

# **TWENTIETH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**

**18-24 August 2024**

## **Solemnity of Our Holy Father Saint Bernard**

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- Sun. Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Aug 18 **THE BODY OF CHRIST**  
A Reflection by Yves Congar
- Mon. Memorial of Bl. Gueric of Igny  
19 **ADVICE TO THOSE WAITING FOR CHRIST**  
A Reflection from a Homily by Bl. Gueric of Igny
- Tues. Solemnity of Our Holy Father Saint Bernard  
20 **OUR LONGING FOR GOD**  
A Reflection from "A Sermon on the Canticle" by St. Bernard
- Wed. Memorial of St. Pius X, Pope  
21 **BEING A BLESSING TO OTHERS**  
A Reflection from a Sermon by St. Pope John XXIII
- Thurs. Memorial of the Queenship of Mary  
22 **MARY'S QUEENSHIP POINTS TO CHRIST'S KINGSHIP**  
From the Angelus Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 22 August 2010
- Fri. Friday of the 20<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time  
23 **COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW 22: 34-40**  
By St. Teresa of Avila
- Sat. Feast of Saint Bartholomew, Apostle  
24 **THE WISDOM OF THE GUILILESS**  
A Reflection taken from a Sermon by Cardinal Newman

*Sunday*

## **The Body of Christ**

### **A Reflection by Yves Congar**

The Gospel of John tells us, “Jesus said to the crowds of the Jews: I am the living bread which has come down from heaven; anyone who eats this bread will live forever.” The Eucharist is the sacrament of the redemptive mystery of the cross. This is what it symbolizes, celebrates, and makes present. It is also the sacrament of the unity of the Mystical Body. Its special grace is to bring this unity into being.

In the Eucharist we receive Christ in the form of food. Thus, according to the law of the sacraments, whose special effects result from what they signify, we unite ourselves to Christ in a mysterious union similar to that between a living being and its food. In the natural order, the living things assimilate its food and make it part of its own substance. Here, however, this is reversed even while the net effects are mysteriously alike. The Eucharist is food, and it is certainly our own soul which feeds upon that food, which is Christ. In the natural and material order, all the power of assimilation resides in us—so that we make what we take a part of our own being and life. In his Confessions St. Augustine has Truth say, “Eat me and grown in stature; but it is not you who will change me into yourself, as you do bodily food, but it is I who will change you into me”. (VII, 10)

The union with Christ that results from communion is an infinitely mysterious one. Like the union which takes place in a living thing, it is both an “incorporation” and an intensification of life. Our Lord compares most explicitly the union between us and Himself through the Eucharist to that between Him and his Father. That is a unity of perfect life, a substantial unity of life. The Eucharist is the perfect sacrament of our incorporation with Christ.

Theologians are unanimous that its effect is to produce the unity of the mystical body. By a special grace and by living faith Christ takes us all into the supreme act of love by which He offered himself for us on the cross—to bring together into one all God’s children.

We cannot receive communion in isolation from our brethren. We communicate in the true “body of Christ” only by communicating at the same time in his mystical body. The “breaking of bread” brings with it, inseparable, the presence of Christ uniting us to himself and to the multitude that share in his redemption. The one bread makes us one body, though we are many in number. There is the whole mystery of the Mystical Body.

*Monday*

## **ADVICE TO THOSE WAITING FOR CHRIST**

### **A Reflection taken from a Homily of Bl. Gueric of Igny**

In the Holy Ones of old the Church of Christ waited for his coming. In the same way, we wait for Christ's Second Coming. The first hope was that Christ would pay the price of redemption. The second hope is for the reward of the labors of those who follow Christ and live and love as he lived and loved. That means our eyes are raised above earthly concerns and fixed with joyful longing on those of heaven. Some are impatient and try to snatch the prizes this world offers. Blessed are those whose whole hope rests in the Lord's name and take no notice of false and empty foolishness. Isn't it better to be humble with the meek than share ill-gotten gains with the proud? The Lord is our share, and so we will wait for him!

If you are wise, give eye to yourself and see how you are using your time. If you are a sinner don't waste the opportunity to repent. If you are holy then make progress in holiness. Remember the evil servant surprised by his Lord's coming! Evil servants say, "A rule here and a rule there, only a little of this and only a little of that, wait for this and wait for that" and they mock us. The one who grants faith tests it and crowns what he tests. The Lord commands us through Hosea: "You will be waiting for me for many days but you are not to take any other spouse".

This is the proper way of waiting for the Lord and keeping your pledge of love. Even though we miss and long for the consolation of his presence we must not look around for other consolations but keep ourselves in suspense looking toward his return. We are in suspense, as it were, between heaven and earth, unable as yet to grasp the heavenly things but seeking not to contaminate ourselves with the earthly. The reason why we choose this suspense, this suspended death, is to make ourselves persevere in our suspension from the cross—until we merit to die on it.

O Lord Jesus, when you were about to exercise that power of laying down your life, and accepting the sort of death by which you would will to lay it down, everything still remained in your own choice. You chose to hang from the cross so that being raised up over the earth you might draw us to yourself and then hang us too above all earthly concerns. You gave us an example so that we might also persevere until death on the cross and ascend from there to heaven all the more easily—stepping as it were from the topmost rung of the ladder of humility. Grateful thanks be to you, Lord Jesus! Where the cross is we are. Where the cross is we wait for you. We wait for "Eli", for our God, to come and take us to himself.

I believe that I shall see the Lord's favor even in the land of the living. Do you believe that too? Then strengthen your heart and bear with the Lord. Woe to those who lose patience. He promises that he will be coming quickly. "Look", he says, "I am coming quickly and bringing with me rewards to bestow on everyone in proportion to each one's labors. The time truly is short, though it may seem long to those who are in turmoil—whether from labor or love. Both are necessary. How long can anyone's labors last upon this earth? Be certain that the Lord will come, this Lord who is our own Lord, our dread and yet our desire, our rest and our reward, the sweetness and embrace we long for. He is the blessedness of all. He has chosen you. Never forget that; love as you are loved.

*Tuesday*

## **OUR LONGING FOR GOD**

### **A Reflection from a "Sermon on the Canticle" by St. Bernard**

"By night on my bed, I sought Him, whom my soul loves." We seek the Word but because we have already been sought by that very Word. If this were not the case, then when we were cast out of the presence of the Word, that Word would never more return to us. So, it would not be possible for us to even glimpse the good things we lost by our wandering from Him. Everything depends on the Word's seeking us.

If abandoned to ourselves we go to and fro and never find what we seek.

Listen to a fugitive and wandering soul and note its complaint. "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant!" Do you want to return, then? But if it depended on your own will you wouldn't need to seek help. Why would you ask another for what you yourself already had? It is clear, then, that we can't get what we long for by ourselves. But one who longs to return to the Lord, and longs to be sought after, isn't entirely exposed and left to self.

What is the source of willingness to find the Lord in the one who seeks Him? Where does this willingness come from? It comes from the fact that we are already being sought, and so visited, by the Word. And this visit isn't fruitless! The longing has worked in us in such a way that we have goodwill. Without it, a return would be impossible.

But it isn't enough to be brought back just once. Our inner laziness is so great that it makes every return difficult. It is the very will of the wanderer that has to be made to want return. What if the will to return is present? But it can't unless it is gifted with an effective longing to do what will bring it back to the Lord. St. Paul tells us that "to will is present in me but to perform what I will is not in me".

So, what does the psalmist seek in the passage quoted? He seeks only to be sought. One wouldn't seek this if one hadn't been loved already. So, what the psalmist entreats is the grace not only of seeking the Lord but of being sought by Him. "Seek your servant!" That is the prayer we must all pray day and night. And this is the grace that has been granted to us. God grant we may perfectly attain the fulfillment of our longing. May it be God's good pleasure! Amen!

*Wednesday*

## **BEING A BLESSING TO OTHERS**

### **A Reflection from a Sermon by St. Pope John XXIII**

More than fifty years have passed since the day of my own ordination to the priesthood. I remember vividly the day of my first Mass and how St. Pope Pius X laid his hand upon my head as I knelt before him in the Vatican. I have always treasured that memory in my heart, that gesture of care and the gentle words of kindness and good wishes and blessing that went with it. What has happened in the years since that day? Pope Pius has become a citizen of heaven and the young man he blessed has followed in his footsteps, first to the Chair of St. Mark in Venice and then to the Chair of Peter.

Pius X always strove to be faithful and clear in teaching the truth of the Gospel. He always strove to shine with virtues like Christ's. He also sought to be an example to others of what we become when we seek Christ continually—in good times and bad—and are transformed until we have put on the full maturity of Christ.

I trusted much in Pius X as Pope. I was not afraid of labor nor did I fear to die in the cause of Christ. The love that is Christ's doesn't let one cease to work for the Gospel or to learn from others how to do that. I first learned from St. Pius X. And when the Lord called him to the Kingdom I turned to him even more in prayer. I was praying that all which might remain for me to do would be done in a way that would build up the Church, and all the Christians my life touched. It has been a blessing and a joy to do this. It has been sweet to live with and to live for so many others who wanted with me, to love God more and more. It has been an even greater joy to know in difficult times that I was sacrificing myself in an outpouring of loving-kindness and pastoral care like that of Christ, and like that of St. Pius X.

Jesus came to this world to save all, and spent most of his life doing only the tasks of any working person and manual laborer. The world has priests, contemplatives, apostles, great writers, and many who are primarily concerned with material things needed by their families. All work done for God and out of love like that of Jesus is a wonderful thing. It transforms all it touches. Jesus shares his gifts with us through the blessed hands of others in simplicity and by life-giving gestures of service and care.

Thursday

## **MARY'S QUEENSHIP POINTS TO CHRIST'S KINGSHIP**

### **From the Angelus Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 22 August 2012**

Today is the liturgical Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, invoked by the title: "Queen". It is a recently instituted feast, although its origins and the devotion to her are ancient. It was in fact, established in 1954, at the end of the Marian Year, by Venerable Pius XII who fixed the date as 31 May (cf. Encyclical Letter *Ad Caeli Reginam*, 11 October 1954: AAS 46 [1954], 625-640). On this occasion, Mary is Queen more than any other creature because of the sublime dignity of her soul and the excellence of the gifts she received. She never ceases to bestow upon humanity all the treasures of her love and tender care (cf. *Discourse in honor of Mary Queen*, 1 November 1954). Now, after the post-conciliar reform of the liturgical calendar, this feast is set eight days after the Solemnity of the Assumption to emphasize the close link between Mary's royal nature and her glorification in body and soul beside her Son. In the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church, we read: Mary "was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory... and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 59).

This is the origin of today's feast: Mary is Queen because she is uniquely conformed to her Son, both on the earthly journey and in heavenly glory. Ephrem the Syrian, Syria's great saint, said of Mary's queenship that it derives from her motherhood: she is Mother of the Lord, of the King of kings (cf. Is 9:1-6) and she points Jesus out to us as our life, our salvation, and our hope. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, Pope Paul VI recalled: "In the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon him. It was with a view to Christ that God the Father, from all eternity, chose her to be the all-holy Mother and adorned her with gifts of the Spirit granted to no one else" (n. 25).

Now, however, let us ask: what does "Mary Queen" mean? It is a consequence of her being united to the Son, of her being in heaven, that is, in communion with God; she shares in God's responsibility for the world and in God's love for the world. Let us think of the Lord; the royalty of Christ is interwoven with humility, service and love. It is above all serving, helping and loving. Jesus on the Cross was proclaimed king with this inscription written by Pilate: "The King of the Jews" (cf. Mk 15:26).

The kingship of Jesus has nothing to do with that of the powerful of this earth. He is a King who serves his servants; he demonstrated this throughout his life; and the same is true of Mary. She is Queen in her service to God for humanity, she is a Queen of love who lives the gift of herself to God so as to enter into the plan of man's salvation. She answered the Angel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (cf. Lk 1:38), and in the *Magnificat* she sings: God has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden (cf. Lk 1:48). She helps us. She is Queen precisely by loving us, by helping us in our every need; she is our sister, a humble handmaid.

How does Mary exercise this queenship of service and love? By watching over us, her children who turn to her in prayer, to thank her or to ask her for her motherly protection and her heavenly help, perhaps after having lost our way, or when we are oppressed by suffering or anguish because of the sorrowful and harrowing vicissitudes of life. In serenity or in life's darkness let us address Mary, entrusting ourselves to her continuous intercession so that she may obtain for us from the Son every grace and mercy we need for our pilgrimage on the highways of the world.

*Friday*

## **COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW 22: 34-40**

**By St. Teresa of Avila**

“When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert him, one of them put forth a question, “Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?”

The Lord asks only two things of us: Love for His Majesty and love for our neighbor. It is for these two virtues that we must strive, and if we attain them perfectly we are doing his will and so shall be united with him. But how far we are from doing them in the way we ought for a God who is so great! May His Majesty be pleased to give us the grace so that we may deserve to reach this state, as it is in our power to do if we wish.

The surest sign that we are keeping these two commandments is, I think, that we should really love our neighbor. We can't be sure if we are loving God, although we may have good reasons for believing we are, but we can know quite well if we are loving our neighbor. Be certain that the farther advanced you find you are in this love, the greater your love for God will be. So dearly does His Majesty love us that he will reward our love for our neighbor by increasing the love which we bear to him in a thousand ways. This I cannot doubt.

When I see people very diligently trying to discover what kind of prayer they are experiencing, so completely wrapped up in their prayer that they seem afraid to indulge in a moment's thought, lest they lose the tenderness and devotion they have been feeling, I realize how little they understand of the road to union. They think it consists of this (devotion). But no, sisters, no!

What the Lord desires is works! If you see someone sick to whom you can give some help, never fear that your devotion will suffer. Have pity. If in pain, you should feel the pain too. If necessary fast so that the person may have your food, not so much for her sake as because you know it to be your Lord's will. Again, if you hear someone being highly praised, be much more pleased than if they were praising you. This is really easy if you have humility. For in that case, you will be sorry to hear yourself praised. To be glad when another's virtues are praised is a great thing. And when we see a fault in someone we should be as sorry about it as if it were our own, and try to conceal it from others.

I have said a great deal about this elsewhere because I know that if we were to fail here we would be lost. May the Lord grant us never to fail! If that is to be so, I tell you that you must not cease to beg his Majesty for the union which I have described. It may be that you have experienced devotion and consolations, so that you think you have reached this stage, and even enjoyed some brief period of suspension in the prayer of quiet. Some people take this to mean that everything is accomplished. But, believe me, if you find you are lacking in this virtue of love you have not yet attained union. So ask our Lord to grant you this perfect love for your neighbor.

Allow His Majesty to work. If you use your best efforts and strive after this in every way you can, Jesus will give you more than you can desire. If the opportunity presents itself, try to shoulder some trial in order to relieve your neighbor of it. Do not suppose that it will cost you nothing or that you will find it all done for you. Think what the love our Spouse has for us cost him! Do not be afraid.

*Saturday*

## **THE WISDOM OF THE GUILILESS**

### **A Reflection taken from a Sermon by Cardinal Newman**

When Jesus met St. Nathaniel, commonly known as St. Bartholomew, he said: Here is an Israelite without guile! Being without guile is a kind of innocence and that fact helps us realize that this virtue and character is not found only among the poor or lowly or uneducated. Even the learned may have this beauty and it may be found in the courts of kings and the lecture halls of philosophers.

Think of the fact that the Lord's apostles were subjected to all the uproars and agitations of the world and they were often disappointed and even perhaps thwarted in their works. They lived in anxiety and at times lost their honesty. Yet all this did not prevent them from learning guilelessness, if they would. Indeed, guileless persons are members of society and yet for just that reason need to become guileless, innocent, and not deceitful. Perhaps they need this virtue all the more just for that reason.

The guileless person possess an inner strength because certain values and ideals are held clearly and are related to a central, life-shaping dedication—in this case to God. Such people live above the world and so triumph over it even if it should destroy them at some point. Theirs is the blessedness of the innocent. Innocence is not naïveté or ignorance but steadfastness in doing good and seeking to do good. They have never given way to evil or formed habits of sin and have not experienced the power and misery of sin. They are able to discern the right and the wrong in the field of values to which they are committed.

But more is requisite for the Christian, more even than the guilelessness of Bartholomew. When Christ sent him forth with his brethren into the world He said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be therefore as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves". Innocence must be joined to prudence, discretion, and self-command, gravity, patience, perseverance in well-doing, as doubtless, Bartholomew learned in due season under the Lord's guidance and teaching. Innocence is a beginning.

We pray to God to fulfill in us his work of goodness and of faith with power. May it please God to bring us forward to face great trials, as did the Apostles. May we not be taken by surprise, but make of the qualities of innocence and guilelessness the preparation for following the Lord even to the Cross. The clarity of values and the steadiness of dedication to God that helped us live guilelessly prepare us for our heavenly homeland.