

# **THE TWENTY-SIXTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**

29 September – 5 October 2024

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Sun.      The Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Sept. 29 **HOW MANY ARE OF GOD'S CHURCH!**  
A Reflection adapted from a text by Fr. Henri Lacordaire, OP

Mon.      Memorial of St. Jerome  
30      **SAINT JEROME**  
From the General Audience Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 7 November 2007

Tues.      Memorial of St. Therese of the Child Jesus  
Oct. 1      **JESUS FOR OTHERS**  
From the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis,  
On Confidence in the Merciful Love Of God, 15 October 2023

Wed.      Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels  
2      **LEARNING MINISTRY FROM THE ANGELS**  
A Reflection by St. Albert the Great

Thurs.      Memorial of the Dead  
3      **THE FRIENDS WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US**  
Reflection from On Spiritual Friendship by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

Fri.      Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi  
4      **MONASTIC DESERT DAY**  
**SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI**  
From the General Audience Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 27 January 2010

Sat.      Memorial of Our Lady  
5      **MARY AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY**  
A Reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

*Sunday*

## **HOW MANY ARE OF GOD'S CHURCH!**

**A Reflection adapted from a text by Fr. Henri Lacordaire, OP**

*"John said to Jesus: Teacher, we saw a person using your name to expel demons and we tried to stop him because he is not of our number. Jesus replied, Don't try to stop such a person..."* (Mk.9:38ff). Anyone who loves God is a living member of God's Church. It doesn't matter where or when that person lives. St. Augustine tells us that two loves are making two cities. The love of God is making the City of God and the love of merely human things is making the City of Mankind. The love of God makes the Kingdom of God, God's city, and the source of that love is Jesus Christ. Whoever lives that love is a member of God's city.

Jesus has been sacrificed for us from the beginning of the world. Has the extreme character of his suffering moved you? Many find their feelings too cold and too guilty to turn to God naturally. Some can't call on the name of Jesus because he has never been proclaimed to them. Yet people don't have to know the source of the flame of love that consumes them. Many are not led to Calvary from their birth and have not seen at Calvary what the God-become-human suffers in agony for them on that hill. Yet a drop of that sacred blood has sought them by ways invisible to human sight and they sense the fragrance of eternal life and have responded to its mute appeal to charity.

The Church is not only what it seems to be. It is not only a visible organization with buildings, a history, and a hierarchy. Nor is it simply authenticity, virtues, miracles, and the like. We see more of it in the kind of half-light and shadow that contains all the saintliness that is hidden from us. Yes, the angels see it and recognize that it is an underground foundation and support for what is seen and see that each person has within a kind of sanctuary which is a personal holy of holies. There a hidden incense of love and mercy is offered to God.

Love is something that cannot be caught or contained. Who is there that can see how it springs to life within a person? There is, so to speak, an immortal substance within each of us of which we aren't aware any more than we are aware of the hidden ways the Divine Love walks to find and possess us.

Wherever the love of God is, there is Jesus Christ. Wherever Jesus is, the Church is there with him. Every human person, certainly every Christian, is called to join the body which is the Church. But so many are prevented by insuperable ignorance! They are, so to speak, left under the direct rule of Jesus.

The Lord Jesus is the leader and sovereign head of all Christianity and Christians. The Church of God has for this reason a kind of invisible extension that no human eye can take in. Those who see only boundaries which appear lack all idea of the twofold radiance which is its true nature. The Church that is Jesus Christ and all who labor knowingly or unknowingly in his name calls and raises all who live the unselfish love of Jesus, wherever in the world they may be found. Do not seek to forbid them this labor. Show them the fullness of Christ so their labor may be yet more effective in advancing the Kingdom of God.

*Monday*

## **SAINT JEROME**

**From the General Audience Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 7 November 2007**

Today, we turn our attention to St Jerome, a Church Father who centered his life on the Bible: he translated it into Latin, commented on it in his works, and above all, strove to live it in practice throughout his long earthly life, despite the well-known difficult, hot-tempered character with which nature had endowed him.

Jerome was born into a Christian family in about 347 A.D. in Stridon. He was given a good education and was even sent to Rome to fine-tune his studies. As a young man he was attracted by the worldly life, but his desire for and interest in the Christian religion prevailed.

He received Baptism in about 366 and opted for the ascetic life. He went to Aquileia and joined a group of fervent Christians that had formed around Bishop Valerian. He then left for the East and lived as a hermit in the Desert of Chalcis, south of Aleppo, devoting himself assiduously to study. He perfected his knowledge of Greek, began learning Hebrew, and transcribed codices and Patristic writings. Meditation, solitude, and contact with the Word of God helped his Christian sensibility to mature. He bitterly regretted the indiscretions of his youth and was keenly aware of the contrast between the pagan mentality and the Christian life.

Jerome refuted with energy and liveliness the heretics who contested the tradition and faith of the Church. He also demonstrated the importance and validity of Christian literature, which had by then become a real culture that deserved to be compared with classical literature. Further, he wrote biographies of monks, comparing among other things their spiritual itineraries as well as monastic ideal. In addition, he translated various works by Greek authors. Jerome emerges with the profile of a man of culture, an ascetic and a guide of souls.

What can we learn from St Jerome? It is above all; to love the Word of God in Sacred Scripture. St Jerome said: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ". It is therefore important that every Christian live in contact and in personal dialogue with the Word of God given to us in Sacred Scripture. This dialogue with Scripture must always have two dimensions: on the one hand, it must be a truly personal dialogue because God speaks with each one of us through Sacred Scripture and it has a message for each one. We must not read Sacred Scripture as a word of the past but as the Word of God that is also addressed to us, and we must try to understand what it is that the Lord wants to tell us. However, to avoid falling into individualism, we must bear in mind that the Word of God has been given to us precisely in order to build communion and to join forces in the truth on our journey towards God. Thus, although it is always a personal Word, it is also a Word that builds community, that builds the Church. We must therefore read it in communion with the living Church. The privileged place for reading and listening to the Word of God is the liturgy, in which, celebrating the Word and making Christ's Body present in the Sacrament, we actualize the Word in our lives and make it present among us. We must never forget that the Word of God transcends time. Human opinions come and go. What is very modern today will be very antiquated tomorrow. On the other hand, the Word of God is the Word of eternal life, it bears within it eternity and is valid forever. By carrying the Word of God within us, we therefore carry within us eternity, eternal life.

Tuesday

## **JESUS FOR OTHERS**

**From the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, On Confidence in the Merciful Love Of God (C'est la Confiance), for the 150th anniversary of the birth of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, 15 October 2023**

In the name that Therese chose as a religious, Jesus stands out as the “Child” who manifests the mystery of the Incarnation, and the “Holy Face” of the one who surrendered himself completely on the Cross. She is “Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face”.

The name of Jesus was constantly on her lips, as an act of love, even to her last breath. She had also written these words in her cell: “Jesus is my one love”. It was her interpretation of the supreme statement of the New Testament: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8.16).

As with every authentic encounter with Christ, this experience of faith summoned her to mission. Therese could define her mission in these words: “I shall desire in heaven the same thing as I do now on earth: to love Jesus and to make him loved”. She wrote that she entered Carmel “to save souls”. In a word, she did not view her consecration to God apart from the pursuit of the good of her brothers and sisters. She shared the merciful love of the Father for his sinful son and the love of the Good Shepherd for the sheep who were lost, astray, and wounded. For this reason, Therese is the Patroness of the missions and a model of evangelization.

The final pages of her *Story of a Soul* are a missionary testament. They express her appreciation of the fact that evangelization takes place by attraction, not by pressure or proselytism. It is worthwhile reading her own words in this regard: “*Draw me, we shall run after you in the odor of your ointments. O Jesus! It is not even necessary to say: When drawing me, draw the souls whom I love!* This simple statement, ‘Draw me’ suffices. I understand, Lord, that when a soul allows herself to be captivated by *the odor of your ointments*, she cannot run alone; all the souls whom she loves follow in her train; this is done without constraint, without effort, it is a natural consequence of her attraction for you. Just as a torrent, throwing itself with impetuosity into the ocean drags after it everything it encounters in its passage, in the same way, O Jesus, the soul who plunges into the shoreless ocean of your Love, draws with her all the treasures she possesses. Lord, you know it, I have no other treasures than the souls it has pleased you to unite to mine”.

In this passage, Therese quotes the words of the bride to the bridegroom in the Song of Songs (1:3-4), following the profound interpretation found in the writings of the doctors of Carmel, Saint Teresa of Avila, and Saint John of the Cross. The bridegroom is Jesus, the Son of God who united himself to our humanity in the Incarnation and redeemed it on the Cross. There, from his open side, he gave birth to the Church, his beloved bride, for which he gave his life (cf. *Eph* 5:25). What is striking is that Therese, conscious of her own impending death, did not approach this mystery merely as a source of personal consolation, but in a fervent apostolic spirit.

*Wednesday*

## **LEARNING MINISTRY FROM THE ANGELS**

### **A Reflection by St. Albert the Great**

The Lord himself says: "See to it that you do not treat one of these little ones with contempt; I tell you that their angels in heaven behold the face of my Heavenly Father continually." Christ means, more or less: Be attentive, watch that you look down on no one who is simple or weak or poor. He tells us that he holds them in such high esteem as to have placed angels at their service. And these angels are very great, like officers in the palace of God.

These angels see the face of God for four reasons. The first is that it is their duty to present to God the good works people do. Raphael said to Tobiah: I was all the time offering your prayer to the Lord". In Revelation we read: "There was another angel who came and stood by the altar with a golden censer with which he offered before God's throne the prayers of all the saints". The altar is the symbol of the heart of one who is faithful to God. We stand before God in this way and place in the censer our joys, our thoughts, our prayers and words and actions. We present them before God. It is well, then, to have something good always ready to put in the censer for the offering which rises toward the Son in the bosom of the Father. We learn this from the angels.

The angels, second, stand before the face of God to receive God's commands. They do them with alacrity, especially when given a mission for the salvation of someone. The angel said to Tobiah: "Now, for your healing, and the deliverance of your son's wife, Sarah from the fiend's attack, God has selected me as messenger". The text goes on to list the benefits received. The Psalm says: "God has entrusted you to the angles, to guard you in all your ways". We learn from these guardians and companions on the journey to do God's will right away and with joy and to devote ourselves, especially to the help and healing of others.

Now the third reason why the angels see the face of God the Father is that they praise God for the glory given by the conversion of sinners. They sing the joy that they themselves experience. So our Lord says in Luke's Gospel: "So it is, I tell you, that in heaven there will be more rejoicing over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine souls who are justified and have no need of repentance". This is our joy as much as it is the angels' joy.

The final reason which causes in the angels such a great desire and rejoicing is their contemplation of the face of the Father in heaven. Such contemplation is for them the source of happiness that they taste but never get enough of. The Apostle Peter speaks to us of this as a deep mystery: "And now the angels can satisfy their eager gaze". We too are called to imitate their contemplation by our own and by our insatiable desire to behold the Father's face.

Pray, then, and ask our Lord to grant to us also the grace of serving faithfully and to merit, one day, to be carried by the holy angels to eternal joy. Minister these gifts which the angels mirror for us and do so faithfully and to all, most especially to God's "little ones". Thus we too may stand among the angels serving and glorifying God in joy without end.

Thursday

## THE FRIENDS WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US

Reflection from On Spiritual Friendship by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

Who is a greater friend than Our Lord and Savior? What's more, he has given us the formula for genuine friendship: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*". We all love ourselves but we learn to love by being loved and besides our Lord and our parents, we learn to love from friends. A monastic community must be and community of friends who love one another as Christ loves each of us. But we love ourselves best if we love God. Who taught you how to love God even more than you love yourself? Those who have taught us the monastic way of life did this. Today we remember them as teachers and friends who have gone before us and now beckon us to follow them into the fullness of God's love.

If you have become a person worthy of being chosen for friendship with God, you love God above all else. If you are such a person do you think you should be rewarded for loving God or yourself? From the very nature of things each creature loves itself "gratuitously". You transfer this same affection to the other that you love as friends, loving them gratuitously. Unless you do this, you can't appreciate what true friendship is. Do you, then, love God less than yourself or your friends? Of course not.

The one whom you love is another self. God has loved us in a way that makes us another self, another Jesus. As St. Ambrose said, returning this love isn't a tax payment but a free gift full of beauty and full of grace and not acquired by purchase but by generosity. That's how we share love of God with our human friends, as Christ has shared with us as his friends. That's how our departed brothers shared the love of God and Christ with us. It was the greatest gift a friend can give a friend.

The intention of those chosen as "friends" has to be tested subtly so that both know they are joined in friendship gratuitously and not in the hope of gaining some advantage or possession. That is to think of friendship in a mercenary way and not in terms of gratuity. The extraordinary thing we await from God is that he will enact and share with us, as creatures who have been uplifted, the capacity to love one another as God himself loves us. God does this among the degrees and orders distinguished by divine decree, and among the individuals who have been chosen so they know charity and friendship. In this way, just as each rejoices in what is its own so will it rejoice in the good of others. The happiness of each one taken individually will be the happiness of all and the totality of the happiness of all will be the possession of each individual.

Here we test ourselves and one another. No such testing is needed once we have entered God's Kingdom; divine perfection beatifies all. This is the norm by which we now measure friendship and so we see how truly friends are those who have taught us this way to God. Reflect today on the divine example of love so we may pass it on in our turn. Let us pray to our departed to help us today and every day to share this gift with those who come after us and look to us to teach them what our predecessors taught us.

Friday

## **SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

**From the General Audience Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 27 January 2010**

Several 19th-century and also 20th-century historians have sought to construct a so-called historical Francis, behind the traditional depiction of the Saint. This historical Francis would not have been a man of the Church, but rather a man connected directly and solely to Christ, a man who wanted to bring about a renewal of the People of God, without canonical forms or hierarchy. The truth is that St Francis really did have an extremely intimate relationship with Jesus and with the word of God, that he wanted to pursue in all its radicality and truth. He simply wanted, through the word of God and the presence of the Lord, to renew the People of God, to call them back to listening to the word and to literal obedience to Christ. It is only in communion with the Church built on the Apostolic succession that obedience too, to the word of God, can be renewed.

The death of Francis, his *transitus*, occurred on the evening of 3 October 1226, in the Portiuncula. After having blessed his spiritual children, he died, lying on the bare earthen floor. Two years later Pope Gregory IX entered him in the roll of saints. A short time after, a great basilica in his honor was constructed in Assisi.

It has been said that Francis represents an *alter Christus*, that he was truly a living icon of Christ. He has also been called "the brother of Jesus". Indeed, this was his ideal: to be like Jesus, to contemplate Christ in the Gospel, to love him intensely, and to imitate his virtues. In particular, he wished to ascribe interior and exterior poverty with a fundamental value, which he also taught to his spiritual sons. The first Beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5: 3) found a luminous fulfillment in the life and words of St Francis. Truly, dear friends, the saints are the best interpreters of the Bible. As they incarnate the word of God in their own lives, they make it more captivating than ever, so that it really speaks to us. The witness of Francis, who loved poverty as a means to follow Christ with dedication and total freedom, continues to be for us too an invitation to cultivate interior poverty in order to grow in our trust of God, also by adopting a sober lifestyle and a detachment from material goods.

Francis' love for Christ specially expressed itself in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist. In the *Fonti Francescane* (Writings of St Francis) one reads such moving expressions as: "Let everyone be struck with fear, let the whole world tremble, and let the heavens exult, when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest. Oh, stupendous dignity! O humble sublimity, that the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles himself that for our salvation he hides himself under an ordinary piece of bread" (Francis of Assisi, *Scritti*, Editrici Francescane, Padova 2002, 401).

Francis was a great Saint and a joyful man. His simplicity, his humility, his faith, his love for Christ, his goodness towards every man and every woman, brought him gladness in every circumstance. Indeed, there subsists an intimate and indissoluble relationship between holiness and joy. A French writer once wrote that there is only one sorrow in the world: not to be saints, that is, not to be near to God. Looking at the testimony of St Francis, we understand that this is the secret of true happiness: to become saints, close to God!

*Saturday*

## **MARY AND THE CELEBRATION OF THE LITURGY**

### **A Reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini**

The Second Vatican Council teaches as follows: *“In celebrating the annual cycle of Christ’s mysteries, the holy Church honors with special love the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. She is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son. In her, the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the redemption and joyfully contemplates it in a faultless model.”* (SC 103)

This statement contains three key affirmations. The first teaches that all Marian feasts are a part of our celebration of Christ’s mysteries. This is actually the only cycle that the Church celebrates in its liturgy. Mary is strictly bound to Jesus’ redemptive action because she is the most wonderful fruit of his salvific work. We pray this every time we pray the “Hail, Mary”. She is joined to Jesus inseparably because she received everything from Him.

Second, the Church affirms that Mary opened herself and her heart to receive the fullness of God’s gift, Jesus Christ. In this way, she is the model for every Christian. This is our duty to God. We must let ourselves be loved by God! “The Almighty has done great things for me!” Mary recognizes that everything about her and in her is a gift from God. She knows herself as fully loved by God in Christ.

The Church praises God for the gift God has given in Mary. It uses the same words with which she praised the work of the Lord: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my savior”. We celebrate the lived identification between Mary and the Church and we as the Church know ourselves as understood by and represented by Our Lady.

The third affirmation is even more explicit than the others. The Church “joyfully contemplates” all that Mary is by God’s gift. She herself seeks and longs to be nothing but God’s. That is what she hoped to be and what God gave her. In other words, the Church, and each of us, look beyond self and beyond the events that fill our days and we look to Mary as she is in God’s glory. Mary is the concrete image of all that the Church longs to be, of all that we ourselves long to be. She is what we hope to be.

Mary is totally dedicated to the Lord. Mary is totally attentive to the work of Christ. Mary is totally caught up in God’s great mysteries. Mary represents our hope in all these ways, but in her, it is already realized. Mary, glorified in body and soul, is with the Father in Heaven. In her our body is transfigured and so is our daily historicity. She shows us God’s goal for all humanity and for each of us. All are called to share in the fullness of the glory that God has given her. She shows us how we come to that glory in the seemingly simple deeds of each day—like today.