

THE THIRTY-FOURTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR
Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe
24-30 November 2024

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Sunday

ON THE CROSS, JESUS IS EXALTED

From the Angelus Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 21Nov 2010

The Solemnity of Christ the King was established by Pius XI in 1925 and, later, after the Second Vatican Council, it was placed at the close of the liturgical year. The Gospel according to St Luke presents, as in a great painting, the kingship of Jesus at the moment of his Crucifixion. The leaders of the people and the soldiers taunt “the first-born of all creation” (Col 1:15) and put him to the test to see whether he has the power to save himself from death (*cf.* Luke 23:35-37).

Yet precisely: “On the Cross, Jesus is exalted to the very ‘height’ of the God who is Love. It is there that he can be ‘known’... Jesus gives us ‘life’ because he gives us God. He can give God because he himself is one with God” (Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (English translation, Doubleday, New York, 2007, pp. 349 and 354).

In fact, while the Lord seems to be mistaken because he is between two wrong-doers, one of them, aware of his sins, opens himself to truth, arrives at faith and prays “the King of the Jews”: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk 23:42).

From the One who “is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17) the so-called “Good Thief” straight away receives forgiveness and the joy of entering the Kingdom of Heaven. “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). With these words, Jesus, from the *throne* of the Cross welcomes every human being with infinite mercy.

St Ambrose comments that this “is a beautiful example of conversion to which one should aspire: forgiveness is very quickly offered to the thief and grace is more abundant than the request; the Lord in fact”, St Ambrose says, “always gives more than is asked for.... Life is being with Christ because where Christ is there is the Kingdom” (*Expositio Ev. sec. Lucam X*, 121: ccl 14, 379).

Dear Friends, we can also contemplate in Christian art the way of love that the Lord reveals to us and invites us to take. In fact, in the past “in the arrangement of Christian sacred buildings... it became customary to depict the Lord returning as a king — the symbol of hope — at the east end; while the west wall normally portrayed the Last Judgement as a symbol of our responsibility for our lives” (Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, n. 41): hope in the infinite love of God and commitment to ordering our life in accordance with the love of God.

When we contemplate depictions of Jesus inspired by the New Testament — as an ancient Council teaches — we are led to “understand... the sublimity and the humiliation of the Word of God and... to remember his life in the flesh, his Passion and his salvific death, and the redemption that the world derived from it” (Council in Trullo, [691 or 692], can. 82).

“Yes, we need it, precisely to... become capable of recognizing in the pierced heart of the Crucified One the mystery of God” (J. Ratzinger, *Teologia della liturgia: La fondazione sacramentale dell’esistenza cristiana*, LEV 2010, p. 69).

Monday

THE CHURCH AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

From Interracial Apostolate by Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ (written in 1979)

Race relations and poverty are not necessarily and everywhere, two aspects of the same problem. But, as a matter of fact, in the United States, the problem of racial discrimination can hardly be considered apart from the problem of poverty. For it is especially among the hundreds of thousands of racially exploited that the description of the poor is distressingly verified.

The poor are rightfully demanding fair participation in the benefits of scientific and economic progress. They are seeking earnestly for leaders who will enable them to secure their just share of the earth's bounty.

I speak as a Christian, a Catholic, and Superior General of the Society of Jesus. It is time for all church people, all religious orders, all communities to examine our consciences. It is chastening for me to recall, that before the Civil War, some American Jesuit houses owned black slaves. It is humbling to remember that until recently, a number of Jesuit institutions did not admit black students, even in areas where civil restrictions against integrated schools did not prevail, and this even in the case of black Catholics. It is embarrassing to note that up to the present, some of our Jesuit institutions have affected what seems to be little more than token integration of black students. It is salutary for us Jesuits to reflect upon these facts and for other Catholic institutions to reflect on their own history.

It is true, of course, that in the history of the Society of Jesus in the United States, Jesuits have distinguished themselves in laboring faithfully and effectively with many minority groups. Nevertheless, our record of service to Black Americans has fallen far short of what it should have been. Unfortunately, our apostolate to black people has depended chiefly on the individual initiative and very little on the corporate efforts of the Society. I fear it is the same for the Church generally. Our Church is at risk of being identified more and more with the middle-class, white segment of the population.

It would be a wholesome practice for each of us, individually or as members of Jesuit communities or of whatever community to which you belong, to examine our consciences and to inquire why so little of our efforts in the past have been expended in work for, with, and on behalf of Black Americans. There are some possible answers: a failure to appreciate fully the practical implications of the Christian concept of the human person; an uncritical acceptance of stereotypes and prejudices regarding black people, and the insulation of many of us from the actual living conditions of the poor. It is time for us all to reflect on these important matters.

Tuesday

HOW SEEING SIGNS CAN LEAD US TO GOD

A Reflection from a Sermon by John Henry Cardinal Newman

As long as there have been Christians they have constantly looked for signs of the coming of Christ. They have found signs in the natural world as well as the world as created by human ingenuity. Some people make fun of this and claim only the uneducated and uncultured see signs everywhere, as though earthquakes, storms, harvest failures and diseases were something extraordinary. In fact, the educated and the powerful often do this too, but they are thinking of wars, revolutions and the like.

Actually, people see events as signs because their hearts are awake with longing for Christ and they see everything out of the ordinary as a reminder that God is the Lord of nature and of history and of all events. Since Jesus' own disciples did this too, we shouldn't find it surprising. And, indeed, Jesus himself shared these attitudes. He says that there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars and that on earth there will be distress among nations and that people will get terrified by what is happening around them, and think this means that the natural powers of the world are failing and that means that what we know is passing away and will be replaced by the more immediate rule of God.

Clearly, there isn't anything ridiculous about such thinking and there certainly isn't any particular harm in it. When people live from faith, they imagine that what is happening within them, as they are transformed, is happening in the outer world too. Seeing signs in things and events only reflects a religious and faith-inspired way of understanding life.

Yet if, as we find in Scripture, the "world" is opposed to God and the "order of the world" as human beings create it, is opposed to the ordering of everything in terms of its relation to God. But how can things of that same "world" be signs of God's presence and transforming and redeeming power and love as well as dangers because they aren't God-oriented?

Granted all I have said, granted the vastness and mystery of the world and the ways it is borne in upon us, how could we not think that there is nothing here below that isn't connected to the Plan God has for saving and drawing all things into unity in Christ? For all we know each event has a connection with every other event.

Perhaps, then, God is teaching us and offering us insight and knowledge about his ways. If we are only willing to open our eyes maybe we can see the hand of God working for the good of all creation. The Scripture tells us that the very hairs of our heads are numbered by God. All things are ours and all things work together to realize our good and, in its own way, that holds true generally. Let's, then, look for the Lord's presence in everything that happens, no matter how trivial it may seem.

To the ears of faith even what sounds bad doesn't happen without the permission of God. We hear God's footsteps everywhere. Seeing signs of God's presence is a way of seeing signs of God's coming. More important, it is a way of causing us to keep watch for that coming which will bring all into the immediate presence of God. Keep watch and pray! We are commanded to do this.

Wednesday

PERSECUTED BY THE PRINCE OF THE WORLD

From a Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis

Christians are persecuted today more than at the start of Christianity. The originating cause of every persecution is the hate of the prince of the world for those who have been saved and redeemed by Jesus through his death and resurrection. The only weapon by which we can defend ourselves is the Word of God, humility and meekness. Pope Francis pointed to the path we must take to disentangle ourselves from the snares of the world. These snares are works of the devil who is the prince and spirit of the world.

“So many Christian communities are persecuted around the globe. More so now than in the early times.... Why? Because the spirit of the world hates”. Persecution usually comes after a long road. “Think,” urged Pope Francis, “how the prince of the world tried to trick Jesus in the desert”, tempting especially, his vanity. “Jesus never answered this prince with his own words but with the word of God”. The Pope said the message for man today is: “you cannot dialogue with the prince of the world”. Dialogue is “necessary between us”, he explained, “necessary for peace” and we must always maintain it. But “with that prince, there is no dialogue; you can only answer him with the Word of God who defends us”. The prince of the world, Francis warned, “hates us. And what he did with Jesus, he will do with us”. With a little word here, a trifle there, “he will lead us down a path of injustice”. It begins with the little things, “softening us” to the point that “we fall into the trap. Jesus tells us ‘I send you like lambs in the midst of wolves’. Be prudent, but simple.”

Jesus is meek and humble of heart. Let us reflect over the weapons that we have to defend ourselves: “Let us remain like lambs forever because then we will always have a shepherd to defend us”.

Thursday

REMEMBERING HOW GRATEFUL WE SHOULD BE

A Reflection from a Sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny

Whenever we come to a time of special celebration it is good to consider and state as plainly as we can how much God has given us in Christ. Why did our forbears go out into what seemed a wilderness except that they might better serve God? We hear in Proverbs, "A poor thing, such a poor thing, people say, and then go off and brag about their bargain". Won't we be able to boast rightly about the unbelievable bargain we have obtained—an immeasurable and eternal weight of glory, and for no more payment than such minor afflictions as we actually bear? "The sufferings of this time aren't worthy to be compared with the future glory to be revealed in us."

I could easily be carried away by unrelenting wrath against ingratitude and faithlessness, if I were not reminded of the holy and blessed times in which we live the gift that is Jesus Christ. Yet the two realities come together. We live in a time of grace and of wickedness. "Behold, now is the acceptable time!" When the world's wickedness had almost reached its peak God sent us the Only Son. Now we are graced to live a mature and adult faith and through grace and truth, we live in a time of fullness. It is God's grace that makes this the happiest of times for us. The Book of Sirach reminds us not to waste our opportunities: "*Don't be defrauded of the good day!*", he shouts out. This is a good day because it is a day of godly gifts. We have received the best gift of all and we only have to live the grace received.

My friends in Christ, haven't we received the Spirit which is of God? Don't we have the knowledge of what has been given us? Thanks be to you, Father of mercies, who has given us our daily bread, who has opened your hand with such generosity to fill every living thing with blessings!

How wretched, how brutish and unfeeling, even more, how harmful and grudging is the person who defrauds self and others of the godly gifts God has given. Such a person has no share in those gifts, no share in heavenly grace. So much has been set before us. We celebrate a day of refreshment and joy. Could we do it with a sad heart? Wisdom calls out to us, "*A person with a jaundiced eye never has a full meal but always sits hungry and pensive at the table*". We must consider with devotion and with faith all the things that have been offered us.

If we don't turn our face away from Christ we can feed most happily and wonderfully from merely looking upon Him. "*The Lord feeds me and I lack nothing; God has set me in a place of green pastures*". Yes, we yearn for the fullness of time, and even so we are filled with such a plenitude of good things! What can we do but give thanks to the One who has given us all and will give us endlessly more? Let us give thanks, now and through the endless ages. This is the Day of Thanksgiving. Give thanks to God.

Friday

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS BY GIVING THANKS

A Reflection from a Commentary on the Lord's Prayer by St. Gregory of Nyssa

I think that even if we spent the entirety of our lives in constant prayers of thanksgiving and praise, we should still be endlessly far from having made an adequate return to God for all we have been given. Even to begin giving thanks is yet another gift, as is every thought and word of gratitude. The harder we try to thank our God the more gifts we have received from God's generosity and love.

We measure time in terms of past, present and future. In all of them, we constantly receive good in more than munificent measures from the love of our God. Consider the past. You didn't even exist until God created you. Your very growth in your mother's womb was a gift and so was your safe birth. Once you had been born you were showered with gift after gift, right up to now. Think, then, of the present. It is through God that you have life at this very moment. It is through this gift that you can have a future, with all the gifts that you know will fill it. Now turn your attention to that future. You hope that your longings for God and God's Kingdom will be fulfilled. That hope is founded on God. Because you know God you are sure that God will know and love you forever and that by simply clinging to God you can be sure of endless goods and benefits. Your future is not a limited but an unlimited hope. It comes to pass no matter what!

We are masters only of the present. In this present, as St. Paul says, it is in God that we live and move and have our being. This present is the unfolding of the gift of new life you received by simply answering God's call to believe. You know that all the gifts of the past and the present are facts. They are the result of the same divine love that you believe is offered you forever. You know, therefore, that you will never cease to have reason to thank God from the depths of your heart and mind. No, none of us will ever finish thanking our God. That is the one thing we know is impossible since life that continues eternally.

Why are we so far from being able to thank God properly? It seems as though we didn't even have a good intention in this. But who spread out the earth beneath me? Whose wisdom made the waters and made it possible for us to pass over them to so many distant places. Who spread out the endless expanse of the heavens? Who gave us the sun and caused it to light each of our days? Who gave life when I was lifeless earth, and gave me a mind and a heart to know and to love? Who gave me so many kinds of tamed animals to work with me and serve me? Who, after all, am I if left only to myself?

God fashioned clay into the likeness and image of divinity. Even if this divine image was tarnished by sin God provided the means to restore it to its former beauty. When I was exiled from paradise, deprived of the fruit of the Tree of Life, I got myself lost in an ocean of earthly goods, but wasn't it God who brought me back? There is no one who really understands all this, says Scripture. But we do understand that we are gifts and that all life is a continual gift. We do understand how wonderful the universe is. We do understand that we are loved beyond our ability to understand. Let us give thanks.

Saturday

TAKING UP THE CROSS TO FOLLOW CHRIST

A Reflection from a Sermon by St. Bernard

If we celebrate this feast of St. Andrew lovingly, we will find much that builds us up. Have you noticed how St. Andrew, when he reached the place where a cross had been prepared for him, began to utter burning words through the Spirit? The love that burned within him flashed forth like a flame, expressed in these words: "O cross, so long desired and now ready for my eager spirit! With joy and confidence, I come, so receive me gladly as the disciple of one who hung on you, for I have always been your lover and have longed to embrace you!" Those are words all of us would want to utter if the grace were given.

What is the source of such unheard-of joy and exultation? Where does such great constancy and confidence come from in the midst of human fragility? How can a mere human experience such spiritual ardor and such burning love? Certainly, it doesn't come from Andrew's own strength! It is a perfect gift coming down from the Father in Heaven who is the source of all light and alone does such great wonders. It was indeed the Spirit who came to the aid of Andrew's weakness and poured into his heart that love which was stronger than death. Grant that God gives us all a share in it!

If we grow weak and fall asleep instead of praying then our own fragility explains it. But what God did for Andrew, on the cross and in his death, God will do for us in our toil and our penance and our efforts to pray. Not only will these things no longer seem a burden but they will become a delight. My spirit, says the Lord, is sweeter than honey. Nothing can take away that sweetness if only our Lord will give it to us.

So, we seek this Spirit. Let us do our utmost to receive the gift. Don't we want to possess Jesus, and his Spirit, more than anything else? He is already dwelling in us and now we ask him to dwell there more and more fully and completely. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of God, Scripture says, is not God's and doesn't belong to Christ. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God. It is given so we may understand and live the gifts bestowed on us by our God.

What we have to do is take up our cross along with St. Andrew, and even more with the One whom Andrew followed. He is our Lord and Savior. The cause of Andrew's joy and exultation, even as he prepared to die, what not only for having Jesus as Lord but for being give the gift of suffering and dying with Jesus. Do you want to be crucified with Christ? Listen to Christ's words: "If anyone would come after me, let that one take up the cross and follow me" (Mt. 16:24). In the cross is our salvation, provided we cling to it firmly. The cross, as St. Paul reminds us, is folly to those who are perishing. But to all who are being saved it is the power of God! Accept the gift of that power and you too will be with Christ in joy forever.