

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

THE FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

12-18 January 2025

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Sunday

LIVING OUT JESUS' CALL TO ONENESS

A Reflection from a Homily by St. Gregory of Antioch

"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased". This, indeed, is the one who didn't leave the Heavenly Father when he took up his dwelling in Mary's womb. This One was never separated from the Heavenly Father or from us; whole and undivided, the Son is in heaven and yet is at home in the Virgin's womb. There aren't two—the Only Son of God and the Son of Mary. Just so, the same One lay in the manger and was adored by the Magi. There was only one who was baptized, even though having no need to be baptized. This is the Heavenly Father's Son, the only Son. He isn't simply the object of thought but an object of bodily sight; he is one and the same invisible God and yet a human beheld by humans. He belongs both to eternity and to time.

This is part of what we mean when we say this One is the mediator between God and his fellow servants. In this One, unity with God is restored to sinners. This One is Son of God, Lamb of God, priest and victim, offeror and offering, the sacrifice and the one who receives the sacrifice. We have heard the Heavenly Father's testimony to the Only Begotten Son. This testimony was given at his baptism in the Jordan and at his transfiguration on the mountain when he was seen as more radiant than the sun. On both occasions, the same voice testified to him and called us to obey him.

Because of Our Lord's oneness with God, in Him we are drawn into that oneness. *"I am in the Father and the Father is in me"*. That is what he says. He goes on to say: *"One who has seen me has seen the Father too"*. This tells us more than clearly that we have been called by God to peace and not to conflict. We need to be steadfast in our response to this call. At the holy altar, we take part in heavenly mysteries and are made one with them. We can't at the same time be guests at this one table and stumbling blocks to one another. We can't be sharers in the Eucharist—and so in Christ's very self—and go out to be inflamed against one another in discord.

Who would want to hear the Lord Christ say, *"I have begotten children and reared them, I have fed them as my own kin but they have rejected me"*. God has called some of us to help preserve the unity of the Lord's one flock. God has called all of us to help bring into one sheepfold all those who stray. God wills that there be one flock and one shepherd. God wills that there be one Savior for all. But this cannot be apart from our obedient response to the one God's love for all of us united as One Body. What keeps us apart?

Perhaps someone thinks, *"I am greater than that other person so why don't I receive the greater honor?"*. But Christ himself says, *"The Father who sent me is greater than I"*. We see him abasing himself yet we forget that in God all are one and there are no differences such as can divide us against one another. All that matters is being one with the One Father and his One Son. When we believe and live this all reasons for conflict and discord are removed. We can even compete with one another in showing the other greater honor than is shown us. This is the lesson of Christ's love. We must open ourselves to obey that love and imitate it in all we do.

Monday

BECOME FISHERS OF MEN

The Angelus Message of Pope Francis, 21 January 2024

The Gospel today recounts the vocation of the first disciples (cf. *Mk* 1:14-20). Calling others to join his mission is one of the first things Jesus does at the beginning of his public life: He approaches some young fishermen and invites them to follow him to “become fishers of men” (v. 17). And this tells us something important: the Lord loves to involve us in his work of salvation. He wants us to be active with him. He wants us to be responsible and protagonists. A Christian who is not active, who is not responsible in the work of proclaiming the Lord, and who is not a protagonist of his faith, is not a Christian or, as my grandmother used to say, is a “rosewater” Christian.

God does not need us *per se*, but he does so [involves us in his work of salvation] — although it involves taking on many of our limitations: we are all limited, or rather sinners, and he takes this on. Let us look, for example, at how much patience he had with the disciples: they often did not understand his words (cf. *Lk* 9:51-56), at times they did not agree among themselves (cf. *Mk* 10:41), for a long time they were unable to accept some essential aspects of his preaching, such as service (cf. *Lk* 22:27). And yet, Jesus chose them and continued to believe in them. This is important: the Lord chose us to be Christians. And we are sinners — we do one thing after another — but the Lord continues to believe in us. This is wonderful.

Indeed for Jesus, bringing God’s salvation to everyone was his greatest joy, his mission, and the meaning of his existence (cf. *Jn* 6:38), or, as he says, his food (cf. *Jn* 4:34). And light and joy multiply with every word and deed in which we join with him in the beautiful adventure of giving love (cf. *Is* 9:2): not only *around* us, but also *in* us. To proclaim the Gospel, then, is not wasted time: it is being happier by helping others be happy; it is to free ourselves by helping others be free; it is becoming better by helping others be better!

Let us ask ourselves then: do I pause every now and then to remember the joy that grew in me and around me when I welcomed the calling to know and bear witness to Jesus? And when I pray, do I thank the Lord for having called me to make others happy? Finally, do I wish to make someone savor, through my testimony and my joy, to make them savor how beautiful it is to love Jesus?

Tuesday

TRANSLATION OF POWER INTO HUMILITY

The Angelus Message of Pope Benedict XVI, 29 January 2012

Today's Gospel (Mk 1:21-28) presents to us Jesus, who was preaching on the Sabbath in the Synagogue of Capernaum, the little town on the Sea of Galilee where Peter and his brother Andrew lived. His teaching, which gave rise to wonder among the people, was followed by the deliverance of "a man with an unclean spirit" (v. 23), who recognized Jesus as "the Holy One of God", that is, the Messiah. In a short time, his fame spread across the region which he passed through proclaiming the Kingdom of God and healing the sick of every kind: words and action. St John Chrysostom pointed out that the Lord "varies the mode of profiting his hearers, after miracles entering on words, and again from the instruction by his words passing to miracles" (*Hom. in Matthæum* 25, 1: PG 57, 328).

The words Jesus addresses to the people immediately give access to the will of the Father and to the truth about themselves. This was not the case for the scribes who instead had to make an effort to interpret the Sacred Scriptures with countless reflections. Moreover, Jesus united the efficacy of the word with the efficacy of the signs of deliverance from evil. St Athanasius notes that "for his charging evil spirits and their being driven forth, this deed is not of man, but of God"; indeed the Lord "drove away from men all diseases and infirmities"... Those "who saw his power... will no longer doubt whether this be the Son and Wisdom and Power of God?" (*Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi* 18,19: PG 25, 128 BC. 129 B).

The divine authority is not a force of nature. It is the power of the love of God that creates the universe and, becoming incarnate in the Only-Begotten Son, descending into our humanity, heals the world corrupted by sin. Romano Guardini wrote: "Jesus' entire existence is the translation of power into humility... here is the sovereignty which lowers itself into the form of a servant" (*Il Potere*, Brescia 1999, 141-142).

Authority, for human beings, often means possession, power, dominion and success. Instead for God authority means service, humility and love; it means entering into the logic of Jesus who stoops to wash his disciples' feet (cf. Jn 13:5), who seeks man's true good, who heals wounds, who is capable of a love so great that he gives his life, because he is Love. In one of her Letters St. Catherine of Siena wrote: "It is necessary for us to see and know, in truth, with the light of the faith, that God is supreme and eternal Love and cannot want anything but our good" (*Ep. 13 in: Le Lettere*, vol. 3, Bologna 1999, 206).

Wednesday

LIVING AS DISCIPLES OF ST. BENEDICT

A Reflection from a Homily by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

St. Gregory the Great tells us that St. Benedict was filled with the spirit of all the just. In his Rule sparkles the gold of Augustine, the silver of Jerome, the double-dyed purple of Gregory, and the jewel-like sayings of many other holy fathers. But his most precious memory is that of his disciples and their way of life. St. Paul says, *"The temple of God is holy and you are that temple"*. In us, the Lord will reign forever, and yet presently we are on pilgrimage, tabernacles more than temples. Such a tabernacle is born by many shoulders, yours too. From whom do you learn how to carry it?

Listen to what St. Benedict teaches: *"Let them most patiently bear one another's infirmities, whether of body or of habit"*. Think of the example of this given by two of his disciples, Maur and Placid. Acting in obedience Placid took upon himself a task he wasn't fully prepared for and, without intending, it found himself in *"over his head"*, as we say. He was being carried away without being able to master himself and cried out in his heart for help. God revealed this to his spiritual father, who immediately sent a more mature disciple to help him. This one so forgot himself in love for his spiritual father and for his fellow disciples that the Lord worked a miracle through him and saved the endangered brother.

This is the kind of thing that will happen as long as the tabernacles we remain in the world. We have to be carried by others and so we have to love both the Lord and one another with all our heart, forgetting ourselves and our ordinary fears and concerns for the sake of the obedience of love.

Each one of us has a unique gift from God, one this gift and another that one. One can make an offering of extra work, another of extra prayer, another of extra fasting, or extra Lectio. But Benedict cautions us, *"No one shall say or presume to think of anything as his own"*. This is not just a matter of cowls and robes but far more of our strengths and spiritual gifts. No one, therefore, should boast about any grace given by God. That is what we learn especially from the examples of St. Maur and St. Placid and the persons they became through obedient love.

No one should envy another because of some grace. God can immediately bring to perfection anyone he pleases and bestows on that person any virtue he pleases. In his caring way, however, he causes each to need others. Thus, humility is cultivated and preserved, charity is increased and unity is recognized. Each thus has the benefit of the virtues of others while preserving humility by the consciousness of individual weakness.

The greatest sweetness is that of fraternal love. Don't let flies get into this ointment and die, then its sweetness is ruined. I am talking about things like cupidity, envy, and suspicion. This sort of fault can lead even to a kind of spiritual homicide. The worst sort of homicide is killing oneself by vice or another by bad example. It is to avoid such disasters that we must continue in spiritual exercises. It is a part of being buried with Jesus so that we may be like him in death to all that is not the Father's will or love. We must always seek to walk in the newness of life. We do this best when, like Placid and Maur, we help one another out of love for our spiritual fathers and for one another.

Thursday

ACCEPTING THE GIFT THAT IS COMMUNITY

From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Community is a gift. It isn't founded on our collaborative efforts, nor on our sincere desire for friendship. These things are important and must be kept in mind but 'being together,' as it is called in the New Testament, is a gift from God. It is a participation in the 'being together' that we call the Trinity. We find the model of this in Jesus being together with his disciples. God shares this Trinitarian community with the Church and in the Church each how to share in this community experience.

We are not only together with other now-living members of Christ but with those who have left this world and entered that of God's Kingdom of everlasting life. As long as we are joined in Christ, we are together with one another. This means that we are helping and being helped by all who are together in this way. By accepting the Word of God, we become members of an authentic community in Christ, living according to the laws of Trinitarian fellowship; i.e., of mutual love.

Lived Christian fellowship begins in the heart. It is from within that intentions come and from them come acts of love, or its opposite. The failure of love and the dominance of evil intentions are what cause division and all that results. But we know that people bound in fellowship with us in Christ are animated by love, a love like Christ's that fills hearts. Those who are already with God are filled with love for us; it is inseparable from their love for God. Are we mindful of their love? Are we always aware, in some way, that we are loved actively and without hesitation by the many who have gone before us, especially those we knew and were joined within fellowship already upon this earth?

St. Paul's letter to the Philippians describes a community based on charity. We are told this charity lives on God's word as ordinary life depends on breathing. The Word of God, not just the Scriptures but Christ, dwells all around us and within us. A Christian community finds in this its Bread of Life. This bread is indispensable food for the community.

Listen to St. Ambrose: *"When I read the Divine Scriptures God returns to walk in the earthly paradise. Christ and Divine Scripture are the remedy for every distasteful thing and the only refuge from temptation."* What is temptation but the pull of something or someone other than God, hinting that it can free us from whatever is bothering or worrying us at present? But that is a lie. We turn to God and to God's Word, and we do this not simply on our own but by the help of others, itself given us in love and as a sign of love.

We remember those who have gone before us, and we remember how they persevered to the end in clinging to God and God's promises, especially by recalling Scripture passages to their mind and praying with them. To think of these friends is to be drawn to God and to God's promises. What more do we need than this gift of grace? In it, we are actively united around God and in love. This is part of God's gift of community.

Friday

ST ANTHONY'S CHARGE TO HIS COMPANIONS
From The Life of Anthony by St. Athanasius

When Anthony grew very old he withdrew to the desert, and because of his great age, two companions went with him to assist him. When he felt the time of his departure was near he addressed this exhortation to them.

"I am going the way of my fathers, as Scripture says. I see myself called by the Lord. And you should be on your guard and work not to bring to nothing the asceticism you have practiced for so long. Make it your endeavor to keep up your enthusiasm as though you were only now beginning. You know the demons and their designs. You know how fierce these demons are and yet how powerless. Do not be afraid of them.

"Let Christ be your life's breath. Place your confidence in Christ. Live as if dying daily, taking heed for yourselves and remembering the counsel you have heard from me. Let there be no communion whatever between you and the schismatics, and none at all with the heretical Arians. You know how I myself have kept away from them. They attack Christ by their heresy.

"Show your eagerness to give your allegiance, first to the Lord and then to his saints. Then, after your death, they will receive you into everlasting dwellings as familiar friends of God. Give your thoughts to these things; make them your purpose; if you have any care for me and think of me as a father, don't allow anyone to take my body in Egypt, lest they should turn it into relics and keep it in their houses. This was a reason for going to the mountain and coming here.

"You know how I have always put those who practice such deeds to shame. You know I have charged them to stop this practice. You yourself are to carry out the rites of my funeral and are to bury my body in the earth. Let what I have said to you be respected by telling no one of the place where I am buried.

"At the resurrection of the dead, I shall receive back my body from the Savior and it will then be incorruptible. You may distribute my few garments to Bishop Athanasius and Bishop Serapion. Keep my hair shirt for yourselves. God bless you. Anthony is going and is with you no more." More important, God is always with you.

Saturday

MARY AND HER SON

From Prayer In Practice by Fr Romano Guardini

Among those invoked in Christian prayer, Mary, the mother of our Lord, holds a very special place. She is not merely the greatest of the saints but something altogether different and unique.

If one tries to explain wherein lies the special character and dignity of Mary, one can hardly do better than state the simple truth that she is the mother of the Redeemer: not just the mother of the man Jesus into whom, according to the Gnostics, the Logos entered, but of Jesus Christ, who is both God and Man. "And the angel answering, said to her: The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you. And therefore also the Holy One which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God." That infant "Which was the fulfillment of Mary's destiny as a woman was to become her Redeemer and ours. What more can be said? By becoming a mother, she became Christian. By living for her child, she grew to full Christian stature. Her life is linked to the life of the Redeemer not only as everyone who loves Him is linked to Him, but also as a mother to her son. She took part in His life. The Gospel tells us vividly how she followed Him even to the foot of the Cross, faithful in the truest sense of the word.

The Son of God, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man. In that hour the moving principle of creation held sway, not by commanding "Let there be" as it did when it created the world, but through the hearts and minds of those whom it called to fulfill its design. The message of the angel was at the same time an announcement, a demand and a question. To this, the answer was given in humility and obedience, but also in freedom. The event which signified for all humanity the coming of the Redeemer and for the world the beginning of the new creation, at the same time signified for Mary the entry into her own unique relationship with God. The life, passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord, which are, for all, the guarantee and the beginning of salvation, were at the same time for her the true end of her personal life. By contributing towards salvation in this unique way, she herself reached the fullness of Christian perfection.