told me to ask, to seek, and to knock. You caused me to seek you and now I ask you to cause me to receive you! You gave me the gift of seeking you so now give me the gift of finding you. You teach me to knock and if you don't open the door for me how will your gift find its fulfillment? By your gift I am filled with desire, so now let me have its fulfillment.

I cling to you and pray that I may never cease to love you. Good Lord, do not reject me. I am hungry for your love; refresh me with it and never let me be wholly filled. Take me and possess me entirely. O little person that I am, think of what you owe your Savior! Think what God has done for you, has been for you and that everything he does and is makes God more lovable in the eyes of your heart. You were in darkness, on uncertain ground, descending into chaos as into hell. A huge leaden weight hung around your neck and dragged you downwards. You were without help and you didn't know it.

Good Lord Jesus, that was my situation and you, like the sun, gave me light. You showed me what a state I was in and then you cast away that weight that was dragging me down and drove off those who attacked me. You called me by a new name that reminds me always of your name. Take courage, you said. I have given my life for you. You will leave the evil you were in and not fall into the pit—if only you will cling to me! I am leading you into my kingdom and I declare you one of my heirs.

Lord, that's the way it was. But you have done so much. I was in darkness, not knowing myself and weak and liable to fall. You illumined my way, showed me who I am and cast all my oppressors behind my back. You made me a Christian and so called me by your own Son's name. You led me to confess you and set me upright and gave me knowledge and love for you. You have made me sure of my salvation in telling me that you gave your own life for me and have promised me glory if only I will keep following you. If I wandered away into sin you simply waited for me to turn and follow you.

How much my whole being owes to you, O Lord. You made me new, you redeemed me, you promised me the most wonderful things, and then you promised your Self. For each of these gifts, I want to love you with all my heart. You are greater than I am and what I owe you is as great as you are! I can never repay you and you don't ask me to.

Draw me to you constantly, Lord. I am wholly yours by creation and redemption and I ask that you make me all yours in love. There is no greater gift you can give me than that of loving you with all my heart and soul and strength. Possess me wholly! Grant that I may praise and thank you forever!

Thursday

THE ONE THING NEEDED

A Reflection from a conference by John Tauler

God is ready to give, we only have to ask properly. What is more, God has been at pains to tell us how to ask properly. First, we should observe what we must ask for and then how to do it. The answer is simple; we must ask wholeheartedly. The thing is to bring our hearts home, so to speak. This means calling them back from wanderings among created things, from distractions. Then, with deep humility, we must place ourselves at God's feet and ask him to be merciful and generous with us.

What we must do is knock at our Heavenly Father's heart and ask for bread. The bread we truly need is simply love for God. If one has none of this bread then one doesn't really have an appetite for any other food God can give us. However rich any other food might be we can't enjoy it or find it nourishing if we don't long to love God. That's the way this love is. It is the one thing we truly and really need.

So let's ask God to give us this love. Let us ask God to use our prayer to teach us this love. Let's use our spiritual exercises to stimulate this love. Asking humbly is the most pleasing way of asking God for this gift. It is also the most helpful thing for us.

Whatever method of prayer a person uses is not important compared with praying to love God with all our heart. You can pray to God as divine or as Trinity or you can pray to the Passion or the sacred wounds of the Lord. The only essential thing is to pray to love God wholly and always.

It is not given to everyone to use purely mental prayer. Some of us have to use words. If you need to do this don't be concerned. Speak to our dear Lord as lovingly and tenderly as you can. Use all the most loving words you can think of. Doing this raises your heart, and so too your love.

It is very helpful to ask the Heavenly Father to give you a foretaste of himself. Ask this in whatever form of prayer that may suit you. What you are asking is most pleasing to our Heavenly Father. It is very helpful to ask this through the Beloved Son. This way of praying is most pleasing to God.

Do not be concerned if your past sins or faults come to your mind when you set out to pray. What is important is that you persevere in prayer and that you make what you pray your own. When you find that you are really putting your heart into asking that God lead you to love him then you are already making progress.

You now know the one needful thing. You now know what way of praying is most pleasing to God. When you persevere in prayer you quickly discover which way of praying best suits you. Knowing this makes it easier to persevere. God tells us to knock and that if we do we will find the door opened for us. Knocking with zeal and perseverance is a kind of prize given to those who refuse to give up. We don't really

know in detail all that we need. Let God show you what you need as he leads you more and more into prayer. Doing these things can lead you nowhere except to God. What else is needed?

Friday

IMITATING CHRIST IN ALL THINGS

A Reflection by Bishop Bruno of Segni, OSB

"Be imitators of God as God's dearest children, and walk in love, just as Christ loves us and gives himself up for us as a sweet-smelling oblation and sacrifice." Today we celebrate St. Aloysius Gonzaga for his imitation of Christ. Consider Christ's example & that of Aloysius.

In everything he did, Jesus left us a pattern of humility. Although he is the Almighty Lord he chose to be poor for our sakes. He refused honors, freely submitted to suffering and even prayed for those who did him evil. And he did all this so that no one could disdain any of these things if they wished to follow him, insofar as human frailty allows. If we fail to do these things we are not true Christians. Anyone who professes love for Christ must tread the path Christ trod. Look! Aloysius did all these things, and simply to follow Christ.

Because the Lord freely submitted to suffering and the cross he delivered us by his very death from the power of death and all evil. Moreover, he prayed for all, and especially sinners, even as he hung on the cross. If the Lord of the universe was willing to endure so much how can we not bear everything that befalls us with the greatest patience? Look! Aloysius did all these things and simply to imitate his Lord.

When we are in the midst of affliction, we must pray earnestly. Afflictions are of two kinds. There are afflictions caused by suffering some loss of earthly goods or honors. It is an even greater affliction to know that one has given way to doing wrong to someone. Our prayers must be such that they cannot be turned to serve sin or merely earthly quests for passing goods. And we must give all that we have and are simply in order to walk the more perfect way that Jesus walked. Look! This is precisely what Aloysius did.

The perfection of giving and self-giving consists of two things. The first consists in giving forgiveness. The Lord himself says: "Give and it will be given you. Forgive and you will be forgiven!" The second consists of giving things that happen to be in your possession. The willingness to give in both these ways is a great virtue. Such virtues are stepping stones on the path to the Kingdom of Heaven. Look, didn't Aloysius walk just this path? Now we know what it means to imitate our Lord Jesus. Now we know that we too can imitate Jesus, and do this in a way that will make us saints, even as it made Aloysius Gonzaga a saint. The Lord in his great love has given us all such a wondrous gift. How can we not shape our life with this gift?

Saturday

HOW MARY TEACHES MERCY & COMPASSION

A Reflection from a Sermon by St. Bernard

Mary, is there anyone who had no good things to say in your praise? Is there anyone, rather, who hasn't asked you for help and received it? If anyone doesn't want to praise you that person should remember that you never fail to show mercy and compassion to those who need them. What's more, we know ourselves to be no more than your servants and helpers and we congratulate ourselves because we have learned humility and compassion and the virginal gift of self completely to God by imitating you.

What we love and admire most is your mercy. After all, it is to this mercy that we owe the restoration of the whole world and the salvation of all of us. Clearly, you cared very much for us all when you listened to the angel: "*Don't be afraid, Mary, because you have found grace with God!*" Who can take in the complete breadth and length and height of God's mercy, and from God you received that mercy to share with us? It stretches even to the Last Day for all who ask it. How could anyone be more blessed than one who has received such grace?

Mercy and compassion are as broad as the universe and certainly embrace the whole earth. They reach the city of God. Are the ruins of that city being restored? And you have been the means of repairing them by your consent to God's design. We were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death and now we have obtained redemption. It is through your assent that hell has been emptied, that the breaches in the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem have been repaired.

The life that had been lost has been restored to miserable but hopeful mortals. God is all-powerful and through your acceptance of his will and plan you have been the channel of his all-powerful mercy and compassion. In fact, your charity has been all-powerful because it is God's charity poured out through you. It has shown itself not only in deeds of mercy but in endless compassion. God has made you equally rich in both these marvelous qualities.

O brothers and sisters of mine, let's run with all our might to the fountain of mercy opened for us through Mary. We are so often wretched and miserable. So, our misery has recourse to the treasure of compassion and kindness which God has opened through you! Help us, Mother, to learn from you and open ourselves to the endless riches that are God's graces and blessings.