

THE THIRTY-SECOND WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

10-16 November 2024

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Sun. The Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

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A Reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

Mon. Memorial of St. Martin of Tours

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A Reflection from The Life of St. Martin by Septimus Severus

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From the Homily of Pope Francis, 4 Nov 2024

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From the General Audience Address of Pope Benedict, 6 Oct 2010

Sunday

THE GIFT OF LIFE

A Reflection developed from a text by Fr. Carroll Stuhlmueller

All life comes from God. We often carelessly fall into the error of thinking that this only means that God makes people alive. Yet, as the common saying "Get a life!" reminds us, having life is more than just "being alive". All the readings this Sunday focus our attention on this fact.

God had led the prophet Elijah to declare that there would be a drought in Israel so long as so many Israelites worshiped Baal rather than the one and only true God. But the drought threatened Elijah's life like that of other Israelites. Finally, God told him to seek refuge with a widow in the non-Israelite town of Zarephath, perhaps because he was also hiding from King Ahab and would be out of his jurisdiction. The widow was preparing to die, together with her son, due to the famine that came with a severe drought. Elijah's faith gave the two of them a new lease on life, as we say; suddenly they had hope again to live through the hard times and find a better life. Yet one day the widow's son fell ill and suddenly stopped breathing. Through Elijah God again gave him, and his mother, a new gift of life.

The gift of life means so many things! A woman without a husband or son had no legal protection and so that widow counted on her son to save her from being robbed and left with no really decent or secure life to look forward to. She would rather have died with her son in the first place than try to live without him. That is almost exactly the situation of the widow at Naim whom Jesus met as she accompanied her only son's body to the grave. 'Naim' means 'nice' in Hebrew but the widow from 'Niceville' had nothing nice to look forward to. Is a life without hope a "real life"? Jesus gave her back the gift of hope, a gift even more important than mere physical life.

The God who saves by giving hope to those who have none is the God of Mercy. When Paul was trying with all his might to destroy the Church of Christ he had no real hope for a good life because he was fighting God. When God called him to Christ he gave him the entire life we have read about so frequently. When God called us didn't God, in mercy, give us a new life completely worth living? Where were we headed before we were called to our new way of living-in-God? Is there any hope apart from God? So we have a real, worthwhile, even wonderful hope because of our call. It is a call to share, and to share God's mercy. How? By helping others hear God's call and live it day by day. We are servants of God's mercy—as were Elijah and St. Paul, and as Jesus was and is in so many ways, now and forever.

Scripture tells us that the worst drought is the absence of God's Word. Without God's Word, we don't know the path of genuine hope. In mercy, God never takes away his Word, in Jesus or in Scripture. Our responsibility is to listen carefully to these words and then to invest our energy and time in living according to what we hear. The life we live in response to this word is to be merciful and loving. This is what Jesus called us from spiritual death to do and to be. We are living and breathing works of mercy. We are called to share life by helping others see this.

Monday

FEARLESSNESS IN PUTTING CHRIST FIRST

A Reflection from The Life of St. Martin by Septimus Severus

The barbarians were making incursions into Gaul and the Caesar Julian concentrated his army at Worms. There he began to distribute a bonus to the soldiers. They were called up one by one in the usual way. When Martin's turn came he decided it would be a good time to apply for his discharge, for he didn't think it would be honest to take the bonus if he wasn't going to fight.

He said to Julian, *"I have been your soldier up to now. Let me now be God's soldier. Let someone who is going to fight have your bonus. I am Christ's soldier; I am not allowed to fight."* These words put Julian in a rage, and he said that Martin wanted to quit the service not out of religious motives but out of fear of the battle to be fought the next day.

Martin was undaunted. In fact, he stood all the firmer because of this effort to frighten him. *"If it is put down to cowardice and not to faith, I will stand unarmed in the front of the battle line tomorrow and I will walk unharmed through the enemy's columns in the name of the Lord Jesus, protected by the sign of the Cross instead of by shield and helmet"*.

So he was ordered to be placed in custody so that he could prove his words and face the barbarians unarmed. The next day the enemy sent envoys to ask for peace, surrendering themselves and all they had. Who could doubt that this victory was due to Martin's blessing and granted so he would not be sent unarmed into a battle! Christ could not have granted any victory for the benefit of his own soldier greater than one in which the enemy was beaten bloodlessly and no one had to die.

On another occasion, many years later, bishops from various parts of the world had been assembled to meet the Emperor Maximus. Many were fawning at him, lowering the dignity of their priesthood. Martin alone retained his Apostolic authority.

Invitations had been sent to a great feast and to persons of the very highest rank. Martin himself occupied a stool next to the emperor and one of his priests was placed nearby, between two very important counts. Toward the middle of the meal a servant, as was customary, offered a cup to the emperor. He ordered it to be given instead to Martin first and waited, expecting that Bishop Martin would then hand it to him. But after drinking, Martin passed the cup to his priest, affirming that no one had a better right to drink after him and that it would be dishonest to give preference to any other than the Lord's priest, even to the emperor.

The emperor, and all who were present, were so struck by this action that the very gesture by which they had been humbled became for them a source of good feeling. The news went around the palace that Martin had done at the emperor's table what no other bishop had dared to do even when eating with the least of the emperor's magistrates. Martin never hesitated to put Christ and Christ's honor above every human rank and sign of prestige.

Tuesday

REMEMBER

From the Homily of Pope Francis, 4 Nov 2024

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk 23:42). These are the last words spoken to the Lord by one of the two men crucified with him. They were not the words of one of Jesus’ disciples who had followed him along the roads of Galilee and shared bread with him at the Last Supper. On the contrary, the man who spoke those words to the Lord was a criminal, someone who met him only at the end of his life, someone whose name we do not even know.

Yet, in the Gospel, the last words of this “outsider” initiate a dialogue full of truth. Even as Jesus was being “numbered with the transgressors” (Is 53:12) as Isaiah had prophesied, an unexpected voice is heard, saying: “We are receiving the due reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong” (Lk 23:41). So it was. That condemned criminal represents us all; each of us can replace his name with our own. Yet even more importantly, we can make his plea our own: “Jesus, remember me”. ...“Do not forget me”.

Let us meditate on that word: remember. To remember (*ricordare*) means “to lead back to the heart (*cor*)”, to carry in the heart. That man, crucified alongside Jesus, transformed his dire pain into a prayer: “Carry me in your heart, Jesus”. His words did not reflect anguish and defeat, but hope. This criminal, who died as a disciple of the last hour, desired only one thing: to find a welcoming heart. That is all that mattered to him as he found himself defenseless in the face of death. The Lord heard the sinner’s prayer as he always does. Christ’s heart – an open heart – pierced by pain, was laid open to save the world. Dying himself, he was open to the voice of a dying man. Jesus dies with us because he died for us.

Crucified despite his innocence, Jesus answered the prayer of a man crucified for his guilt: “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). The memory of Jesus is effective because it is rich in mercy. As a man’s life comes to an end, God’s love grants freedom from death. The one who was condemned is now redeemed. The outsider becomes a fellow-traveler; a brief encounter on the cross leads to eternal peace. This makes us reflect a little. How do I encounter Jesus? Or better still, how do I let myself be encountered by Jesus? Do I allow myself to be encountered or do I close myself off in my selfishness, in my pain, in my self-sufficiency? Do I have a sense of my sinfulness that allows me to be encountered by the Lord, or do I feel righteous and say: “You are not here to serve me. Move along”?

Jesus remembers those who are crucified at his side. His compassion unto his final breath makes us realize that there are different ways of remembering people and things. We can remember our mistakes, unfinished business, friends and enemies. Brothers and sisters, let us ask ourselves today before this scene from the Gospel: how do we carry people in our heart? How do we remember those who were at our side in the events of our life? Do I judge? Do I divide? Or do I welcome them?

All of history is kept in the memory of the Lord. Memory is safekeeping. He is its compassionate and merciful judge. The Lord is close to us as judge; he is close, compassionate and merciful. These are the three attitudes of the Lord. Am I close to people? Do I have a compassionate heart? Am I merciful? Today, our remembrance becomes a prayer of intercession for our dear brothers (and sisters who) were baptized into the death of Christ (cf. Rom 6:3) in order to rise with him... With firm hope, let us look forward to rejoicing with them in heaven... “Jesus remember us!”

Wednesday

IN PRAISE OF THE MONASTIC VOCATION

A Reflection by William of St. Thierry

Surely it is right to feast in the Lord. Surely it is right to rejoice. The fairest part of the Christian religion, which seems to come into such close contact with heaven, has been restored to life after having died. It has been found after being lost. I am speaking of the monastic life we lead!

Our ears had heard tell of it but we did not believe. We read of it in books and we marveled at the ancient glory of the solitaries and monks. We wondered at the great grace which God manifested in those living this life. Then, suddenly, we found it—in a clearing in the woods, on God's mountain, but a fertile mountain instead of a place in the desert. Now it prospers and grows greatly in the richness of renewed grace; it is girt round with exultation.

It is in such a condition that now, through you, it can offer itself to all. In you, it displays its wonders. Up till now, its beauty was revealed only to simple people. But the One who realizes it among us is that same One who by means of a few simple men subjected the entire world to Himself—to the amazement of that world. *"Do not be afraid, then, you, my little flock"*, says the Lord. *"Show utter trust, because your Father has determined to give you the Kingdom"*. (Lk. 12:23)

It is not for you to concern yourself with feebly keeping the commandments or to give your attention only to what God lays down as of obligation. You must seek what he longs for, fulfill in yourselves what God most wills—the good and desirable and perfect! It is for all to serve God. It is for you to cling tightly to God! It is for all to believe in God, know God, love God, and revere God. It is for you to taste God, to understand God, to be intimately acquainted with God, to enjoy God.

This is no slight matter and no easy goal. Yet the One who in love makes you such promises is almighty and good. God will be faithful in bringing to fulfillment these promises and will be untiring in giving you help. To those who in their great love for God pledge themselves to great things and, believing and trusting in grace, undertake what is beyond their own strength, God imparts not only the will and desire but follows them up with the grace and power to achieve what you desire and will. Let the calumniator calumniate. If a person faithfully does what it is humanly possible to do, God in mercy will give judgment on such a weak one as champion of that person's cause.

You did what you could! But let all exaltation be far from us. Consider others as being far above you in strength; admire their glory. As long as is allowed, they love to stay inside and devote their leisure to the contemplation of truth and charity. But when necessity summons and duty impels and they go without a moment's hesitation to give themselves to the practice of charity in truth. So in fear and trembling work out your own salvation. Do not worry about others but to the best of your ability influence what others may become. It is not only for the sake of those now alive but for that of those who will come afterward. It is from you, from your example, that all the future of this holy Order will derive its character in this part of God's world.

Thursday

DISTINGUISHING TRUE FROM FALSE PROPHETS

A Reflection from a Homily by Origen of Alexandria

“Son of Man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy from their own hearts.” This word of God applies to all who teach in the Church. Some teach by words but most teach by their deeds and their lives. If your teaching is contrary to the truth in either sense then you are a false prophet.

A prophet teaches first of all what those who turn to God can hope for. What sort of hopes do you teach by your way of living? That is even more important than what you teach by word of mouth. If you live as the Lord Jesus did then you teach what our Lord Jesus Christ taught. You “speak” the word of the Son of God and are inspired by the Holy Spirit and not simply by your own heart’s longings.

Those who walk with the Lord Jesus agree with the Holy Spirit who guided him. If they don’t walk with the Lord then they speak only from their human hearts. The Holy Spirit spoke through Paul and through Peter and through all the apostles. That is not what people do when they interpret the Gospel according to their own ideas about what is good and bad, misunderstanding the Lord’s words because they misunderstand his deeds.

“Woe to those who prophesy from their own hearts and follow their own spirit.” There are two sins in question. One is of the heart and the other of the spirit. St. Paul says that he prays with his spirit and his mind. He also sings psalms with his spirit and his mind. Those who prophesy merely from their own hearts and their own minds have no true hope to give others. They have merely human hopes but what God gives is much greater, and it will come true!

We are told that prophets who speak or act from their own hearts and minds and not the Lord’s “see nothing at all”. Let me give you an analogy. We have physical eyes and we have spiritual eyes. The physical ones see only what is of this world but the spiritual eyes see the Lord Jesus and recognize him as their Lord. We were created to contemplate the Lord. If we cannot then we are completely blind in what really matters. If I live in sin then I see nothing. A sinner is incapable of looking at the light of truth. The Lord said: *“I have come into the world so that the blind may see and those who see may become blind”*.

The word ‘seer’ means “one who sees”. If one is righteous then one receives God’s grace and can rightly be called a seer. Blessed are those whose eyes the Lord opens so that they can see the wonders of God and of God’s law and of God’s salvation. One of the prophets prayed: *“Lord, open my eyes that I may behold the wonders of your law.”* It is through such prayer that we begin to be able to live from God’s law and do the deeds of love that this law commands. Do you want to be a true prophet? Then pray that God will open your eyes, send the Holy Spirit into your heart, and fill your mind with understanding of the Gospel’s teaching so that you may live—now and forever.

Friday

PREPARING FOR GOD'S CALL TO THE KINGDOM

A Reflection from a Sermon by St. Augustine of Hippo

Watch yourselves! This world is passing away for each of us. Remember how the Lord foretells in the gospels that it will be the same on the last day as it was on the day when Noah entered the ark. That is how it will be on our personal last day too. "People ate and drank, bought and sold and married right up to the day when Noah entered the ark: Then the flood came and they all perished."

The reason the ark took so long to build was to make unbelievers wake up. Noah worked on it for a hundred years, yet people weren't awake enough to say to themselves: The man of God must have a good reason for building this ark; it must mean that the human race will soon be destroyed! We see people 100 years old and we don't pause to think: This person will soon be called to God, and so will I, even if I live to be 100.

So the ark is still being built and the hundred years represent the days in which we live. The whole period that is our life is prefigured by that number. If those, then, who paid no heed when Noah was building the ark deserved the death that came to them, what do people deserve who are careless about their own salvation? Christ is building his Church and is drawing us nearer and nearer to his Kingdom where that Church finds its true home. So the people of that day have become a fearful example for us, their descendants, because they did not believe and many still don't.

Christ, who is God become human, is building the Church as our ark. Every day incorruptible timber—i.e., believers who renounce this world—are being added to this ark's structure. So let us fast and pray for tomorrow we may die. Those who say "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we shall die" have no hope for rising again. But we who, thanks to the words of the prophets and the preaching of Christ and the apostles, believe in and prepare for death and the resurrection, we who hope for everlasting life, must not lose courage or let our minds be dulled by distractions and dissipations.

How many of our friends and family members have been called by God into the Heavenly Kingdom? Many of them answered this call filled with hope and trust in God's love. We pray for them so let us pray for ourselves. They show us what we need to do. Let us be dressed for action and keep our lamps alight as we await the Lord's call and even his coming. We wait with all sobriety and we wait, in fasting and prayer. We do it not so we may avoid death but so we may die without fear. We prepare to join that cloud of witnesses to the importance of trusting in God. They have gone before us and with Jesus prepare our place in God's Kingdom. Let us join them in prayer for one another and all whom God is to call soon to come to him and the Church assembled in Heaven.

Saturday

SAINT GERTRUDE THE GREAT

From the General Audience Address of Pope Benedict, 6 Oct 2010

St Gertrude the Great from the Monastery of Helfta is one of the most famous mystics, the only German woman to be called "Great", because of her cultural and evangelical stature: her life and her thoughts had a unique impact on Christian spirituality. She was an exceptional woman, endowed with special natural talents and extraordinary gifts of grace, the most profound humility and ardent zeal for her neighbor's salvation. She was in close communion with God both in contemplation and in her readiness to go to the help of those in need.

At Helfta, she measured herself systematically with her teacher, Matilda of Hackeborn. Gertrude came into contact with Matilda of Magdeburg, another medieval mystic, and grew up under the wing of Abbess Gertrude, motherly, gentle, and demanding. From these three sisters, she drew precious experience and wisdom; she worked them into a synthesis of her own, continuing on her religious journey with boundless trust in the Lord. Gertrude expressed the riches of her spirituality not only in her monastic world but also, and above all, in the biblical, liturgical, Patristic, and Benedictine contexts, with a highly personal hallmark and great skill in communicating.

Gertrude was born on 6 January 1256, on the Feast of the Epiphany, but nothing is known of her parents nor of the place of her birth. Gertrude wrote that the Lord himself revealed to her the meaning of this first uprooting: "I have chosen you for my abode because I am pleased that all that is lovable in you is my work... For this very reason, I have distanced you from all your relatives, so that no one may love you for reasons of kinship and that I may be the sole cause of the affection you receive" (*The Revelations*, I, 16, Siena 1994, pp. 76-77).

When she was five years old, in 1261, she entered the monastery for formation and education, a common practice in that period. Here she spent her whole life. In her memoirs she recalls that the Lord equipped her in advance with forbearing patience and infinite mercy, forgetting the years of her childhood, adolescence and youth, which she spent, she wrote, "I would have behaved like a pagan... in spite of desiring you since childhood, that is since my fifth year of age, when I went to live in the Benedictine shrine of religion to be educated among your most devout friends" (*ibid.*, II, 23, p. 140f.).

From being an extraordinary student she moved on to dedicate herself totally to God in monastic life, and for 20 years nothing exceptional occurred: study and prayer were her main activities. Because of her gifts, she shone out among the sisters; she was tenacious in consolidating her culture in various fields.

In religious observance our Saint was "a firm pillar... a very powerful champion of justice and truth" (*ibid.*, I, 1, p. 26), her biographer says. By her words and example, she kindled great fervor in other people.

Two favors, in particular, were dearer to her than any other, as Gertrude herself writes: "The stigmata of your salvation-bearing wounds which you impressed upon me, as it were, like a valuable necklace, in my heart, and the profound and salutary wound of love with which you marked it.