

TWENTY-FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

15-21 September 2024

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Sunday

WHAT WE HAVE TO DO TO FOLLOW CHRIST

A Reflection taken from a Sermon by St. Caesarius of Arles

The Lord tells us that whoever wants to be Christ's follower must renounce self. Does this command sound harsh to you? Do you think the Lord is imposing a burden on us? But pause and ask: Where do we have to go to follow Christ? Do we have to go where he has gone? He has gone to Heaven. He rose and ascended to the Heavenly Father. Do you think it is a burden to follow the Lord to Heaven?

Ordinarily, an order isn't a real burden when the one who gives it helps you fulfill it. How much more when Jesus is with us to help us follow him to Heaven?

If left to ourselves we couldn't do anything. But we have Christ's promise to be with us. There is no reason to despair; he is with us!

Heaven was beyond our reach before the Head of the body, whose members we are, went there. If we are members of Christ then we will surely get to Heaven. Is there any reason to lose hope? Many are afraid of afflictions and trials that confront us in this world. But if we follow Christ we will end up in a place of perfect happiness, perfect peace, and everlasting freedom from all fear. Let's look at Christ's command in terms of our own anxieties. St. Paul reminds us that "one who claims to abide in Christ ought to walk as Christ walked". Now human sin made the path to heaven rough but when Christ himself walked it he transformed the narrowest of tracks into a royal highway. You need two feet!

The first foot is humility. If you want to follow Christ be humble as he was. Don't despise his lowliness or fear it. Everyone wants to get to the top. Good, the first step is humility. Why try to take strides that are too big for you? Do you want to fall flat on your face instead of climbing higher? Lowliness and humility are steps to exaltation. Begin with humility and you have already begun to climb.

The second foot is charity. Perhaps that seems very difficult because it involves renouncing self and taking up our cross. What does it mean to take up one's cross? It means bearing every annoyance patiently. If you begin to follow Christ's way of life and God's commandments some will resist you or mock you or even persecute you. They may be people who claim to be Christians but are that only in name? Nevertheless, you need not be afraid. When one learns patience, one learns how to endure trials without being overwhelmed by them.

You want to follow Christ. Good, then take up the cross without delay. Endure injuries without being overcome by them. The first thing to remember is a word of St. Paul's: "As long as we have food and clothing, let this be enough for us". One who seeks all kinds of property or much wealth or wants to be rich will have to face many temptations. Many such things are actually useless or even harmful. We flee from such temptations by loving the Lord more and more. We have enough if we have Christ. Loving Christ is the charity that teams up with humility to enable us to run the way of God's commandments, as Jesus did. Remember Jesus' word to Martha: "*Only one thing is necessary!*" That one thing is God revealed to us in Jesus. If we have Jesus we have God, and if we have God we have everything we truly need.

Monday

EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER TO MARTYRDOM

A Reflection from a Letter by St. Cyprian

Each Christian must prepare for the struggle of keeping the faith untainted. The thing is to think of nothing except life eternal and the crown that goes with confessing the Lord. Don't concern yourself with familiar things, as those heavenly realities are going to be the same. An especially difficult struggle now threatens us. Like soldiers preparing for battle, we need real courage and trust in God. Don't forget that you drink the cup of Christ's blood daily just so that you may be capable of shedding your blood for Christ. This is what it means to long to imitate Christ, not only in what he said but in what he did. Listen to St. John the Apostle: *"One who says, I abide in Christ!, ought to walk in the same way Christ did"*.

The Lord wants us to rejoice and even leap for joy when persecutions come. That is how we gain the crown of faith. Doing this opens the gates of heaven to us as soldiers of Christ, and most of all to martyrs. Don't think only of peace and draw back from the struggle of spiritual warfare; the Lord didn't turn back from it. He taught us humility and endurance and suffering and so He did first what he was teaching us to do in imitation of him.

In this world, those who are chosen to fight for their people undergo much and hard training. They receive great rewards if they are victorious in battle. Here before us is a high and marvelous struggle and the offer of a heavenly crown. This is how God makes us his own children! He rejoices in the spectacle of our victory, as do his angels and saints. What a great dignity we are given, and what great happiness, to fight in the very presence of God and of Christ, and to be crowned with Christ himself.

Prepare to fight with all your strength and with minds untainted by worry about what we may lose. Let those who are healthy put on their armor. Let those who have lapsed see that they can regain all they had lost, and let the longing for honor stimulate us all. Remember what St. Paul tells us: *"We don't wrestle against ordinary powers by against the princes of this world of darkness and against spirits of wickedness in high places. So put on the whole armor of faith so you may be able to stand fast on the evil day. Let yourself be belted with truth, and put on the breastplate of righteousness with the preparation that is the Gospel of peace as your boots and carry the shield that is faith so even fiery arrows won't be able to hurt you. Wear the helmet that is confidence in salvation and the sword that is God's word."*

We all need to take this armor and these armaments. We need to strengthen ourselves with these spiritual safeguards. Then we will be able to endure any evil day of testing and of threats. We can't be hurt if we stand firm in the gospel teachings but will tread upon the serpent without being bitten or tripped up. Faith makes us brave and protects us from spiritual harm. Our ears will never have to hear condemnatory words and we will not be injured by any evil sights or images. The tongue that confesses Christ conquers! With the Gospel at hand, we will never do any evil deed or compromise the purity of our faith. If we are aware of the Eucharist we know that the Lord embraces us and we embrace Him. We have received the Lord's body and by being faithful we make ourselves able to receive from the Lord the reward that is like a heavenly crown. Fear not! Only trust in the Lord!

Tuesday

TO HAVE COMPASSION, TO COME FORWARD AND “TOUCH”

From the Message of Pope Francis for the 35th World Youth Day 2020

The Scriptures often speak of the feelings experienced by those who let themselves be touched “viscerally” by the pain of others. Jesus’ own feelings make him share in other people’s lives. He makes their pain his own. That mother’s grief became his own. The death of that young son became his own.

You have shown over and over again that you are capable of *compassion*. I think of all those of you who have generously offered help whenever situations demanded it. No disaster, earthquake, or flood takes place without young volunteers stepping up to offer a helping hand. The great mobilization of young people concerned about defending the environment is also a witness to your ability to hear the cry of the earth.

Do not let yourselves be robbed of this sensitivity! May you always be attentive to the plea of those who are suffering, and be moved by those who weep and die in today’s world. “Some realities of life are only seen with eyes cleansed by tears” (*Christus Vivit*, 76). If you can learn to weep with those who are weeping, you will find true happiness. So many of your contemporaries are disadvantaged and victims of violence and persecution. Let their wounds become your own, and you will be bearers of hope in this world. You will be able to say to your brother or sister: “Arise, you are not alone”, and you will help them realize that God the Father loves us, that Jesus is the hand he stretches out to us in order to raise us up.

Jesus stops the funeral procession. He draws near, he demonstrates his closeness. Closeness thus turns into a courageous act of restoring life to another. A prophetic gesture. The touch of Jesus, the living One, communicates life. It is a touch that pours the Holy Spirit into the dead body of that young man and brings him back to life.

The Gospel does not tell us the name of the young man whom Jesus restored to life in Nain. This invites each reader to identify with him. To you, to me, to each one of us, Jesus says: “Arise”. We are very aware that, as Christians, we constantly fall and have to get up again. People who are not on a journey never fall; then again, neither do they move forward. That is why we need to accept the help that Jesus gives us and put our faith in God. The first step is to let ourselves get up and to realize that the new life Jesus offers us is good and worth living. It is sustained by one who is ever at our side along our journey to the future. Jesus helps us to live this life in a dignified and meaningful way.

This life is really a new creation, a new birth, not just a form of psychological conditioning. Perhaps, in times of difficulty, many of you have heard people repeat those “magic” formulas so fashionable nowadays, formulas that are supposed to take care of everything: “You have to believe in yourself”, “You have to discover your inner resources”, “You have to become conscious of your positive energy”... But these are mere words; they do not work for someone who is truly “dead inside”. Jesus’ word has a deeper resonance; it goes infinitely deeper. It is a divine and creative word, which alone can bring the dead to life.

Wednesday

HYMN TO LOVE

From the Angelus Message of Pope BENEDICT XVI, 31 January 2010

In today's Liturgy we read one of the most beautiful passages of the New Testament and of the whole Bible: the Apostle Paul's "hymn to love" (1 Cor 12: 31-13: 13). In his First Letter to the Corinthians, after explaining through the image of the body that the different gifts of the Holy Spirit contribute to the good of the one Church, Paul shows the "way" of perfection. It does not, he says, consist in possessing exceptional qualities: in speaking new languages, understanding all the mysteries, having a prodigious faith, or doing heroic deeds. Rather, it consists in love *agape* that is, in authentic love which God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Love is the "greatest gift" which gives value to all the others and yet it "is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant"; on the contrary, it "rejoices in the right" and in the good of others. Whoever truly loves "does not insist on [his or her] own way", "is "not irritable or resentful" but "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (cf. 1 Cor 13: 4-7). In the end, when we find ourselves face to face with God, all the other gifts will no longer matter; the only one that will last forever is love, because God is love and we will be like him, in perfect communion with him.

For now, while we are in this world, love is the sign of Christians. It sums up their entire life: what they believe and what they do. This is why at the beginning of my Pontificate I chose to dedicate my first Encyclical to this very subject of love: *Deus Caritas Est*. As you will remember, this Encyclical is made up of two parts that correspond to the two aspects of charity: its meaning and hence its practice. Love is the essence of God himself, it is the meaning of creation and of history, it is the light that brings goodness and beauty into every person's existence. At the same time, love is, so to speak, the "style" of God and of believers, it is the behavior of those who, in response to God's love, make their life a gift of themselves to God and to their neighbor. In Jesus Christ these two aspects form a perfect unity: he is Love incarnate. This Love has been fully revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Fixing our gaze on him, we can confess with the Apostle John: "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us" (cf. 1 Jn 4: 16; Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1).

Dear friends, if we think of the Saints, we recognize the variety of their spiritual gifts and also their human characteristics, but the life of each one of them is a hymn to charity, a living canticle to God's love! My Mary Help of Christians, a model of love, obtain these graces for us.

Thursday

LOVE AND JUDGMENT

From the Homily of Pope Francis, 13 March 2015

The Gospel for today (cf. Lk 7:36-50) opens to us a path of hope and comfort. It is good to feel Jesus' compassionate gaze upon us, just as it was felt by the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee. In this passage two words persistently return: *love* and *judgment*.

There is *the love of the sinful woman* who humbles herself before the Lord; but before that is *the merciful love of Jesus* for her, which drives her to approach him. Her tears of repentance and joy wash the feet of the Master, and her hair dries them with gratitude; the kisses are an expression of her pure love; and the perfumed ointment poured in abundance attests to how precious He is in her eyes. This woman's every gesture speaks of love and expresses her desire to have unwavering certitude in her life: that of having been forgiven. And this certitude is beautiful! And Jesus gives her this certitude: in accepting her He demonstrates the love God has for her, just for her, a public sinner! Love and forgiveness are simultaneous: God forgives her many sins, He forgives her for all of them, for "she loved much" (Lk 7:47); and she adores Jesus because she feels that in Him there is mercy and not condemnation. She feels that Jesus understands her with love, she who is a sinner. Thanks to Jesus, God lifts her many sins off her shoulders, and He no longer remembers them (cf. Is 43:25). For this is also true: when God forgives, He forgets. God's forgiveness is great! For her now a new era begins; through love, she is reborn into a new life.

This woman has truly encountered the Lord. In silence, she opened her heart; in sorrow, she showed repentance for her sins; by her tears, she appealed to divine goodness to receive forgiveness. For her, there will be no judgment but that which comes from God, and this is the judgment of mercy. The hero of this encounter is certainly love, a mercy which goes beyond justice.

Simon, the master of the house, the Pharisee, on the contrary, *doesn't manage to find the road of love*. Everything is calculated, and everything is thought out... He stands firm on the threshold of formality. It is an unpleasant thing, formal love, he doesn't understand. He is not capable of taking that next step forward to meet Jesus who will bring him salvation. Simon limits himself to inviting Jesus to lunch, but does not truly welcome him. In his thoughts, Simon invokes only justice and in doing so he errs. *His judgment of the woman distances him from the truth* and prevents him from even understanding who his guest is. He stopped at the surface — at formality — incapable of seeing the heart. Before the parable of Jesus and the question of which servant would love more, the pharisee responds correctly: "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more". Jesus doesn't fail to observe: "You have judged rightly" (Lk 7:43). When Simon's judgment is turned to love, then is he in the right.

Friday

THE PASSION FOR EVANGELIZATION: THE APOSTOLIC ZEAL OF THE BELIEVER **Catechesis on Evangelization No 14 by Pope Francis, 24 May 2023**

We find a great example of passion for evangelization in the Korean Church. Let us look at Saint Andrew Kim Tae-gon, a martyr and Korea's first priest. Initially, evangelization of Korea was done mainly by the laity! It was the baptized laity who transmitted the faith. The priests came later. And Saint Andrew was one of the first priests. His life was and remains an eloquent testimony of zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel.

About 200 years ago, the Korean land was the scene of a very severe persecution, believing in Jesus Christ meant being ready to bear witness unto death. From the example of Saint Andrew Kim, we can draw out two concrete aspects of his life. The first is the way in which he had to meet with the faithful. Given the highly risky context, the saint was forced to approach Christians discreetly, and always in the presence of other people. To confirm the other's Christian identity, there was a previously agreed upon sign of recognition- a sign on his outfit or in his hand. Then, he would surreptitiously ask "Are you a disciple of Jesus?" With other people around, the saint had to speak in a low voice, and in a few words. Thus, for Andrew Kim, the expression that summed up the whole Christian identity was "disciple of Christ".

Indeed, being a disciple of the Lord means following him. The Christian preaches and bears witness to Jesus. Every Christian community receives this identity from the Holy Spirit, and so does the whole Church, since the day of Pentecost (cf. Vatican Council II, Decree *Ad Gentes*, 2). And it is from this Spirit that we receive the passion for evangelization, this great apostolic zeal. And even if the context is not favorable, the passion does not change. It even becomes more valuable. Saint Andrew Kim and other Korean believers demonstrated that witnessing to the Gospel in times of persecution can bear much fruit for the faith.

The second is the way to welcome foreign missionaries. When he was still a seminarian, Saint Andrew would secretly welcome missionaries from abroad. One time Saint Andrew walked in the snow, without eating, for so long that he fell to the ground exhausted, risking unconsciousness and freezing. Then suddenly he heard a voice, "Get up and keep walking"! At that, Andrew reawakened, and caught a glimpse of something like the shadow of someone who was guiding him.

This makes us understand a very important aspect of apostolic zeal; namely, the courage to get back up when one falls. But do saints fall? Yes! Indeed, from the earliest times. Think of Saint Peter who committed a great sin, but he found strength in God's mercy and got up again. And in Saint Andrew, we see this strength. He had fallen physically but he had the strength to go on.

No matter how difficult the situation may be, and seem to leave no room for the Gospel message, we must not forsake pursuing what is essential in our Christian life: namely, evangelization. "But how can I evangelize"? Well, look at these great ones, and think about our own small context: evangelizing the family, evangelizing friends, talking about Jesus with a heart full of joy, full of strength. And this is given by the Holy Spirit. Let us ask him for that grace of apostolic courage, the grace to evangelize, to always carry the message of Jesus forward.

Saturday

PREFERRING NOTHING TO GOD

A Reflection taken from a Sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

According to the rule of the Gospel, the lack of wealth is, as such, a more blessed state than its possession. This is illustrated in the call of Matthew to discipleship. There is an obvious danger posed by worldly possessions. One may end up treating them as a substitute in our hearts for that One to whom supreme devotion and love are due. Possessions are present and seen but God is unseen. They are ready and at hand for us to use in accomplishing what we want. Whether or not God will our prayers for the fulfillment of those same wants is uncertain, or perhaps even certain in the negative. This is the case when we use wealth to satisfy the corrupt inclinations of our nature or heart. Worldly wealth promises and is actually able to do deeds as gods might, but they are gods that require no service. How easy to choose to serve such a master instead of the Lord who leads us to a cross!

Worse yet, wealth can fill us with notions of our own power and security, and self-sufficiency which are wholly false. This is their constant and primary mischief. People who would live in God are not always able to eliminate from themselves all sinful desires, all the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, all gluttony and drunkenness, and the like. They may continue to love mere entertainment and frivolous pleasures and putting on a show. One can't easily rid oneself of a feeling of self-importance and superiority. As a result, they get attached to this world and lose sight of the duty of bearing the Cross. One can become spiritually dull and near-sighted and lose the inner delicacy that alerts one to opportunities to love as Christ loves and to serve.

Does it seem somehow unnatural to risk everything for the sake of imitating Christ? Does this seem extravagant and give one a morbid preoccupation with death? Isn't it better to act graciously and give good things to others with a liberal hand? What happens to the contemplation of death and the thought of going to God and facing God's judgment? Doesn't a dedicated Christian contemplate all these things willingly and with a kind of joyous anticipation? But people attached to this world are all too often content to remain as they are. Even if some do serve God in intention, and even in fact, they do it without the noble enthusiasm and elevation of heart and soul that marks the Christian who has given oneself into God's hands.

What if you didn't think there was anything after this life? Perhaps you "*would eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a happy heart, seeing that your clothes always indicate joy and gladness and that you are anointed with sweet smelling perfumes and oils, living joyfully with one's spouse and loving one another all the days of your life—a life which is vanity even as you enjoy the good things won by your labor*". This is not even an indirect criticism of the good things God gives us. But it is a warning that these things are not the "One Spouse" who wants to be the One to whom all our love and devotion are directed. There is much more to come after death. To close one's eyes to these things is to misunderstand the Gospel. Every day, turn always toward God and toward the marvels to which God calls those who love him above all else.