

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
19-25 January 2025

- SUN.** **THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**
Jan. 19 **DO YOU LONG TO BE TRANSFORMED?**
 A Reflection from a Homily by St. Maximus of Turin
- MON.** **Memorial of Blessed Cyprian Michael Tansi**
20 **THE TASK OF RECONCILIATION**
 A Reflection from a Homily by St. Pope John Paul II
- TUES.** **Memorial of St. Agnes**
21 **REMEMBERING THE POWER OF GOD’S GRACE**
 A Reflection developed from Butler’s Lives of the Saints
- Day of Prayer for Legal Protection of the Unborn**
- WED.** **Wednesday of the Second Week in Ordinary Time**
22 **DIGNITY, THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DUTIES**
 From the Declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith
 “Dignitas Infinita” on Human Dignity, 2 April 2024
- THURS.** **Thursday of the Second Week in Ordinary Time**
23 **THE SPIRITUAL OFFERING**
 From the treatise On Prayer by Tertullian
- Monastic Desert Day**
- FRI.** **Memorial of St. Francis de Sales, Bp and Doct of the Church**
24 **THE PATH TO FERVENT LOVE OF GOD**
 A Reflection from a Letter by St. Francis de Sales
- SAT.** **The Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul**
25 **FINDING GOD IS FINDING ONE’S TRUE SELF**
 A reflection from St. Paul Apostle of the Nations by H. Daniel- Rops

Sunday

DO YOU LONG TO BE TRANSFORMED?

A Reflection from a Homily by St. Maximus of Turin

The Son of God went to a wedding. He went so that his presence would sanctify the institution of marriage which He had founded. It was a wedding done according to the “old order” of things but he went to begin a New Order. He had come into the world in order to take as a bride the Church, drawn into one from all nations. He didn’t go to the wedding to enjoy the banquet or to drink wine but he went to show by the miracle of transforming water into wine what being one with him means. He no doubt enjoyed the wedding supper and the wine but he came to give a New Wine because the old wine was giving out.

So it was that, when the feast was well underway, the most blessed Mary came and said to him, “They have no wine”. Jesus answered as though he were displeased. “Mam”, he said, “how is that my concern, or yours?” However, the displeasure was only that his mother was thinking of earthly things and he was thinking of transformative grace. So, he replied: “My hour has not yet come.” He foresaw the glorious hour of his passion and then his resurrection, from which was to spring the grace of our redemption—the redemption of all. Why worry about ordinary wine when he was soon to give all the opportunity to drink the New Wine that would bring everlasting life and eternal redemption?

Holy Mary, however, since she was truly Mother of God, in her spirit realized what her son and Lord was thinking and knew he could give us both that spiritual wine and ordinary wine. She advised the servants, as she advises us, to do whatever Jesus might command. He showed immediately that he wasn’t really angry and said: “Fill the jars with water”. The servants obeyed immediately and suddenly a marvel began to take place. Water began to acquire a new color, a new fragrance, a new flavor—all at once it was completely transformed.

Of course, this transformation witnessed to the powerful presence of the Creator. Only he who had made water out of nothing could make it something new. No doubt, God thickens water so that it becomes snow, and hardens it so it becomes ice, and cause a rock in the wilderness to produce it, and turned it into blood in Egypt. But this sign was not about God’s power over water but God’s power to transform us.

Scripture says that this sign at Cana in Galilee was the first that Jesus performed, and so manifested his glory. More important yet, his disciples began to believe in Him. It was not what they saw happening to the water that they believed but that an ordinary human being was the Son of the Most High. Let’s believe this too, and believe it wholeheartedly.

He whom we confess to be the Son of Man is also Son of God. We believe not only that he shared our nature but that he had a divine nature. If such is our faith then we should believe as well that his is the power to transform us as completely and wonderfully as he did the water into wine. But we mustn’t only believe. We must act out the transformation. This means living divine-human loving, just as Jesus loved. That is the point of the transformation. It requires too that we share Jesus’ cross, however. Are you longing for this transformation, and will welcome it no matter what the cost?

Monday

THE TASK OF RECONCILIATION

A Reflection from a Homily by St. Pope John Paul II

The life and witness of Father Cyprian Tansi is more than an inspiration to the people of Nigeria, the people he loved so much. He was a lover of God and spent long hours praying before the Blessed Sacrament, the food of love and of generosity and courage that in him strove to bring God's love to as many as possible. Those who knew him testify to his great love of God. Everyone who met him was touched and moved by his personal goodness. He was a man for others. He always put others' good in first place and was especially sensitive to the pastoral needs of families.

If Christians are to learn to love God above all else and love one another as they love themselves they must begin in the life of their family. Father Cyprian always took great care in preparing couples for Holy Matrimony. He preached the special importance of marital chastity. He tried likewise to promote recognition of the dignity of women. More, this was integral to his concern for the education of the young. He knew all such things depended on love for God and seeking God's face in prayer. He was thinking of his people in this way when he got his bishop to send him to Mount St. Bernard Abbey to pursue a Cistercian monastic vocation. He hoped to bring contemplative life to his part of Africa.

Prayer and sacrifice are the door to holiness and sanctification. But Father Cyprian knew there is something of the prodigal son in every human being. He knew all are tempted to separate themselves from God and seek to control their own happiness in a self-centered, independent way. He knew that all are disappointed by the emptiness this illusive quest brings, yet it fascinates us. He also knew we all eventually find in the depths of our hearts a road leading to our Heavenly Father's house.

He made himself an apostle of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but not as an individualistic turning to God. We must forgive one another and learn from one another in God's love. He wanted reconciliation to be a reality at every level of Nigerian life. Thus the Prodigal Father of Jesus' parable is given us. This realization alone can lead all Nigerians, all Christians, both Christian and Muslim people, to reconcile with one another. The call to reconciliation is also a call to the joy of restored communion—with God and one another.

Let us join Father Cyprian in inspiring people to come to true peace in God and to nourish a life of peace with others through the grace of God. We begin with the Sacraments, and especially that of Holy Communion. We are one with Father Cyprian now in Christ and in the Eucharist. With him let us pray to God that all may become one in Him.

Tuesday

REMEMBERING THE POWER OF GOD'S GRACE

A Reflection developed from Butler's Lives of the Saints

We are told in a fifth-century document about a thirteen-year-old girl who accepted martyrdom rather than be unfaithful to her complete gift of self to Christ. Her virginity is emphasized as a way of reminding all Christians that not even lustful attraction is more powerful where believers are concerned than love for God. Agnes was remembered as a person who had given herself in marriage to Christ. When young men sought to marry her she refused them with the explanation that she had already been "married" to God in Christ and so was not available. Finally, one of them denounced her to the prefect of Rome citing the decree of Diocletian that those obstinately professing Christ were to be executed.

In the legend, the prefect begins by decreeing she shall be confined to a public house of prostitution and all her clothes taken away. Those who sought to gratify lust with her found that they could not overcome her resistance, and this was attributed to the miraculous intervention of God. In other words, she was a convincing witness to the power of grace that enables one to cling to God, and to doing God's will, in spite of every and any obstacle. In Roman law, virgins were not to be executed, and to get around it, a virgin was usually lustfully violated by the executioner or condemned to prostitution—as a prelude to execution. The legend claims this did not work in Agnes' case and so the prefect had to order her killed while still a virgin. Nothing could keep her from remaining faithful to her gift of self to God alone.

The name 'Agnes' means "pure" in the sense of "guiltless". Scripture tells us that the "pure of heart" will see God. Agnes is a witness to the fact that God's grace can enable everyone who will trust in Jesus to remain pure and guiltless, and so to enter God's Heavenly Kingdom and "see" God face to face. If one need not fear government-sponsored persecution and the death penalty how can those who are not threatened by such extreme dangers drawback from fidelity to their gift of self to God in Christ? But accepting baptism is equivalent to making such a gift. There is nothing with a person, including carnal passion or attraction, that can prevent us from being faithful to this gift. The legend witnesses to the fear of their own passions which our early Christian ancestors felt, and an assurance that God's grace can overcome every such influence. Nothing can come between God and those God has chosen, as St. Paul declares. The example of St. Agnes amazed these ancestors of ours because they didn't expect a person so young could resist authority figures as she did. She overcame all obstacles, both within her and outside her, declaring "You may stain your sword with my blood, but you will never be able to profane my body, consecrated to Christ." Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ! We can bear witness to these things no matter what our age or circumstances. As Scripture so often says: Do not be afraid!

Wednesday

DIGNITY, THE FOUNDATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DUTIES

From the Declaration of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith “Dignitas Infinita” on Human Dignity, 2 April 2024

As Pope Francis has recalled, “In modern culture, the closest reference to the principle of the inalienable dignity of the person is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Saint John Paul II defined as a ‘milestone on the long and difficult path of the human race,’ and as ‘one of the highest expressions of the human conscience.’” To resist attempts to alter or annul the profound meaning of that Declaration, it is worth recalling some essential principles that must always be honored.

Unconditional Respect for Human Dignity

First, while there has been a growing awareness of human dignity, many misunderstandings of the concept still distort its meaning. Some people propose that it is better to use the expression “personal dignity” (and the rights “of the person”) instead of “human dignity” (and the rights “of man”) since they understand a “person” to be only “one who is capable of reasoning.” They then argue that dignity and rights are deduced from the individual’s capacity for knowledge and freedom, which not all humans possess. Thus, according to them, the unborn child would not have personal dignity, nor would the older person who is dependent upon others, nor would an individual with mental disabilities. On the contrary, the Church insists that the dignity of every human person, precisely because it is intrinsic, remains “in all circumstances.” The recognition of this dignity cannot be contingent upon a judgment about the person’s ability to understand and act freely; otherwise, it would not be inherent in the person, independent of the individual’s situation, and thus deserving unconditional respect. Only by recognizing an intrinsic and inalienable dignity in every human being can we guarantee a secure and inviolable foundation for that quality. Without any ontological grounding, the recognition of human dignity would vacillate at the mercy of varying and arbitrary judgments. The only prerequisite for speaking about the dignity inherent in the person is their membership in the human species, whereby “the rights of the person are the rights of man.”

An Objective Basis for Human Freedom

Second, the concept of human dignity is also occasionally misused to justify an arbitrary proliferation of new rights, many of which are at odds with those originally defined and often are set in opposition to the fundamental right to life. It is as if the ability to express and realize every individual preference or subjective desire should be guaranteed. This perspective identifies dignity with an isolated and individualistic freedom that claims to impose particular subjective desires and propensities as “rights” to be guaranteed and funded by the community. However, human dignity cannot be based on merely individualistic standards, nor can it be identified with the psychophysical well-being of the individual. Rather, the defense of human dignity is based on the constitutive demands of human nature, which do not depend on individual arbitrariness or social recognition. Therefore, the duties that stem from recognizing the dignity of the other and the corresponding rights that flow from it have a concrete and objective content based on our shared human nature. Without such an objective basis, the concept of dignity becomes de facto subject to the most diverse forms of arbitrariness and power interests.

Thursday

THE SPIRITUAL OFFERING

From the treatise On Prayer by Tertullian

"Prayer is the spiritual offering which has abolished the ancient sacrifices. 'What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?' says the Lord. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams; I have no desire for the fat of lambs or the blood of bulls and of goats. Who looked for these from your hands? 'We learn from the gospel what God has asked for. 'The hour will come,' we are told, 'when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. God is spirit, and so this is the kind of worshipper he wants.'

We are the true worshippers and the true priests: praying in spirit, we make our sacrifice of prayer in spirit, an offering that is God's own and acceptable to him. This is the offering which he has asked for, and which he has provided for himself. This is the sacrifice, offered from the heart, fed on faith, prepared by truth; unblemished in innocence, pure in chastity, garlanded with love, which we must bring to God's altar, in a procession of good works, to the accompaniment of psalms and hymns. It will obtain for us from God all that we ask.

What will God deny to a prayer that proceeds from spirit and truth, seeing it is he who demands it? How great are the proofs of its efficacy which we read and hear and believe? The old prayer, no doubt, brought deliverance from fire, wild beasts and hunger, and yet it had not received its form from Christ: how much more fully efficacious then is Christian prayer!

It does not station the angel of the dew in the midst of the fire, nor block the mouths of lions, nor transfer to the hungry the peasants' dinner. It has no special grace to avert the experience of suffering, but it arms with endurance those who do suffer, who grieve, who are pained. It makes grace multiply in power, so that faith may know what it obtains from the Lord, while it understands what for God's name's sake it is suffering.

In the past, prayer induced plagues, put to flight the hosts of the enemy, and brought on drought. Now, however, the prayer of righteousness turns aside the whole wrath of God, is concerned for enemies, and makes supplication for persecutors. Is it surprising that it knows how to squeeze out the waters of heaven, seeing it did have power even to ask for fire and obtain it? Prayer alone it is that conquers God. But it was Christ's wish for it to work no evil: he has conferred upon it all power concerning good.

And so its only knowledge is how to call back the souls of the deceased from the very highway of death, to straighten the feeble, to heal the sick, to cleanse the devil-possessed, to open the bars of the prison, to loose the bands of the innocent. It also absolves sins, drives back temptations, quenches persecutions, strengthens the weak-hearted, delights the high-minded, brings home wayfarers, stills the waves, confounds robbers, feeds the poor, rules the rich, lifts up the fallen, supports the unstable, upholds them that stand.

The angels too pray, all of them. The whole creation prays. Cattle and wild beasts pray, and bend their knees, and in coming forth from their stalls and lairs look up to heaven, their mouth not idle, making the spirit move in their own fashion. Moreover, the birds taking flight lift themselves up to heaven and instead of hands spread out the cross of their wings, while saying something that may be supposed to be a prayer. What more then of the obligation of prayer? Even the Lord himself prayed: to him be honor and power forever and ever."

Friday

THE PATH TO FERVENT LOVE OF GOD

A Reflection from a Letter by St. Francis de Sales

You want to know how to love God fervently and so come to peace of mind. Reflect that love of God is a virtue, an inclination to do willingly whatever is pleasing to God. It is an enlargement of the heart opening one to God. The good walk in this way and the fervent run in it, and swiftly.

The first step is to obey God's general commandments and then those that go with our state in life. To fail in this is to live in sin. As a bishop I am obliged to visit the people I shepherd; if I spent the whole week praying and fasting while neglecting this duty I would be lost! A married person can't refuse his/her spouse conjugal obligations or neglect care for their children; refusing to do these things is worse than unfaithfulness! These two sorts of commandments, faithfully observed, are the foundation of fervent love for God if one does them promptly and willingly.

How does one acquire promptness and willingness? First by remembering that it is God we serve. Our purpose for existing is to do God's will so we should be anxious to do it. We ask daily that God's will be done so why does it seem so hard to do it?

After all, one remembers that God's commandments are gracious, gentle, and sweet. What makes them hard is self-will. You want to do what you want, period! From among all sorts of fruit our First Parents chose the one forbidden fruit; they wanted it to be good and thought they could make it so. Saul was ordered to destroy everything pertaining to Amalek but he destroyed only what he thought was not precious enough to be offered in sacrifice and a feast for his soldiers. God wants obedience and not sacrifice! The contemplative life is good, but not if that gets in the way of obedience. If God wants us to serve in one way, we mustn't try to serve in another.

Third, we have to face the fact that every state in life has its irksome side; there is always something that seems bitter and unpleasant. That leads people to think they want to change their state in life. Bishops would rather not be what they are and married people want to be single and single people want to get married and so on. We want to get rid of what irks us and we have a general restlessness, not to mention a kind of rebellion against all sorts of constraints. We like to think everyone else is better off than we are and don't want to accept the truth. What we have to learn is to resign ourselves to God's will and do it willingly. Sick people are never comfortable and tend to toss and turn and complain. A person who is not sick with the fever of self-will can put up graciously with everything. What we ought to aim at is having no real personal preference but seeking only God's will as such.

Finally, we need to learn to do God's will cheerfully. I am a bishop and am obliged to do the hard things involved. What's more, I must do them joyfully! I must find my pleasure and happiness in doing these things. This means denying self and your own will, according to our Lord's wish. To think I would do better at something else or be happier is just a temptation. Our Lord knows what he is doing. Let us do his will out of joyful love!

Saturday

FINDING GOD IS FINDING ONE'S TRUE SELF

A Reflection from St. Paul Apostle of the Nations by H. Daniel- Rops

What Saul had done to the Nazarenes in Jerusalem—tracking them down, denouncing them, having them arrested and beaten, forcing apostasy—was not enough. Groups had formed outside Palestine and he would strike them down! He would start with Damascus. Suddenly a light shone around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Stammering, he replied: “Lord, who are you?” “I am Jesus!” Stunned and trembling, the Pharisee murmured: “Lord, what do you want me to do?” “Get up and go into the city and you will be told what to do. I have appeared to you to appoint you a minister and a witness.” It was a portentous event, incalculably important; apart from it the future of Christianity would have been changed.

One supposes it impressed those of Saul’s age as much as us. The New Testament retells it four times in narratives that are identical apart from details. The facts are incontestable just by reason of Paul’s two accounts. On the road to Damascus, in the midday sun, he found himself face to face with Jesus and addressed by name. This is how the so-called conversion of St. Paul was accomplished.

If there were in him secret openings to grace—unknown even to him, or if discernable elements contributed to the staggering psychological shock on the road to Damascus, this is of secondary importance. The narrative made clear that Paul continued to believe he was through and through Jewish in conviction. Yet he was caught up in an overwhelming event that changed him radically and completely. What he hated one day, he adored the next. The cause he had fought against so violently, he would serve with the same violence. In a single second God had transformed him and bound him forever to Jesus.

This man whom the light struck down upon that road was conquered, but in this defeat, his heart’s most profound desires were fulfilled. How can we avoid a certain envy? Saul of Tarsus, more sinful than any of us, an executioner whose hands were stained by the blood of faithful Christians, had the inconceivable good fortune to meet Christ personally and to be called by name by Christ’s voice. Why was this? Why was this one person singled out?

We are in the midst of what Paul thought of as the mystery of grace. There, in the secret designs of Providence, all is obscure. Yet everything still leads to one goal and that is what the Light decides. Paul has become the person God had chosen for him to be from before his conception. It was to be the fact that Paul would ever after move toward the goal set by this divine choice. The Christ who overcame him would, in his words, parade him on the highways of the world as his own captive and even slave. Saul made Paul would always find the hours of his life too few to adequately give witness to his love for the One who had loved him so much as to strike him to the heart and make him Paul. May God grant that we should have such a blessing and always live in it.