

THE THIRTY-FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

3-9 November 2024

- Sun. The Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Nov. 3 **LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR**
A Reflection by St. Francis de Sales
- Mon. Memorial of Saint Charles Borromeo
4 **HOW DO YOU GIVE YOUR LIFE TO GOD?**
A Reflection from Journeying with the Lord
- Tues. Tuesday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time
5 **THE CHRISTOLOGICAL HYMN**
From the General Audience Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 1 June 2005
- Wed. Wednesday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time
6 **JOY IN BEING A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST**
From the Angelus Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 27 June 2012
- Thurs. Thursday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time
7 **GOD'S MERCIFUL HEART**
The Angelus Message of Pope Francis, 11 September 2022
- MONASTIC DESERT DAY**
- Fri. Friday of the 31st Week in Ordinary Time
8 **WHO UNDERSTANDS THE STEWARDSHIP OF LOVE?**
A Reflection from a Text by Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ
- Sat. Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica
9 **LEARNING TO GLORY IN OUR WEAKNESS**
A Reflection from Christ, the Sacrament of Encounter with God
by Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx, OP

Sunday

LOVING GOD AND NEIGHBOR

A Reflection by St. Francis de Sales

Because God created us in his own image and likeness, he ordained that our love for one another should be an image and likeness of the love we owe him, our God. God said: *“You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart; this is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it; you must love your neighbor as yourself.”*

Why do we love God? It is because God is supreme and infinite goodness. Why do we love ourselves? It is because we are images and likenesses of God. All of us possess the same dignity and we love this in all as we do in ourselves—each and all are living and holy images of the Godhead. That is why we belong to God, and through a kinship so close, a dependence so lovable, that God doesn’t hesitate to call each of us children. As God’s children, we are capable of sharing with God in the fulfillment that is God’s own sovereign joy and goodness. As children we receive grace and our spirits are bound together with the Holy Spirit. and made, in that sense, sharers in the divinity’s goodness and joy.

It is one and the same charity that gives birth to acts of love for our God and for neighbors. Jacob saw it was one and the same ladder that touches heaven and earth and that the angels use to ascend and descend. That shows how one single charity cherishes both God and neighbor. It raises us to spiritual union with God and it brings us down to love and share with neighbors. Recall the reason for loving our neighbor: Each person is made in the image and likeness of God and each has been created to share God’s goodness, God’s grace, and joy in God’s glory. To love neighbors is to love God in them and love them in God.

When we look at a neighbor we see a person created in the image and likeness of God; shouldn’t we say to one another: Look at the people God has made; aren’t they like their maker! How could we fail to be drawn irresistibly toward them, how can we fail to embrace them and be moved even to tears by love for them? Shouldn’t we call down on them a hundred blessings? Why? For love of them? Yes and no. We can’t be sure whether they deserve love or hate because of what they do to others and themselves but the image of God is always in them and that draws our love.

Everyone can share in God’s own goodness, grace, and glory. We can see this capacity in them knowing God created them in the divine image and likeness. They exist for God. They exist from God. They exist through God. They exist in God. They exist unto God. They resemble God in a very special way. This is why divine love not only commands us, and repeatedly, to love our neighbor but produces this love in us and pours it into our hearts and our actions.

Others bear God’s own image and likeness! Just as we are God’s image and just as we love ourselves in seeing that in us, so we love others in the same way. If we are the image of God we must love as God does—so we love one another as we are loved. Our love itself then becomes an image of God’s divine and heavenly love, for us and for all. This is what we experience now, and all the more marvelously the more fully we experience God’s love.

Monday

HOW DO YOU GIVE YOUR LIFE TO GOD?

A Reflection from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

What did St. Charles Borromeo do? He took risks. When he did that he gave his life to God. For example, at one time a plague was devouring the people of his city. He threw himself at this scourge, not isolating himself from the plague-stricken like a hired hand but like a good shepherd, he remained with his flock without fear of death.

This is a sample of a thousand other things that Charles Borromeo did as signs of his tireless gift of self to his people. Charles left no autobiography, no spiritual writings telling us his "secret". He had no secret; his inner life and his prayer were visible to all in his gift of self.

As a witness to the intensity of his prayer, we have only a few pictures showing him in ecstasy or in tears while he venerated the crucifix. Apart from these, his swiftness in grasping the meaning of the Madonna's tears he saw at the Shrine of Rho gives a confirmation of the faith he lived by.

St. Charles moved in an atmosphere of intense awareness not only of disasters like the plague but of all the wounds in the living flesh of his city and saw them as the same as the wound in the side of Christ. He was intensely aware of Christ's suffering and Christ's sorrows. God isn't recognized as God, or loved, by people who are lazy as Christians and deaf to God's Word.

If St. Charles lived his inner life in an inexhaustible capacity for praise and for sharing suffering, he was only living what the Psalmist says are the two basic aspects of human praying. It was probably his capacity for sharing suffering that primarily manifested itself exteriorly.

St. Charles was a person of prayer, of tears, and of penance. He understood this last not as something heroic but as a mysterious and even impassioned sharing in the sufferings of Christ himself. He saw this as a path by which Christ enters into the depths of the world's sin and finds there the absurdity of refusing God. Christ lived this until his heart almost broke and his soul was torn open.

Today we celebrate one of the great witnesses who have penetrated to the very depths of the mystery of divine sharing in human suffering. Christ drank the last drops of this bitter cup and so was capable of understanding very lucidly his age and ours. This was true also of Charles. He understood the deep meaning of the events and history of his times, as we are called to do in our times. He understood and he loved. This is our call as well.

Tuesday

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL HYMN

From the General Audience Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 1 June 2005

1. In every Sunday celebration of Vespers the liturgy proposes anew the Christological hymn of the Letter to the Philippians (cf. 2: 6-11) which is short but laden with meaning. We are examining the first part of this hymn that has just resounded (vv. 6-8), in which the paradoxical "self-emptying" of the Divine Word is described as he divests himself of his glory and takes on the human condition.

Christ, incarnate and humiliated by the most shameful death of crucifixion, is held up as a vital model for Christians. Indeed, as is clear from the context, their "attitude must be that of Christ" (v. 5), and their sentiments, humility and self-giving, detachment and generosity.

2. He certainly possesses the divine nature with all its prerogatives. But this transcendent reality is not interpreted or lived out under the banner of power, greatness and dominion. Christ does not use his equality with God, his glorious dignity, or his power as an instrument of triumph, a sign of remoteness, or an expression of incontestable supremacy (cf. v. 6). On the contrary, he strips or "empties himself", immersing himself without reserve in our weak and wretched human condition. In Christ the divine "form" (*morphe*) is concealed beneath the human "form" (*morphe*), that is, beneath our reality marked by suffering, poverty, limitation and death (cf. v. 7).

Consequently, it was not a mere disguise or a change in appearance such as people believed the deities of the Greco-Roman culture could assume. The form Christ took was divine reality in an authentically human experience. God does not appear only as a man, but he makes himself man and truly becomes one of us, he truly becomes the "God-with-us" who is not satisfied with looking down kindly upon us from the throne of his glory, but plunges in person into human history, becoming "flesh" or, in other words, a fragile reality, conditioned by time and space (cf. Jn 1: 14).

3. This radical and true sharing in the human condition, with the exception of sin (cf. Heb 4: 15), leads Jesus to the boundary that is a sign of our finite condition and transience: death. However, it is not the product of an obscure mechanism or a blind fatalism. It stems from his free choice of obedience to the Father's plan of salvation (cf. Phil 2: 8).

The Apostle adds that the death Jesus encounters is death on a cross, actually the most disgraceful death; he thereby desires to be truly a brother to every man and every woman, also of those who are forced to suffer an atrocious or ignominious end.

But it was precisely in his passion and death that Christ witnessed to his free and conscious obedience to the Father's will, as we read in the Letter to the Hebrews: "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Heb 5: 8).

The basic element of this first part of the Canticum seems ... to be the invitation to enter into Jesus' sentiments. Entering into the sentiments of Jesus means not considering power, riches and prestige as the supreme values in our lives, for basically they do not respond to our most profound spiritual thirst, but rather, by opening our hearts to the Other, carrying with the Other our life's burden and opening ourselves to Our Heavenly Father with a sense of obedience and trust, knowing that by such obedience to the Father, we will be free. Entering into the sentiments of Jesus: this should be our daily practice of living as Christians.

Wednesday

JOY IN BEING A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

From the Angelus Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 27 June 2012

Today I would like to speak of one of the most ancient songs or hymns of the Christian tradition which St Paul presents to us in the Letter to the Philippians. In a certain sense, this is his spiritual testament. Indeed, it is a Letter that the Apostle dictated while he was in prison, perhaps in Rome. He must have felt that his death was close at hand, for he says that his life will be offered as a libation (cf. Phil 2:17).

Despite this situation of grave danger to his physical safety, throughout this text, St Paul expresses his joy in being a disciple of Christ, of being able to go to meet him even to the point of seeing death not as a loss but rather as a gain. In the last chapter of the Letter, there is a pressing invitation to joy, a fundamental characteristic of being Christian and of our prayer. St Paul writes: "rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (Phil 4:4). But how is it possible to rejoice in the face of a death sentence whose execution is now imminent? From where, or better, from whom did St Paul draw the serenity, strength and courage to go forward to meet martyrdom and the out-pouring of his blood?

The hymn in the Letter to the Philippians offers us important instructions for our prayers. The first is the invocation "Lord", addressed to Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father: he is the one Lord of our life, among so many "dominant" people who desire to direct and guide it. For this reason, it is necessary to have a scale of values in which the primacy is God's, in order to affirm, with St Paul: "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8). The encounter with the Risen One made the Apostle realize that he is the one treasure for which it is worth expending one's life.

The second instruction is prostration, that "every knee shall bow", on earth and in heaven. This is reminiscent of the words of the Prophet Isaiah, where he points to the worship that all creatures owe to God (cf. 45:23). Genuflection or kneeling in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament exactly expresses the attitude of adoration in God's presence and also with the body. Hence the importance of not doing this action out of habit or hastily but rather with profound awareness. When we kneel before the Lord, we profess our faith in him, we recognize that he is the one Lord of our life.

Dear brothers and sisters, in our prayers, let us fix our gaze on the Crucified One, let us pause more often in adoration before the Eucharist to let our life enter the love of God who humbly lowered himself in order to lift us up to him. At the beginning of the Catechesis, we asked ourselves how St Paul could rejoice when he was facing the imminent risk of martyrdom and out-pouring his blood.

This was only possible because the Apostle never lifted his gaze from Christ, to the point that he became like him in death, in the hope that "I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:11). As St Francis said before the Crucifix, let us too say: "Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith, certain hope and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out Your holy and true command" Amen (cf. *Prayer before the Crucifix at San Damiano*: ff, [276]).

Thursday

GOD IS MERCIFUL LOVE

From the Angelus Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 16 September 2007

The liturgy today once again presents for our meditation Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel, one of the loftiest and most moving passages of all Sacred Scripture. It is beautiful to think that on this day throughout the world, wherever the Christian community gathers to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist, the Good News of truth and salvation rings out: God is merciful love.

The Evangelist Luke has gathered in this Chapter three parables on divine mercy: the two shortest ones which he has in common with Matthew and Mark are the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin; the third, lengthy, articulate, and proper to him alone, is the famous parable of the merciful Father, commonly known as the parable of the "Prodigal Son".

In this Gospel passage, we almost seem to hear Jesus' voice revealing to us the Face of his Father and our Father. Basically, this was the reason he came into the world: to speak to us of the Father; to make him known to us, his lost children, and to revive in our hearts the joy of belonging to him, the hope of being forgiven and restored to our full dignity, the desire to dwell forever in his house which is also our house.

Jesus recounted the ... parables of mercy because the Scribes and Pharisees were muttering bad things about him since they had noticed he permitted sinners to approach him and even eat with him (cf. Lk 15: 1-3). He then explained in his typical language that God does not want even one of his children to be lost and that his soul overflows with joy whenever a sinner is converted.

True religion thus consists in being attuned to this Heart, "rich in mercy", which asks us to love everyone, even those who are distant and our enemies, imitating the Heavenly Father who respects the freedom of each one and draws everyone to himself with the invincible power of his faithfulness.

This is the road Jesus points out to all who want to be his disciples: "Judge not... condemn not... forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you.... Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6: 36-38). In these words, we find very practical instructions for our daily conduct as believers.

In our time, humanity needs a strong proclamation and witness of God's mercy. Beloved John Paul II, a great apostle of Divine Mercy, prophetically intuited this urgent pastoral need. He dedicated his Second Encyclical to it and throughout his Pontificate made himself a missionary of God's love to all peoples.

After the tragic events of 11 September 2001, which darkened the dawn of the third millennium, he invited Christians and people of goodwill to believe that God's Mercy is stronger than all evil, and that only in the Cross of Christ is the world's salvation found.

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy, whom we contemplated yesterday as Our Lady of Sorrows at the foot of the Cross, obtain for us the gift of always trusting in God's love and help us to be merciful as our Father in Heaven is merciful.

Friday

WHO UNDERSTANDS THE STEWARDSHIP OF LOVE?

A Reflection from a Text by Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ

“Jesus said to his disciples, A rich person had a steward that was denounced to him for misusing his property.” Our life is a series of ups and downs. Now we are happy and then unhappy, first we are satisfied and then disappointed, now grateful and then wounded that we haven't all we want. But are we prudent? The steward in the Gospel this Sunday was dishonest but very prudent. Indeed, maybe our ups and downs are like those of that steward. But do we have the faith and the stout heart, the humble and docile mind to see in the most contrasting fortunes and misfortunes a chance to bring forth fruit for eternity by showing our love for God?

Before we know to expect it God changes our fortune or circumstances. Are we both patient and courageous and prepared to perceive God's call and work for us in the new situations he sends us into? We need loving and uninhibited prudence! What we need to do is accept each new thing as God's will and bend all our will to get on with God's work. If you are not as prudent as the steward in the parable of Jesus then you should be! If your heart is really kept open and ready for God, anything that may happen can be accepted as a grace and a blessing.

Of course, this means we need hearts that are humble, listen well, and know how to obey even if the directions are not clear and definite. We are not slaves, Jesus has told us, so we know what our Lord is about. We know he is about loving. So why not ask God for the gifts we need to be good stewards? Can't we pray instead of complaining? Perhaps the problem is that somewhere in every person's life there is an unhealed wound. It is because of this that we do not have heavenly prudence. Look a bit more closely at your life. We can be healed of the wounds we find only if we are prudent enough in regard to God's grace to acknowledge our wounds and let God heal them.

God has told us: Be loving and courageous and compassionate. If you can't, now and again, you need healing. Begin to pray for it today. Begin by looking more closely at your lives, their situations in the past, the relationships that have shaped us, the burdens we have had to carry, and all that we have had to cope with. These too are actually words of grace from God. They were given us as opportunities to love as God loves. They are lessons in love. We are called to be stewards of divine love. We begin by learning how to be stewards of God's love in our own regard. We were first called to love others as we love ourselves. We were then called to love ourselves as Jesus has loved us. That is what we are to show forth in our living and doing.

Saturday

LEARNING TO GLORY IN OUR WEAKNESS

A Reflection from Christ, the Sacrament of Encounter with God,

by Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx, OP

Today we celebrate the Cathedral of the Church of Rome, and in doing this we celebrate the entire Church in its unity. The whole Church is the visible shape of salvation. It is a sign filled with the reality which it signifies. Think of the fact that the Church's members can sin only to the extent that they withdraw themselves from its sanctifying influence. To the extent that any of us is "in sin," we have placed our self outside the Church. That is a terrible thought. To the extent that we are "in sin" there is in us a rupture between the Church as sign and the Church as reality—a rupture in us.

It is clear that this means the Church has not yet reached its final state. We can't hold that at the end of time the Church will cease to exist and make way for some purely spiritual community and communion of the saints in grace. In virtue of Christ's incarnation, the bodily visibility of grace is not a provisional or temporary reality; it is the definitive reality! Only in Heaven will the Church reach its full maturity, and still be a visible society. The resurrection of all flesh establishes and perpetuates in glory the earthly history of the Church just as does our personal holiness perpetuate each of us as saints who have fought for and won in this life. All we have won will be visible in our risen bodies. All that is weak and sad and troublesome will have disappeared, from the Church and from us individually.

The Church, as the earthly sign of the triumph of Christ's grace, remains now in a state of weakness. It needs to purge itself of all that is sinful. This fact shows us two things: First, the glory of the Church is always a veiled glory, for around it there is still a broad margin of weakness and shortcomings. Second, and more especially, the power of God is fulfilled in and through the weakness and poverty of the Church. The Church is great and glorious, but not on account of any earthly strength or achievements. In the Church Christ's redeeming grace always triumphs despite human weakness.

It is in weakness that the divine power comes into its own and becomes visible precisely as divine. The Church is therefore not only the object of our faith but is also the test of our faith. It can become an obstacle and a danger to faith. Belief, after all, is not a conviction to which a person is forced by things like the glory of the Church or some other manifestation of achievement that we can experience. We always believe amid darkness and confusion. If we look at things in this way, the weakness of the Church is, to use an Easter expression, a "happy fault". It makes us realize that our only boast is in the power of God. Just as Christ was a scandal to the Jews because he set himself up, in many minds, in opposition to the Law given by God, so too the Church must pass through its pilgrimage as poor and despised. The power of redeeming grace alone will bring victory. This must be our deepest faith. It is one of God's most marvelous gifts.