

**THE THIRTY-THIRD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**NEVER ENDING JOY**  
17-23 November 2024

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Sun.    **THE FOUNDING OF MEPKIN ABBEY**  
Nov.17 **THE FEAST OF UNENDING JOY**  
          **Recollection by a Monk of Mepkin**

Mon.    **Monday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time**  
18       **FAITH AS TRUST**  
          **From a Reflection by Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP**

Tues.   **Memorial of St. Mechtilde**  
19       **SAINT MATILDA OF HACKEBORN (part1)**  
          **From the Angelus Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 29 September 2010**

Wed.    **Wednesday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time**  
20       **PARABLE OF THE TALENTS**  
          **From the Angelus Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 16 November 2008**

Thurs.   **Memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin**  
21       **PRESENTING WHAT WE HAVE**  
          **A Reflection from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII**

**MONASTIC DESERT DAY**  
Fri.     **Memorial of St. Cecilia**  
22       **THE WITNESS OF THE LIFE & DEATH OF CECILIA**  
          **A Reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII**

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          **From the Angelus Message of Pope Francis, 10 November 2019**

*Sunday*

## **THE FEAST OF UNENDING JOY**

### **Recollection by a Monk of Mepkin**

In November of 1949, twenty-nine monks from Gethsemani Abbey arrived at Mepkin to found the Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Fifteen were novices, supposedly flexible enough to adapt to the hardships that go with founding a new community. An ancient motto to help us along the path to God says: “Through hardships, to Heaven”! Monastic life provides the hardships and God provides the grace to bear with them and persevere. Brother Boniface summed up the challenge and the grace by pointing to two of Mepkin’s huge live oaks: “Those great big oak trees were once just little nuts that held their ground!” Monks are nuts for Christ putting down roots into monastic life and persevering until death, as St. Benedict says, they show the Church and the world the inner beauty that grows in one who walks the monastic way with Jesus. It is a matter of seeking the face of God in prayer, work, and community living. Only 10 of the 29 founders persevered to be buried at Mepkin.

All Christians are called to pray, to work, and to live in a community of mutual love, and monks seek to do this in the most thorough way possible. It is hard. Everything begins and ends with prayer—no matter how hot the summer heat or how hard the drudgery of turning what contained only a summer home into a property able to feed and clothe an entire community. Trappist tradition insists that monks support themselves by the work of their own hands. It took many experiments for the community to find success in raising chickens for their eggs, and then mushrooms.

This makes it difficult not to let prayer slip from the center of who you are and what you do. Besides, you live in silence and a kind of solitude; you rise early so you can get prayer and meditation in before the day’s work begins. Many of our human ways of finding encouragement and support are deliberately given up in monastic life. A monastery is a kind of half-open door through which one can glimpse the life and joy of the Kingdom of God. The name ‘mepkin’ is said to mean “beautiful place”. To translate natural into spiritual beauty it is important to have a beautiful church and liturgy. The monastery became the “Abbey of Our Lady of Mepkin”—Our Lady of the Beautiful Place—to show that beauty leads to joy. The present award-winning church was dedicated in 1993 with this in mind.

Mepkin Plantation didn’t put prayer first but focused on work, done by slaves. Monks work to become wholly free and make the fruit of their work a free gift to others. It is a life of turning from all that enslaves people and leads them away from the love of God and loving respect for others. This is the path to God’s Kingdom and unending joy. The twin blessings that are the Mepkin community and its church remind all of God’s call to live now the life of charity that will last forever. Those who have gone into glory remind us who remain to keep death, and God, daily before our eyes. We show that we too can share God’s unending joy. The special thing our founders did was love one another in God for an entire lifetime. Deeper than hardships, and even sin, is the joy given us in Christ. It shapes each monk’s life as a witness for all to see and an invitation to follow Jesus. It is a response to the call that is faith and our call to celebrate on earth the Day of Unending Joy.

*Monday*

## **FAITH AS TRUST**

**From a Reflection by Carroll Stuhlmueller, CP**

The word we translate as 'faith' is better translated as 'trust'. Jesus evokes trust and heals the blind (man), but directs the attention away from himself by saying, "It is your trust that has healed you". Trusting wholly in God that brings about healing.

Scripture presents the sin of Adam and Eve as one of refusing to trust in God. They decide to trust in themselves rather than God. We are all entangled in this sin. Jesus calls us to stop trusting in ourselves or our human capacities, and to begin, at last, to put all our trust and hope in God. To trust in God, first and last, and always is to let God be our hope—not our endowments or talents or skills or knowledge, or all of these together. If we are preparing for Christ's coming we have to prepare to trust and hope in God absolutely. That is what Jesus did, and what he would teach us to do. It is the lesson of the Cross and of Advent.

Now we "see" the heart of our relationship with our God. The blind (man) had come to the end of every hope except God. Jesus was the catalyst who brought all his disappointments, and sufferings and depressions together so that he turned to God. He knew that he was bringing healing to all sorts of people for almost every illness and incapacity they had ever heard of.

Haven't we come to that same point? Haven't we learned that no human ingenuity or capacity can take our lives, and those of all the world—especially the multitude of those who are suffering and sick and powerless, and heal what is broken and wrong? So why aren't we running after Jesus crying out to him from the depths of our hearts? We were meant to grow gradually into complete trust in our God but we have grown in all sorts of other directions. We haven't learned to trust anyone without conditions or limitations.

Jesus, down through the ages, has sent an army of workers into the harvest the Heavenly Father has planted and cultivated. He sent people to lead us to Jesus. Now he sends us to lead others to Jesus. Think of the commission Jesus gave to his disciples when he sent them to do this. How many of us are prepared to believe that we can do all the things Jesus told his first disciples to do? Here is a test of our readiness to hope and believe that we can do such things just because Jesus tells us to do them.

Jesus says: What you have received give to others, and give it freely, seeking only to give the gift you have received. Perhaps we need to begin by reflecting on the wonderful gifts we have received. Perhaps we don't yet realize what we have been given—especially the ability to trust our entire lives to God. We have done this—or say we have. Now Jesus calls us to live what we believe. Setting out to do it is the first step in trust and transforming hope.

Tuesday

## **SAINT MATILDA OF HACKEBORN (part1)**

**From the Angelus Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 29 September 2010**

St Matilda of Hackeborn is one of the great figures of the convent of Helfta, who lived in the 13th century. Her sister, St Gertrude the Great, tells of the special graces that God granted to St Matilda in the sixth book of *Liber Specialis Gratiae* (Book of Special Grace), which states: "What we have written is very little in comparison with what we have omitted. We are publishing these things solely for the glory of God and the usefulness of our neighbor, for it would seem wrong to us to keep quiet about the many graces that Matilda received from God, not so much for herself, in our opinion, but for us and for those who will come after us" (Mechthild von Hackeborn, *Liber specialis gratiae*, vi, 1).

Matilda was born in 1241 or 1242 in the Castle of Helfta. She was the Baron's third daughter. When she was seven she went with her mother to visit her sister Gertrude in the convent of Rodersdorf. She was so enchanted by this environment that she ardently desired to belong to it. She entered as a schoolgirl and in 1258 became a nun at the convent, which in the meantime had moved to Helfta, to the property of the Hackeborns. She was distinguished by her humility, her fervor, her friendliness, the clarity and the innocence of her life and by the familiarity and intensity with which she lived her relationship with God, the Virgin and the Saints. She was endowed with lofty natural and spiritual qualities such as knowledge, intelligence, familiarity with the humanities and a marvelously sweet voice: everything suited her to being a true treasure for the convent from every point of view (*ibid*, *Proem.*). Thus when "God's nightingale", as she was called, was still very young she became the principal of the convent's school, choir mistress and novice mistress, offices that she fulfilled with talent and unflagging zeal, not only for the benefit of the nuns but for anyone who wanted to draw on her wisdom and goodness.

Illumined by the divine gift of mystic contemplation, Matilda wrote many prayers. She was a teacher of faithful doctrine and deep humility, a counselor, comforter and guide in discernment. We read: "She distributed doctrine in an abundance never previously seen at the convent, and alas, we are rather afraid that nothing like it will ever be seen again. The sisters would cluster around her to hear the word of God as if she were a preacher. "She was the refuge and consoler of all and, by a unique gift of God, was endowed with the grace of being able to reveal freely the secrets of the heart of each one. Many people, not only in the convent but also outsiders, religious and lay people, who came from afar, testified that this holy virgin had freed them from their afflictions and that they had never known such comfort as they found near her. "Furthermore, she composed and taught so many prayers that if they were gathered together they would make a book larger than a Psalter" (*ibid.*, VI, 1).

Matilda gave an emphasis in liturgical prayer to the canonical hours, to the celebrations of Holy Mass and, especially, to Holy Communion. Here she was often rapt in ecstasy in profound intimacy with the Lord in his most ardent and sweetest Heart, carrying on a marvelous conversation in which she asked for inner illumination while interceding in a special way for her community and her sisters. At the center are the mysteries of Christ which the Virgin Mary constantly recommends to people so that they may walk on the path of holiness: "If you want true holiness, be close to my Son; he is holiness itself that sanctifies all things" (*ibid.*, I, 40). The whole world, the Church, benefactors and sinners were present in her intimacy with God. For her, Heaven and earth were united.

*Wednesday*

## **PARABLE OF THE TALENTS**

**From the Angelus Address of Pope Benedict XVI, 16 November 2008**

The Word of God invites us to be vigilant and hardworking, in the expectation of the Lord's return at the end of time. The Gospel passage recounts the famous Parable of the Talents. The "talent" was an ancient Roman coin, of great value, and precisely because of this parable's popularity it became synonymous with personal gifts, which everyone is called to develop. In fact, the text speaks of "a man going on a journey [who] called his servants and entrusted to them his property". The man in the parable represents Christ himself, the servants are the disciples and the talents are the gifts that Jesus entrusts to them. These gifts, in addition to their natural qualities, thus represent the riches that the Lord Jesus has bequeathed to us as a legacy, so that we may make them productive: his Word, deposited in the Holy Gospel; Baptism, which renews us in the Holy Spirit; prayer the "Our Father" that we raise to God as his children, united in the Son; his forgiveness, which he commanded be offered to all; the Sacrament of his Body sacrificed and his Blood poured out; in a word: the Kingdom of God, which is God himself, present and alive in our midst.

This is the treasure that Jesus entrusted to his friends at the end of his brief life on earth. Today's parable stresses the inner disposition necessary to accept and develop this gift. Fear is the wrong attitude: the servant who is afraid of his master and fears his return hides the coin in the earth and it does not produce any fruit. This happens, for example, to those who after receiving Baptism, Communion and Confirmation subsequently bury these gifts beneath a blanket of prejudice, beneath a false image of God that paralyzes faith and good works, thus betraying the Lord's expectations. However, the parable places a greater emphasis on the good fruits brought by the disciples who, happy with the gift they received, did not keep it hidden with fear and jealousy but made it profitable by sharing it and partaking in it. Yes, what Christ has given us is multiplied in its giving! It is a treasure made to be spent, invested and shared with all, as we are taught by the Apostle Paul, that great administrator of Jesus' talents. The Gospel teaching that the liturgy offers us today has also had a strong effect at the historical and social level, encouraging an active and entrepreneurial spirit in the Christian people.

The central message, however, concerns the spirit of responsibility with which to receive God's Kingdom: a responsibility to God and to humanity. This attitude of the heart is embodied perfectly in the Virgin Mary who, on receiving the most precious gift of all, Jesus himself, offered him to the world with immense love. Let us ask her to help us to be "good and faithful servants" so that we may one day enter "into the joy of our Lord".

*Thursday*

## **PRESENTING WHAT WE HAVE**

### **A Reflection from a homily by St. Pope John XXIII**

Every Christian heart is glad to be reminded by the liturgy of the sacred event commemorated today. We think of Sts. Joachim and Ann going up to the temple of God with their child, Mary. We think of her as the purest of all creatures—pure of heart in a way that opens eyes to see God. When we think of Mary, we think about God's choice of her to become the Mother of his Only Begotten Son, the Mother of God.

I can't remember these things, however, apart from what may be the very first memory I carry with me from my childhood. It is a memory of my mother's taking me to visit a small shrine dedicated to Mary, one built on land belonging to my native town. It is dedicated to Mary precisely as Mother of God and this title is associated especially with the Feast of Mary's Presentation. The small chapel is set among the trees at the end of a small country lane.

When I came there with my mother we couldn't get into the chapel because it was already so filled with people. But my mother wanted to share with me her love for Mary, symbolized by the statue in the chapel. She got me to the front of the building, where there were two small windows—the only windows in this chapel. They were barred and were located just above my mother's head. She lifted me up and said to me, "Look, look at our Lady! She is our special lady on this feast day! She was presented in God's Temple today."

What a wonderful way to remember my mother and her love for me. She lifted me up so I could see Blessed Mary, whom she taught me brings Christ to us all. Look at the one who most of all brings us Jesus, who brings us to the Heavenly Father, and to the love that saves and blesses us forever.

Today I am Pope and I want to take you with me to that little shrine and lift you up so that you too can see Mary and know you are close to Jesus, to whom she looks with all her heart and soul. Can anyone do more for another than this? Isn't this a ministry that our Good and Loving God has called all of us to? If you can't see God's deep love for you, because you can't see God, then you can look to Jesus, who reveals God for you. But how will you draw close to Jesus in such a crowd as fills our world? Look first to Mary and ask her to bring you to Jesus.

Perhaps you only see Jesus as shown to us in images like those in cathedrals. Then you only see him resplendent and glorious and clothed with power. But that isn't the sort of person you would go to with your pains and puzzles, your needs and nonsense fears. Mary can show us the Jesus to whom we can bring everything. She can remind us of our own mothers and how they tried to share their faith with us even when we were too small to understand. Mary bears the light who is Christ and she wants to share that light with us and help us in turn share it with one another. There is no more wonderful thing to do, whoever you are and whatever titles you bear or don't bear. Turn to a divine love that is as gentle as a mother's love for her child, and as rich as the entire world of beauty our caring God's love has given us. God would have you play in it and share it with others, as perhaps your own mother did with you.

*Friday*

## **THE WITNESS OF THE LIFE & DEATH OF CECILIA**

### **A Reflection developed from a talk by St. Pope John XXIII**

The liturgy has much to say about Cecilia the virgin and martyr. She is an example of the singular beauty that Christ gives to those who love Him. She sheds upon so many the heavenly light and sweetness of faith in God. She was deeply conscious of the truths of her faith and of the duty to God that they taught her.

It has been said of St. Cecilia that wherever she went she bore witness to the Gospel. How blessed are all those who are able to do this following her example? Above all, how blessed are those who show us what a great honor it is for a follower of Christ to find the inner strength to sacrifice everything, even life itself, when faced with the choice of choosing justice and fraternity and mutual love and peace by obeying the teachings of our Redeemer? Jesus has given these ideals new and deeper meanings than ever before and shown us how to so live them that all the world will be redeemed and saved.

I can only wish that all might find within their hearts the divine gift of a desire to live frankly and generously in obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. Wasn't Jesus' new commandment a call to love others even as he has loved them, and loved us? It isn't a path to personal or inner narrowness but to honor and openness and service. It is a path that multiplies care and concern and action on behalf of all that is good.

Cecilia was wealthy. A young man wanted to marry her, but not for herself. He lusted after her money and property. When she decided to give all she had inherited to the poor he denounced her as a Christian. He hoped this would cause her to turn back from her purpose out of fear for her life. It only caused her to make the even greater gift of her life to God. She went ahead and gave away her wealth and property, but she gave her very life and self in giving it. This is the call that her feast proclaims. It is a call that God makes to all of us—whether we have any property or wealth or not.

What we give is not important unless the gift is yourself. You may give it in a lifetime of dedication to God and to the love of others. You may give it by refusing to turn away from what you hear as God's call to you. Whatever that call costs, refusing to turn back is your path to God and to God's Kingdom.

*Saturday*

## **LIFE BELONGS TO GOD**

**From the Angelus Message of Pope Francis, 10 November 2019**

Today's Gospel reading (Lk 20:27-38) offers us a wonderful teaching of Jesus on the resurrection of the dead. Jesus is asked by some Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection and therefore provoke Him with an insidious question: in the resurrection, whose wife would a woman be if she had seven successive husbands, who were all brothers, who all died one after the other? Jesus does not fall into the trap and replies that in the hereafter the risen "neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (vv. 35-36). This is how Jesus responds.

With this response, first and foremost, Jesus invites His interlocutors — and us too — to consider that this earthly dimension in which we now live is not the only dimension, but that there is another, no longer subject to death, which will fully manifest that we are children of God. It is of great comfort and hope to listen to this simple and clear word of Jesus about life beyond death; we need it very much, especially in our time, so rich in knowledge about the universe but so lacking in wisdom about eternal life.

Jesus' clear certainty about resurrection is based entirely on the fidelity of God, Who is the God of life. In fact, behind the question of the Sadducees is hidden a more profound question: not only whose wife will be the widow of the seven husbands, but to whom will her life belong. This is a doubt that touches mankind of every age and also us: after this earthly pilgrimage, what will become of our life? Will it belong to nothing, to death?

Jesus responds that life belongs to God, who loves us and cares very deeply about us, to the point of linking His name to ours: He is "the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him" (vv. 37-38). Life exists where there is [a] bond, communion, brotherhood; and it is a life stronger than death when it is built on true relationships and bonds of fidelity. On the contrary, there is no life where one has the presumption of belonging only to oneself and of living as an island: death prevails in these attitudes. It is selfishness. If I live for myself, I am sowing death in my heart.

May the Virgin Mary help us to live every day from the perspective of what we affirm in the final part of the Creed: "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come". Awaiting the hereafter.