

**SOLEMNITY OF THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST  
SOLEMNITY OF SS PETER & PAUL  
THE TWELFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME  
23-29 June 2024**

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From the General Audience Address by Pope Benedict XVI, 29 June 2005

Sunday

## **WHEN WE FEEL WE ARE IN A STORM** **From the Angelus Address by Pope Francis, 20 June 2021**

Today's liturgy tells the episode of the storm calmed by Jesus (*Mk* 4:35-41). The boat in which the disciples are crossing the lake is beaten by the wind and the waves and they fear they will sink. Jesus is with them on the boat, yet he is in the stern asleep on the cushion. Filled with fear, the disciples cry out to him: "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (v. 38).

And quite often we too, beaten by the trials of life, have cried out to the Lord: "Why do you remain silent and do nothing for me?". Especially when it seems we are sinking because love or the project in which we had laid great hopes disappears; or when we are at the mercy of unrelenting waves of anxiety; or when we feel we are drowning in problems or lost amid the sea of life, with no course and no harbor. Or even, in moments in which the strength to go forward fails us because we have no job, or an unexpected diagnosis makes us fear for our health or that of a loved one. There are many moments when we feel we are in a storm; when we feel we are almost done in.

In these situations and in many others, we too feel suffocated by fear and, like the disciples, risk losing sight of the most important thing. In the boat, in fact, even if he is sleeping, *Jesus is there*, and he shares with his own all that is happening. If on the one hand, his slumber surprises us, on the other, it puts us to the test. The Lord is there, present; indeed, he waits for us to engage him, to invoke him, to put him at the center of what we are experiencing. His slumber causes us to wake up. To be disciples of Jesus, it is not enough to believe God is there, that he exists, we must put ourselves out there with him; we must also raise our voice with him. Hear this: we must *cry out to him*. Prayer is often a cry: "Lord, save me!". Prayer becomes a cry.

Today we can ask ourselves: what are the winds that beat against my life? What are the waves that hinder my navigation, and put my spiritual life, my family life, and even my psychological life in danger? Let us say all this to Jesus; let us tell him everything. He wants this; he wants us to grab hold of him to find shelter from the unexpected waves in life. The Gospel recounts that the disciples approach Jesus, wake him, and speak to him (cf. v. 38). This is the beginning of our faith: to recognize that alone we are unable to stay afloat; that we need Jesus like sailors need the stars to find their course. Faith begins from believing that we are not enough for ourselves, from feeling *in need of God*. When we overcome the temptation to close ourselves off, when we overcome the false religiosity that does not want to disturb God, when we cry out to him, he can work wonders in us. It is the gentle and extraordinary power of prayer, which works miracles.

Jesus, begged by the disciples, calms the wind and waves. And he asks them a question, a question which also pertains to us: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" (v. 40). The disciples were gripped with fear because they were focused on the waves more than on looking at Jesus. And fear leads us to look at the difficulties, the awful problems, and not to look at the Lord, who many times is sleeping. It is this way for us too: how often we remain fixated on problems rather than going to the Lord and casting our concerns to him! How often we leave the Lord in a corner, at the bottom of the boat of life, to wake him only in a moment of need! Today, let us ask for the grace of a faith that never tires of seeking the Lord, of knocking at the door of his Heart. May the Virgin Mary, who in her life never stopped trusting in God, reawaken in us the basic need of entrusting ourselves to him each day.

Monday

## **OUR CALL TO SHINE WITH THE LIGHT OF CHRIST**

### **A Reflection derived from a sermon by St. Bernard**

Today we celebrate the solemnity of John the Baptizer. Listen to what Scripture says about him. *"He was a burning and shining lamp."* He was both burning and shining. A genuinely wise person's inward burning shines out. Such a person is concerned to burn more intensely. That should be our concern too. One who shines is praised but we don't want human praise; we want God.

It was inspiration rather than teaching that enabled John to burn as he did. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. The heavenly flame so possessed him that he perceived Christ's coming even before he could perceive himself. A new fire from heaven penetrated the Virgin's ear through Gabriel's mouth and then entered into a little child through Mary's voice; the Holy Spirit filled John from then on. He was made a lamp stand for all those who dwelt in God's house, and first of all for his own mother. Thus, she perceived that Mary brought the Messiah to her and to John in her womb. When Mary's greeting entered her ear, it filled her and her child and they rejoiced. Then she was given the gift of recognizing who Mary truly is.

A threefold burning and shining is shown us. John was burning in himself. He burned with the vigor that was to express itself in his way of life. He burned in dedication to Christ. This is shown in the constancy of his calls to his neighbors to repent and in his example of repentance. It is shown by his pointing out Christ. He had been promised by an angelic annunciation, conceived by a miracle, and sanctified in the womb.

John made little of all that is merely of this world and so lived Scripture tells us *"neither eating nor drinking and clothed in camel's hair"*. Do we worry about what we will wear or eat? If so, why are we celebrating John's birth? John draws us into the desert, but what will we seek there? It was prophesied that many would rejoice at this birth because he teaches us to seek the Lord and not vanities. Our call is to labor as John did to come to God in whom we can live and rejoice forever. We are to work for food that doesn't perish but makes us endure unto eternal life. We live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from God's mouth, most especially The Word who is Christ. If so, who can boast about doing penance or grumbling over food? Let us examine our consciences. Let us correct ourselves. Let the fervor of a pure confession and of humility supply whatever we lack. God is faithful and God will forgive.

I cannot be a burning lamp unless I love the Lord my God with all my heart, and all my mind and all my strength. Charity is kindled for our salvation. Why don't you approach the Throne of Mercy with total confidence? Give thanks to John and journey toward Christ. As John had to decrease, so must we. It is so that Christ may always and everywhere increase. By God's grace, may we always have the strength to burn and let Christ shine through us. The more intensely you burn the brighter the light of Christ will shine from you. You will be God's lamp.

*Tuesday*

## **HOW A MONASTIC WAY IS THE WAY TO LIFE**

### **A reflection from Letter 18 by St. Peter Damian**

Who can properly describe the greatness of God's work? God seems to be hiding both in a grain of sand and in a cluster of grapes, even while God reveals himself. Notice the leaf on a tree trembling in the wind, and perhaps about to fall. Now in fall, the ground is strewn with fallen leaves, yet a leaf that hasn't fallen bears witness to the beauty of all trees when they were in leaf. Likewise, when we remember this why should we marvel when we so often see the monastic order of life decaying? Almighty God, cares for the leaves of his tree and holds some firm while letting others fall. God strengthens those he chooses in the monastic way, and others in another way. Let us rejoice in God's grace and choice.

I give boundless thanks to my Creator who wished me to have the office of an unworthy servant in a small but good Carthusian community. I only need to keep up with the pace of my brethren. I want, then, to relate briefly a few things about our life so it may be handed down in writing. Those who come after us will be the heirs of this way of life and it should not be lost, even if they fail to imitate it.

Ordinarily, we fast four days a week. We consider those to be fasting who take bread with salt and water. It is customary for the brethren on all Sundays to have two warm meals, but on others only one. Concerning the recitation of psalms, it is customary that when two brethren live together in one cell, they recite two complete psalters daily, one for the living and the other for the dead. There are three lessons, one for each fifty Psalms. We observe continual silence in the cells, just as in the chapel. All year round neither shoes nor stockings are worn in the cells. Regarding other monastic practices, whatever is done in monasteries of strict and regular observance we also do.

One practice exceeds all the rest in importance—love among the brethren. The unanimity of will is forged by the fire of mutual charity so that each sees self as born to serve all and not to serve self. If one appears ill, all will at once inquire about his condition so that the sick person won't hesitate to give up his usual rigor, and so he will be promptly furnished all the necessities and so all may take joy in offering themselves as willing nurses. Likewise, if someone dies all fast for seven days for that person and takes the discipline seven times, each with a thousand blows, and then performs seven hundred prostrations, chants thirty psalters, and offers Mass for the deceased.

Strive, then, to persevere in the good work you have begun by your way of life. Do not deviate from the rule of life you have established, or which has been given you as a member of a community. This is how we enter the narrow gate that leads to life. This we should seek to do each day that God gives us. God has given us today and we should rejoice and be glad in it, because he has shown us how to live it in his service and for his glory. Help one another do this. That is how we love one another in God and in imitation of Christ.

*Wednesday*

## **THE CONTEMPLATIVE IN THE WORLD**

### **Abbot Francis Kline OCSO**

The monk is inserted into the monastic community by the imitation of Christ. But the monastery is part of the Church in the world, because of the baptism into Christ of its members. The monastic community is a Church in its own right and is therefore inserted into the Church universal, whose confines in space and time, no one can fix. Thus, the contemplative in the Church is present to the whole world, not just by desire, or social or prophetic stance, but by insertion into the body of Christ, and by a particular position in that body.

The Church allows the monastic-contemplative to assume a stance of prophecy and forgiveness for the society at large. The contemplative becomes a sign to the world of the conversion of the human heart. The contemplative goes to the depths where dreams speak the truth. We look to Christ, the contemplative, for a countenance of truth and liberation, and for reassurance that humanity cannot reach its goal without putting on its own unique and qualified obedience. Our place is in the heart of Christ, and our lives point to his ultimate meaning.

For the monk, having loved the place he first gave them, they now find that place to be infinitely wider than any geographical place. With the vow of stability still intact, though not in the eyes of the small-minded, the place that they love is now the world for which Christ died. Here is prayer, contemplation, and cloister. Here is home, examen and discretion. Yet, here is also the noble human family housed in a place of wealth, and the monastics serve the palatial home like servants from the carriage house out back. Here the monastics bless and approve, affirm, and take notice, even if their ministry is hidden.

As lovers of the place and the world, the monastic tradition should share its riches more easily with the Church under the guidance of the bishops. In the vast assembly hall where the heavenly liturgy takes place, the monastics are in full and tantalizing view of everybody who thirsts for God. A more obvious sharing of gifts and a more comprehensive benediction of the world must take place within and without the vast assembly hall which is the Church.

*Thursday*

## **Encountering God in the Divine Office**

### **Fr. Anthony Delisi OCSO**

A fundamental “Flame” to pass on to future generations is the belief that God is looking for you and me. St Benedict in his Rule offers us a valid and authentic way of living the Gospel. It is he who teaches us the value of early rising in imitation of Jesus to commune with our Heavenly Father. What do we do when we rise early in the morning for Vigils? We proceed at once to gather as a community for the major work of the monk: the praise of God through the Liturgy of the Hours.

Benedict teaches that the Divine Presence is everywhere and in every single place, the eyes of the Lord watch the good and the bad. But he tells us that beyond all doubt this is true when we celebrate the Divine Office. So, we gather in the early hours to encounter the Divine Presence. God is there and we are invited to encounter Him. What does this mean for you and me? Are we willing to call this a value that needs to be passed on to future generations?

Why does Our Father look at us? Because He sees in you and me the continuation of that prayer of His Son, Jesus, who also rose early and went to quiet, lonely places to pray. As monks, we are called each day to continue that prayer. What a dignity, what an honor.

St Benedict outlines in detail the psalms that are to be recited or sung at the Divine Office, although he allows for local flexibility. I have heard monks on occasion complain that there is not enough of Jesus in the Liturgy of the Hours. My answer is that the psalms are a part of what makes a Cistercian monk. The psalms are the prayer book of the church inherited from the synagogue. If one feels that the Psalms are not Christocentric, then I suggest he ponder the commentaries on the Psalms by St Augustine, St Jerome, and St Athanasius.

The psalms were an integral part of the prayer of Jesus and every practicing Jew. We find the psalms on the lips of Jesus as he was dying on the cross. So, in the way that the Psalms are the prayer of Jesus, the Psalms are the songs of the monk and a great part of who he is.

Friday

## SAINT IRENAEUS

### From the General Audience Address by Pope Benedict XVI, 28 March 2007

Irenaeus was in all probability born in Smyrna (today, Izmir in Turkey) in about 135-140, where in his youth, he attended the school of Bishop Polycarp, a disciple in his turn of the Apostle John. We do not know when he moved from Asia Minor to Gaul, but his move must have coincided with the first development of the Christian community in Lyons: here, in 177, we find Irenaeus listed in the college of presbyters. In that very year, he was sent to Rome bearing a letter from the community in Lyons to Pope Eleutherius. His mission to Rome saved Irenaeus from the persecution of Marcus Aurelius which took a toll on at least 48 martyrs, including the 90-year-old Bishop Pontinus of Lyons, who died from ill-treatment in prison. Thus, on his return, Irenaeus was appointed Bishop of the city. The new Pastor devoted himself without reserve to his episcopal ministry which ended in about 202-203, perhaps with martyrdom.

Irenaeus was first and foremost a man of faith and a Pastor. Like a good Pastor, he had a good sense of proportion, a wealth of doctrine, and missionary enthusiasm. As a writer, he pursued a twofold aim: to defend true doctrine from the attacks of heretics and to explain the truth of the faith clearly. His two extant works - the five books of *The Detection and Overthrow of the False Gnosis and Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching* (which can also be called the oldest "catechism of Christian doctrine") - exactly corresponded with these aims. In short, Irenaeus can be defined as the champion in the fight against heresies. The second-century Church was threatened by the so-called *Gnosis*, a doctrine which affirmed that the faith taught in the Church was merely a symbolism for the simple who were unable to grasp difficult concepts; instead, the initiates, the intellectuals - *Gnostics*, they were called - claimed to understand what was behind these symbols and thus formed an elitist and intellectualist Christianity. Obviously, this intellectual Christianity became increasingly fragmented, splitting into different currents with ideas that were often bizarre and extravagant, yet attractive to many. One element these different currents had in common was "dualism": they denied faith in the one God and Father of all, Creator and Savior of man and of the world. To explain evil in the world, they affirmed the existence, besides the Good God, of a negative principle. This negative principle was supposed to have produced material things, matter.

Firmly rooted in the biblical doctrine of creation, Irenaeus refuted the Gnostic dualism and pessimism which debased corporeal realities. He decisively claimed the original holiness of matter, of the body, of the flesh no less than of the spirit. But his work went far beyond the confutation of heresy: in fact, one can say that he emerges as the first great Church theologian who created systematic theology; he himself speaks of the system of theology, that is, of the internal coherence of all faith. At the heart of his doctrine is the question of the "rule of faith" and its transmission. For Irenaeus, the "rule of faith" coincided in practice with the *Apostles' Creed*, which gives us the key for interpreting the Gospel, for interpreting the Creed in light of the Gospel. The Creed, which is a sort of Gospel synthesis, helps us understand what it means and how we should read the Gospel itself.

Saturday

## **THE ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH**

### **From the General Audience Address by Pope Benedict XVI, 29 June 2005**

The Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul is at the same time a grateful memorial of the great witnesses of Jesus Christ and a solemn confession for the Church: *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*. It is first and foremost a feast of *catholicity*. The sign of Pentecost - the new community that speaks all languages and unites all peoples into one people, in one family of God -, this sign has become a reality.

Strangers have become friends; crossing every border, we recognize one another as brothers and sisters. This brings to fulfillment the mission of St Paul, who knew that he was the "minister of Christ Jesus among the Gentiles, with the priestly duty of preaching the Gospel of God so that the Gentiles [might] be offered up as a pleasing sacrifice, consecrated by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15: 16).

The purpose of the mission is that humanity itself becomes a living glorification of God, the true worship that God expects: this is the deepest meaning of *catholicity* - a *catholicity* that has already been given to us, towards which we must constantly start out again. *Catholicity* does not only express a horizontal dimension, the gathering of many people in unity, but also a vertical dimension: it is only by raising our eyes to God, by opening ourselves to him, that we can truly become one.

Like Paul, Peter also came to Rome, to the city that was a center where all the nations converged and, for this very reason, could become, before any other, the expression of the universal outreach of the Gospel. As he started out on his journey from Jerusalem to Rome, he must certainly have felt guided by the voices of the prophets, by faith, and by the prayer of Israel.

The mission to the whole world is also part of the proclamation of the Old Covenant: the people of Israel were destined to be a light for the Gentiles. The great Psalm of the Passion, Psalm 22[21], whose first verse Jesus cried out on the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", ends with the vision: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of the nations shall bow down before him" (Ps 22[21]: 28). When Peter and Paul came to Rome, the Lord on the Cross who had uttered the first line of that Psalm was risen; God's victory now had to be proclaimed to all the nations, thereby fulfilling the promise with which the Psalm concludes.

*Catholicity* means *universality* - a multiplicity that becomes unity; a unity that nevertheless remains multiplicity. From Paul's words on the Church's *universality*, we have already seen that the ability of nations to get the better of themselves to look towards the one God is part of this *unity*. In the second century, the founder of Catholic theology, St Irenaeus of Lyons, described very beautifully this bond between catholicity and unity and I quote him. He says: "The Church spread across the world diligently safeguards this doctrine and this faith, forming as it were one family: the same faith, with one mind and one heart, the same preaching, teaching, and tradition as if she had but one mouth. The *unity* of men and women in their multiplicity has become possible because God, this one God of heaven and earth, has shown himself to us; because the essential truth about our lives, our "where from?" and "where to?" became visible when he revealed himself to us and enabled us to see his face, himself, in Jesus Christ. *Catholicity* and *unity* go hand in hand. And *unity* has a content: the faith that the Apostles passed on to us in Christ's name.