

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

6-12 October 2024

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Sun. The Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Oct. 6 **OUR UNION WITH GOD IN CHRIST**
A Reflection by Bishop Jacob of Serugh

Mon. Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary
7 **THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF PRAYING THE ROSARY**
A Reflection from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

Tues. Tuesday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time
8 **HOW JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM**
A Reflection by Fr. J-M. Tillard, OP

Wed. Wednesday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time
9 **SURRENDERING TO GOD IN PRAYER**
A Reflection by St. Teresa of Avila

Thurs. Thursday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time
10 **A MEDITATION: ON PRAYER**
By Pope John Paul II

Fri. Monastic Desert Day
11 Memorial of St John XXIII, Pope
THE DAILY DECALOGUE OF POPE JOHN XXIII
Homily of Cardinal Tarciso Bertone on the Memorial of Pope John XXIII,
11 October 2006

Sat. Saturday of the 27th Week in Ordinary Time
12 **WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD**
From the Catechesis on the Letter to the Galatians by Pope Francis,
8 September 2021

Sunday

OUR UNION WITH GOD IN CHRIST

A Reflection by Bishop Jacob of Serugh (c.451 - 29 Nov 521 AD)

“What God has joined together, no one must divide.” The Heavenly Father created us to be one in faith and love and a beauty that makes us God’s People and bride. If the Spirit grants you prophetic sight you can see all this in the Scriptural words just spoken. God becomes one with us in baptism and makes us yet more one, as a bride of the Only Son. It is written in the Book of Genesis that men and women are to leave their birth families and be joined to one another in such a way that in truth the two become one. When we contemplate this mystery, we contemplate ourselves and our lives.

Scripture speaks of men and women in this way as a foretelling of the union of Christ and the Church. Christ becomes one with us first through the water of baptism. Christ has been drawing us to himself from the very beginning of his life in human flesh as from the beginning of our life in faith. As the Church responds in whole-hearted love it too, so to speak, draws Christ to itself. Bridegroom and bride are joined and wholly united not simply with and in one another but with and in Christ. Scripture says that the two are to become one.

All of this is presented to us in Scripture in a veiled way. But after the marriage ceremony took place on the cross, God began to unveil this mystery. St. Paul entered into it and became God’s special instrument to reveal these wondrous truths to the entire world. In an outburst of inspiration, he cried out: “What a great mystery!” The union of two human persons is seen as a revelation of the union of Christ and the Church. We were many and are now made one.

A wife and a husband aren’t united to one another as closely as the Church is to the Son of God. He died for us before we loved him or had any idea of becoming one with Him. What bride ever chose a crucified man as her husband? Whoever gave his own blood as a wedding gift to his bride? The only one who ever did this was the one who died on the cross and sealed the marriage bond with us through his wounds and dying. Who was ever seen lying dead at his own wedding banquet with his wife at his side seeking to console herself by embracing him? At what other wedding celebration, or at what other sort of feast, is the bridegroom’s body distributed to the guests in the form of bread?

Clearly, we are become part of a great mystery! Ordinarily, death separates wives and husbands. But in this case alone it is death that unites them. The groom died on a cross and bequeathed his body to his spouse. Now she consumes it daily under the form of bread and wine, food and drink. In this way the Church proclaims to the entire world that we are no longer separated from our God but are one instead of two. But there is yet a further mystery. Having been joined with Christ in this way we are called to live out the mystery of our oneness with God by living and loving each other as one with one another. This is the consummation of our marriage union whereby our union bears fruit and realizes the fullness of the love that binds us. It is through our love for one another that we enter into joy as in a marriage banquet. We do it symbolically only so that we can do it really as we bear our crosses with the one who has married us into unity with God in Him and through love for one another.

Monday

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF PRAYING THE ROSARY

A Reflection taken from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII

The real substance of a well-prayed and well-meditated rosary is three-dimensional.

Its first dimension is contemplation. We strive as we pray to contemplate as clearly and purely and directly as we can one of God's Mysteries. These are truths of faith that speak to us of Christ's redeeming mission and of the Divine Love which sent him on it. When we contemplate we enter into a communion of thought and feeling and will with the teaching and life of Jesus. He is the Son of God and Son of Mary. That is the Mystery of the Incarnation. The Son of God lived on earth, in Jesus the Christ, redeeming, sanctifying, teaching, and living the same sort of life we do. He did this in a hidden life for some thirty years. Those years were all prayer and work, as ours can be. He suffered the Passion, he triumphed in the Resurrection, he Ascended into the Glory of Heaven. He sits at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. He ever assists us by sending us the Holy Spirit. He gives life to the Church he founded. These are all Mysteries for us to contemplate because as we do that in prayer we will be drawn more and more into participation in those mysteries, according to the Heavenly Father's will and grace.

The second dimension of rosary prayer is reflection. This is what makes it possible for the fullness of the light that shines from the Divine Mysteries to enter into our minds and hearts. When you reflect carefully, you find in each of the mysteries you contemplate a teaching that is especially given to you. You hear a message for your sanctification that is adapted in a special way to the circumstances of your unique life. This is due to the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit which is always interceding for you from within the very depths of your individual soul. What comes from the Holy Spirit is grace, a special gift from God. We are told that even when we are not sure how to pray the Spirit is there "interceding for us with sighs too deep for words".

Each of the Divine Mysteries contains a word to strengthen you in your particular trials and joys. We need this help in order to confront our life in the way Jesus confronted him. We may find ourselves asking God whether a particular trial is really his will for us. If we hear God say that it is we can be sure that with that answer comes a grace to respond, just as it did to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Each time we reflect on a given mystery the Spirit will draw a new and richer lesson in grace and support from it.

That brings us to the third dimension of this prayer. It is what we call its intention. When we pray we pray for people, for institutions and for all sorts of good purposes. We pray for necessities and we pray for personal and social benefits and gifts. This is an integral part of our charity towards our neighbors. We allow God's grace to insert us in a great net that is drawing everyone out of this world and into God's kingdom. We are one of the knots that create this great web of Divine Love. The more deeply we enter into the prayer of the rosary, the more deeply we contemplate and the more richly we reflect, the broader becomes our love for all our brothers and sisters, and, indeed, for all that is the earth and that fills it. This means that the rosary prayer binds us more tightly and wonderfully into the Mystical Body of Christ and the Communion of Saints. It is by our intentions that we begin to share in all this. As our intentions are more and more suffused by charity they become like the very heart of Christ, itself perfectly one with the heart of the Heavenly Father. We celebrate all this today. Today our prayer helps us live the charity which makes us one with God and each other a little more deeply and fully.

Tuesday

HOW JESUS CALLS PEOPLE TO FOLLOW HIM

A Reflection by Fr. Jean-Marie Tillard, OP

When one gives careful thought to what the gospel accounts tell us about those who welcomed the word of Jesus and became his disciples, we discover that the most common way to follow him was to stay at home among one's ordinary duties. Indeed, we find that Jesus ordered some to do this and even refused to allow them to leave their homes and folk and follow him wherever he went.

Remaining at home is, in fact, the usual way of welcoming the good news and responding to it wholeheartedly. One doesn't forsake one's usual lifestyle but stays at home and continues in one's trade or occupations. They were, in fact, disciples like Mary, the mother of Jesus, and like Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus.

Who would venture to say that these three didn't love Jesus in the deepest way imaginable? Who could say that Mary, his mother, in her everyday life as a woman in an obscure village was not leading a life of holiness? On what grounds could one argue that Martha, Mary and Lazarus were less holy than the sons of Zebedee whom Jesus called to leave everything in order to follow him?

The Gospels point out that some of those who stayed at home remained unswervingly faithful to Jesus, whereas Peter and the apostles took to their heels and betrayed him. The stay-at-home group may seem mysterious and elusive to us because we have heard again and again about leaving everything for Christ, but those he calls to follow him while remaining where they are when called to be disciples are also with him as they do this. It doesn't seem that those who are called to leave everything are always more perfect on this account. Indeed, rivalries sprang up among the Twelve, one of them handed Jesus over to his enemies, and Peter three times denied being Jesus' disciple at all.

What is supremely important is declaring and living in a way which says, "One thing alone is necessary!" Jesus is that one thing necessary. He can fill the whole of one's life, leading one to everything one longs for and desires. It is not words that proclaim this, nor even extraordinary actions, but obedience to God and living as a person who dwells in God's kingdom in obedience.

There are, then, at least two distinct ways of living the Good News that this kingdom has been inaugurated. Both are ways of holiness. Indeed, in many ways the monastic life combines both of them; one gives up everything and then proceeds to live in a settled way doing ordinary occupations. It seems that no matter what we do and what we leave or don't leave behind, the important thing is that all be done in service of the Kingdom of God and as a way of praising and giving glory to our God and Savior.

Wednesday

SURRENDERING TO GOD IN PRAYER

A Reflection by St. Teresa of Avila

“Once Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished one of his disciples said: Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.” In response, the Lord taught us to pray, “Your will be done”. We can easily enough promise to give up our own will, but when it comes to the test we find it the most difficult thing in the world, let alone when we try to do it perfectly. Yet God knows what each of us is able to bear; when God finds a valiant soul God does not hesitate to accomplish his will in that person. I want to warn you and help you understand what God’s will is. As the saying goes, you need to realize who you are dealing with when you pray to God.

Think of what the good Jesus is offering to the Heavenly Father on your behalf. Then ask whether you know what you are asking for when you say, “Your will be done”? You ask that God’s will, and nothing else, be done in you. You needn’t be afraid that God will give you wealth or honor because God’s love for you is not so weak as that. God sets a far greater value on your gift. Would you like to see how he treats those who make this prayer without reserve? Look at his glorious Son and how he made the prayer to do God’s will in the Garden. God’s will in him was accomplished through trials, sufferings, insults, and persecution until his life ended on the cross.

You see what God gave to the one he loved best of all. This shows you what God’s will is. These things are his gifts in this world, and God gives them in proportion to his love. Fervent love can suffer a great deal for God’s sake. I myself believe that love is the gauge of the crosses we are able to bear. So if you have such love, think what you are doing when you pray the Lord’s Prayer. Do not let the promises you make to so great a Lord be no more than empty compliments. Brace yourself to suffer whatever God wishes.

Any other way of surrendering our will to God is like offering someone a precious stone and then withdrawing your hand. Such mockery is not for the one who bore so much mockery for us. Let us give God once and for all the precious stones we have offered so many times. Actually, he gave us what we are now giving back.

My whole aim in writing this is to encourage you to yield your entire self to your creator, to submit your will to God’s, and to detach yourself from created things. Why does our good Master want us to make this prayer? Because in a very short time, we shall find ourselves at our journey’s end. We shall find ourselves drinking at the fountain of living water.

Thursday

A MEDITATION: ON PRAYER

By Pope John Paul II

“Lord, teach us to pray..” (Lk 11:1) One of the disciples asks this of Christ. He responds by giving them the example of a person, an importunate one, who, finding himself in need, knocks at his friend’s door at midnight. But he gets what he asks for. Jesus encourages us to have a similar attitude in prayer: that of ardent perseverance.

A model of such persevering prayer, humble and at the same time confident, is found in Abraham, who begs God for the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah.. if there are at least ten righteous men to be found there.

In this way, we must encourage ourselves more and more to pray. We must often recall Christ’s exhortation: “Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you”. (Mt 7:7ff / Lk 11:9ff) In particular, we must remember this when we lose confidence or the desire to pray.

We must also learn anew to pray always. It often happens that we dispense ourselves from praying with the excuse that we are unable to pray. If we really do not know how to pray, then, it is all the more necessary to learn. That is important for everyone. It seems to be particularly important for the young, who often neglect the prayer they learned as children because it seems to them too childish, naïve, and superficial. Such a state of mind is an indirect incentive to deepen one’s prayer, to make it more thoughtful, more mature—to seek support for it in the Word of God himself and in the Holy Spirit, “who intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

We know that prayer cannot be taken for granted. We have to learn to pray. It is like learning an art anew. Go to the lips of the Divine Master himself. Prayer develops that conversation with Christ which makes us his intimate friends: “Abide in me and I in you”. This reciprocity is the very substance and soul of the Christian life, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. It opens us through Christ and in Christ to contemplation of the Father’s face. Leaning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the liturgy—the summit and source of the Church’s life—but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity. It has no reason to fear the future because it turns continually to the sources and finds in it new life.

Yes, dear brothers and sisters, our Christian communities must become genuine schools of prayer. There the meeting with Christ is to be expressed not just in imploring help but in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion until the heart truly falls in love. Intense prayer, yes, but not as distracting us from our commitments. It opens our heart to the love of God and also to the love of our brothers and sisters. It makes us capable of shaping history even according to God’s plan.

Friday

THE DAILY DECALOGUE OF POPE JOHN XXIII

Homily of Cardinal Tarciso Bertone on the Memorial of Pope John XXIII, 11 October 2006

Pope John XXIII's message is still extraordinarily timely today. His life, his Discourses, and his actions bring us to the heart of the faith and the heart of Christian commitment.

As we know, one of Pope John's most important decisions was to convoke the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which was inaugurated on 11 October 1962 here in St Peter's Basilica.

I was present and I remember how the day unfolded to its extraordinary conclusion in St Peter's Square by moonlight.

We could recall a wealth of Pope John's teachings and episodes concerning him, but today I intend to focus on several thoughts that might be useful in our personal life and spiritual renewal.

The Church, in his view, has a motherly face: her task is to keep "her arms open to receive everyone". She is a "home for one and all" that "desires to belong to everyone, and in particular she is the Church of the poor, like the village fountain", with no distinctions of race or religion.

The Church's holiness and human wisdom are expressed very clearly in what is called "The Daily Decalogue of Pope John XXIII":

- 1) Only for today, I will seek to live the livelong day positively without wishing to solve the problems of my life all at once.
- 2) Only for today, I will take the greatest care of my appearance: I will dress modestly; I will not raise my voice; I will be courteous in my behavior; I will not criticize anyone; I will not claim to improve or to discipline anyone except myself.
- 3) Only for today, I will be happy in the certainty that I was created to be happy, not only in the other world but also in this one.
- 4) Only for today, I will adapt to circumstances, without requiring all circumstances to be adapted to my own wishes.
- 5) Only for today, I will devote 10 minutes of my time to some good reading, remembering that just as food is necessary to the life of the body, so good reading is necessary to the life of the soul.
- 6) Only for today, I will do one good deed and not tell anyone about it.
- 7) Only for today, I will do at least one thing I do not like doing; and if my feelings are hurt, I will make sure that no one notices.
- 8) Only for today, I will make a plan for myself: I may not follow it to the letter, but I will make it. And I will be on guard against two evils: hastiness and indecision.
- 9) Only for today, I will firmly believe, despite appearances, that the good Providence of God cares for me as no one else who exists in this world.
- 10) Only for today, I will have no fears. In particular, I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful and to believe in goodness. Indeed, for 12 hours I can certainly do what might cause me consternation were I to believe I had to do it all my life.

To conclude: here is an all-embracing resolution: "I want to be kind, today and always, to everyone". In this way, we can put Pope John's hope for every Christian into practice: "Every believer in this world must be a spark of light, a core of love, life-giving leaven in the mass: and the more he is so, the more he will live, in his innermost depths, in communion with God".

Saturday

WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD

From the Catechesis on the Letter to the Galatians by Pope Francis, 8 September 2021

The Apostle audaciously confirms that the identity received with baptism is so completely new that it prevails over the differences that exist on the *ethnic-religious* level. That is, he explains it thus: “There is neither Jew nor Greek”, even on the social plain, “there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female” (*Gal 3:28*). We often read these expressions way too quickly, without grasping the revolutionary value they possess. For Paul, to write to the Galatians that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek” was equivalent to an authentic subversion in the ethnic-religious sphere. By the fact of belonging to a chosen people, the Jew was privileged over the pagan (cf. *Rom 2:17-20*). – as the Letter to the Romans (2:17–20) says, Paul himself affirms this (cf. *Rom 9:4-5*). It is not surprising, therefore, that this new teaching by the Apostle could sound heretical. “What, everyone equal? We are different!” It sounds a bit heretical. Even the second set of equalities, between those who were “free” and those who were “slaves”, introduced a shocking perspective. The distinction between slaves and free citizens was vital in ancient society. By law, free citizens enjoyed all rights, while the human dignity of slaves was not even recognized. This happens even today. There are many people in the world, many, millions, who do not have the right to eat, who do not have the right to education, who do not have the right to work. They are the new slaves. They are the ones who live on the margins, who are exploited by everyone. Slavery exists even today – let us think a little bit about this. Human dignity is denied to these people. They are slaves. Thus, finally, equality in Christ overcomes the social differences between the two sexes, establishing an equality between man and woman which was revolutionary at the time and which needs to be reaffirmed even today. How many times do we hear expressions that denigrate women! How often do we hear: “No not do anything, those are women’s concerns”. But, look, men and women have the same dignity. And it has happened in history, even today, a type of slavery of women: women do not have the same opportunities as men. We have to read what Paul says: we are equal in Christ Jesus.

As we can see, Paul confirms the profound unity that exists between all the baptized, in whatever condition they are bound to, whether men or women – equal because every one of them is a new creature *in Christ*. Every distinction becomes secondary to the dignity of being children of God, who, through his love, creates a real and substantial equality. Everyone, through Christ’s redemption and the baptism we have received, we are all equal: children of God. Equal.

Brothers and sisters, we are, therefore, called in a more positive way to live a new life that roots its foundational expression in being children of God. Equal because we are children of God; and children of God because Christ redeemed us and we attained this dignity through baptism. It is decisive even for all of us today to rediscover the beauty of being children of God, to be brothers and sisters among ourselves, because we have been united *in Christ*, who redeemed us. The differences and contrasts that separation creates should not exist among believers in Christ. Everything that exacerbates the differences between people, often causing discrimination, before God, no longer has any basis, thanks to the salvation effected in Christ. What is important is that faith operates according to the path of unity indicated by the Holy Spirit. And our responsibility is that of journeying decisively along this path of equality, but an equality that is sustained, that was created by the redemption of Jesus.