

SEVENTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

28 July – 3 August 2024

Sun. **The Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

July 28 **SEEING GOD BY FAITH**

A Reflection from a homily by St. Augustine

Mon. **Memorial of Sts. Martha, Mary & Lazarus of Bethany**

29 **MAKING OUR HOME A PLACE FOR JESUS**

A Reflection from a talk by Pope Francis

Tues. **Tuesday of the 17th Week of Ordinary Time**

30 **GOD MAKES THE IMPERFECT PERFECT**

A Reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

Wed. **Memorial of St. Ignatius of Loyola**

31 **THE APOSTOLATE IS CHRISTIAN LIVING**

A Reflection from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

August

Thurs. **Memorial of St. Alphonsus Liguori**

Aug 1 **ST. ALPHONSUS MARIA DE LIGUORI, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH**

From the Message of Pope Francis, 23 March 2021

MONASTIC DESERT DAY

Fri. **Friday of the 17th Week of Ordinary Time**

2 **KNOWING BUT NOT RECOGNIZING**

From the Angelus Address of Pope Francis, 4 July 2021

Sat. **Memorial of Our Lady**

3 **CHRIST'S LOVE SHOWN IN GIFTS OF LIFE**

A Reflection from The Reed of God by Caryll Houselander

Sunday

SEEING GOD BY FAITH

A Reflection from a homily by St. Augustine

What we call the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ lead our minds through visible things to an experience of God. We know that God is not the sort of being who can be seen with eyes and yet we know that God creates and rules the entire universe. But the amazing artistry we discover in a tiny seed is actually found everywhere. We don't bother to reflect on this fact because it is always there. What we notice are events that aren't part of the ordinary course of nature. They are works that God has reserved for particular times and places to cause us amazement and dumbfound us so that we will open our minds to God's presence and care in all events and beauties.

Governing the entire universe is certainly a greater miracle than feeding a mere five thousand people with five loaves of bread. Yet no one marvels at that governance but everyone is amazed at the second. We marvel at what is extraordinary. Think of the fact that a few seeds bring forth an entire field of wheat. Just as God multiplies a few seeds to make this field of wheat, so Christ multiplies five loaves. Christ does what God does, but in a way that opens our eyes to what God is always doing. The eyes that are opened are those of faith. The five loaves Christ multiplied were like seeds and from them comes our faith. This is much greater than a wheat field, and much more extraordinary!

A miracle is sensibly recounted to us in order to stimulate our minds and to engage our efforts to understand whatever happens. It makes us marvel at the God we don't see by showing us works we can see. The process raises us to the level of faith. Purified by the experience of faith we long to behold God. We know we can't do this with our ordinary eyes but we couldn't recognize God's hand working in our ordinary world except by the gift of faith. From this gift comes an ability to see what eyes cannot see. Christ performed a miracle so that the multitude he fed could see what was happening. It called forth faith. It was recorded and is read to us to call for the same faith. Faith, moreover, does for us what ordinary eyes did for the multitude. But doesn't the Lord tell us: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe"?

The people whom Jesus had healed realized they had seen a sign. "*Surely, this must be a prophet*", they said. He was in fact, the Lord of the prophets, the one who fulfills what *the* prophets had proclaimed, the one who sanctified the prophets. He was also a prophet himself, and the one whom Moses had foretold: "*I will raise up for them a prophet like yourself*", God said to Moses. The Lord Jesus is that prophet. He is the Word of God, and without God's Word, no prophet can prophesy. Yes, the Word of God is a prophet and is with the prophets. Think of the people to whom God gave the gift of hearing the prophets proclaim the divine word. Now think of the fact that God has given you the gift of hearing the word of the very Word of God, the prophet of prophets.

Faith should open our hearts to gratitude and thanksgiving just as it has opened our minds to believe. That very thanksgiving is a miracle of faith that God is working in you at this very moment. Do you see God in yourself? Believe and so see and so rejoice.

Monday

MAKING OUR HOME A PLACE FOR JESUS

A Reflection from a talk by Pope Francis

In the Gospel of Luke, we hear that Jesus visited the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. He and his disciples were welcomed enthusiastically into that home. All receive him but St. Luke wishes to point especially to the work of Martha and to Mary's sitting at Jesus' feet and listening with rapt attention to all he said. She is shown us as leaving whatever she was doing to be close to Jesus. She doesn't want to miss any of his words. When Jesus comes to visit us shouldn't everything else be put aside? Don't his presence and word come before everything else?

The Lord is always surprising us. When we truly listen to Him the clouds vanish and the doubts give place to his truth, fears give way to serenity and each of the tasks that go with the many situations of life finds its rightful place. When the Lord comes He always rearranges things, us included. In picturing Mary at Jesus' feet, Luke shows the praying attitude of believers who can be in the Lord's presence and listen to Him, and be in tune with Him. It's about pausing during the day, recollecting oneself in silence for a few minutes, making room for the Lord who is "passing by" and finding the courage to stay somewhat aside with Him. One can then return with more serenity and efficacy to everyday things. Praising Mary for "choosing the better part" is something Jesus means to us. Let's not let ourselves be overwhelmed by the things we have to do but first of all listen to the Lord's voice so we can do the tasks that he assigns to our lives.

Then there is Martha, whom Luke says received Jesus. She certainly had the charism of hospitality. She is wholly taken up with that service. Jesus reminds her that being concerned with many things requires ordering them so the one thing necessary gets first place. Jesus doesn't condemn the attitude of service but the breathlessness with which it is sometimes lived. We are to share Martha's concern and, following her example, we need to cultivate the sense of hospitality and fraternity as lived in our families and communities. The goal is that each person feels "at home", and especially the little ones and the poor, in our home and when they knock at our door. Nor must we miss the fact that Lazarus is there and is seeing that all the things necessary for hospitality and feeling "at home" are there for those who come.

The Gospel passage we are thinking of reminds us that wisdom of heart lies precisely in being able to combine contemplation, active service, and a certain oversight that brings all together in peace and comfort with one another. If we truly relish life lived with joy and a welcoming spirit we must keep all these realities and the attitudes that make them real, together. We have to be able to be at the feet of Jesus and we have to be deeply concerned with hospitality, and we have to make sure that everything is in order so both these can be realized for each of us according to our needs at the time. This is what is genuinely needed if we are to live the Gospel with and for one another and for all. That is how we prepare a place where all can be with Jesus and meet their greatest need.

Tuesday

GOD MAKES THE IMPERFECT PERFECT

A reflection developed from a text by Sr. Dianne Bergant

One of the great disappointments of my life has been the painful realization that every religious group or organization I belong to is riddled with imperfection and even failure. Every group is made up of limited human beings, and I'm not the only person who has felt disillusioned at this. There are poor liturgies, uninspiring sermons, sexism, racism, disregard for the needy, abuse of power and authority and even sexual abuse. Yes, there are many who stand against such evils and strive to eliminate them. There is no excuse for such imperfect, evil, sin and even wickedness. Yet these things are found in every part of God's Church.

Jesus was well aware of this. The field sown by God's grace contains both wheat and weeds that look-like-wheat (darnel), as well as weeds that don't look like anything but weeds. But who is going to do the elimination? Are there perfect people who can spot the imperfect and throw them out? Besides, who really determines who is bad and who is good? That is Jesus' task and he refuses to do it the way we want him to. What if Peter had been weeded out, or Paul or Augustine of Hippo or Charles de Foucauld or any of the people God has graced with repentance? Until the end of time, the Church will always be a gathering of sinners, as Pope Francis not too long ago reminded us.

In the meantime, how are we supposed to live in this mixed church of so many types of sinners? The Gospel tells us to be understanding and compassionate and kind. The parable of the Sower is coupled with (e.g.) the parable of the Mustard Seed. This tiny seed grows into something so great that all sorts of birds can nest in it! Are all the birds alike? Do all sing sweetly? Do some make messes? Those who want to live in Jesus' Church have to be ready to accept all kinds of people who come seeking shelter and help from him. What he intends is that the community of the Church be life-giving for all. And he intends to create this with all the sorts of imperfect people like you and me.

It is through give and take with selfish, inconsiderate sinners like ourselves that we learn to be understanding, patient, tolerant and forgiving. But we have to let the grace of God work in us and in our lives. We have to let Jesus refine and strengthen and purify us. After all, it is God's Church that is destined for the life of God's Kingdom. There "all will shine like the sun". If we want to be of that number we will have to let grace make us like Jesus.

Wednesday

THE APOSTOLATE IS CHRISTIAN LIVING

A reflection from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII

To Christ Jesus be the glory! The fact that the saints lived according to this maxim is one of the reasons why we admire them. And in whom do we admire this way of life more than in St. Ignatius of Loyola? It is vital that we pay careful attention to the example that St. Ignatius offers us today.

Perhaps the first thing he teaches us is not to be afraid for the Church. We say the Church of Christ is holy. This is true because the Lord sustains and guides it and not because of human efforts. It is Christ who makes the Church a fountain of life.

In some parts of the world the church is opposed or persecuted. This is at times due to the conduct of her members and not just to non-believers or anti-clericals. We have to turn to Christ when the Church is in trouble. There have been many such storms but they have always been followed by calm weather. One of the ways this is brought about is through the saints' examples of genuine St. Ignatius knew that all perfection is a result of the exercise of a genuinely Christian way of living. He saw that poverty and obedience, for example, are ways of living as Christ lived and paths we can walk to perfection. He wasn't talking about destitution when he spoke of poverty. It wasn't lack of goods or wealth he had in mind but an indifference toward what is merely human and not godly. Ordinary good things are desirable only as they lead us to salvation. We don't love them but we love all the people God has created and use goods to express this love. The same thing is true of obedience; it has to be like Christ's obedience to the Heavenly Father for the sake of the salvation of all. How does God work this salvation? He does it through us. We teach others by our way of living, by our works of charity, by our concern for the social welfare of all, and by our efforts to build up our societies and nations so they embody a civilization of love. What we do should be seen as building up and ennobling human life and ways of living.

What not all see is that what makes all of this a reality is making our living together an instrument for sanctification. We are to seek to sanctify our families, our communities, our civic and social order, our country and the Church. To difficulties and crises, we must respond with the "calm of the Gospel". There will always be difficulties and opposition, both from the failures of Christians to live sanctification and from the hatred of those who misunderstand Christ's message of love.

Let opponents rage! Continue to bless the name of the Lord Jesus! Continue to imitate and bless the saints! To Jesus Christ be glory and honor and blessing! This is the message of St. Ignatius and the message of the Gospel and of Jesus. Keep it in mind that when you sanctify your living and acting in the ways possible in your circumstances you are both an apologist and an apostle of Jesus Christ!

Thursday

ST. ALPHONSUS MARIA DE LIGUORI, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH **From the Message of Pope Francis, 23 March 2021**

Following the example of Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori, renewer of moral theology, it becomes desirable and therefore necessary to walk alongside, accompany, and support those most deprived of spiritual aid on the path towards redemption. Evangelical radicalism should not be set against human weakness. It is always necessary to find a way that does not distance but rather brings hearts closer to God, as Alphonsus did with his spiritual and moral teaching. This is because "the great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship, his blessing, his word, the celebration of the sacraments and a journey of growth and maturity in the faith. Our preferential option for the poor must mainly translate into privileged and preferential religious care" (EG 200).

In these times, society is facing countless challenges: the pandemic and work in the post-Covid world, the care that is to be guaranteed to all, the defense of life, input from artificial intelligence, the protection of creation, the anti-democratic threat, and the urgency of brotherhood. Woe to us if, in this evangelizing effort, we were to separate "the cry of the poor" from "the cry of the earth".

Alphonsus de' Liguori, master and patron of confessors and moralists, offered constructive answers to the challenges of the society of his time, through popular evangelization, indicating a style of moral theology capable of holding together the need for the Gospel and human fragility.

I invite you to follow the example of the Holy Doctor and to approach seriously, at the level of moral theology, "the cry of God who asks us all: 'Where is your brother?' (Gen 4: 9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister who you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labor?" (EG 211).

Faced with epochal changes such as the present one, there is a real risk of making the rights of the strong dominant, forgetting those most in need.

The formation of consciences for good seems to be an indispensable goal for every Christian. Giving space to consciences - the place where God's voice resounds - so that they can carry out their personal discernment in the reality of life (cf. AL 37) is a formative task to which we must remain faithful. The attitude of the Samaritan (Lk 10:33-35), as I have indicated in *Fratelli tutti*, spurs us in this direction.

Moral theology must not be afraid to take up the cry of the least of the earth and make it its own. The dignity of the fragile is a moral duty that cannot be evaded or postponed. It is necessary to testify that right always means solidarity.

I invite you, as Saint Alphonsus did, to go towards the fragile brothers and sisters of our society. This entails the development of a moral theological reflection and pastoral action, capable of being committed to the common good, which has its root in the proclamation of the *kerygma*, which has a decisive role in the defense of life, towards creation and brotherhood.

Friday

KNOWING BUT NOT RECOGNIZING

From the Angelus Address of Pope Francis, 4 July 2021

Let us reflect on the attitude of Jesus's fellow villagers. We could say they *knew Jesus*, but they did not recognize him. There is a difference between knowing and recognizing. In essence, this difference makes us understand that we can know various things about a person, form an idea, and rely on what others say about that person, we might perhaps meet that person every now and then in the neighborhood; but all that is not enough. This is *knowledge*, I would say ordinary, superficial, that does not *recognize* the uniqueness of the person. We all run this risk: we think we know so much about a person, even worse, we use labels and close the person within our own prejudices. Jesus's fellow villagers knew him for thirty years in the same way and they thought they knew everything! "But isn't this the boy we saw growing up, the son of the carpenter and Mary? Where do these things come from?". The distrust...in reality, they never realized who Jesus truly was. They remained at the exterior level and refused what was new about Jesus.

Here, we enter into the true crux of the problem: when we allow *the convenience of habit* and the *dictatorship of prejudice* to have the upper hand, it is difficult to open ourselves to what is new and allow ourselves to be amazed. We control: through attitudes, through prejudices... It often happens in life that we seek from our experiences and even from people only what conforms to our own ideas and ways of thinking so as never to have to make an effort to change. And this can even happen with God, and even to us believers, to us who think we know Jesus, that we already know so much about Him and that it is enough to repeat the same things as always. And this is not enough with God. But without openness to what is new and, above all – listening well – openness to God's surprises, without amazement, faith becomes a tiring litany that slowly dies out and becomes a habit, a social habit.

In the end, why didn't Jesus's fellow villagers recognize and believe in Him? But why? What is the reason? In a few words, we can say that *they did not accept the scandal of the Incarnation*. They did not know this mystery of the Incarnation, but they did not accept the mystery: they did not know it. They did not know the reason and they thought it was scandalous that the immensity of God should be revealed in the smallness of our flesh, that the Son of God should be the son of a carpenter, that the divine should be hidden in the human, that God should inhabit a face, the words, the gestures of a simple man. This is the scandal: the incarnation of God, his concreteness, his 'daily life'. And God became concrete in a man, Jesus of Nazareth, he became a companion on the way, and he made himself *one of us*. "You are one of us", we can say to Jesus. What a beautiful prayer! It is because one of us understands us, accompanies us, forgives us, and loves us so much. In reality, an abstract, distant god is more comfortable, one who doesn't get himself involved in situations and who accepts a faith that is far from life, from problems, from society. Or we would even like to believe in a 'special effects' god who does only exceptional things and always provokes strong emotions. Instead, brothers and sisters, God incarnated Himself: God is humble, God is tender, God is hidden, and he draws near to us, living the normality of our daily life.

Saturday

CHRIST'S LOVE SHOWN IN GIFTS OF LIFE

A Reflection from The Reed of God by Caryl Houselander

"I have come that all may have life and have it more abundantly". (Jn 10) Have you ever considered how this is realized in the case of Christ's mother? Even before Christ was born his presence gave life and his mother found joy in it. With what piercing shafts of joy the story of Christ unfolded in his mother's life! First in the conception of her child, and then in the fact that her child brought joy to another mother and child, making that child leap for joy in his own mother's womb. A quickening of life can be felt as a leap of joy.

If we practice the contemplation taught and shown to us by Our Lady, we will find that our experience is like hers. If Christ is growing in us, if we are at peace, if we are recollected then we know that however insignificant our own life may seem to be, Christ is forming himself in us and that is never insignificant.

If we go with eager wills, in haste, to wherever our circumstances compel us, because we believe that is what He wants—that He wants to be in that place, we will find that we are driven more and more by the impulse of his love.

And there are the answers we get from others as the Christ life in us awakens impulses of love in them. They are awakened to a leap of joy at the life they find is growing within them as well.

It isn't necessary, at this stage in our contemplation, to speak to others about the mystery growing in us. It is only necessary to give ourselves over to that life in all that we are. We pray without ceasing, almost without noticing it. It isn't a continual effort to concentrate our minds but a growing awareness of Christ taking form within our lives and transforming who we are and what we are becoming.

We must trust Christ in this because the time hasn't yet come to see his face. We must possess Christ in secret and in darkness, as the earth possesses a seed. We mustn't try to force Christ's growth in us, but let ourselves be filled with deep gratitude for the light burning secretly in our darkness. We must fold our concentrated love upon Christ like the earth as we nourish the seed within.

We need to be swift to obey the impulses of Christ-love as we carry Him to wherever he longs to go. Those who recognize his presence will be stirred by a new life within them. They will know Christ's presence, not by anything special about us, but in the way the bud knows the presence of the light, by an unfolding in themselves. They are putting on the new beauty God is giving them as bearers of Christ.

It seems to me that this may be Christ's favorite way of being recognized. He prefers to be known, not by his own human features but by a quickening of his life in the hearts that respond to his coming within them.

After the Resurrection, he wasn't known by the familiar features people had once known. He was now known by the love in the hearts of others, as in the heart of Magdalene. He was known by the fire in the feet of the travelers to Emmaus as they hurried return to Jerusalem to tell about him. He was known by the wound in his side and heart, as touched by Thomas. He is known in the deeds of love he does in and with us. That's how we imitate Our Lady in showing him to all the world.