

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER - C
DIVINE MERCY SUNDAY
April 27 – May 3, 2025

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 A Reflection developed from the Teaching of the Apostles

Sunday

HOW WE GLIMPSE THE SECRETS OF GOD'S MERCY

A Reflection taken from a sermon by St. Bernard

Is there a place where all can find perfect safety? Yes, all can find it in the wounds of our Savior. The measure of one's security is Christ's power to save. The world may rage, my weaknesses may weigh me down, the devil may lay snares for me, but I won't fall because my feet are planted firmly on solid rock. If I had sinned gravely, my conscience would be troubled, but I would not despair—for I would call to mind the wounds of my Lord. Scripture says that Christ was wounded for our iniquities. What sin is so death-dealing that it cannot be forgiven because of the death of Christ? If I remember this powerful and effective medicine for the malignancy that is sin, then it can no longer terrify me.

Someone said: My sin is too great to be pardoned! That person was wrong! Whoever is a member of Christ can always obtain pardon. Such a person has a personal claim on Christ's own merits. Any member of the body can claim a share in what belongs to the body's head. I confidently seek all I lack in the heart of the Lord. That heart overflows with mercy.

And there are openings in the Body through which that mercy pours out. Christ's hands and feet and side were pierced and through these clefts, I may suck honey from the rock and oil from the hardest stone, as Scripture says. In other words, I am able to taste and see that the Lord is sweet. We are to be other openings for love and mercy.

My Lord was thinking thoughts of peace, and I was unaware of it. After all, who knows the mind of the Lord or who has been the Lord's counselor? But the piercing nails became so many keys to unlock the door so that I might see the Lord's will. What did I see? Both the nails and the wound in the Lord's side cry out that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Christ's soul itself was pierced, and the lance opened his heart. It was so that the Lord might feel compassion for us in our weakness.

Through the sacred wounds, the secret of the Lord's heart lies open. The great mystery of love is revealed. It was the tender mercy of our God that caused the Dayspring from On High to visit us. This is manifested through Christ's wounds. Where has God's mercy, compassion, and love shown out more luminously than from these wounds?

O sweet and gentle Lord of Mercy, greater mercy than this no one has than to lay down life itself for those doomed to death. My every claim to merit comes from your mercy, so I lack nothing so long as you don't lack pity. If your mercies are so many, then I am rich. So what if I am aware of many sins? Where sin abounded, there grace has abounded all the more. Your mercies, Lord, are eternal, and so I will sing your mercies forever. O Lord, our God has made you my hope and confidence and righteousness; I will not remember my sin, but I will be ever mindful of you, my Savior.

Monday

A NEW BIRTH

A Reflection by Fr. Thomas Merton OCSO (Part 1)

One of the most important and characteristic themes of Christianity is that of the renewal of the self. This is “the new creation” of the Christian in Christ. The death to the old self and new life in the Spirit sent by Christ from the Father means not only juridical salvation in heaven and in the hereafter but much more a dimension of one’s present life, a transformation and renewal not only of the Christian as a person but of the community of believers, the brotherhood of those who have received the Spirit of Christ and live in the grace of Christ.

The renewal of life cannot be understood if it is seen merely as a ritual affair, the result of certain formal exterior acts. Nor is it an emotional conversion followed by adherence to a set of new attitudes and convictions, based on a sense of inner liberation.

In the theology of the New Testament, particularly that of Paul and John, the new being of the Christian, his new creation is the effect of an inner revolution which, in its ultimate and most radical significance, implies complete self-transcendence and transcendence of the norms and attitudes of any given culture, any merely human society. This includes the transcendence of religious practices.

There is a depth in our hearts in which we hear a voice telling us, “You must be born anew”. It is an obscure but insistent demand of one’s own nature to transcend itself in the freedom of a fully integrated, autonomous, personal identity.

Jesus tells the doctor of the Law, Nicodemus, “You must be born again”. He was not only telling him something he could hear, if he listened, in the silence of his own heart. He was also telling him that ordinary answers were not sufficient to meet his demand. To be born again is more than a matter of good moral resolutions, of self-discipline, of adjustment to social demands and requirements, of finding oneself a respected and worthwhile role in society. The summons to be born again does indeed make itself heard in our hearts, but it does not always have the same meaning, because we are not always capable of interpreting it in our true depth. Sometimes it is a little more than an expression of weariness, a sense of failure, an awareness of wrong, a half-hopeless wish that one might get another chance, a fresh start in the New Year. One desires to begin a new life because the burden of the old has now become an unbearable accumulation of fatigue, mistakes, betrayals, evasions, and disappointments. One longs for a new life because the old life is stale, unworthy, uninteresting, and cheap. One looks for a new way because all the old familiar ways are dead ends.

Tuesday

THE BRIDGE TO GOD THAT IS JESUS

A Message of God from the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena

God is speaking: “By Adam’s sinful disobedience, the road was so broken up that no one could reach everlasting life. Since they had no share in the good for which I created them, they did not give me the return of glory they owed me, and so my truth was not fulfilled. What is this truth? That I had created them in my image and likeness so that they might have eternal tenderness and goodness. But because of their sin, they never reached this good, for sin closed heaven and the door of my mercy.

As soon as they rebelled against me, they became rebels against themselves. They became like filthy beasts. All created things rebelled against them, while had they been submissive, all would have been as I had established in the beginning. With sin, there came troubles from themselves as well as from the devil and the world. You were all drowning because not one of you, for all your efforts at righteousness, could reach eternal life.

But I wanted to undo these great troubles of yours. So I gave you a bridge, my Son, so that you could cross over the river, the stormy sea of this darksome life, without being drowned.

I want you to look at the bridge that is my only-begotten Son, and notice its greatness. Look! It stretches from heaven to earth, joining the earth of your humanity with the greatness of the Godhead. This is what I mean when I say it stretches from heaven to earth. This was necessary if I wanted to remake the road that had been broken up, so that you might pass over the bitterness of the world and reach life.

Using earth alone, your humanity alone, I could never have made it great enough to cross the river and bring you to eternal life. The earth of human nature by itself, as I have told you, was incapable of atoning for sin and draining off the pus from Adam’s sin, for that stinking pus had infected the whole human race. Your nature had to be joined with the height of humanity so it could endure the suffering that joined humanity to the divine nature. Then you could accept my Son’s sacrifice on your behalf to release you from death and give you life.

So, the highest stooped down to the earth of your humanity, bridging the chasm between us and rebuilding the roadway. Why should he have made himself a roadway? So that you might in truth come to the same joy as the angels. But my son’s having made himself a bridge for you cannot bring you to life unless you make your way along it.”

God has called. Will you follow the call and walk with Jesus?

Wednesday

EASTER HOMILY

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (2012)

Easter is the feast of the new creation. Jesus is risen and dies no more. He has opened the door of death to a new life, one that no longer knows illness and death. He has taken humanity up into God himself. A new dimension has opened up for all humanity.

At Easter, on the morning of the first day of the week, God says once again, "Let there be light". The night on the Mount of Olives, the solar eclipse of the passion and death of Jesus, the night of the grave had all passed. Now it is the first day once again, creation beginning anew. Jesus rises from the grave. Life is stronger than death. Good is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate. Truth is stronger than lies. The darkness of the previous days is driven away the moment Jesus rises from the grave and himself becomes God's pure light. But this applies not only to him, not only to the darkness of these days. With his resurrection, light itself is created anew. He draws all of us after him into the new light of the resurrection and conquers all darkness. He is God's new day, new for all of us.

Through the sacrament of baptism and the profession of faith, the Lord has built a bridge across to us, and thus the new day reaches us too. At our baptism, Christ took us by the hand. From that day on, we have been held by him and have walked with him in the light. We have walked into real life.

At Easter, the time of the new creation, the Church presents the mystery of light using a unique and very humble symbol: the new Paschal candle. This is a light that lives from sacrifice. The candle shines in as much as it is burned up. It gives light, inasmuch as it gives itself. Thus, the Church most beautifully presents the paschal mystery of Christ, who gives himself and so bestows the great light. We should always remember that the candle is a fire. Fire is the power that shapes the world, the force of transformation. And fire gives warmth. Here, too, the mystery of Christ is made visible. Christ, the light, the fire, the flame, burns up evil and reshapes both the world and ourselves. "The one who is close to me is close to the fire", as Jesus is reported by Origen to have said. And this fire is both heat and light: not a cold light, but one through which God's warmth and goodness reach down to us.

Let our Easter prayer be that we will experience the joy of the light of Jesus, and let us ask that we become bearers of this light.

Thursday

A NEW BIRTH

A Reflection by Fr Thomas Merton OCSO (Part 2)

Unfortunately, our weariness with the old, our longing for the new, is often just another trap of nature, another variation in the imprisonment we hope to escape. It may inspire us with bright hopes, and it may induce us to believe we have found a new answer, but then, after a while, the same despair regains possession of our hearts. Or simply, we fall back into the same old routine. Modern commercial society is largely built on the exploitation of this need for a “new life” in the hearts of men and women. But by exploiting this need, manipulating and intensifying it, the marketing society also aggravates and corrupts it at the same time.

Thus, the need for the new becomes false. It is at the same time insatiable and deceptive. It is tantalized and kept in a state of excitement by all kinds of clever techniques, and it never receives anything but pseudo-satisfactions. We have more and more needs, more and more hopes, and yet we have become more and more suspicious, less and less able to bear the burden of anxieties and half-truths that we carry about in our hearts. We can become depressed and weighed down by the falsity and illusion of our lives. We can lose hope in the possibility of renewal. In the end, we opt for easier forms of escape.

In our quest, something tells us that we are trying to recover that which is deepest, most original, most personal in ourselves. To be born again is not to become someone else, but to become ourselves.

Our deepest spiritual instinct is that urge of inner truth that demands that we be faithful to ourselves. We need to be open to our deepest and most original potentialities. Yet, at the same time, to become one’s true self, one must die. That is to say, the false self must die.

In the Gospel of John, the scholar Nicodemus asks Jesus in bewilderment how it is possible for a grown man to be born again. We cannot reverse our course. He thinks it is not possible to change. But Jesus has another idea. He talks of an entirely different kind of birth. To be born again in this way is to be born beyond egoism, beyond selfishness, beyond individualism, in Christ. We are to be born beyond hatred, beyond struggles, in peace, love, joy, self-sacrifice, service, gentleness, and humility. This rebirth is not a single event but a continuous dynamic of inner renewal.

Friday

GOD'S LOVE WORKS THROUGH US

A Reflection taken from Three Discourses Against the Arians by St. Athanasius

When God came among us from Mary for the abolition of sin, the Son of God took flesh and became a human being, and in that flesh, he suffered for us. He did this in order that we might all believe that the Godhead dwelt in flesh. Being God, He had a body and used this as an instrument for our sakes. On account of this, the properties of the flesh are said to be his. So he hungered, thirsted, suffered, was tired, and all the rest. On the other hand, the works proper to the Word himself, such as raising the dead, restoring sight to the blind, curing the woman with an issue of blood were done as works of the Godhead but through his body. The Godhead was in the flesh which was God's.

The prophet Isaiah said very appropriately that he "bore" our infirmities, and he himself "bore" our sins so that it might be clear that he was not external to the body. That would leave human beings still subject to death, and we were redeemed from our infirmities and filled with righteousness. Thus, when the flesh suffered, the Word wasn't external to it. That is why the passion is said to be just as much a human work as a divine work of the Father's love. In the body, the Lord did his works. That is why he said, "If I don't do the works of the Father, don't believe in me, but if I do them, believe the works even if you don't believe in me. Know that the Father is in me and I am in Him."

When there was a need to free Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, he stretched out a human hand and stopped the fever by divine power. In the case of Lazarus, he spoke in a human voice, but as God he raised Lazarus from the dead. These things were done because he had a body, not only in appearance, but in truth. It was appropriate that in putting on human flesh, the Lord should put on the whole with the affections proper to human nature. The affections of the body were absolutely proper to it, and the body was proper to Him, so that the affections of the body were too, though without altering in any way the Godhead. To the one to whom the bodily affections were attributed—such as being condemned, being scourged, thirsting, and the cross and death—so too were the triumph and grace. All such affections are ascribed appropriately to the Lord.

As God worked through human flesh, when he made it his own when the Son of God became incarnate, so does God, in a different but no less real way, work through us and our flesh. It is really God who sends the Spirit into our hearts and souls to make us his instruments for saving and loving mankind. This is what he does when he divinizes us. God unites what is human to himself that he might save humankind, and deification might be certain. He saves human persons by uniting them to himself. Salvation is not something outside of us that happens to us. We are saved by being made one with the real and true Godhead. It is this Godhead who came to us in the Son of God and put on our humanity to show us what it will mean for us to put on, by grace, his divinity. God really works through us for salvation as truly as through Christ. This has happened through Christ's incarnation, passion, death, and resurrection. The loving deeds that you do today are God's loving deeds done in and through you. Rejoice that this great wonder is done daily in and through you.

Saturday

CHRIST MODELS OUR PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY

A Reflection from the Teaching of the Apostles

Everyone who learns a craft has to watch a master. One sees how the skills of the craft are exercised. This kind of learning enables one to carry out the work of the craft successfully. One copies the master in one's work and does it in a way that the master will approve. But if a person shirks some aspect of the task? Such a one is not a good craftsman.

Our Lord is the Master of the craft of leading others to God. He has called us to continue the work which he has begun. We have our Lord for master and teacher. We must imitate his teaching and way of life as fully as we are able. For instance, He left riches and favor and power and glory and accepted poverty and even parted with Mary, his blessed mother, and with his brethren, and, finally, with His very life itself. He endured persecution even unto the cross and death.

These things he endured for our sake, that he might redeem those from the bonds of the Old Law and the Gentile worship of idols as well as from all ungodliness. He did this so that we might share his inheritance.

If, then, he suffered so for our sake, to redeem us who believe in Him, and if He was not ashamed to do this, why don't we imitate Him in all these things, including his sufferings? He gives endurance. He does it that we may be delivered from the eternal death of fire.

He endured everything for our sake, but we also do it for our own sake. Or has Our Lord any need to prove that we will suffer for Him? Rather, it is this alone that he wants; he would prove the love that comes from our faith and our free will. Let's part with our parents and our kinsfolk and with all that is in this world, and even with our lives for his sake and one another's sake.

We must, indeed, pray that we don't fall when we are tempted. If we should be called to martyrdom, we can, by God's grace, confess when interrogated and, when we suffer, we can endure it. If we are afflicted, we can rejoice, and if persecuted, we don't need to grieve. In doing these things, we deliver ourselves from hell, and, equally important, we teach those who are young in the faith, and those who are still hearers to do the same.

This is the pastoral responsibility God gives to all who follow Christ. To follow Christ is to live for God and one another. The Lord lived and died for us. Can we do less for one another? If we fail in faith towards the Lord, we deny him through infirmity of body. Often, as our Lord said, "*the spirit is willing and ready but the body is weak*". If we fail, we not only destroy ourselves but also kill the brethren who see our denial and fall because of it. They will think that they have been made disciples of a defective teaching. But if we lead them to stumble, we will have to render an account for them, as well as for ourselves. We will render it to the Lord on the day of Judgment. If you deny the hope that you have in Our Lord, you have destroyed your life in God. It is our responsibility to one another, as to God, not to do this.