

SIXTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

21-27 July 2024

- Sun. **The Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**
July 21 **OUR RESPONSE TO JESUS' CARE FOR US**
 A Reflection from St. Bede's Commentary on Mark's Gospel
- Mon. **Saint Mary Magdalene, Feast**
22 **NEVER FORGET GOD'S FORGIVENESS**
 A Reflection taken from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman
- Tues. **Tuesday of the 16th Week in Ordinary Time**
23 **THE CALL TO SHEPHERD ONE ANOTHER**
 A Reflection developed from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman
- Wed. **Wednesday of the 16th Week in Ordinary Time**
24 **SEEDS SOWN**
 Address of Pope Francis at the Prayer Vigil With the Young People, 27 July 2013
- Thurs. **Feast of Saint James, Apostle**
25 **REALLY BECOMING LIKE CHRIST**
 A Reflection developed from a Homily by St. John Chrysostom
- Fri. **Memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne,**
 Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary
26 **GIFTS ARE GIVEN THROUGH PRAYER**
 A Reflection adapted from a discourse by St. John Damascene
- Sat. **Memorial of Our Lady**
27 **THE GLORIOUS VIRGIN SHOWS US WISDOM**
 A Reflection from a Conference by St. Bonaventure

Sunday

OUR RESPONSE TO JESUS' CARE FOR US

A Reflection from St. Bede's Commentary on Mark's Gospel

"The apostles returned to Jesus and reported to him everything they had done and taught." Jesus said to them: *"Come away to a place where we can be alone by ourselves and rest awhile."* Another passage in the Gospel shows us why there was a real need to give the disciples some rest: *"Many were coming and going and they had no time even to eat"*.

That there was great happiness in those days is seen from the hard work of those who were sent to teach and heal, and even more from the enthusiasm of those who were learning. What a joy it would be in our days if there were such a concourse of listening believers pressing around the ministers of the word so eagerly as not to give them even time to attend to their own needs!

Should we attend only to the fact that those who lack time to look after themselves will thus have less opportunity to fall into temptation? No, in fact, people from whom a word of faith and a saving ministry is demanded, both in season and unseasonably, will have an incentive as well as a need to meditate on heavenly things without neglecting earthly necessities. They must watch carefully so that what they teach is not contradicted by what they do. So they need time apart from their ministry and service to care for themselves spiritually.

"They got into the boat and went away by themselves to a deserted spot". The disciples didn't go alone; they went with the Lord. The evangelist makes this very clear. That is what we must do as well. Yet this may not be enough. *"Many people saw them set out and recognized them and from all the townspeople hurried on foot to the place to which they were going and reached it before them."* The fact that people on foot got there first shows that they weren't going very far but to a place within walking distance. We need to remember that we don't have to go far to find a place to be alone with the Lord.

"When Jesus landed, he saw a large crowd and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and so, he began to teach them many things." Matthews adds to Mark by telling us that Jesus cured their sick. That is what it means really to take pity on the poor and those who have no guide. One needs to open the way of truth to them by teaching and healing their physical infirmities as well, and then one leads them to praise the divine generosity, especially by feeding the hungry. This is what, as we are told, Jesus did.

In a sense, Jesus tested people's faith in going away so they would have to follow him quickly if they were to obtain his help. He wanted to see if they would go to real trouble to follow him. Their effort showed how concerned they were for salvation. Jesus responded by welcoming them, instructing them, healing them, and feeding them. This is what our Lord has done for us.

What sort of devoted trust ought we to show Jesus in response to his love for *us*? What sort of effort should we make to find time to be alone with Him? How should we respond when others' demands take that time away from us? We must hurry to find Jesus now when he is near!

Monday

NEVER FORGET GOD'S FORGIVENESS

A Reflection taken from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Scripture presents Jesus to us speaking words of consolation: *"Many sins are forgiven her, for she has loved much"*. Scripture singles out three people in speaking of penance and love. One is Mary Magdalene. Many believe her to have been the person who bathed the Lord's feet with her tears and dried them with her hair and anointed them with precious ointment. She came into a room as though to a party but did a marvelous deed of repentance. It was a formal dinner honoring Jesus and yet she came in, young and beautiful, as if to honor that festival, as was the custom for women in that time, by pouring ointments and perfume on the forehead and the hair of special guests.

The proud Pharisee who was giving the dinner let her come in, so long as she didn't touch him, for he thought her a sinner destined for perdition. She herself was nothing to him. He might, as Scripture elsewhere says, cross sea and land to make a proselyte but he wasn't interested in looking into that proselyte's heart to pity the sin there and to try to heal it. That didn't even enter his thoughts.

But what a wondrous thing! A poor child of guilt draws near to crown Jesus with her ointment. Was it a sudden inspiration or a mature resolve? Was it an act of the moment or the result of a long inner conflict? She looked and discerned the one without stain or sin, the brightness of eternal light and the spotless mirror of God's majesty, and recognized the Lord of Life, her judge. She looked again and saw a sweetness and serenity. She looked timidly but eagerly and caught his eye and in his smile, she saw loving-kindness and tenderness and compassion and mercy.

She looked at herself. How vile and hideous she seemed. Yet she was attractive, but with a withered beauty—though her admirers didn't notice the fact. She felt only the seven evil spirits that dwelt within her. And she felt trapped, and would have stayed trapped and wrapped in confusion and despair, had she not seen his loving face looking at her as a shepherd looks for a lost sheep. And that lost sheep surrendered herself to Him.

He didn't say a word but his eyes drew her. She ignored the scorn of the proud and the whispered jokes of the profligate and drew near wanting only to be received and saved and not sure what would happen. She knows him as the fountain of holiness and truth, and of mercy. To whom should she go except to the One with the words of eternal life? He didn't shrink from her lips or her kissing of his feet. As she wet them with her tears, love for Him grew stronger within her and lit a flame that would never die, from that moment forever.

What happened when he declared her forgiven and tenderly praised her love? *"Many sins are forgiven her, for she has loved much! One to whom less is forgiven responds with less love."* Then he crowned these words with peace: *"Your sins are forgiven! Your faith has made you well. Go in peace!"* He means these words for us as well. We need only turn to him with our love and watch it grow in the light from his love for us.

Tuesday

THE CALL TO SHEPHERD ONE ANOTHER

A Reflection developed from a sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

“I am the good Shepherd; the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep.” Our Lord appropriates to himself the title under which he had been foretold by the prophets. Almighty God says through Ezekiel, “David, my servant, shall be king over them and they shall all have one shepherd”. What is more, our Lord found the sheep scattered. Recall his saying, “All who came before me were thieves and robbers”. He said this concerning the official shepherds, the rulers in Israel. As a result, the people had no proper guides. That was the character of the priests and rulers of the Jewish people when Christ came. Recall that one day when he was teaching, we are told, “he saw the multitudes and was moved to compassion for them because they were scattered and losing strength like sheep who have no shepherd”.

This had been true for a long time. Recall the stories about the prophet Micah and King Ahab. When asked if Ahab should attack Syria Micah responded “I saw all Israel scattered among the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said: These have no master; let everyone return to his house in peace”. The same had been true in the time of Ezekiel who prophesied: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves, though shepherds should feed their flocks. Israel was scattered because there was no shepherd and so they became prey for wild animals”. The prophet Zechariah said, “Woe to the idle shepherd that abandons the flock”.

In fact, it was this way all over the world when Christ came in infinite mercy to gather all God’s children who had been scattered abroad”. Though Christ, the Good Shepherd, had to lay down his life it was only for a moment. He rose from death to live forever. He is now calling his own by name and leading them and goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice”. We are all like Mary Magdalen who wept in the garden because she couldn’t find her shepherd but recognized him when she heard his voice.

How do we hear Jesus’ voice? We hear it in and through the Spirit, Christ has poured into our hearts. We hear it through the ears of love that the Spirit gives us. What did Christ tell his chosen ones when he breathed into them the Spirit? He said, “As the Father has sent me I send you!” We are given the Spirit so we may be taught how to imitate our Good Shepherd and become shepherds to one another. From Jesus, we learn compassion for those who can’t find their shepherd and don’t recognize his voice. If we love as he does then we speak with his voice. In giving us his own Spirit the Lord Jesus has given us his own love and so his own compassion and so his own care for one another, even to the point of giving our lives for one another. A true shepherd of God’s people shows a love like that of Jesus for all those who belong to God’s flock. It is a great privilege to follow and to imitate and to share in the work of the one truly Good Shepherd. That is our privilege. Today we are called to love one another with the same mercy and tenderness with which we ourselves are loved and shown mercy by Christ, our One Good Shepherd.

Wednesday

SEEDS SOWN

Address of Pope Francis at the Prayer Vigil With the Young People, 27 July 2013

A field is a place for sowing seeds. We all know the parable where Jesus speaks of a sower who went out to sow seeds in the field; some seeds fell on the path, some on rocky ground, some among thorns, and could not grow; other seed fell on good soil and brought forth much fruit (cf. Mt 13:1-9). Jesus himself explains the meaning of the parable: the seed is the word of God sown in our hearts (cf. Mt 13:18-23). Today . . . every day, but today in a particular way, Jesus is sowing the seed. When we accept the word of God, then we are the Field of Faith! Please, let Christ and his word enter your life; let the seed of the Word of God enter, let it blossom, and let it grow. God will take care of everything, but let him work in you and bring about this growth.

Jesus tells us that the seed which fell on the path or on the rocky ground or among the thorns bore no fruit. I believe that we can ask ourselves honestly: What kind of ground are we? What kind of ground do we want to be? Maybe sometimes we are like the path: we hear the Lord's word but it changes nothing in our lives because we let ourselves be numbed by all the superficial voices competing for our attention. I ask you, but do not respond immediately; everyone responds in his or her own heart: am I a young person who is numb? Or perhaps we are like the rocky ground: we receive Jesus with enthusiasm, but we falter and, faced with difficulties, we don't have the courage to swim against the tide. Everyone of us responds in his or her heart: am I courageous or am I a coward? Or maybe we are like the thorny ground: negativity, negative feelings choke the Lord's word in us (cf. Mt 13:18-22). Do I have the habit of playing both sides in my heart: do I make a good impression for God or for the devil? Do I want to receive the seed from Jesus and at the same time water the thorns and the weeds that grow in my heart? But today I am sure that the seed is able to fall on good soil. We are listening to these witnesses, of how the seed has fallen on good soil. "No, Father, I am not good soil; I am a disaster, and I am full of stones, of thorns, of everything." Yes, maybe this is so on the surface, but free a little piece, a small piece of good soil, and let the seed fall there and watch how it grows. I know that you want to be good soil, true Christians, authentic Christians, not part-time Christians: "starchy", aloof and Christian in "appearance only". I know that you don't want to be duped by a false freedom, always at the beck and call of momentary fashions and fads. I know that you are aiming high, at long-lasting decisions which are meaningful. Is that true, or am I wrong? Am I right? Good; if it is true, let's do this: in silence, let us all look into our hearts and each one of us tells Jesus that we want to receive the seed of his Word. Say to him: Jesus, look upon the stones, the thorns, and the weeds that I have, but look also upon this small piece of ground that I offer to you so that the seed may enter my heart. In silence, let us allow the seed of Jesus to enter our hearts. Remember this moment. Everyone knows the seed that has been received. Allow it to grow, and God will nurture it.

Thursday

REALLY BECOMING LIKE CHRIST

A Reflection developed from a Homily by St. John Chrysostom

The [mother of the] sons of Zebedee put pressure on Jesus by asking to be given the two highest places after his own in the Kingdom of Heaven. Listen carefully to his reply to them and ask what it implies about your efforts to follow Christ and become “another Christ”, as we say.

Jesus knows that they weren’t looking for something that was purely spiritual. He also knows that they would be afraid to ask for what they did if they knew what it would take to prepare them for the places they wanted. He is quite explicit: “You don’t know what you’re asking for! Are you ready to drink the cup I’m about to drink or be baptized in the way I’m about to be?” They were thinking of rewards and honors and being exalted, but Jesus was thinking of struggles and difficulties and being rejected and scorned. They thought the time of rewards, the end time, was at hand but Jesus knew that this was not so and that their lives would be filled with dangers and pains and even martyrdom.

Notice how the Lord not only corrects them but draws them on to want to become like him and even suffer as he would suffer. He didn’t talk about death and being martyred. He didn’t say, Are you ready to shed your blood? but Are you ready to drink the cup I drink and be baptized with my baptism? He lures them on to want more intensely to become like him and do all that he was to do. He calls it a “baptism” to show there will be a great cleansing. And they replied as he hoped they would: We can! They were determined to do as he did.

What did the Lord do? He promised them that they would indeed do as he was about to do and suffer as he was about to suffer, but again by using symbolic language. He prophesied, in effect, great blessings—like the blessing of martyrdom that James would very soon suffer. He tells them that they will become fit to be martyrs and undergo a violent death for God. In this they will be partners with Christ. They will want only places that God has foreordained for them, and not worry about being more than or over others.

Are you among the disciples of Christ? When the companions of James and John heard what they had asked for they got angry and jealous. How imperfect they all were, just as we are. James and John had tried to get preferred to everyone else and made the rest jealous. But look at them a few years later when they were ready to be martyrs and to suffer all the things Christ had. Grace had reshaped them, James perhaps more than the others, since he was one of the first to die for Christ. Do you want to be first among your companions?

Friday

GIFTS ARE GIVEN THROUGH PRAYER

A Reflection adapted from a discourse by St. John Damascene

Nothing is known about Jesus' maternal grandparents. But their daughter, the Virgin Mary, played by her faith and trust in God, such a part in redemption that they had to be special. So our ancestors made up two names for them, Anne, which means "grace" and Joachim, which means "God's preparation", and in them celebrated the heritage that formed Mary and Jesus and forms us. This is St. John's Damascene's version of this reflection.

"The Virgin Mother of God was born of Anne and of grace; nature could not anticipate what only grace made possible. Anne was barren until grace enabled her to conceive as a result of her prayer. From prayer was born Mary, from whom was born the "firstborn of all creatures" and "the one in whom all things hold together".

O blessed Joachim and Anne! All creation is in your debt, for through your prayers the noblest of gifts, a spotless mother, was prepared for Christ. O wondrous couple, she who was freed from sin was the fruit of your bodies, of your way of life, so pleasing to God. You sought only to do God's will and formed your beloved daughter to walk in this path. She was spiritually a virgin as truly as she was a physical virgin. She was a spiritual virgin in her love for you alone, and so conceived our savior. She was a spiritual virgin when she gave birth to Him and she forever remains such. Let all mothers endowed by God with fruitfulness say: Blessed be God who hears the prayers of those who turn to Him.

Let us too offer praise and cry out in the words of Scripture: How blessed is the one from whom you sprang, O Virgin, and in whom God was conceived without human seed. We have all become blessings because through graces given us, Christ is born in others. Many know the new hope that leads us to endless joy. How should we not praise those who receive a revelation of the divine goodness and bring forth so marvelous a fruit—the sweetest of all fruits, our sweet Jesus?

Rejoice Joachim, and all you who labor so that Christ may come to the world and to unnumbered souls. You rejoice, Joachim, because through you was born the one through whom the Eternal Son came into the world. From Him was born the salvation of the whole world. Let all rejoice that Christ is born as savior in so many hearts that once were empty and cold and devoid of joy. You brought forth one who became the temple of the living God and by doing so offered the Trinity a sacrifice of praise greater than all others. You are named "God's preparation" and all follow you who live preparing the way of the Lord. In response, God works wonders. All such people become temples of the Living God—all who answer God's call given in Christ.

O blessed Joachim and Anne, you teach us to pray with confidence. You show us how marvelously our God answers such prayers. What God gives is great beyond anything we could have imagined. Blessed be all those who walk in the footsteps of the Virgin and her parents. Blessed be all who teach others to walk always in the Lord's ways.

Saturday

THE GLORIOUS VIRGIN SHOWS US WISDOM

A Reflection from a conference by St. Bonaventure

Who can pay the price of our salvation? Only Jesus Christ. Who can bring us to Christ? The Blessed Virgin, by her spiritual fortitude and her prompt obedience. The commandments of God in the heart of a holy woman are like an everlasting foundation resting on solid rock. This refers to the Blessed Virgin. She is not lazy and she not only listens but acts on what she hears. So the commandments of God were in her heart as the foundations of her life. Jesus said, *"Whoever listens to my teachings and puts them into practice is a wise person who builds a house on a rock foundation"*. Eve violated the command of God and so destroyed the foundations of the home intended for our salvation; the wise Virgin restores these and prepares us for salvation.

Again, the Blessed Virgin shared in paying the price of our salvation by being filled with goodwill. Listen to Gabriel: *"Blessed are you among women; the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and so the Holy One to be born of you will be called the Holy Son of God."* St. Augustine tells us that the Holy Spirit is love and that there is no gift one can't lose except this gift of love. All other virtues can be found in the good and the evil but love of God and neighbor can only be found in the good and the pious. This is the gift that makes one holy. Hugh of St. Victor says, *"because the love of God burned so powerfully in the Virgin's mind wonderful things were done in her body"*. Through that fire, light came to the world and wasn't put out. Fleshly love of a man and woman give birth to a fleshly child but from the Virgin's love for God was born God's Son. Our love should be like hers.

Whoever would be holy ought to imitate the holiness and the uncorrupted chastity of the Glorious Virgin together with her ready obedience and abundant goodwill. In imitating the Glorious Virgin we become like her instead of like Eve. We do this when we join her at the Cross. She was there accepting the Divine Will and conforming her own will to it. St. John tells us that Jesus saw his mother there and confided her to St. John, a virgin confided to a virgin, in order to teach us how to accept God's will. She shows us how to give ourselves to God with Christ. God had laid upon Eve the curse of pains in childbirth. The Virgin didn't know that pain but knew spiritual pains after childbirth. Ordinarily, the pains of childbirth are physical but in the Virgin they are spiritual. We too can share such pains.

In a spiritual way, the entirety of the Christian People was given birth from the womb of the Glorious Virgin. She represents the Church. While Adam slept God formed Eve from his side and while Christ slept on the Cross God formed the Church from the blood and water that flowed from his side—i.e., by the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. This was possible because Christ was formed from the Virgin and she was formed anew by him as he hung on the Cross. It was so that she might become mother of us all and we might imitate her love and obedience and readiness to share in all that Christ does to reform our race for God. Mary considered as nothing all she suffered with Christ for our sake and we must imitate her in this by suffering for one another's salvation. Indeed, we see how the Glorious Virgin united herself with Christ through the Holy Spirit to share in paying the price for the world's salvation. She shows us true wisdom that is the Spirit's gift through love.