

EIGHTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

4-10 August 2024

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- Sun. **THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**
Aug. 4 **TRUSTING IN THE LIVING BREAD**
A Reflection by Bishop Theophylact
- Mon. **Monday of the 18th Week in Ordinary Time**
5 **BEYOND MERE BROTHERLY SHARING OF A FEW LOAVES**
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- Tues. **THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION**
6 **PASSING FROM GLORY TO GLORY**
A Reflection from a homily by St. John Damascene
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7 **CALLED TO GROW IN FAITH**
From the Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 14 August 2011
- Thurs **The Memorial of St. Dominic**
8 **PRAYER AND AN APOSTOLIC LIFE**
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- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. **The Memorial of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross**
9 **GIVING ONE'S LIFE IN SOLITARITY WITH GOD'S LOVE**
A Reflection developed from the words of St. Teresa Benedicta
- Sat. **Feast of St. Lawrence the Deacon**
10 **SHEDDING ONE'S BLOOD FOR LOVE**
A Reflection based on a letter by St. Bernard

Sunday

TRUSTING IN THE LIVING BREAD

A Reflection by Bishop Theophylact

Scripture tells us; *“Our ancestors ate manna in the desert; God gave them bread from heaven to eat”*. When the Lord Jesus performed a miracle by multiplying bread, did those who ate think only of earthly hunger or did they see what he did as a sign that God is always ready to satisfy our spiritual hunger? Jesus makes the contrast clear by telling those who came to him, *“It wasn’t Moses who gave you bread”*; only God could give manna. What’s more, Moses couldn’t give the true bread but could only represent this gift symbolically by the manna. The true giver was God and the true bread was, and is, Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us that he is the true bread come down from heaven, and it is “true” bread because it gives “true” life; i.e., a life that lasts forever.

The bread that is the Son of the living Heavenly Father is life by its very nature. Thus, it gives life to all who eat it with true faith. Just as earthly bread sustains the frail substance of the flesh and prevents it from decaying, so Christ gives the soul life through the power of the Spirit. He also preserves even the body for immortality. Through Christ’s resurrection from the dead and through bodily immortality, everything pertaining to life is given freely to the human race.

We read in the Gospel: *“Jesus said to the people: “I am the bread of life and whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst”*. He didn’t say he gave bread for bodily nourishment and nothing more; he said that he gave “the bread of life”. When everything had been reduced to a condition describable only as “spiritual death”, then the Lord gave life through himself. He is bread because, as we believe, the leaven in the dough that is our humanity was baked through and through by the fire of his divinity.

Christ gives us the bread not of ordinary life but of a very different kind of life. Death can never cut short this kind of life. Whoever believes in the true bread that is Christ will never hunger and never be famished. What sort of hunger is he speaking of? It is a hunger for hearing God’s word. Christ is the Word of God and one who eats him can’t lack God’s Word. Nor can such a person be parched by spiritual thirst. One is given to drink of the Spirit through the waters of baptism. One is thereby consecrated by the Spirit.

Compare your condition, then, to that of an unbaptized person. Such a one lacks the refreshment given by the sacred waters. Such a one suffers great spiritual aridity. But we who are baptized and have been possessed by the Spirit can be sure of being given continually all that is needed for spiritual consolation. You have only to ask. God has promised you all things by choosing you and then gifting you with his Christ and his Spirit. What would God withhold from you? You have only to ask in prayer for what you truly need.

Never allow the gift of prayer to fade within you. Pray daily. Pray continually. Pray with Jesus. You will have all you need. But you have to trust that what God has given you meets the needs you truly have. Trust God to know what you need and gives that to you in love.

Monday

BEYOND MERE BROTHERLY SHARING OF A FEW LOAVES

From the Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 31 July 2011

Today's Gospel describes the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves that Jesus worked for a great throng of people who had followed him to listen to him and to be healed of various illnesses (cf. Mt 14:14).

As evening fell the disciples suggested to Jesus that he send the crowds away so that they might take some refreshment. But the Lord had something else in mind: "You give them something to eat" (Mt 14:16). However they had "only five loaves... and two fish". Jesus' subsequent action evokes the sacrament of the Eucharist: "He looked up to heaven, and blessed, and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds" (Mt 14:19).

The miracle consists in the brotherly sharing of a few loaves which, entrusted to the power of God, not only sufficed for everyone but enough was left over to fill 12 baskets. The Lord asked this of the disciples so that it would be they who distributed the bread to the multitude; in this way, he taught and prepared them for their future apostolic mission: in fact, they were to bring to all the nourishment of the Word of life and of the sacraments.

In this miraculous sign, the incarnation of God and the work of redemption are interwoven. Jesus, in fact, "*went ashore*" from the boat to meet the men and women (cf. Mt 14:14). St Maximus the Confessor said that the Word of God made himself present for our sake, by taking flesh, derived from us and conformed to us in all things save sin, in order to expose us to his teaching with words and examples suitable for us" (*Ambigua* 33: PG 91, 1285 C).

Here the Lord offers us an eloquent example of his compassion for people. We are reminded of all our brothers and sisters in the Horn of Africa who in these days are suffering the dramatic consequences of famine, exacerbated by war and by the lack of solid institutions. Christ is attentive to material needs but he wishes to give more because man always "hungers for more, he needs more" (*Jesus of Nazareth*, Doubleday, New York 2007, p. 267 (*English translation*)). God's love is present in the bread of Christ; in the encounter with him "we feed on the living God himself, so to speak, we truly eat the 'bread from Heaven'" (*ibid.* p. 268).

Dear friends. "in the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God's compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The Eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbor" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 88). St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus whom the Church is commemorating today, also bore witness to this. Indeed Ignatius chose to live "finding God in all things, loving him in all creatures" (cf. *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, III, 1, 26).

Let us entrust our prayers to the Virgin Mary, so that she may open our hearts to compassion for our neighbor and to fraternal sharing.

Tuesday

PASSING FROM GLORY TO GLORY

A Reflection from a homily by St. John Damascene

When Jesus took three disciples up the holy mountain he was transfigured. They were amazed but not terrified. But then “a bright cloud overshadowed them” and they fell on their faces in terror; within that cloud, they sensed the presence of God in a way they never had before.

When Moses saw God on Mt. Horeb God was revealed in a kind of darkness. In the same way, when one accepted the Law one had to live in a kind of darkness because one couldn't see clearly the face of God in the dark. Israel could see only a passing glory in the face of Moses because even in darkness God transforms those who come and worship and this shoes.

We who have been called by Christ behold the glory of the Lord in a way that can't be hidden, at least from us, by a veil, as was the glory reflected from Moses' face. St. Paul tells us that we are being transformed by God's presence from one degree of glory to another. The cloud that overshadowed the disciples wasn't one of darkness but of light. The mystery hidden from the ages is revealed to them with a new glory. God has revealed the Divine Face in a human face. On the holy mountain, a few disciples beheld the glory that lives in us as we are made one with Jesus. As we see this we realize a new glory.

A mystery hidden for ages, the fact that God comes in human faces, is now revealed. Moses and Elijah so testify. They proclaim the hope now fulfilled in such an unexpected way in Jesus. A voice from the cloud said: “*This is my beloved Son*”. God really is seen in human form. Christ lives in the midst of us every day. Just as the Son proceeds timelessly and eternally from the Heavenly Father, a Father who didn't begin to exist because of the Son, but generates the Son to be with the Father from all eternity, now the Son comes continually to us in human faces. It is a new revelation of glory to see the Son in ourselves and so to see the glory that is really in us.

It was by the Father's good pleasure that the only Son, the Word, should become incarnate. It was by the Father's good pleasure that the salvation of the world should be achieved through the only begotten Son become human. It was the Father's good pleasure that brought about the union of the whole universe through the only begotten Son. Humanity is a microcosm linking all things visible and invisible together by sharing in the nature of both sorts of things in Christ. It is this that Scripture means in saying that through Christ “*God is all in all*”. In Christ, we see ourselves and our call as stewards of all creation.

This is my beloved Son, says the Heavenly Father. This one bears the stamp of my own nature. Through the Son, I created angels and all bodily things. Through the Son all things are made firm; the Son upholds the universe. The Son does this by his word and by the life-giving and guiding Spirit. We see all this in ourselves and so we see yet more clearly God's glory and how we share in it. The Heavenly Father says: “Listen to Him!” Whoever receives the Son receives the Father who sent him and by whose authority He speaks. He makes us words of life for all. Reveal this glory in your words and deeds.

Wednesday

CALLED TO GROW IN FAITH

From the Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 14 August 2011

Today's Gospel passage begins by indicating the district to which Jesus was going: Tyre and Sidon, to the northwest of Galilee, a pagan land. And it was here that he met a Canaanite woman who spoke to him, asking him to heal her daughter who was possessed by a demon (cf. Mt 15:22).

In her supplication, we can already discern the beginning of a journey of faith, which in her conversation with the divine Teacher grows and becomes stronger.

The woman was not afraid to cry to Jesus "Have mercy on me", an expression that recurs in the Psalms (cf. 50:1), she calls him "Lord" and "Son of David" (cf. Mt 15:22), thus showing a firm hope of being heard. What was the Lord's attitude to this cry of anguish from a pagan woman?

Jesus' silence may seem disconcerting, to the point that it prompted the disciples to intervene, but it was not a question of insensitivity to this woman's sorrow. St Augustine rightly commented: "Christ showed himself indifferent to her, not in order to refuse her his mercy but rather to inflame her desire for it" (*Sermo 77*, 1: PL 38, 483).

The apparent aloofness of Jesus who said: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24), did not discourage the Canaanite woman who persisted: "Lord, help me" (v. 25). And she did not even desist when she received an answer that would seem to have extinguished any hope: "it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (v. 26). She had no wish to take anything from anyone; in her simplicity and humility a little was enough for her, crumbs sufficed, no more than a look, a kind word from the Son of God. And Jesus was struck with admiration for an answer of such great faith and said to her: "Be it done for you as you desire" (v. 28).

We too are called to grow in faith, to open ourselves in order to welcome God's gift freely, to have trust and also to cry to Jesus "Give us faith, help us to find the way!". This is the way that Jesus made his disciples take, as well as the Canaanite woman and men and women of every epoch and nation and each one of us.

Faith opens us to knowing and welcoming the real identity of Jesus, his newness and oneness, his word, as a source of life, in order to live a personal relationship with him. Knowledge of the faith grows, it grows with the desire to find the way and in the end, it is a gift of God who does not reveal himself to us as an abstract thing without a face or a name, because faith responds to a Person who wants to enter into a relationship of deep love with us and to involve our whole life.

For this reason, our heart must undergo the experience of conversion every day, every day it must see us changing from people withdrawn into themselves to people who are open to God's action, spiritual people (cf. 1 Cor 2:13-14), who let themselves be called into question by the Lord's word and open their life to his Love.

Let us therefore nourish our faith every day with deep attention to the word of God, with the celebration of the Sacraments, with personal prayer as a "cry" to him, and with charity to our neighbor.

Let us invoke the intercession of the Virgin Mary, whom we shall contemplate tomorrow in her glorious Assumption into Heaven in body and soul, so that she may help us proclaim and witness with our lives to the joy of having encountered the Lord.

Thursday

PRAYER IN AN APOSTOLIC WAY OF LIFE

A Reflection by Fr. Bede Jarrett, OP

It surprises some to know that St. Dominic calls for his followers to pray the full cycle of the chanted Divine Office. It is, of course, a fact that Dominic was a great lover of liturgical prayer, and not just because he began his life with God as a canon. Dominic's biographers tell us repeatedly of his ways of practicing devotion, as it was then called. He sang his morning mass whenever that was possible and arranged his trips so he could stay at certain priories where he knew the liturgy was celebrated devoutly and well. We read about his practice of the devotion of repeated genuflections before the crucifix as that of repeated prostrations before the Blessed Sacrament. Bowing, kneeling, standing and every other bodily posture were part of the proper way to address God. He thought of worship as claiming the whole of a person, body and spirit.

He loved what he thought of as serried ranks of people at prayer chanting the Office. He had his own choir stall in Dominican priories. He thought this prayer should be made more impressive by various gestures and he is described as leaving his own stall to pass up and down the ranks of the brothers exhorting them to sing more strongly (*fortiter*). He looked upon all this as having a positive, formative effect on those assigned to apostolic work. It was a way of making people conscious that they weren't alone in a huge undertaking and that a force of praying religious stood behind them. He thought of his success as *preacher* as depending on the power of prayer rather than that of rhetoric or logic in arguing. He saw this mutual support as parallel to that of the ranks of angels standing in perpetual prayer before God's throne.

Dominic was concerned lest his brethren see choosing their own superior in a way that diminished the person's authority. He was also concerned lest studies should develop a kind of critical spirit that could undermine reverence for tradition. To avert such dangers and avoid what he thought of as mere small talk he emphasized the practice and attitudes encouraged by choral prayer. When chanted in a measured way the Office makes one think and feel in a more decorous and grave way.

More important yet was the fact that the Office is an opportunity for prolonged contemplation of the mysteries of faith and of the word of God generally. That means it provides one with daily sustenance for the spiritual life. In his time lesser importance was given to retreats and private devotions than to the choral praying of the office. Dominic thought of the first need of his followers as spiritual, and he saw the Divine Office as the primary and most effective way of nourishing spirituality. That is no less true today than in the time of St. Dominic. It is equally true for us whether we preach or not. We must not underestimate the practical importance of praying the Divine Office and doing so in a serious and decorous way. Leading people to pray the Office, and pray it as Dominic did, is a major factor in any Christian apostolate to the world.

Friday

GIVING ONE'S LIFE IN SOLIDARITY WITH GOD'S LOVE **A Reflection developed from the words of St. Teresa Benedicta**

Edith Stein was born a member of an observant Jewish family and as a graduate student in philosophy was assistant to another Jew, Edmund Husserl, the founder of Phenomenology as a philosophical method. Yet Edith lost her family's faith as she grew up. Then she found Christian faith through reading the works of St. Teresa of Avila. She sensed a vocation to contemplative life and entered the Carmelite convent of Our Lady of Peace (in Cologne) in 1933. She had been a teacher and continued this for other Carmelites and externs.

Because of the anti-Semitic laws of the Nazis, Edith, together with a younger sister for whom she cared, was sent to the community in Echt, Holland. But, after the conquest of that country, the Dutch bishops issued a pastoral letter that condemned Nazism and its anti-Semitism. In retaliation, all converted Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

Sr. Teresa Benedicta added the phrase "of the Cross" to her name and had prepared for what the Nazis inflicted on her by special fasting and self-privation. She wanted to be ready to live in concentration camp conditions. She also wrote a kind of spiritual will. *"I beg the Lord to accept my life and my death for the sake of the Holy Church and our order, especially in Cologne and Echt. I offer this as atonement for the unbelief of the Jewish People and that they will receive the Lord and that his Kingdom may come in glory. I offer it for the salvation of Germany and the peace of the world, and for my loved ones living or dead, and for all those that God gave to me. May none of them go astray."*

She had long believed that she would not survive the war and so asked her prioress for permission to offer herself to the heart of Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement in the cause of peace. She was ready for the arrest of all converted Jews ordered in July of 1942. Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross with her sister went successively to two concentration camps. A Dutch official involved in processing her papers was so impressed by her that he offered to arrange an escape. *"If someone intervened at this point and took away my chance to share in the fate of my brothers and sisters (Jews) I would see it as utter annihilation."* She was determined to offer herself in solidarity with God's loving intention for his chosen Jewish people. She thought this was God's will in her regard.

She and her sister were deported to Auschwitz on August 7th and the two of them probably died together in a mass gas chamber on August 9th. She was beatified as a martyr in 1987 and declared a saint in 1998. She is now one of the six patron saints of Europe. Many schools have been named after her and there is a society dedicated to the study of her philosophical works, as well as books and a play about her. She wrote several studies on women's issues in the face of Nazi attitudes toward women. But she died as the result of a pastoral letter, and so her death is considered a witness to the Christian faith as well as to solidarity with her people. She viewed herself as sent by God to witness to God's love for the Chosen People. We are all given opportunities by our way of life to live and die as witnesses to God's love.

Saturday

SHEDDING ONE'S BLOOD FOR LOVE

A Reflection based on a letter by St. Bernard

No one who loves God need have any doubt about God's love. God gladly returns the love he called forth. God loved us first and we have the pledge of this love in the Spirit, as well as a faithful witness to it in Jesus. This is a double and irrefutable proof of God's love for each one of us. Christ died for us and deserves our love; the Spirit by its grace enables us to love. Christ gives us the reason and the Spirit gives us the power. Jesus sets before us the example and the Spirit empowers us to love him and live this love.

Today we celebrate the love of St. Lawrence, a deacon, who loved even to the shedding of his blood in fulfillment of his vocation. A deacon is called by God to care for the poor and to embody the Church's charity toward them. He gave away to the poor what he needed to save his life because love for Christ and his poor required it.

How shameful it would be for us to see God's Son and the martyrs dying out of love and to refuse to live that same love in our vocation.

We possess a double token of salvation, the twofold outpouring of blood and Spirit. Neither is of any profit without the other. To say the Spirit gives us life is only another way of saying that the Spirit justifies us by rectifying our relationship with God. Who are the just? Aren't they the ones who pay their debt of love to the God who loves them?

It is impossible to do this unless you have received in faith the Spirit's revelation of God's eternal plan for salvation. That revelation is nothing other than an infusion of spiritual grace thought which, as we mortify the works of mere flesh, we prepare for a Kingdom that flesh and blood can't possess. We too have been called to the love of Christ and empowered to live it by the gift of the Spirit. In the Spirit, we receive both the audacity to believe ourselves loved and the power to love in return so that God's love for us does not go unrequited. That is our right relationship to God.

But this means pouring out our entire life in prayer and penance and the works of love for one another and for Christ's poor. Just as our works support our brethren they support the poor who turn to us for aid. This is only possible if we support one another by showing love to one another. We give thanks to God for the love shown us in Jesus Christ and the Spirit and through our common prayer and our work. All are deeds of love. We aid Christ's poor as much by our prayer as we do by our work, and the same is true of our aid for one another. To celebrate the feast of a martyr is to celebrate every way of pouring out of one's life and blood for God in love.